THE GROWTH OF SMALL NATIONS IN EASTERN EUROPE AND THE STATEHOOD OF THE BALTIC COUNTRIES IN 1918

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The formation of democratic nation states by the Baltic peoples during the last stage of the emergence of new states in Europe is a complex problem. The written sources dedicated to the formation of the Baltic nation states reflect extremely controversial stances ranging from the exaggeration of the role played in this respect by the international situation (i.e., that independence fell into the hands of the Baltic nations by mere chance)¹ to excessive praise sung to the Entente (in Communist sources)² and the national liberation war of 1918-1920 and its leaders. Scholars engaged in more impartial investigation make attempts to abide by both such points of view.³ Discussion of issues related to Baltic statehood is made more difficult by the lack of serious and comprehensive studies of the emergence of the Baltic nation states in their European context and of the social history of the Baltic national liberation struggles.

One will not be able to perceive fully the process of the formation of a democratic nation state without an insight into national history. Before industrialization the small nations of Eastern and Central Europe were constantly an arena of international political events. Without joining into a union with stronger and larger nations these peoples could not exert any impact upon such events and make them

¹Sigmar Stopinski. *Das Baltikum im Patt der Mächte. Zur Entstehung Estlands, Lettlands und Litauens im Gefolge des Ersten Weltkriegs*. Berlin Verlag, 1997.

²A. Drizulis. *Latvia in the Period of Foreign Military Intervention and the Civil War (1918-1920)*. Riga, 1948.

³John Hiden. Nationalbewegung und Nationalstaatswerdung der baltischen Republiken im internationalen Kontext. *Nationalbewegung und Staatsbildung*. Frankfurt a.M., 1995; H. Strods. Die Hauptrichtungen der Politik Russlands im Baltikum: Geschichte und Gegenwart. *Die Aussenpolitik der baltischen Staaten und die internationalen Beziehungen im Ostseeraum*. Hamburg, 1994, 446-455; E. Andersons. The Baltic Region on the Eve of World War One. The Baltic Countries 1910-1914. *Acta Universitatis Stockholmensis*, 5,1. Stockholm, 1990.

favourable for their countries.⁴ In the time between the thirteenth and the eighteenth centuries alone four periods of war over the 'Dominium maris Baltici' can be distinguished. During the fourth period of wars in the eighteenth century, the Baltic found itself in the vanguard of Russian imperial expansion. In the twentieth century the Baltic Region turned into a battlefield of endless struggles between the Russian white and red empires, and the German black and brown ones. After military and political occupation, the development of the Baltic nations was rendered more complicated by the attempts of the conquerors to build their own permanent spiritual, economic and demographic infrastructure on this strategically and geo-politically important plot of land. In spite of centuries-long occupation the local people of this area managed to preserve their national identity without any enhancing factors being offered. Such prerequisites emerged only in the nineteenth and particularly in the twentieth century as a result of a complex combination of external and internal ideological, economic, political and religious conditions.

Agriculture was the central economic activity for the Baltic nations; its integration into an industrial mode of production in the nineteenth century proceeded in the presence of numerous vestiges of its former feudal organization. Though the Baltic lands did not excel in features required for latifundium-type of farming, 59 per cent of Estonian land still belonged to private landowners and the Russian Government in the early twentieth century. In Latvia 917 landowner families held 48 per cent of the land. The Lithuanian aristocracy owned 40 per cent of the land (in the Vilnius and Kaunas gubernias). Some individuals held dozens of estates (the Volfs family in Latvia held 90 estates and 290,000 hectares of land, Count Tyszkiewicz in Lithuania - 137,000 hectares.) Around 60-70 per cent of the rural population was, at the same time, landless in Latvia and Estonia. For its European location the Baltic Region became the testing ground for the Russian Empire to impose capitalism from above. In the run of the nineteenth century the Baltic nations not only gradually liberated themselves from serfdom but also started to build their own national economies. Peasant farms were able to adjust themselves to market conditions more quick and effectively than did the farming systems practiced by the large landowners on their estates.⁵

⁴Cf. *The Baltic Sea in Power Politics. I-II. Stockholm, 1995. Alfred Bilmanis.*

The Struggle for the Domination of the Baltic. *Journal of Central European Affairs*. Vol. 5, no. 2. July, 1945, 119-142.

⁵E. Dunsdorf. A Study on Latvian Harvests in 1840-1936. *People's History*. Riga, 1938, 358-394; J. Kahk, E. Tarvel. *An Economic History of the Baltic Countries*. Stockholm, 1997.

However, the competition between the local Latvian national farming and the latifundium-type economy proved to be over-exhaustive for the Baltic nations and this soon started to figure as one of the central reasons for impressive resistance.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw steady industrial development. Restrictive tariffs on the import of manufactured goods into the Russian Empire in 1868, resulting from state interference, a favourable geographical position by the sea and the building of railway networks connecting such cities as Riga, Liepaja, Ventspils and Tallinn, turned the Baltic states towards Russian foreign manufacture and encouraged the transporting of millions of tons of goods through these ports. On the eve of World War I, 20 % of all Russian imports and 28 % of its exports passed through the Latvian ports. Large foreign companies opened in Riga, and many people were employed in them. Thus, for instance, a large rubber factory provided employment for some 13,500 people. Four Latvian match factories fully satisfied the demand of the Russian Empire. A cotton-processing mill, founded in the Estonian city of Narva in 1857, employed 12,200 people, and this factory was the largest of its kind in Europe. The population swiftly grew in Latvian and Estonian towns and cities. In 1913 over 108,600 people (52%) were engaged in Latvian, 67,000 (32%) in Estonian and 39,000 (16%) in Lithuanian manufacturing. This accounted for around 0.25 million of the total number of industrial workers.

In 1914 the Baltic Region generated 68.7 million roubles' worth of income for the Russian Treasury, accounting for almost 70 per cent of the total imperial revenue coming from its non-Russian provinces. Generation of net income to the amount of 69-73 million roubles was a convincing proof to the Baltic politicians that their countries could exist independently outside the Russian Empire.

Table 1

Income of the Russian Empire generated by the Baltic Region⁶

	Gross income, in roubles	Net income, in roubles	%
Income of non-Russian provinces of the Empire	1,033,200,000	98,208,000	45.3
Estonia	50,000,000	5,000,000	10.0
Latvia (1914)	88,054,576	33,730,371	38.3
Lithuania	55,000,000	35,000,000	6.4
	1,380,454,700	68,730,376	100.0

⁶ E. Andersons. *The Baltic Region*, 30.

The economic development of the Baltic Region had far-reaching consequences for social and political relations as the contacts between factory owners and workers became loose and the differences between their life styles and ways became more evident. Estonia and Latvia transformed into a more developed province of the Russian Empire, just like Bohemia within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Though rich Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians had undeniably existed for several hundred years, in the second half of the nineteenth century more enterprising and better educated Estonians, Lithuanians and Latvians - merchants, peasants, small businessmen, teachers and the like, became economically independent of the privileged groups and formed a middle class. Representatives of the middle class more actively sought to acquire technical education, and many energetic and active people from the Baltic countries took internationally renowned positions as administrators and production leaders. They belonged neither to the aristocracy nor to the proletariat, but filled the place of a necessary and respectable social layer. The former relative polarization of the Baltic society (*Standesstaat*) was economically interrupted as the representatives of the small nations took their rightful place among the ruling élite. If in pre-industrial era only the Lithuanian nation could boast of a full social spectrum consisting of landlords, burghers and peasants, then both the Latvian and the Estonian nations entered the industrial world having all social classes in place.

A number of large European states started to intensify their colonization of nations outside Europe in the second half of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the conditions of expanding nations the Russian territorial empire sought to 'devour' previously conquered nations. The imperial bureaucracy made attempts to press down the centrifugal forces of the nineteenth-century empire by administrative, demographic and cultural integration of the empire.⁷ Such a policy was pursued by St Petersburg starting with the 1830s, taking the form of administrative, economic, religious and educational Russification and colonization of the Baltic, Finnish and Belorussian nations. These nations were subject to three basic Russification and colonization waves. First, this was mental Russification by dissemination of the Russian Orthodox religion and enforced Russian language and form of writing.⁸ By ap-

⁷*Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland. 1855-1914*. Ed. E. C. Thaden. New Jersey, 1981; Vytautas Merkys. *Knygešių laikai (1864-1904)*. Vilnius, 1994.

⁸*Ibid.*

Vytautas Merkys. *Draudžiamosios lietuviškos spaudos kelias 1864-1904*. Vilnius, 1994.

pointing local Russian officials, enforced conversion of Lutheran and Catholic believers to Orthodox religion and banning the Latin alphabet, which had been used in creating literature in Lithuania and east Latvia, the cultural Russification sought to eliminate two more of the five basic identities of the Baltic and particularly the Lithuanian and Latvian nations - their languages and Western religions. It must be noted that the Baltic Germans and also the Poles made direct and indirect attempts to protect the Baltic nations from Russification, and the Catholic Church played a particularly significant role in this. The second wave consisted in economic colonization by way of distribution of estates and peasant farms among Orthodox Russians on favourable terms.⁹ During the third wave of the Baltic colonization the settling of a Russian population on state-owned lands took place. In order to transform the Baltic states into 'basic Russian land' the imperial government undertook a series of measures aimed at the eviction of the Baltic peoples from their lands (organization of emigration to 'the warm territories' to Russia¹⁰ and the USA¹¹). Both the Russian and the German Empires sought to colonize the Baltic Region; the attempts of the former were more spiritual, while those of the latter - more physical. According to the imperial 'General Plan West' of the early twentieth century (incorporating the subsequent Nazi 'Generalplan Ost') the Baltic Region had to be transformed mentally, politically and economically into three Russian provinces in the course of the lifetime of one generation. By way of colonization the Russian Empire sought to deprive the Baltic peoples of an important national identity - their territories. In spite of the fact that on the eve of World War I there were around 1 million (about 13 per cent of these peoples) Lithuanians, Estonians and Latvians in the USA alone, and some 0.5 million in Russia (around 7 %) the Baltic nations revived and at home numbered 7.5 million people.

Democratic and national states in the Baltic area could not exist without educated nationals. Compared to illiteracy in the Russian Empire, which in 1897 was between 84 and 90 %, illiteracy in

⁹H. Strods. Imperial Colonization in Latvia, Second Half of the Nineteenth Century. *History of Latvia*. No.1, 1997, 64-69.

¹⁰Publication of Emigration Board. *Emigration Across the Urals. 1914. Information for the Baltic Emigrants*. Riga, 1914, 21; V. Krasnais. *The Latvian Colonies*. Riga, 1938, 13-14.

¹¹By 1914 over 958,000 people from the Baltic countries had moved to the USA. *Lietuvių etnografijos bruožai*. Vilnius, 1964; *Abriss der estnischen Volkskunde*. Tallinn, 1964; M. Skujenieks. *The Latvians Abroad and Foreign Peoples in Latvia*. Riga, 1935.

Estonia it was 19 per cent, in Latvia 13 % (21.5 %, if Latgale is also included), and 60 per cent in Lithuania.¹² The Baltic nations did not spare their efforts to acquire higher education. This was facilitated by the fact that all three new Baltic States had their own universities - the university in Vilnius since 1579 (until 1832), a university in Tartu since 1632, and the very first polytechnic institute of the Russian Empire in Latvia - since 1862. Representatives of the Latvian, Estonian and Lithuanian younger generation attended also universities in Russia, Germany, France and the United States of America. The Balts together with the Russians and Finns formed the biggest group of foreign students in Germany. A lot of young Estonians and Latvians entered the Russian Army, became officers and later acted as military leaders in the Latvian and Estonian national armies. Penetration of the Lithuanian youth into the officer corps of the Russian Army prior to World War I was obstructed by their Catholic religion. Though many scholars were compelled to work in Russia or abroad the Baltic national intelligentsia and intellectual community came into being. They had an enormous impact on the formation of these nations, their consciousness and their national states. It was the development of national economies and emergence of national intelligentsia that predestined the formation of national states by small nations in Eastern Europe.

It was the growth of national democratic intelligentsia that in the mid-nineteenth century led to widespread national movements of revival and awakening of the Baltic nations. Beginning with the nineteenth century the need for national states became more and more vividly expressed. These no longer needed to be the result of territorial expansion or policy; the new states had to be confined to and become legitimate only within the limits of an organized nation. The idea of a nation state (*Nationalstaat*) was used as a justification not only for the unification of Germany and Italy, liquidation of the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg dynasty, and rebirth of Poland but also for the formation of independent states by small nations. Even the formation of the dominating states in East Europe proceeded grudgingly, not to speak about the enslaved nations. The oppressed peoples in the Austro-Hungarian system were eager to assure their national independence as early as the years of the 1848-1849 Revolution, but the Baltic nations did not

¹²E. Andersons. *The Baltic Region*, 21.

Literacy level of the Estonian and Latvian youth in 1897 reached the level of 72%. (T. U. Raun. The Development of Estonian Literacy in the 18th and 19th Centuries. *Journal of Baltic Studies* (henceforth *JBS*), 10, 1979, 115-126).

pose an issue as yet.¹³ This resulted in the domination among the small nations of ethnic perception of cultural nations (*Kulturnation*) to be distinguished by their language and culture. All small nations of East Europe, the Baltic peoples included, belonged to this group of 'cultural nations'. However, the cultural autonomy of each of them started to grow swiftly and was expressed first through the emergence of various legal associations and societies (like those of singing, agriculture, insurance, crediting, discussion clubs, etc.). Second, the nations paid much attention to their language and culture (song festivals in Estonia in 1869, in Tartu and in Riga in 1873), their origins and roots as well as to their historical role in correlation with other peoples. The Lithuanian nation ranked prominently in this respect, having a united state since the thirteenth century and being a strong European state.¹⁴ In addition to this, folklore (including heroic epics *Lačplēsis* and *Kalevipoeg*) and the creation of professional literature played an important part. The writers and composers made use of folklore and folk themes in their creative works. This entitled the Latvian poet Janis Rainis (1865-1929) to assert that it was the poets who created an independent state for the Latvians. As the idea of the nation was a higher value than submission to a monarch, the movement of national democratic revival was actually an anti-monarchic one already in the middle of the nineteenth century. Generally anti-imperial trends of the Baltic nations were determined by their overall oppression. The national democratic movements supported the development of the nations as equally advanced nations of Europe. An ever-greater number of people, carried away by the spirit of national liberation, formed a real, though not always openly demonstrated, force in the conditions of double national oppression. National liberation movements of the small and oppressed nations formed an integral part of the European liberation movement. Though the Baltic nations were unable to reach the stage of the formation of nation states through their national democratic revival, significant prerequisites for the future independent statehood came into being.¹⁵

The Baltic nations started to form real political groups of significant size aware of their origins, territories, languages, religion,

¹³ H. Strods. Der Wiederhall der Revolution von 1848 im Baltikum. *Acta Baltica*. Bd. 29/30 1992, 105-116.

¹⁴ A. Gerutis. *Lithuania: 700 Years*. New York, 1969.

¹⁵ V. Berzins, I. Ronis. Nationale Identität als historischer Faktor in Lettland am Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts. *Geschichtsbild in den Ostseeländern*. Stockholm, 1991, 11-22; National Movements in the Baltic Countries during the 19th Century. *Studia Baltica Stockholmensia*, 2. Stockholm, 1985.

culture and history. This was directly related to both - doing away with their past as colonized territories and building of their national future. The Baltic people did not want to comply with the role of politically subordinated small nations within large empires. Only after formation into nations did the small Baltic nations come into the focus of large European states and peoples. Co-operation among those peoples living in the Baltic Region became possible. The national liberation movements of the Baltic peoples would have been useless and meaningless without internationalization of the 'Baltic Question'.

Though there was almost the same starting line for all East European small nations, the strategies used in attaining the goal of national independence were different. The Polish and the Lithuanian nations headed the independence struggles in Eastern Europe and were fighting for their independence after armed uprisings in 1794,¹⁶ 1831, and 1863. The Latvians and Estonians, though acknowledged as independent, but oppressed nations as early as the eighteenth century,¹⁷ chose peaceful forms of national liberation in the nineteenth century. The Baltic nations could follow three basic trends in their independence fights - struggle for independence (the Czechs), struggle for economic and cultural autonomy (the Latvians and Estonians) and struggle for independence together with the Polish nation (the Lithuanians). The Lithuanian nation was for decades severely punished by the Russian Empire for participation in the uprisings of 1794, 1831 and 1863; this resulted in underdeveloped infrastructure in Lithuania and Latvia, and religious and cultural oppression until 1904. Unsuccessful attempts by the Poles and Lithuanians to win national independence by means of armed uprisings made the Latvians and Estonians reject violent action. A peaceful road to national liberation shall be treated as an important achievement of the Latvian and Estonian peoples.¹⁸ The results of non-violent struggle were delayed in time, but more effective. Initially individual representatives of Lithuanian intelligentsia started to demand independence; they were later joined by the Latvian intellectuals. The Lithuanians, though

¹⁶H. Strods. Der Kosciuszko Aufstand 1794 und Kurland. *Acta Baltica*, 1996. - Königstein im Taunus, S. 123-130; B. Szyndler. *Powstanie Kosciuszkowskie 1794*. Warszawa, 1994; M. Wojciechowski. Die historische Rolle der nationalen Identität im Kampf des polnischen Volkes um staatliche Selbstständigkeit am Anfang des 20. Jhr. *Geschichtsbild in den Ostseeländern*, Stockholm, 1991, 23-36.

¹⁷Garlib Merkel. *Die Letten*. Riga, 1797.

¹⁸Cf. Sigmar Stopinski. *Das Baltikum in Patt der Mächte*. Berlin Verlag, 1997, S. 257 u.a.; H. Strods. Rozruchy chłopskie we wschodniej Łotwie w roku 1863. *Studia Podlaskie* III. Białystok, 1991, 41-55.

more prosecuted in the Russian Empire than other Baltic nations, became less infected by the utopian ideas of socialism than the Latvians, and fought for independence of their nation in the conditions of tough Russification policy. Here we mean the Lithuanian publication *Aušra* (1883) and the recommendations by Jonas Šliupas (1861-1944) on the formation of federal independent states of Latvia and Lithuania. On behalf of the Latvian intelligentsia the idea of liberation from the Russian Empire was voiced by Mikelis Valters (1874-1958) and his assistant Ernests Rolavs (1874-1907). Then, in the years of awakening the Baltic nations did not have any political parties. The foundation of first political parties at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries ushered in the second stage of the liberation struggles for the Baltic peoples. The political parties represented the whole political spectrum of those days, and the Leftist parties proved to be the better organized. The political parties demanded the expansion of suffrage and civil rights, curbing of contacts between the legislation and bureaucracy, and opposed censorship. While in the nineteenth century the Baltic nations were barred from participation in the government at the provincial level, the communal and local government levels permitted their representation and participation. Hence participation of the workers and peasants in the revolution of 1905 and the formation of the very first committees with both legislative and executive powers need not to be perceived as a surprise. During the revolution of 1905 the Baltic nations, just like the Finnish, Polish, Ukrainian and Caucasian peoples, started a violent struggle for vast autonomy rights, and the nationalist democratic interests seemed to have taken secondary positions behind the struggle for social justice. The revolution encouraged the Baltic peoples to overcome the inherent syndrome of servile diffidence and to enter unequal physical battle with the former regime without reliance on a more favourable international situation. But - alas! - the Baltic movement for national democratic liberation was severely undermined and fragmented by the cruelty of the imperial military forces that shot to death over 4,000 Latvians and 500 Estonians, deported to Siberia thousands of others and compelled thousands of still others to flee or to emigrate to foreign countries. Nevertheless, national liberation fights of the Baltic nations in the aftermath of the 1905 revolution continued to intensify both in the political meaning (resistance to the police, anti-monarchist appeals) and also as cultural and ideological activities.¹⁹ The

¹⁹M. Jučas, L. Mulevičius, A. Tyla. *Lietuvos valstiečių judėjimas 1861-1914 metais*. Vilnius, 1975, 357-358.

fact that after the revolution and starting with the year 1907 both the Baltic German landlords and the Russian Empire had to transform their policy to a defensive one shall be treated as a national victory won during the 1905 revolution. This policy made the Baltic aristocracy turn away from the Tsar and face the Kaiser in the period between 1914 and 1916. The Russian Empire failed to implement the principle 'Cuius regio eius natio' (H. Rohtfels). The Baltic liberation movement was saturated with general democratic content - against oppression, against lumpen Russian Empire (existing just on exploitation of oppressed peoples), for elimination of colonial dependence. This democratic movement of national liberation stated by the enslaved peoples is one of the decisive factors leading to the Russian imperial collapse.

In the period of the social and structural crisis of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the wave of incorporation of the old pre-industrial structures into the newly-born industrial structures swept the Baltic Region just as it had affected the Russian Empire and Germany.²⁰ Social and national aspects of the growing national liberation struggles intermingled with ever growing intensity, while the pursuit of social goals began to be dominated by national liberation movements. It is interesting to note that the ruling German, Polish and Russian classes, when driven into a corner, participated in the Russian imperial social reform process imposed from above. Yet, the same ruling élite unanimously supported preservation of the old political structures, not to mention national autonomy of the Baltic people.

Unlike the Swedish aristocracy, which compromised with the Finnish national liberation movement and retained the autonomy of Finland, the Baltic German nobility played a double game and fought, on the one hand, against the imperial unification policy while on the other - against the Latvian and Estonian national liberation movements. The majority of the Baltic German nobility declared the national liberation movement of the Latvian and Estonian nations to be a revolution and the 'number one enemy'.²¹ This resulted in a loss of political footing in Latvia and Estonia for the German nobility. The Baltic German nobility failed to create another political H. Folkersaham to make the Baltic liberation movements and the Baltic German nobility compromise. The ruling élite in the Russian Empire was very

²⁰W. Conze. Die Strukturkrise der östlicher Mitteleuropa vor und nach 1919. *Vierteljahrschrift für Zeitgeschichte*, I. 1953, 319-338.

²¹Cf. *Kreuzzeitung*, *Düna Zeitung*; G. von Pistohlkors. *Historische Einleitung.*; Fanny von Anrep. *Briefe einer Livländerin aus den Jahren 1873-1909*. Landshut, 1990. - S. V-X.

well aware of the geopolitical significance of the Baltic for Russia. Therefore, they strongly objected even to autonomy of the three Baltic peoples whose intellectuals pinned their hopes on the liberalization of the Russian Empire. The local ruling circles were ill disposed to the aspirations of the Baltic peoples to independence, even to their autonomy within the Russian Empire.

In the years of World War I the idea put forth by Dr. Jonas Šliupas as early as 1885 about the foundation of a Lithuanian-Latvian, and later also a Belorussian federal state was resurrected with new force. In order to attain this goal a conference initiated by Lithuanian public activists residing in Switzerland was held on 4 October 1915. The participants of this forum demanded foundation of the Lithuanian-Latvian federal state. This idea was supported also by the Latvian poet Rainis. When M. Januškevičius, member of the Lithuanian State Council, openly voiced the demand for the Lithuanian independence on 30 August many Latvians confined to admiring this boldness.²² The repressions that started in 1915 against the Germans who had supported the achievements of Wilhelm's army offered a good opportunity for the pro-Russian Latvian nationalists to demand and to succeed in restricting certain privileges of the German nobility (pubs, markets, factories, fishing, hunting) on 10 July 1916. The Latvian national anthem 'God bless Latvia!' was allowed to be performed in public starting with 1 August 1916. And though the Communist sources stated that the slogan 'Long live free Latvia!' was proclaimed only after the Bolshevik revolution, the Latvian periodical *Dzintenes atbalss* had published it on 17 (4) March 1917 immediately after the Russian democratic revolution 'in the spring of the Russian peoples'.²³ As the attempts to use anti-German policy with respect to the ruling German élite for the purpose of achieving at least economic and self-determination goals did not generate positive results, it became clear that the German ruling class was more important for Russia than the Baltic nations taken together.

The imperial mind-set and attitudes of the Russian liberals, still alive even after the Russian democratic revolution of 1917, and overall extremely negative stances towards autonomy of Latvia and Lithuania gave impetus to the leftist political extremism, the movement being particularly marked in Latvia. The meaning of participation in the wars and fighting under alien banners against another national enemy obtained a specific importance during World War I.

²²F. Cielens. *Change of Epochs*. I. Riga, 1997.

²³U. Germanis. Evolution of the Idea of Latvian independence. *Jauna Gaita*. 1966, № 59, p. 13.

National units, consisting of representatives of the middle and lower classes were formed within the Russian imperial army. The middle class of the Baltic community focused on support of political autonomy and personal freedoms, while the lower layers emphasized social justice and equality. Both groups were rejected later by the imperial and also the democratic governments of Russia. This made a great number of the armed representatives of the two groups turn to the Bolsheviks, who gave their backing to ethnic minorities, and support them. In addition to this, the politicians who decided the future of the small nations quite often supported the idea of breakdown of the Empire, but did not call for independence of the Baltic nations. W. Wilson and his friend Masaryk stepped out in defense of these nations within the future federative republic of Russia.²⁴ Economic, political and ideological suppression of the Baltic nations led to an extraordinary deformation of their social structures. The development of economically wealthy groups was delayed, but the poor strata of the community experienced hypertrophied growth. Such social structure determined three development alternatives for the Baltic nations.²⁵ If the wealthy groups were oriented towards the great states and empires that could make their status viable, the middle classes basically nursed a hope for an independent national development. The poor population, in their turn, since the end of the nineteenth century had been focusing on the red utopia created already in the nineteenth century. In their selection of an alternative these three social strata, undoubtedly, were supported by the respective groups of the large nations that were willing to channel Baltic developments into directions favourable to themselves. In this respect Lithuania was more under Polish, but Latvia and Estonia - under German influence. The Russian landowners, merchants and peasants stood apart in their hopes for restoration of the Empire. In spite of the fact that the Communist atrocities of 1917-1919 against humankind were known to the international community, the Communist utopian theory did not lose its international legitimacy. The Russian leftists, charged with the idea of the red utopia, had an important part in the Bolshevikization of the Latvian Red Riflemen, this being a serious impediment for the emergence of the Latvian independent statehood - Latvia as the last of the three Baltic nations finally declared its national independence only on 18 November 1918.

²⁴Declaration on Self-determination of Small Nations by Woodrow Willson.

²⁵H. Strods. Die drei Alternativen des Staatlichkeit Lettlands in den Jahren 1917-1920. *Acta Baltica*. - Bd. 31. S. 203-213.

The formation and proclamation of national democratic states by the Baltic peoples was the only appropriate solution of the national issue; by making such a decision the most favourable conditions were created for the development of these nations and Europe as a whole. The Civil War in Russia and the revolution in Germany gave rise to a unique situation favourable for national liberation of the Baltic nations. Making use of prevalent conditions depended, however, on the level of political, economic and cultural maturity of each of them. The physical national liberation war of 1918-1920 proved to be only the concluding phase of those economic and cultural endeavours made by the Baltic nations for quite a long time in a non-physical form and aimed at attaining the overall objective - that of national independence.²⁶ In Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania democratic nation states emerged victorious because a greater democratic potential and content was inherent to this type of state than to the two other alternative states.²⁷ The formation and existence of the Baltic nation states, recently marking their eightieth anniversary, became possible as a result of European democratization; these states have always been a bench-mark to measure the level of European democratization and as such they will persist in the future.

Concluding Remarks

1. In the middle of the nineteenth century the Estonian, Lithuanian and Latvian peoples created economic, political and cultural pre-conditions for the emergence of their independent democratic nation states.

2. The formation of democratic nation states in the Baltic Region has been affected by internal and external political factors. The overall international situation in 1918 demanded a high level of social, economic and cultural maturity of the Baltic peoples.

3. Such maturity and national will were the decisive factors in the process of the formation of the democratic independent states in the Baltic Region.

4. The struggle for the national independence of the Baltic states, as is typical of all small nations, proceeded initially and continued for a long time, in a non-violent and peaceful way. During the second stage of such struggle it proceeded under the banners of other states (1794, 1831, 1863, 1905, 1915-1916). The third decisive state of the armed national liberation movement took place under national banners and resulted in the long desired victory.

²⁶E. Andersons. *The Baltic Region*, 43.

²⁷I. Ronis. Historical Preconditions for the Formation of the State of Latvia. *Journal of the Latvian Institute of History*. No 3, 1993, 75-86.

5. The national democratic state was not imposed on the Baltic nations by anybody from above, it matured for almost a century and grew out of the existing democratic environment.

6. The emergence of national democratic states in the Baltic Region was the legal homecoming of the three Baltic nations to a democratic Europe, to the model of economy, writing, religion and mentality to which they had belonged for ages.

7. After fifty years of occupation each of the Baltic states retains its own differences and national peculiarities. Nevertheless, they will be able to exist and be heard by other states in the world only under the condition that they act jointly.