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RUSSIA IN THE BALTIC STATES' FOREIGN POLICY IN 1990s: CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

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The goal of the article is to examine, how the main principles and concepts of the Baltic states' foreign policy shaped their relations with Russia in 1990s. For this purpose it analyzes the reasons standing behind each of these principles and concepts and reveals their implications on Baltic foreign policy towards Russia. Besides the author applies some theoretical approaches, explaining the behavior of small states on the international arena, to reveal the mechanisms of forming the major trends of Baltic foreign policies in the 1990s and their perceptions of Russia.

Keywords: foreign policy; Baltic states; Latvia; Lithuania; Estonia; Russia.

РОССИЯ ВО ВНЕШНЕЙ ПОЛИТИКЕ БАЛТИЙСКИХ ГОСУДАРСТВ В 1990-е гг.: КОНЦЕПТУАЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ

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Выясняется, как основные принципы и концепции внешней политики балтийских государств формировали их отношения с Россией в 1990-е гг. С этой целью были проанализированы причины, которые лежали в основе этих принципов и концепций, и их влияние на балтийскую внешнюю политику в отношении России. Кроме того, чтобы раскрыть главные тенденции внешней политики балтийских государств в 1990-е гг. и их восприятие России, автор использовал некоторые теоретические подходы, объясняющие поведение малых стран на международной арене.

Ключевые слова: внешняя политика; балтийские государства; Латвия; Литва; Эстония; Россия.

Introduction

It's necessary to start with explanation of the article's basic term – the “Baltic states”. First of all there should be underlined the difference between the terms “Baltic states” and “Baltic Sea states”. The later definition is generally used to mark all the states situated

around the Baltic Sea and having direct access to it. In this sense the term “Baltic Sea states” is broader and in addition to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia includes such countries as Sweden, Poland, Germany and even Russia (at least its north-western regions). The notion

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of the Baltic Sea region is quite new in international relations. It was institutionalized only in the early 1990s as a special regional body, the Council of the Baltic Sea States was established in 1992. Although the term “Baltic states” has much longer history. This definition appeared in international politics of the 1920s and was attributed at that time to five non-Soviet states, that emerged on the eastern and south-eastern shores of the Baltic Sea after the collapse of the Russian Empire: Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Finland. In meantime these five states organized a series of regional conferences generally called “Baltic conferences” aimed at the development of a regional alliance among them. But soon Poland left this process due to a harsh territorial dispute with Lithuania. By the early 1930s Finland also showed a clear intention to be affiliated on the international arena with the group of the Scandinavian states (thus, forming with them a new regional group of Nordic countries), rather than with its small Baltic neighbors to the south. So the group of the Baltic states included only three countries: Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. In 1934 they reached the agreement known as the Baltic Entente – the document that confirmed the attribution of the term “Baltic” to these three states. Then they shared a common destiny of incorporation into the USSR in 1940. In the Soviet Union the “three new republics” were attributed by Soviet Russian variant of this term – “Pribaltica”. In the times of Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian struggle for independence at the junction of the 1980s and 1990s the term “Baltic states” could be traced in the titles of such regional structures as the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council, established by their governments in 1989–1990. And since these states restored their independence in the early 1990s, they have been commonly named in English sources as “Baltic states”. Although this term receives frequent criticism in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as it ignores their linguistic and cultural differences, and has too much connotations with the Soviet past, it is still widely used in research and analytical literature [1, p. 875–876; 2, p. 2]. In this article the term “Baltic” refers to three states: Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

Despite the fact that since their very independence from the USSR the Baltic states declared establishing close ties with the West as their main foreign policy priority, it was obvious that they can not achieve their major goals in the western direction without resolving certain problems in their relations with Russia. Therefore, although not assigned a special priority in major foreign policy documents of the Baltic states, their relations with Russia still played a crucial role for realization of their national interests. So it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that at least in the 1990s “Russian vector” in Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian foreign policy played equally significant (if not more significant) role to that of the western one.

But the Baltic states' relations with Russia at that period were very complicated, strained and charged not only with real problems (such as Russian troops withdrawal from their territories or defining and agreeing upon their state borders with Russia), but with mutual negative stereotypes and claims stemming from the difficult heritage of the Baltic-Russian relations of 20th century and their contradicting perceptions thereof. So the aim of this article is to examine, how the main principles of the Baltic states' foreign policy of the 1990s shaped their policy towards Russia. The tasks are:

- to reveal the nature of the major principles of the Baltic states' foreign policy in 1990s;
- to analyze their implications for Baltic-Russian relations;
- to conceptualize major trends of the Baltic states' foreign policy regarding Russia applying some instruments of the international relations theory and foreign policy analysis.

The chronology of this work could be briefly defined, as the period of B. Yeltsin's presidency in Russia, because the first change of leadership in post-Soviet Russia had much greater impact on the development of Baltic-Russian relations, than any electoral cycles in the Baltic states, and it changed to a certain degree the Baltic and western perceptions of Russian politics. Besides some major events on European and global political arena at the junction of the 1990s – 2000s (such as Kosovo crisis and terrorist attacks on the USA on 11 September) marked the emergence of a new international situation that changed the conditions for Baltic-Russian relations significantly.

Looking at numerous publications on the topic of Baltic-Russian relations, that appeared within the last two decades, it could be easily detected, that most of them focus primarily on Russian policies, interests and goals in the region, analyzing them and even making theoretical schemes to explain the patterns of Russian policies towards the Baltic states. Yet very few authors pay enough attention to the foreign policies of the Baltic states regarding Russia. Among them Russian researchers R. Simonyan [3–7] and V. Vorotnikov [8; 9], who promote the idea of “occupation doctrine” as the decisive factor in Baltic foreign policy towards Russia should be mentioned. Former American Ambassador to Estonia and Lithuania K. Smith in his work pays more attention to explaining the reasons of Baltic “fears” of Russia, yet his paper adds some information on the origins of some trends in the Baltic foreign policy [2]. Valuable observations on the topic are also provided in the articles of Lithuanian researchers G. Vitkus [10], D. Mereckis and R. Morkvėnas [11]. A prominent work of B. Buzan and O. Waever [12] and the article of J. Lamoreaux and D. Galbreath published in the Journal of Baltic Studies [13] are the theoretical bases for this research.

The role of Russia in securitization of the Baltic states' foreign policies

At first glance, it may seem, that the relations with the West, not with Russia, became the main foreign policy vector of the Baltic states since their independence from the USSR. But it is necessary to remember that such a strong will of integration with the West from the part of Baltic political elites had more emotional than rational reasons. Of course, they had some pragmatic expectations of certain benefits from closer ties with the West. But the main reason was certainly an existential fear of Russia and its possible attempts to recapture the Baltic states again in the future. And this reason had the greatest impact to the forming of the basics of Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian foreign policy.

The analysis of numerous publications, documents and officials' speeches gives a clear understanding that there were two basic principles, that defined the whole foreign policy developments in the Baltic states in the 1990s: the concept of "restored statehood" and the slogan "return to Europe". The former (often described by Russian authors as "the occupation doctrine" or "the myth of occupation") [3; 5; 8; 9; 14] implied a legal continuity of the contemporary states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia with the independent nation-states of the same name and location that existed in the interwar period and lost their independence as a result of incorporation into the Soviet Union in 1940. This concept gave the Baltic states significant advantages. First of all, it allowed Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian elites, striving for national independence, to avoid very long and complicated procedures of leaving the Union in accordance with the USSR legislation – they simply declared the Soviet jurisdiction over their republics "illegal", underlining that it was established as a result of forcible occupation.

Second, it allowed them to draw a clear watershed between themselves and other republics of the former USSR, which had never before experienced a noticeable period of its own independent national statehood. So they could join a group of transition countries of Central-Eastern Europe (CEE), which also established their national statehood after the World War I and then fell under the Soviet control after the World War II, yet, formally, never losing their independence and being never governed directly from Moscow. And this fact had not only symbolic, but practical importance: thus, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia could claim from international, especially European institutions treatment different from that of other ex-USSR republics. As soon as January 1992, the EU Phare program initially designed for a large scale assistance for restructuring the economies of Poland, Hungary and other CEE states, was extended to the Baltic states, while all the rest post-Soviet states remained within the Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States program responsibility, that had much more moderate goals and provided much lower financial support.

Third, it gave legitimacy to the Baltic states' claims for return of financial assets that Interwar governments of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia deposited in western banks and real estate abroad – mostly buildings of diplomatic missions [8, p. 68]. It was very important, as all post-Soviet states in the first years after their independence suffered severe deficiency of foreign currency reserves for international trade operations.

And finally the concept of "restored statehood" strongly influenced the Baltic states' policy towards Russia – it gave the grounds for their claims to make Russia recognize the fact of forcible occupation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in 1940. The reasons behind such claims included not just symbolic restoration of "historical justice" but practical expectations of making Russia pay a compensation for repressions, deportations and expropriations of Stalin's era.

Yet the further interpretation of the "occupation heritage" and what to do with its consequences divided Lithuania from Latvia and Estonia on the two important issues. One of them was the issue of borders. As Lithuanian territory was substantially enlarged after the incorporation into the USSR and included Druskeninkai, Svencionys, Klaipeda and some other territories, its leaders favored a status-quo principle in border question. The same was true for the second issue – granting citizenship to those people (mostly of Russian ethnicity or Russian-speakers from other Soviet republics) who moved to Lithuania and settled there in the Soviet period. As their share in the country's total population was relatively small, the national leaders didn't consider them a threat to the national Lithuanian identity and therefore chose a "zero variant", meaning automatic granting of citizenship to all the people permanently living in Lithuania as of the date, when the restoration of independence was declared.

On the contrary to Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia after the incorporation into the Soviet Union lost some territories, which were included into Leningrad and Pskov regions of the Russian Federation. Therefore Estonian and Latvian leaders suggested that the concept of "restored statehood" implied the return to the provisions of agreements, signed between these countries and the Soviet Russia/USSR in interwar period – first of all the famous Tartu peace treaties of 1920. According to them the Soviet government, weakened by the civil war and foreign interventions, ceded the above-mentioned disputed areas to Estonia and Latvia. Latvian and Estonian position on citizenship issue also differed completely from Lithuanian. Russians and Russian-speakers, who settled in these two republics in the Soviet period, constituted by early 1990s a substantial part of their population – more than 34 % in Latvia and more than 30 % in Estonia [14, p. 17]. So, according to predominant views in Latvian and Estonian political elites, they posed a real threat to national sovereignty

and national identity of these two Baltic states and were often perceived as the “fifth column” of Russia. Therefore Estonian and Latvian political elites decided to exclude these Soviet time settlers, who arrived on Latvian and Estonian territory after 1940, from political process by imposing long and complicated procedures of naturalization for obtaining citizenship rights, similar to those envisaged in most Western countries for newly arrived immigrants.

As for the slogan of “return to Europe”, its message to the Baltic-Russian relations was also very clear. Some Russian authors tried to snipe at them that the European order, that the Baltic states left in 1940 doesn't exist anymore, the European politics has changed completely since then, so they have “nowhere to return”. Yet it was obvious that both the Baltic political elites and the general public understood this slogan simply as a complete disengagement with Russia and its sphere of influence and integration as far as possible into the Western community. Of course, at the beginning of 1990s, when Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were still very dependent on Russia economically and Russian (former Soviet) troops were still stationed on their territories, it was too early to define forms and terms of achieving this goal. Yet it set a clear direction for the Baltic foreign policy: integration into the major European and Euro-Atlantic institutions as the main long-term priority and breaking any dependencies on Russia as the immediate goal and necessary prerequisite for “return to Europe”.

The most prominent expression of such a trend in making of doctrinal basis for the Baltic foreign policy was the Constitutional Act “On Non-Alignment of the Republic of Lithuania to the Post-Soviet Eastern Unions” adopted on 8 June 1992 [15]. This document stated that Lithuania must not accede in any way to any political, military, economic or whatever else unions or commonwealths, being established on the basis of the former USSR. And any activity to engage Lithuania in such unions or commonwealths was declared to be hostile to the Lithuanian state.

Besides analyzing these two “particularly Baltic” political principles some theories of small states' general behavior in international politics could be applied here to enhance the understanding of the Baltic states' foreign policy. Understanding their vulnerability against Russia, Baltic governments have started since the very restoration of their independence pursuing a strategy of “negotiating the East by engaging the West”. J. Lamoreaux and D. Galbreath in their article propose four theoretical approaches to explain such a trend in the Baltic foreign policy. First – small state theory of D. Vital, second – S. Walt's analysis of alliances, third – the regional security complex theory, based on works of B. Buzan and O. Waever. And finally B. Thorhallson's concept of action capacity and vulnerability [13, p. 4]. Leaving aside the first of them, as rooted too deep in classic realism with its accent on military force,

and the last one, as more corresponding to the period, when the Baltic states have already become full-fledged members of such collective institutions as the EU and NATO, let's focus on the two remaining.

According to S. Walt (as cited by J. Lamoreaux and D. Galbreath) small states have only two options in securing their interests: balancing or bandwagoning. Balancing here means joining the weaker side of a conflict in order to “balance” the stronger side and prevent it from getting even stronger. And S. Walt considers balancing to be not a good choice for a small and weak state as its weight in international balance of power is hardly sizable to influence the outcome of the conflict substantially, but the price of appearing “on the losing side” can be disastrously high: they “can still incur the wrath of larger states if they are on the losing side” [13, p. 5]. On the contrary, bandwagoning means “joining the stronger side of a potential conflict/rivalry with the assumption that it has chosen the “winning side”... Consequently, it is in their best interest to choose the winning side in the first instance” [13, p. 5].

Applying these terms Baltic determination to join the leading Western institutions looks like a clear bandwagoning – choosing the side, that won the Cold War, and getting obvious benefits from being on the winner's side. Yet such logic looks completely inappropriate to the situation when conflict between Russia and the West seemed to be over and integration replaced block confrontation as the main trend of European politics. Besides bandwagoning is always based on rational motives and accurate calculation of costs and benefits of certain alliances. But in forming of Baltic policies towards Russia irrational motivations, stemming from traumatic memories, emotions and stereotypes seemed to have even more importance, than pragmatic thinking. Therefore the next approach looks the most appropriate.

In their famous work “Security: a new framework for analysis” B. Buzan and his colleagues representing the so called Copenhagen school in international relations theory, explain how a certain object becomes perceived as a threat. According to them, this process involves two stages. First it should be brought to actual public debates and should become a part of political discourse. This stage is called “politicization” [12, p. 25]. Then the audience involved in decision-making should be persuaded, that this issue poses a real threat to its very existence and therefore all the possible means must be used to overcome this threat. So in brief “securitization” can be described as a process of entitling a certain issue with the meaning of vital security threat. And of course, if something becomes a vital security threat, it legitimates the use of extraordinary means, which otherwise would be impossible.

So, in terms of O. Waever and B. Buzan, Baltic political elites made “securitization” of the issue of integration into the major Western institutions, presenting it as ensuring Western military and political protection

against any possible Russian aggression. In the 1990s it became the main mobilizing and consolidating factor for the elites (and to a lesser extend for general public) of the Baltic states. And Russia was awarded the role of “existential threat” to the survival of the Baltic states in this strong and lasting securitization scheme.

Even when the first Russian President B. Yeltsin declared his strong devotion to the principles of liberal democracy and market economy, Baltic elites still were among the greatest skeptics about the ability of Russia to become “a normal democracy”. In other words, it didn’t matter so much what Russian officials had done or said – the enormous size of Russian territory and its resource and military potential already was enough to proclaim Russia to be a threat to the Baltic states’ sovereignty. And both the historical memories of Stalin’s politics and ongoing disagreements with Moscow on purely practical issues were interpreted as a proof

of such vision. Because in order to make this scheme working Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian politicians had to keep Russia constantly in focus of their foreign policy to maintain, both for internal audience and their Western partners, the image of persisting “Russian threat” by bringing new evidence of Russian unfriendliness to the Baltic states and their vulnerability to their enormous and troublesome neighbour to the East.

As R. Vilpisauskas and V. Vorotnikov noted, such scheme was very comfortable and beneficial for the Baltic political elites [9; 16]. First, it allowed them to channel Western support to their states and to play the card of their vulnerability to speed up admission to the EU and NATO. Second, it helped the Baltic political elites to mobilize and consolidate domestic support for their policies in the face of supposed enormous threat from the East.

Conclusions

So it could be outlined that the major principles of Baltic foreign policy formation in the 1990s didn’t favor any positive developments of cooperation with Russia, because such cooperation was considered just from the perspective of establishing new unwanted dependencies. On the contrary, they set a goal of clear distancing from Moscow – both in political and economic fields, thus minimizing its ability to influence their politics. And in short-term perspective this goal of disengaging with Russia was even more acute and important for the Baltic states than still very distant and unclear perspective of getting full membership in the EU and NATO.

There were two basic principles of the Baltic foreign policy that defined their relations with Russia: the concept of “restored statehood” and the slogan of “return to Europe”. The first one paved the way for numerous Baltic claims to Russia – starting from demands for compensation for all the damages of Soviet occupation and, in the case of Estonia and Latvia, including even

territorial disputes resulted from their attempts to restore their prewar borders. The second principle justified and grounded the Baltic determination to completely disengage with Russia and to build solid and reliable barriers against any possible Russian attempts to renew in any form in the future its control over Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, by accession into the major Western institutions, such as the EU and NATO.

In the international relations theory there developed several approaches to understanding and explaining the reasons of small states behavior in international politics. Two of them – those of S. Walt and of B. Buzan and O. Waever appeared to be fully applicable to the case of the Baltic states’ foreign policy. Yet securitization concept of B. Buzan and O. Waever seems to be the most suitable for understanding mechanisms of forming the major trends of Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian foreign policy regarding Russia in the 1990s. This concept reveals how the image of external threat is being constructed and used in state politics.

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