

**Book Review:****“Ethnic policies in the Baltic States” by V. Poleshchuk and V. Stepanov<sup>1</sup>**

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There is a paucity of books on ethnic policy and its political intersection on European continent. The current book fills this lacuna in the professional literature by focusing on understanding the role of ethnic minorities and its importance in the state building's process of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania after collapse of the USSR.

“Ethnic fever” traumatized America in 60s; it shocked Baltic States and all post-Soviet space in early 90s and came back to Ukraine in 2014. The “ethnic fever” pulls out the questions of how ethnic groups are discovering their ethnicity, what approach have preserve a modern state's awareness towards language policy and “ethnic” past of its inhabitants. Getting properly assess into the ethnic policy paradigms and its formation, development and refraction man should read “Ethnic Policy of the Baltic States”. This book shows different facets of ethnic politics in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Let me highlight some aspects of the current collective work and its urgency in a modern time:

*1. Small nations vs big nation and the ways how one suffers from the threads of another's and overcomes it.*

The situation in the Ukraine again demonstrates the importance of proper evaluation of ethnic politics and its components in the post - Soviet space. In 2014, all of us became witnesses on the conflict of interest in the post - Soviet continent, where one country –Ukraine- divided by East and West, and by subsequent East that was and is West-oriented. The basis for aforementioned division is a Russian language and its admiration among huge number of Ukrainians. According official version, as we remember, the initial point for the forceful phase of the conflict was a protection of the interests of Russian - speaking population. Ethnic - oriented and ethnic-formed confrontation caused redrawing boundaries and geopolitical

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<sup>1</sup> Poleshchuk, V., Stepanov, V., Ethnic policies in the Baltic States, Moscow: Nauka 2013, 407p.

instability in the region. Nowadays, as it was two decades ago, again appears a question on continuity, i.e. the recognition and acceptance of a newly created sovereign territory by other states, based on a perceived historical relationship the new territory has with a prior state. In coming years politicians will face troubles in a context of the Tartu Peace Treaty for the Baltic States, the Budapest Treaty and its value in relations Russia – Ukraine and search an answer of how much years are required "for the restoration of statehood" in the occupied, annexed and / or incorporated territories (p. 66).

The next debatable authors' point that required a further study is "Russian-speaking individuals cannot yet be called a diaspora's community, due to the lack of essential criteria of the diaspora (their relation towards home – kin country) .... As a result, this lack of feelings lead to their orientation "to the so-called new home country, i.e. new independent state"(P. 28) Such thesis is presented by the authors with two opposite views in the book. On the one hand, in the Baltic States man finds a dominant civic/state identity among young Russian - speaking persons that often elected as opposed to their ethno – cultural Russian identity (pp. 22, 214). On another hand, man observes a reverse process, when "some Russians fear of losing their ethnic and cultural identity" (P.60). However, such a dichotomy in a large extent man perceives only in the Baltic States; it does not happen in other states of the former USSR. Doubtless, the thesis about ethnic/civic orientation among Russian - speaking population towards new independent, newly created states in the post - Soviet space requires discrete consideration and further studies.

*2. Language ethnicity or language unity as "a central argument used to justify political activity" and a way "to overcome threats to the "small nations". (Pp. 24-39).*

In 1969, Park & Burgess presented the «race-relation-circle» concept and noticed that the common language is a most significant precondition for unity within the group. Besides, the lack of a common language is a serious barrier for communication within group's members and... their [assimilation] (Park & Burgess, 1969: 360-362). In this context, man face a question on role of language knowledge for the Russian-speaking minorities as an element of the "restoration of Estonian statehood" and its correlation regard non-discrimination regulation.

Poleshchuk & Dimitrov in the essay "Continuity as a Basis for Statehood and Ethnic Policies in Estonia and Latvia" describe a theoretical approach on special language requirements for Russian-speaking inhabitants of the Baltic States for years (P.80). It's surprising that Lithuanians and Estonians during Soviet time have not been "rusified", they retained their native language, compulsory studying Russian language (P.46). It was a cultural pluralism by Horace Kallen's understanding, where one ethnic group was willing to be loyal to another nation, including her participation in its political and economic life, but at the same time keep sufficient freedom in order to develop and cultivate her ethnic differences. Such cultural pluralism's measures were absolutely impossible and unavailable in other territories of the former USSR.

Besides, there are some doubts on thesis of Priit Ydrve that Soviet nation and American nation as well were built on language unity's basis, in other words the basis of Soviet nation is a comprehensive "Russification." (P. 39). Doubtless the common usability of Russian language on the territory of USSR is an essential geopolitical and cultural point, although Soviet's common values and communist ideology are determined the nature of the Soviet identity more than Russian language. Moreover, all Baltic countries have been an exceptional area of influence of the Russian language and Russian culture in which continued an existence of the "parallel institutions to serve the interests of the indigenous population" (p. 162)

### *3. Memory out of history*

In coming years many of us have to re-evaluate that the "collective interpretation are not necessarily memories out of real history" (p. 94). The Ukrainian situation shows that many individuals face a domination of collective imagination and collective substitution of certain historical events instead the reality. Beyond any doubt man agreed, "different nations have their own mental series, memories and their understanding of history ... is not wrong" (p.66). Whereby search for a consensus and common vision, or rather vision that fits the interests of both parties, is a task and responsibility taking each country differentially. Nonetheless, a delay in solving the national minorities' issues has its own price that at first "reduces the level of inter-ethnic belief and trust" and at second "produces losses instead benefits from "historic homeland" of minorities (P.61).

The next crucial issue is an analysis of “Historical Memory Policies in the Baltic States” by Nikiforov (pp. 92 - 155). Here author defines the historical memories as a “symbolic capital of the folk in the process of creating its current political discourse that creates ... confirms or shifts the boundaries of ethnic groups” (p. 95). Historians have to evaluate the parallels and links to the historical dates, i.e. March 16 in Latvia (Day of Latvian Legion’s Remembrance) and March 16 in the Crimea (Referendum Date); the Freedom Defenders Day in Estonia (January 13), Commemoration Day of the Defenders of Barricades (January 20) and the Day of Maidan’ Heroes in the Ukraine (20 February).

Nowadays seems remarkably and reasonable that in 2014 man again witnesses an “assignment/theft of time” (p. 131), when “the questions of ethnic national relations, language measures and Russian-national bilingualism” (p. 119) formed a new historical narrative in the post-Soviet space. Coming back to the Nikiforov’s essay mentioned above, man faces a dilemma on demands for compensation (occupational) payments. For a long time the compensation (occupational) claims to Russia from Lithuania and Latvia were and are hopeless (S. 139), although in a light of Ukrainian crisis, nobody cannot foresee the future of those claims today.

#### *4. The relation between Baltic States and European Union. Its influence on the triangle of geopolitical interests in the region.*

Marcinkevicius in his essay „Ethnic Russians in Independent and Soviet Lithuania: Demography, Social Status and Identity“ writes that “the accession into the EU helped the Baltic States to “create their common identity” (p. 214); ...[this identity] is able under the number of circumstances to replace ethnic identification of Baltic states’ inhabitants. Those theses required further studies; in particular detailed research on how much this substitution of identity contributes to the consolidation of society and the acceptance of the political regime within the Baltic countries, as well as how much this substitution of identity destroys the idea of building ethno-national Baltic States.

The relation between Baltic States and European Union and its evaluation is a hot topic. Nowadays are very burning points should take in an account. What is the role of the EU on the “transition to a new quality” for joining associated states; how the “small nation’s exempts from

external threats”; and what kind of transition in “re-designing of the national identity” of associated states could man observe after the accession into the EU (P. 263). In a light of Ukrainian situation, man should considered very carefully the European orientation of the Baltic countries and the consequences of its preferences. Herewith should be also properly evaluated fears of the Baltic States in respect of the Russian repatriation program towards compatriots living abroad as a threat to “the Baltic States ‘constitutional order” (p. 171).

The reviewed book "Ethnic Policies in the Baltic States focuses on a wide range of topics targeted to readers interested in in the ways of political self-determination of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the pan-European realities; in understanding the ethnic-based strategies of the Baltic States, their political and cultural formations after collapse of the USSR. The book will be of interest to a broad audience.

#### Bibliography:

1. Steinberg, S., The Ethnic Myth Race, Ethnicity, and Class in America, 1989.
2. Park, R., Burgess, E., Introduction to the Science of Sociology, 1969.
3. Kallen, H., Democracy Versus the Melting Pot, in: <http://www.expo98.msu.edu/>