RUSSIFICATION POLICIES IMPOSED ON THE BALTIC PEOPLE BY THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE AND THE SOVIET UNION

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** This article is based on my master's degree thesis titled "The Citizenship Policies of the Baltic States: Do They Conform to the European Framework?" submitted at Başkent University, Ankara/Turkey in January 25, 2012.*

Abstract: *This article examines the russification policies imposed by the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union on the people of the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Within the context of this examination, the specifics of the russification policies and the Baltic people's responses to them are explained. This article concludes that although russification policies were effective in maintaining control over the Baltic people, these policies had the unintended consequence of bolstering Baltic nationalism and calls for independence. These policies also left a profound impact on the minds of the Baltic people, and heavily influenced the way Baltic countries shaped their citizenship policies with regards to the Russian minority.*

Keywords: *russification, Baltic countries, Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russian Empire, Soviet Union, Russian minority, statelessness, citizenship*

Rus İmparatorluğu ve Sovyetler Birliği Tarafından Baltık Uluslarına Uygulanan Ruslaştırma Politikaları

Öz: *Bu makale Rusya İmparatorluğu ve Sovyetler Birliği tarafından Baltık ülkeleri Estonya, Letonya ve Litvanya'nın insanlarına uygulanan ruslaştırma politikalarını incelemektedir. Bu inceleme çerçevesinde ruslaştırma politikalarının detayları ve Baltık insanlarının bu politikalarına olan tepkileri açıklanmaktadır. Makale ruslaştırma politikalarının Baltık insanlarını kontrol altında tutmakta etkili olmakla*

beraber kasıtsız bir şekilde Baltık milliyetçiliğini kuvvetlendirdiği ve bağımsızlık taleplerini ortaya çıkardığı sonucuna varmaktadır. Bu politikalar aynı zamanda Baltık insanlarının zihninde derin bir iz bırakmış; ve Baltık ülkelerinin Rus azınlığı ilgilendiren vatandaşlık politikalarının oluşturulmasını çok ciddi bir şekilde etkilemiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *ruslaştırma, Baltık ülkeleri, Baltık devletleri, Estonya, Letonya, Litvanya, Rus İmparatorluğu, Sovyetler Birliği, Rus azınlık, devletsizlik, vatandaşlık*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Baltic people of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania[1] have throughout their history struggled against foreign powers that attempted impose their rule on these peoples. While throughout their history Estonians and Latvians struggled against German influence and control, the Lithuanians struggled against Polish influence and control. Neither the Germans nor the Polish; however, left the kind of mark that the Russians have left on the Baltic people.

The Baltic people came under Russian rule twice in their history; once during the 19th century under the Russian Empire, and a second time after the Second World War under the Soviet Union. From the perspective of the Baltic people, the defining element of Russian rule was "russification"; a process which broke down Baltic people's resistance to Russian rule through decisively stamping out any move towards seeking independence and suppressing the expression of Baltic culture by imposing the primacy of Russian culture. While the first instance of Russian rule and the russification it entailed was strict in terms of political control and unsystematic in terms of cultural suppression; the second instance of Russian rule and the russification it entailed was much harsher, systemic and far-reaching in the way it was imposed. Not only was the expression of Baltic culture strongly suppressed in every respect, but forced population transfers conducted by the Soviet Union had a significant impact on the ethnic composition of the Baltic countries. It was because of the more severe nature of this second instance of Russian that it would have a much more defining impact on the mindset of the Baltic people, and greatly influence they way they behaved in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

1 Due to reasons that shall be elaborated later, modern day Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are multi-ethnic countries. Historically speaking; however, the term "Baltic people" should be understood as referring to ethnic Estonians, ethnic Latvians, and ethnic Lithuanians. Other ethnic groups came to exist in large numbers in Baltic countries only after the annexation of these countries by the Soviet Union.

Although the Soviet Union was a vast multi-ethnic formation, it was the Russians at the forefront of the Union and it was their interests that primarily shaped the functioning of the Union. It was for this reason that the Baltic people came to associate the nearly fifty years of Soviet rule as Russian domination in disguise. The large Russian-speaking minority[2] that became a part of the Baltic countries came to be viewed from this negative perception. The Russian minority was considered to be a foreign element forcefully introduced to the Baltic countries, and also as element that served as a reminder of the humiliating half a century of Russian domination. Due to this perception, the Baltic countries sought to curtail the influence of the Russian minority after achieving independence in the aftermath of the collapse of the Union.[3] It was only through the Baltic countries interactions with various international organizations (especially the European Union) that these countries would loosen their stance on the Russian minority.

On a further note, both instances of Russification have had the unintended consequence of bolstering Baltic nationalism and calls for independence. The cultural subjugation attempted by the Russians only stiffened Baltic resolve to preserve their culture, which served to strengthen a sense of nationalism amongst the Baltic people. Russian policies also inadvertently provided a justification to break free from Russian control and establish Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as independent states.

As it can be seen from this narrative historical wrongdoings end up having unforeseeable repercussions in the future. The wrongdoings committed by the Soviet Union upon the Baltic countries would lead them to commit wrongdoings (although to a much lesser scale) against the Russian minority. Such wrongdoings would also serve as a rallying call for aspirations of Baltic independence.

2. THE FIRST INSTANCE OF RUSSIFICATON

The Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had all fallen under Russian control by the 19th century. As a method of control, the Russian Empire began to employ a policy of russification towards Estonians,

2 In the context of the Baltic countries, the Russian-speaking minority – made up of ethnic Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians – are usually simply referred as the "Russian minority".

3 Lithuania constituted a separate case from Estonia and Latvia, since it was much more positive in its approach towards the Russian minority. The reason for this difference shall be elaborated upon in the paper.

Latvians and Lithuanians. As a state policy, this first instance of russification would serve as a precursor to the second instance of russification during the Soviet rule. As it has been mentioned earlier, however, the two instances of russification differed in their characteristics, scope and severity.

Russia during the imperial period was a vast and multi-ethnic empire. The ruling section of the empire was Russian, but they were aware of the impracticality of and the potential trouble that would come with trying to impose Russian culture on the vast number of non-Russians living in the empire.[4] Anyone wishing to be part of the Russian state apparatus, however, was expected to be familiar with Russian culture and know how to speak Russian. As such, non-Russians who chose this path would in essence become russified.[5] But beyond this, Russia had no intention of culturally eliminating the various groups living within its borders.[6] It did, however, regard any opposition movement by non-Russians as a threat to the integrity of the empire. This law enacted by Russia in 1906 demonstrated the Russian mentality during the imperial period:

The Russian State is one and indivisible. … The Russian language is the common language of the State and is compulsory … in all State and public institutions. The use of local languages and dialects in State and public institutions is determined by special laws.[7]

During this time period Russia had no coherent and specific policy towards non-Russians. Russian policy towards non-Russians was at most reactionary and preventative in its scope.[8] Russia enacted "special laws" according the circumstances at hand. Poles and Jews, for example, were perceived by Russia to be potentially dangerous groups, and as such faced many cultural and political restrictions. Lithuanians on the other hand, were generally seen as being a harmless group destined to eventually become assimilated by Russian culture.[9] It was for these reasons that only when the Lithuanians rebelled alongside the Poles did the Russians react harshly against the Lithuanians. As such, Russian action towards the Lithuanians during this period must not be judged as

4 Theodore R. Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863-1914* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), pp. 12-13.

5 Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia*…, pp. 12, 14.

6 Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia*…, p. 69.

7 Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia*…, pp. 44.

8 Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia*…, pp. 5, 11, 14.

9 Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia*…, pp. 46, 53.

a sinister move, but as a natural consequence of Russia's drive to maintain a centralized and a unified empire.[10]

When Lithuanians rebelled against Russian rule, Russia predictably reacted by imposing restrictions on the expression of Lithuanian culture.[11] Russians shut down schools teaching Lithuanian, and made Russian compulsory in elementary schools. They shut down Catholic[12] monasteries and churches. They made Russian the official language in bureaucratic, administrative, and judicial affairs. They forbid the use of Latin letters when publishing books in Lithuanian, hoping that Lithuanians would start using the Cyrillic alphabet. Finally, they either imprisoned or executed anyone who was instigating opposition towards Russian rule.

Russian relationship with the Estonians and Latvians was of a different nature. Being much smaller, Estonians and Latvians posed no threat to the Russians, and thus Russians mostly left their loyal subjects the Germans in charge of ruling Estonians and Latvians.[13] Things began to change by the end of the 19th century for two reason:[14] 1) Russia began to implement reforms and sought further centralization, and thus sought to bring Estonia and Latvia closer in line with Russian standards, 2) Russia began to feel uncomfortable with the cultural pull the Germans were having on Estonians and Latvians, especially after the German unification in 1871. Germany was now one of the most powerful states in Europe, Russians sought to prevent Estonians and Latvians drifting into rival Germany's orbit. Based on these two objectives the Russians enacted a number of changes.[15] They brought the education and the justice system in Estonia and Latvia under direct Russian control. Like in Lithuania, they made Russian the official language in bureaucratic and administrative affairs. They also encouraged the growth of Orthodox Christianity and sought to undermine the influence of Protestant Christianity[16], but were unsuccessful in this regard.

10 Kevin O'Connor, *The History of the Baltic States* (London: Greenwood Press, 2003), p. 53.

11 O'Connor, *History of the Baltic States*, p. 58. Also see; Steven Otfinoski, *Nations in Transition - The Baltic Republics* (New York: Facts on File, 2004), p. 109.

12 Lithuanians have historically been predominantly Catholic Christians.

13 As a legacy of previous German rule and despite the then current Russian rule, the German land owners were still highly influential within Estonia and Latvia.

14 O'Connor, *History of the Baltic States*, pp. 53, 55.

15 O'Connor, *History of the Baltic States*, pp. 54-56.

16 Estonians and Latvians have historically been predominantly Protestant Christians.

A sense of nationhood had already begun to form in Estonia and Latvia by early 19th century. This formation process began first when Russians abolished serfdom in Estonia and Latvia by 1819. This move was partly based on the genuine desire to improve the living conditions of Estonians and Latvians, and but also on the desire to collect taxes from these now emancipated people instead of having to rely on the Baltic Germans.[17] Russia then proceeded to implement land reforms, which allowed Estonians and Latvians to buy land and financially secure themselves. Having secured themselves, Estonians and Latvians now found the time to express themselves, which resulted in a dramatic increase in the creation of Estonian and Latvian literature, art, and music.[18] The first time Estonian and Latvian nationalism was made clearly apparent was when both Estonians and Latvians held national song festivals which openly celebrated Estonian and Latvian culture. Lithuanians, on the other hand, lagged behind Estonians and Latvians in this respect;[19] they were poorer and faced more restrictions, and thus didn't have the opportunity to express themselves like Estonians and Latvians.

Though feeling increasingly nationalistic, the Baltic people aspirations were not always the same. When nationalism first began to form amongst the Baltic people, it was against German cultural domination (for Estonians and Latvians), and against Polish cultural domination (for Lithuanians). None of the three groups of people had any intention of breaking away from Russia; they considered being part of Russia to be something permanent.[20] This began to change in time, especially with the imposition of russification. While supporting Russian rule for having undermined Baltic Germans' power, Estonians and Latvians became increasingly uncomfortable with it the more they cultivated their sense of nationhood. Such sentiments eventually turned into political aspirations by the turn of the century as Estonians and Latvians first began to yearn for autonomy, which in turn turned into a call for independence.[21]

With regards to nationalism, Lithuanians caught up with the Estonians and Latvians partly due russification.[22] As Polish cultural influence

17 O'Connor, *History of the Baltic States*, p. 41. Also see; Otfinoski, *Nations in Transition*…, p. 11.

18 Otfinoski, *Nations in Transition*…, p. 11, 61-62.

19 O'Connor, *History of the Baltic States*, pp. 46, 60.

20 O'Connor, *History of the Baltic States*, pp. 47-48, 51, 59.

21 Charlotte Aston, *Antonius Piip, Zigfrids Meierovics and Augustinas Voldemaras: The Baltic States* (London: Haus Publishing Ltd, 2010), p. 15.

22 Aston, *Antonius Piip*…, pp. 20-22.

diminished due to Russian crackdown, Lithuanians began to culturally express themselves in late 19th century just like Estonians and Latvians had done earlier. Moreover, the banning of the Lithuanian alphabet severely backfired. Highly religious people, Lithuanians viewed this ban as an attempt to curb their expression of Catholic Christianity (practiced using the Lithuanian alphabet) and an attempt to push them towards Orthodox Christianity (practiced using the Cyrillic alphabet). Hostility towards the Poles began to be directed towards the Russians as well. What started as a religious reaction eventually turned into secular topics as well. In order to work around the alphabet ban, a large underground book printing and reading culture using the Lithuanian alphabet flourished. More and more Lithuanians began to read literature emphasizing Lithuanian culture. Unlike Estonia and Latvia, Lithuanian cultural expression quickly turned into a call for independence due to Lithuania's past as an independent and influential state during the 15th and 16th centuries. Having once been independent, Lithuanians were more galvanized by their predicament than Estonians and Latvians.

The year 1905 was a turning point for the Baltic people. In 1905 protests broke out throughout Russia in reaction to the failings of Tsarist rule. Estonians and Latvians too joined this protest, but the protest movement was brutally repressed by Russia. Meanwhile in the same year Lithuanians called for self-government, but Russia refused to grant it. Being tiny in comparison to Russia, the Baltic people did not have the means to forcefully break away from Russian rule. Circumstances needed to change in order for the Baltic people to achieve independence. The necessary change occurred during the First World War. During the war, Russia became engulfed in the revolutionary events of 1917; which began when Russian people finally managed to overthrow Tsarist rule. Since internal power struggles in Russia were keeping Russian attention fixated on domestic affairs, Russia was not in a position to respond to events occurring elsewhere. The Baltic people took advantage of the situation, and by 1918, with Lithuanians taking the lead the Baltic people declared themselves as independent states.[23]

3. THE SECOND INSTANCE OF RUSSIFICATON

As the Baltic countries' period of independence prior to the Second World War is not really relevant within the context of this paper, a brief summary will suffice. The period of independence for the Baltic countries from

23 Otfinoski, *Nations in Transition*…, pp. 11-12, 61-62, 110.

1918 to the beginning of the war can be summarized by stating it was a period of democratic experimentation which eventually devolved (for all three countries) into political dictatorships. Although these dictatorships curtailed democratic ideals, they also a brought much welcome political and economic stability after a long period of political turmoil and economic hardship for all three countries. This stability created a period of relative affluence, which would lead to a burst of cultural advancement for all three Baltic peoples. This was so because this was the first time in centuries that the Baltic people were free from foreign rule and free to determine their own countries' course for the future.

This period of independence was cut short by the events of the Second World War. The Baltic countries attempted to protect themselves from the looming war by maintaining a policy of neutrality, and forming a defensive Baltic alliance.[24] Their efforts were going to be vain, because they were located in the middle of a struggle that was to take place between two great powers: Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union wanted control of Eastern Europe, and naturally the Baltic countries were a part of this struggle. During the course of the Second World War, the Baltic countries were eventually overrun by the Soviets. This meant that, by 1940, all three Baltic countries had ceased to exist as independent states. Furthermore, this Soviet occupation was to be a long lasting one, for it lasted from the end of the Second World War until the collapse of the Soviet Union. The events that took place during this Soviet occupation and control were to leave bitter memories for the Baltic people, especially Estonians and Latvians.

With the end of the Second World War, Nazi Germany had been pushed out of the Baltic countries by the Soviets. But at the same time, Soviets had seized control of all three Baltic countries. For the Soviet Union, the control of the Baltic countries was important for two reasons:[25] 1) The control of the Baltic countries increased Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, 2) The Baltic countries acted as a buffer zone to protect inner parts of the Soviet Union against possible military aggression coming from the west, which to the Soviets would mostly likely be one from Germany. As a relic of imperial Russian mentality, the Soviet Union viewed the Baltic countries as naturally belonging to the Union.[26] For this reason, unlike other Eastern European countries during

24 O'Connor, *History of the Baltic States*, p. 108.

25 O'Connor, *History of the Baltic States*, p. 109-111.

26 Henry R. Huttenbach, "Introduction: Towards a Unitary Soviet State: Managing a Multinational Society, 1917-1985," in *Soviet Nationality Policies: Ruling Ethnic Groups in the USSR*, ed., Henry R. Huttenbach (London: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1990), p. 4.

the post-war era, the Baltic countries did not become satellite states with communist regimes; they were forcefully incorporated into the Soviet Union.[27] Now having full control over the Baltic countries, the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin's rule implemented a number of policies in these three countries that were to have a lasting impact.

The most important policy to mention was the russification of the Baltic countries. Russification is the most important policy to mention because it was the policy that subjugated the Baltic people, and changed the ethnic composition in the region. The change in the ethnic composition in turn would influence the way Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania would behave after they declared their independence in 1990/91.

The russification policy of this time period shared similarities with the russifacation policy of the imperial period. In contrast to policy of the previous period, however, the more recent russification policy was much more ruthless and calculated in its character. It is interesting to note that the term "russification" was never used by the Soviet Union. The founding doctrines of the Soviet Union, as outlined by its first leader Vladimir Lenin specifically criticized and opposed aggressive Russian nationalism and any attempt to subjugate other nations.[28] The Soviet Union was initially meant to defend internationalism; the ideal of bringing together the working classes of various nationalities in an effort to build a well-functioning socialist system, which in turn would lead to communism.[29] In such a system, each separate nation was meant to grow and cultivate itself, and contribute its share to the common good. No individual nation was meant dominate other nations. Furthermore, the concept of nation itself was not opposed, but instead seen as an indispensable step toward a successful socialist system.[30]

Stalin assumed control of the Soviet Union after Lenin passed away, and changed the way the Soviet Union functioned. Aggressive Russian nationalism had been a growing phenomenon during the later stages of the imperial period, and it continued to have an effect on Russian minds even after the socialist take-over of power in Russia.[31] Stalin shared the mentality of the Russian nationalists; the future of the Soviet Union

27 Otfinoski, *Nations in Transition*…, pp. 14-15, 63-64, 111-112.

28 Ivan Dzyuba, *Internationalism or Russification? A Study in the Soviet Nationalities Problem* (New York: Monad Press, 1974), pp. 25, 42.

29 Dzyuba, *Internationalism or Russification*…, pp. 27, 33, 46, 49.

30 Dzyuba, *Internationalism or Russification*…, pp. 24, 44.

31 Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia*…, p., 68. Also see; Dzyuba, *Internationalism or Russification*…, pp. 62-64.

would revolve around the interests of Russians with other ethnic groups acting as subordinates. For this reason, during Stalin's rule the ideas of Russian nationalism came to be implemented through distortion of internationalism.[32]

Internationalism became a tool to create one common Soviet people; united under common ideals, and with no national distinctions. Nationalism was officially seen as a subversive idea; contrary to the ideal of the Soviet people. But in truth this rhetoric meant the promotion of Russian culture and influence at the expense of other cultures.[33] With increased frequency Russian culture - its history, language, and character - came to be more and more praised, while other cultures became progressively more undermined. The ideal was to create the Soviet people, but it was to be achieved through the unifying power of Russian culture. As such, internationalism was turned into the new version of russification.

The Soviet Union, just like the Russian Empire, was a multi-ethnic formation. As was mentioned earlier the Russian Empire had no clear policy towards non-Russians. In contrast, Soviet Union's approach to non-Russians mainly revolved around the process of russification. Henry Huttenbach concisely explains Soviet Union's approach by stating;

Commitment to a unitary state with a homogeneous citizenry lies at the heart of all Soviet nationality policies since Lenin, the belief that the hodgepodge of Eurasian peoples could be fused by shrewd government management into a single, essentially Russian-oriented, people.[34]

In terms of the Baltic region, the new form of russification was carried out in two ways: by suppressing Baltic culture, and by changing the ethnic composition of the Baltic region. The suppression of Baltic culture helped Russian culture to penetrate into the Baltic region. The ethnic alteration enforced this process by decreasing the number of those who would oppose this process, and increase the number of those who would support this process.[35] These changes would allow Russians to better dominate the Baltic region.

32 Dzyuba, *Internationalism or Russification*…, pp.40, 42-43, 46. Also see; Huttenbach, "Introduction: Towards a Unitary Soviet State…, pp. 3, 5.

33 Dzyuba, *Internationalism or Russification*…, pp. 45, 65-66, 92-93. Also see; Romuald J. Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence, 1940-1990* (London: Hurst & Company, 1993), p. 120.

34 Huttenbach, "Introduction: Towards a Unitary Soviet State…, p. 3.

35 O'Connor, *History of the Baltic States*, p. 127.

Baltic culture was suppressed in the following manner: Russian was declared as the official language in the Baltic countries; as such the Baltic people had to do deal with Soviet authorities not in their own native language, but in Russian.[36] Furthermore all major institutions throughout the Soviet Union used Russian, and most of the noteworthy cultural, scholarly, and scientific work was produced in Russian.[37] Russian was not made compulsory in the Baltic education system, but the Baltic people were expected to become bilingual by taking optional Russian courses.[38] The Russians who immigrated to the Baltic region, however, were not expected to learn the local languages. Teachers were trained according to Soviet directives, which reflected Russian interests. It was evident that Russian enjoyed a dominant position not only in the Soviet Union in general, but also specifically in member states like the Baltic countries. This domination naturally weakened the position of other languages of Soviet Union such as the Baltic languages.

Besides language policies, official cultural events were held to praise Russian culture.[39] Furthermore, all Baltic cultural work - literature, theater etc. - were regulated by strict Soviet guidelines.[40] These guidelines restricted overt expressions of Baltic culture. In such works, not only were people expected to abstain from criticizing the Soviet system, but were also expected to abstain from making neutral comments. As such, Soviet guidelines expected people to praise the Soviet system. Failure to comply with Soviet guidelines resulted in a number possible outcomes: official warning, demotion, house arrest, actual arrest, interrogation under torture, or deportation.[41] Faced with such potential consequences, most people chose to comply with Soviet guidelines. It was for this reason that, in comparison to the independence years, the amount of noteworthy Baltic cultural work plummeted during Soviet rule.[42]

Faced with Soviet occupation and cultural suppression, some Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians chose to wage an armed struggle that began in 1944.[43] They collectively came to be called “the Forest Brothers”.

36 Otfinoski, *Nations in Transition*…, pp. 15-16, 64-65, 112.

37 Dzyuba, *Internationalism or Russification*…, pp. 135-136, 156-157, 159, 161, 163.

38 O’Connor, *History of the Baltic States*, p. 135. Also see; Misiunas, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence*…, pp. 114-115, 130.

39 Misiunas, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence*…, p. 115.

40 Misiunas, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence*…, pp. 116-118.

41 Misiunas, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence*…, p. 121.

42 O’Connor, *History of the Baltic States*, p. 132.

43 Misiunas, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence*…, pp. 83, 86, 88-90, 92-93.

They would hide in the forested areas of the Baltic region, and only leave to collect supplies and employ hit-and-run tactics against Soviet personnel and infrastructure. The Soviet authorities responded with overwhelming brute force to wipe-out members of the Forest Brothers. They also carried out propaganda campaigns portraying the Forest Brothers as bandits preying on local populations. Faced with limited supplies, diminishing public support (based both on propaganda and increased complacency with Soviet rule), and overwhelming Soviet military power, the remaining Forest Brothers decided to disband after about eight years of operation.

Meanwhile the ethnic composition of the Baltic region was changed in the following manner: With the onset of the Soviet occupation many ethnic Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians were imprisoned, exiled, or out-right executed. At the same time, Russians and other Russian-speaking people from around the Soviet Union were transferred to the Baltic countries.[44] This meant that as the number of ethnic Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian people went down, the number of Russian and other Russian-speaking people went drastically up. As a side note; thousands of Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanian's had fled their countries or perished when trying to flee because of the war and the Soviet occupation.

The russification of the Baltic countries had the impact of drastically changing the ethnic composition of Estonia and Latvia. Before 1940, Estonia's ethnic Estonian population compromised about ninety percent of the total population. In Latvia, the ethnic Latvians compromised about seventy-seven percent of the total population. As a result of Soviet Union's policy, by 1989 ethnic Estonian percentage had dropped to sixty-two percent, while ethnic Latvian percentage had dropped to fifty-two percent. At the same time, Russians came to compromise twenty-eight percent of Estonia's, and thirty percent of Latvia's total population.[45] The situation became especially drastic for Latvia; ethnic Latvians became minorities in their capital Riga, and the six other major cities of Latvia.[46]

Lithuania was not affected by this policy as much as Estonia and Latvia

44 Otfinoski, *Nations in Transition*…, pp. 14-16, 64-65, 112.

45 The percentages have been compiled from; Anton Steen, "Ethnic Relations, Elites and Democracy in the Baltic," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 16, 4 (2000): pp. 71-72. Also see; Anton Steen, "Accessioning Liberal Compliance? Baltic Elites and Ethnic Politics under New International Conditions," *International Journal of on Minority and Group Rights*,13, 2-3 (2006): p. 192.

46 Otfinoski, *Nations in Transition*…, p. 58.

were. The proportion of ethnic Lithuanians with the regards to the total population of Lithuania remained stable at around eighty percent. Russians came to compromise about twelve percent of the total population.[47] The reason behind why Lithuania was not as affected by Estonia and Latvia was because Lithuania was not as industrialized as the other two Baltic countries. Russians wanted to work in factory jobs like they did back in Russia, and Lithuania did not offer the same opportunity as did Estonia and Latvia.[48] For this reason there was not much incentive for Russians to move to Lithuania. Lithuania's lack of industrialization thus made it less of target for Russian immigration than Estonia and Latvia.

There was not much the Baltic people could do in the proceeding decades after Soviet annexation.[49] The amount of repression imposed by the Soviet Union was eased after Stalin's death in 1953. For the next couple of years, the Baltic countries were given partial autonomy in economic affairs, which gave the Baltic countries the opportunity to improve their economic standards. This period, however, came to an end in 1965 when Leonid Brezhnev became the leader of the Soviet Union. From the time it began during Stalin's rule, cultural suppression continued throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. The Baltic people continued conform to Soviet rule, though they never lost their resolve to preserve their culture. Although they had managed to preserve their culture, the Baltic people entered the 1980s with little hope for the future because they saw no opportunity to break away from Soviet control.

Although both Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union attempted to use russification policies as a method of control over the Baltic people, in the long run it proved to be ineffective in both instances. Just like they had done during Imperial Russia's rule, the Baltic people submitted to Russian rule only so long as the Soviet Union had to capacity to exert firm control on the Baltic countries. As soon as the Soviet Union began lose power, the Baltic people – fueled by a sense of nationalism – began to maneuver for independence.

Although maintaining a tight grip on those it ruled, the Soviet Union began to show signs of critical failure by the 1970s, mainly in its

47 Steen, "Ethnic Relations, Elites and Democracy in the Baltic, pp. 71-72. Also see; Steen, "Accessioning Liberal Compliance…, p. 192.

48 Otfinoski, *Nations in Transition*…, p. 103.

49 Otfinoski, *Nations in Transition*…, pp. 16, 65, 112-113. Also see; Misiunas, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence*…, p. 204.

competitiveness in the global economy.[50] Brought to power in 1985, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev considered reform a necessity if the Soviet Union was to survive in a changing world. Although repeatedly warned that his reforms would lead to the downfall of the Union, Gorbachev went ahead and enacted the reforms and encouraged people of the Soviet Union to express their complaints with the system.[51] Gorbachev believed that this reform process could be used in a controlled manner to identify the problems of the Union, and help it to become competitive again in the world economy. It did not work as Gorbachev had hoped; when people became aware that they could speak their minds, they could no longer be contained.[52] The Soviet Union began to lose its ability to suppress its citizens' criticisms; and initial reluctant criticisms of the system eventually led to more and more open criticisms and protests. Those who resented the system, but who were too afraid to speak became emboldened when more and more people around them decided to speak. This trend first began in Russia, and eventually spread to other parts of the Soviet Union.[53]

The Baltic countries were too small in comparison to the rest of the Soviet Union to attempt a forceful break-away. The reform process Gorbachev initiated, however, presented a golden opportunity for independence. The Baltic people's path to independence began in 1987, and went ahead in three phases:[54] 1) Protests regarding Soviet rule, 2) Call for autonomy, and 3) Push for independence. Protests first began over non-political issues; such as when the Latvians campaigned to stop the construction of a large hydro-power plant that would damage the environment.[55] In an atmosphere of Gorbachev-initiated reforms, Latvians pressed on until the local Soviet authorities decided to scrap the project. Such non-political protests spilled over to Estonia and Lithuania.

The authorities' unwillingness to crack down on protests further

50 Scott Shane, *Dismantling Utopia: How Information Ended The Soviet Union* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1994), pp. 59, 63-64, 67-68.

51 Shane, *Dismantling Utopia*…, pp. 5, 45, 66-67.

52 Shane, *Dismantling Utopia*…, pp. 17, 25, 40, 46.

53 Misiunas, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence*…, p. 303.

54 Misiunas, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence*…, pp. 303, 311, 322.

55 Protests regarding environmental concerns had historically been partially permitted in the Soviet Union. This provided a useful opportunity for the Baltic people to begin expressing their opposition to Soviet policies. Soviet reaction to such protests would help Baltic people determine whether to act more timidly or more aggressively when opposing Soviet rule. For reference, please see; Anatol Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Path to Independence* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 220.

encouraged people.[56] Emboldened by success of ecological protests, people began to protest political issues as well; such as when in 1987 people protested the Soviet annexation of the Baltic countries, held national song festivals in 1988 openly celebrating Baltic culture, and formed a 692 km human chain in 1988 to express solidarity against Soviet rule.[57] In 1988 with Estonia taking the lead this time, protests eventually turned to popular fronts demanding Baltic autonomy for internal affairs. Such popular front eventually came to encompass a large majority of the Baltic population.[58] Gorbachev's stance regarding the events in the Baltic region was beneficial for the Baltic drive for autonomy. Gorbachev did not want to tarnish his positive image as a liberal reformer, and thus refused to employ violent means to suppress the opposition to Soviet Rule.[59] In this lenient atmosphere created by Gorbachev's rule, Soviet authorities in the Baltic region were unwilling to forcefully bring the Baltic people back in line with Soviet rule.

The path towards of independence entered its final phase by 1989; calls for autonomy turned into a push for independence. Lithuania was more confident than both Estonia and Latvia in pursuing independence because of its larger size and also because of its smaller Russian minority population. Estonia and Latvia meanwhile had to contend with a much larger Russian minority population which was for the most part vehemently opposed to the idea of Baltic independence.[60] Under such domestic circumstances, Estonia and Latvia were more timid than Lithuania, and thus were in favor of a more gradual approach to pursuing independence.[61]

Due to its confidence described above, and also emboldened by the previous successes and the rapid growth Baltic opposition towards Soviet rule, Lithuania decided to take the lead by declaring its independence in March 1990.[62] Up until this stage Soviet authorities had mostly relied on arrests and staged rallies in support of the Soviet Union. But when the Baltic countries began to demand independence, the Soviet Union began to resort to open violence. By now, however, the

56 Misiunas, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence*…, pp. 304-307.

57 Otfinoski, *Nations in Transition*…, pp. 16-17, 114.

58 Misiunas, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence*…, pp.311-312, 316, 318. Also see; Otfinoski, *Nations in Transition*…, pp.16-17, 65-66, 113-114.

59 O'Connor, *History of the Baltic States*, p. 146, 156, 162.

60 The Russian minority's opposition to Baltic independence stemmed from their fear of becoming a vulnerable minority group within newly independent Baltic countries that might act hostile towards them based on historical grudges. For reference, please see; O'Connor, *History of the Baltic States*, p. 153.

61 Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution*..., p. 241.

62 Misiunas, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence*…, pp. 322, 329, 333.

international community had focused its attention on the Baltic countries. The Soviet Union was portraying itself as a reforming country, and its actions in the Baltic region were damaging its international image. Coupled with this was the fact that there was by that time too much momentum behind the Baltic independence movements; people refused to back down even when threatened with violence. Faced with this reality the Soviet Union decided to end its violent crackdown.[63]

Convinced that Gorbachev's leadership was ruining the Union, Soviet hardliners attempted a coup in August 1991. The coup failed, but by now Gorbachev had lost his power, and the Union was nearing collapse. With the Soviet Union collapsing, Estonia and Latvia followed the example of Lithuania, and declared their independence in late August 1991. In September 1991, the Soviet Union acknowledged the independence of all three Baltic countries. As its final act, in December 1991 the Soviet Union decided to dissolve itself.[64] After about fifty years of foreign occupation, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania had once again become independent states.

4. BALTIC CITIZENSHIP POLICIES SHAPED BY SOVIET RUSSIFICATION POLICIES

During the period Soviet rule, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were subject to Soviet interests. Soviet Union's russification policy had altered the ethnic composition of the Baltic region. The ethnic tension that existed between the native peoples of the Baltic region and the Russian-speaking people was masked by Soviet ideology; which maintained that there was harmony between different groups of people, and that all groups possessed the same political and cultural rights.[65]

But as the Soviet Union ceased to exist; Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania became free to express themselves. The Baltic people consider the Soviet occupation to be like a bad dream from which they were finally able to wake up in 1991.[66] Despite Soviet propaganda, to Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians Soviet interests were nothing more than Russian interests in disguise. For this reason, the Baltic people

63 Misiunas, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence*…, pp. 329. Also see; Otfinoski, *Nations in Transition*…, pp.16-18, 66, 116.

64 Otfinoski, *Nations in Transition*…, pp. 18, 66, 116.

65 Steen, "Ethnic Relations, Elites and Democracy in the Baltic," p.75.

66 Otfinoski, *Nations in Transition*…, pp. IX-X.

developed a deep resentment towards Russia, and also towards the Russian minority and their descendants who came to their country during the Soviet occupation. To the Baltic people, the Russian minority who live amongst them are like the remnants of that Soviet occupation.[67]

As the two Baltic countries that were most affected by the policies of the Soviet Union, Estonia and Latvia took measures against the Russian minority. Due to their historical resentment and fear, Estonia and Latvia sought to limit the ability of the Russian minority to challenge the rule of the ethnic Estonian and Latvian majority.[68] Renal'd Simonian explains this mentality by stating that these two countries' past experiences under Soviet rule created "a fixation on what happened in the past."[69] This fixation of Estonia and Latvia, in turn, led to "a stubborn desire to build a mono-ethnic state"[70] aimed at ensuring the supremacy of the titular majorities at the expense of the Russian minority. One such way was to establish a citizenship mechanism that would exclude the Russian minority. Since political participation depended on being a citizen of Estonia and Latvia, the Russian minority was automatically barred from wielding political power.

As a consequence of such policies, Estonia and Latvia would initially shape into ethnic democracies; democracies in which citizenship is granted based on lineage. The only valid lineage that would entitle someone to become a citizen was to be ethnic Estonian (for Estonia) and ethnic Latvian (for Latvia).[71] Since they were of a lineage foreign to Estonia and Latvia the Russian minority and their descendents had no legal means to acquire citizenship. Such state policies created what authors such as Annelies Lottmann and Nida M. Gelazis refer to as a statelessness problem both for Estonia and Latvia, and for the Russian minority. Lacking the citizenship of any state, unwilling assimilate or leave, and not allowed to integrate (since that would put the Russian minority on equal footing with ethnic Estonians and Latvians); the Russian minority was stuck somewhere in the middle in a legal, political, and social limbo.[72]

67 Renal'D Simonian, "The Russian Diaspora in the Baltic Countries," *Russian Politics and Law*, 42, 4 (2004): pp. 81-82. Also see; Otfinoski, *Nations in Transition*…, p. 159.

68 Steen, "Accessioning Liberal Compliance…, p. 187.

69 Simonian, "The Russian Diaspora…, pp. 67, 82, 88.

70 Simonian, "The Russian Diaspora…, p. 80.

71 David Galbreath, "The Politics of European Integration and Minority Rights in Estonia and Latvia," *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 4, 1 (2003): pp. 35-36.

72 For reference please see the following three articles: Steen, "Accessioning Liberal Compliance…, p. 197. Annelies Lottmann, "No Direction Home: Nationalism and Statelessness in the Baltics," *Texas International Law Journal*, 43, 3 (2008): p. 516. Simonian, "The Russian Diaspora…, p. 80.

It was only through the combined pressure exerted by the European Union, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization that Estonia and Latvia made reforms in their citizenship policies.[73] Through such reforms the Russian minority too became eligible to acquire citizenship, but only through passing a tough examination process that made sure that the applicant was thoroughly knowledgeable about Estonia and Latvia (their history, culture etc.) and loyal to Estonia and Latvia.[74] Through such reforms Estonia and Latvia would eventually evolve to become ethno-liberal democracies; democracies that discriminate against certain groups, but leave a strict mechanism through which such groups can attain citizenship.[75] It should be noted that through continued reforms both countries have become much more liberal over time with regards to their citizenship policies, and have noticeably decreased the number of Russian minority members who are without citizenship.[76] Nevertheless, as a consequence of the initial discriminatory citizenship policies and troubled relationship with the Russian minority, both countries have had strained relations with Russia in the post Cold War era.[77]

Lithuania, on the other hand, was not in the same position as that of Estonia and Latvia. Its ethnic Lithuanian population remained at the same proportion with regards to the total population, and its Russian minority was a small one. Although viewing them with suspicion like Estonia and Latvia, Lithuania did not feel threatened by the Russian minority like the other two countries did. As a consequence of this, the citizenship mechanism it adopted after regaining its independence was an inclusive one. Upon attaining independence, Lithuania enacted a citizenship policy that basically granted citizenship to all residents of Lithuania, regardless of their lineage.[78] As a consequence of this, virtually all members of the Russian minority were granted citizenship just like ethnic Lithuanians. For this reason, Lithuania shaped to become a liberal democracy; a democracy that stresses civic identity over ethnic identity and one that creates policies that are as inclusive as possible,

73 Nida M. Gelazis, "The European Union and the Statelessness Problem in the Baltic States," *European Journal of Migration and Law*, 6, 3 (2004): pp. 225, 232, 242.

74 Gelazis, "The European Union and the Statelessness Problem…, p. 232.

75 Galbreath, "The Politics of European Integration…, pp. 35-36.

76 "Citizenship," *Estonia.eu: Official Gateway to Estonia* website, 13.11.2013, [accessed on 11.12.2013] http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/society/citizenship.html. Also see; "Citizenship in Latvia," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia* website, 2013, [accessed on 11.12.2013] http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/policy/4641/4642/4651/.

77 Otfinoski, *Nations in Transition*…, p. 24.

78 Gelazis, "The European Union and the Statelessness Problem…, p. 227.

without discriminating against anyone based on their lineage.[79] It was for this reason that Lithuania and its Russian minority never experienced a statelessness problem like Estonia and Latvia did. As a consequence of this situation, unlike the other two Baltic countries Lithuania has had more positive relations with Russia.[80]

5. CONCLUSIONS

The mindset of any group of people is heavily affected by their past experiences. For the Baltic people of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania being politically dominated and culturally suppressed had been a reality throughout much of their history. Amongst all foreign elements that ruled over the Baltic people, however, it was the Russians that left the most noticeable impact.

The Baltic people experienced Russian rule in two instances; once by the Russian Empire and a second time by the Soviet Union. While Russian domination was evident during the rule of the Russian Empire, it was hidden behind Soviet ideology during the rule of the Soviet Union. Despite its nature, however, it was apparent for the Baltic people by whom they were being subjugated by.

Both instances of Russian rule entailed being subjected to russification policies. The first instance of russification that came during imperial Russian rule was strict in terms of political control and unsystematic in terms of cultural suppression. Despite Russian intentions, this policy ended up bolstering Baltic nationalism that had already begun to form amongst the Baltic people. Having a sense of nationhood, the Baltic people grabbed onto the opportunity to break away from the Russian Empire just when it was in no position to retaliate. The Baltic countries' period of independence was cut short when got annexed by the Soviet Union. Soviet rule brought with it the second of instance of russification; which was much harsher, systemic and far-reaching in the way it was imposed. In this second instance, Baltic culture was strongly suppressed in every respect. Even worse for the Baltic countries were the forced population transfers conducted by the Soviet Union, which had a noticeable impact on the ethnic composition of the Baltic countries (especially for Estonia and Latvia).

79 Galbreath, "The Politics of European Integration…, pp. 35-36.

80 *Otfinoski, Nations in Transition…,* p. 103.

Russian treatment of Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians during Soviet rule had a deep impact on the mindset of these people. The Russian minority living amongst them was seen as a left over from Russian rule, and thus viewed with suspicion. It was from this experience that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania shaped their citizenship policies once they achieved their independence from Soviet rule. Having been most affected by Soviet rule, Estonia and Latvia initially refused to give citizenship to the Russian minority which they viewed as a threat; thereby blocking the Russian minority's access to the political affairs of these two countries. It was only through the efforts of international organizations that these two countries changed their course for more liberal citizenship policies. Although viewing them with suspicion, Lithuania chose to give the Russian minority citizenship because it did not deem the small minority as a threat to itself.

As it can be seen from this narrative, repressive policies can have unintended consequences that are detrimental for the state that is applying it. Furthermore, repressive policies result in bitterness and hostility in repressed people, and lead onto past wrongdoings being reflected onto present times and into new circumstances that go onto create problems of their own.

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