

Ethnic dimension of political competition and cooperation in the Baltic states

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Trans-ethnic Coalition-Building within and
across States

Uppsala, 7-9 January 2015

Identity (ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious) as a factor of shaping political stratification

- **Under what conditions may become significant?**
- **Cultural diversity – is it enough?**
- **Power-sharing arrangements – accommodates or triggers politicization of ethnicity?**
- **(Con)federal arrangements?**
- ***(Belgium, Switzerland...)***

Concept of a nation-state and its interpretation in post-Communist Europe: the state's *mission*

- **The Constitution of Estonia:** *“With unwavering faith and a steadfast will to strengthen and develop the state... which shall guarantee the preservation of the Estonian nation, language and culture through the ages...”*
- **The Constitution of Latvia:** *“The State of Latvia, proclaimed on 18 November 1918, has been established by uniting historical Latvian lands and on the basis of the unwavering will of the Latvian nation to have its own State and its inalienable right of self-determination in order to guarantee the existence and development of the Latvian nation, its language and culture throughout the centuries...”*

Liberal concept of “cultural neutrality” vs “ethnic statehood”

- **East European tradition + Soviet legacy**
- **Accommodation of diversity as a tool for ensuring equality – “positive obligations” towards minorities?**
- **State’s mission - “positive obligations” towards majority, “special rights”**
- **Rozenvalds: Both majority and minority feel as oppressed minority**

Factors promoting and hindering “ethnicisation” of politics

- competition for resources, particularly at the times of transition to market economy and large-scale privatization
- quest for democracy and equality
- conflict prevention considerations
- external influence, incl. political conditionality

Competition and cooperation over symbolic vs practical issues

- Symbols and history: claims for “ownership” of the territory/state. Example: toponimics (*Hungarian place names in Slovakia*)
- Practical issues: competition on equal footing. Example: use of languages before public authorities (*extreme case – effective denial of the rights guaranteed by law*)

Delimitation of boundaries between ethnic groups in the Baltic states

- linguistic (first language) rather than “ethnic” (whatever it means) criteria
- “physical” separation?
- mixed marriages
- multiple identity
- cannot judge by name
- often loose boundaries – “three communities”?

Precondition for successful coalition-building – effective participation

- **consultation (consultative bodies)**
- **delegation of power**
- **autonomy (territorial or cultural)**
- **federalization**
- **formalized power-sharing**

Political representation

- **“ethnic” vs “mixed” parties**
- **citizenship legislation – undermines effectiveness of ethnic parties, particularly in Latvia (voting rights in municipal elections)**
- **ethnic parties: relative success in Lithuania, total failure in Latvia and Estonia**

Ethnic Polish MPs in Lithuania

Ethnic Polish MPs in Lithuania (share in total population: 7% in 1989, 6.6% in 2011)

Elections	Total	Results of Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania	Elected (including majoritarian constituencies)
1992	4	2.14%	4
1996	3	3.13%	1
2000	4	1.95%	2
2004	3	3.79%	2
2008	4	4.80%	3
2012	8	5.83%	8

Ethnic Russian MPs in Estonia

Ethnic Russian MPs in Estonia (share in total population: 30% in 1989, 25% in 2013)

Elections	Total	Elected on the lists of "Russian parties"
1992	0	0
1995	6	6
1999	6	4
2003	6	0
2007	6	0
2011	9	0

Russian-speaking MPs in Latvia

Russian-speaking MPs in Latvia (share in total population: 48% in 1989, 37% in 2014)

Elections	Total	Elected on the lists of “Russian parties”
1993	7	0
1995	7	0
1998	14	0
2002	22	0
2006	27	0
2010	26	0
2011	27	0
2014	21	0

External actors

- **International organizations: political conditionality**
- **Kin states: Poland (Lithuania), Russia (Estonia, Latvia)**
- **Concepts: diaspora vs national minority**
- **The “compatriots” approach**
- **“Post-imperial syndrome”**
- **Competition for loyalty – information war?**

Conclusions

- **“Ethnic” vote: clear correlation between ethnicity and voting patterns (Kolsto, Tsilevich EEPS 1997)**
- **More complicated than just “Russians vote for Russians”**
- **“Ethnic” parties: total failure in Latvia and Estonia, relative success in Lithuania**
- **Citizens belonging to minorities tend to support national parties advocating inclusive policies (Centre party in Estonia, SDP Concord in Latvia)**
- **More minority politicians appear in mainstream parties**
- **Ethnic nature of parties: external labelling not self-definition**

Conclusions

- **Changing meaning of “ethnic” (“Russian”) parties – rather in a geopolitical sense (“pro-western” vs “pro-Moscow”). Both Baltic states and Russia are interested in presenting as the latter**
- **However, virtual absence of really “pro-Moscow” parties – parties labelled as “Russian” unequivocally support EU membership, accept NATO membership, do not recognize annexation of Crimea and do not support Russia’s action in Ukraine – although ethnic Russian communities are deeply divided over the issue**
- **domination at municipal level (Tallinn, Riga), ethnic factor less important – and “doomed to opposition” at the national level**

Conclusions

- **Keeping control over the state government in the hands of “state nation” is seen as vitally important, the state is perceived as a guarantor of the rights of Latvians/ Estonians**
- **Russian-speaking minorities are accepted as friends, colleagues, family members – but not as equal citizens, unless they “prove their loyalty” by accepting official model of integration**
- **Integration understood in a cultural sense: distinct identity limited to some designated areas (family, religious communities, “ethnic cultural associations”)**

Conclusions

- **Mistrust towards Russian-speaking minorities weakens democracy:**
- **Reduced competition within local political elite, as a result “forced” coalitions, lower competence of civil servants**
- **Facilitates alienation and emigration**
- **Security – no immediate risks, but undermines unity of the nation, less efficient dialogue with Russia**