RUSSIAN POLICY TOWARDS THE BALTIC REPUBLICS DURING YELTSIN PERIOD

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of
Master of Philosophy

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Dated 23/07/2001

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled, " **RUSSIAN POLICY TOWARDS THE BALTIC REPUBLICS DURING YELTSIN PERIOD**", submitted by **BIPLOB GOGOI** in partial fulfillment of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** (M. Phil) is his original work and has not been submitted for the award of any other degree of this or other university.

The dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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Dedicated

to

My Grandfather

PREFACE

The Baltic region of the former USSR has acquired a special place in the history of the disintegration of the Soviet Union as well as in the emergence of a new democratic Russia. The three Baltic constituent republics of the USSR were the first to break away from the erstwhile Soviet Union in 1990. It was no other than Boris Yeltsin himself who was then the President of another constituent republic of USSR, RSFSR, who took the lead in recognizing the independence of the Baltic states. Thus new Russia emerged on the international scene with a soft corner for the independent Baltic republics. However, developing a stable and friendly relation with the new Baltic republics proved problematic, for President Yeltsin, inspite of his best efforts and Western pressure. By the time President Yeltsin left the scene, Russian policy towards the Baltic states still smarting under the strains of the earlier years.

The above is precisely the theme of this study. The first chapter analyses the historical backdrop of Russian policy with a focus on Soviet period as it provides a link with bilateral relations after 1990. The second chapter investigates some major issues that have influenced Russia's policy towards the Baltics. The third chapter is devoted to Russia's policy towards the Baltics on

strategic and defence considerations. In the final chapter we have tried to present an overview of Russian policy.

The study is based on published primary sources comprising important official documents and declarations emanating from Russian sources. They are further supplemented with secondary sources comprising books and articles from academic journals and periodicals. A bibliography has been appended at the end of the dissertation.

I hereby take the opportunity to extend my sincere thanks to my Supervisor, Prof. Zafar Imam, without whose benevolent guidance and directions, this arduous task would have remained almost incomplete. I also extend my special thanks to my colleagues, teachers and to all my well wishers for their help and much needed cooperation.

I take the responsibility for whatever I have written in the following pages.

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Chapter – I

RUSSIA AND THE BALTIC REPUBLICS: A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Introduction

Historically, Russia's presence in the states of the Baltic region — Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia — has always been problematic. Russia entered into the region in the eighteenth century when the Tsarist Empire expanded north. Before the Russian conquest, the Baltic peoples had gone through totally different kind of experiences, first by the conquering German Knights in the middle ages and then by the Danish and Swedish over lordship.

Linguistically and culturally, they were also quite different than the Russians. Linguistically, Estonian is closely related to Finnish language, while the Lithuanian and Latvian together, formed the Baltic-Indo-European language family. The Lithuanians are mainly Roman catholic and their religion has also been an important element in their national identity. On the other hand, Estonians and Latvians largely adhered to Luthernism, in other words, close to the Germans. Thus we find that Estonia and Latvia were dominated by local German elite and were influenced by German cultural and other traditions. On the other hand, the Lithuanians developed a

Polish and Central European identity and they had emerged in history much stronger as a nation than their two northern neighbours.[1]

Thus the Tsarist Empire found the Baltic people quite different than the Russians. For one thing, the reformation and renaissance in Europe had a sizeable impact on the region. On the other hand, the abolition of serfdom in early nineteenth century paved way for industrialisation among the indigenous nationalities sooner than in other parts of the Tsarist Empire. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Baltic provinces of the Empire were the most developed and their population the most developed and skilled in the empire.[2] By the time the Tsarist Empire fell, there were thus marked difference, between the Baltics and other constituents of the Tsarist Empire. The historical ties have been primarily with their western neighbours- " Scandinavia and Germany in the case of Estonia and Latvia, Poland and Central Europe in the case of Lithuania and their cultures predominantly European in orientation".[3] On the other hand, from an economic point of view, Lithuania was underdeveloped as compared to Estonia and Latvia, although Lithuania had a large population.

When the Russian revolution of October 1917 came, like the other parts of Tsarist Empire, the Baltic nations also gained independence with the new Soviet regime recognizing them as independent and sovereign

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[1] For a coherent historical background of the period, see, Remuald J, Misiunmus, "The Baltic Republics: Stagnation and Strivings for Sovereignty" in The Nationalities Factor in Soviet Politics and Society, edited by Lubomyr Hajda and Mark Beissinger, West View Press, New York, 1990, pp. 204-205.

[2]. Ibid., p. 205

[3] .Ibid., p. 204

states. During much of the inter-war years, the Russians left the republics largely on their own. As a result, during this period, their national consciousness were consolidated, in fact, further developed. On the other hand after the rise of Nazi Germany in 1933, they, particularly Estonia and Latvia, began to get more attention from it. The gathering storm of the second world war since 1935, particularly after the beginning of Soviet-Finnish war, the Soviet Government turned apprehensive for its defences and it feared that the German might attack the USSR through the Baltic republics. It was perhaps this very fear that propelled the Soviet government to move in the Baltic republics in 1940 after the beginning of the second world war and to formally incorporate them as constituent republics of the USSR. With this sudden Soviet action and various other follow-up measures, these in effect, alienated most of the Baltic peoples. More seeds of discord were thus laid. At this stage, we turn to developments in the Baltic republics during the Soviet period.

The Soviets in the Baltics

One of the major problems Stalin grappled with was the issue of integration of the Baltics in the Soviet system. Here, Stalin's post-war nationality policy seems relevant. He had indicated that post- war nationality policy was nationalist in form, socialist in content. This meant that there would be a unified artistic culture based on traditions of Russian realism. But it seemed "the Stalinist system was a brutal, over-centralised

and an anti-democratic one".[4] Such policy was ruthlessly pursued in the Baltics with disastrous results and excesses. Post –Stalin policy of the successive governments on the nationality question falls into three clearly defined chronological sections. [5] First there was the period when after Stalin's death, Beria was in Charge. He recognized the right of indigenous nationalities. Thus non- indigenous cadres from the Baltic leadership was removed and replaced by local people and use of indigenous languages in local official business. The second stage was of a re-enforcement of indigenization in the Baltic republics. However, it was the Khrushchev's period (post- 1958), the stage, that saw a change of policy towards the non-Russians. Khrushchev put forward his concept of "new Soviet people" aiming at a common economic base, common class structure and a common Russian language as the only means of communication between different nationalities.

The policies of economic development undertaken by Stalin and continued by his successors involved industrialisation, urbanization and education on a large scale. One index of the integration process was proliferation of enterprises subordinate to the central authorities. Their growth was a natural consequence of a centralized economic system. The economic situation also began to improve significantly. By 1960, all the three Baltic republics had surpressed 1940 levels of production. Baltic

[4] .Zafar Imam, New Russia: Disintegration and Crisis; A Contemporary Chronicle, 1988-1994, ABC Publishing, New Delhi 1995, p.36.

[5] .For a concise presentation of the developemnts during inter-war years, see, Ben fowks, The disintregation of the Soviet Union, A Study in the Rise and Triumph of Nationalism, Macmillan Publication, London, 1997, pp. 72-73.

collective farms were better cared for and more efficient than in Russia. The Baltic states took the lead in the Soviet economic table, and were the most richest and developed parts of the Soviet Union.[6] The another result of Stalinist economic development was localism- formation of indigenous national intelligentsia and entrenchment of local elites. There were renewed attacks on intelligentsia but would not be as severe as it used to be in the Stalin era. Yet the post 1956 liberalisation was short lived. The Baltic republics did not present a uniform picture of indigenization, i.e., the Lithuanian local elite was more strongly anchored than the Latvian or Estonian.

In the post –1944-45 period, the process of "Sovietization" was unleashed on full scale in Latvia.[7] There were mass deportations of Latvians to Russia and Central Asia. Independent political activities were prohibited and exclusive political power was exercised by the Communist Party of Latvia. The process of industrialisation encouraged continuous Russian immigration into the Republic. The only opposition to the Soviet Occupation was provided by the Latvian partisans.

Latvian's privately owned farms had been merged into collective farms. The consequences of Soviet process of industrialization was agricultural stagnation. On the other side, economic decentralization permitted local demands for greater culture and linguistic autonomy.

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[6] .John Fitzmaurice, The Baltic States: A Regional Future, St. Martins Press, New York, 1992, p. 117.

[7] ."Latvia, Introductory Survey", in Europa World Year Book, 1999, Europa Publication London, 2000, P. 2146

However, limited autonomy gained in the 1950s was reversed and repression of Latvian cultural and literary life was increased.

In Estonia, Post World War II period saw the soviet style in government in the republic. The process of "Sovietization" involved collectivization of agricultural farms. Heavy industry underwent expansion. Structural change in the economy was accompanied by increased political repression. Political repression resulted in mass deportations of Estonians. Until the 1950s, dominant form of movement was provided by the "forest brethren", a guerilla movement.[8] In the 1960s, it came to replaced by more traditional forms of dissent which concentrated mainly on cultural issues. As a result, the immigrant Russians and slaves met with active resistance from cultural nationalists.

During the late 1970s and 1980s, the issue of "Russification" got merged with the issue of environmental degradation as a result of industrialization.

From 1957 to 1959, during the Khushchev era, "national communists" briefly gained the upper hand within the leadership of the Communist Party of Latvia.[9] Led by Deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers Eduards Berklavs, this group attempted to slow the influx of Slavic settlers into Latvia, promote native cadres, expand the use of the

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[8] ."Estonia, Introductory Survey", Ibid., P. 1317

[9] .Nills Muiznieks, "Latvia: Restoring a State, Rebuilding a Nation", in, New States, New Politics: Building the Post-Soviet Nations, edited by IAN Bremmer and Ray Taras, Cambridge University Press, London., 1997, p. 379.

Latvian language in the educational system and in party affairs, and increase republican autonomy in management of the economy. The 1959 purge was a turning point in postwar Latvian history. It doomed party nativization and economic experimentation and marked the onset of stepped up immigration; and a renewed campaign of cultural Russification that would last for the next thirty years. the influx of Slavic immigrants, the declining share of Latvians, and Soviet policies of Russification transformed the linguistic environment. Most Latvians and other non-Russian minorities were compelled to learn Russian, while most non-Latvians had neither the incentive nor the opportunity to learn Latvian. The Soviet authorities had destroyed the interwar cultural infrastructure of Latvian's non-Russian minorities, thereby facilitating their linguistic Russification. As a consequence, many non-Latvians became monolingual speaker of Russian, while most Latvians became bilingual speakers of their native language and Russian.

During this era, a more common response appeared to be either a turn to consumerism or cultural activism. Latvia and its Baltic neighbours consistently had the highest relative levels of consumption per capita of all the union republics, a feature that might have blunted some political dissatisfaction during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev years. while some Latvians might have turned to consumerism, other sought refuge from the pressures for political conformity in culture. By the mid-1970s, the vibrant Latvian cultural scene led some Western observers to detect in Latvian's

efforts to protect and extend their cultural values a "conscious commitment to nationalism.[10]

The Brezhnev era's assimilationist nationalist policy played a role in increasing the natural fear among the three small nations. There were two kinds of nationalism that co-existed: a pervasive national consciousness operating within the Soviet System with the aim of improving the position of the appropriate national group; and an illegal dissident movement of radical nationalist acting outside the system. The main positive reasons for the development of the new nationalism were three fold. Firstly, the relaxation of the political atmosphere after Stalin's death: Secondly, the increased autonomy allowed to the Union Republics by Khrushchev, thirdly, change in the intellectual atmosphere as a decay of Soviet Marxism as a system of thought.

Gorbachev and his Policy Towards The Issue of Baltic Nationalism

The rise of national self-assertion in the Gorbachev era led to inter-ethnic conflict. And in the Baltic States they were actually strengthened by prosperity. But inter-ethnic conflict never became the dominant factor. This was because the Russian, the main ethnic minority did not resist them or resisted only through Central Soviet mechanisms.

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[10] Remauld J. Misiunas and Rein Taagpera, The Baltic States: Years of Dependence, 1940-1990, Hurst and Company Publication, London, 1993, p.72.

Local party leaders in the Baltic region were inclined to sympathize with or at least be tolerant of nationalist demonstration in the late 1980s. This was only partly a result of Gobachev's cadre changes; the situation had long been ripening in the Brezhnev era. By 1988, popular fronts were set up on the basis of association together of a number of single – issue movements. Although their basis was clearly the ethnic claims and grievances of Baltic indigenous peoples. Many Russians supported them – and even joined in the agitations. The popular fronts in Latvia and Lithuania were generally more moderate at first than their Estonian counterpart, in the sense that they did not aim at restoring the national independence lost in 1940. Hopes were still placed in the Soviet leaderships under Mikhail Gorbachev in 1988. However it soon became evident that perestroika had little to offer the national movements. Gorbachev still continued to insist that the national question has essentially been solved in the Soviet Union.[11] During 1988-89 some of the leading nationalist of the Soviet Union raised the stakes in the battle with centre. Instead of just autonomy they started to call for "sovereignty", the first to do these were Estonians. Their dream was of a return of Leninism in nationality policy.[12]

And the demand for republican economic sovereignty gave rise to fierce arguments in the period between 1987 and 1989, The orthodox Soviet reply was that central control must be maintained, both to upkeep the

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[11] Ben Fowks, The Disintegration of the Soviet Union: A Study in the Rise and Triumph of Nationalism", Macmillan Press, London, 1997, p.146.

[12] Ibid., p.151.

economic system and to allow the redistribution from more fortunate to less fortunate regions.

"In pronouncing the word Russian we must always keep in mind the word "union".[13] Gorbachev's hostile reaction to Baltic declaration of sovereignty was all of a piece with this attitude. He put strong pressure on the Lithuanian communist not to pass a similar declaration. He made sure that the USSR constitution was amended in order to block local initiatives and preserve unity. Gorbachev was not opposed to compromise with the Baltic nations at this time. He was afraid of the Russian population itself. After long resistance, he finally admitted that there was indeed a secret protocol attached to Molotov – Ribbentrop Pact of 1939. But he was not yet prepared to take the further step of admitting the illegality of Baltic annexation in 1940. The period between 1988 and 1990 saw the gradual adoption of popular front programmes by the local communist leaders in the Baltic. Hence a shift towards nationalism in language policy was instituted in 1989 in all the three states by the local communist leaders themselves.

There were two reasons for the further radicalisation of the popular front movements in the course of 1989. Failure to achieve serious concessions by the negotiations with the centre was one. The other was the danger of being flanked by more radical nationalists. The spectacular display of national intransigence enraged the conservatives in Moscow.

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13 Ibid., p.157.

The Central Committee carried out declarations in August 1989 on the situations in Soviet Baltic Republics. It came as a shock to the Baltic nations. The declaration stated plainly that the goal of the people front was secession from the USSR and that this concerned the fundamental interests of all Soviet nations. The Central Committee charged the party and government leaders of the Baltics with an inability or unwillingness to control and regularise the "perestroika process". The declaration stated plainly warned of civil conflicts, mass rioting and hinted of the possible heavy price to pay, if the bourgeois nationalist extremists were mostly not curbed.[14] The Moscow threats were mostly taken as a bluff and rather the Central mass media was accused of representing the Baltic case.

During 1990-91, Gorbachev turned towards Soviet conservatism. Meanwhile, behind, the scenes, a coalition of disappointed members of the Baltic nomenklatura and local military and KGB officers was putting pressure on communist party officials to act decisively against Baltic separation. This was connected with the issue of the ethnic Russian minorities. Surveys conducted in 1989 showed severe tensions in the Baltic region between the Russians and the Balts. The second possible response was to band together in defence of narrow ethnic interests under the cover of Soviet patriotism.

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[14] The Soviet Empire: Its nations speak out; The first Congress of People's Deputies, Moscow, 1989, May-June, edited by Oleg Glovev and John Crawfoot, Harvwood publication, Hampsphire, England, p.169.

The psychological and propaganda offensive by Gorbachev served as an encouragement to local Russian forces to take unilateral action. In resulted in a combination of independent steps taken by local military commanders, in Vilnius (Lithuania) against the refusal of Baltic states to collect recruits for the Soviet Army, their general hostile attitudes towards Soviet military personnel. Boris Yeltsin condemned the military actions and added that there was "almost nothing left" of Gorbachev's commitment to seek a "humane socialism" and signed statements of sovereignty with the three Baltic Republics. The march of the Baltic republics towards autonomy and independence had thus gained momentum.

Towards Baltic Autonomy / Independence

The period of independence, which ended in 1940 with the first Soviet occupation and the establishment of communist governments saw the completion of the nation-building process. However, there were two insurrections during the initial years; the first was a short lived affair in the Summer of 1941 in which participants hoped to take advantage of the German invasion. The second which began in 1944, started as an attempt to form forces to fight under the German auspices against the advancing Red Army. After the defeat of Germany, the movement reverted to bring purely anti-Soviet.

In the Baltic, a dissident movement was intermittently present throughout the Post-Stain years. It was on small scale and subject to constant harassment. In the early 1970s, the most active dissidence was to be found in Lithuania. There was a renewed upsurge in Baltic protest in 1979-80. The so called "Calendar demonstrations" became a regular feature of political life. Many of the Baltic leaders were Russified non-Russians: people who had spent a considerable part of their life away from their own country in a Russian environment.

There was more open discontent on the shores of the Baltics than in the Central Asia. Here the memory of forced Sovietisation in 1940-41 and again in 1944-45 continued to rankle. Even so, a considerable period of time had gone by since then, and the Baltic national elites had benefited as much as anyone from the Corporatist compromise of Brezhnev. The dynamic local elites of the Baltic increasingly took up the defence of specific national interests inevitably within the framework of the Soviet system. In the early 1980s there was considerable controversy among the scholars of the West over the degree of commitment by local national elites to the Soviet connection.

Similar linguistic battles were waged in the Baltic region. In Latvia and Estonia in particular, the numerical insecurity of the titular nations made the defence of the national language a serious issue. The Latvians objected both to the reduction of their language's role in public life, and to

the introduction of Russian words into it. Analogous protests came from Estonia. The resistance of the Baltics to the introduction of Russian words in Baltic language was extremely successful, for several reasons. The Russian language campaign coincided, paradoxically, with a revival of cultural life in the Baltic encouraged by the local party leaders.

The fiercest resistance came from Lithuania, the largest of the three states and the area well adapted to guerilla warfare. The Lithuanian struggle was conducted in an organised way, under a central resistance organization called the "United Democratic Resistance Movement." This was the result of the Deportation Policy adopted by Stalin in 1941 that resulted in mass deportations of Lithuanians, similar on the lines of those of Estonians and Latvians. Further waves of deportations in 1944-48, increased the bitterness of the Baltic nations. The Lithuanians continued their organized resistance until 1952. At first, the peasantry assisted the partisans out of anger at the imposition of collective farming.

In Lithuania, another aspects was that of new religious nationalism. Here the roman Catholics formed a majority of the population. The link between religion and nationalism, absent at first, was created by the Post 1945 persecution of the church by the Soviet authorities. Moreover underground religious literature was distributed in Lithuania than anywhere else in the Soviet Union. Dissidence was always stronger there. But it was moderate than anywhere else in the Baltic being limited to a narrower range

of issues. There was less concern with demands for independence as such, and more with the defence of cultural and above all religious values. Thus, the initial moderation of the Lithuanians was a result of their self-confidence and lack of ethnic anxiety. The country was largely Lithuanian; the party and state apparatus was too; there were relatively few Russian residents; and the tension between the Catholics and the regime had been reduced by the abandonment of anti-religious propaganda.

One of Gorbachevs first moves as CPSU general secretary was to accelerate the personnel changes as a means of breaking up of entrenched republican machines and re-asserting central control.[15] It took place after the benign neglect of Brezhnev era. While Gorbachev was reasserting central control on personnel matters, he was loosening control in other realms by reducing official coercion and advocating 'glasnost'. The impact of glasnost in Latvia, as in the other Baltic republics, was profound. When Gorbachev ligitimized a reevaluation of history, especially that of the Stalin era; he unwittingly gave Baltic activists the sanction to question the circumstances of the Soviet annexation of the Baltic states, and thus, the legitimacy of soviet rule. Several Latvian dissidents attempted to create a nationalist organization called Helsinki '86.

In Latvia, as in many areas of the Soviet Union, one of the first issues to elicit mass protest was environmental destruction. The Chernobyl

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[15] Nils Muiznieks, : Latvia: restoring a state, rebuilding a nation" in New States, New Politics: Building the Post-Soviet Nations", edited: IAN Bremmer and Ray Taras, Cambridge University Press, London, 1997, p.382.

disaster and the slow official reporting on its effects evoked outrage and suspicion that the authorities were covering no other health hazards as well. From a political point of view, environmentalism was a relatively safe tropic. Moreover, the environment could bring together activists of widely divergent ideological inclinations.

Helsinki '86 was the first openly nationalist unofficial organization to appear in Gorbachev-era Latvia.[16] It called for the restoration of Latvia's independence, an end to the Sovietization and Russification of Latvia, and observance of international human right norms. The Latvia cultural elite entered the political arena at an expanded plenum of the writers' union on June 1-2 devoted to "Pressing Problems of Soviet Latvian Culture on the Eve of the 19th CPSU Conference." The most prominent theme was the perceived threat of Latvian ethnic annihilation. The sense of looming disaster was highlighted in numerous speeches decrying immigration and its demographic consequences, linguistic Russification, economic centralization, and environmental degradation. It also produced a detailed resolution. The resolution was a comprehensive political program calling for Latvia's "sovereignty" within the Soviet Union. An that stage, "sovereignty" was understood to entail local control over the natural resources, budget, borders, and foreign policy of the republic. While decentralization was portrayed as being in the interests of all of Latvia's inhabitants, the resolution unequivocally demanded priority status for

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16 Ibid. p. 23

Latvians. The Communist Party of Latvia (CPL) and the government were urged to consider one of their main tasks to be "the preservation and renewal of the Latvian nations." The leaders of the informal groups, especially of Helsinki '86 and VAK, remained suspicious of the establishment intellectuals and reform communists organizing the popular front during the summer. Considering the idea of independence rather than democracy to be of the utmost priority, some of the more militant members of the informal groups had already founded "Latvia's National Independence Movement" (LNNK) in late June. Faced with this groundswell of organizational activity and popular mobilization, Moscow and the republican leadership moved to defuse popular discontent. On September 29, the Supreme Soviet declared Latvian the state language and legalized the long-banned independence -era national flag. On the eve of the front's founding congress, Moscow intervened to shuffle the republic's leadership in preparation for more trying political times. Polarization accelerated, however, soon after the founding of the popular front, when a Russian-dominated "Inter-Nationalist Front of the Workers of the Latvian SSR" (Interfront) emerged. The interfront , which held its founding congress in January 1989, cast itself as the defender of the Russian-speaking community, though it never attracted more than a vociferous minority of Conservative Communist Party members, workers and managers in the military industrial complex, and retired military officers. The interfront's aim was to uphold the leading role of the Party and oppose

the adoption of Latvian as the state language and other changes that threatened the privileged status of Russian-speaking immigrants. A greater challenge to the Popular Front was posed by Moscow's proposals in late October 1988 to constitutionally limit democratization and republican rights. In the first instance of what was to become extensive cooperation, the Popular front moved rapidly to coordinate with its Estonian and Lithuanian counterparts. The Spring 1989 elections to the Congress of people's deputies provided the Popular Front with another opportunity to test its base of support and gain access to the halls of power in Moscow.

While the front's initial program called for "sovereignty" within the Soviet Union, many front activists and informal groups supported full independence. With this decision to support independence, the front aligned itself with the more radical informal groups, and set itself on the collision course with Moscow. This conflict first came to a head with the "Baltic Way" demonstration of August 23, 1989 - the fiftieth anniversary of signing of the Molotov-Ribbenntrop Pact. The three Baltic popular fronts mobilized nearly 2 million people to form a human chain stretching from Tallin through Riga to Vilnius.[17] The mass action was meant to demonstrate to the world the lack of legitimacy of the Soviet rule in the Baltics. Three days later the CPS Central committee issued a statement harshly criticizing the Baltic movements.

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[17]. Summary of World Broadcast, SU/0312 E1, 24 February, 1989

On May 4, 1990, over two-thirds of the Latvian Supreme Soviet voted for restoration of independence. When the Latvian government held plebiscite on independence on March 3, 1991, 74 percent of the voters opted for independence.[18]

The demographic impact of the Second World War and the ensuing Stalinist decade on the population of Estonia was devastating. During the war, the main components of population losses included Soviet and German deportations and forced military mobilization, wartime casualties, executions and flight to the west. Under Stalin, arrests and deportations continued, although not quite at the level of the Glasnost era. In addition, the clashes of the pro-independence guerilla movement with Soviet forces led to considerable loss of life in the late 1940s. The Soviet Regime never got any appreciable legitimacy among the ethnic Estonian population. True to his deep-seated distrust of communists who had lived outside USSR, Stalin based Soviet rule in Estonia on so -called Russian-Estonians, i.e, Sovietized ethnic Estonians who had spent most of their lives in the USSR. Although native Estonians did rise to the ranks of party in the post-Stalinist era, they never attained decisive leadership position until the Gorbachev era.[19]

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[18]. ibid, , SU/1028 E1, 5 March, 1991

[19]. Toivo U. Raun, "Estonia: Independence Redefined" in New States, New Politics, Building the Post-Soviet Nations,' Edited by IAN Bremmar and Ray Taras, Cambridge University Press, London, 1997, p. 410

Under Stalin, peaceful dissent was impossible and the Estonian resistance in the first post-war decade took the form of a guerrilla movement of "forest brethren" who were based in the thickly wooded rural areas of the country. The guerrillas clearly did not expect to defeat the Soviet regime by their own efforts, but hoped to hold out until pressure from the Western powers would force the Soviet Union to withdraw from Estonia. Leaving aside patriotic motivations, the forest brethren were mainly comprised of veterans who had been conscripted into the German military and feared arrest, and those seeking to avoid deportation or other forms of repression.

In the post-Stalin era, dissent in Estonia emerged in the late 1960s on the Moscow model, expressing similar frustration at reforms engendered by de-Stalinization. The small band of dissidents in Estonia demanded both civil and national rights, including among the latter the restoration of Estonian independence. By the late 1970s, as the Communist Party of Estonia (CPE) adopted an increasingly harder line. The scope and social base of dissent broadened and led to some cooperation with other Balts, most notably in a memorandum on self-determination on the fortieth anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in 1979.

The scope of outright dissent among the Estonian population remained limited since the penalties for overt opposition, although usually not murderous in the post-Stalin era, still constituted a strong deterrent. On

the other side of the spectrum a considerable element, but still a minority, of the ethnic Estonian population collaborated directly with the Soviet regime for various reasons, most typically for personal gain. In the three decades between Stalin and Gorbachev, however, the great majority of Estonians might be termed as "conservationists" in the sense that they quietly and in their own way sought to preserve Estonian national identity, integrity, and inherited cultural tradition.

Culture played a key role in the struggle for national survival under Soviet rule. In the Stalin era, a rigid interpretation of the doctrine of socialist realism and a persistent campaign against "bourgeois nationalists" among Estonian writers, composers, artists, and others had a chilling impact on cultural output. However, parallel to the post-Stalin era elsewhere in the Soviet Union , a remarkable cultural rebirth took place in Estonia during the 1960s, never directly questioning official guidelines, but gradually expanding their parameters beyond recognition. In the late Brezhnev era, the heavy-handed promotion of Russian as the "language of friendship and cooperation" among the nations of the USSR provoked a strong reaction. This kind of "Nationalist Propaganda" became widely known in the early 1980s through newspapers as well as Western Radio Broadcasts and had far reaching impact on the Estonian population, providing a significant lift to national morale at a bleak time. By 1987, clear sings of rebirth of civil society, drawing in part on the experience of pre- Soviet times, appeared in Estonia. Environment protests, against plans for expanded phosphate

mining in North-central Estonia began the process of social mobilization. By 1988, the intelligentsia became increasingly involved in the movement for changes, especially at a landmark plenum of leadership organs of the cultural unions in April. During 1988, the "inchoate movement" for renewal in Estonia became increasingly politicized, and Estonia took the lead in the USSR with two major firsts: the establishment of a Popular Front in April and passage of a declaration on sovereignty in November of the same year.[20] The Estonian popular front sought to consolidate and channel the reawakened civic energies of the population and to prod the Communist Party of Estonia (CPE) toward fundamental reform. At this relatively early stage in the Gorbachev era the CPE still played a significant role. In the course of 1989 public opinion among the ethnic Estonian population shifted increasingly toward full independence from the USSR. Gorbachev and the central authorities in Moscow failed to address the nationalities issue in any meaningful way and rejected a project for self-management and economic autonomy, first proposed in September 1987 by four Estonian intellectuals. Beginning in February 1989, a new factor was a grass-roots organizing campaign by Estonian Citizen's Committee, a movement based on the principle of legal continuity from the interwar republic and seeking the voluntary registration of individuals born in independent Estonia and their descendent. By early 1990, over half of the ethnic Estonian population had registered as citizens, and this massive

[20] "Estonia, Introductory Survey", in Europa World Yearbook, 1999, Europa Publication, London, 2000, p.1319

organized efforts and its appeal to historical continuity helped push public union opinion toward the goal of independence.

Events elsewhere in the Soviet Bloc, especially in Eastern Europe and the other two Baltic States, had a marked impact on developments in Estonia. The fall of communist rule in Poland in summer 1989 without Soviet intervention, i.e., the withering away of Brezhnev doctrine, suggested that the restoration of Estonian and Baltic independence might not be the impossible dream that it had appeared to be few years earlier. During the era of glasnost there was much interaction and cross-fertilization among the Baltic movements for change, most stirringly through Estonian and Latvian Popular Fronts and Lithuania's Sajudis. The most dramatic instance of Baltic cooperation and solidarity came on the fiftieth anniversary of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in August 1989, as the three popular fronts organized a massive human chain of over one million people linking the three Baltic capitals over a distance of some 400 miles. Moscow's threat following the demonstration merely served to further fuel Estonian and Baltic sentiment for independence. When the Estonian Popular Front explicitly endorsed full independence in October 1989, it proved to be the final step in the consolidation of Estonian public opinion on the issue.

On March 30, 1990, the Supreme Soviet of Estonia or the "Supreme Council" declared Soviet power illegal in Estonia, since the country had been unlawfully occupied and annexed in 1940, and proclaimed the

beginning of a period of transition that would culminate in the restoration of an independent Estonia. The major political casualty at this stage of the developing independence movement was the Communist Party of Estonia (CPE) because it lost its leading role in public life. It lost most of its membership during the next year as most of the ethnic Estonians no longer saw any need to be associated with a Soviet era institution.

The period March 1990-August 1991 witnessed a continuing stalemate between the new Estonian government led by Edger Savisaar, based on the Estonian Popular Front as the single largest entity in the Supreme Council, and Moscow. Gorbachev refused to negotiate seriously, presumably fearing the ripple effect of any territorial changes in the Soviet Union. In January 1991, Estonia escaped the bloody crackdown that occurred in Lithuania and Latvia, largely because of strong resistance in those states and also support from Boris Yeltsin who travelled to Tallinn during the crisis and spoke out for the Baltic "Right to self-determination". Estonia boycotted Gorbachev's all-Union referendum of independence in March. The abortive August 1991 coup in Moscow provided the final, unexpected turn on the road to Estonian independence. On August 20, the Supreme Council, noting that the Soviet coup had made it possible to restore the national independence of the Republic of Estonia through bilateral negotiations with the USSR and unilaterally affirmed Estonian independence.

The coup of 1991 did not represent an act of state policy. The coup atmosphere of January 1991 resulted from a combination of abstract emotionalism on the part of Gorbachev, desperation among the Baltic Russians, and Baltic obstinacy over the issue of recruitment to the army. The solidarity most Russians displayed with the Baltic nations in January 1991 showed that they were unprepared to take the hardliner's stance on ethnic Russian cause. Rejection of ethnic solidarity was expressed. Gorbachev reverted to his Customary line of approach, which was to rely on political action. Having discovered the attempted coup in the Baltic region, he proposed a Union treaty, by which a loosened federation would be created. On the other hand, Boris Yeltsin President of RSFSR denounced the coup, called for a general strike and appealed for public support. The August coup of 1991 failed, but in one respect it succeeded: It prevented the signing of the new Union treaty worked out by Gorbachev.

The failed coup d'etat of August 1991 was launched to prevent the collapse of centralised power in Soviet Union and it was obviously also directed against Baltic states' drive for independence. Ironically it resulted in the Baltic states' achieving recognition of their independence, not only by the Scandinavian states but by the European Commission and United states as well, and importantly by the new interim state council, established to provide a minimum of central government during the transition to a new Union. By one dramatic leap they had achieved in one week what otherwise might have taken several years of painstaking building of sovereignty.

As a result of the events of August 1991 Boris Yeltsin, the President of the RSFSR, emerged much stronger than the President of the USSR, Gorbachev. Boris Yeltsin lost no time and unilaterally declared the recognition by the RSFSR of the three Baltic republics, with Gorbachev quietly listening and nodding his approval. Suddenly, Boris Yeltsin became the leader and Gorbachev, the follower.[21]

This was during the last days of August of 1991.

Thus we can see that the very emergence of the Baltic republics was closely linked with the developments in Moscow and power struggle between Boris Yeltsin and Mikhail Gorbachev, in other words, the disintegration of the USSR. Such a process of the emergence of Baltic states as independent nations was hardly conducive to a normal state to state relations between Russia and the three independent Baltic republics. Against historical background of the different levels of developments of Russian and Baltic people's, as we have analysed in the preceding pages, most of the issues of discord and alienation between them become more complex and remained unresolved. As a matter of fact after Soviet disintegration these turned more complicated exercising adverse influences on Russia's policy towards the Baltic states. Now we turn to Russia's relations with Baltic states after 1991.

[21] Zafar Imam, New Russia : Disintegration and Crisis; a Contemporary Chronicle, 1988-1994, ABC Publishing, New Delhi, 1995, p.9

Chapter - II

MAJOR ISSUES IN RUSSIAN POLICY

Introduction

The issue of evolving and pursuing a policy towards the Baltic states on the principle of equality of independent nations came up before Russia much before it itself gained a fully independent status. Russia became a fully independent and sovereign state in December 1991 after Gorbachev resigned as the President of the USSR. On the other hand, the three Baltic states had unilaterally declared their independence much earlier—Lithuania on 11th March 1990, Latvia on 4th May 1990, and Estonia on 10th June in the same year. However the formal recognition of their independent status by Russia and the international community came from August 1990 onwards.[1] Therefore, Russia faced the issue of dealing with the Baltic States much before it was entitled to do so.

Although President Boris Yeltsin of Russia was a firm supporter of the independence of the Baltic states from 1990 onwards, he hardly showed the urgency of conducting a new type of relationship with the Baltic states. This was obviously because of the fact that there was a unfavourable historical backdrop for conducting a good neighbourly relations. Besides the ground

[1] Zafar Imam, Foreign Policy of Russia: 1991-2000, New Horizon Publishers, New Delhi, 2000, pp.34-35

reality in the Baltic states was also problematic for Russia. Indeed right from the beginning, Russia had to grapple with some major issues in dealing with the Baltic states.

Some of the major issues may be identified in the beginning- the most urgent was how to meet the pressing demand of the Baltic states for a total withdrawal of Russian army and naval fleet from the region. This issue has become complex for the Russian as the western powers particularly USA and Germany were pressurizing the Russian government for a quick and unconditional withdrawal of Russia's armed presence as it was done in Germany. From other issues were civic rights of Russian ethnic minorities and the problems of citizenship and the use of Russian language. As the issue of withdrawal of Russian forces and naval fleet stationed in the Baltics emerged as the most significant problem for Russia in the North with international dimension, it is appropriate for us to instigate in some detail the entire issue in a separate chapter. This we propose to do while here below, we take up the issue of ethnic minorities concerning their citizenship and the use of their native language. Then we come to the issue of Russian minorities. The issue of the Russian minorities and their issues were the legacies of Russia's interaction with the three Baltic states---Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia right from the beginning, from 1991 onwards. Russia's relations with the Baltic states were thus problematic during Yeltsin presidency. We may now look at the general background of the issue in Russia's policy towards the Baltic states.

General Background:

According to the data of the last Soviet population census of 1989, the number of Ethnic Russians in Soviet republics outside Russia was 25.3 million or about 17 percent of the total Russian population of the USSR and about the same share (18 percent) of the total population of the 14 non-Russian republics. The total number of people of Russian-based nationalities outside Russia was 28.2 million, with ethnic Russian constituting nearly 90 percent of this total.[2] According to the 1989 census, the proportion of Russians in the total population is particularly in Latvia, 34 percent and in Estonia, 30 percent and in Lithuania, 9.3 percent.[3]

It is important to note that many Russians who permanently settled in non-Russian states can be rightly regarded as native inhabitants, since they were born in those republics. On the other hand, relatively few Russians have so far been disposed to master local language. It is only in Lithuania that more than one-third of the local Russians are more fluent in the national language of the Republic.[4]

The general pattern of economic existence goes back to the period of the 1930s to the 1950s, when Soviet authorities promoted the large-scale migration of workers, pre-dominantly Russians, to areas of prospective industrial

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[2] Zafar Imam, Foreign Policy of Russia: 1991-2000, Horizon Publishers, New Delhi, 2000, p.35

[3] Nikolai Rudensky, "Russian Minorities in the Newly Indepedendent States" in, National Identity and Ethnicity in Russia and the New States of Eurasia, edited by Roman Sporluk (New York, ME. Sharpe, 1997) p. 59

[4] Ibid.

development in the Baltics. Apart from economic considerations, this centralised effort was motivated by a political goal: "internationalizing" that is, Russification of the ethnic periphery. This planned migration was a major factor in the process of industrialisation in many non-Russian areas of the Soviet Union, leaving its lasting imprint on the ethnic composition of the working class. Even now the Baltic Republics rely heavily on Russian workers for their industrial potential. According to some estimates, Russian labour force in Latvia still creates about 70 percent of the country's gross national product in 1993.[5]

During the last decades of the communist regime in the Soviet Union, the situation in the non Russian republics was characterised by growing alienation and tensions between the so-called titular nationalities and local Russian population. From 1988 to 1991, there emerged three major political currents in the Russian diaspora. Some ethnic Russians and Russian speakers, favouring adaptation to the new conditions in their republics and advocating the general idea of democratic change, supported the so-called popular fronts-mass-democratic movements dominated by native leaders.

After independence of the Soviet Union Republics, the deteriorating socio-economic conditions of Russian minorities in the Baltic Republics is closely related to the radical change in their political status. All of them now have to rethink their social status and assimilate new patterns of social

[5] Ibid, p. 63

behaviour characteristics of minority groups. Interestingly enough, in the late 1991, Russians in the Baltic states indicated a higher level of identification with their republics than did Russians in other regions. In 1991, Russians in non-Russian republics were much more disapproving of the dissolution of the USSR than Russians living in Russia.

The Baltic states were the first ex-Soviet republics to receive recognition from the world community as Sovereign nations, even before the dissolution of the USSR. Now the Baltic governments supported by overwhelming majority of the native populations, rightfully assert that their countries had never joined the USSR and regard the five decades between 1940 and 1991 as the period of unlawful Soviet occupation. By de-occupying, the Baltic governments seek to reverse the radical change in the ethnic structure of the population that occurred due to massive influx of migrants from Russian mainland during the Sovietisation period.

The issue of citizenship is vital indeed for the minorities and it is not only for political reasons. Beside being excluded from political life through denial of suffrage, non citizens expect to receive unequal treatment economically - they might be discriminated against in the privatisation process and above all against freedom of movement. In each Baltic country, Russians and other non-indigenous settlers demanded automatic citizenship. Natives were reluctant to meet this demand especially in Estonia and Latvia, where

outsiders almost outnumbered natives. Nonetheless, there was movement in 1992-93 towards accommodation between native peoples and non-indigenous residents in Estonia and Lithuania. The situation in Latvia, where population balance was most tenuous was less clear. The governments of the three Baltic Republics replied that citizenship is a privilege, not a right and that human rights were vigorously upheld in their nations.[6] Each Baltic government welcomed outside observers in February 1993. Estonia and CSCE (Commission on Security and Co-operation in Europe) announced that CSCE would establish watch groups to monitor human rights in the Baltic and urged all concerned parties to abstain from any official declaration or actions that might undermine confidence building with the Baltic states.

There were two traditions that competed for higher ground of nationalist politics in Estonia and Latvia.[7] On the one hand, there was the tradition of civic nationalism based on a conception of cultural co-existence of plural Soviet groups and classes. On the other hand, the late 1980s national awakenings had also given birth to an ethnic nationalism linked in part to ethno-national insecurity. It grew in opposition to and in conflict with the polity of which it was a part. Nationalist politics in Lithuania reflected a view that it could move

[6] Walter C. Clemens Jr. "Baltic Identities in the 1990s" in, National Identity and Ethnicity in Russia and the New States of Eurasia (New York, ME. Sharpe, 1997) p. 195

[7] Graham Smith, Aadne Aadne Aasland and Richard Mole, "Statehood, Ethnic Relations and Citizenship", in, TheBaltic States:The National Self--Determination of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, edited by Graham Smith, Macmillan Press, London, 1996, p. 184

unhindered towards a more multi-ethnic and less rigid stance on exclusion of non-Estonians from citizenship, nationalist politics in Estonia and Latvia were that the circumstances justified a more exclusionary stance. It was however the formation of citizens' committees in both Estonia and Latvia which did much to radicalize the debate, during the pre-independence era. The citizens committees adopted a conception of political community based firmly on descent. These radicals resented Russian immigrants enjoying equal status with the indigenous population and considered unfair the participation in the fate of the region of all the residents of the republics.[8]

In the post-independence era, there was a shift of focus in the citizenship debate in both republics. During the transitional phase to independence, Estonia and Latvia subsequently centered upon the need to determine the boundaries of the citizenry.[9] They demanded for the principle of restoration to be applied only to the original citizenry and their descendents of the inter-war republics.

We may now look at each of the Baltic republics in a sequence with respect to these major issues in the following pages.

[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid. p. 185

Latvia and Its Policy Towards The Russian Minorities

The case of Latvia shows how the state of competition among ethnic groups set the terms for cultural pluralism in a newly independent state. In the late 1980s, Latvians had faced a situation where they themselves were about to become a minority in their own country and where Russians were in many respects the dominant ethnic group. Since then, the ethno political balance has decidedly shifted in favor of the Latvians. It has exerted a commensurate degree of pressure for assimilation on the new Russian minority.

It was the collapse of the Soviet state and the consequent shift of the power between ethnic groups, due to which there was a success in regional revival. It also explains the early moves by the Russians to assimilate linguistically. The "tipping of " the Latvian population in favor of self-assertions and mobilization brought hundreds of thousands of people into the political fray. Thus national revival in Latvia was more contingent on levels of fear and possible repression. It was not contingent upon any conviction of the Latvians that they were a nation.[10] It was not the long-struggle of ethnic entrepreneurs seeking to revive a language and culture. The first dissidents to challenge the Soviet system in 1986-87 were just lonely voices in the desert, trying to tip the population into opposing Soviet rule.

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[10] Vello Pettai, "The Games of Ethno-Politics in Latvia", Post-Soviet Affairs, 1996, vol. 12 no.1 p.43

From a national revival point of view, Latvia was often viewed as the "weak-link" among the Baltic States. Because despite the potential outbursts of its nationalism in 1988, there were numerous constraints on its potential radicalization. The nationalists did not expect for a radical change in the ethnic balance of power. It was due to several factors such as higher percent of Russian-speaking residents, higher rates of inter-ethnic marriage and greater Soviet Military presence. Thus in relation to the Russian speaking community this was not destined to lead automatically to any downgrading of their status or to any particular pressures for assimilation. Throughout its 1989-91 fight to restore the country's statehood, the Latvian popular front continued to pledge its commitment to the building of a common home for all nationalities.

However, there was always a distinct ethnic agenda. The early appeals for support, from both the dissident and mainstream groups, were defined in terms of the right of national self-determination and protecting the linguistic and cultural rights of small nations. The Latvians shifted to a pro-active agenda of minority integration. It came directly from the restorationist concept of post-independence state-building process. This was supposed to offer the Latvians leverage as to defining and controlling the ethnic pluralism in the state. The "restorationist model" propagated by the Latvian citizens committees and later the citizens' congress, stressed Latvia's illegal occupation by the Soviet Union in 1940 and therefore the illegality of all that had changed in the republic in the

course of 50 years. This included demographic changes. The policy of restorationism saved them from being obliged by the large numbers of Russian speakers to settle for a bi-national state. Just on the eve of independence, the Latvians constituted at least 78 percent of the total population.[11] Soon after independence the Latvian Supreme Council adopted a decree restoring the citizenship of pre-war citizens and their descendents. The legislature left open the question of naturalisation for Soviet era immigrants. The intention was to secure the rights and claims of Latvians to have a dominant role in determining the post-occupation power balance. In late 1993, there was a debate on a final citizenship law where the nationalists argued for strict annual limits on naturalisation. This provision was adopted but later only to be annulled by the Latvian President Guntis Ulmanis.

In late 1992, the Latvian government began a controversial registration of population when the Soviet era permits of several thousand non-citizen residents were revoked. On the other side, classification as a "non citizen, permanent resident" had negative consequences for various social and economic rights. In addition, the Latvian parliament mandated a language requirement for citizenship, which was to have its significant effect on integration and competitive assimilation of the non-Latvians.

[11] Ibid. p. 45

During 1995-96, the nationalist Fatherland and Freedom Party was still trying to legislate a formal quota system, this time through a national petition. Although similar to Estonia's test of basic knowledge of the language, the Latvian requirement, as it went into effect in 1996 served as an opportunity through which all non-citizens would have wanted to gain political power or qualify for wide array of occupations. By 1996, all these state mechanisms were in place and functioning. Because of being in the receiving end of Latvian ethno political agenda, Russians in Latvia were wary about their prospects in the early 1990s. Still there were latent hopes because of which they remained non-respondent to calls by some groups, such as the pro-Soviet Interfront, to resist Latvian nationalism in 1989-91. Instead many Russians joined Latvians in Jan-Aug 1991 to defend Riga against incoming Soviet Tanks. In particular, many Russian spoke from the vantage point of being long-term residents of Latvia, whose root far predated the Soviet take over in 1940. Those people were automatic citizens and were greater in number than in Estonia. Moreover, greater linguistic similarities between the Latvian and Russian languages had prompted many more Russians to learn Latvian than was the case with Estonia. Finally, large percentage of Russians in Riga, the Latvian Capital, and in all of the country's major cities would also prompt moderation.

The Russian non-citizens were as aware as the Latvians of the ethno-political impact of the new citizenship laws; nevertheless, they were forced to

play the Latvian bureaucratic and legal game to exercise their rights. Russia, although often vocal in its support for Russians and non-citizens in Latvia, was either unable or unwilling to exert full pressure on Latvia.

The incentives and disincentives for Russians to integrate into Latvian society did not develop as rapidly as in the neighboring Estonia. Delays in Latvia's adoption of naturalisation requirements for non-citizens meant that the pressures for integration among Russians came more from negative sanction than through positive encouragement of gaining citizenship[12]. During the period 1992-94, most Russians felt only the stick of government regulations on language and residency, often arbitrarily enforced, not to speak of full-fledged citizenship. The slow adoption of a citizenship law gave rise to suspicions, similar to those in Estonia. Latvians were the first and foremost practising a policy of squeezing out of the non-citizens population before offering any incentives to co-operate.

A high percentage of Russians feel that assimilation represented probably the best future for the Russians in Latvia. Many Russians felt that Russians had no right to territorial autonomy in the country. It reflects a sensitivity among Russians to their large geographic dispersal within Latvia, though Russians make large minorities in many urban centers. Many also show

[12] Graham Smith, Aadna Aasland and Richard Mole," Statehood, Ethnic Relations and Citizenship", in, The Baltic States: The National Self-Determination of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania , edited by Graham Smith, Macmillan Press, London, 1996. p. 185

the willingness to speak the local language when the matter comes to being in contact with the state machinery or power centers. However it is a different matter that they did not come to have very strong feeling about any great benefits from the process of integration through language adaptation. Because they also see little economic benefits in learning the titular language.

The exclusionary stance was clearly evident in Latvia. The Latvian citizens' Congress criticised the inclusive nature of the Lithuanian citizenship legislation and stressed that there should be an ethnically pure attitude towards citizenship, there should be no hypocrisy, there is nothing shameful in a Latvian - like Latvia.

National Radicals in Latvia, therefore, also insisted that the national government re-instate pre-war law on citizenship, with all norms for naturalisation of immigrants envisaged in it. The greater danger of "national extinction" in Latvia, however led to the call for even more stringent residence-requirements for those seeking naturalisation i.e. it supported the introduction of quotas or a priority list with respect to acquisition of citizenship. In Latvia, many proponents of the "zero-options argued that the Baltic republics ceased to exist as a result of Soviet annexation in 1940. These inclusionists felt the need for proclamation of a second Republic in August 1991 and hence opposed all forms of residence and language requirements for citizenship.

By Summer of 1992, Moscow censured the Latvian parliament for its treatment of the republic's Russian population. Latvian politicians however countered the accusation, laying the blame for the fate of the Latvia's Russian minority with the Parliament of the Russian federation.

The issue of republican citizenship had developed from a puely domestic political concern to a factor in geo-political inter-state relations. Russia insisted that the situation in Latvia warranted the possible granting of interim powers to the Russian military present in Latvia.

Latvia's 1994 citizenship law stipulates a 10 year residency requirements.[13] Hence, for Russian community this effect means that historic Russians automatically qualified for full citizenship while most Russian migrants do not. Thus in Latvia, about a quarter of those who have registered as citizens are non-Latvians, having qualify through being either citizens of the former Latvian state or, through family to a former citizen.

The Russian President Boris Yeltsin, linked the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Baltic states to amendments being made to local citizenship legislation.[14] As he later emphasized, "Russia has no intention to sign any agreement regarding the withdrawal of troops from Latvia or Estonia until these countries bring their legislation into line with the international

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[13] Ibid. p, 188
[14] Ibid. 187

standards". Russia's eventual willingness to withdrawing its garrisons was successfully concluded by April 1994, primarily due to western pressures concerning economic aid. This was despite the lack of negotiations between Russia and Baltic states on issues related to the status of Russian speaking communities. Similarly, Western pressure played a part in influencing Latvia's 1994 Citizenship law which saw the abandonment of proposed citizen-quotas and the residency qualification being reduced.

In 1996, Latvia began the full scale naturalisation process for non-citizens born in Latvia. By 1998, there were amendments to Latvia's labour laws or legislation adopted by the country's parliament and the new language regulation which could lead to human rights violations.[15]

Latvia has much in common with Estonia but there are some subtle differences with respect to ways of solving the problem of aliens. The EU set specific tasks for Latvia, including some concerning citizenship and attitude towards minorities. Latvian President Ulmanis calls for alien integration and citizenship law debate.[16] Even as LNF (Latvian national front), Equal Rights Movement etc continue to grow on anti-authoritarian agenda, Russian speakers continue protest against "apartheid". Russia insists on that "no double standard" can be applied in the universally applied sphere of human rights violations particularly with respect to Latvia. However Latvia still sees "new

[15] Summary of World Broadcast, SU/311145 E/5, 7 February, 1998
[16] Ibid, SU/3153 E/1, 17 February, 1998

constructive approach" in relations with Russia because of US involvement and some unilateral initiatives on the part of Russia.

Russia opines that wide-scale non citizenship has been elevated to the rank of state policy and discriminatory hiring practices have taken root. Russia draws the attention of the UN, the Council of Europe, and the OSCE to these outrages, particularly after the protests against large scale desecration of Soviet War Grave in Latvia. Russian officials accuse the West of Double Standards over human right in Latvia and Russian left wingers point out at the rise of fascism in Latvia.

About 7,00,000 people in Latvia or one-third of the population are Russian speakers.[17] Latvia sees a linkage between its long term integration programme for ethnic Russian and its strategic foreign policy goal of achieving integration into the European Union. But still, Latvian legislature acts undeniably distinguish the rights of citizens and non-citizens, although there is no feature of legislation either which curbs the political, civil and economic rights of non-citizens

On April, 1998, the Latvian government endorsed draft amendment to citizenship law, in full compliance with the recommendations of the OSCE and other international organisations.[18] The amendments provide for the scrapping of naturalisation of all citizens born in Latvia and later other non-citizens.

[17] Summary of World Broadcast, SU/3180 E/2, 20 March,1998
[18] Ibid. SU/3208 E/1, 23 April, 1998

According to the Latvian President Ulmanis, there must be no non-citizens in Latvia but citizenship envisages loyalty to the state, knowledge of its language, history and anthem. He acknowledges a "passively frozen relationship" with Russia.

Latvian-Russian relations already had a negative effect on the volume of the country's external trade and relevant official Russian establishments started placing restrictions on Latvia's export goods. There is also an upsurge among Russian speaking youths against new education law that violates the use of their native language in education. The Latvian premier voiced his support for a referendum on changes to the citizenship law, making an European scale experiments. Non approval of the citizenship law would have international consequences though it may increase the rifts in Society.

The Case Of Estonia And The Russian Diaspora

Just after the declaration of Estonian independence, there was a decline in the intensity of ethnic tensions. Public signs of ethnic conflict were displayed less vividly than in 1988-91.

- The official political elite and state apparatus were visibly Estonianised, migration trends changed rapidly; while education, mass media, economic activity etc witnessed only modest adjustments in that period.

- The Russian movement in Estonia grappled with a serious adaptation crisis in 1991-93.

- Estonia's citizenship policy followed a quite strict restorationist strategy until the 1992 elections, after which a trend towards liberalisation occured. Compared with many other post-communist states, the minorities and citizenship policy in Estonia in 1991-93 appeared to be quite successful: the visible signs of ethnic grounds were avoided; Estonia's integration into European and other international organisation was generally successful.

After August 1991 there were two main phases in Estonia's citizenship policy:[19] the phase of tightening, and the phase of liberalisation when in 1992 the government announced its intention to relax some of the citizenship regulations. From the point of view of the mainstream Estonian political forces, 1991 saw not the creation of a new state but the restoration of the pre-1940 republic of Estonia. Estonia's citizenship policy also followed this restorationist line and produced quick and deep changes in the ethnic composition of the electorate. The 1938 Citizenship law was re-introduced in Estonia in February 1992. According to the legislation, all those who were citizens of the republic of Estonia in 1940 as well as their desendants, were

[19] Andres Park, " Ethnicity and Independence: The Case of Estonia in Comparative Perspective", Europe-Asia Studies, vol.46 no.1 1994 p.72

granted citizenship; the others were considered to be foreign nationals or stateless persons. The naturalisation requirements through which Estonian Citizenship is granted are quite liberal : anyone who has resided for two years may apply for citizenship. Language requirements were specified in a separate law emphasising on Estonian language.

Generally speaking, the current citizenship law does not discriminate against anybody on formal ethnic grounds and is more liberal than similar legislation of most other countries.[20] But the immediate real political effect of the citizenship law can be interpreted of course in ethnic terms. After September 1992 elections, the victorious right centre coalition led by the Prime Minister, Mart Laar, started to liberalise its stance. The liberalisation of the governments approach to citizenship issues led to counter-reaction from the radical Estonian nationalists. The possibility to grant citizenship for "special service" was used quite skillfully by the Estonian government to influence the leaders of the Russian community.

On the one hand new Estonian Constitution of 1992 adopted human rights clauses for the minorities; on the other hand, the share of Estonians at the begining of 1993 was still very moderate in some of the power structures in comparision to the Soviet Era.

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[20] Ibid. p.73

There would certainly have an incentive for Russians under the circumstances in which they had been working class migrants into titular republics, to assimilate linguistically to the titular nationality. There was evidence that such a trend was emerging in the Baltics.[21] Russians in Estonia feel themselves closer in values to the Estonians than to Russians in Russia. Yet these people identify themselves as Russian or Baltic Russians, never as merely Estonians.[22]

Estonia's citizenship policy was a major irritant for the Russian political circles. The Supreme Soviet of the Russian federation passed a resolution accusing Estonia of "flagrant violations" of human rights and the Estonian Russian treaty of January 1991, and threatening Estonia with economic sanctions. The Russian government raised the issue in various international forums too, and also linked troops withdrawal from Estonia to the rights of the local Russians. Still the power struggle and stability in Russia itself during 1991-93 dramatically reduced its capacity to put pressure on Estonia. Russia's attempt to garner western support for its condemnation of Estonia's human rights record largely failed. There was a visible retreat by the former imperial heartland.

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[21] David Laitin "National Revival and Competitive Assimilation in Estonia", Post-Soviet Affairs,vol.12 no.1 January-March 1996 p.38

[22] Ibid.

The 1991-93 phase can be best described as an adaptation crisis for the Russian movement. The Russian speaking political forces in Estonia were trying during that period to grapple with the loss of their status as peculiar representatives of the distant but powerful centre of the USSR. There were two distinctive sub-periods in the development of the political activities of Russian speakers: the period of disintegration and disorientation, and the period of moderate and controversial consolidation.[23] The hardline activists among the Russian speakers in 1993 were planning to convene their own political organization and demanding radical concession from Estonian government, making the Russian the second state language, introduction of dual citizenship for minorities, ensuring proportional representation to all ethnic groups on all levels of state power and re-orienting Estonia from the west towards Russia.

Estonia adopted a very different kind of participatory democracy which can be labelled as an "ethnic democracy".[24] Hence political hegemony was to be secured by limiting the access to political and electoral participation to only those members of the polity who qualify for citizenship under the 1992 Estonian Citizenship law. According to the Citizenship law, only those who were citizens in the inter-war years of the independent statehood and their descendents are automatically granted citizenship. For the remainder, made up

[23] Andres Park, "Ethnicity and Independence: The Case of Estonia in Comparative Perspective", Europe-Asia Studies, vol.46 no1 1994 p.80

[24] Graham Smith and Andrew Wilson, "Rethinking Russia's Post-Soviet Diaspora: The Potential for Political Mobilisation in Eastern Ukraine and North East Estonia", Europe Asia Studies, vol.49, no.5, 1997 p.850

of Russian settlers and the emigrants of the Soviet era, naturalisation requires length of residency, competence in the Estonian language, and an oath of loyalty. For most of the Russian minority population, the major obstacle to membership of the citizen-polity is language. Moreover there are cleavages in rights within the minorities themselves, with respect to participation in national elections or formation of their own political organizations. In structuring political access on the basis of non-ethnic criteria, the state has helped to create 'insiders' and 'outsiders' amongst the diaspora and in the process, weakened the social base for collective action. This has helped promote political factionalism amongst the diasporic elites, between the so-called- "integrationist" and "hardliners". The integrationists, comprising the Russian political parties and an umbrella organisation, the Russian Representative assembly (RRA), have chosen institutional politics as the arena to champion citizen rights. "Hardliners" most notably the Russian Council, set up in 1993 in opposition to the RRA, demanded both unconditional citizenship and the installation of Russian as the second official state language. The state keeps open the possibility of individual members of the settler communities becoming members of the citizen polity and thereby advancing their status and material prospects. Thus ordinary Russians must weigh the short term costs of being a non-citizen against the long term benefits of individual adherence to the status quo. Thus, many Russian speakers were keen to exploit the avenues that existed to become citizens.

Although the core nation political elites are split on a number of political issues, there has been remarkable consensus on citizenship policy. Thus it has prevented elite factionalisation. Consequently there has been little or no incentive for the resource-poor minority to take political initiative or for the oppositional elite to take up the cause of minority rights. And the elite consensus reflects the feeling that exists amongst members of the core nation against the presence of the Russian minority as a product of Soviet Rule.

Particularly in the North East of Estonia, there is a strong sense of community due to the overlapping ethno-linguistic and socio-economic boundaries. There has been created an "ethno-class" by the recently arrived industrial urban workers migrants who know no or little Estonian. There exists a strong sense of homeland identity with Russia, reinforced by frequent cross-frontier communications. Although many Russian feel uncomfortable about Estonian nationalism, it has not resulted in mass politics of secessionism. Rather the political attachment to a localised ethno-class than to Russia. Lack of leadership skills, limited media resources, lack of a cultural intelligentsia -- are the hindrances on the path to ethnic mobilisation.[25]

Since 1993, a new style of confrontational politics has developed. The Russian minority group has largely diminished interest in minority politics.

[25]Graham Smith and Andrew Wilson, "Rethinking Russia's Post-Soviet Diaspora: The Potential for Political Mobilisation in Eastern Ukraine and North-East Estonia", Europe Asia Studies, vol.49 no.5, 1997 p.857

Rather than struggling to retain or secure occupational niches within the public sphere, many have moved into private sector thus constituting a new "Russian business elite".[26] This new elite is one of the fastest growing social groups in Estonia. But it is also a group restrained by citizenship legislation from becoming a property-owning class. The term "Russian Speaking population" was first adopted by various organisations and activists around 1990 to rally support for the interests of the ethnically non-Estonian population in Estonia. Now the formal status of the Non-Estonians has begun to shift and can be defined by civic status as well as in ethno-linguistic terms.

The Russian speaking population, which is mainly urban, has lower incomes than the Estonian population as a whole, of whom vast bulk belongs to rural population. Although the difference in the average annual incomes of Estonians and the Russian population is not extremely large, it is important to note politically that Russians are economically more deprived. Moreover, in more complex models of income, the predictive power of the nationality is great. It appears that the marketizing Estonian Economy of the 1990s has operated to disadvantage the Russian population per se as compared to Estonians, in contrast to the situation before independence.[27] If the nationality-based income-difference persists, it may reinforce the already existing

[26] Mikk Titma, Nancy Tuma and Brian Silver, "Winners and Losers in the Post- Communist Transition: New Evidence From Estonia", Post-Soviet Affairs, vol.14 no.2 April-June 1998 p.116
[27] Ibid. p.122

nationality-based differences in perceptions of the state's fairness and in views about civil and citizenship rights.

The Russian minority's economic deprivation thus works against their full integration into Estonian Society. Because the newly independent Estonian government deliberately wrecked the all union enterprises where the bulk of the Russian speakers worked, their disadvantage is partly attributable to differences in region and the economic branch i.e. industry. As a corollary, substantial differences also exist in terms of other factors such as educational attainment, occupation and economic branch. Many Russians are disadvantaged in the labour market partly due to language because many jobs are open only to those with fluency in Estonian.

The nationality issue strongly differentiates the Russian's deviating attitude towards the state institutions. Though, by 1997, a substantial portion of them had established a potentially permanent civil status in Estonia.

Even those Russian speakers who become Estonian citizens are not Estonian by self-identity and do not express confidence in Estonian institutions. Many have not developed a strong facility in Estonian language, despite the Estonian law on language, which provides strong incentive to learning Estonian. Nor the Russians endorse a key aspect of the language policy of the current regime. And it is very unlikely that strategies of linguistic adaptation or a change in citizenship would result in assimilation.

On January 20, 1995, the Estonian parliament adopted a new law on citizenship, ignoring the protests of the Russian parties as well as the Estonian radical nationalists, raising the residence requirements.[28] The Russian foreign Ministry called it as flouting the Russian fundamental rights, which even violates the Estonian side's obligations under the January 1991 treaty between Russia and Estonia on the principles of relation between the two states. Importantly, in March 1998, the Estonian Parliament dropped a draft amendment to the citizenship law from its agenda on the pretext that it would create a large number of citizens who speak non-Estonian.[29] However the simultaneous launching of the Estonian-Russian inter-government commission stressed on signing an agreement on social guarantees for Russian Estonian citizens.

However, Premier Mart Siimann's envisaged nationality policy seeks to replace the problem of non-Estonians by providing the subjects of non-Estonians an opportunity for becoming potential for development,[30]. However he has tightened the laws on illegal immigrants which may have its impact on about 125,000 Russian citizens, now living in Estonia.

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[28] Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press; 15 February, 1995,vol.x2 vii, no.3 p.27
[29] Summary of World Broadcast,SU/3173 E/3, 12 March, 1998
[30] Ibid. SU/3141 E/2, 3 February, 1998

Lithuania And The Russian Diaspora

The major minorities in Lithuania were Russian (in 1989, 9.4 percent, mostly in cities throughout the republic) and Poles (about 7.0 percent, concentrated in the city of Vilnius and in the rural districts in the south east).[31] For the most part, these people considered themselves citizens of Soviet Union rather than of Lithuania, and many rallied to the so-called "interfront" organisation. In Lithuania, it took the form of an organization called "Unity" – criticizing the efforts of the Lithuanians to free themselves of Moscow's controls. Lithuanians in turn considered these people hostile to the idea of a Lithuanian national state.

The Lithuanian republic was a "national state", its leaders considered "Lithuania" to be an ethno regional concept blending language and territory into a single whole with its own distinctive political imperatives[32]. Although nationalists still insisted that, "a large part of ethnic Lithuanian's territory is outside the border of the Lithuanian SSR,". Government leaders nevertheless tended to accept the boundaries of Lithuanian SSR as their frontier. In practice, this of course meant that while the Lithuanians constituted 80 percent of the

[31] Alfred Erich Senn, "Lithuania: Rights and Responsibilities of Independence ", in, New States, New Politics: Buildinng the Post—Soviet Nations, edited by IAN Bremmer and Ray Taras, Cambridge University Press, 1997.p.336

[32] Ibid. p.361

population, other nationalities, comprised one-fifth of the population. The Lithuanians were in this way able to avoid the controversial publicity that Latvians and the Estonians received on the citizenship question. The Lithuanian government also accepted the organization of minority groups as communities and supported the development of schools for the major groups. Leaders of the minority nationalities now have the opportunity – which they never had in the Soviet times – to mobilize their own communities and build their own power bases.

The Russians, of course, presented a unique problem as a formerly dominant nationality, now demoted in status. Whereas Russians formerly could force their language onto any meeting in Lithuania as a matter of course, they now considered it a victory when that could convince the Lithuanians to use Russian in speaking with them directly. The provisions for citizenship, however, softened the problems in that they allowed Russians who took Lithuanian passports to share in the distribution of "checks" for the distribution of property. By mid 1990s, the Russian population of the republic has declined to less than 9 percent with minimum of rancor. For the Russians remaining, the problems have focused mainly on trails of daily life.

It was evident in the Declarations of Republican Sovereignty itself that Lithuania did not lay much more emphasis as in Estonia and Latvia on the need to safeguard a secure homeland for the titular nationalities. For reasons of

ethno demographics, Lithuania was comfortable with the multi-ethnic nature of their societies. The Lithuanian proportion of its republic remained relatively unchanged at around 80 percent, a product of both an economy which saw slow industrialisation and less migrant labour force during Soviet period and of a relatively high rate of native population growth which contrasted with Estonia and Latvia.[33]

Lithuania's accommodating stance was consolidated with the adoption of its law on citizenship in November 1989 itself. Lithuania was keen to harness the support of non-indigenous population and adopted the "zero option" which based the conditions for citizenship upon territorial and not primordial factors. In order to appease the national radicals within the government, deputies acknowledge that Lithuania was a restored but not a new state, despite the 'new state' model of citizenship adopted.

After independence, attempts were made by neo-nationalists to narrow down the range of residents eligible for automatic citizenship; the neo-nationalists were fuelled by the anti-Russian feeling following Moscow's economic blockade. The then President, Vytautas Landsbergis, however declined to hold a referendum on the legitimacy of granting citizenship to those that arrived in Lithuania during the Soviet period. He cited the reason that this

[33] Graham Smith, Aadne Aasland and Richard Mole, "Statehood, Ethnic Relations and Citizenship", in, The Baltic States: The National Self-Determination of Estonia Latvia and Lithuania, edited by Graham Smith, Macmillan Press Ltd, London 1996 p.185

would side-track the more pressing problems facing the country and would also aggravate the political situation in the republic, stir up ethnic animosity, lead to civil confrontation and strengthen the underground CPSU and KGB structures. Nevertheless in September 1991, the Sajudis-led Supreme Council imposed direct rule over Russian dominated urban area. Russian found this as because of their desire for greater autonomy.

Lithuania comes closer to resembling a second type of model of democracy: majoritarian-type-democracy.[34] Thus what is aspired to is no "Lithuanian nation" but "nation of Lithuania" in which citizens are mobilized into a national political community irrespective of ethnic affiliations. Its citizenship laws are by far most liberal; it is highly homogenous society (over 80 percent Lithuanian) ; ethnic and linguistic differences are politically less problematic due to the high degree of social interaction between ethnic groups; and support for political parties is less ethnically partisan. Adoption of a complex system of proportional representation does allow ethnic minority parties. All permanent residents have the right to participate politically and to stand in national and local elections. Lithuanian citizenship legislation does not allow for dual citizenship.

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[34] Ibid.

Russian Communist were unhappy with an emigrant as President of Lithuania after the election of the new President Valdas Adamkus in August 1998. Adamkus stressed that Lithuania has "no problem with national minorities and Russian diaspora".[35] In a significant development, the migrants from Russia would be placed by Lithuanian government in the Kaliningrad region, the former military settlements of Russia, backed up by an international movement in support of migrants – the Forum of Migrating Organizations.[36]

Russian Policy vis-a-vis The Russian Ethnic Minorities in The Baltic Republics

The nature and evolution of Russia's policy towards Russians living in the near abroad, to a great extent, can be indicated by its current law on citizenship.[37] In accordance with international norms, Russia acknowledged that dual citizenship could exist only in the context of a treaty relationship with a particular state. The law on citizenship is very friendly to those former Soviet citizens who reside in other states and wish to move to Russia and become Russian citizens. In 1994, the Russian government decided to supplement the idea of dual citizenship with a broader strategy of building special relationship with Russians living abroad. President adopted a special government programme qualifying three categories of Russians minorities residing in

[35] Summary of World Broadcast,SU/3316/ E/2, 27 August, 1998
[36] Ibid. SU/3552 B/10, 4June 1999
[37] Igor Zevelev, "Russia and the Russian Diasporas", Post-Soviet Affairs, 1996, 12(3), p.271

neighbouring states as "compatriots"[38]—(1) Russian citizens living in the near abroad (2) former Soviet citizens who have not obtained new citizenship, particularly in Latvia and Estonia and (3) those who obtained citizenship of the host country but wish to maintain their own culture and ties with Russia.

On August 1994, President Yeltsin signed a decree that called for the government to formulate the major component of this policy.[39] Government document defined the strategic line of Russia's policy towards the "compatriots" as promotion of their voluntary integration into the host states. According to the programme, the Russian government's primary means of defending the rights and interests of the Russians living in the near abroad was to be diplomatic and economic. It also called for the promotion of economic ties between Russia and those enterprises in the near abroad, in which most employees were "compatriots".

In 1995, the period for obtaining Russian citizenship after migration to Russia was extended until the year 2000. But facing strong opposition from Estonia, Russia did not dare to extend the same rights to those who preferred to stay in their host state. The subsequent retreat meant that Russia never introduced a permanent mechanism for creating "pure" Russian citizens in the "near abroad". Thus dual citizenship, once elevated to a strategic task of Russian foreign policy, started disappearing from the political agenda in 1995.

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[38] Ibid. 273.
[39] Ibid.

Thus we can see that during the initial period around 1992, Russian policy was entirely rhetoric towards the Russian diasporas. During 1993-94 there took place an attempt to back up the rhetoric with some assertive measures, including the advocacy of dual citizenship. And by 1995, after the failure of this undertaking, there remained only a combination of moderate policy and tough rhetoric.

It needs to be recognised that diasporic identities are likely to be shaped not only by how diaspora communities define their own culture attributes but also by how they relate.[40] It is important to recognise the relational dimension in the non-Russian successor states. The political practice of a nationalising state results from the fact that despite acquiring statehood in 1991, core nation elites in each successor state still see themselves as having to secure a dominant place for their nation within the cultural, economic and political life of their "historic" homelands. Policies designed to promote the languages, culture, economic well being and even political hegemony of the core nation produce obvious states and culture threats for the minorities.

The relationship between the diaspora and its external homeland, Russia, have an important bearing on diasporic politics. It is in terms of the role that minorities ascribe to the external homeland in its own geographical

[40] Graham Smith and Andrew Wilson, "Re-thinking Russia's Post-Soviet Diaspora: The Potential for Political Mobilisation in Eastern Ukrain and North-East Estonia", Europe -Asia Studies, vol.49, No.5, 1997, p. 846

imagination and secondly, the role that Russia is likely to adopt as ethnic patron to the Russian minorities in the Baltics.

As regards the external homeland, as a concrete political agent, the adoption of supportive policies adopted by Moscow will be likely to reinforce a sense of identity with Russia, in case of the Baltic Russian minorities becoming a victim of the new nationalising states. The opening up of access to participation, shifts in ruling alignments, the availability of influential allies and cleavages within and among political allies – these are the primary factors that are likely to determine the relationship between Baltic states and the diasporic Russian minorities.

Thus despite being a firm supporter of the Russian Diaspora in the Baltic Republics, President Yeltsin could only adopt some sort of a combination of moderate policy and tough measures. The issue often cropped up only at the diplomatic level while Moscow often tried to use its economic leverages. The recent offshoot of alleged violation of human rights in Latvia and very frequent annulments of citizenship reform laws by the Estonian Parliamentary and representative bodies point out to the fact that the issue continues to linger on in state to state relations. Despite the occasional friendly rhetorics and dispositions often exhibited by the Baltic leaders, Moscow continues to see them with an eye of suspicion. This, seemingly, has resulted in

some deliberate efforts by the Russian federation to draw the attention of the international forums and organisations.

Yeltsin's regime did bring about some moderation in the Baltic state policies towards the Russian minorities, but the issue continues to be in the doldrums of domestic power politics in the region. Frequent changes of regimes or alignments or realignments of political forces in the Baltics continue to hamper a consistent and determined policy. This is true even in the case of Russia

Chapter - III

STRATEGIC DIMENSION IN RUSSO-BALTIC REPUBLIC RELATIONS

Russian Perspective Of National Security vis-à-vis the Baltic States

President Yeltsin's Russian Republican regime was initially disposed favourably towards the Baltic States. It recognised the case for independence of the Baltic as based on the legal principles. But developing a stable relation with them independent nation proved problematic for Russia.

From the Russian perspective, the Baltic countries are obviously a part of Russian geography. Russia searches its natural western frontier in the distinct geographical features of the Baltic Sea. Conversely no pronounced geographical features on the eastern borders of the Baltic countries establish a natural frontier between themselves and Russia[1]. Most Russians believe that reasonable and acceptable independence for the Baltic states should follow the model of Finnish independence[2]: to be economically and culturally part of the west politically independent of the west and Russia and militarily neutral and unthreatening to Russia.

The rebirth of the national statehood had brought to an end the former alliance between Russian and the Baltic, while a number of number of factors have aggravated Russia – Baltic security relations. Despite the friendly

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[1] James Kurth, "The Baltics; Between Russia and The West", Current History, October 1999 p. 334.
[2] Ibid.

rhetoric, Moscow did not give up a geopolitical leadership in the area. Instead, Moscow proclaimed itself a guarantor and protector of the security in the entire post-Soviet space by the concept of "enlightened post-imperialism", adopted as a guideline.

Moscow's chauvinistic elements see the place of the Baltic States as "a window into Europe" for Russia. The shortest sea transportation line from Russia extends into the Northern and Western Europe through the Baltic ports. Thus the official Russian policy towards the Baltic is characterised by the endeavours to preserve its influence, direct or indirect, in this region.

1993 witnessed a shift in Russia's foreign policy from an emphasis on relations with the West to an emphasis on the countries of the near abroad. "Near Abroad" was to mean the other fourteen former Soviet republics. Russian policy makers saw both the near abroad and the west as equal priorities. The 1993 official document "Russian Foreign Policy Concept" formally termed the "Near Abroad" as Russia's top foreign policy priority.[3]

President Yeltsin adopted a decree on 2nd November 1993, "Basic Provisions of the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation" approved by the Russian Federation Security Council. This defined the main points of Russian security and also determined the political threats to Russia. It also includes the factors that directly concerned the Baltic States

[3] Zafar Imam, Foreign Policy of Russia: 1991-2000, New Horizon Publishers, New Delhi, 2000, p.12.

(a) The territorial claims of the other states to the Russian Federation and its allies.

(b) The suppression of the rights, liberties and legal interests of the citizens of the Russian federation in foreign countries. The Baltic States have been accused of these "sins", and Russia has expressed its readiness to punish the Balts for any of them in future.

There has been a consensus of potential threats to the Baltics from Russia. First, many chauvinists have emerged in Russian Army and Russian media[4], While they fight for the retention of Kurils in Russia, they draw parallels with the Baltic states as age-old Russian territories . There had been extremely hostile statements from Vladimir Zhirinovsky, the leader of the Russian Liberal Democratic Party who threatened to re-conquer the Baltic states.[5] Moreover, the post Perestroika situation in the Commonwealth of Independent States ,particularly in Russia, is supposed to signal potential dangers for the independence of the Baltic Republics. Second, the issue of the rights of the minorities in Baltic Republics has caught the attention of the international community. They seem to recognise the "natural rights" of Russia to have specific interests in the Post-Soviet countries. It is somewhat very akin to the

[4] Ibid p.35

[5] Peter Vares," Baltic Security And Foreign Policies", in, The Making of Foreign Policy in Russia and the New States of Eurasia",edited by Adeed Dawisha. and Karen Dawisha,, ME Sharpe Inc. New York, USA. 1995 ,p.168.

idea that Latin America is the private domain of the United States. Estonia has been the first to protest against Russia's intentions to exercise such a role on territory of former USSR.

Military Withdrawal

The first problem of withdrawal of Russian residual forces concerned issues such as political linkage with human rights, financial costs of re-deployment of forces and dismantling of military installations and technically a future of Russian military property in the Baltic states and the accommodation of the withdrawn troops in Russia. To the extent that Lithuania adopted citizenship legislation which had satisfied Russia, Moscow and Vilnius reached an agreement on withdrawal of residual forces relatively earlier. It was more difficult to Moscow to conclude agreements on troop withdrawal with Estonia and Latvia. Both sides under pressure from the domestic public opinion and hoping to gain more advantages , adopted tactics instead of a pragmatic search for compromise. The tactic of "linkage" between the issue of minorities and troop withdrawal was a major instrument of Russian policy towards Estonia and Latvia.

The Russian Defence Minister, Grachev, during his visit to Finland, in October 1993, made a statement in which he linked the withdrawal of Russia's forces from Latvia and Estonia to the human right issues involving the Russian-speaking population in these countries. There was enough evidence of

the enhanced role of the military in the resolution of foreign policy issues between Russia and the newly independent states. President Yeltsin sent a message to the NATO nations asking for revision of the 1990 Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty concerning the dislocation of military hardware in the North Caucasus and permission for Russia to overstep its infantry limit. Foreign Minister Andrie Kozyrev even sought UN recognition of Russia's priority role in the settlements of conflict in the territory of the former Soviet Union. It was not until 1994 that the troops could be withdrawn from the three of the Baltic republics.

Boundary Question

Russia's military dominance overshadows another conflict-- "borders". Estonia claims those guaranted by the Tartu Peace Treaty of 1920. But on 19 February 1993, the Russian Parliament fixed the former border of the RSFSR as the state border of the Russian Federation. This meant, Estonian Foreign Minister Trivimi Velliste told the parliament, that Russia was refusing to return to Estonia some 5 percent of it territory seized after the annexation.[6] It comprises two areas heavily populated by Russian speakers. Latvia also lost borderlands guaranteed to its in 1920 but took a less firm stand on these lands than did Estonia. Nationalist claims were also raised in Lithuania and Belarus. The

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[6] Walter Clemens, Jr. "Baltic Identities In The 1990s" in National Identity and Ethnicity in Russia and the New states of Eurasia, New York, ME Sharpe, p.195

future of Kaliningrad Oblast is another territorial issue that is bound to surface. This Russian enclave of the Russian Federation is a left over consequence of the territorial re-adjustments in the aftermath of the World War II. The bulk of former East Prussia was given to Poland. Its northern third was placed under Soviet administration. Although the Russian position that it is eternally Russian land has been voiced on numerous occasions, contrary claims also have been made.

Strategies Towards National Security In Each Of The Baltic Republics

Among the states formed from the former Soviet Republics, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia were most determined to remain independent of Russia's control. The primary focus of the Baltic foreign policy has been to underscore the European orientation of the three countries and to build up their Western ties. They have sought in every possible way to minimise identification and interaction with the CIS. The downplaying of the relations with the CIS was especially pronounced in Lithuania under President Lansbergis. Untill very recently, the Lithuanians markedly maintained only a charge'd'affairs rather than an ambassador in Moscow.[7] They have been particularly sensitive over Russia's formulation of the concept "near abroad", which is viewed as an

[7] Romuald J. Misiunas, " National Identity and Foreign Policy in the Baltic States", in, The Legacy Of History in Russia and the New States of Eurasia., New York, M.E. Sharpe, 1994. p.102.

unwillingness to forsake hegemony and an effort to secure international sanction for intervention in the domestic affairs of the Baltic states.

The creation of more substantive foreign and security policies in the Baltic Republics actually began before they gained independence in August 1991. In 1989-90 the emerging political parties voiced their first visions of the future Baltic states as sovereign Democratic states that enjoyed friendly relations with all countries of the world. The first moves were to pursue three aims:[8] to recall the attention of the international community, to gain international support and assistance and third to join international organizations. They had almost completely failed in their third aim because the policies of the major powers towards the Baltics were greatly influenced by the US-Soviet dialogue as well as the Gorbachev Syndrome, which was to make the western attitude towards the Baltics less resolute and cause them to maneuver between Moscow and the Baltic capitals.

Baltic Politicians were then unprepared for independent foreign policy formulation, let alone the charting of security policy perspective. Even for the establishment of rule of law in their states, they could only refer back to the little international law that Moscow had formulated for the periphery. The longstanding non-recognition de jure of their incorporation into the USSR by

[8] Peter Vares, " Dimensions And Orientations in the Foreign and Security Policies of the Baltic States", in The Making of Foreign Policy in Russia and the New States of Eurasia, edited by Adeed Dawisha and Karen Dawisha, ME Sharpe Inc.New York, 1995 p. 157

the West and the remnants of old diplomatic and consular services provided a "rudimentary entree".

The Baltic countries have adopted radically different strategies in their approach to national security.[9] The Lithuanians have cast the issue in moral terms, and having won on the large questions such as minorities with Russia, often have made concessions on other issues. The Latvians have defined it in legal terms and sought to achieve security by enmeshing themselves and the Russians in a series of agreements with vested interests of both sides. The Estonians have defined the security issue broadly-seeking to reduce Russian influence in all aspects of Estonian life.

The major external risks for Lithuania's security today are connected with the instability on the territory of Russia and the CIS which is characterised by inter regional, ethnic-religious, territorial or social conflicts into which Lithuania could also be drawn. Vilnius also faces the risk of renewed Russian expansionism and Moscow's meddling in Lithuania's internal affairs. Lithuania's economic dependence on Russia especially on energy and raw materials is a significant factor in this respect. It is a considerable achievement on the part of both Russia and Lithuania that there are no problems between the two countries concerning ethnic minorities, borders or other complicated issues. However the transit of Russian troops and military

[9] Paul A Goble, " The Baltics; Three States, Three Fates," in, Current History, October 1994 p. 332

equipments based in Kaliningrad through Lithuania continues to give rise to worries and suspicions in Lithuania, despite the agreements which have been reached. Kaliningrad, the Russian enclave, is now a strategic military outpost for Moscow but President Yeltsin had also granted it special economic status, giving it more freedom to establish independent international contracts (On 18th January 1995, Vilnius sent a note to Russia on that). Uncertainties over the future of the Kaliningrad region remain closely related to the ambiguity of Russia's future.

In keeping up with the overall Baltic foreign policy, Latvia also refuses to join the CIS states. Latvia's policy towards the commonwealth is to wait and see whether the CIS facilitates its relations with the Soviet successor states. CIS leaders called for joint air defence system in which they included Latvia's skrunda radar station where there is still a small Russian military presence. Even though Latvia has made it clear in the past that it wants to remain outside CIS structures, Moscow has also consistently used various forms of political leverages to influence Latvia's domestic and foreign policies. President Boris Yeltsin issued a decree on 5th April 1994 which stressed the need to maintain Russian military bases in CIS. The Latvian Government immediately declared that 'Riga' never has and never will agree to the establishment of Russian Military base in Latvia or to the testing of new weapons and military technology on Latvian soil. Following protests from the Baltic States and the

west, Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev and Defence Minister Grachev gradually dissociated themselves from this decree.

Following the agreements of 30 April 1994 on the withdrawal of Russian troops, the Riga Government is hoping to obtain OSCE support for monitoring total compliance by Russia with these agreements. The Latvians fear that a future Russian government could ignore the agreement on the withdrawal of the missile defence facility at skrunda, the Russian radar station in Latvia.

The Russian military doctrine of 1993 with the concept of "Near Abroad" is considered to be the main security risk for Estonia. A leading official of the Estonian Defence Ministry, Hames Walter declared in December 1993 : "There is only one state in the world whose influential politicians have publicly threatened to eliminate the republic of Estonia . To state bluntly that Estonia needs to defend itself against Russia is therefore not an unfriendly act but an acknowledged reality".[10]

On July 1994, after more than two years of negotiations involving nineteen rounds of talks between delegation of the two countries, the President of Estonia and Russia finally signed an agreement on the withdrawal of Russian troops. In particular, the issue of more than 10,000 retired Russian military remained a bone of contention. Moreover, despite the official

[10] Bajarnas, Haab, Viskhe edited by Peter van Hans, "The Baltics States : Security and Defence after Independence, "June 1995, published by the ,Institute for security studies of WEU, Geneva 1996 (http:// www. weu. int/ institute/ chaliot/ chai 19e html).

withdrawal of Russian troops from Estonia, a total of 1,000 military personnels remained in the country in violation of the Estonian-Russian agreements.

The international community has always been inclined to treat the Baltics as a unified entity, united by common problems. Riga, the Latvian Capital, was often considered a regional center, although Estonia and Lithuania have never recognised its leading role. Their different historical, ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds do not favour the spiritual unity of the Baltic states. Thus inter-Baltic co-operation is one of the least significant options among the foreign policy alternatives of the Baltic states. However, diplomatic co-operation between the Baltic States had got underway in 1989 with the creation of the Baltic Council.[11] Common political institutions were the Baltic assembly where delegates from the Baltic State's legislatures debated and liaised and the Baltic Council of Ministers established in June 1994.[12] The regular meetings of the Baltic Presidents, Prime Ministers, Ministers of Foreign Affairs that make up the Council of the Baltic Assembly, and the Baltic Council of Ministers with its secretariat including the efforts at revival of the traditions of special Baltic order etc. are pointer to the direction of common efforts at co-ordination of foreign and security policies. However

[11] Roger East and Jolyon Pontin, Revolution and Change in Central and Eastern Europe , Pinter Publication, London ,1997, p. 306

so far, they have contributed little to any kind of political and economic rapprochement.

The differences in the domestic side of national security have been mirrored in the foreign policies of the three states. While all three have sought and obtained recognition and membership in international organisations, and all three have been interested in promoting Baltic co-operation, their differences in approach are striking.

- Lithuania has enormous difficulties dealing with its immediate neighbours, Poland and Belarus, thus limiting its ability to find a counterweight to Russian power. Just like his predecessors, Lithuanian President Agirdes Brazauzkas asked for NATO membership in the spring of 1994 while the other two Baltic Republics were content with exploiting the possibilities for partnership for peace. But this dramatic gesture was not followed by active diplomacy in either Europe or Washington.

- Latvia has pursued a more cautious, step by step approach. It has expanded its ties towards Europe, especially Germany, although its foreign policy has been marked by a turn over in foreign ministers. It has made few missteps – establishing consular relations with Taiwan at the cost of ties with Beijing. Perhaps, the most important one was Riga's unsuccessful effort to promote a Baltic-Black sea

security zone arrangement with meetings in Latvia during mid 1993, of representatives from the various countries in this zone.

- Estonia has pursued the most aggressive diplomatic campaign with its leaders visiting all the major countries in Europe, America and around the Russian Federation. It has developed extensive ties with Japan, China , Turkey and Kazakhstan and has pursued expanded ties with Poland, the Czech Republic and Ukraine--all of these visits and agreement are subordinate to the idea of finding a counterweight to Russia.

The first impulse for the Baltic States in rejoining the international community was the Nordic attraction. In the spring of 1990 itself, Iceland offered itself as an intermediary between Moscow and the Baltic republics. It was a demonstrative and practical step in proving that the Baltic question was no longer "the domestic affair" of the Soviet Union. The interest of the Baltic States in joining the Council of Baltic Sea States was quite natural. Because the formation of a new regional union implied the equality of all its participants; secondly, because the participation of both Germany and Russia in the council would reduce the leverages of both the powers towards claims on Baltic territory.

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were rapidly re-integrated into the diplomatic community. On 10 September 1991, they accorded to the "Council

For Security And Co-Operation In Europe"(CSCE) now called "Organisation For Security And Co-Operation In Europe" (OSCE), and on 17 September to the United Nations. Their preference for integration into the western economic and political structures was also accompanied by a desire to join the Western Security Organizations. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania joined NATO's partnership for Peace (PfP) initiative soon after its launch in January 1994 and were granted "associate-partnership" status in the Western European Union (WEU) in June 1994.[13]

The Baltic States acknowledge that 'security' is a multi-dimensional concept, which has a wide variety of aspects and includes not only political and military facets but also has economic, environmental and even demographic aspects. The current security and defence policies reflect the need for international and regional co-operation, not only through the establishment of practical links among the three Baltic republics but also with the Scandinavian countries. The initiative to set up a Baltic peacekeeping battalion (BALTBAT), with the co-operation of the countries of the Baltic Sea Council and United Kingdom and the reluctant moves with EU for a European stability pact, are significant trends. The "European Stability Pact" consisted of a so-called "Baltic Regional Table" which has addressed the border and minority questions of these three nations, prepare the Baltic for their membership of the

[13] Ibid.

EU .[14] Moreover the ideas of a "NATO–bis" a collective defence organization for Central European countries including Baltic States have been just put forward with even the idea of a Baltic-to-Black Sea framework for co-operation recently being launched, promoted mainly by Ukraine.[15]

NATO Expansion And Its Implication For The Security Of The Baltic And Russian Security

IT should be mentioned that for the Baltic States, close ties with NATO are not only important for strictly military or political reasons. In the Baltic regions, it is clearly acknowledged that NATO's involvement also has a direct and very positive impact on the economic security of the Central European States since close relations with NATO are seen as an element of stability and are expected to make the region more attractive for Western investors.

For the Baltic States, there are two possibilities of joining NATO: full membership or an intermediate option which might include some form of security guarantee, possibly linked to a gradual accession to the Alliance. The latter option would mean that these new comers would receive at least "soft security guarantees" in the beginning and pass through intermediate stages on the road to full membership.

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[14] Bajarnas , Haab,Viksne, "The Baltic States: Security and Defence after Independence", edited by Peter van Hans, in, http:// www. weu. int/ institute/ challiot/ 19e html, June 1995.
[15] Ibid

However, the probability of a pre-emptive strike from Russia is especially great for the Baltic states. According to the Council on Foreign and Defence policy, a working group on Russian policy with respect to NATO, the Baltic states, which desire to join NATO will create a potential source of conflict in the center of Europe. Given the location of the Baltic states, it is doubtful that NATO could provide any effective conventional military assistance if they were threatened by Russia. And even though Russian forces did not perform well in Chechnya, they still pose a threat to Baltic republics as the defence Intelligence agency recently told the Congress, "Through the next five years, Russia will retain the capability to overwhelm any other former Soviet State with a conventional offensive, provided it has sufficient time to prepare".[16] In these circumstances, the prospect of NATO membership for the Baltic republics will offer false hopes, much like the British and French guarantee to Poland in 1939. Even worse, far from deterring Russian reaction, it could actually incite the action that the west seeks to avert.

The Russian military doctrine of 1993 enumerated certain principles which gave Russia a doctrinal and theoretical ground work for the use of political and military means to guarantee stability in the near abroad. It seems to have been a part of a general hardening of the Russian attitude towards its traditional areas of concern, as witnessed in terms of the universally negative

[16] Ibid.

reaction generated among Russian policy elites by the prospect of NATO membership for East European countries. Among the most vocal of Russian foreign policy institutions on the issue was the Former Intelligence Service (FIS), more or less the inheritor of the Soviet KGB"s external intelligence functions.[17] Noting that Russians had long been raised in an anti-NATO spirit, the FIS opines that inclusion of the former Soviet allies in NATO would force the military to rethink its doctrine, force structure, and deployment patterns: Given Russia's dire economic straits, this raised the possibility that the government would not be able to keep the military satisfied.

Russia recognised NATO expansion from the beginning as a threat to the balance of power and to its prestige as a great power. In the end, Moscow was unable to admit the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to NATO. But the issue of "Near Abroad" states was another matter. And the focus of that struggle was the Baltic states

Russia was unable to prevent NATO invitations to three former Warsaw Pact states but it did attempt to influence the parameters of NATO expansions. Moscow's policy was formally described in a "conceptual line".[18] In it Russia's government acknowledged the inevitability of NATO expansion but

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[17] Jonathon Valdes, "Russia, the Near Abroad and the West", in, The Making of Foreign Policy in Russia and the New States of Eurasia, edited by Adeed Dawisha and Karen Dawisha ,New York, ME. Sharpe inc.1995 p. 8

[18] Robert Donaldson and Joseph I. Nogee, "Russia and the Near Abroad" in, The Foreign of Russia: Changing Systems, Enduring Interests, ME. Sharpe Inc. 1998, p. 188

insisted that such expansion could not include former republics, "especially the Baltic countries". Admitting the Baltic to NATO would create a "serious barrier" between them and Russia. In compensation, Moscow announced its willingness to offer its neighbours some kind of security guarantees. Prior to the NATO decisions, negotiations were begun in January between Foreign Minister Evgenii Primokov and NATO Secretary General Javier Solana. Primokov took a strong line against Baltic membership in NATO.

NATO enlargement would destroy the existing "security buffer" between the two sides in the sense that it could bring the NATO military presence to the Russian borders, potentially including foreign military bases and nuclear weaponry; NATO extension could evoke a Russian military build-up on the western and north-western borders to protect Kaliningrad, Novgorod, St. Petersburg and other vulnerable areas; it would strengthen "war party" inside Russia which could demand a stoppage of military reforms and re-militarize the country; NATO enlargement could accelerate a creation of the military alliance within the CIS and resume confrontation in Europe on the military block basis; it would challenge Ukraine and Moldova's status of neutral states; The alliance's extension could generate a new crisis and even potential collapse of the CFE Treaty; it would undermine the OSCE's role as a main backbone of the European security system, etc.

The Russian leadership believes the East and Central European countries' NATO membership would not enhance their security. On the contrary, it could compel Moscow to perceive them as a potential threat to Russia's security. Presently, Moscow's concerns are mostly related to the soft security issues in the case of the Baltic states. Russia's relations with the Visegrad countries are not burdened with any serious security problems at all. Their membership, however, would shift Russian perceptions to the hard security issues. For this reason, Russia's security concerns over the future developments remain. Commenting on the Madrid meeting, Primakov asserted that "NATO enlargement is a big mistake, possibly the biggest mistake since the end of the Second World War"[19]

In September 1994, Russia offered the Baltic States bilateral security agreements like those signed that month with Norway, Finland and Denmark. According to Russian defence Minister Pavel Grachev, another possibility was one multilateral security agreement signed by the three Baltic States and Russia. However, the prime ministers of the Baltic States, meeting in Riga on 13 September, had earlier said such a Russian proposal should be rejected because it was premature and old problems should be resolved first.

[19] Alexander Sourgunin, "The Russian Dimension", in, Bordering Russia: Theory and Prospects for Europe's Baltic Rim, edited by Hans Mauritzen, Ashgate Publication, Hampsphire, England. 1998 p.36

Baltic leaders turned their sights towards NATO, which, in conformity with its new action programme towards Eastern Europe was ready for contacts with the Baltic states. Thus in December 1991, a political declaration on joint activities of NATO and the Baltic states within the North Atlantic Co-operation Council (NACC) was signed in Brussels which, the Baltic republics hoped, would help them solve the most pressing problem of their military security--eventually admission to NATO, thus removing the Baltic states from Russian sphere of interest. It would also link them more tightly with the west, though not necessarily meaning that NATO bases would have to be located on Baltic territory. Beside, NATO membership would enable the Baltic states to rebuild and modernise their defence forces. Commenting on NATO relations with the Baltics, the late Manfred Womer, NATO Secretary General had stated, "We don't exclude future membership.....but it is not on agenda".[20] The Baltic authorities, came gradually, but rather unwillingly, to the understanding that NATO, in fact, was not going to admit any new members in the near future. At the same time, the Baltic authorities encountered NATO's willingness to help them with advice. NATO representatives participated actively in different conferences in the Baltic states on the present situation in Europe and in the Baltic region, the development of the of Baltic strategic interests, Baltic-CSCE relations, and Baltic co-operation in international security. When NATO came up with the Partnership for Peace (PfP) initiative

[20] Peter Vares,"" Dimensions and Orientations in the Foreign and Security Policies of the Baltic States", in, The Making of Foreign Policy in Russia and New States of Eurasia, edited by Adeed Dawisha and Karen Dawisha, ME. Sharpe. New York, 1995

towards the East European states, the Baltic states joined it in mid 1994[21]. Just prior to joining NATO, on 17 December 1993, the Prime Ministers of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania met in Vilnius, where they agreed to exchange military attaches, intensify their military co-operation, co-ordinate training of Baltic defence forces, acquire weapons and even communication in accordance with NATO standards, and even plan for the tightening of their eastern borders. Estonia proposed the creation of a unified Baltic defence organisation similar to NATO.

Lithuania And NATO

Like most other Central European states, Lithuania views NATO as the main security guarantor in Europe. On the one hand, Lithuania fears a resurgent Russia while on the other hand, is being aware of the absence of an effective security architecture for the region. By applying for NATO membership does not only seek to obtain security guarantees, but it thereby also expresses its willingness to contribute to European security in general. For Lithuania as well as for the other Baltic states, the North Atlantic Co-operation Council (NACC) is particularly important because it can make use of NATO assistance in the formation of the Baltic Military structure, ensuring the application of the Western model of democratic control over the Baltic defence force.

[21] Zafar Imam, Foreign policy of Russia: 1991-2000, New Horizons Publishers, New Delhi, 2000, p,68

However, from Lithuania's point of view, the Baltic dilemma has been solved to date by giving preference to Russia's interests first while postponing indefinitely the Baltic states' acceptance into NATO. It seems that the efforts of the NATO countries at persuading the Balts to acquiesce in the scheme of things were not successful. In response to the official-declaration made in September 1996 by the US secretary of Defence William Perry that Baltic states were not yet ready for NATO membership, Presidents of the three states stated in a joint declaration: "We do not want to see new lines drawn in Europe....."[22] but it is rather doubtful whether Lithuanian's chance of joining NATO has increased as the result of the Madrid Summit meeting in July 1997 demonstrated. In the final declaration that left Lithuania some hope of joining NATO at sometime, no one particular Baltic state was specifically mentioned. They were all referred to as "the countries of the Baltic regions seeking membership in to NATO".

None of the three Baltic states considers any alternative to joining NATO. They do accept "pillows" from the west; however they do seek membership in NATO both separately and jointly.[23] And in the joint declaration of the Presidents of the three Baltic Republics, "On partnership for integration", in April 1996, a common Baltic approach was expressed: that in

[22] Grazina Miniotaite, "Lithuania" in, Bordering Russia; Theory and Prospects for Europes Baltic Rim edited by Hans Mouritzen, Ashgate Publication, 1998, p. 179

[23] Ibid.

moving to the European Union and NATO, "the countries were intent to co-operate, not compete".

Estonia and NATO

During and directly after the "national awakening" and "Singing revolution" of 1988-89, establishing close ties and eventually joining NATO became the priority issue for Estonia's political leaders. The official Estonian rhetoric focused on promoting the idea of "a security belt" to be created in the vicinity of Russian borders through member states of NATO, in order to support Russia's co-operation with stable state and create favourable conditions for integration with the Western Europe. Estonia was accepted in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme of NATO on 2nd February, 1994. On that occasion, Estonia's Foreign Minister Juri Lurik argued that "Estonia is going to apply for NATO membership as soon as NATO is ready to accept this application"[24]. A special commision of experts in Talinn, the capital of Estonia, is formulating Estonia's exact needs and requirements within the PfP of NATO. During their visits to the Baltic states, NATO officials have made it clear that the Alliance does not give security guarantees to non-member states, and that in order to obtain membership, defence structures of new members must be compatible with those of NATO countries. It is obvious that for

[24] Ibid

Estonia, it will be a long time before the country is able to meet these requirements.

The vast majority of Estonia's politicians, however argue that NATO's enlargement must not be limited to the Visegrad countries only (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), since this would create a much feared "grey area" between Russia and an enlarged NATO. Indeed, placing Estonia and the other Baltic countries on a secondary list of potential NATO members could give the false impression that the Baltic States were again returning to Russian "sphere of influence". For most Baltic observers however, it seems that NATO is treating Russia carefully and gently and is granting Russia special status in its relations with NATO.

Since the Autumn of 1994, a certain relaxation was expressed by the Estonian government as to border problem vis-a-vis Russia and the Tartu Peace treaty of 1920. Estonia showed first signs of willingness to compromise with Russia and agree to the existing border, if Russia acknowledged the existence of the 1920 peace treaty as historically important to Estonia. This flexibility was determined by Estonia's aspirations towards EU and NATO membership.

In the wake of the 1997 Madrid Summit of NATO, Estonia's long term security and defence prospects linked to NATO looked less achievable than

1991.[25] The manifold political and financial obstacles for Estonia to obtain "hard security" compelled her towards joint defence efforts, estimated in Estonia to be one of the more means of making the three Baltic states credible partners for co-operation with NATO

Latvia And NATO

Historical experience of the country and the contemporary interdependent international environment taught the political elite and public of Latvia, that for a small country with a peculiar geo-political location and limited resources, there were not many security options left. In building up its security policy, Latvia was looking for several solutions--especially taking into account that NATO option was not available until 1993. The concepts of "small extente "(three Baltic states) and "large extente " (three Baltic nations plus Northern and Eastern partners) were reconsidered but not accepted as sufficient corresponding to the Post-Cold-War era.

From the very beginning Latvia was very much in favour of NATO supporting all initiatives proposed by the alliance. Latvia joined the NACC in December 1991, the Partnership of Peace (PfP) in January 1994, signed an

[25] Maare Haab,"Estonia", in, Bordering Russia; Theory and Prospects for Europe's Baltic Rim , edited by Hans Mouritzen, Ashgate Publication, 1998. p. 120

individual co-operation programme with NATO in February 1995 and most recently, participated in IFOR activities in Bosnia.

Latvia is increasingly integrated economically and politically in western structures. A conflict situation between Latvia and Russia could produce refuge flights into neighbouring countries and create tensions. At the same time, international organizations where Latvia is a full member i.e. OSCE, Council of Europe, UN etc. could also be drawn into the conflict area. Therefore, two rationales for NATO enlargement is to include Latvia in the first wave.[26] However in Madrid. NATO countries decided to postpone a decision on Latvia.

In terms of calculating the best policy means for approaching NATO, the year 1996 and 1997 were instructive for Latvia.[27] Latvia is encouraging the development of close relations between NATO and Russia on the condition that Moscow does not have the right to veto the enlargement of the alliance and that the international community will not grant Russia any "special rights" to guarantee peace and security in the territory of the former Soviet Union. Like other Central European countries Latvia considers "Partnership for Peace" (PfP) programme as a sort of an opportunity for future membership.

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[26] Zaneta Ozalina, "Latvia", in, Theory and Prospects for Europes Baltic Rim, edited by Hans Mauritzen , Ashgate Publication, 1998 p. 146

[27] ibid.

It will be clear that NATO is unlikely to accept as a new member state which cannot ensure their own defence; the Baltic states cannot just be "consumers of security". Riga also acknowledges this fact and is therefore actively seeking support for its cause in Western Europe and North America towards forming bilateral links with those countries to that end. In anticipation of its membership of NATO, Riga is working towards building a network of military co-operation agreements with the west which can help Latvia to overcome its present difficulties.

On 16th January, 1998, the US President Bill Clinton, Presidents Guntis Vlammis of Latvia, Algirdas Braraubkas of Lithuania and Lennert Meri of Estonia signed at the White House, the US-Baltic Charter of Partnership.[28] Clinton thereby reaffirmed the Baltic's vitality for overall security in the European continent. However, he cited that the charter provides no guarantees of the three Baltic states' admission to NATO.

The Russian Response

In his annual address to the Parliament, on 17th February 1998, President Boris Yeltsin cited NATO internal reform as a key issue and the concept of "NATO-centrism" in the form of expansionism as unacceptable to

[28] Summary of World Broadcast, SU/ 3128/E1, 19 January,1998

Russia.[29] Moscow now even plans of deploying tactical nuclear weapons in the Kaliningrad region. Despite the odds, Baltic defence establishments continue to call for additional defence funding to meet NATO demands.

The NATO air strike against Serbia in the spring of 1999 could establish an ominous precedent for future Russian actions against the Baltic states.[30]The United States and NATO argued that the Serbs were engaging in gross violations of human rights of the Albanian majority in Kosovo. During Kosovo campaign Russia saw itself as the historical ally of Serbia, Although in its current weakness it could do nothing substantial in terms of military help to the Serbs it did engage in many symbolic actions. Russia may now consider the NATO arguments to be a precedent. Because it can now see potential parallels between recent NATO interpretations of the situation in the Balkans and its own interpretations of the situation in the Baltics. And although the excessive denial of human rights in the Baltic is not the same as the gross violation in Kosovo, the Russian security agencies have long experiences in inflating incidents for the purposes of propaganda within Russia itself. While it is true that a Russian intervention would have no chance of gaining any approval of any international organisation, in Russian eyes, this lack of international legitimacy could be compensated by demographic affinity and geographic

[29] Ibid. SU/3154/B5 18 February, 1998
[30]James Kurth,"The Baltics: Between Russia and the West", in, Current History, October 1999, p.336

proximity. This potential Russian threat to the Baltic states poses the question of NATO's further expansion to the East.

From the above, we can see that there are three patterns that are likely to influence, indeed continue to define, the complex security relationship between Moscow and the three Baltic Republics. However, it needs to be emphasized that these three patterns are interlinked and inter-locked. We may conclude by focusing on these three interlocking patterns, as explained by Paul A. Gouble.

First, the shift to the left that has already taken place in Lithuania and seems certain to occur in Estonia, and possibly in Latvia, will not end the story. In the given situation of US withdrawal from the world and the inevitability of Europe to push an agenda against the wishes of Moscow – these Baltic entities may feel increasingly isolated in the face of Russian power. In that situation, a shift to the power governments that are more anti-Russian and also less European will further isolate these countries and undercut the very security that these new regimes will claim to be seeking.

Second, what security the Baltic states can achieve will be achieved by economic means. That will require both the re-orientation of their economies towards the west--something Estonia has taken the lead in and non-threatening

co-operation with the Russian Federation and the other countries of the former Soviet Union – something Lithuania and Latvia seem better to do.

Third, the Baltic countries and Russia will continue to find themselves in a security trap, albeit with very different resources. If Moscow tries to increase Russian pressure on the Baltics, it will produce regimes that will be increasingly anti-Russian and un-co-operative, where as if it pursues a policy of greater tolerance, it will obtain more co-operative Baltic states. And the reverse is true for the Baltic states. Although naturally, their influence is much less and they cannot push things to the brink as Russia quite easily can. [31]

[31] Paul A Gouble,: "The Baltics:Three States, Three Fates" in, Current History, October, 1994, p.336

AN OVERVIEW

After the disintegration of the USSR in 1991, foreign policy of new Russia had strong linkages with the past Soviet foreign policy. Although the leaders of new Russia disclaimed any link from the past in their foreign policy, they could not have wished it away. In fact, foreign policy of new Russia began to develop within the framework of continuity and change. As years rolled by, the change in the framework gradually became more precisive, and continuity less pronounced. No where this framework was more true than in Russia's relations with the Baltic states.

At the initial formative period of new Russia during 91-93, we find that both Yeltsin's Russia and Baltic states had favourable perception of each other. It was Boris Yeltsin who had taken the lead in recognizing the independence of the Baltics as early as in 1990. A new Russia followed it up by a general support to the nationalist aspirations of the Baltic people. On the other hand, we find that the Baltic states also felt grateful to Boris Yeltsin and new Russia for their initial support and recognition of their independent status. However, as we have pointed out in the past, historical legacies of the past and irritant issues in bilateral relations soon took over. Russia's policy towards the Baltic states turned hawkish as it found increasingly problematic to resolve the bilateral irritant issues.

Eversince Yeltsin came to power, the Baltics came to acquire a special place in Russia's overall foreign policy towards its neighbourhood. But as we can see, in our study, from 1991-99, Moscow faced problems in developing a stable and friendly relationship with the three Baltic republics.

It was particularly after 1993 that we can see a shift in Russian foreign policy. The post-1993 period saw Russian policy makers giving away equal priorities to both the west and to Near Abroad. The 1993 Russian official document "Russian foreign policy concept" formally termed the Near Abroad as Russia's top foreign policy priority. It is thus in the post 93 period that the Baltics came to occupy a very special place in Moscow's overall foreign policy towards its neighbourhood. Russia however, recognized very soon that building up of friendly relationship with the Baltics was especially problematic because it was interwined with the domestic problems in the Baltic states. Moreover, there was the unfavourable historical backdrop of the Soviet period that contributed towards difficulties in conducting good neighbourly relations.

During the 1991-95 period, as we can see from the preceding pages, there were two major issues that emerged in Russia's policy towards the Baltics - military withdrawal and political status of the Russian ethnic minorities in the Baltic states. The first issue led to some consistent moves in Russia's policy towards the Baltic republics. There was also enough evidence of enhanced role

of the military in the resolution of foreign policy issues between Russia and the newly independent Baltic states. During this period, Moscow censured domestic policy makers in Latvia and Estonia and tried to link up the military issue with the Baltics domestic policy towards the Russian ethnic minorities in these states.

In the post - 94 period, particularly after military withdrawal from the Baltics was complete, the issue of ethnic minorities in the Baltics came up as a major issue in Russian policy. Moscow took utmost care to take up the issue, accusing the Baltic states of blatant violation of "human rights". Moscow came out with accusations and counter accusations against the major legislations in the Baltic countries that were directed against the large scale Russian ethnic minorities.

The official Russian policy towards the Baltics was characterized by endeavours towards exerting influence, direct or indirect, in the region. The Russian policy elites made full use of the 1993 Russian military doctrine and showed a general hardening in their attitude towards some traditional areas of concern in the Baltic region. Chauvinists in the Russian army and the Russian media took a lead in this direction but the rigid, inflexible and anti-Baltic stance exhibited by the Russian chauvinists created a great deal of problem in conducting a good neighbourly relationship.

One of the traditional areas of concern of Russia in the Baltics was strategic: the question of NATO's eastward expansion. The many a visits by Russian foreign and defence ministers to the Nordic countries and Moscow's consistent correspondence with the UN over the issues, were pointer to the fact that during this period, Moscow's policy revolved around one core issue - Baltic membership to NATO. Yeltsin made frequent anti-NATO statements, especially against the US-Baltic charter of partnership. With regard to the Russian stance towards the issues, now , we can see a difference between the Russian policy stance taken towards the NATO eastward expansion in general and NATO expansion to the Baltics in particular. Russian policy statements consistently insist on the possibility of creation of a " serious barrier" between the East and the West, in case of the Baltics becoming victims of NATO. The prospect of full scale membership from NATO to the Baltics has brought about a universally negative reaction from the Russian foreign policy elites. It is because Russia consistently draws a line between the enhancement of security prospects for the Baltics and Russian's perception of potential threats to its Near Abroad.

After 1995, there were frequent visits by the then Russian foreign minister Primakov to the Baltic capitals. It was only to reiterate that Russia does not thrust upon the Baltic states any stance concerning their activity in international security structure. Nor Russia expects that problems in strategic

and domestic sphere should complicate the multi-dimensional links in economic, political or other spheres. As the Lithuanian President, Adamkus emphasized during his term that the policy of good-neighbourly relations is fully supported by leading activists both in the west and the east. And Primakov talked about the preparation of a whole series of agreements to provide legal foundation to partnership.

With the coming of Victor Chernomyrdin into premiership, hopes were placed in the powers of the experienced politician to stabilize the situation. But many peripheral issues cropped up like the problems relating to the issues of state border and division of the Baltic sea economic zone between Russia and Lithuania. By the time Chernomyrdin came to premiership, Russia was still smarting under its long - term "policy of economic pressure" with respect to Latvia. Russia allegedly tried to give up, in its trade with Latvia, most favoured nation treatment that was in effect since the early 1990s. Use of economic leverages and economic sanctions were the peculiar features of Russian policy towards Latvia and this worsening relations between both the sides indirectly hampered Russia's relations with the other two states as well.

Moderate policy and tough measures - these were the characteristic Russian foreign policies towards the Baltic region. The issues of contention and concern about them always came to be conveyed to each other only

through some third party state. Such issues came up during diplomatic visits or important policy pronouncements by both the sides but not through any dialogue or direct state to state interaction between the entities. On the one hand, Baltic leaders exhibit occasional friendly rhetorics and dispositions, on the other hand, Moscow continues to see them with an eye of suspicion. Human rights violation in Latvia and the enigma shown by the representative bodies in Estonia to the Russian concerns, and Lithuania's vehement bid for NATO -- these altogether make a strong case for Russia to preserve its direct or indirect influence in the region.

By the time Yeltsin left in December 1999, the core issues remained unresolved, with still very little state to state interactions between Russia and the Baltic republics. Relationship was defined in terms of occasional pleasantries and commentaries in the media and among the intelligentsia. On the one hand, domestic power politics in the Baltic region and on the other hand, Moscow's severe economic crisis--these factors have confirmed in contributing towards difficulties and complexities in conducting a good and stable neighbourhood policy from both the sides, Russia and the Baltic states.

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