



BALTIC JOURNAL OF LAW & POLITICS

A Journal of Vytautas Magnus University

VOLUME 10, NUMBER 2 (2017)

ISSN 2029-0454



DE GRUYTER
OPEN

Cit.: *Baltic Journal of Law & Politics* 10:2 (2017): 26–45

DOI: 10.1515/bjlp-2017-0011

THE SECURITIZATION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES IN THE BALTIC STATES

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Received: August 2, 2017; reviews: 2; accepted: December 11, 2017.

ABSTRACT

The occupation of Crimea and war in Eastern Ukraine brought minority issues to the top of the Baltic security agenda. Although experts estimate that a separatist scenario for Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia is not probable, the issue of national minorities has already been included into the security concept as a potential source of danger to stability and national identity. While there is need to analyze political risks in the Baltics, the concept of securitization will be applied to the topic of national minorities. This paper addresses the problem of national minorities' political integration and loyalty to the state. For the empirical analysis, the paper will use secondary data of surveys conducted in 2014-2017, exposing opinions and beliefs of minorities in the Baltic States referring to their domestic and foreign policies, NATO, Ukrainian crisis and relations with Russia. As a result, the concluding suggestion is made that more attention should be paid to political cohesion and minority policy management: 1) to optimize the minority development; 2) to predict potential risks in the region, and 3) to prevent further threats from Russia.

KEYWORDS

National minorities, Baltic States, Russia, security, state stability, integration

NOTE

This work was supported by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education under Grant no. DN/MOB/121/IV/2015.

INTRODUCTION

While some symptoms of security perception changes have been observed since the Russia-Georgia war (2008), it was the annexation of Crimea in 2014 that influenced security environment significantly in the Baltic States. Russia, as its recent actions in Ukraine reveal, frequently prefers hard power to powers of attraction. While since the collapse of the Soviet Union relations between Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Russia have made little progress, following the conflict in Ukraine the relations have become significantly more complex as a result of blacklists, sanctions, antidiplomatic measures and mutually critical rhetoric.

The Baltic States perceive themselves as pressured by Russia on their political system, economic, social and cultural cohesion as well as national identity. While Estonia perceives itself as prepared enough for the contemporary challenges, the Lithuanian government realizes its security primarily in military terms due to proximity of militarized Kaliningrad and the Suwalki Gap. Latvia is something in-between, recognizing Russia's influence on its economy, energy and information system, and considering the possibility of Russian troops in Latvia as well as separatist movements, terrorist attacks and cyber-threats. It is believed Russia may also try to discredit the Baltic States in the international arena by propaganda and disinformation.

For more than 70 years Moscow's strategic aim towards the Baltic States has been to intimidate and undermine their national cohesion.¹ In addition to traditional economic pressure and military policy, Russia also uses the media to influence Russian-speakers in the Baltic States. As a result, a historical, cultural and linguistic transnational community of 'русский мир' (Russkij Mir, 'Russian World') has been formed.² The idea serves as a justification for Russia's engagement in post-Soviet area; it is the reason for reconnecting the Soviet past with the current situation of Russian diaspora and it is a crucial instrument for articulating Russia's interests in the international arena. In fact the idea of protecting the rights of Russian-speakers in the Baltic States as articulated by Russia in the international arena is a subtle form of discrediting the governments of the Baltic States. Interestingly, Russian media tends to highlight that in Lithuania not only the rights of Russians, but also the rights of the Polish community are being violated.

¹ Glen E. Howard, "Latvia-US Relations and the Changing Security Environment in the Baltic": 100; in: Andris Spruds and Diana Potjomkina, eds., *Latvia and the United States: Revisiting a Strategic Partnership in a Transforming Environment* (Riga: Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2016).

² Triin Vihalemm and Anu Masso, "(Re)Construction of Collective Identities after the Dissolution of the Soviet Union: The Case of Estonia," *Nationalities Papers* Vo. 35, No.1 (2007) // DOI: 10.1080/00905990601124496.

Shortly after the annexation of Crimea a few journalists described Latvian Latgale as "Latvia's Crimea," referring to the possibility of pro-Russian riots and separatist activity in Daugavpils. As a consequence, the Baltic States have expressed concern about the loyalty of minority populations. The objective of the study is to answer the question: how are minorities securitized by the Baltic States and does the securitization have substantive justification? For the empirical analysis, I have decided to focus on the secondary data of surveys conducted in 2014-2017, exposing opinions and beliefs of minorities in the Baltic States referring to Baltic States' domestic and foreign policies, NATO, Ukrainian crisis and Russia-Baltic States relations.

My point of departure is that following the annexation of Crimea the issue of national minorities has been included into the security concept as a potential source of danger to the stability and national identity. I indicate the national minorities that have been securitized in the Baltic States. This main idea relates to the process of securitization and de-securitization of states as defined by Barry Buzan.³ Within the changing international environment we observe a re-conceptualization of the security concept takes place by including new issues related to threats and risks to state stability as a consequence of new-generation (hybrid) warfare. Furthermore, referent objects of security are widened from state to sub-state levels, including communities and individuals. While military concerns have been still serious, other types of threats have emerged, such as social threats. States may address problems differently and their approaches about how to solve them may diverge as well. Buzan explains that when objects start to be defined as a threat and are distinguished from the normal political run, the process of "securitization" starts. Paul Roe compares the process to an act of "call and response" when an actor recognizes that something is a matter of "security", and the audience may accept or reject it. When the call is accepted the securitization process starts.⁴ In contrast, "desecuritization" means that people think of the issue in terms of fairness rather than threat.

In Baltic and Russian studies, Žaneta Ozolina⁵ employs the concept of social security to examine internal insecurities in multi-ethnic states. Further, Triin Vihalemm and Veronika Kalmus,⁶ Nils Muiznieks, Juris Rozenvalds and Ieva Birka⁷

³ Barry Buzan, "Rethinking Security after the Cold War," *Cooperation and Conflict* Vol. 32, No. 5 (1997) // DOI: 10.1177/0010836797032001001.

⁴ Paul Roe, "Securitization and Minority Rights: Conditions of Desecuritization," *Security Dialogue* Vol. 35, No. 3 (2004): 281 // DOI: 10.1177/0967010604047527.

⁵ Žaneta Ozolina, ed., *Societal Security. Inclusion- Exclusion Dilemma. A portrait of the Russian-speaking community in Latvia* (Riga: Zinātne Publishers, 2016).

⁶ Triin Vihalemm and Veronika Kalmus, "Cultural Differentiation of the Russian Minority," *Journal of Baltic Studies* Vol. 40, No. 1 (2009) // DOI: 10.1080/01629770902722278.

⁷ Nils Muiznieks, Juris Rozenvalds, and Ieva Birka, "Ethnicity and social cohesion in the post-Soviet Baltic states," *Patterns of Prejudice* Vol. 47, No. 3 (2013) // DOI: 10.1080/0031322X.2013.812349.

as well as Juhan Kivirähk,⁸ focus on the sense of belonging attendant to social cohesion, and the potential risks and vulnerabilities perceived by minorities in the context of contemporary security debate in the Baltic States. While much attention is paid to Russian-speaking minorities in Latvia and Estonia, fewer publications are concerned with minorities' vulnerabilities and social risks in Lithuania. With few exceptions, the issue of securitization of minorities following the Crimea annexation has hardly been employed to analyze social security debate in the Baltic States.

Although the experts estimate that the "Ukrainian" scenario for the Baltics is not probable, this article intends to analyze the Baltic security threats in the context of national minorities. In order to address this issue, the arguments in this paper are structured as follows. First, the current situation of national minorities in the Baltic States will be presented. Then I address what states perceive as threats and how minorities are securitized by the Baltic States. Lastly, I look at the opinions and beliefs of national minorities to prove their attachment to the states where they reside. The conclusions suggest that more attention should be paid to political cohesion and the minority policy management in particular: 1) to optimize the minority development; 2) to predict potential risks in the region, and 3) to prevent further threats from Russia.

1. NATIONAL MINORITIES IN THE BALTIC STATES

Minorities in the Baltic States constitute 16-38% of the residents of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Among them there are 32% and 28% Russian-speakers in Latvia and Estonia respectively, as Table 1 presents. In Latvia they are concentrated in the region of Latgale (60% of total population) and the city of Daugavpils (54%). In Riga, the largest Russian-language capital in the EU, ethnic Russians make up 40% of the population while Russian-speakers constitute more than half of the residents. Russian-speakers in Estonia are concentrated primarily in the northeast of the state and in the capital (ethnic Russians constitute 37% of Tallinn residents). In the Ida-Virumaa County 84% of the population is Russian-speaking and 47% either hold Russian citizenship or are stateless.⁹

⁸ Juhan Kivirähk, *Integrating Estonia's Russian-Speaking Population: Findings of National Defense Opinion Surveys* (Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, 2014).

⁹ Agnia Grigas, "Russia-Baltic Relations after Crimea's Annexation: Reasons for concern?" *Cicero Foundation Great Debate Paper* Vol. 14, No. 05 (June 2014).

Table 1. Baltic States By Ethnicity Of Their Residents (%)

Ethnicity	Lithuania	Latvia	Estonia
Polish	6,6	2,2	0,1
Russian	5,8	26,9	25,2
Biellarussian	1,2	3,3	0,9
Ukrainian	0,5	2,2	1,7
Jewish	0,1	0,3	0,2
Tatar	0,1	-	0,2
Lithuanian	-	1,2	0,1
Other	1,5	2,0	1,5
Total	15,8	38,1	29,9

Sources: Lithuania: Oficialiosios statistikos portalas; Latvia: Centrālā Statistikas Pārvalde; Estonia: Eesti statistika.

Russian-speakers in Latvia and Estonia are large, relatively hermetic, concentrated populations that reside on Russia's border. They differ from the other nationalities by their language, religion, values and socio-political status. They are not Russians *per se*; they are said to be Euro-Russians¹⁰ with hybrid Baltic-Russian identity¹¹. There are fewer Russians in Lithuania. They reside mostly in Vilnius, Klaipeda, and Visaginas (12%, 20% and 50% respectively). The Polish minority is the largest ethnic minority in Lithuania, concentrated in the Vilnius Region. Especially large Polish communities are found in Šalčininkai region (almost 80%).

National minorities in the Baltic States are in process of securitization. To rebuild the national identity following the collapse of the Soviet Union the Baltic States have adopted an ethno-nationalist model of national policy in order to consolidate and integrate multi-ethnic communities. Apart from Lithuania which chose a "zero option" for residents, including national minorities, to receive citizenship in the independent state, Latvia and Estonia followed a restrictive strategy. Citizenship was granted only to those who had it before 16/17 June 1940, the date indicating the beginning of the Soviet occupation, and to their descendants. Restrictive legislation resulted from continuing distrust of ethnic Latvians and Estonians to Russian-speaking immigrants accused of fifty years of Soviet occupation, separatist tendencies and need for rapid assimilation of Russian-speakers. That is why both Latvia and Estonia sought to rebuild the nation-state on the interwar tradition and European identity basis.¹² For example, Merje Kuus argues that

¹⁰ Renal'd KH. Simonyan, "Russkoyazychnoye naseleniye v stranakh Baltii," *Vestnik MGIMO-Universiteta* 3 (2010).

¹¹ Ammon Cheskin, "Exploring Russian-Speaking Identity from Below: The Case of Latvia," *Journal of Baltic Studies* Vol.44, No. 3 (2013) // DOI: 10.1080/01629778.2012.712335.

¹² Irmia Matonyte, "Political reconsideration of the Soviet past: attitudes and actions of the Lithuanian elites," *Baltic Region* 3 (2013); Graham Smith, "The Resurgence of Nationalism"; in: Graham Smith, ed.,

Estonian national identity since the time of independence has been framed as being constantly threatened by the Russian-speaking residents as well as the Russian state, although the character of the threat has changed from a military to a cultural one.¹³ While Latvia insisted more on assimilative language policy by reducing Russian language in public space and limiting Russian schools,¹⁴ Estonian integration policies have proceeded more smoothly.¹⁵ Since the beginning of the 2000s, when the first integration strategy was adopted, integration discourse is described as a process of socialization including "the adaptation of different ethnic minority cultures existing in Estonia, *not* their assimilation into (ethnic) Estonian culture."¹⁶

2. SECURITY THREATS AND MINORITY SECURITIZATION AFTER THE CRIMEA ANNEXATION

Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia perceive their security threats differently. According to the results of the "Spinter tyrimai" survey in Lithuania in 2014, 55% of respondents (regardless of nationality) claimed that they are in danger from Russia.¹⁷ Lithuanian officials openly criticize Russia and are afraid of military threats from Russia as well as energy risks from the Ostrovec Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) in Belarus. According to Lithuanian National Security Threat Assessment Russia increases intelligence services recruiting Russian-speaking entrepreneurs, journalists, criminal groups, scientists, diplomats and experts to invigilate Lithuania.¹⁸ Latvia and Estonia apply a more adaptive approach towards Russia. They are more in favor of cooperating with Russia and avoiding criticism and open conflict. Erik Noreen and Roxanna Sjöstedt explain that since Estonian re-independence, Russia is in the process of being desecuritized and new threats have appeared such as terrorism, migration, organized crime, illegal arms trading, as well as health and social issues and environmental problems.¹⁹ These exemplified that Estonian government slowly but steadily started to securitize soft issues and non-military threats. Estonia takes defense matters seriously, allocating 2% of its GDP to defense

The Baltic States: The National Self-Determination of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996).

¹⁵ Veronika Kalmus, "Is Interethnic Integration Possible in Estonia?: Ethno-Political Discourse of Two Ethnic Groups," *Discourse & Society* Vol. 14, No. 6 (2003) // DOI: 10.1177/09579265030146001; Gregory Feldman, "Culture, State, and Security in Europe: The Case of Citizenship and Integration Policy in Estonia," *American Ethnologist* Vol. 32, No. 4 (2005).

¹⁶ Vello Pettai and Klara Hallik, "Understanding processes of ethnic control: segmentation, dependency and co-optation in post-communist Estonia," *Nations and Nationalism* 8 (2002): 524-525 // DOI: 10.1111/1469-8219.00063.

¹⁷ Sprinter Research, "Gyventojų apklausa dėl Rusijos keliamos grėsmės" (October 27, 2014) // http://spinter.lt/site/lt/vidinis_noslides/menutop/9/home/publish/NjY3Ozk7OzA=.

¹⁸ State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania, *National Security Threat Assessment* (Vilnius: 2017) // <http://www.vsd.lt/Files/Documents/636265688721000000.pdf>.

¹⁹ Erik Noreen and Roxanna Sjöstedt, "Estonian Identity Formations and Threat Framing in the Post-Cold War Era," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 41, No. 6 (November 2004): 739.

and participates in various military and peacekeeping operations although Estonian officials claim Russia is not a military threat to Estonia.²⁰

Above all, Russia is seen as the most influential actor to influence security in the region. It has been developing a broad spectrum of military and economic methods to legitimize Russia's interests in post-Soviet spaces. Russia has exerted its influence in each state through Russian-language media imported from Russia. Russian-based organized crime (RBOC) is seen as being located in Latvia.²¹ Further, Russia has extended various antidiplomatic instruments of influence in the Baltic States to construct a negative image of the Baltic States, affect the Baltic States' domestic policies, and subtly discredit their governments.²²

Russia's annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine have influenced the Baltic States' perception of security in the region significantly. The issue of internal stability and integration of communities has become more important. Need for harmonized policy towards national and ethnic minorities was recognized, otherwise social divisions can be used by Russia as an instrument of Russia's hybrid war against the Baltic States. Estonia launched state-owned Russian-speaking TV as well as applied more open citizenship program. Lithuania re-established the National Minorities Department in 2015 and introduced *Strategic Action Plan for 2016-2018*. Additionally, a few amendments to citizenship law were adopted by Latvia. While the contemporary discourse of nationality has made some efforts in the field of development of the titular language, encouragement of civic attitude and sense of solidarity, as well as informative policy to prevent the negative influence from Russia, new integration strategies do not seriously change the Baltics' point of view towards national and ethnic minorities. They should be regarded more as a concretization or update of national policies in the context of contemporary challenges.

However, following Russia's annexation of Crimea numerous anti-minority sentiments and practices have been accepted more frequently than before. Following sanctions, Latvia stopped organizing enormously popular Russian-speaking festival "New Wave" ("Новая волна") in Jurmala and banned Russian artists who openly supported Russia's annexation of Crimea to arrive in Latvia.²³ A ban on Russian

²⁰ The Baltic Times, "President Kaljulaid: Russia does not pose physical threat to Estonia" (March 27, 2017) // http://www.baltictimes.com/president_kaljulaid_russia_does_not_pose_physical_threat_to_estonia/.

²¹ Mark Galeotti, "Crimintern: How the Kremlin uses Russia's criminal networks in Europe," *ECFR policy Brief* (April 18, 2017) // http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/crimintern_how_the_kremlin_uses_russias_criminal_networks_in_europe.

²² Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik, "Antidiplomacy in Russia's Policies Regarding Russian-Speakers in the Baltic states," *Baltic Journal of Politic Science* 5 (2016): 94 // DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15388/BJPS.2016.5.10338>.

²³ Delfi.lt, "Latviya vnesla v chernyy spisok Kobzona, Valeriyu i Gazmanova" (July 21, 2014) // <http://ru.delfi.lt/misc/celebrities/latviya-vnesla-v-chnyj-spisok-kobzona-valeriyu-i-gazmanova.d?id=65346066>.

artists entering Lithuania was also suggested by Lithuanian conservatives.²⁴ Furthermore, Latvia and Estonia continuously banned Russian religious and philosophical intellectuals and journalists from entering their countries.²⁵ While several Russian-speaking NGOs are seen as politicized because they promote Russia's view of history, more extreme Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian politicians called minority residents a "fifth column" or "Russian provocateurs" to undermine their loyalty to the national authorities.²⁶ In Latvia Russian-speaking party clubs, foundations and intellectual societies were argued to be the GONGO (government organized NGO) affected by Russia to disinform, make propaganda and history falsification.²⁷ Estonia accused Russian-speaking NGOs of participating at the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) of OSCE, Warsaw 2016 to discredit Estonian authority.²⁸ Then, Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE) proposed depriving permanent residents with undetermined citizenship and foreigners in Estonia (mostly Russian citizens) of voting rights in local elections. Fortunately, the other parliamentary parties did not support the proposal, so it is unlikely to be adopted.²⁹ Furthermore, in December 2016 President Raimonds Vejonis accepted controversial amendments to the Education Law that will allow the dismissal of teachers for disloyalty to the Latvian state. It was argued that the aim of the bill was to prevent risks to national and public interests, democracy, security, and growth from illegal activities by teachers and school principals disloyal to Latvia.³⁰ Finally, in April 2017, a tactical training simulation of a hostile forces intrusion took place in southeast Lithuania. "Saboteurs" illegally crossed the border and declared independent People's Republic of Salcininkai. Of note was that the exercises took places in Salcininkai, where almost 80% of residents are ethnic Poles.³¹ According to Lithuanian officials there were no extremist groups supporting Russian military

²⁴ Delfi.lt, "Molodyye konservatory pryzvyvayut takzhe ne puskat' v Litvu Gazmanova i Kobzona" (July 22, 2014) // <http://ru.delfi.lt/news/live/molodye-konservatory-pryzvyvayut-takzhe-ne-puskat-v-litvu-gazmanova-i-kobzona.d?id=65358756>.

²⁵ Delfi.lt, "Protodiakona RPC Andrey Kurayeva ne vpustili v Latviyu" (November 27, 2016) // <http://ru.delfi.lt/abroad/global/protodyakona-rpc-andreya-kuraeva-ne-pustili-v-latviyu.d?id=72994100>; Postimees, "Italian journalist Chiesa ordered to leave Estonia" (December 16, 2014) // <http://news.postimees.ee/3028421/italian-journalist-chiesa-ordered-to-leave-estonia>.

²⁶ More: Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik, "Russian-speaker NGOs in the Baltic states," *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe* Vol. 15, No. 3 (2017): 176-179.

²⁷ Drošības policija, *Publiskais pārskats par Drošības policijas darbību 2016.gadā* (Riga: 2017) // <http://www.dp.gov.lv/lv/?rt=documents&ac=download&id=18>.

²⁸ Estonian Internal Security Service, *Estonian Internal Security Service Annual Review* (Tallinn 2016) // <https://www.kapo.ee/en/content/annual-reviews.html>.

²⁹ ERR.EE, "Pyat' partiy ne vidyat perspektiv u idei EKRE lishit' negrazhdan prava golosa na mestnykh vyborah" (May 9, 2017) // <http://rus.err.ee/594617/pjat-partij-ne-vidjat-perspektiv-u-idei-ekre-lishit-negrazhdan-prava-golosa-na-mestnykh-vyborah>.

³⁰ The Baltic Times, "President Vejonis to promulgate legislation on teachers' loyalty" (December 3, 2016) // http://www.baltictimes.com/president_vejonis_to_promulgate_legislation_on_teachers_loyalty/.

³¹ The Baltic Times, "About 700 Lithuanian statutory officers attend training to deter" (April 12, 2017) // http://www.baltictimes.com/about_700_lithuanian_statutory_officers_attend_training_to_deter_little_green_men/.

aggression and conducting anti-constitutional activity identified in Lithuania in 2016; however, there are certain indications that such kind of groups may appear in the future.

According to Arjun Appadurai's "dialectical nature of globalization" the divergence of cultural identity among national minorities and titular nations may weaken state-national identity or destruct state integrity, but the opposite scenario is also probable.³² In other words we should not take for granted national minorities as a threat to social cohesion and territorial integrity of the state. The degree of securitization of national minorities depends on the level of political, linguistic and socio-economic integration of minorities, their loyalty to the state and acceptance of national values. If state loyalty and respect for state values of minorities concern the government, then minorities start to be securitized. The media may incite ethnic hatred or promote national divergence accusing minority communities of state disloyalty. Additionally, state institutions, political elites and titular nations may perceive state security in different ways which make the process of minority securitization more complex. So far much effort has been devoted to integrating minorities into the Baltic societies in order to prevent social risks and alienation. Despite that, governments' mistrust of minorities has remained high.

It seems the process of minorities securitization is related to identity building in the Baltic States, which has been shaped in opposition to the former Soviet/Russian identity. As a consequence Latvia and Estonia recognize their Russian-speaking communities as threats and rebuild their national identity according to ethnic and language conditions. Contrary to Latvia and Estonia, Lithuania recognizes Russian-speakers as heterogeneous, weakly consolidated and well assimilated into the Lithuanian community.³³ Instead, Lithuania perceives the Polish community as a threat to its social coherence. When the Polish political party, Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania (AWPL), conducted by Valdemar Tomaszewski, formed a coalition with Lithuanian Russians, it strengthens the negative image of Lithuanian Poles in the eyes of the Lithuanian majority.³⁴ What is more, the Lithuanian government believes the aim of Russia's compatriot policy is to support the Polish minority to be granted exclusive rights and eventually a special status to the Russian community(s) in all of the Baltic States. According to the Lithuanian National Security Threat Assessment,

³² Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Duke University Press, 2006).

³³ Arvydas V. Matulionis and Monika Frėjutė-Rakauskienė, "Identichnost' russkoy etnicheskoy gruppy i yeye vyrazheniye v Litve i Latvii. Sravnitel'nyy aspekt," *Mir Rossii* 1 (2014): 91.

³⁴ Paweł Sobik, *Akcja Wyborcza Polaków na Litwie w systemie politycznym Republiki Litewskiej (1994-2014)* (Wrocław: 2017).

Russia supports cooperation between Polish and Russian communities and unfairly blames Lithuania for violating the rights of ethnic communities.³⁵

3. WHAT DO THE SURVEYS SHOW?

In this section the discussion of minorities' opinions and beliefs as well as their attachment to the Baltic States is presented.

Broad surveys from Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia regarding minorities' identification and state loyalty in the aftermath of the Crimea annexation reveal that a significant majority of the minority communities perceive themselves to belong to the state where they reside. In general, they recognize themselves as patriots and are proud to be citizens of the Baltic States. In case of military aggression they claim to support the state authority, although a few of them would prefer to leave the country following a hostile forces attack. It is assumed that the longer the minority representatives reside in the republic, the more likely they are to consider themselves citizens or even as representatives of the titular nation. For example, in Latvia the strongest patriotic feeling was demonstrated by old generations of minority residents.³⁶

Unsurprisingly, the division of support of NATO was clear along linguistic lines. In Latvia 45% residents believe NATO guarantee Latvian integrity and state security while 38% was opposed to it. According to the survey 60% of those who support the allied forces are ethnic Latvians while only 23% Russian-speakers support it. In the same survey around 60% of Russian-speaking population in Latvia are against NATO.³⁷ Similarly, the results of a recent survey conducted by the polling firm Turu-uuringute AS commissioned by the Estonian Ministry of Defence show that while nearly 90% of the country's Estonian-speaking residents support the presence of NATO forces in Estonia, more than half of its Russian-speakers are opposed to it. Similarly, while 53% of ethnic Estonian indicated that they believed NATO would render direct military assistance in case Estonia were in danger, just 19% of Russian-speaking respondents agreed to it.³⁸

Minority residents in Lithuania claimed Russian propaganda in Central and Eastern Europe results from the aggressive US and NATO policies towards Russia. Additionally, 65% of Lithuanian Russians and 40% of ethnic Poles believe that Russia

³⁵ State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania, *supra* note 18, 29.

³⁶ SKDS, *Latvijas iedzīvotāju viedoklis par valsts aizsardzības jautājumiem* (Riga: SKDS, 2014).

³⁷ Kristina Khudenko, "Issledovaniye: neset li russkaya obshchina Latvii gibridnyu ugrozu dlya strany?" (July 6, 2016) // <http://rus.delfi.lv/news/daily/latvia/issledovanie-neset-li-russkaya-obshchina-latvii-gibridnyu-ugrozu-dlya-strany.d?id=47641303>.

³⁸ NEWS.ERR.EE, "Survey: more than half of Estonia's Russian-speaking population unsupportive of NATO presence" (June 16, 2016) // <http://news.err.ee/v/news/2d9251f0-dab5-4fd3-aa2c-cbbb713c16a1/survey-more-than-half-of-estonias-russian-speaking-population-unsupportive-of-nato-presence>.

had re-joined the Crimea Peninsula legally. In the same opinion pool, among Polish and Russian-speakers about 60% said the war in Ukraine is Ukraine's own fault or the West's.³⁹ In Latvia, 35% of Latvian residents were for Russia and further 15% were in solidarity with Ukraine.⁴⁰ More than half of the Latvian Latgale region, where Russian-speakers constitute the majority, supported Putin's policy towards Ukraine. In a few cases the Ukraine crisis and the escalation of mutually critical and assertive political rhetoric between Russia and the Baltic States both domestically and abroad served to divide public perception and estrange minorities in the Baltics. Two extreme examples show that both Latvian and Estonian citizens unlawfully participated in an armed conflict in the East Ukraine against the authorities of Ukraine, became members of the terrorist organization "Lugansk People's Republic" and were extradited to Ukraine for suspected terrorist crimes.⁴¹

Unlike ethnic Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians, minorities in the Baltic States are against EU sanctions and other assertive action against Russia. They prefer to maintain good neighborly relations with Russia in order to develop security and economic cooperation in the region. They believe the deterioration of relations with Russia could affect the national economy, which is still heavily dependent on cooperation with Russia.

Studies reveal general conclusions about minorities' attachment to Russia and the state where they reside. Their loyalty to their host country appears beyond doubt. They express very strong local attachment and prefer to live in independent Lithuania, Latvia or Estonia although they admit strong ethnic ties with Russia.⁴² Despite more radical opinions of minority nationalists, in general they identify themselves with their mother country only in cultural ties, not political or ideological ones. As Oliver Zimmer notes, while the ethnic origin of the group members is the most important factor of the ethnic identification, it is the state of residence and identification with the state of residence which construct the civic identity.⁴³ Interestingly, a sense of belonging to mother country and a sense of belonging to the Baltic State are not mutually exclusive. In other words the expression of feelings of

³⁹ Vaidas Saldžiūnas, "Co zrobiliby litewscy Rosjanie i Polacy, gdyby Kreml napadł na kraje bałtyckie?" trans., ed. Dominik Wilczewski, *Przegląd Bałtycki* (August 12, 2016) // <http://przegladbaltycki.pl/2956,zrobiliby-litewscy-rosjanie-polacy-gdyby-kreml-napadl-kraje-baltyckie.html>.

⁴⁰ SKDS, *supra* note 36.

⁴¹ Drošības policija, "The criminal prosecution about an unlawful participation in an armed conflict in the East Ukraine is launched" (June 1, 2016) // <http://www.dp.gov.lv/en/useful/publications/the-criminal-prosecution-about-an-unlawful-participation-in-an-armed-conflict-in-the-east-ukraine-is-launched.art44>; Estonian Internal Security Service, *supra* note 28.

⁴² Delfi.lv, "Issledovaniye: latviyskoye obshchestvo ne speshit osuzhdats' Rossiyu za voyennuyu agressiyu protiv Ukrainy" (June 26, 2016) // <http://rus.delfi.lv/news/daily/latvia/issledovanie-latviyskoe-obshchestvo-ne-speshit-osuzhdats-rossiyu-za-voennuyu-agressiyu-protiv-ukrainy.d?id=47604035>.

⁴³ Oliver Zimmer, "Boundary mechanisms and symbolic resources: towards a process-oriented approach to national identity," *Nations and Nationalism* Vol. 9, No. 2 (2003): 176 // DOI: 10.1111/j.1469-8129.2007.00269.x.

belonging to Russia does not necessarily hinder one's feelings of belonging to another country.⁴⁴

However, there are some issues that may strongly differentiate majority and minority communities in the Baltic States. Minorities, particularly Russian-speakers, are confronted with historical narratives of two different states (host and mother countries) that are not mutually complementary.⁴⁵ The Soviet/Russian historical narrative based on the Soviet Union victory in the WWII dominates among Russian-speakers. For 47% of Russian-speaking residents and 56% of non-citizens in Latvia the Victory Day and St George Ribbon induce positive feelings.⁴⁶ Similarly, pro-Russian sympathies concern a part of Lithuanian Poles. They are the result of their specific position in Lithuania, similar interests in many spheres with the Russian minority, and highly efficient operation of the Russian propaganda and abandonment on both the Lithuanian and Polish sides.⁴⁷ In contrast, for ethnic Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians, the Soviet victory means the beginning of the Soviet occupation in the Baltic states. Monika Frėjutė-Rakauskienė's research revealed that history is involved in the process of strengthening or constructing the minorities' collective identity. But while minority representatives are related to commemorations of historical events and people, and (re)building monuments of historical personalities or heroes, they emphasized their civic and political loyalty to the national state.⁴⁸ Furthermore, minorities' opinions and beliefs related to the Russian-Ukrainian crisis should be perceived through the prism of the integration problems and social cohesion. A few polls revealed that people in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia feel insecure in areas such as material and financial situation, job security, and health security more than in area of the country's stability and national security.⁴⁹ While numerous minority members work as blue collar workers due to the lack of high language proficiency, they are afraid of losing jobs as a consequence of geopolitical and economic risks in the Baltic region. Minority communities with low socio-economic conditions are much more vulnerable to propaganda and populist ideology, and some may feel being discriminated against in their host state due to their ethnicity.

⁴⁴ Arvydas V. Matulionis and Monika Frėjutė-Rakauskienė, *supra* note 33, 108.

⁴⁵ Ieva Birka, "Expressed attachment to Russia and social integration: the case of young Russian speakers in Latvia, 2004–2010," *Journal of Baltic Studies* Vol. 47, No. 2 (2016): 230 // DOI: 10.1080/01629778.2015.1094743.

⁴⁶ SKDS, *supra* note 36.

⁴⁷ Małgorzata Kozicz, "Boćkowski: Prorosyjskie sympatie Polaków wynikają z polityki państwa litewskiego" (January 10, 2017) // <http://zw.lt/opinie/daniel-bockowski-prorosyjskie-sympatie-polakow-wynikaja-z-polityki-panstwa/>.

⁴⁸ Monika Frėjutė-Rakauskienė, "The Role of Voluntary Organisations in Constructing the Common Identity and Mobilising of Polish Community in Southeastern Lithuania," *Polish Political Science Review* Vol. 3, No. 1 (2015).

⁴⁹ The Baltic Times, "Latvians still feel less secure than Lithuanians and Estonians" (April 20, 2017) // http://www.baltictimes.com/latvians_still_feel_less_secure_than_lithuanians_and_estonians/.

CONCLUSIONS

This article explains the particulars of minorities in the Baltic States in light of the Ukrainian crisis. The intention, through qualitative and quantitative data, was to determine the implication of security discourse in the Baltic States following Russia's Crimea annexation. Securitization theory was used to describe the national minorities as a potential source of danger to the stability and national identity. Initially, the analysis concluded that there is a strong need to belonging to the host state by minority communities. They do not support unifying any Baltic region to Russia which means that a "Ukrainian scenario" for Baltic is unlikely. Similarly, the same analysis indicates strong cultural ties with the mother country. Secondly, the division of NATO support and attachment towards Russia were clear along linguistic lines: while ethnic Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians strongly support allied forces, minorities are in favor of Russia or stay politically neutral. Finally, language proficiency, citizenship, history narrative, media preferences and low socio-economic status of minority groups implicate their attachment to Russia and the state of their residence. That means that minorities' vulnerability to Russia's propaganda and populist ideology may cause integration problems in the future.

The result of the analysis suggests more attention should be paid to political cohesion and the minority policy management. There is strong need to prevent political and social radicalization of both national minority and majority in the state. While some evidence of radical sentiments of national political elites have already appeared, populist ideology and social frustration may increase social risks and instability in the region. As Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia continue to be engaged in political and historical disputes against Russia, more attention must be paid to social inequality and integration challenges. Additionally, as Russia increases its influence in the region, it is crucial to develop counter strategies to prevent further threats from Russia. The Baltics' geopolitical position between Russia and the West determines its sensitivity and vulnerability to Russian influence, particularly as a consequence of numerous Russian-speaking communities. Russia launched the integration project inventing the "Russian World" and unifying Russian-speaking diaspora in post-Soviet space. As a result, Russia prefers "soft power" instruments by using its political, cultural and economic agencies, in particular, television, the internet, the radio, language policy, visa and citizenship policy, private entities (companies, foundations, organizations, Orthodox Church) and mass culture. For Russia, whose crucial method of influence is media propaganda, its aim is to exert pressure on governments and citizens of other countries so that they accept certain political solutions, concealment, manipulation, falsification as well as discrediting

Western countries and their political ideals. While there is effective media influence in Latvia and Estonia, Russian propaganda in Lithuania is not limited to Russian-speaking populations. Although the Lithuanian-speaking population is relatively resistant to Russian propaganda, Lithuania's Polish-speaking communities are more vulnerable. 88% of national minorities in Lithuania are fluent Russian-speakers and usually watch Russian TV.⁵⁰ As a result one of Russia's goals in Lithuania is to radicalize both Russian and Polish minorities by improving media influence.⁵¹ What is more, Russia employs the "ethnic issue" to provoke chaos in the Baltic States, maintain its favorable position in the Baltic region and deteriorate relations between neighbor states.⁵² The painful historical memories still obstruct dialogue between Lithuania and its Polish minority as well as trammel Polish-Lithuanian official relations. And it is Russia who is deeply interested in the clash between Poland and Lithuania.

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⁵⁰ Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, "Lietuvoje gyvenančių tautinėms mažumoms priklausančių asmenų padėties tyrimas ir rezultatų analizės. Ataskaita" (December 7, 2015) // https://lrkm.lrv.lt/.../1_%20Tautinių%20mažumų%20apklausos%20ATASKAITA.pdf.

⁵¹ Marius Laurinavičius, "Is Russia Winning the Information War in Lithuania?" (July 6, 2015) // <http://cepa.org/index/?id=6fcbe90edddbc8bc99ec9fb4960ef0b9>.

⁵² Marcin Tarnawski, "Wpływ kwestii etnicznych na politykę zagraniczną Federacji Rosyjskiej"; in: H. Chałupczak et al., eds., *Polityka etniczna. Teorie, koncepcje, wyzwania* (Lublin: UMCS, 2015).

- <http://rus.delfi.lv/news/daily/latvia/issledovanie-latvijskoe-obschestvo-ne-speshit-osuzhdad-rossiyu-za-voennuyu-agressiyu-protiv-ukrainy.d?id=47604035>.
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