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ETHNIC RELATIONS IN THE BALTIC STATES

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Executive Summary

This paper assesses the state of ethnic relations in the Baltic states today and includes historical and demographic perspectives on this issue. The author argues that despite numerous tragic scenarios in recent years, violent conflict is not inevitable in the post-communist world and prospects for continued peaceful resolution of ethnic tensions in the Baltic states remain favorable.

Historically, ethnic conflict among the indigenous Baltic nationalities--the Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians--has been virtually non-existent. The major ethnic tensions in the Baltic states today date from World War II and the period of Soviet rule, especially with the appearance of large Russian populations in Latvia and Estonia (about one-third of the population in each case). In Lithuania the potential problems stem from the existence of a small, but compact Polish minority, joined to the country in World War II, and the legacy of an historically antagonistic Polish-Lithuanian relationship.

The major factors exacerbating ethnic tensions are the continued, albeit declining, presence of ex-Soviet troops in Latvia and Estonia, and the uncertainty regarding Moscow's foreign policy intentions. Other irritants in ethnic relations are the language issue and the question of citizenship. Although Moscow continues to hammer away at alleged human rights abuses in Estonia and Latvia, numerous representatives of international organizations (e.g., the UN, CSCE, and the Council of Europe) have not found any significant violations in this area.

Attitudes among ethnic groups in the Baltic states are complex. Among Balts, outright hostility is usually reserved for those Russians and non-Balts associated with the former Soviet regime, and opinion polls in recent years suggest that both Balts and non-Balts find ethnic relations to be improving.

A non-violent scenario in the Baltic states remains likely for the following reasons. First, because Russians in the Baltic are overwhelmingly recent immigrants, ethnic relations do not have the burden of deep-seated historical antagonisms. Second, the independent Baltic states in the interwar era established a precedent for constitutional government and representative democracy--however flawed in practice--that serves as a basis for gradualism today. The use of violence and terror has never been a part of Baltic political culture except briefly in the unstable 1930s. Third, during the entire Gorbachev era and movement for restoration of independence, the Balts practiced strict non-violence, probably drawing

inspiration from their historical ties to Scandinavia and certainly from the example of the Solidarity movement in Poland. Finally, it would be counterproductive for the Balts to engage in violence against Russians given the disparity in numbers between Russia, on the one hand, and Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, on the other.

The major factor of uncertainty affecting ethnic relations in the Baltic states is the role of Russia. Moscow is certainly capable of artificially raising ethnic tensions, but that would hardly be in its long-term interest, economic and otherwise.

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Introduction

Given the tragic developments in recent years in many parts of the former Soviet Union and especially the horror of Bosnia-Herzegovina, it must be asked whether violent conflict will be the fate of other post-communist countries and regions. Despite the potential for violence virtually everywhere in the former Soviet bloc, it should not be assumed that the Yugoslav case is the norm for the future. It is this author's contention that each post-communist country or region must be viewed in a clearly differentiated perspective and should be examined in the context of its own distinctive ethnic composition and historical development. In particular, the argument presented here suggests that the prospects for continued non-violent development and a gradualist solution to any ethnic problems in the Baltic states remain favorable.

Historical and Demographic Background

Although the Baltic states are treated as a unit today, it is important to recall that their histories only began to converge about a century ago as the Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians all developed parallel national movements under tsarist Russian rule, leading to similar demands for cultural and political autonomy during the Russian Revolution of 1905.¹ A key common historical experience for the three Baltic peoples was the two decades of independence they enjoyed during the interwar era, a distinction that sets them apart from all other post-Soviet nationalities. Although the political legacy of this period--as elsewhere in East Central Europe--was mixed, it nevertheless signified the firm beginning of a modern civic culture that could not be eradicated by nearly fifty years of Soviet rule. In all three cases the Baltic states began their first era of independence with liberal democratic regimes, but later succumbed to authoritarianism (in 1926 in Lithuania, in 1934 in Estonia and Latvia). Nevertheless, the regimes were mild by the European standards of this period.² In any case, during the Gorbachev years, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were uniquely able among Soviet republics to draw upon significant post-tsarist and pre-Soviet political precedents.

The secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in August 1939 sealed the fate of the Baltic states and ushered in a new era of parallel development: unwanted Soviet military bases in fall 1939; military occupation and forced annexation by the USSR in summer 1940;

Sovietization, including mass deportations, in 1940-1941; German occupation in World War II; postwar Stalinism, including collectivization of agriculture, new deportations, and the beginning of massive in-migration of non-Balts; and all the ups and downs of the post-Stalin era.³

With regard to demographic development in the 20th century there are striking parallels between the Estonian and Latvian cases whereas Lithuania has followed a distinctive path of its own. In 1989, in their home republics, there were just under one million Estonians, nearly 1.4 million Latvians, and just over 2.9 million Lithuanians. Two key trends should be singled out in the northern two Baltic states. First, the titular nationalities in both Latvia and Estonia have yet to recover from the demographic catastrophe of the 1940s (the result, mainly, of Soviet deportations and repression, wartime deaths, and flight to the West); there are still fewer Latvians and Estonians in their homelands today than there were in the mid-1930s.⁴ Moreover, an aging population combined with low birth rates in both cases suggest that no increase or even a decline is likely in the foreseeable future.

Second, there has been a precipitous drop--unique among union republic nationalities in the former Soviet Union--in the proportion of the titular ethnic group in the total population. From the mid-1930s to 1989 the Estonian share of the population plummeted 26.7 percentage points (from 88.2 to 61.5 percent) while the Latvian one fell 23.7 (from 75.7 to 52.0 percent)--and the drop would be even greater if postwar borders were used as the basis of comparison. On the other hand, despite suffering the same kinds of repression as the Estonians and Latvians, the Lithuanians have displayed a demographic dynamism based on higher birth rates and have maintained a remarkably consistent proportion of the population in their homeland during the past seventy years. In 1923, the Lithuanian share of the total population was 80.6 percent; in 1989, it was 79.6 percent.⁵

Roots of Ethnic Tension

Historically, ethnic conflict among the three indigenous peoples of the Baltic region has been very limited. From the 13th to the 20th centuries the Estonians and Latvians were under foreign rule, usually by the same powers or overlords, and both ethnic groups were relegated to the lower echelons of society. In contrast, Lithuania was a major state in medieval Europe, but its domains extended east and south to the East Slavic lands and did not include its northern Baltic neighbors. The Lithuanian elites gradually became Polonized, and by the 19th century the position of the Lithuanian-speaking population, overwhelmingly peasant, was comparable to that of the indigenous peoples in Latvia and Estonia. In modern

times these nationalities have been too small in numbers to harbor any imperial ambitions with regard to each other's territory.

Estonia and most of Latvia have been Lutheran since the Reformation, but in neither case did religious factors play a major role in shaping the ideology of nationalism, largely because the local Lutheran Church remained in the hands of Baltic German elites until the post-World War I era. Despite a religious revival in recent years this generalization remains true today. In Catholic Lithuania, however, religion has been a powerful historical force and remains so today, much as in Poland.⁶ Nevertheless, in none of the Baltic countries do religious issues or divisions contribute significantly to ethnic tensions. In the interwar era the fledgling Baltic states, protective of their newly established sovereignty, proved reluctant to cooperate with each other, but the rigors of Soviet rule brought them increasingly closer together. It is instructive that in the Gorbachev years Baltic popular fronts moved quickly to learn from each other and work together.⁷ Thus, given their geopolitical location and previous historical experience, there are virtually no prospects for any serious conflict among the indigenous Baltic nationalities.

The ethnic tensions present in the Baltic states today are essentially a product of World War II and the period of Soviet rule. In Estonia and Latvia, the major conflict is between native Balts and Russians (30.3 and 34.0 percent, respectively, of the total population in 1989). In Lithuania, on the other hand, the potential Lithuanian-Russian confrontation is muted because of the relatively small Russian presence (9.4 percent in 1989), although a unique source of tension here is the existence of a compact Polish minority (7.0 percent in 1989).⁸ Opinion differs today on how best to characterize the large contingents of ethnic Russians in Estonia and Latvia.⁹ They--or some of them--have been termed "colonists," "immigrants," "migrants," "occupiers," and "integrated Russians."¹⁰ What is clear, however, is that it is not possible to view the great majority of the Baltic Russians as a traditional minority, i.e., one that has been rooted in the region for a long period of time. In fact, they only began appearing en masse in the Baltic states in the immediate postwar era under Stalin. Some came as part of the political elite or the Soviet repressive forces ("occupiers"), others found their way to the Baltic mainly for economic reasons (the more permanent "immigrants" and the more coincidental "migrants"), and still others were sent to the Baltic under Stalin without even knowing their final destination.

The greatest source of tension in the Baltic states in the post-Soviet years has been the continuing, albeit declining, presence of ex-Soviet troops. From approximately 120,000 officers and men in spring 1992 in the three Baltic states altogether, the total figure fell to

less than 15,000 in early 1994--in Estonia and Latvia alone, since Lithuania was freed of ex-Soviet armed forces by the end of August 1993. Lithuania fared best among the Baltic states because its foreign and domestic policies were relatively acceptable to Moscow, and its small ethnic Russian population was not a major issue. Of the remaining troops, over 80 percent are concentrated in Latvia because it had been the headquarters of the Baltic Military District under Soviet rule and home to key installations such as the Skrunda radar station and the major submarine base in Liepāja.¹¹

The larger issue reflected in the continued presence of Soviet troops in the Baltic states is the question of Russia's intentions as the main successor to the Soviet Union. The widespread use of the term "near abroad" since early 1992 is only one indication of the strength of the imperial lobby, both civilian and military. The striking success of extremist parties in the December 1993 Russian parliamentary elections immediately led to a shriller tone in foreign policy by both President Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Kozyrev since they presumably feared being outflanked by the victorious nationalists and communists. With regard to the Baltic states, Russia has become more intransigent in negotiations on further troop withdrawals and increasingly insistent on acting as the "protector" of ethnic Russians residing in the Baltic region.¹²

The strategic issue in the Baltic area is further complicated by the anomalous existence of the Kaliningrad (formerly Königsberg) region, physically separated from Russia by Lithuania and Belarus. Once forming the northern third of East Prussia, the region fell to Stalin as a result of World War II and quickly became a major Soviet military base. Despite various proposals for demilitarization in the post-Soviet era, it is highly unlikely that the Russian government or military will relinquish any significant control in the foreseeable future. Because of its historical ties to the region and the recurring issue of land access, Lithuania is in a unique situation among the Baltic states in its relationship to Russia on this matter.¹³ Kaliningrad's strategic impact remains ambiguous. On the one hand, the existence of a strong military base may make the Russian leadership more flexible on troop withdrawals from the Baltic states. On the other hand, since Kaliningrad is physically separated from Russia, Moscow may be tempted to view the territory in between as strategically vital.

As noted above, an ethnic issue specific to Lithuania is the existence of a compactly located Polish minority in the Vilnius region that was joined to the country only through the territorial gains made in World War II. The current tensions between Lithuanians and Poles in Lithuania must be seen in the entire historical context of Polish-Lithuanian relations. A

strong undercurrent of resentment remains among Lithuanians today, especially with regard to the Vilnius (Pol. Wilno) issue. It is striking that as the possibilities for change began to unfold in the Gorbachev era the Polish community in Lithuania chose to ally itself with the local Russians rather than the Lithuanian majority, and Sajudis, the Lithuanian popular front that led the movement for the restoration of independence, did not see fit to reach out to the Poles in Lithuania. Although tensions have flared from time to time, e.g., over Lithuania's dissolution of local councils in ethnic Polish areas for allegedly supporting the failed August 1991 coup in Moscow, the issue remains manageable, especially since Poland has no interest in pushing the matter to the point of no return.¹⁴

A significant factor in assessing ethnic tensions in the Baltic states is the language issue and the entire question of communication among different nationalities. The three Baltic peoples have remained highly loyal to their mother tongues in first-language use, but according to the 1989 census Latvians were about twice as likely to be fluent in Russian as a second language (68.3 percent) as Lithuanians (37.4 percent) or Estonians (33.6 percent). It is likely that the greater role of Russian as a lingua franca in Latvia mitigates ethnic tensions in that country. On the other hand, Lithuanian is the most dominant of the indigenous languages in the Baltic states, and Russians and other non-Lithuanians in Lithuania feel relatively obliged to learn it.¹⁵ Since 1989 the status of the Baltic languages has risen markedly. In the first five months of that year all three Baltic republics passed language laws raising Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian to the level of "state languages," and the restoration of independence in 1991 provided still another boost to their status. For example, in Estonia there is evidence that younger age cohorts among the Russian population are adopting an increasingly more favorable attitude towards learning Estonian.¹⁶

The citizenship question is yet another crucial factor in evaluating the state of ethnic relations in the Baltic states. A particularly thorny issue, it has been on the public agenda since the emergence of independence movements in the late 1980s. Before the restoration of independence the Latvian and Estonian governments were reluctant to move hastily on the citizenship issue for fear of locking themselves into a long-term policy while the status of the large non-Baltic populations in their countries remained unresolved. In contrast, Lithuania--whose demographic composition had been altered the least by the decades of Soviet rule--took the lead on this question, and in November 1989 it offered citizenship, after a two-year waiting period, to all permanent residents who declared loyalty to Lithuania. The great majority of non-Lithuanians exercised this option. In December 1991 a new, more

restrictive citizenship law required ten years of residence, reading and speaking knowledge of Lithuanian, and knowledge of the constitution.¹⁷

Estonia, on the other hand, took a more gradual approach, reinstating its 1938 citizenship law only in November 1991 and passing enabling legislation in February 1992. All citizens of Estonia in June 1940 and their descendants were automatically considered citizens. Naturalization required two years of residence (counting from March 30, 1990, when Estonia declared the beginning of a transition period to the restoration of independence) and an additional one-year waiting period, minimal competence in Estonian, and an oath of loyalty to the constitution. The post-Soviet Latvian parliament, elected in June 1993, is expected to pass a new citizenship law in the first half of 1994, and there is every indication it will be similar to the most recent Lithuanian and Estonian legislation described above. The draft law currently under discussion in the Latvian parliament calls for a 10-year residency requirement and conversational knowledge of Latvian, among other provisions.¹⁸

The post-Soviet Yeltsin government in Russia has taken a hard line on the citizenship issue in Latvia and Estonia. It is noteworthy that Moscow has categorically refused to take any responsibility for the previous actions of the Soviet regime in the Baltic states, especially under Stalin, and has argued in effect that the present negotiations should be based on a blank slate with regard to the past. However, given the forcible and sweeping demographic changes brought about in Estonia and Latvia under Soviet rule,¹⁹ the northern two Baltic states have not seen their way fit to accept a "zero option" on this issue. Numerous fact-finding missions over the past few years by representatives of international organizations such as the United Nations, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Council of Europe have not found any significant violations of human rights in Latvia and Estonia.²⁰ Moreover, the citizenship legislation in Estonia and that proposed for Latvia are well within the norms prevalent today in Western Europe. It is striking that Russian accusations have found the most sympathetic hearing in the United States,²¹ probably because the US feels more comfortable dealing with large states and nations, and Russia is correctly--if often one-sidedly--seen as the key to stability in most of the post-communist world. Furthermore, American reporting on the former Soviet Union since the latter's demise has moved increasingly back to a Moscow-centered perspective, and the intractable problems of the former Yugoslavia have colored much of the perception of the post-communist world, leading to a growing fear of worst-case scenarios.

A minor factor, but one that cannot be ignored is the question of borders. The territory of all three Baltic states changed during World War II and the late Stalin era. Moscow arbitrarily transferred about 5 percent of the territory of Estonia (the trans-Narva region and most of the Petseri [Russ. Pechory] district) and about 2 percent of that of Latvia (the Abrene region) to the Russian SFSR.²² By an irony of fate, however, Lithuania regained the Vilnius region (lost to Poland in 1920) and the Klaipėda district (lost to Germany in 1939). Probably because Estonia lost more territory and some ethnic Estonians remain across the current border in Russia, it has made more of an issue of the border question in negotiations with Russia than has Latvia. Nevertheless, neither Estonia nor Latvia has assigned this particular item leading priority, viewing it rather as simply part of the larger framework of negotiations. In the Lithuanian case any potential problems are not with Russia, but Poland since it was Polish territory annexed by the Soviets that was handed over to Lithuania in 1939-1940. However, Poland has not raised this issue and is not likely to--if for no other reason than it would encourage German pretensions to Poland's western territories.²³

Baltic and Russian Attitudes

The popular ethnic stereotypes in the Baltic states are well known: Balts allegedly refer to Russians as "occupiers," and Russians call Balts "fascists."²⁴ Reality, however, is much more complex. Among most Balts it can be argued that a distinction is made between three groups of Russians (and other non-Balts in general): (1) "integrated" Russians, a category of individuals best distinguished by their fluency in the Baltic languages (in 1989, this included 38 percent of the Russians in Lithuania, 22 percent of those in Latvia, and 15 percent of those in Estonia); (2) economic immigrants or colonists who came to the Baltic mainly because of its relatively high standard of living; and (3) genuine "occupiers," i.e., those directly associated with the Soviet regime such as party officials and members of the military and KGB. Only toward this third group can it be said that there is strong hostility. In the case of Latvia a complicating factor is the presence of an unusually large number of retired Soviet officers (a reasonable estimate is around 50,000, not including family members).²⁵

In the post-Soviet world all three Baltic states have held unicameral parliamentary elections that provide an indication of the political sentiments held by those who are already citizens, including the Baltic natives. In the Estonian legislature (the Riigikogu) nine parties or electoral alliances are represented, ten in Lithuania's Seimas, and eight in Latvia's

Saeima.²⁶ The ideological sweep is broad, ranging from former communists to ex-dissidents and Christian-based parties. As would be expected, the right wing tends to be more anti-Russian in its views while the left takes a more moderate position. There is no indication, however, that any Baltic political movement, including the so-called national radicals in each country, advocates the use of force as a solution to ethnic issues.

Given the similarity of the demographic situation in Estonia and Latvia, one might also expect parallel patterns in ethnic relations. In fact, however, there are significant differences. In Latvia the Russian and Latvian communities are considerably more integrated with each other than is the case with the Russian and Estonian populations of Estonia. This is evident, for example, in the more even distribution of Russians in Latvia in both urban and rural areas throughout the country and also in a substantially higher rate of ethnic intermarriage. In 1989, 18.4 percent of ethnic Latvian men and 19.6 percent of women entered into ethnically mixed marriages in their home republic, while the comparable figures for ethnic Estonian men (8.0 percent) and women (8.3 percent) were less than half this rate. For ethnic Lithuanians, the proportion was even lower: 5.5 percent for men and 7.3 percent for women.²⁷ Probably a contributing factor to the higher Latvian rate of exogamy is the continuity of a much larger non-Baltic population in Latvia compared to Estonia. In 1943, there were 168,000 Russians living within Latvia's postwar boundaries whereas the comparable figure for Estonia was only about 20,000 Russians in 1945.²⁸ Thus, the "colonist" factor in Estonia is considerably more significant than in Latvia, and this would suggest a more difficult process of integration.

On the eve of the restoration of Baltic independence, one measure of Russian and other non-Baltic public opinion in the Baltic states that occurred almost simultaneously was the referendums on independence held in February-March 1991. As would be expected, given the ethnic balance, voters in Lithuania supported independence by the largest margin: 90.5 percent "yes" vs. 6.6 percent "no" with 84.7 percent of the eligible voters participating. In Estonia the comparable figures were 77.8 percent "yes" and 21.4 percent "no" (82.9 percent voting) while in Latvia they were 73.7 percent "yes" and 24.7 percent "no" (87.6 percent participating).²⁹ It is nevertheless striking that Latvia and Estonia did not lag very far behind Lithuania, suggesting that a substantial proportion of non-Latvians (some 38 percent of the total) and non-Estonians (about 30 percent of the total) supported Baltic independence.³⁰ In the post-independence period public opinion polls have been increasingly used to measure perceptions of ethnic relations. In Estonia in February 1993, for example, both Estonians and non-Estonians found relations among nationalities to be much better than

three to four years earlier. Compared to December 1988, the proportion of Estonians who assessed ethnic relations as "poor/very poor" declined from 55 percent to 12 percent while among non-Estonians this figure fell from 39 percent to 9 percent.³¹

In terms of political attitudes and parties it is noteworthy that Russians in the Baltic states have remained relatively unorganized, especially in comparison to the Balts themselves. One of the hallmarks of the Baltic independence movements was a broad grass-roots base, and a strong nexus between the intelligentsia and the population at large. In contrast, the bulk of the Russian communities in the Baltic states has been relatively transient and heavily concentrated in the working class, and although a technical-managerial elite has been present, a humanistic intelligentsia of any size or influence has been lacking. This has rendered them less cohesive or capable of mobilization. Although the backlash against the emergence of the indigenous Baltic popular fronts in 1988 (organized as Intermovement in Estonia, Interfront in Latvia, and Unity in Lithuania, and based on the old communist elite of party officials, military officers, and all-Union plant managers) initially enjoyed some success by playing on the fears of the Russian population, these movements only appealed to a hard-line minority. Following the restoration of Baltic independence the Russians in the Baltic were most oriented toward economic questions and remained relatively indifferent to Baltic cultural and political agendas.³²

Prospects for Violent Conflict

At first glance it might appear that the Baltic states, especially Latvia and Estonia with their large Russian populations, would be probable candidates for a Yugoslav- or Transcaucasian-type scenario. However, a closer look at the situation suggests that there are key distinctive features in the Baltic case that make a continued non-violent solution to the region's ethnic tensions more likely. Because Russians in the Baltic are overwhelmingly recent colonists or immigrants, the major ethnic issues in the region lack the deep-seated historical antagonisms associated with Serbs and Croats in the Balkans or with Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Transcaucasia. Moreover, the indigenous Baltic nationalities are currently at a historical high-point in terms of cooperation among themselves, and despite a post-communist desire to assert their individuality, there are numerous indications that this trend will deepen and develop further. In essence, ethnic relations remain negotiable in the Baltic states and are not likely to pass the point of no return.

It might be objected that the more appropriate analogy for the Baltic states is Moldova, where violence has erupted between Russians and the indigenous Moldovans over

the Transdniester region. However, the parallel has several flaws since the Soviet manipulation of borders in the Baltic was much less drastic than in Moldova, and nothing comparable to the Gagauz problem exists in the Baltic states, except on a milder basis with the Polish issue in Lithuania.³³ Above all, it is crucial to bear in mind that Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were fully independent states in the 1920s and 1930s and not merely poor provinces of another state (Romania), as in the case of Moldova. In the interwar era the Baltic states established a precedent for constitutional government and representative democracy--however flawed in practice--that serves as a basis for gradualism in Baltic politics today. The use of violence and terror has never been part of Baltic political culture except for brief instances in the unstable 1930s.

The perspective of the recent past also provides grounds for optimism. Since the onset of the Gorbachev era and the sweeping political and social change it initiated, no one to my knowledge has been killed in the Baltic states for ethnic or political reasons, except by Soviet repressive forces. The two major instances of regime-sponsored violence occurred in Vilnius (15 dead) and Riga (6 dead) in January 1991 as part of Gorbachev's ill-fated crackdown in the Baltic and then in July 1991 at a Lithuanian border crossing (7 dead).³⁴ The credit for this record of non-violence in recent years should certainly go to Balts and non-Balts alike, and this is perhaps an example of how Russians and other immigrants have to a considerable extent internalized values of the Baltic political environment.

The absence of violence does not mean the absence of issues that could lead to serious ethnic conflict. An example is the city of Narva in northeastern Estonia with a population of 81,000 in 1989 of which only 4 percent was Estonian.³⁵ According to the last census held in interwar Estonia, Narva's population of 23,500 was 65 percent Estonian. What took place under Stalin's rule can only be termed a form of "ethnic cleansing" in which evacuated and otherwise displaced residents of Narva were not allowed to return after World War II. As an editorial in a Russian-language newspaper in Narva in 1950 put it, "Soviet Narva" did not want to see the return of "many White Guardists, spies, and exploiters."³⁶ In short, although Narva has always been a border region with a mixed population, it was deliberately turned into an overwhelmingly non-Estonian city by Soviet policy.

There has been some talk of secession in recent years and periodic discussion of a special status for Narva and northeastern Estonia. In July 1993, a minor crisis occurred as the city councils of Narva and neighboring Sillamäe held referendums on the question of autonomy. The national government in Tallinn opposed the initiatives, but decided not to use force to stop them. Although nearly all those voting in both cities supported autonomy, the

turnout was low (54 percent in Narva and 60 percent in Sillamäe), and more importantly, numerous irregularities were noted that raised the issue of whether half of the eligible voters--especially in Narva--actually participated. In August, the Supreme Court of Estonia declared the referendums invalid and unconstitutional, and this ruling was accepted by the local authorities in both cities.³⁷ Whatever its legality, the abortive vote suggested that about half or more of Narva's population had made its peace with an independent Estonia. The referendum in Narva is best explained as an attempt by a traditionalist elite to hold on to political power in the face of impending local elections in October 1993. Interestingly, only citizens could be candidates, but non-citizen permanent residents of at least five years were allowed to vote. Moderate Russian candidates proved to be more successful than hard-liners in Narva, along with some ethnic Estonians, and the new city council is working with the national government in a more cooperative spirit than the previous one.³⁸ Thus, despite tensions and some misunderstandings, cool heads have prevailed both in Narva and in Tallinn, and the situation should remain manageable.

A further perspective on the tradition of non-violence in the Baltic states is seen in their historical ties to Scandinavia and Central Europe. In addition to their previous connections to the Baltic, the Scandinavian states served as important models for Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in the interwar period, and even under Soviet rule they provided a partial window to the West. In the post-Stalin era the Balts were especially impressed with the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the Solidarity movement in Poland throughout the 1980s. It seems clear that Solidarity's emphasis on grass-roots mobilization and non-violent resistance served as a key inspiration for the Baltic popular fronts in the late 1980s. These movements took a centrist position and acted as umbrella organizations that reflected the shift of public opinion from the more modest goal of autonomy to full independence. Especially striking is that the Popular Front of Latvia, having to deal with the greatest ethnic mixture in the Baltic, played a crucial role in mediating between the Latvian and non-Latvian populations.³⁹

A pragmatic aspect of this question should also be noted. A glance at the 1989 census will recall that there were 145.1 million Russians in the former Soviet Union and only 5.3 million Balts in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Baltic advocacy or use of violence against local Russian populations would clearly be counterproductive. Here is another significant difference in comparing the situation to that in Transcaucasia. In any ethnic confrontation in the Baltic, Moscow would not be neutral or acting as some sort of mediator. In the chaotic and shrill political atmosphere in Russia in 1993 and early 1994, the Yeltsin

government felt it incumbent to take an increasingly hard line on the Baltic situation. Yet neither Moscow nor the Baltic governments operated in a vacuum, and all had to take account of their actions in the international arena.

Thus, despite violent scenarios in some parts of the post-communist world, the prospects for continued non-violent evolution in the Baltic states remain favorable. The main factor of uncertainty in the Baltic question is, in fact, a non-Baltic one: the role of Russia and its foreign policy in the region. By meddling in Baltic affairs and asserting an imperial right to intervene in the "near abroad," Russia is certainly capable of artificially raising ethnic tensions. However, as Carl Bildt, the Swedish Prime Minister, has argued, it would be in Russia's long-term interest, economic and otherwise, to promote stability rather than conflict in the Baltic states.⁴⁰

NOTE: This paper is an abbreviated and updated version of my "Ethnic Relations and Conflict in the Baltic States" which will appear shortly in W. Raymond Duncan and Paul Holman, eds., Ethnic Nationalism and Regional Conflict in the Former USSR and Yugoslavia (Westview Press).

NOTES

1. For the Baltic experience in the late tsarist era, see the sections on Latvia and Estonia, respectively, by Andrejs Plakans and Toivo U. Raun in Edward C. Thaden, et al., Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland, 1855-1914 (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981) and Manfred Hellmann, "Die litauische nationale Bewegung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert," Zeitschrift für Ostforschung, 2 (1953): 66-107.
2. For a brief, but useful summary of interwar developments in the Baltic states, see Joseph Rothschild, East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1974), pp. 367-81.
3. On the Soviet period, see especially Romuald J. Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, The Baltic States: Years of Dependence, 1940-1990 (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1993). For developments in Estonia, see Toivo U. Raun, Estonia and the Estonians, 2nd ed. (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1991).
4. For a useful introduction to Baltic population losses in the 1940s, see Misiunas and Taagepera, Baltic States, especially Tables 1-5 in Appendix B.
5. Egil Levits, "Die demographische Situation in der UdSSR und in den baltischen Staaten unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von nationalen und sprachsoziologischen Aspekten," Acta Baltica, 21 (1981): 63-64, 90-91, 119-20; Eesti arvudes 1920-1935 (Tallinn: Riigi Statistika Keskbüroo, 1937), p. 12; Riina Kionka, "Migration to and from Estonia," Report on the USSR, 2, no. 37 (1990): 20; Dzintra Bungs, "Migration to and from Latvia," *ibid.*, 32-33; Saulius Girnius, "Migration to and from Lithuania," *ibid.*, 25.
6. On Catholicism in Lithuania, see V. Stanley Vardys, The Catholic Church, Dissent, and Nationality in Lithuania (Boulder, Colo.: East European Quarterly, 1978).
7. See Alfred Erich Senn, "Lithuania's Path to Independence," Journal of Baltic Studies, 22 (1991): 245-50; Toivo U. Raun, "The Re-establishment of Estonian Independence," *ibid.*, 251-58; Andrejs Plakans, "Latvia's Return to Independence," *ibid.*, 259-66.
8. Raun, Estonia and the Estonians, 2nd ed., p. 247; Dzintra Bungs, "Recent Demographic Changes in Latvia," RFE/RL Research Report, 2, no. 50 (1993): 47; Girnius, "Migration to and from Lithuania," p. 25.
9. There has been some out-migration of Russians and other non-Balts from Latvia and Estonia in recent years, raising the native proportion of the population to about 62.8 percent in Estonia (1992) and about 53.5 percent in Latvia (1993); see Ene Tiit, "Eesti rahvastik ja selle probleemid," Akadeemia, 5 (1993): 1659; Bungs, "Recent Demographic Changes," p. 47.

10. "Colonists" is used by Rein Taagepera in Estonia: Return to Independence (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1993), pp. 218-21. The other four terms are used by Andrejs Pantelejevs, who served as head of the Latvian Supreme Council's Human Rights and National Affairs Commission, as cited in Richard J. Krickus, "Latvia's 'Russian Question,'" RFE/RL Research Report, 2, no. 8 (1993): 31-33.
11. The Baltic Observer, February 24-March 2, 1994, p. 1; March 10-16, 1994, p. 3.
12. *Ibid.*, March 10-16, 1994, pp. 1, 6.
13. Misiunas and Taagepera, Baltic States, pp. 336-37, 344-45; Anatole Lieven, The Baltic Revolution: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Path to Independence (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1993), pp. 210-13.
14. For useful overviews, see Stephen R. Burant, "Polish-Lithuanian Relations: Past, Present, and Future," Problems of Communism, 40, no. 3 (1991): 67-84 and Richard J. Krickus, "Lithuania's Polish Question," Report on the USSR, 3, no. 48 (1991): 20-23.
15. Vestnik statistiki, no. 1 (1991): 70, 76; no. 6 (1991): 76.
16. Helsingin Sanomat, July 11, 1993, p. A4.
17. Dzintra Bungas, Saulius Girnius, and Riina Kionka, "Citizenship Legislation in the Baltic States," RFE/RL Research Report, 1, no. 50 (1992): 40.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39; Riigi Teataja, no. 7 (1992): 175-76; The Baltic Observer, December 3-9, 1993, p. 1.
19. In 1934, ethnic Russians constituted 8.2 percent of the population of Estonia, and in 1935 they comprised 10.6 percent of the population of Latvia; see Levits, "Demographische Situation," pp. 64, 91. If postwar borders are used, the Russian share in both cases in the 1930s was even smaller.
20. The Baltic Independent, May 21-27, 1993, p. 1; Helsingin Sanomat, March 22, 1993, p. A2; Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Russians in Estonia: Problems and Prospects (Washington, D.C.: n.p., 1992).
21. See, for example, Charles William Maynes, "Containing Ethnic Conflict," Foreign Policy, no. 90 (Spring 1993): 5; Robert Cullen, "Human Rights Quandry," Foreign Affairs, 71, no. 5 (Winter 1992/1993): 80-81; Francis Fukuyama, "Trapped in the Baltics," The New York Times, December 19, 1992, p. 15.
22. Raun, Estonia and the Estonians, 2nd ed., p. 169; Edgar Anderson, "How Narva, Petseri, and Abrene Came To Be in the RSFSR," Journal of Baltic Studies, 19 (1988): 207.

23. Helsingin Sanomat, July 24, 1993, p. A7; Burant, "Polish-Lithuanian Relations," pp. 83-84.
24. Wall Street Journal, February 4, 1992, p. A1.
25. Krickus, "Latvia's 'Russian Question,'" pp. 31-32; Dzintra Bungs, "Soviet Troops in Latvia," RFE/RL Research Report, 1, no. 34 (1992): 20; The New York Times, November 22, 1992, p. 11. The number of retired ex-Soviet officers in Latvia remains a matter of dispute. Recently, the Russian side put the figure at 20,000 while the Latvian authorities claimed it is "closer to 70,000"; see The Baltic Observer, March 10-16, 1994, p. 4.
26. The Baltic Independent, September 25-October 1, 1992, p. 9; November 27-December 2, 1992, p. 8; Dzintra Bungs, "Moderates Win Parliamentary Elections in Latvia," RFE/RL Research Report, 2, no. 28 (1993): 1-2.
27. O. Krastiņš, "Jauktās laulības, vecāku un bērnu tautības problēma," Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis, no. 6 (1992): 6; Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1990 g. (Moscow: Finansy i Statistika, 1991), pp. 84-85.
28. Ilmars Mežs, Latvieši Latvijā (Kalamazoo, Mich.: n.p., 1992), p. 7; Kalev Katus, "Rahvus: venelane; elukoht: Eesti," Aja Pulss, nos. 5/6 (1991): 8.
29. Ekho Litvy, February 13, 1991, p. 4; The Estonian Independent, February 14, 1991, p. 1; March 7, 1991, p. 3.
30. B. Zepa, "Sabiedriskā doma pārejas periodā Latvijā: Latviešu un citlatviešu uzskatu dinamika (1989-1992)," Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis, no. 10 (1992): 23; Raun, Estonia and the Estonians, 2nd ed., p. 239; Taagepera, Estonia, p. 14.
31. Aksel Kirch, Marika Kirch, and Tarmo Tuisk, "Russians in the Baltic States: To Be or Not To Be?," Journal of Baltic Studies, 24 (1993): 178.
32. Anatol Lieven, "Baltic Notebook," Encounter 74 (May 1990): 66; Rein Ruutsoo, "Transitional Society and Social Movements in Estonia, 1987-1991," Eesti Teaduste Akadeemia Toimetised: Humanitaar- ja Sotsiaalteadused, 42 (1993): 211; Philip Hanson, "Estonia's Narva Problem, Narva's Estonian Problem," RFE/RL Research Report, 2, no. 18 (1993): 20.
33. On Moldova, see Daria Fane, "Moldova: Breaking Loose from Moscow," in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras, eds., Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993), pp. 121-53.
34. The Baltic Independent, August 16-22, 1991, p. 1.

35. Raimo Pullat, Linnad kodanlikus Eestis (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1978), p. 137; Raun, Estonia and the Estonians, 2nd ed., pp. 207, 235.
36. Sirp, October 11, 1991, p. 1.
37. Philip Hanson, Local Power and Market Reform in the Soviet Union (Munich: RFE/RL Research Institute, 1993), p. 50; The Baltic Independent, July 23-29, 1993, p. 1; RFE/RL Daily Report, no. 153, August 12, 1993.
38. Eesti Aeg, October 20, 1993, p. 5; RFE/RL Daily Report, no. 244, December 22, 1993.
39. Eric Rudenshiold, "Ethnic Dimensions in Contemporary Latvian Politics: Focusing Forces for Change," Soviet Studies, 44 (1992): 620-21, 626, 634.
40. The Baltic Independent, August 6-12, 1993, p. 3.