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**K. Duvold, S. Berglund, J. Ekman,  
*The Political Culture in the Baltic  
States Between National and  
European Integration,***

**Palgrave Macmillan 2020, pp. 220**

**Review**

The book titled *The Political Culture in the Baltic States Between National and European Integration* written by Kjetil Duvold, Sten Berglund and Joakim Ekman and published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2020 is certainly of great interest to Baltic studies researchers. The Authors have rich experience in the field of politics in the region. Kjetil Duvold is Associate Professor of Political Science at Dalarna University in Sweden, Sten Berglund is Professor Emeritus at Örebro University in Sweden, and Joakim Ekman is Professor of Political Science and Director of the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES) at Södertörn University in Sweden.

This fascinating study has focused on political culture in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. It is the result of a research project regarding European values, the state of democracy, dissatisfaction, and minority rights in the Baltic states. The idea was to collect a series of opin-

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ions in the three countries concerning perceptions of the Soviet past and communist regime, patterns of integration of Russian-speaking minorities and titular nations, political divisions, perceptions toward Russia and the European Union, trust in political institutions, and others. The political culture – according to the Authors – is a distribution of patterns of orientations toward political objects among members of the nation. It refers to citizens' values, feelings, beliefs, and perceptions toward the political system. The Authors seek to elaborate the relations between support for the regime and democratic stability in the region. In other words, the intention of the book was to answer the question of how people perceive their government and the political and economic development of the state.

The Authors analyse common attitudes, values, identities and political behaviours. They explore socioeconomic context in depth – unemployment and the aging population – and find that it coincides with the growing political discontent in the region. Then they unveil the contradictory dimensions within communities.

The Authors had not expected that there is a common political culture in the Baltic states. Over the past 30 years of transformation, they have rebuilt their statehoods and national identities, they have promoted democratic values and institutions, and have also integrated ideologically, politically, economically and socially with Europe<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, the study reveals a significant division between states and between language groups. The differences are the strongest in Latvia but are significant in Estonia and Lithuania as well. For example, Russian-speakers stand out as less well off than others. They are also more sceptical about democracy, more critical toward their governments and more positive about Russia than the core populations.

Along with a limitation on the use of the Russian language in public life, aimed at restoring national identity, and economic problems connected with the transition of economies towards free markets, dissatisfaction among Russian-speakers has increased. A lack of citizenship, a low economic status and integration problems have fostered feel-

1 A. Kuczyńska-Zonik, *Państwa bałtyckie: Trzy modele rozwoju*, "Wschodni Rocznik Humanistyczny" 2017, vol. XIV, no. 3, pp. 107-125.

ings of alienation<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, the minority question is both a part of societal or political security because it lies both in social identity or sovereignty of the state. It's worth noting that following the annexation of Crimea, Russian-speakers have become significantly politicized and securitized<sup>3</sup>. They have been divided into Putin 'supporters' and 'opponents'. As a result, they have become victims of politics. Being securitized means they are defined as an existential threat requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal political procedure.

But Baltic Russians are not just Russians. The term 'Russian-speakers' has appeared in the political and social discourse of the Baltic states to define an 'imaginary community' that speaks the Russian language as its mother tongue. They are often called 'Russians', although these are also ethnic Ukrainians, Belarussians Poles and Jews) who speak Russian on a daily basis. Above all, Russian-speakers are attached to the country where they were born or raised. I am slightly confused when the Authors include the Polish minority in Lithuania into a Russian-speaking group. Poles in Lithuania, while using Russian at home, are very aware of their identity and attitude to Polish culture. But to some extent, they share a similar perception to the Russian-speaking minority as the overall country does. For example, the political party Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania (AWPL) is supported by representatives of both Polish and Russian minorities in Lithuania.

Nevertheless, the analysis underlines a clear polarization along lines of status, class and ethnicity. The minorities and the core populations are divided on issues like ownership of businesses, social equality, job security and taxation. They are frequently seen as living in parallel societies. They attend different events and they live in separate media landscapes. Concerning political trust, the Authors find that the population is generally dissatisfied with the effectiveness of the state authorities and the poor performance of the government, which constitute a challenge for political support in the region. Among the three countries, it is Latvia that is the most distinctive in terms of disen-

2 A. Kuczyńska-Zonik, *Integration of Russian-speakers in the Baltic states*, "Myśl Ekonomiczna i Polityczna" 2017, no. 3, pp. 228-250.

3 A. Kuczyńska-Zonik, *The Securitization of National Minorities in the Baltic States*, "Baltic Journal of Law & Politics" 2017, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 26-45, doi: 10.1515/bjlp-2017-0011.

chantment and disillusionment. It has the largest Russian-speaking population and thus the serious integration problems. It was less open to naturalization of non-citizens than was Estonia, and it was more affected by the financial crisis of 2008 to 2010.

The overall impression of the book is that the study concentrates on three broad topics – nation building, integration and democracy. The Authors conclude that the ethnic divide has the potential to stoke conflict, but the Baltic states do not stand out as conflict region. There are indicators of clashes, but there are strong elements of successful integration too. The book is definitely worth exploring and deserves appreciation.

## References

- Kuczyńska-Zonik A., *Integration of Russian-speakers in the Baltic states*, "Myśl Ekonomiczna i Polityczna" 2017, no. 3, pp. 228-250.
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