

THE BALTIC PUZZLE
Russia's Policy towards Estonia and Latvia
1992 – 1997

University of Helsinki
Department of Social Science History
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Laura Eleonoora Kauppila

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INTRODUCTION

Russia's policy towards the Baltic States is a valid object of research because of the uniqueness of these relations in the post-communist world. Too often this policy is viewed simplistically as either being a "litmus test" of Russia's democratic credentials and of its policy towards Europe, or as a deviation from its policy towards the former Soviet Union, what it terms the "near abroad". Most analysts dismiss the Baltic issue too easily, and pay insufficient attention to Russia's distinct interests in the region and the constraints that shape its policy. The exceptionality of the Baltic States is generally attributed solely to the protection extended to them by the West, and if the analyst takes the view that Russia's imperialist tendencies have not disappeared, the Baltic States are regarded to remain an "eternal captive" as a natural part of the Russian sphere of influence.¹ This thesis aims to contribute to filling the gap by outlining the development of Russian policy in this context, and evaluating the reasons from the Russian point of view for treating the Baltic States as *sui generis*. I want to argue that Russia's policy in the first five years after the collapse of the Soviet Union has not reflected an imperial drive, and that the reasons for why Russia's policy has shown relative restraint are more nuanced than merely the impact of western involvement.

Due to limitations of space and time, I am restricting my work to cover Estonia and Latvia, with Lithuania serving only as a point of comparison – but often a very enlightening one.

What I have set out to do in this thesis is to examine what has actually happened and why. Given the initial fears at the time of re-independence that Russia's Baltic policy was going to be militant because of the potential explosiveness of ethnic and security issues, what is interesting is the comparative lack of instability in the region. It is precisely the absence of actual conflict – as opposed to verbal accusations and counteraccusations – in a situation ridden with problems that can provide insight into the specific nature of Russia's Baltic policy. Therefore I begin with describing the negative legacy of the past in my first chapter, and go on to make a chronological assessment of the period in chapter two. The time limits I have set in my thesis are somewhat

¹ Robert Blackwill: Russia and its periphery, in the volume *Engaging Russia* (New York 1995), p. 9.

hesitant. Because of the difficulties of including the period of Soviet breakdown in my analysis – although this contained an interesting configuration of elite co-operation – I have begun my research at the time of Russia’s “independence”, 1992. My research covered the subsequent five years, and the end of the period is determined by the publication in February 1997 of the government’s first policy paper on the Baltic States.

My intention in this thesis is to analyse why Russia has shown restraint in its policy. Russian-Baltic relations have certainly commanded considerable space in world news in the period in question due to problems connected with the Russian minorities and security (troop withdrawal and NATO expansion). Nevertheless, I want to argue that this has deflected attention from those aspects of Russian-Baltic relations that have motivated Russia to act in a relatively restrained manner. In order to assess the set of constraints that prevent it from pursuing a hard line, I will analyse each of the main elements of Russian policy separately in chapters 3 – 6. The influence of one theme is not a straightforward question of whether it causes control or conflict: there are subtleties and even contradictions within each element that arise from their in-depth study.

My focus is on the three main elements that make up Russia’s Baltic policy: the military, economic and ethnic questions, as these are topics that relate to Russian national interests, and the international dimension, as it cannot be dismissed in Russian-Baltic relations. I will attempt to assess the relative significance of these elements and the interplay among them. Russian foreign policy can be analysed as a game played simultaneously on several “chess boards” – the geo-political, geo-economic and geo-ideological. Each board has its own figures, its own rules, and its own stakes.² In the case of Baltic policy, these “chess boards” cannot be entirely separated from each other. By looking at the general developments in relations among these countries and then at each element in turn in more depth, I can arrive at an analysis of Russia’s overall policy.

² Vladimir Lukin: *Russia and Its Interests*, in the volume *Rethinking Russia’s National Interests* (Washington, D.C 1994), p.113. Lukin is the former Russian ambassador to the US and the chairman of the Foreign Policy Committee of the Russian Parliament (“Duma”).

Sources and definitions

The source material I have used for my thesis consists of a wide range of literature and journals. The topic that has by far been studied most widely is the Russian minorities question, of which the best studies are Jeff Chinn and Michael Kaiser's "Russians as the New Minority", Paul Kolstoe's "Russians in the Former Soviet Republics" and Neil Melvin's "Russians Beyond Russia". They are essentially similar – and not only as regards their titles – in that they look at the questions in post-Soviet politics almost entirely in terms of the "Diaspora" issue, and thus attribute the vast majority of Russian policy decisions to the ethnic question – an assumption that I dispute in my chapter on the Russian minorities. I have found no comprehensive study on the Baltic States that would incorporate all the various aspects of Russia's policy. There is a general division between books dealing with post-Soviet politics in the Baltic States or in Russia – no overall assessments of Russia's Baltic policy. Much more has, for instance, been written on Russia's policy towards the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). As an examination of the historical legacy of Russian-Baltic relations, the classics of Vilho Niitemaa and Edward Thaden still stand out. Most writing on the security aspect has been done by Baltic researchers, and the possibility of national bias must be kept in mind when using their work. The international context has received rather little detailed attention so far. Hanne-Marget Birckenbach's study on preventative diplomacy was a good guide to the policies of the OSCE and the Council of Europe in mediating in the ethnic conflict, but surprisingly, the prominent question of NATO expansion and the Baltic States has not produced significant studies. Birthe Hansen and Bertel Heurlin's "The Baltic States in World Politics" is perhaps the only attempt at a study that covers both the Russian and the Western approaches to the Baltic States, but here too the parts pertaining to Russia are only related to security. The omission of the economic element seems to be a common trait, and few researchers have attempted to even look at the security and minority aspects simultaneously. Therefore trying to make an assessment comprising all the aspects of Russian policy is a justified exercise.

I have extensively and systematically used a variety of news sources. These include Russian newspaper material (in English translation), press releases and news reports, a weekly journal on

post-communist countries' affairs.³ In addition, I have used some Baltic, British and American newspapers to expand and diversify my source base.⁴ The availability of official documents concerning the issues related to this thesis are restricted to a small number of OSCE and Council of Europe documents that have been published. My source-base is therefore lacking to a degree in comprehensiveness, but I believe that it is possible to arrive at an analysis and to draw valid conclusions with the source material I have had at my disposal.

In an attempt to avoid dullness in my text, I have used the following terms interchangeably: the "Baltic States", "Baltics", "Baltic countries" and the "Baltic region" – it is important to note that in the last case, the word Baltic refers to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and not the Baltic Sea. The Finnish term "Baltia" is not translatable into English ("Baltic"), because this would certainly cause confusion over whether it pertains to the countries or the sea.

Due to limitations in the span of a thesis, I have not analysed Russian policy in terms of the various actors who constitute the overall establishment of foreign policy –making. Therefore the terms "Russia", "Russian leadership", "decision-makers" remain rather ambiguous, but I have attempted to analyse Russia's official policies. Furthermore, I have avoided the term "foreign policy" when talking specifically about the Baltic context, because this would already assume a certain interpretation of Russian policy. I do not want to argue that the Baltic States belong to the Russian concept of the "near abroad", but as they do not constitute part of Western policy either, it is not justified to talk about foreign policy as such. I have also used the terms "the West" and "the international community" interchangeably. In my text, they both denote West European and North American governments, the EU, and various international organisations that have taken interest in the Baltic case.

³ The Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press (CDPSP), the BBC World Service: Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB), the U.S. Government's Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty Research Report (later Transition).

⁴ The Baltic Times (later The Baltic Independent), The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, The Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times.

1 The Legacy of the Past

The framework of Russia's Baltic policy is determined by the past. The emerging pattern of relations has its historical determinants, which are therefore a relevant subject to discuss in this chapter before commencing on the actual analysis of Russia's policy. History has a double effect on policy-making: it acts as memory and bequeaths specific processes.⁵ In the case of Russian-Baltic relations, this is expressed by legacies of imperial domination and Soviet occupation, and interdependence in terms of demography and economics. It is possible that the importance of history in this region surpasses that of all other post-communist cases.⁶

So the legacy of the past weighs heavily on Russian-Baltic relations. The territories that today make up the Baltic States were first incorporated into the Russian Empire between 1721 and 1795.⁷ The collapse of the empire and the subsequent Bolshevik revolution in 1917 led, but only after warfare, to the independence of the three Baltic States. In 1940, the states were "returned" by annexation to the Soviet Union, until this "empire" dissolved in turn, in 1991. The long period of time that the Baltic territories have been a part of a Russian-cum-Soviet entity is an influential factor constituting Russian attitudes towards the renewed independence of these states. The difficulty of dealing with and recognising the Baltics as foreign and sovereign states underlies many of the problems in their relations.

This chapter embraces three themes. First, the legacy of domination will be presented, focusing in particular on imperialism and popular attitudes towards the Balts themselves. This will be followed by a description of the consequences of the Soviet period, with an analysis of the different interpretations of history and of the ethnic question. Finally, the factors inherent in the break-up of the Soviet Union that have affected Russian attitudes and policy will be presented:

⁵ Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrot: *Russia and the New States of Eurasia: The Politics of Upheaval* (Cambridge 1994), p. 23.

⁶ Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan: *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore 1996), p. 402.

⁷ The Baltic provinces were conquered by Russia in 1710. Estland and Livland were officially incorporated in 1721, but Kurland was not officially given to Russia until the third partition of Poland in 1795. Vilho Niitemaa and Kalervo Hovi: *Baltian historia* (Jyväskylä 1991), pp 272, 276.

how identity and independence were intertwined, and how the final disintegration may have influenced Russian perceptions.

1.1 Domination

Empire is Fate?⁸

Russia's imperial past forms the necessary long-term historical perspective for its Baltic policy in the 1990s and serves to portray the vast changes that Russia has had to adjust to since the disintegration of the Soviet Union – analogously to the situation in 1917, when the Russian Empire crumbled. For most of its history, Russia has been the centre of an empire. The characteristic element of this was its constant territorial expansion, which has been calculated as constituting, on average, all of 50 square kilometres a day for over four centuries.⁹ The coast of the Baltic Sea, with its warm-water ports, was the object of Russian territorial ambitions for centuries. For Peter the Great, access to the Baltic Sea had a dual significance: the possibility of bringing Russia closer to Europe economically and culturally, and of becoming a great (sea) power. Furthermore, there was the threat of invasion from the West: Baltic lands were a transit-area of Swedish and German aggression since the times of the assault of the Teutonic Knights on Pskov, the capital of Russia's medieval republic in the north-west, in the 13th century. Strategic and economic interests of the Baltic region were thus the motivation behind Russia's expansion.

Slavophile repression

As part of the Russian Empire, the Baltic region retained its regional identity to a considerable degree, as it was ruled as a separate entity for most of the 18th and 19th centuries. This separation and preferential treatment was a result of the conception of the region being historically, economically and socially different to the rest of the empire. With the rise of nationalism in the

⁸ The following account is based on Niitemaa and Hovi, pp 278, 310-314, 354-64, 394; Edward Thaden: Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland, 1855 – 1914 (Princeton 1981), pp 3-10, 36, 227; David Kirby: The Baltic World 1772 - 1993 (Singapore 1995), pp 278, 310-314, 354-364; Elizabeth Teague: Russians Outside Russia and Russian Security Policy, in the volume The Emergence of Russian Foreign Policy (Washington, D.C 1994), p. 83-89; Walter Clemens: Baltic Independence and Russian Empire (Basingstoke 1991), pp 16, 28, Alexander Pikayev: Russia and the Baltic States, in the volume The Baltic States in World Politics (Surrey 1998), pp 133-136; Iver Neumann: Russia and the Idea of Europe (London 1996), pp 28-39.

19th, these Baltic prerogatives were increasingly questioned. The Russian Romantic nationalists, called the “slavophiles”, who believed in a historic Russian “civilising mission”, criticised any attempts at Europeanisation of the Russian state but advocated the imposition of uniform, centrally directed control throughout the Empire. As they gained in political power against their ideological enemies, the “Westernisers”¹⁰, they began the implementation of a Russification policy in the administration and cultural sphere of Russia’s western borderlands in order to remove all remnants of regional particularism. However, many analysts seem to overlook the conceptual contradiction in terms of Russia’s grand mission: it was certainly used to incorporate the Ukrainian and Belorussian peoples under one Slavic people and thus to deny them an independent identity, and to impose domination over Muslim and Asian areas, but these ethnic and cultural explanations do not hold in the Baltic case. The Baltic peoples were not Slavs, and their cultural heritage was not backward. Russification was thus more administrative than cultural, which is further evidenced by the way the Baltic peoples were able to retain their cultural integrity despite the repression. This is an important background for the examination of Russian attitudes towards the Balts in more recent times.

1920

The collapse of the Russian Empire in the aftermath of the Revolution was a shock to all Russians, both red and white. Despite the Bolshevik theory on national self-determination, the loss of Baltic territories was traumatic, and difficult to accept. Then the declaration of workers’ soviets in both Estonia and Latvia at the end of the year 1917 lead the Bolsheviks to temporarily regard the Baltic region as the sphere of interest of not Russia, but the Russian Revolution.¹¹ It took prolonged fighting to remove red army troops from Baltic territories, and Soviet Russia did not recognise the independence of the Baltic countries until 1920. This represented a change in attitude: instead of spreading the socialist revolution, the region was neutralised with peace

⁹ Richard Pipes: *The Formation of the USSR: Communism and Nationalism, 1917 – 1923* (Cambridge, Mass. 1964), p. 1, quoting A. Bruckner: *Die Europaisierung Russlands* (Gotha 1888).

¹⁰ This term denotes the “zapadniki”, who sought to modernise Russia by emulating European political and economic systems and who believed that Russia had the possibility of becoming a “western” state.

¹¹ Aappo Kähönen: *Bolshevikkien Suomen ja Baltian kuva 1918 – 1920*. Master’s thesis, Helsinki University 1998, p. 50.

treaties.¹² The treaty signed with Estonia in February 1920 was the first crack in the encirclement imposed on Russia by the Entente countries that were staging an intervention. The predominant memory of this period was that yet again, the Baltic region had been used by the enemy to launch an attack on Russia.

Attitudes

Popular attitudes of neighbouring peoples are often fraught with prejudice and animosity, but they condition some of the responses and decisions made by political leaders. Here I will briefly analyse Russian attitudes towards the Baltic region and peoples, as well as outlining the symbiosis between Russian and Soviet identity.

Russian/Soviet identity

From the point of view of both Russians and non-Russians, Soviet identity was largely associated with the nationality that held overall power in the Union. This overlapping of identities was coupled with perception that the Soviet state was also essentially Russian; pursuing Russian interests with its ideology as well as reflecting Russian political culture and Russian views.¹³ “The overwhelming majority of Russians had been indoctrinated to believe they have moral and historical rights to control and russify the whole Soviet Union, the Baltic republics included.”¹⁴ From this follows the widely held conviction of “natural” Russian rights and interests in formerly Soviet territories, and the existence of major Russian minorities who did not conceive of moving to another republic as signifying a move away from their own habits, traditions and rights.

From the point of view of the Baltic peoples, Soviet occupation was regarded as direct continuation of subjugation under the Russian Empire: Soviet leaders were equated with the former Russian overlords. The policies of domination along ethnic lines were evident throughout the period in issues such as Communist Party cadre policy. The second secretaries, in charge of local cadres policy and thus very influential, were predominantly Russian. On the other hand, it

¹² Ibid., p. 112.

¹³ Alexander Motyl: *Will the Non-Russians Rebel? State, Ethnicity and Stability in the USSR*. (Ithaca 1987), pp 39-49.

cannot be claimed that the Balts were particularly keen on establishing themselves as party functionaries. More importantly, the internal security apparatus in the republics was dominated by Russians or russified Balts, and the “exchange of cadres” system led to a one-way supply of Russian party functionaries from Moscow to the republics. The russified party members were referred to as “Yestonians” in Estonia because of their Russian pronunciation, while the Russian-speaking settler population was generally referred to as the “civilian garrison”.¹⁵

Emotions

The widespread attitude of equating all Russian residents with the occupying forces has had distinct consequences in the post-1991 period and demonstrates the importance of feelings and attitudes. Russian attitudes towards Balts were complex. The republics were generally viewed as the “Soviet West” thanks to their higher level of economic wellbeing and relatively more links to the West, particularly from Estonia to Finland.¹⁶ The material aspect was dominant in Russian views, leading most to want to participate and imitate the Baltic success, although some would claim a moral and ideological superiority to the Balts.¹⁷

In the Soviet times, Russians could always declare that the Baltics needed Russian defence capabilities, raw materials and industrial labour force in order to function. The fundamental difference of interpretation was evident in this matter: they considered that Baltic ingratitude prevented them from understanding the inputs from the Russian side – “Russians were doing them a favour”¹⁸. In the new situation, although it was abundantly clear that the Balts had no desire for Russian military protection, Russians have continued to emphasise the economic and even intellectual resources that Russia has, over time, invested in the Baltic region.¹⁹ This serves

¹⁴ Kristian Gerner and Stefan Hedlund: *The Baltic States and the End of the Soviet Empire* (London 1993), p.60.

¹⁵ Rein Taagepera: *A Note on the March 1989 Elections*. *Soviet Studies* Vol 42, No 2, 1990.

¹⁶ The importance of the possibility to watch Finnish television in northern parts of Estonia was judged by Mart Nutt, an Estonian Member of Parliament, to have been invaluable. (Lecture 20 November 1998, notes are held by the author.)

¹⁷ Clemens, p. 150.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

¹⁹ Statement by President Yeltsin’s press secretary Valery Kostikov in *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*, Vol 2, No 35, 3 September 1993 “Newsbriefs”.

as justification for Russia's legitimate interests in the Baltic States, according to the President's adviser Sergei Stankevich.²⁰ Problems of interpretation continued.

The disputed interpretations of either side's views on questions of history help to examine the legacy of the Soviet experience further. This also includes a look at the demographic changes brought about by the regime. These aspects are all significant in Russian-Baltic relations and so deserve to be clarified.

1.2 Problems

Interpretations

1940

With the introduction of glasnost soon after Gorbachev came to power in the Soviet Union, and the increased possibilities to discuss the Soviet past in public that it brought about, the question of annexation began to increasingly be raised in the Baltic republics. The Soviet theory claimed that following a popular uprising of workers against their fascist governments, the Baltic peoples asked to be incorporated into the Soviet Union.²¹ The Red Army was presented as liberating Baltic farmers and fishermen from the German invaders. This theory neatly encapsulated a Russian rescue of the Balts from both an internal and external fascist threat. The standard Soviet view went even further in seeing the entry of the Baltic States as a natural development, because it increased the security and economic power of the Soviet Union (that is to say, Russia).²² Even after the commission set up by Gorbachev to investigate the question of secret protocols to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact admitted to their existence, and the Congress of People's Deputies condemned them as illegal and invalid (December 1989), the official tenet of voluntary incorporation and deliverance from German forces remained unchanged. The importance to Russians of the "Great Patriotic War"²³ as a collective defence of the Russian heartland prevents them from understanding the inherent contradiction between protection and conquest.

²⁰ John Dunlop: *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Princeton 1993), p. 290.

²¹ Radio Free Europe Research, *Baltic Area Situation Report*, No 6, 25 September 1986.

²² Gerner and Hedlund, p. 62.

From the point of view of the Balts, the legacy of annexation and of the following mass deportations cannot be underestimated. Russians, particularly those who live in the Baltic States, have difficulties understanding why they are judged for crimes committed over 50 years ago and in the name of a different regime. But for the Balts, they represent the foreign occupiers. The actual concepts of annexation and occupation were the basis for validating the Baltic independence drive from the late 1980s onwards. Most other states had not recognised the incorporation of the Baltics into the Soviet Union, which was an important legitimising factor. The existence of the secret protocols to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was a rallying point for the independence movements and some of the earliest demonstrations against Soviet power took place to commemorate what was boldly stated as the “victims of the Pact”.²⁴

State Continuity

The question of state continuity ties in with the entire issue of the 1940 annexation. The Baltic States maintain that at the re-independence of 1991, they reconstituted the republics that existed until an involuntary incorporation into the Soviet Union.²⁵ They do not regard themselves as successor states of the Soviet Union, but as having been illegally annexed and occupied. Russia has at times used the wording “post-Soviet space” as opposed to talking about the CIS and Baltic States separately. The Russian position leads to the Baltic States being seen as a single geopolitical unit, and it emphasises their former Soviet connection instead of the continuity of their inter-war status. The idea of state continuity is important for Baltic identity and in terms of policy, the most significant implications of this concept have been seen in the minority and security spheres. Automatic citizenship has been denied to post-1940 immigrants on the basis that they have arrived under illegal conditions of occupation. As for the security aspect, the minor border changes in 1940, which returned some territory to Russia that had been granted to Estonia and Latvia in 1920, led to a deadlock in border demarcation after 1991. The Baltics insisted on a

²³ This is the term Russians use for the Second World War.

²⁴ In this thesis I have used the terms “annexation” and “occupation period” without particular uneasiness, as it is widely considered an established historical concept.

²⁵ This interpretation was strengthened by the response of the Finnish government, which claimed it did not need to officially recognise the Baltic States in 1991, because the recognition it had promulgated in 1919 had never been revoked.

recognition of the only legitimate inter-state treaty among the countries – the 1920 peace treaties – and this entailed a territorial claim.

Ethnic Troubles

The immense demographic changes in the Baltic region since 1939 are possibly without parallel in Europe. Four major changes took place. During the German occupation of the Baltic States, the Baltic Germans were relocated to Germany, and the Jewish population was annihilated almost in its entirety. In the immediate aftermath of Soviet seizure of the Baltics, deportations reduced the numbers of the Balts by a considerable percentage. Emigration and war depleted the populations further, and subsequent waves of deportations (up until 1949) had a disastrous effect. The immigration of Russians and other (mostly Slavic) nationalities throughout the Soviet period and the low indigenous birthrates caused far-reaching changes in the ethnic composition of the Baltic States.²⁶ This is a legacy that determines the conditions of relations to a great extent.

In late 1985, the First Secretary of the Estonian communist party, Karl Vaino, still openly displayed strong pro-Russian attitudes in emphasising that “the Estonian people’s historical destiny has indissoluble links with the (---) Soviet state (---) and the Great Russian People.”²⁷ With accelerating pace, events were to show that his calls to “come to terms with the limitations of nationality” went unheard in Soviet Estonia. The fact that he dwelled on the nationality issue so early in Gorbachev’s term serves to demonstrate that the nationality question was very much alive in the republic even before glasnost. Vaino admonished incessant anti-Soviet and pro-Western attitudes of the Estonians further at the Party Congress in March.²⁸ This presents one example of the latent ethnic tensions and shows that the ethnic problems of the 1990s have not been caused by new-born nationalistic euphoria following the independence struggle, but their rationale lies deeper in the Soviet experience.

²⁶ Jeff Chinn and Robert Kaiser: *Russians as the New Minority: Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Soviet Successor States* (Oxford 1996), p. 96.

²⁷ RFE, Baltic Area Situation Report, No 7, 6 September 1985.

²⁸ RFE, Baltic Area Situation Report, No 3, 1 April 1986.

The vast numbers of workers who immigrated to Estonia and Latvia (less to Lithuania due to its predominantly agricultural structure) throughout the Soviet period caused serious alarm in these republics, where it was feared that the indigenous nationalities would soon become minorities.²⁹ These antagonistic feelings began to be expressed openly in the glasnost period. Economic and environmental concerns combined with the ethnic question made the immigration issue even more contested. A labour-intensive industry, which had to import a substantial part of its labour force from outside the Baltic republics, and then exported the commodities, was not regarded as economically sound. Moreover, it was seen to be a deliberate attempt on the part of the central authorities to drown out the Balts in their own republics.³⁰ For most Russians, emigration to Estonia and Latvia meant a considerable rise in living standards.

The hostility in ethnic relations has been accredited in part to the economic structures of the centrally planned system. The enterprises controlled by the central authorities in Moscow tended to be large, whereas those run by the local authorities were small and did not have equal access to resources also distributed by the centre. Wages in heavy industry were higher, and because of the relative overrepresentation of Russians in heavy industry, this was seen as a discriminatory policy, as were the other benefits given to immigrants such as faster access to housing. The vast numbers of Soviet military officers and servicemen also created friction in ethnic relations. More evident however, even before glasnost brought it to the forefront, was the ecological aspect that related to immigration. The most environmental damage was caused by the labour-intensive industrial enterprises, which as a rule mostly employed Russian and other Slavs. For example, plans to build a new Estonian phosphate plant caused large-scale resistance, which was based on sound environmental concerns but with an ethnic undertone. The ecological movements implicitly opposed these immigration policies.

²⁹ Aksel Krich: *The Integration of non-Estonians into Estonian Society* (Tallinn 1997), p. 14; Gershon Shafir: *Immigrants and Nationalists: Ethnic Conflict and Accommodation in Catalonia, the Basque Country, Latvia, and Estonia* (Albany, N.Y 1995), p.159.

³⁰ Aksel Kirch, Maria Kirch and Tarmo Tuisk: *Russians in the Baltic States: to be or not to be?* *Journal of Baltic studies*, Vol 24, 1993, p. 161.

1.2 Break-up

Independence

From the point of view of the Baltic peoples, the independence movement was aimed as much against Russian as Soviet domination and further at Russian immigrants.³¹ As for the Russians resident in the Baltic republics, their attitude towards independence varied across time, place and social group.³² For instance, those living in predominantly Russian areas such as north-eastern Estonia were more prone to negative attitudes than those in ethnically heterogeneous areas whereas those who had been resident for a longer period were more sympathetic to Baltic independence. Although developments such as the new language laws increasing the use of the local languages passed by the legislatures in 1988 gave the Russian-speakers justifiable concerns, the bulk of resistance consisted of specifically pro-Soviet rather than pro-Russian forces. An apparent discrepancy existed between those who were connected to central authorities and those who were not. Baltic Russians in the military, the KGB, the communist party apparatus and in centrally controlled enterprises working mostly as managers all had vital interests which were threatened by the independence movements. They were active in setting up counter movements based on Soviet/Russian opposition.³³ However, the vast majority of Russian settlers consisted of blue-collar workers. They were also affected by the language laws and the prospective change in the status of the republics, but as a rule their Soviet loyalties were weak and so they did not feel as directly threatened. This explains their relatively unenthusiastic response to strike calls.³⁴ The attitudes of these people often changed over time. In the 1991 referendums substantial numbers of Russians supported independence. The strongest support came from the intellectuals, who had associated themselves with the emerging Popular Fronts, which initially were in favour of inclusive citizenship rights.³⁵

³¹ Shafir, p.174; Melvin, Neil: Forging the New Russian Nation: Russian foreign policy and the Russian-speaking communities of the former USSR (London 1994), p.12.

³² Graham Smith: The Resurgence of Nationalism, in the volume The Baltic States: The National Self-Determination of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (Basingstoke 1994), p.135.

³³ John Hiden and Patrick Salmon: The Baltic Nations and Europe: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the twentieth century (Singapore 1994), p. 151.

³⁴ Melvin (1994), p.12.

³⁵ Clemens, p. 142.

Despite the prospect of difficulties in the form of losing economic privileges and the perceived ultranationalist Baltic proclamations related to language issues in particular, many Russians could see positive things in staying in the Baltics even if they were to become independent. Some analysts even go so far as to see that Russians can accept a subordinate position in Baltic States because of the higher and advanced level of these societies, and that the problems are not ethnic or economic, but artificially caused (initially by party-state apparatus officials).³⁶ This does not seem plausible considering that the main ethnic problems pertain to citizenship, but what is interesting is that only 52% of Russians in Latvia and 59% in Estonia considered the Soviet Union as “rodina”, their homeland, in 1991.³⁷ The fact that nearly half of the settlers had lost their connection to the Soviet Union, even in a situation where they live rather isolated from other nationalities, reflects increasing acceptance of the host republics. However, the economic reality of Baltic affluence probably outweighed a sincere appreciation of Baltic culture.

In contrast to the strong national feelings of all the three Baltic indigenous nationalities, there is no distinct and unified national identity of the Russian speaking minorities - the “homo sovieticus” never having emerged. A minor but interesting point to make is that in Riga, the Russian community is decidedly heterogeneous consisting of Russian and Russian-Jewish intellectuals historically present in the city. Their support for Latvian independence was substantial.³⁸

Intermarriage and knowledge of local languages can be seen as relevant to settlers’ attitudes towards the host country. Intermarriage between Latvians and Russians was the third highest in the Soviet republics, at 33% of all marriages according to statistics from 1988.³⁹ In Estonia the equivalent figure was 16%. There may be a causal relationship between this and the fact that language knowledge was also higher in Latvia than in Estonia (17% of Latvian Russians in 1970

³⁶ Leon Gudkov: The Distintegration of the USSR and the Russians in the Republics. *The Journal of Communist Studies*, Vol 9, No 1, 1993, pp 82, 86.

³⁷ Melvin (1994), p. 15 (Quoting *Moskovskie novosti*, 27 January 1991).

³⁸ Anatol Lieven: *The Baltic Revolution: Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia on the Path to Independence* (New Haven 1993), p.174.

³⁹ Shafir, p.179.

as opposed to 12.5% in Estonia, with the figures rising to 21% in Latvia but falling in Estonia by 1989).

Disintegration

The role of the Baltic republics was crucial in the disintegration of the Soviet system. What this means to the Russians is contradictory. In part, the Balts have been accused of bringing about the destruction of the system along with the loss of superpower status. On the other hand, Russia's democratic leadership did not rebuke Baltic independence claims during the summer of 1991, without openly and unequivocally endorsing it either. President Yeltsin did meet the Baltic leaders in Tallinn to sign a declaration acknowledging the "state sovereignty" of all four states concerned. However, he also made claims to support the right of Russia to protect Russians in other former republics before independence had been attained. The attitude towards the Baltic role in the break-up reflects the ambiguous nature of the new Russian identity: whether to accept the disintegration and loss of empire or not. Russians view themselves as the major victims of the Soviet system so for them, Baltic claims that the development of their countries was impeded by Soviet control is not justified.⁴⁰

The role of the Baltics in the break-up of the Soviet Union holds a contradiction also in the fact that the Baltic intelligentsia was perceived by Gorbachev as a natural ally in his reform policy. The economic advancement of the states was presumably also thought to make them a fertile ground for perestroika. However, the Soviet leadership did not view the nationalities question as important until 1988, and even then did not devise a policy for addressing the grievances that had been aired as a result of glasnost. Instead, the leadership was increasingly reacting to events and conducting "crisis management". When accepting diverse social grass roots organisations in the Baltic States, Gorbachev unwittingly let loose ethnic tensions as the issue was not regarded as important. One major mistake of the Soviet leadership was in underestimating the strength of nationalism and overestimating the influence of his proposed reforms to cure ethnic ills.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Lieven, p.176.

The Soviet military and the political and governmental apparatus were vehemently opposed to Baltic independence.⁴² It was a direct threat to the central apparatus as it attacked Soviet sovereignty. The fact that the Baltic republics were instrumental in the disintegration process has led to their dislike by some Russian officers.⁴³ The strategic aspects of relinquishing defence positions and the age-old ambitions in the Baltic region were naturally even more relevant for army professionals than other people. In addition, the Baltic republics, especially Latvia, had been favourite retirement areas for Soviet officers.

The threat of force and its implementation marks a major contrast between attitudes of the Soviet authorities towards Baltic and East European independence movements. The Baltic leaders' calls for negotiations were turned down on the grounds that negotiations could only be conducted with foreign countries. The interesting question is whether this was only because of a prediction that if they let the Baltics go, the whole construct of the union would crumble or to what extent was it a distinct vision that the Baltic States comprised something entirely different to East Europe. This pattern of thought is also reflected in the present Russian attitudes towards the independent Baltic States. Another implication for consequent relations was the illegitimacy of the use of force in the mind of the public and state apparatus. After the violent crack-down in Vilnius and Riga in January 1991 Gorbachev shifted the blame for the casualties to local military commanders, which may imply that he understood that the use of violence had become unjustified even in Soviet policy. This is also reflected in the fact that most of the confrontation took place through telegrams sent to the Lithuanian president Landsbergis and through economic pressure instead of military action.⁴⁴ The use of brutal force was objectionable also to many Russians in the Baltic, who as a result increased their support to Baltic independence claims.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Smith (1994), p.139.

⁴² Stanley Vardys and Judith Sedaitis: Lithuania: The Rebel Nation (Oxford 1997), p.163.

⁴³ Lieven, p.203.

⁴⁴ Vardys and Sedaitis, p.169.

⁴⁵ Riina Kionka and Raivo Vetik: Estonia and the Estonians, in the volume The Nationalities Question in the Post-Soviet States (London 1996), p.140.

1. 4 Conclusion

The long-held perception of Russians is that the Baltic area is strategically significant or even vital for the security of Russia and therefore a “natural” region of acquisition and influence. This assumption has been justified also by European balance of power theories, as the Baltics have given a “window to Europe” to both Russia and the Soviet Union. This sense of legitimate domination is, however, qualified by other conceptions. The region is perceived concurrently as a regional entity (the ‘ostzeiskii provintsij’, later “Pribaltika”; both denote the region next to the Baltic Sea) and as distinctively different from the other republics in terms of advanced development (“our West”).

Conflicts and tensions dominate the overall legacy of historic relations between Russia and the Baltic States. These negative impulses give hardly any hope for a positive development of Russian-Baltic relations. Russian policy towards the Baltic States is bound by these, and a host of other factors. Where can Russia go from such an imperialist past? As the following chapters will demonstrate, the past is not the only factor in decision-making. Legacies are important, but so are choices made in the present. The interaction between present and past developments will be followed in this thesis.

2 The Stages of Russian Policy

In order to map out the general development of Russian-Baltic relations in 1992-96, this chapter has a double task. To assess Russian policy towards the Baltic States, it must be put in the context of Russia's general foreign policy orientation to the West, and the simultaneous formulation of policy towards the other former republics of the Soviet Union. In addition, for the purposes of analysis, the period will be presented chronologically in three stages. The themes covered are the permanent elements of Russian policy: security, minority rights and economic links. The aims and means of Russian policy are deduced from the dynamics of the interaction of these elements, as evidenced by the events shaping the relations. One might expect one or another element to be emphasised at different times, and vis-à-vis the Baltic States, there was never serious competition for precedence: even after the completion of the withdrawal process Russian policy was primarily concerned with security issues, NATO expansion in particular. However, all elements influenced the formation of Russian policy, and in this chapter I will examine their mutual balance.

The criteria used to distinguish the three stages are not categorical, but signify shifting trends. The stages highlight the varying degrees of influence the various elements have had on policy formulation, and are reflections of the general pattern of developments in Russian foreign policy in this period. In a relatively non-contradictory initial phase, the emphasis was on the gradually emerging negotiations on troop withdrawal. This was transformed by increasing interaction of the withdrawal and the minority issue, whereupon the nature of Russian policy became more demanding. This development was based on the shift in focus of Russian foreign policy in general, by which it began to lay more emphasis on its relations with the other republics of the former Soviet Union (henceforth "the FSU") after a deviation in the direction of a passively pro-Western policy. The lack of clearly defined objectives in terms of the "near abroad" countries, that had characterised the initial phase, was consciously changed by policy-makers who understood the value of the diaspora issue and the geo-strategic concerns that had never really disappeared. The end of military presence in the Baltics allowed Russia to actually use stronger and more diverse pressure tactics in the pursuit of its own aims.

2.1 Moderation: 1992

In the immediate aftermath of the attempted coup in August 1991, the three Baltic States Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania declared the restoration of their independence. Russia's independence was effectively brought about by the creation of the CIS and the dissolution of the USSR in 1992. The new Russia and its leadership accepted the declarations of sovereignty of the Baltic States as a continuation of the policies of Russian President Boris Yeltsin, who had supported Baltic independence claims. During this early period, Russia needed to be quickly accepted by the West as a democratic partner. The essential foreign policy aim focused therefore on developing both political and economic ties to Western countries and international financial organisations as a response to the acute crisis Russia was facing as a consequence of the Soviet economic system. This paved the way for Russia's relatively positive and non-confrontational stance towards the Baltic region. The lack of a coherent strategy and clearly defined objectives vis-à-vis the Baltic States implied also that the region was not considered of primary importance to Russian leaders at this stage. This is not to say that geo-strategic imperatives were totally ignored in Russia, but that the balance of influences on foreign policy making was tipped away from the immediate neighbouring states.

The main elements at this stage of Russian policy consisted of security issues relating to troop withdrawals from all three states, and the question of the substantial Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia. These problems were taken to the international arena by different parties in order to gain support, but the issues were dealt with independently from each other. In the initial stage of independent statehood, Russia's approach towards the Baltic States can, all in all, be characterized as one of moderate accommodation. The question of troop withdrawal was the immediate concern of the newly independent Baltic States: the demand for the withdrawal of army, KGB and MVD forces came instantly after the re-establishment of independence. Thus it was clearly the most prominent issue in Russian-Baltic relations at this stage.

Negotiations on withdrawal had begun already in September 1991 with delegations named by Gorbachev.⁴⁶ Initially, the Soviet side had set the year 1994 as the starting point of the withdrawal process, that is to say, after the pullout from East Germany and Poland would be completed. Russia took over the jurisdiction of the Soviet armed forces in January 1992 and agreed to regard the troops as “foreign military forces to be withdrawn”.⁴⁷ Russia’s acknowledgement of the necessity of withdrawing the former Soviet troops from the territory of the newly independent states was considered to be an important reflection of its new democratic credentials. The basic understanding of the need to withdraw troops from the independent Baltic States was no longer officially questioned by the beginning of 1992, despite the occasional statement to the effect that Russia would be interested in retaining or jointly administering some bases in the region.⁴⁸ Sporadically, officials might also issue a blunt statement to the effect that the troops should stay put until the Baltic States could afford to finance the relocation, in particular the construction of housing for the military personnel in Russia. A degree of confusion was detectable among the Russian leadership concerning timetable pronouncements, with different officials giving dates ranging from the year 2000 to 1993 as the completion date. The conditions set by Russia were that social guarantees for military pensioners should be settled, housing questions resolved and the pullout from East Germany and Poland completed before Baltic withdrawal was to begin. However, troops in Lithuania and Latvia began their pullout in February 1992.⁴⁹ Lithuania became the first state to sign a formal agreement on withdrawal in September 1992, with the completion date set at the end of August 1993.⁵⁰ Despite the twists and turns of the negotiation process, which can be interpreted as Russian stalling tactics, often on economic grounds, the validity of the promise to withdraw was never officially renounced.

The ethnic issue was the second element in Russian policy, but at this stage it did not yet command a major role in official policy, although the situation of Russian minorities and their

⁴⁶ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report (RFE/RL) Vol 2, No 25, 18 June 1993, p.50 “Progress on Withdrawal from the Baltic States” (Dzintra Bungis), p. 50.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁴⁸ RFE/RL, Vol 1, No 37, 18 September 1992, p. 66 “Military and Security Notes” (Stephen Foye and Alfred Reisch).

⁴⁹ *Izvestia*, 3 February 1992, p.2 “Troop Withdrawal from the Baltic States to Begin in February” (Nikolai Laskevich and Irina Litvinova). (Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press (CDPSP), Vol XLIV, No 5.)

lack of citizenship rights in Estonia and Latvia were topics frequently discussed in the Russian media. The existence of ethnic problems was evident and was articulated by the Russian side on various occasions, but the criticism did not reach vast dimensions. The first institution to articulate any policy on the issue was the State Council of the RSFSR⁵¹: it issued a statement on its intention to use all lawful means to protect the rights of Russians in all of the former republics in the autumn.⁵² Therefore it can be assumed that the question of Russian minorities was acknowledged to be of importance from the very beginning, but it did not immediately become prominent in Russia's official policy towards the Baltic States.

The citizenship issue was avidly debated in the three Baltic States. In mid-October 1992, Latvia adopted guidelines for its citizenship law. Through the 1970s and 1980s two thirds of population growth had been accounted for by immigration and so the new nationalistic-minded Supreme Council was determined to set strict guidelines for naturalisation. The criteria for citizenship included knowledge of language and the Constitution, 16 years residence and an oath of allegiance. Dual citizenship would not be recognised.⁵³ The Estonian Supreme Council adopted the 1938 citizenship law in November 1992 with amendments soon to follow.⁵⁴ Lithuania had opted for a more inclusive citizenship law in 1989 whereby citizenship was granted without nationality considerations, and even after a later amendment in December 1991 that introduced e.g. residence requirement (10 years), the law was much more liberal in comparison to those of its neighbours.⁵⁵

Towards the end of 1992, the opposition outside official circles to the lack of involvement in the affairs of the Russian diaspora grew in strength and numbers. Leading officials as well as conservative and nationalist opposition politicians increasingly came out in favour of linking the issue of troop withdrawal to the rights of the Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltic States.

⁵⁰ RFE/RL, Vol 1, No 49, 11 December 1992, p.23 "Conference in Salzburg on Baltic Security" (Jan Arved Trapans).

⁵¹ The Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic.

⁵² RFE/RL, Vol 1, No 43, 30 October 1992, p.72 "Weekly Review" (Dzintra Bungs, Suzanne Crow, Hal Kosiba).

⁵³ RFE/RL, Vol 2, No 1, 1 January 1993, p. 98 "Latvia: Towards Full Independence" (Dzintra Bungs).

⁵⁴ RFE/RL, Vol 1, No 50, 18 December 1991, p. 38 "Citizenship legislation in the Baltic States" (Dzintra Bungs, Saulius Girnius and Riina Kionka).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Gradually, the strength of this opinion persuaded decision-makers to take a harder line, which can be interpreted as giving in to pressure from nationalist or “patriotic” forces.⁵⁶ The accusation of Baltic ‘human rights violations’ became widespread in this connection, along with the internationalisation of the ethnic conflict. This led to intensified deterioration of relations between Russia and Latvia, and Estonia.

The Baltic States saw early on that bringing the troop withdrawal issue to the international arena would increase the pressure on Russia for a speedier completion of the process, and thus appealed to the United Nations and to the United States for support. Russia interpreted this as a tactic used purely against itself and for a long time continued to emphasise and work only through bilateral negotiations with each Baltic country. The internationalisation of the withdrawal question began in earnest at the 1992 CSCE summit meeting, where its concluding document included a demand for “early, orderly and complete withdrawal”, which must have satisfied both sides - early and orderly being interpreted in an appropriate way. Baltic leaders called for NATO assistance in May, but the Russian response ruled out third parties mediating in the withdrawal issue.⁵⁷ However, the internationalisation of the issue led to the US Senate stipulating that its aid to Russia was contingent on the continued process of removal of forces from the Baltics.⁵⁸

In terms of the minority question Russia was, on the contrary, quick to internationalise its case. The foreign minister, Andrei Kozyrev, has widely been portrayed as a believer in international law and the arbitration of the international community on inter-state conflicts.⁵⁹ The subsequent change in his policy, which will become clear later, suggests a less sincere belief in these values or at least in their implementation. The personal beliefs of the politician aside, he wanted to use the concept of international law and human rights to push through changes in the situation of the Russian minorities. Russia’s first steps were to present a memorandum outlining the supposed

⁵⁶ Nikolai Rudensky: Russian minorities in the Newly Independent States: An International Problem in the Domestic Context of Russia Today, in the volume National Identity and Ethnicity in Russia and the New States of Eurasia (Armonk, N.Y 1994), p. 74.

⁵⁷ RFE/RL Vol. 1, No 40, 9 October 1992, p. 54 “Military and Security Notes” (Stephen Foye and Alfred Reisch); RFE/RL Vol. 1, No 46, 20 November 1992, p. 49 “Military and Security Notes” (Foye and Reisch).

⁵⁸ RFE/RL Vol. 1, No 27, 17 July 1992, p. 59 “Military and Security Notes” (Foye).

⁵⁹ Paul Kolstoe: Russians in the Former Soviet Republics (London 1995), p. 283.

human rights violations against the minorities in Estonia and Latvia at the Council of Europe in May, at the UN in September and at the CSCE meeting in December 1992. As a result, several missions were sent to the Baltic States to monitor their minority situation. They all presented slightly different reports, providing enough ammunition to please either side in the dispute, when only partially reviewed in the national press. Shortly after Kozyrev's first memorandum, the commander of the Russian North-Western Group of Forces, Colonel Valerii Mironov, made veiled threats by implying that a Transdniester-type conflict could erupt in the Baltic region because of the problems between the ethnic groups.⁶⁰ However, the Russian leadership refrained from painting such scenarios.

Economic relations were strained throughout the initial period. The Baltics repeatedly accused Russia of staging an outright economic blockade, in terms of oil and raw material imports in particular. The trade and economic co-operation agreements between the states signed in March 1992 did not eliminate the problem of energy supplies, and it was thought that Russia was using economic levers as a means of applying pressure in the Baltic States. However, dire economic problems on both sides, increasing Baltic payment debts to Russian enterprises, and the virtual break-down of trade links and supply routes across the former Soviet Union created a substantial part of the problems. Therefore it would not be justified to claim that Russian policy at this stage was intentionally trying to disrupt the Baltic States for its own purposes.

⁶⁰ RFE/RL Vol. 1, No 23, 5 June 1992, p. 59 "Military and Security Notes" (Stephen Foye and Douglas Clarke). See also RFE/RL Vol 2, No 1, 1 January 1993, p. 91 "Estonia: A Difficult Transition" (Riina Kionka).

2.2 Bellicose Rhetoric: late 1992 – mid-1994

In the second stage of its policy towards the Baltic States, Russia underscored the linkage between troop withdrawal and the rights of Russian minorities. The rights of Russian residents in the Baltics were to be affirmed before the completion of the withdrawal process. This corresponded with the beginning of a more assertive phase in Russian foreign policy, when it began to emphasise its national interests alongside its relations with the West. In essence, the issue of the defence of Russians' (minority) rights in the newly independent states was co-opted from the nationalist opposition into official policy. Russia can be seen to have moved from a largely accommodating approach in its policy towards the Baltic States to a more dominating and uncompromising role. Negotiations with the Baltic States on the various problematic issues continued throughout the period, but were protracted and complicated. This stage can be said to have lasted from the end of 1992, when the linkage between minority rights and the continued presence of the army was officially made, until the completion of troop withdrawal in August 1994. Russia seemed to be conducting a much more forceful policy: its statements were certainly more harsh than earlier and contained more threats, but even at this stage there were no direct threats from the leadership that would have indicated a reversal of respecting the independence of the Baltic States.

The development of Russian foreign policy in general was characterised by a substantial shift in focus in this period. The foreign policy pursued by Kozyrev had been mocked as the "diplomacy of smiles" and the "policy of yes" throughout 1992, in opposition circles and the media hostile to the Western orientation. The results of the 1993 elections for the Duma increased the power of the patriotic forces, and gradually official policy shifted closed towards the nationalist position.⁶¹ In addition, the shift signified that the leadership had become aware of the importance of the former Soviet territory in terms of security and economics. Policy towards the states in the post-Soviet space became assertive and more systematic. Russia began to increasingly use the expression of the "near abroad" countries in its policy concerning the other former republics. The "near abroad" term suggests that Russia did not conceive of its new neighbours as entirely

foreign entities, but not as elements of domestic policy either. By the end of the year 1993, reasserting influence in the former Soviet republics was declared the foreign policy priority among the Russian leadership and policymakers, and modifications were planned in its policy towards the West. The shift was neatly reflected in Kozyrev's new stance: even he, the "liberal" cornerstone of the Western-oriented policy, began to refer to the "near abroad" with the implicit meaning that the territory constituted an area of de facto Russian dominance.⁶² The territory of the former Soviet Union was no longer regarded simply as an economic liability, but as a region of vital importance.

The inclusion of Baltic States in the "near abroad" concept was not unequivocal. The Baltic States objected fiercely to its connotation, as they did not consider themselves as former Soviet republics at all, having been forcefully incorporated into the union. The question of whether the Baltics are included in the concept is debatable, but is at the heart of the matter when assessing Russia's attitude towards the region. The determined response from the Baltic States to any attempt at grouping them with the CIS countries and the apparent Western policy of driving integration with the Baltics have made it difficult for Russia to embrace them in its "near abroad" policy. Certain inconsistencies were apparent in Russian policy in this respect. Officially, it has been denied that the Baltic States constitute part of the "near abroad".⁶³ Nevertheless, when Kozyrev spelled out the Russian stance vis-à-vis its neighbour states, there was no differentiation between the approach towards the CIS and the Baltic States: "Countries of CIS and the Baltics are a region where Russia's primary vital interests are concentrated. The main threats to these interests also emanate from this region."⁶⁴ Kozyrev also stated that Russia was "prepared to resort to the most far-reaching, tough and radical measures, but within the framework of international law" to protect the rights of ethnic Russians in the former Soviet republics.⁶⁵ Occasionally, even the reference to international law was omitted, when Kozyrev stressed Russia's

⁶¹ Alex Pravda: *The Politics of Foreign Policy*, in the volume *Developments in Russian Politics 4* (Basingstoke 1997), p. 210.

⁶² Roger Kanet and Alexander Kozhemiakin: *The Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* (Basingstoke 1997), p. 31.

⁶³ Lena Jonson: *Russia and the "Near Abroad", Concepts and Trends*, in the volume *The Baltic States in World Politics* (Surrey 1998), p. 112.

⁶⁴ *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 19 January 1994, p. 1 "Foreign Minister Holds Conference on Russian Foreign Policy." (CDPSP Vol. XLVI, No 3.)

right to resort to any measures it felt necessary of “an international, economic, political and other nature” when the rights of Russians were being violated.⁶⁶

Interestingly, often Russia has let a controversial statement rouse anxiety and protest in the Baltic States, and then retract it. The demand that president Yeltsin made in mid-1993 for Russia to be given special powers from the international community to act as a regional peacekeeper in the post-Soviet space serves as an example. When this statement caused uproar in the Baltics, because they interpreted as a direct threat to their sovereignty, the Russian government was quick to correct that the president had not meant the Baltic States should fall under his peacekeeping jurisdiction. Further substantiation of this claim can be taken from another episode in early 1994.

⁶⁷ Kozyrev stated that in the interests of international stability, Russian troops should remain in the former Soviet Union to avoid a security vacuum, the implication of which was that negotiations on troop withdrawal from Latvia and Estonia would face severe obstacles. The following day his spokeswoman denied that the minister had proposed a continuation of Russian presence in the Baltic States, and that the Russian newsagency Itar-Tass had misconstrued his comments when it indicated he had included them.

The Baltics tended to interpret these incidents as an example of Russia’s neo-imperialist thinking, and as proof that Russia had not renounced its claims to having a “special mission” of expanding its civilisation. Russia’s retaliation was to accuse the Baltic States, Estonia in particular, of attempting to discredit Russia in the eyes of the West by making such allegations. Russia also accused Estonia of seeking to encourage separatist movements in Chechnya.⁶⁸ This leads to the conclusion that the Baltics are not considered to be a part of the “near abroad” in Russia’s eyes, but that does not preclude the fact that they are not considered to belong to the “far abroad” either. The accepted policy axiom became that the entire territory of the FSU, Baltic States included, constitutes a vital region for Russia in which its interests cannot be ignored.

⁶⁵ RFE/RL, Vol 2, No 44, 6 November 1993, p. 72 “Weekly Review” (Hal Kosiba and Louisa Vinton).

⁶⁶ ITAR-TASS, 14 January 1993. (Summary of World Broadcasts, Soviet Union (SWB SU)/1589, 18 January 1993, p. A2/1.)

⁶⁷ The Boston Globe, 18 January 1994, p. 7.

⁶⁸ Nezavisimaya gazeta, 3 March 1993, p. 3 “Idea of ‘Cordon Sanitaire’ Is Alive and Well” (Ilya Nikiforov). (CDPSP Vol XLV, No 9.)

Whether these interests could be denied to Russia was the crux of the problem in terms of the Baltic States.

At this stage of Russian-Baltic relations, Russian rhetorical attacks at the state level had adopted most of the arguments of the patriotic front. Nevertheless, in terms of policy, no extreme action was taken against the Baltics. A case in point was the event that marked the very beginning of this phase in Russian policy, namely the decree issued by Yeltsin in October 1992 suspending the pullout of troops from the Baltics. The decision was seen to stem from the general hardening of Russian foreign policy and the influence of conservative nationalist forces on the president.⁶⁹ Decisively, in this directive Yeltsin explicitly linked the issue of human rights to the withdrawal, stating that no agreements concerning the troops would be signed with Latvia and Estonia "until they have brought their (human and civil rights) legislation into line with international standards."⁷⁰ The implication was that the troops would remain to protect the Russian civilians from perceived discrimination. He also stated that the condition for any economic agreements would be the resolution of these problems.⁷¹ The decree, however, had no practical consequences as withdrawal continued. By way of another example, the conflict in Russia between Yeltsin and the Duma in 1993 did not directly affect Russia's policy towards the Baltic States either in terms of practical policy. A broad consensus on foreign policy was established after the defeat of the parliamentary opposition and by the end of the year the assertiveness of Russia's foreign policy only continued to intensify.

All the above led to significant changes in Russia's Baltic policy. Attempting to impress the West with speedy withdrawal was no longer on the agenda because of the change in policy priorities. More emphasis needed to be placed on safeguarding and expanding Russian national interests and the complaints about selling out to Western interests were to be disquieted. Russia did not renounce the use of pressure tactics against the countries of the region should they not conform to these interests. Having been relatively co-operative with the Baltic States in terms of

⁶⁹ RFE/RL, Vol 1, No 46, 20 November 1992, p. 30 "Russian Politics Complicates Baltic Troop Withdrawal" (Stephen Foye).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁷¹ *Izvestia*, 30 October 1992, p. 1 "Troop Withdrawal from the Baltic States Suspended" (Boris Vinogradov). (CDPSP, Vol XLIV, No 44.)

troop withdrawal, Russia now claimed that it was necessary to retain military presence in the region to safeguard the Russian population and at least the rights of the military personnel themselves. Defence minister Pavel Grachev threatened openly on one occasion that the troops would stay until the minority question was resolved.⁷² Despite the threatening rhetoric, no drastic action was taken to enforce the verbal threats. Troop withdrawal continued and the numbers of soldiers continued to decrease in all three Baltic States. In Latvia the decline was from 58 000 soldiers in the spring to less than 30 000 by the end of 1992.⁷³ Eventually the negotiations resumed as well, despite no official cancellation of Yeltsin's October decree.

To complicate matters even further, the border question entered the negotiations between Estonia, Latvia and Russia in this period. Both Baltic countries held the view that the state borders should be considered to be those decreed by the 1920 peace treaties, thus claiming back territories annexed into the RSFSR after the incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union. The territories in question were small and populated almost exclusively by Russians, so it was more a question of principle from the Baltic perspective. The issue came to a head when the Supreme Soviet unilaterally declared the administrative borders with all three Baltic States to be the official state borders.⁷⁴ Russia was adamant in its justification of the principle of the inviolability of borders in Europe: all attempts to revise borders would be unequivocally viewed as a destabilising factor in European life.⁷⁵ In addition, the actual shifting of state borders in the Baltics to the pre-WWII situation would have meant that Lithuania would lose its capital city and an area around it to Poland.

Attacks on Estonia and Latvia on their citizenship legislation increased in both in their vigour and frequency. Sporadically, Russia also threatened Estonia and Latvia with cutting off their gas pipeline and reducing the supply of raw materials for their industries. The hardening of Russian attitudes was clearly evidenced by an attitude survey of Russian Duma deputies, in which Estonia was rated as the country most hostile towards Russia, with the other Baltic States also ranking

⁷² RFE/RL, Vol 2, no 43, 29 October 1993, p.17 "News Briefs: 18 – 22 October 1993".

⁷³ RFE/RL, Vol 2, no 1, 1 January 1993, p. 97 "Latvia: Toward Full Independence" (Dzintra Bungas).

⁷⁴ RFE/RL, Vol 1, No 46, 20 November 1992, p. 64 "Weekly Review" (Suzanne Crow and Riina Kionka).

⁷⁵ *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 9 April 1993, p. 3 "Troop Withdrawal from Estonia Continues" (Natalya Pachegina). (CDPSP, Vol XLV, No 14.)

high.⁷⁶ Provocative concepts such as "apartheid" and "ethnic cleansing" began to be used by Russian officials in connection with the Estonian and Latvian citizenship laws. However, no concrete steps were taken to enforce the verbal threats. The implication therein is, that although the Russian leadership found it necessary to conform to conservative and nationalist demands, and took a more confrontational stance in defence of the diaspora and its "vital" national interests, the primary objective still remained to retain good relations with the West and to prevent violent hostilities on its borders.

Occasionally, the Russian leadership still seemed perplexed by the key question of whether Russia should officially combine troop pullout with citizenship issues and sent confusing signals to the outside world. This was a reflection of internal struggles between various centres of power in a situation where policy-making was in disarray and division of powers was unclear among the Foreign and Defence Ministries as well as the Presidential Security Council.⁷⁷ The Defence Ministry consistently implied that it did make the connection, by claiming that the troops would remain until discrimination ceased, but the Foreign Ministry did not always acknowledge the link between the two issues, and there was no uniformity of opinion on the topic. This inconsistency may have been used as policy tactics, to "periodically have the military scare Tallinn and Riga and then have diplomats soothe things".⁷⁸

Differentiation

Russia's relations with Estonia and Latvia deteriorated considerably over this period. With regard to Lithuania, it is interesting to note that there were no problems with Lithuanian treatment of its (small) Russian minority, and yet the suspension of troop withdrawal in October 1992 and Grachev's subsequent threat were both extended to cover all three Baltic States. It seemed that Lithuanian efforts to build good relations with Russia did not deter the Russian side from treating it on a par with the more offending neighbouring states. As in the other countries, the withdrawal from Lithuania continued in practice. But at the last minute, Russia in fact suddenly halted the

⁷⁶ RFE/RL, Vol 1, No 47, 27 November 1992, p. 65 "Weekly Review" (Hal Kosiba and Ann Sheehy).

⁷⁷ Stephen Larrabee and Theodore Karasik: Foreign and Security Policy Decisionmaking Under Yeltsin (Washington, D.C 1997), p. 7.

⁷⁸ Izvestia, 22 October 1993, p.3 "Pavel Grachev is Blackmailing Riga and Tallinn on His Own Initiative. So Claim Russian Diplomats" (Gennady Charodeyev and Konstantin Eggert). (CDPSP, Vol.XLV, No 42.)

withdrawal, two weeks before the agreed deadline of 31 August, 1993. The alleged reason was the lingering disagreement over the issue of compensation. The gravity of the situation was reflected by the fact that contrary to previous threats and halts, this one concerned the abrogation of a formal agreement, signed between Russia and Lithuania in September 1992, and was presented by the Foreign Ministry as opposed to the Defence Ministry.⁷⁹ The process was, however, duly completed and contrary to the situation with the other two Baltic countries, Lithuania signed trade agreements with Russia, including the mutual granting of most-favoured-nation status, and transit arrangements relating to Kaliningrad were negotiated.

Russian-Estonian negotiations on withdrawal ultimately reached a compromise between the two sides' demands in November 1993, when the completion date was set on August 31, 1994. The number of troops continued to decline while the negotiations were going on. The success of the negotiation process for Estonia can be seen as surprising, considering the new low-point in relations that year, when the Riigikogu (the Estonian parliament) had passed the new Law on Aliens. The caused great opposition and protests in Russia and among the non-citizens in Estonia. The statement issued by Yeltsin in response to the law was uncompromising: it reminded Estonia of "geopolitical and demographic realities that some seem to have forgotten" and threatened that "Russia will not be able to remain in the position of an indifferent observer" when the rights of Russian-speakers are not respected.⁸⁰ In the end, when the law was adopted, it contained amendments proposed by the CSCE and the Council of Europe. Although the Russian President and the Foreign Ministry had criticised the law in harsh terms, it was the Duma that called for "political, economic and other kinds of influence to bear on the Estonian Republic, including a total suspension of the withdrawal of Russian Federation troops".⁸¹ Russia's animosity towards Estonia was explicitly reflected in its attitude to Estonian membership in the Council of Europe. Even though not a full member itself, Russia attempted to block Estonia's

⁷⁹ The Washington Post, 23 August 1993, p. A1.

⁸⁰ Statement by the President of the Russian Federation. Taken from Rossiiskaya gazeta, 25 June 1993, p.2. (CDPSP, Vol XLV, No 25.)

⁸¹ Sevodnya, 2 July 1993, p.1 "Russian Parliament Forbids Troop Withdrawal from Estonia" (Aleksei Zubro). (CDPSP, Vol XLV, No 26.)

admission by claiming it to be “premature” and in the end, Kozyrev avoided the Council’s meeting where Estonian membership was confirmed as a diplomatic snub.⁸²

In the case of Latvia, the withdrawal negotiations were concluded when a compromise solution was eventually reached. The agreements stipulating a withdrawal timetable and the rental of the Skrunda radar facility were arrived at only a few months before the completion date of the pullout.⁸³ The completion date was set as it had been in Estonia, with Latvia agreeing to rent the radar base at Skrunda to Russia until August 1998 with an additional 18 months time to dismantle the installation. This annulled one of the major irritants in the relations between the two countries. With respect to the ethnic issue, the rhetoric on the Russian side was increasing in tone and strength. The Latvian election law on local government was adopted in January 1994 that excluded non-citizens from the suffrage. The debates over the draft citizenship law continued and when it was finally passed in June, the law raised international objections. Russia accused Latvia of intentionally pursuing policies that sought to expel Russian-speakers and of harbouring an ideology of racism.

Overall, this period in Russian-Baltic relations was characterised by harsh accusations and enmity. This was reflected by Russia’s continuing policy of addressing the international community with its grievances concerning the status of the minorities, and by the enemy image it thus attempted to propagate of the Baltic States both internationally and among Russians in the Baltic. Negotiations between the countries were constantly halted by Russian demands to include agreements on civil and political rights of the Russian speakers in the overall accords of the withdrawal treaties. Russia made constant threats to halt the withdrawal process throughout the period, but in the end, the last troops departed on schedule at the end of August 1994. Nonetheless, the final withdrawal signified that the Russian government upheld the recognition of Baltic independence. With the removal of the last Russian troops from Estonia and Latvia, the time was ripe for a new alteration in policy.

⁸² Izvestia, 12 May 1993, p.3 “Russia Tries to Block Estonia’s Admission to the Council of Europe” (Yuri Kovalenko). (CDPSP, Vol XLV, No 19, p.18.)

⁸³ Nezavisimaya gazeta, 5 May 1994, p.3 “Yeltsin and Ulmanis Reach Agreement” (Vitaly Portnikov). (CDPSP, Vol XLVI, No 18.)

2.3 Opposing NATO: mid-1994 – early 1997

The third stage of Russian policy towards the Baltic States, beginning from the completion of the troop withdrawal, was marked by the continuation of security concerns as the crux of Russian-Baltic relations. The question of NATO expansion and the underlying context of European security overshadowed other aspects of these relations in this period. Conflict concerning citizenship issues did not disappear, however, by any means, and statements on the plight of the Russian minorities were hardly moderated. Although Russian interests included both the security aspect and the protection of its nationals in the Baltic States, the security questions can be seen to have dominated in the actual policy-making.

The policy arsenal in the hands of the Russian leadership changed considerably after the completion of the withdrawal process, which justifies the division of the second and third stage into separate phases. Once its military presence had ended, Russia had more freedom to use pressure tactics in the sphere of diplomacy and to use its economic leverage, because it was no longer considered an occupying power. Kozyrev immediately made a promise of “speaking much more loudly” in the defence of his compatriots.⁸⁴ The ethnic issue did not cause direct threats of intervention Latvia or Estonia at this stage either. In this sense as well, it was the NATO issue that commanded most concern and caused the harshest reaction. In general, the minority question was exploited to a greater extent, but in terms of economics, threats of sanctions as a means of coercion were replaced by delaying negotiations over the granting of most favoured nation -status (MFN). Minority and economic issues combined to make the Russian stance towards Baltic EU-membership mostly favourable, as increased wealth and co-operation with Western Europe was considered to be conducive to both more relaxed citizenship legislation and a lessened desire on the part of the Baltic Russians to immigrate back to the homeland. The prospect of the Baltic States joining the EU was considered by Russia to be a positive development for its own economic development, as it would bring more EU members to its borders, but in particular, through being an alternative to NATO.

⁸⁴ William Maley: Does Russia Speak for Baltic Russians? *The World Today*, Vol 51, No 1, 1995, p.4.

In Russia's foreign policy in general, this stage was marked by a clearer definition of national interests and greater assertiveness in pursuing them. The overall strategy was discernible, whereas the tactics chosen could vary and continue to cause disagreement among different actors. The recognition that the neighbouring states constituted a vital area for Russia led to the policy of maximising Russian influence in the region in the tradition of "great powers". Parallel to this, the recognition of global interdependency in economic terms and of the importance of Western financial co-operation precluded any major deviations from the general path of co-operation in the world community. The change of foreign minister reflected the permanent shift in tactics that had already taken place. Kozyrev, who had long been blamed for endangering Russia by means of increasing dependency on the West, and whose policy has been characterised by "hard-edged but impotent declarations"⁸⁵ was replaced by Yevgenii Primakov in January 1996. The transformations in Russia's Baltic policy brought about by these personnel changes were not substantial, but concerned more the increased coherence of policy as a result of the receding differences between the Foreign and Defence Ministries' tactics. Primakov personally emphasised the use of Russia's economic leverage in policy in order to bind the neighbouring regions closer to the centre⁸⁶, in the light of which it was not surprising that Russia's Baltic transit trade continued to expand.

The most significant issue in Russian-Baltic relations was the question of NATO expansion and Russia's rejection of the idea of Baltic membership in the alliance. Russia remained unequivocally and adamantly opposed to it:

"There can be no question of even the hypothetical possibility of extending NATO's sphere of operation to the Baltic countries. Such a prospect is categorically unacceptable to Russia, and we would regard steps in that direction as posing a direct challenge to our national

⁸⁵ Kolstoe, p. 271.

⁸⁶ Aivars Stranga: Russia and the Security of Baltic States 1991-1996, p.179.

security interests and destroying the fundamental structures of European stability."⁸⁷

Russian opposition to the alliance's eastward move was modified to accept the membership of the three Central European states in combination with its own charter with NATO. Vis-à-vis the Baltics, Russia never changed its view of their membership being utterly unacceptable, and expected its pressure to act as a veto on the geographic range of the expansion of the alliance. A significant development on the domestic political scene was that opposition to NATO united all factions of the political arena, thus generating a significant consensus on Russian strategy and national interests. Russia's position on NATO also reflected its growing geo-political concerns in foreign policy. Its interests were to retain hegemony in the post-Soviet space, and avoid the threat of for forces on its borders. The main point was that although Russia was seen to stop short of trying to assert military control over the whole area of the FSU (Baltics included), its policy was to prevent any other country from exerting influence in the region at its expense. The Russian view was that this was a pragmatic policy, whereas the Baltic States interpreted it as a return to traditional spheres of influence –thinking. The policy of dictating or influencing the security decisions of neighbouring states was not perceived by Russians as anything but their legitimate right.

Differentiation

Russian-Estonian relations deteriorated increasingly through this stage and became evidently the most strained of the three Baltic States. Despite the fact that the primary objective of both sides in using harsh rhetoric was to appease their own domestic constituencies, the tensions constituted a big problem and Russia clearly put more pressure on Estonia than the other Baltic States. Russia accused Estonia of trying to present Russia on the international and especially on the European scene as a threatening force hoping that this would give it better position towards integration into European institutions and structures.⁸⁸ The mutual accusations centred on earlier themes.

⁸⁷ Yeltsin's letter to Clinton on eve of Baltic presidents' visit to the US. Taken from Izvestia, 6 July 1996, p. 2 "Secret Yeltsin-Clinton Correspondence" (Konstantin Eggert and Maksim Yusin). (CDPSP, Vol XLVIII, No 27.)

⁸⁸ Transition, Vol 2, No 11, 31 May 1996, p.42 "Relations with Russia Turn Bitter" (Saulius Girnius).

Russia's primary objections were the Estonian territorial claims and the exclusion of non-citizens from political life in all but local elections.

The question of annexation was again brought up during the Russian-Estonian border talks. Russia's stance was not to acknowledge the Soviet occupation, because it would - in Russia's view - have set the stage for possible compensation claims for illegal annexation.⁸⁹ From the Russian view, a border settlement could not be worked on with the other side presenting territorial claims. Progress was made after the Estonians concentrated on a new dimension of the issue: instead of pressing for the acceptance of the 1920 Tartu treaty and the territorial claims resulting from it, the emphasis was turned to the validity of the treaty, renouncing the claims themselves in November 1995.⁹⁰ The historical significance of the treaty as the prime symbol of Estonian nationhood continued to be denied by Russia, which claimed the treaty had no more significance than other historical treaties and could not be thought as relevant to the contemporary situation. The question was more broadly of the different interpretations of Estonia and Russia of the status of the new Estonian republic – whether it was a continuation of the old republic, the development of which was only disrupted by a period of occupation. In Russia's view the 1920 treaty had become null and void at the time of Estonia's incorporation into the Soviet Union. A crucial shift in Estonian policy came at the end of 1996, when it announced its readiness to sign border treaty with Russia, relinquishing its previous demands in connection with the Tartu Treaty.⁹¹ Immediately afterwards, Latvia agreed to act accordingly and sign a treaty on the basis of present *de facto* border.⁹² This readiness can easily be interpreted as having resulted from their desire to join NATO and the EU – neither of which would under any circumstances accept member states that have unresolved border disputes. The issue was not, however, brought to a conclusion.

⁸⁹ Izvestia, 20 March 1992, p.3 “Russia Rejects Latvia's Territorial Claims” (Gennady Charodeyev). (CDPSP, Vol XLIV, No 12.) See also Transition, Vol 2, No 23, 15 November 1996, p.18 “Restraint and Resentment from the Baltic States” (Saulius Girnius).

⁹⁰ The Baltic Independent, Vol 6 No 292, 1 – 7 December 1996, p.2 “Border Talks Snag on Pre-War Treaty” (Burton Frierson).

⁹¹ CDPSP No 45. Sevodnya, 6 November 1996, p.1.

⁹² Ibid., Sevodnya 12 November 1996, p.2.

Russia's application for membership of the Council of Europe was debated in the Council's Parliamentary Assembly on January 26, 1996 amid fierce controversy on the subjects of human rights and the war in Chechnya. The vote was clearly in favour of admission, but Russians focused on the fact that the Estonian delegation did not endorse Russia's bid for membership. This led Kozyrev to ignore Estonia while sending out letters of thanks to Latvia and Lithuania. The interesting point besides the rather restrained response is the fact that two Latvians also voted against Russia and the Lithuanians abstained.⁹³ The minority issue had receded to some extent after Estonia's elections in 1995, after which the Russian community had six representatives in parliament, unlike in Latvia, where the percentage of non-citizens (without voting rights) was still 28%. This supports the contention that Russia had singled out Estonia for harsher policy.

Latvia's stand on the border issue was similar to that of Estonia's and the concepts of annexation and occupation caused more tensions in Russian-Latvian relations in 1996. In the disputed territory only 0.1% of the population of the area are ethnic Latvians – the assumption that Latvia needed an increase in the numbers of its nationality minorities seems rather absurd. The emphasis was elsewhere: the Latvian parliament adopted a resolution demanding recognition of annexation and compensation for damages caused during the occupation period, but not only from Russia but from the international community.⁹⁴ The resolution also condemned the transfer of territory in 1944 and bluntly stated that the Soviet Union “purposefully carried out genocide against the people of Latvia”, but no longer explicitly demanded the return of the area. The Russian reaction was severe and the next round of talks with Russia suffered from the bringing up of this issue.⁹⁵

The change in Russian tactics after its military presence was over was evidenced by the imposition of tariffs on Latvian and Estonian imports as well as the disputes and delays over the implementation of most-favoured-nation-status (MFN). Likewise, Russia used economic pressure on Lithuania to solve the Kaliningrad transit question. Lithuania had followed the most

⁹³ Transition, 31 May 1996, p. 43 “Relations with Russia Turn Bitter” (Saulius Girnius).

⁹⁴ Transition, Vol 2, No 23, 15 November 1996, p.17 “Restraint and Resentment from the Baltic States” (Saulius Girnius).

⁹⁵ Sevodnya, 27 August 1996, p. 2 “Latvian Prime Minister's Visit to Moscow Will Evidently Be Cancelled” (Leonid Velekhov). (CDPSP, Vol XLVIII, No 34.).

conciliatory path towards Russia. However, Russia refused to ratify the trade agreement or to implement the MFN-accords until Lithuania relented on the transit issue. Lithuania extended the earlier transit regulations to cover the year 1995, although it had passed legislation changing and tightening the rules that was to have come into force at the beginning of 1995.⁹⁶ These were to apply to all foreign countries equally. They stipulated the need for individual permits for the transport of personnel and goods, as well as prohibited the simultaneous transport of troops and equipment or weapons and ammunition. In the end, in exchange for an immediate implementation of agreements concerning economic relations, Lithuania left the earlier regulations in force for one year, with the implication that the process would annually be repeated.⁹⁷ In general, by this stage relations between these two states had developed to the level of cordiality.

Overall, Russia's policy was two-fold: on the one hand, it applied sanctions against the Baltic States collectively, and on the other, it reacted more harshly to Estonian policy than corresponding actions of Latvia. Russian-Estonian relations seemed to have been the most strained in the region through this period. Both states reacted to what they termed as provocation in an extremely harsh manner, which only served to reinforce the problematic situation; a kind of vicious circle of recriminations based on more emotion than facts. Relationships between Russia on the one hand and the three Baltic States on the other were differentiated on two dimensions: the size of the Russian minority in the country and the citizenship laws it implemented, and the existence of territorial claims. The relations have changed in substance and tone. Lithuania started out by attempting to put the most pressure on Russia to pull out its troops, but has since established friendlier relations. It had no difficulties on border demarcation (insisting on the borders of 1920 would have meant the loss of a considerable territory, including Vilnius itself) and as its minorities were small, Lithuania had granted citizenship to all residents at the time of re-independence. Latvia's situation at the beginning of the independence period was most constrained by the existence of the largest Russian minority, but it established better relations with Russia than neighbouring Estonia. The demand for Russia to recognise the illegality of the Soviet occupation remained a trouble-spot in the relations between both countries and Russia.

⁹⁶ Ingmar Oldberg: Kaliningrad och Östersjöregionens säkerhet (Stockholm 1998), p. 2.

February 1997 marked a watershed in Russia's Baltic strategy, when the Russian leadership publicised a conceptual outline of its Baltic policy.⁹⁸ This was the first policy-paper that had been made on the issues, and it set the guidelines for the entirety of Russian-Baltic relations. Thus it attempted to scrutinise security, minority, economic and international issues in a consistent way. It stressed the "exceptional importance" of these relations, and even emphasised the mutual economic benefits resulting from trade instead of its earlier insistence that the Baltic States were insignificant to its overall trade. The question of NATO expansion was prominently discussed in the text, and the possibility of further deterioration in Russian-Baltic relations was highlighted: expansion would create "a serious barrier" between the countries. In terms of the minorities, the policy paper set a different tone and stressed their integration as its long-term goal, and advocated further the mediation of international organisations in the issue. An explicit conclusion in the new blueprint was that Russia's Baltic policy had up until that time been poorly planned.

Through this last stage, Russian policy had been more confrontational than co-operational, although again mostly on the rhetorical side. The refusal to negotiate and enact economic treaties did cause some harm on the practical level. Russia's firm stance on NATO was a reflection of its new policy of asserting its own interests even in the face of Western disapproval. The increased sharpness in official statements and the policy paper of February 1997 can be construed as different tactics to counter the threat of NATO expansion and a possible attempt to bargain with the West on the issue. The lengths to which Russia was willing to go in defence of its strategic interests were never tested, as the Baltic States were not included in the first round of membership negotiations with NATO. Russia's policy in refusing to accommodate small states can be interpreted as great power mentality or tactics, not necessarily as a categorical denial of their independent statehood, but insistence that its small neighbouring states keep the interests of their larger neighbour in mind.

⁹⁷ Transition, Vol 1, No 4, 29 March 1995, pp 44-46 "Compromise at the Crossroads" (Saulius Girnius).

⁹⁸ Izvestia, 12 February 1997, p. 1 "Russia Formulates its Baltic Policy". (CDPSP, Vol XLIX, No 7.)

3 The Security Dimension

Security issues belong to the sphere of priority questions that have determined the character and development of Russia's Baltic policy. As neighbouring countries, the security decisions of the Baltic States are obviously of the utmost relevance to Russia. The influence Russia wields in the Baltic region is clearly stronger than its power at present on the international arena is. This gives Russia more opportunities to enact its policies in a way that is conducive to its own interests. The significance of the region is illustrated by the fact that the role of the Baltic States Russian security -thinking is totally disproportionate to their small size. The historically and geographically determined rationale for this has already been set out in the first chapter.

Russia's security agenda is based on the geographical realities of the proximity of the Baltic States on its border. Russia's strategic aims are to keep the Baltics out of military blocks, to deter the possibility of their territory being used to launch an attack against itself and to maintain a strategic presence in the Baltic Sea. Russia sees it as imperative to retain them as part of a neutral buffer zone that exists *de facto* (with the exception of the Norwegian border) around the Russian Federation since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The historical view of Baltic States as a "window" to the West is not intended as approval of the Baltics actually joining any Western security arrangements, lest the "window" then be closed on Russia. However, what Henry Kissinger interprets as an inevitable and lasting craving for conquered territories⁹⁹, has not been visible in Russian Baltic policy in the period 1992-97, as for example the completion of the troop withdrawal process attests.

Security considerations have, in combination with other factors, influenced a policy that is accommodating in issues that have strong international interest and clear legal/moral grounds (such as the withdrawal), but firmly insistent on those points which are deemed vital to national security. But even on the latter points Russia has not threatened outright military intervention. Potential for conflict does exist, due to the inherent differences in the way the two sides view international security arrangements in the post-Cold War era. The Russian sees NATO expansion

⁹⁹ Henry Kissinger: *Diplomacy* (London 1994), p.176.

as hostile and dangerous, whereas the Baltic interpretation of Russian involvement in their security decisions is that Russia is pursuing a neo-imperialist policy in the former Soviet republics. These disagreements, and the importance of security matters in general, contribute to making the security dimension the most prominent one in Russia's Baltic policy.

The major issues to be discussed in this chapter are the question of troop withdrawals and border demarcation, as well as the debate over NATO expansion. These will be preceded by an analysis of the concepts and consensus of security policy, and a brief description of the strategic upheavals that have brought about these security problems.

3.1 Background

The changes of the security environment in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union have signified the need for Russia to conform its security perspectives to the "loss" of the Baltic States and to begin viewing them as objects of its foreign and security policy. The degree to which Russia is willing to do so fundamentally shapes its policies in the region. Russian security concerns in the Baltic area were fundamentally heightened with the re-independence of the Baltic States. Prevailing security considerations deal with the strategic importance of the Baltic coastline, and correspondingly, the permanent interest that the region holds for Russia.¹⁰⁰ In addition, Russian grievances centred on the loss of the Baltic component in the all-union security structures. The fact that Russia was obliged to relinquish a number of strategic bases and ports in the Baltic Sea nullified the goal of a centuries-long ambition to control these warm-water outlets in the north. The potential difficulties in supplying Kaliningrad through an independent Lithuania and alarm over possible isolation added to the sense of loss.¹⁰¹

This transformation had to be dealt with in the context of Russia's altered status in the international system.¹⁰² Russia's Baltic policy was influenced by the overall difficulties in

¹⁰⁰ Robert D. Blackwill: *Russia and Its Periphery*, in the volume *Engaging Russia* (New York 1995), p.15.

¹⁰¹ Kaliningrad, as a Russian exclave, does serve to reduce the Baltic losses. See Anatoly Trynkov: *The Region's Security: An Expert View from Moscow*, in the volume *Kaliningrad: The European Amber Region* (Aldershot 1998), p. 117.

¹⁰² Richard Latter: *Security and Stability in the Baltic Region* (London 1994), p.13.

coming to terms with the loss of both the “outer empire”; the Warsaw Pact countries, and the “inner empire”; the other republics of the former Soviet Union. The security situation gave Russia a heightened sense of vulnerability: its defensive borders had been pushed back 1500km from the centre of Europe, for which reason it felt like it had been the loser not only of the Cold War but also of the Great Patriotic War¹⁰³.

3.2 National interests

The system of foreign policy concepts for Russian national interests and its role in international affairs, as well as its abilities and resources to carry out its objectives, provide the backdrop against which Russia evaluates its security concerns. Arriving at a consensus on the central tenets of foreign policy took until late 1993. The unitary body of thought that then emerged was not subject to substantial variation during the rest of the period in question, although within the foreign policy establishment, there remained disagreement over how to implement the new theoretically assertive policies, and safeguard the established national interests in practice.¹⁰⁴

The consensus on vital national interests from 1993 onwards was fundamentally security-related: a pursuit of strategic interests in the "near abroad" through increased integration and significant control over this area. The rationale behind this strategy concerned Russia's aspiration to transform itself into a major power – aspirations to a recovery of superpower status have not been expressed. In order to sustain even this reduced status in world politics, the most obvious region to focus on was that of the former Soviet Union, where dependencies continue to exist in many spheres. Becoming a regional power was inevitably the only way to assert a new sphere of influence; resources for anything else (e.g. satellite colonies) simply did not exist.

As became apparent in the previous chapter, the Russian leadership became very vocal about its new emphasis on its "near abroad". Of critical significance was the axiom that the most

¹⁰³ This is the Russian term for the Second World War.

¹⁰⁴ Paul Goble: Russia and Its Neighbours. Foreign Policy, No 90, 1993, p. 84.

substantial threats to Russian national security and interests emanated from the "near abroad".¹⁰⁵ In the Baltic context, the implicit meaning was the danger of NATO enlargement. Furthermore, intimidation in the minority conflict was reflected in the isolated veiled threats of the use of "any" measures deemed necessary for the protection of Russian minorities.¹⁰⁶

The Russian Military Doctrine (MD) promulgated in November 1993 spelled out several threats to Russian national interests that would permit the use of force to protect these interests.¹⁰⁷ This assessment can be interpreted as an opportune means of furthering neo-imperialist policies, and the entire MD could be used to justify military intervention in a number of cases. Several of the contingencies of the MD were relevant to Baltic policy: the oppression of the rights and lawful interests of ethnic Russians in the former Soviet republics, attacks on military facilities (use of force to defend facilities, not only people) and the expansion of military alliances that would impinge on Russian vital security interests were named as instances where force might be used. The MD served as a model to justify the need for force if such a situation should arise owing to political circumstances, but in itself has been thus far not more than a rhetorical device. In terms of Baltic policy, it was a threatening piece of paper, even if only rhetorically or theoretically.

Some analysts go so far as to declare that regional hegemony in the entire former Soviet territory - that is to say, not only the CIS - has been declared to be Russia's explicit strategic aim.¹⁰⁸ This is contentious, because Russian troops were withdrawn and even implicit (official) threats to Baltic security have been rare. The use of force is against international norms, and in order for Russia to have a justified position on the minority issue (namely, that Estonia and Latvia are in breach of commonly accepted international norms), it needs to try to avoid similar accusations. The question of Russia's policy aims regarding the Baltic region was certainly not clarified until February 1997, and attempting to analyse the underlying objectives in terms of a re-establishment

¹⁰⁵ Leon Aaron: *The Emergent Priorities of Russian Foreign Policy*, in the volume *The Emergence of Russian Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C 1994), p.23. Blackwill, Braithwaite and Tanaka, p.8.

¹⁰⁶ *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 19 April 1995, p.15, "Kozyrev Is Determined" (Dimitry Gornostayev). (CDPSP, Vol XLVII, No 16.)

¹⁰⁷ Lothar Ruhl: *The historical background of Russian security concepts and requirements*, in the volume *Russia and Europe* (1997), p. 22.

of military power in the region may not be feasible. What is relevant to the security dimension is that the Baltic States interpret Russia's attempts to influence them in various ways as embracing a deeper, strategy- and therefore security-based motive.

Conflicts arising in Baltic-Russian relations are often lodged in these fundamental differences of interpretation. One of the problems is the evidently divergent perception the countries have of the status of the Baltic States in the new European security structure. The Baltic States see Russian foreign policy as constituting a security threat for them.¹⁰⁹ What Russia perceives as its legitimate interests, are viewed by the Balts as subverting their rights as sovereign countries or attempts to pull them into the Russian orbit – against their will. The debate on something being a “vital national interest” as opposed to it being a reflection of “neo-imperialist thought” is a constant topic in post-Soviet studies of Russian foreign and security policy. From its own perspective, Russian interests in its military and economic security in the Baltic area, in the just treatment of its nationals, and in keeping free communications, are perfectly legitimate. On the other hand, Russian justifications are often clearly reminiscent of the traditional spheres of influence -thinking: because its security needs demand this strategy, these interests must be seen as legitimate.

The central security issues in Russian-Baltic relations - the withdrawal of former Soviet troops and the demarcation of state borders - were also confounded by different starting points. For Russia, the context of troop withdrawal was the loss of bases, leading to a general disruption of some elements in the defence system and a fear of possible internal disruption in the army when troops had inadequate living quarters to return to. For the Baltic States, withdrawal of foreign troops from their territory was a fundamental question of state security and sovereignty. As for the border dispute, from Russian perspective the Estonian and Latvian stance constituted a territorial claim, but the extent to which Russia could count this as a real security threat – of territorial annexation - is highly questionable. For Estonia and Latvia, the principle of adhering to

¹⁰⁸ Aivars Stranga: *Baltic-Russian Relations: 1995 – beginning 1997*, in the volume *Small States in a Turbulent Environment: The Baltic Perspective* (Riga 1997), p. 187. A researcher of Latvian nationality, which helps to explain his views to some extent.

¹⁰⁹ Evaldas Nekrasas: *Lithuania's Security Concerns and Responses*, in the volume *The Baltic States: Search for Security*. (Riga 1996), p.61.

or at least recognising the 1920 treaties and its borders was a question of national self-identification.

The resources available to Russia to further its interests have been limited in the period under study. This may help explain the evident disparity between threats and practice. Russian perceptions of its interests have been modified by its recognition of the limitations that it has on its freedom of action due to economic weakness. It may also constitute an important tactic in its policy arsenal, to periodically intimidate the Baltic States. Overall, Russia's Baltic policy in the security sphere has thus been more on the level of threat, not action.

An essential aim of foreign policy has been to keep other states (the US in particular) or organisations (in which Russia is not a member) from increasing their influence (political, economic or military) in the region. In the military sphere, this signifies that the establishment of a buffer zone of neutral and possibly militarily weak countries along the western borders is imperative from the Russian security perspective.¹¹⁰ This way of thinking is clearly reminiscent of the traditional spheres of influence: Russia's justification was that its security needs demand this strategy and moreover, that it is therefore entitled to control this area - thus these interests must be seen as legitimate. However, the assertion that Russia would prefer to see weak states on its borders is at odds with the traditional fear of foreign intervention. Neutral neighbour states with credible defence systems of their own may be more advantageous to Russian security if it wants to deter them from falling under the influence of potentially hostile states.

¹¹⁰ Alexander Pikayev: *Russia and the Baltic States: Challenges and Opportunities*, international he volume *The Baltic States in World Politics* (Surrey 1998), p. 154; *NATO and EU enlargement: the case of the Baltic States* (conference proceedings) (Riga 1996), p.30.

3.3 Security issues

Troop withdrawal

Troop withdrawal was the most prominent security issue in the first half of the period 1992-96. The situation was relevant from a security perspective because of the combination of the changed security environment: Baltic independence following the collapse of the union and the remaining Russian military capabilities for aggression. At first, Russia insisted on a gradual and staged withdrawal to take place no earlier than 1997-99. From the Baltic perspective, troop withdrawal should have been the first priority because the occupation had been illegal. The problems associated with the process itself were manifold. The most pressing questions dealt with the future of the various military installations for air defence and missile defence on Baltic territory. Of these installations the most significant ones were the training centre for nuclear submarine crews at Paldiski, Estonia, which was the only one of its kind in the Soviet Union, as well as the radar station at Skrunda in Latvia. Dismantling these installations and relocating them was known to require enormous amounts of money and some time, and their relocations to the Russian interior inevitably weakened Russia's defensive effectiveness, for which reasons Russia insisted on maintaining and leasing the territory of the bases.¹¹¹

Social problems constituted the second major problem area in terms of withdrawal. The costs of the construction of new housing for the returning troops was known to be high and the relocation itself a precarious issue, after the experiences Russia had gained from pulling out of Eastern Europe. Estonia and Lithuania were willing to help build housing for the armed forces but not to pay compensation to the Soviet government for army property. Latvians was quick to claim ownership of all property occupied by Soviet forces themselves.¹¹² In the end, various Western countries contributed to financing the housing construction.¹¹³ Other social problems centred on the future and the rights of the military personnel residing in the Baltic States. Especially Latvia

¹¹¹ Nezavisimaya gazeta, 8 May 1992, p. 3 "What Is Troop Withdrawal? Everyone Has His Own Understanding of It" (Yelena Visens). (CDPSP Vol XLIV, No 19.)

¹¹² Nezavisimaya gazeta, 10 June 1992, pp 1, 3 "Russia Wants to Ratify Treaty with Latvia. But Can't Afford To" (Andrei Sorokin). (CDPSP, Vol XLIV, No 23.)

¹¹³ In addition, a voucher program was set up by the U.S whereby military personnel received a set sum of money to be used in Russia for buying or building a house. Interview with Kirsti Narinen, former Counsellor at the Embassy of Finland (Tallinn). (26 October 1998, notes are held by the author.)

had been a favourite retirement spot for Russian officers, and they were certainly in the category of *persona non grata* in the restored Baltic States.

The actual processes of negotiations and withdrawal were complicated and protracted. Russia threatened to halt the pullout on various occasions. The reasons for the threats related either to the settlement of the minority issues or of the status of remaining military pensioners. In addition to the decree of president Yeltsin in October 1992, Defence Minister Grachev made statements on various occasions in 1993 on the suspension of withdrawal. He stated the reason for these suspensions was the absence of interstate treaties between the parties, which would regulate withdrawal timetables as well as social guarantees for military personnel and their families. On a subsequent occasion he threatened to have the troops stay until the Russian minority question was resolved.¹¹⁴ In the end, Grachev's statement had as little effect on the withdrawal process in practice as Yeltsin's decree suspending the pullout in October 1992 did. Because the statements issued by ministers or the president were not enforced on the ground, it is plausible that they were mostly attempts to intimidate the Baltic side into concessions on various points. This view is supported by the way Lithuania was also included in the decree, although there were no problems with the Russian minority in this country. Therefore the question of minority rights seems to have been utilised to serve strategic ends.

Lithuania had had its withdrawal agreement since September 1992, but Russia halted further negotiations on property, social and transit questions in mid-June 1993 over the issues of occupation and compensation brought up by the Lithuanian delegation. The problems were caused in part by Lithuania's \$140-billion compensation claim to Russia for damages caused during an illegal occupation period.¹¹⁵ From Russia's point of view Lithuania was obliged to recognise all the positive development it had experienced during the Soviet era. However, the last Russian troops left by the end of August 1993 after a protracted period of confusion and last-minute threats that they were not going to leave.

¹¹⁴ RFE/RL, Vol 2, No 43, 29 October 1993, p.17 "News Briefs: 18 – 22 October 1993".

¹¹⁵ *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 20 August 1993, pp 1,3 "Russian Troop Withdrawal Suspended from Lithuania" (Tamara Nikolayeva). (CDPSP, Vol XLV, No 23.)

Russian-Estonian negotiations ultimately reached a compromise between the two sides' demands in November 1993, when the completion date of troop withdrawal was set on August 31, 1994. The number of troops declined from around 10 000 to 3 000 during 1993. Problems remained concerning housing, although the pullout had mostly been completed, because the majority of the families of military personnel still remained in Estonia.¹¹⁶

In Latvia, there were around 15 000 troops left at the end of 1993, down from 27 000 at the beginning. Russia also offered to complete its withdrawal by the end of August 1994 with the condition that it should be allowed to keep the radar station at Skrunda for 6 years. Eventually, a compromise solution was reached whereby Latvia decided to rent it to Russia until August 1998 with an additional 18 months time to dismantle the installation, thereby annulling one of the major irritants in the relations between the two countries. However, the conflict in the military sphere was protracted. Latvia accused Russia of continuing to send unauthorised troops to its military installations in Latvia. Border guards had prevented entry on several occasions of soldiers being sent in by railway and air, but the Latvian Ministry of Defence claimed Russia was sending them in secretly on warships. It also issued statements concerning the numerous violations of Latvian airspace and the illegal entry of warships into Latvian harbours.¹¹⁷

Despite the problems surrounding the issue, troop withdrawal was carried out on schedule. The Russians were by no means eager to leave the Baltics, but besides the obvious facts of commitments and international pressure, there were financial and other constraints that made the continuation of the military presence very difficult. Notably, no new recruits were allowed to be sent to the Baltic area to replace the servicemen whose terms of duty had expired.¹¹⁸ In addition, the armed forces were obliged to pay for the services they received (e.g energy and food supplies) in first Western and then domestic (Baltic) currencies. The completion of troop withdrawal changed the security scene and let other issues take prominence.

¹¹⁶ Estonian Radio, 7 January 1993. (Summary of World Broadcasts Soviet Union (SWB)/1583, 11 January 1993, p. A2/2.)

¹¹⁷ Latvian Radio, 7 and 8 January 1993. (SWB SU/1582 and 1583, 9 and 11 January 1993, p. A2/2.)

¹¹⁸ RFE/RL, Vol 1, No 19, 17 July 1992, p.59 "Military and Security Notes" (Stephen Foye).

Borders and transit

The question of border demarcation has been an irritant in Russian-Baltic relations, and although it may not constitute a security problem as such, it is best placed in the security context. Already at the beginning of 1992, the Latvian Supreme Council had annulled the annexation of part of its territory in 1944 to the Pskov province of the RSFSR.¹¹⁹ The Estonian government had also issued its first official declaration on the border issue in the summer of 1992, calling on Russia to pull back its border guards to the old frontier marked by the 1920 Tartu Peace Treaty. The implication of the territorial claims (an area of approximately 2000 square kilometres for Estonia and 1600 for Latvia) was clear. Russia's response did not come until November, when it unilaterally declared the existing administrative border to be the state border.¹²⁰ The question was subsequently presented at the negotiations, but no compromise could be reached as the two sides' perspectives were completely at odds with each other. The settlement of the issue would have demanded an implicit or even explicit acknowledgement on the part of the Russians that the Baltic States had indeed been annexed and occupied, and this was something that the Russian leadership was not prepared to do.

The security problems caused by the non-signing of border agreements between Russia and Estonia and Latvia were not threatening as such to Russia. The territorial claims inherent in the refusal to deal with anything else than the 1920 treaty as a base cannot seriously be espoused and built into a security risk. On the other hand, the territorial claims, other security issues and problems in Russian-Baltic relations definitely have had resonance in the Duma and the public at large. In that sense, they must be taken into consideration as threats, even if only as a domestic stratagem. The enemy image of the Baltic States is striking. Estonia was voted by the Duma as being the country most hostile to Russia in 1994. In August 1996, Latvia claimed the title of "enemy number 1" after parliamentary declarations supporting the breakaway republic of Chechnya and condemning the occupation of 1940, which leads back to the problem of the territorial claim. More out of the pressures set by prospective EU-membership, Estonia moved to

¹¹⁹ RSFSR = Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic.

Izvestia, 20 March 1992, p.3 "Russia Rejects Latvia's Territorial Claims" (Gennady Charodeyev). (CDPSP, Vol XLIV, No 12.)

¹²⁰ RFE/RL, Vol 1, No 45, 13 November 1992, p.69 "Weekly Review, 28 Oct – 3 Nov 92" (Hal Kosiba and Anna Sabbat-Swidlicka).

disown its prior principle on the issue in autumn 1996. ¹²¹ Latvia soon followed suit and attested its willingness to consider dropping its demand.¹²² The option chosen by Russia to respond to these overtures reflects its Baltic policy in general. It can attempt to slow down Baltic EU accession by not signing a border agreement, and it can use the issue to widen the divisions among the Baltic States themselves, Lithuania having no unresolved border questions at all with Russia.

Instead of border problems, Lithuania was faced with the problem of Russian military transit to its enclave Kaliningrad. In the end, Russia used economic pressure on Lithuania to resolve the transit question. Lithuania had followed the most conciliatory path towards Russia throughout the period in question. However, Russia refused to ratify the trade agreement or to implement the MFN-accords until Lithuania relented on the transit issue. Lithuania extended the earlier transit regulations to cover the year 1995, although it had passed legislation changing and tightening the rules that were to have come into force at the beginning of 1995. These were to apply for all foreign countries equally. They stipulated the need for individual permits for the transport of personnel and goods, as well as prohibiting the simultaneous transport of troops and equipment or weapons and ammunition.¹²³ Ultimately, in exchange for an immediate implementation of agreements concerning economic relations, Lithuania left the earlier regulations in force for one year, with the implication that it would be repeated subsequently, as has indeed been the case.

NATO expansion

“NATO expansion to countries in immediate proximity to our borders will elicit a negative reaction from public opinion and promote undesirable sentiments in civilian and military circles and could ultimately lead to military and political de-stability”.¹²⁴

¹²¹ CDPSP No 45. Sevodnya, 6 November 1996, p.1.

¹²² Ibid., p.2.

¹²³ Transition, No 4, 29 March 1995, p.45 "Compromise at the Crossroads" (Saulius Girnius).

¹²⁴ Valery Zhdannikov, "Russia Concerned About Possibility of NATO Expansion", Sevodnya, 6 January 1994, p.1. CDPSP, Vol XLVI, No 1.

The aspect of NATO I am discussing in this chapter is the way NATO and the idea of Baltic accession has been viewed from the Russian security perspective. In the international context chapter I shall come back to the subject of NATO in the way in which other countries and international institutions have played a role in Russian-Baltic relations. The NATO issue is the most prominent example of how Russia's Baltic policy cannot be dealt with in isolation from its policy towards the West and European security.¹²⁵

From the security perspective, the possibility of NATO expansion right up to the borders of Russia is undoubtedly the most serious issue that Russian foreign policy has had to confront and thus had a direct bearing on its Baltic policy. It was not until 1993 that Russian policy makers began to devote serious attention to the matter (Hungary declared its desire to join in 1989).¹²⁶ Russia has made it clear that Baltic membership in NATO would be perceived as a striking provocation. It considers itself threatened by isolation and alienation by enlargement, and views the prospect of having NATO forces and even nuclear weapons in the Baltic States as utterly unacceptable. In order to put pressure on the West, Russia has emphasised the dangers of offering membership to the Baltics because of the reaction that would cause in conservative and patriotic circles. Consequently, Russia has made consistent efforts to influence the geographic range of NATO expansion. For most of the period in question, Russian leaders believed that their viewpoint would have considerable weight in the deliberations of NATO members. The whole issue of enlargement has been anathema to Russians and all talk of Russia receiving compensation for agreeing to the enlargement, an idea toyed with by Kozyrev, was categorically denied by the president in March 1995.¹²⁷

Various unofficial documents have been leaked to the press in which the implication has been that Russia would consider it necessary and justified to send in its troops to the Baltic States the moment they were accepted as NATO members. Some scenarios even predicted this leading to

¹²⁵ Vladislav Vershinin: *The Changing Security Environment in the Baltics and Russian National Interests* (London 1996), p.1.

¹²⁶ Aivars Stranga: *Russia and the Security of the Baltic States 1991 – 1996*, in the volume *The Baltic States: Search for Security* (Riga 1996), p.151.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 152. Possible "compensation": no nuclear weapons spread, a non-aggression pact between NATO and Russia, and strict promises that Baltic States and Ukraine would never be admitted.

large-scale nuclear war between the alliance and Russia.¹²⁸ Although the Foreign Ministry has denied the existence of such plans, the leaks themselves were probably intended to pressure the Baltics. There were occasions when the deputy foreign minister, Sergei Krylov, made threats about Russia resorting to military, not only political and economic, measures, to prevent Baltic accession to the alliance.¹²⁹ Pressure tactics were used also when an unofficial study of possible Russian countermeasures to expansion was leaked to the press, which stated that Russia considers its moral and legal right to invade the Baltic States if they were given NATO membership.¹³⁰ Thus Russia was able to exert pressure on the Baltic States without officially being quite so controversial.

Yeltsin's secret letter to president Clinton on the eve of the Baltic presidents' visit to the US in July 1996 represented the fierce objections of Russia to Baltic membership in NATO. Its immediate objectives were to prevent a public statement of American support for Baltic membership and to induce the American president to take up the issue of discrimination against Russians in the Baltics. The wording of the text was harsh: Russia protested the "glaring and widespread human rights violations" in the Baltic States. Yeltsin brought up the issue of Baltic EU membership, implying possibly that instead of NATO membership, the Baltics should strive to become EU members, which Russia would condone. He made it clear that Russia's position on Baltic NATO-membership remained adamantly opposed. "There can be no question of even the hypothetical possibility of extending NATO's sphere of operation to the Baltic countries. Such a prospect is categorically unacceptable to Russia, and we would regard steps in that direction as posing a direct challenge to our national security interests and destroying the fundamental structures of European stability."¹³¹ Consequently, when Clinton did not elaborate on Baltic membership in public, which Russia took as a diplomatic victory.

¹²⁸ Sevodnya, 28 September 1995, p.1 "NATO Expansion – An Unsuccessful Compromise" (Pavel Felgengauer). (CDPSP, Vol XLVII, no 39.)

¹²⁹ The Baltic Independent, Vol 6, No 280, 8 – 14 September 1995, p.2 "Russia Threatens Balts over NATO Expansion".

¹³⁰ The Baltic Independent, Vol 6, No 288, 3 – 9 November 1995, p.2 "Study Done to Government Orders, Says Paper".

¹³¹ Yeltsin's letter to Clinton on eve of Baltic presidents' visit to the US. Izvestia, 6 July 1996, p. 2 "Secret Yeltsin-Clinton Correspondence" (Konstantin Eggert and Maksim Yusin). (CDPSP, Vol. XLVIII, No. 27.)

In response to the security threat posed by NATO expansion and the manifest Baltic unwillingness to conform to typical small state conduct towards a powerful neighbour, Russia initially attempted to solve its concerns by dealing directly and exclusively with NATO.¹³² This strategy proving to yield too little, Russia began to develop a long-term strategy. This consisted of a dual approach of seeking to deal with the alliance over the heads of the Baltic States on overarching security matters and developing bilateral relations with these countries at the same time in order to be able to settle disputes. Russia developed the idea of providing the Baltic States with so-called cross guarantees, security guarantees from both NATO and Russia to take away the need for membership, but this idea was never fully developed because it found no resonance outside Russia.¹³³ The Baltic States explicitly turned down an official offer of security guarantees from Russia while simultaneously negotiating a security charter with the US in late 1997.

From the Russian security perspective, Baltic membership in the EU is not considered a danger. This is despite the fact that the EU is an organisation in which Russia is not a member, and which one day may have a substantial military component and thus fulfil the criteria of organisations hostile or inimical to Russian special interests.¹³⁴ Even before the relationship of the EU with its military organisation, the Western European Union, is conclusively settled, joining the EU would mean an “escape to Europe” for the Baltic States; a definite retreat from the Russian sphere of influence in political and economic terms, and participation in the common foreign and security policy of the Union. Setting obstacles to EU membership in the form of unsigned border treaties and raised voices about the discrimination of minorities was one way in which Russia sought to influence security-related events in the Baltic States, but its basic attitude towards EU enlargement has been positive. In economic terms, EU membership for the Baltics would present Russia with the benefits of being neighbours to a dynamic economic area. Moreover, the EU is not considered a threat in Russia because of the inherent differences

¹³² Stranga (1997), p.193.

¹³³ The Baltic Independent, Vol 6, No 280, 8 – 14 September 1995, p.2 “Russia Threatens Balts over NATO Expansion”.

¹³⁴ Paul Goble, p. 82.

between this organisation and NATO: the EU is Russia's main trade partner and its major donor of aid.¹³⁵

3.4 Conclusion

To recapitulate, Russian security perceptions have been transformed from a global to a regional level. Its thinking on security matters has developed through a brief phase of prioritising “internationalisation” and co-operation with the West, into a more assertive policy of defining and pursuing its vital geo-political interests. Russia sees itself as having interests in the post-Soviet space that must not be ignored or intercepted by the international community. The loss of Baltic bases and ports constituted an immediate security problem in Russian-Baltic relations. Nevertheless, the tradition of solving security problems through territorial expansion has not surfaced in Russian official policy towards the Baltic States. The “imperial idea” seems to have dissolved, but has it?

The Baltic region is still considered a vitally important area for Russian security. Economic considerations have possibly become vastly more significant in Russian-Baltic relations, and the possession of territory or ports may no longer be essential. But on the contrary, preventing the influx of hostile forces still is.

In strategic terms, Russia does not perceive the Baltics as belonging to Europe, but to the post-Soviet space, and thus in its “legitimate” orbit and sphere of influence, unable to “escape to Europe” in the sense that they are not granted the right to make their own security arrangements. The prevalent Russian view is that the Baltic States do not need to join any military bloc, because there is not threat to their security. The Baltic States and Russia have, of course, totally different views on what constitutes a security threat for the Baltics. In its security thinking, Russia determines a neutral status for the Baltic States as the only acceptable model. Russia has accepted Baltic States as independent states, which is reflected in the fact that it concluded treaties and conducted negotiations with its new neighbours, but on the other hand, Russia prefers still to

¹³⁵ Interview with Reino Paasilinna, Member of the European Parliament. (12 January 1999, notes are held by the author.)

develop relations and deal with the West over the heads of Baltic States. Forging its attitude towards small states as equal partners has been difficult. Russians have not considered these small states as constituting a direct threat as such, but as part of an organisation that is set up against Russia, the territories of the Baltic States might be used to launch an attack against Russia – as has happened in the past. Whether Russia is determined to avoid such a development at all costs, has not been tested. There are other aspects of Russian-Baltic relations that constrain Russia from resorting to violent measures against the Baltic States to protect its security interests. These and other elements of Russian policy are the subject of the following chapters.

4 The Minority Problem

The question of the Russian minorities in the Baltic States is one of the central dimensions of Russian policy towards the Baltic States and the other former Soviet republics. In this chapter I intend to evaluate how the minorities question sheds light on Russian policy. It is therefore necessary to analyse the relative importance of the issue compared to other dimensions of Russian-Baltic relations. To put the question in perspective, the unfocused nature of Russia's policy concerning its nationals in the other former republics of the Soviet Union and the subsequent consensus on policy demands a brief discussion. The question of the Russians outside Russia has had both a divisive and a defining effect on achieving this consensus among different factions in Russian domestic politics. For the purpose of deeper evaluation of the minority question, I will then discuss the nature and definitions of these minorities. It is important to look at the different perceptions of both the Baltic and Russian sides. Finally, I will describe the history and content of the laws on citizenship that prompted Russia to actively protest against the Baltic States in international forums.

The significant dimensions at work are both domestic and interstate politics and thus the point is to look at the dynamics related to both, as well as their interconnections. I will discuss the aspects of the situation of the minorities in the Baltic States that are relevant to Russian policy. Therefore I do not intend to give a comprehensive description of minority-politics in the Baltic States themselves, I will only consider those elements that have most spurred Russian decision-making.

In discussing the different aspects of Russian policy, it will be argued that the minorities issue plays a part that is largely instrumental and only partly based on a genuine and substantive concern for the Russian minorities themselves. Security concerns and economic considerations play a relatively larger role, and the focus in this chapter is to illuminate the way the minority dimension is more a rhetoric device and a focus of attention rather than an actual determination to strengthen the status of the minorities in their host countries. Russia's resources are limited especially in the economic sphere, and this may add to the relatively small weight of the matter in concrete politics. The issue occupied a lot of space in Russia's public statements and is

doubtless a genuine concern to some extent, but in actual policy decisions it has not played such a prominent role.

4.1 The evolution of consensus

Russian policy towards the minorities in the Baltic States developed neither automatically nor instantly. In the initial period after independence, more immediate problems in internal affairs and the need to establish co-operative relations with the West meant that the fate of the Russians in the former republics was mostly ignored in official policy. The idea of the diaspora as being significant to Russia first arose in opposition circles, in which strong demands were made for a more forceful policy that would take into account the needs of Russians who had suddenly found themselves living abroad. This idea was not accepted right away by the Russian leadership, and consequently it became one of the determining questions in Russian internal politics.¹³⁶ The fate of the new minorities was debated also in academic circles from very early on. The diaspora as a vehicle for continued influence of Russia in the "near abroad" was expressed very clearly by influential academics like Sergei Karaganov, the deputy head of the European Institute in Moscow.¹³⁷

The formulation of Russia's own national identity was still in process. In the early 1990s, vague conceptualisations about the civic and ethnic Russian nation conflicted with each other. Defining who should be a Russian citizen was crucial to the development of the Russian stance towards the diaspora. It is interesting to note that although the perception in Russia on the nationality and allegiances of the minorities was unequivocal – they were Russian - there was no clear or straightforward definition of "Russia". With the development of official thinking on the issue, the diaspora was transformed into a body with political significance. In the diaspora issue, strategists saw an important element for defining the new national identity. It was a convenient way to build up national feeling, to help in the process of state-building, to gather people (and elites) around a common issue in the domestic arena as well as gaining support among the Baltic

¹³⁶ John Dunlop: *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Princeton 1993), p.287.

¹³⁷ Dagmara Vallens: *The Law on Aliens Controversy in the Baltic States*. *International Commission of Jurists Review*, no 54, 1995, p.4.

Russians. "With only a weak sense of national identity, the boundaries of history, culture, language and kin emerged as powerful alternative definitions of the Russian nation to the one provided by existing borders. Ethnicity increasingly became political identity...[the] notion of the diaspora [was] subsequently integrated into the definition of the Russian nation."¹³⁸ By the end of 1993, the notion of the diaspora gradually became widely accepted and was transformed into a legitimising and consolidating factor in Russian political and societal life.¹³⁹

The tone and direction of Russian foreign policy changed when the citizenship debates in Estonia and Latvia brought the status of the Russian-speaking minorities to the forefront of the diaspora issue, and it could no longer be ignored by Russian policy makers. President Yeltsin and even one of the leading democrats, foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev, began to lay emphasis on the treatment of these minorities and to speak about Russia's obligation to protect the rights of Russians in the post-Soviet states. The centrality of the question was demonstrated by the president's New Year speeches in 1994, when he addressed the issue of the diaspora:

"Dear compatriots! You are inseparable from us and we are inseparable from you. We were and will be together. On the basis of law and solidarity, we defend and will defend you and our common interests. In the New Year, 1994, we will do this with greater energy and greater resoluteness."¹⁴⁰

The consensus on the importance of the diaspora was consolidated through 1994-95. The responsibility of the Russian Federation for Russians in the "near abroad" and the fact that this should be an integral part of (foreign) policy were consistently emphasised in official statements, and allocated substantial space in Russian pronouncements dealing with its relations with the Baltic States in particular.

¹³⁸ Neil Melvin: *Russians Outside Russia. The Politics of National Identity* (London 1995), p. 5-6.

¹³⁹ Alex Pravda: *The Politics of foreign policy*, in the volume *Developments in Russian Politics 4* (Basingstoke 1997), pp 213, 215; Ramazan Abdulatipov: *Russian Minorities: The Political Dimension*, in the volume *The New Russian Diaspora. Russian Minorities in the Former Soviet Republics* (Armonk, N.Y 1994), p.43.

¹⁴⁰ Ostankino Channel 1 TV, 31 December 1993. (SWB SU/1885, 3 January 1994 p. B/1.)

In terms of specific aims, Russia's Baltic policy is partially similar to that of the CIS-states and is also linked to overall Russian foreign policy aims. A primary objective has been the need to inhibit possible mass emigration of Russians feeling discriminated against in the other former republics.¹⁴¹ For this reason it was deemed essential that the minorities be provided with full rights in their countries of residence, and preferably even be given dual citizenship rights. The aim of the Russian government to allow dual citizenship for all Baltic Russian-speakers was rejected by all three Baltic States. From the Russian perspective, this would have been conducive to retaining concrete bonds between the Baltic minorities and the Russian Federation, and would have contributed to the willingness of the Russian settlers to stay in the Baltics.¹⁴² On the other hand, as most emigration has happened from the Caucasus into the Russian Federation, one might conclude that it is safety and no citizenship that determines migration patterns and therefore there must be other reasons behind Russia's drive to "protect" the minorities in the Baltics.

It has been argued that no coherent strategy towards the diaspora exists as such, although it is evident that the question itself plays a central part in Russian foreign policy strategy.¹⁴³ Disagreements over the means of intervention and the implementation of policy towards the minorities have abounded in ruling circles. No clear line of policy towards the diaspora was developed, so Russia responded to specific events and situations as they unfolded. In general terms, there was agreement on using diplomatic and economic measures as opposed to military ones to further these interests.¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless, renouncing the use of force and territorial annexation did not mean that Russia did not make use of threats, the implication of which were often military, to press its claims. Russian steps have predominantly consisted of diplomatic pressure both in bilateral relations and in the form of initiatives in the international arena. The constraints on devising a coherent and consistent strategy included the pressures of the world

¹⁴¹ Lowell W. Barrington: Nations, States and Citizens. Review of Central and East European Law, Vol 21, No 2, 1995, p.118.

¹⁴² Ibid., p.109.

¹⁴³ Aivars Stranga: Baltic-Russian Relations: 1995- the beginning of 1997, in the volume Small States in a Turbulent Environment: The Baltic Perspective (Riga 1997), p. 28.

¹⁴⁴ Neil Melvin: Forging the New Russian Nation: Russian foreign policy and the Russian speaking communities of the former USSR (London 1994), pp 27, 30.

community and Russia's own weaknesses, leading to uncertainty about the possibilities to construct (and implement) a policy towards the diaspora.

4.2 Divisions and Distribution

The break-up of the Soviet Union left a legacy of diasporas; millions of people of different ethnicity to the titular nationality of the republic were resident in them at the time of the dissolution of the union. This created problems of citizenship and nation-building in all the independent and re-independent states. These circumstances had been effected by Soviet nationality policies and the general aims of Soviet leadership to create a Soviet people through "internationalisation", usually perceived by non-Russians as a modern version of Russification policy.¹⁴⁵ By far the largest and most prominent diaspora¹⁴⁶ is that of approximately 25 million Russians, who were resident in non-Russian republics that either reinstated their independence or became independent for the first time, and based their statehood on ethnic grounds. The status of the Russians in Latvia and Estonia was determined by the fact that the new national leaderships' priority was to distance themselves from Soviet conventions, in which Russia and the Russian language had always played the leading role.¹⁴⁷ In discussing the impact of the Russian diaspora on Russian politics, it is necessary to note that the meanings of ethnicity and the definitions of minorities are manifold. Ethnicity can be interpreted to stem from a combination of perception of the group or individual concerned, and the external contextual reality.¹⁴⁸ The established definition of a minority is that of a group which is in numerical minority, is not equally represented in institutions of political power, whose members differ from the rest of the population by their ethnic, linguistic or religious features, and who share the common objective of retaining their distinctive culture, traditions, and language.¹⁴⁹ Using these criteria, the position

¹⁴⁵ Roman Szporluk (ed): *National Identity and Ethnicity in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (Armonk, N.Y 1994), p.5.

¹⁴⁶ The term "diaspora" is somewhat problematic as it denotes a unity of those it covers, whereas the differences within this group of 25 million people are considerable. The term is, however, widely used by the Russian leadership and therefore used in this text as a reflection of their point of view.

¹⁴⁷ Neil Melvin (1995), p.5.

¹⁴⁸ Kumar Rupesinghe and Valery Tishkov (eds): *Ethnicity and Power in the Contemporary World* (Tokyo 1996), p.13.

¹⁴⁹ Klara Hallik: *From centre-periphery conflict to the making of new nationality policy in an independence state: Estonia*, in the volume *Ethnicity and Power in the Contemporary World* (Tokyo 1994), p.136;

of the Russian minorities in the Baltic States has changed substantially following the independence of their countries of residence. Before the break-up of the union they belonged to the majority ethnic group of the entire state and the politically dominant group, operating in their own language wherever they went.¹⁵⁰ In terms of politics, Russians were not cut off from positions of power in the other republics, as the second secretary of the communist party of each republic was usually an ethnic Russian.

From the perspective of the Russians, it is notable that the proportional size of the Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia (33 and 34% respectively)¹⁵¹ is exceeded only in Kazakhstan (38%) and therefore the fate of a third of the population is what hangs in the balance. The Russians who became residents in the Baltic States had viewed the entire Soviet Union as their homeland, not just the RSFSR, whereas other nationalities generally felt more allegiance to their own republic.¹⁵² The transformation from being in the dominant and privileged position in society¹⁵³ to a minority that was denied automatic citizenship (in the case of Estonia and Latvia, but not Lithuania) was sudden and difficult.

The minorities in the Baltic States are generally referred to as the Russian-speaking communities. The Russian-speakers concept denotes people linguistically, but not ethnically Russian. What is striking is the way that this group (which constitutes an immense diaspora in the post-Soviet space) has been co-opted by Russia not just culturally and language-wise, which would be natural and legitimate, but also politically. This conceptual merger was concluded in order to multiply the numbers of people concerned, to increase the impact of the problematic issue. The total numbers of non-Russian Russian-speakers and Russians in Latvia add up to nearly 50% and in Estonia to nearly 40% which explains the significance of the issue.¹⁵⁴

Emil Payin: Disintegration of the Empire and the Fate of the "Imperial Minority", in the volume *The New Russian Diaspora: Russian Minorities in the Former Soviet Republics* (Armonk, N.Y 1994), p.22.

¹⁵⁰ Jeff Chinn and Robert Kaiser: *Russians as the New Minority: Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Soviet Successor States* (Oxford 1996), p. 10.

¹⁵¹ Öst, Anna-Carin: *Medborgare eller främling?* (Åbo 1994), p. 36.

¹⁵² Paul Kolstoe, pp. 7, 112.

¹⁵³ Aksel Kirch, Marita Kirch and Tarmo Tuisk: *Russians in the Baltic States: to be or not to be*. *Journal of Baltic studies*, Vol 24, 1993, p.162. Concrete changes were the loss of privileges concerning housing, and other economic benefits

For Russia, the link between the minorities and the Russian Federation is essential, but more analysts have contested Russia's ability to "speak for the Baltic Russians" precisely because the group in itself is so heterogeneous. In this study I am using the terms Russian minority and Russian-speaking communities or settler population interchangeably, and including the ethnically non-Russians too, because that is the group in whose name the Russian Federation claims to act. In the Baltic definition, the minorities are usually referred to as the non-titular nationalities, i.e. the non-Estonians, in order to downplay the significant Russian element. The Russian-speakers group includes Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians. The significant factor that combines the members of these three nationalities is that the two latter groups have often lost their titular mother tongue over the course of russification and sovietisation processes.

As an identity, the Russian-speakers' self-identification is yet unformed and cannot objectively be called an ethnic minority.¹⁵⁵ During the Soviet period, the Russians in the other republics did not consider themselves as a minority, although they numerically were.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, a process of identity construction has been underway and the potential exists for an identity to develop that would be a common focal point for the entire former Soviet minorities in the Baltics and could be used as a mobilising factor.¹⁵⁷ However, this process is far from complete and there is less common ground for the development of a common identity among all the Russian-speakers in the former republics than Russia would like there to be. The shared experience of the Soviet past, when they represented the leading nation, and their common language are elements the Russian-speakers have in common, but this does not necessarily constitute a priority in the 1990s for the majority of the people. More often than not, the majority of the minorities has expressed a preference for the Baltic States rather than to the Russian Federation, although this is no doubt largely due to their appreciation of the material well-being and higher standards of living in the Baltics.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Paul Kolstoe: *Russians in the Former Soviet Republics* (London 1995), p.109.

¹⁵⁵ Neil Melvin (1994), p.19.

¹⁵⁶ Chinn and Kaiser, p. 10.

¹⁵⁷ David D. Laitin: *Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Nationality in Estonia and Bashkortostan*. (Glasgow 1995), p. 5.

¹⁵⁸ Kolstoe, Paul: *The new Russian diaspora – an identity of its own? Possible identity trajectories for Russians in the former Soviet republics*. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol 19, No 3, 1996, p. 624.

The Baltic perspective

Due to repression and deportation in the 1940s as well as extensive immigration throughout the Soviet period, the percentages of native populations in Latvia and Estonia were substantially reduced. At the time of the 1989 census, the percentage of Latvians in the republic had dropped to 52%, down from 76% in 1935. In Estonia, the corresponding figures were 63% from 92%.¹⁵⁹ These alarming demographic realities were the major cause for Estonia and Latvia to opt for exclusive citizenship policies. The Latvians in particular felt a genuine fear of becoming a minority in their own country already during the Soviet period. The Lithuanian situation was markedly different. Only there did the titular population remain in clear majority, constituting still more than 80% of the population in 1989. In addition, the minorities that exist there are more diverse and have longer roots in the country.

The Baltic States have regarded the influx of Russians as a deliberate demographic policy to dilute the ethnic composition of their republics and considered the 1, 725 000 -strong Russian population (1989 census) as representatives of an illegal occupation power. However, Russians do not constitute a politically homogenous group in the Baltics.¹⁶⁰ Some had settled in the region before 1940 and are thus considered citizens, as are their descendants. Some had either been born in the Baltic region, and the majority had arrived as migrant workers in search of a higher standard of living without planning to subdue the titular population. The economic infrastructure was relatively good for increased production, and more labour was required for the Soviet industrialisation project than the Baltic republics could provide. Another major group was military personnel, of whom officers in particular came to the Baltic republics to stay as they were often regarded as the best retirement spot. The native population considers all post-1940 immigrants as representatives of an occupation power. Of the different major sub-groups the ones which arouse the most hostility include the retired military and KGB personnel, former

¹⁵⁹ Chinn and Kaiser, p. 96.

¹⁶⁰ Vesa Saarikoski: Russian Minorities in the Baltic States, in the volume *New Actors on the International Arena: The Foreign Policies of the Baltic Countries* (Tampere 1993), p.132.

communist party officials and “apparatchiks”.¹⁶¹ Those Russians with long historical roots in the Baltic region are often from the intellectual strata.¹⁶²

However, the Balts consider all the immigrants to be members or at least representatives of a foreign occupation force, brought into the Baltic States in order to quench separatism and destroy Baltic culture. No proper distinction is made between those Russians who came to work in factories and those who actually were employed in those institutions of Soviet repression.

The massive influx of Russian migrant workers into Estonia and Latvia during the Soviet period had been for industrial purposes, often in the military sector. These people were mostly employed in big enterprises and factories where wages were comparatively higher than in other areas of the economy. This led to the immigrants receiving housing of better quality more quickly than members of the titular population (although the situation varied according to the specific enterprise one worked in). The double shift to independent statehood and a market economy system made the Russians more vulnerable than the Balts precisely for the same reasons they had previously been advantaged for: belonging to the Russian population and working in heavy industry enterprises of the state.

The Russian-speakers tend to be concentrated geographically within the Baltic States. In all three Baltic capitals the non-titular minorities constitute approximately half of the city population and generally the eastern regions are populated by the minorities in disproportionate numbers to their overall share of the population. The large industrial complexes in the eastern parts are predominantly manned by non-Estonians and non-Latvians, and have often become virtual enclaves of Russian-speakers: communities and towns where the proportion of the native population has shrunk drastically into insignificance and thus the prospects for integration between the nationalities seem slim. The Latvian region of Latgale is densely populated by Russian-speakers and Kohtla-Jarve, Sillamae and Narva, the Estonian towns in the north east, (in

¹⁶¹ RFE/RL 30 April 1993, Vol.2 No. 18, p.30 “Latvia’s Russian Question” (Richard J.Krickus).

¹⁶² Interesting figures are given for the population of Riga in 1867 (and 1913). The percentage of Latvians was 23.6 (42.2), Germans 42.9 (13.8) and Russians 25 (18.3). This testifies to the multicultural yet inconstant past of Latvia’s capital city. Niitemaa and Hovi, p 328.

the immediate vicinity of the Russian Federation) are respectively 77, 97 and 96% Russian-speaking.¹⁶³

Organisations of Russian-speakers have tended to be more cultural and religious than political. The degree of political organisation among the Russian-speakers has not been high at any point during the period in question, although evident disagreements on citizenship and other issues abound. The number of people actively involved is thus clearly small.¹⁶⁴ Parties have fared relatively well in both local and national elections in Estonia (in Latvia, non-citizens cannot vote in local elections). However, the constraints set by citizenship laws in Estonia and Latvia prevent political activity to a certain extent to begin with. What is also an evident cause is the heterogeneous nature of the Russian-speaking population. Differences in attitudes towards the Soviet past, in the length of time spent in the Baltic States, in the feeling of closeness to Russia vis-à-vis the state of residence affect both the readiness to join or support Russian parties and attitudes towards the conflicts. An essential factor is age: the hard-line extremists tend to be from the older (Communist) generation, who experienced a definite down-grading after the end of the Soviet nomenklatura system.

Extremist organisations such as Union of Russian Citizens in Estonia seem to manage to influence Moscow through their newspapers – the more moderate Russians having much less media access. A serious attempt to achieve integration would entail an emphasis on the development of alternative media for the Russian-speaking communities. The degree to which minorities in general look to the Russian Federation as their defender, responsible for protecting their interests and rights, seems to be low but not insignificant, but emigration is not seen as a viable or desirable option by most Russian-speakers in either Latvia or Estonia.¹⁶⁵ The overwhelming majority considers their Baltic state of residence as providing better chances to improve their living standards than the Russian Federation.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Kolstoe, p.133.

¹⁶⁴ Graham Smith, Aadne Aasland and Richard Mole: Statehood, Ethnic Relations and Citizenship, in the volume *The Baltic States: National Self-determination of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania* (Basingstoke 1994), p.201.

¹⁶⁵ Richard Rose and William Maley: *Conflict or Compromise in the Baltic States: What do the people there think?* (Glasgow 1994), p.16.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15. Richard Rose: *New Baltic Barometer III*, (Glasgow 1997), p.50.

4.3 Citizenship

As discussed above, domestic politics have had substantial influence in determining Russia's policy. What is also needed is an analysis of external factors, which modify and change domestic politics. The most controversial issue in the Russian public and official mind concerning the development of policy towards the diaspora was the restrictive citizenship legislation in Estonia and Latvia.¹⁶⁷ It was in itself one of the central elements leading to emphasis of Russia's responsibilities in the post-Soviet space. Describing the laws in question is important, as they have had a straight relevance to and such a strong impact on Russian policy.

During the independence fight in 1988-1990, most Balts had relatively liberal views on citizenship.¹⁶⁸ In the interstate treaties signed by Russia and the Baltic States in January 1991, provisions were made for all residents, irrespective of nationality, to receive automatic citizenship in any of the four states. Everyone was to have "the right to receive or retain citizenship in the Russian Federation or [the] Republic of Estonia (or Latvia) in accordance with his free expression of will".¹⁶⁹ There was a not-so-subtle change in the attitude of the titular nationalities towards the issue after the reinstatement of independence became a reality.

In both Estonia and Latvia, the *de jure* continuity of the inter-war republics became the basis for citizenship legislation. Citizenship was regarded as a privilege rather than a right.¹⁷⁰ This privilege belonged only to the citizens of the inter-war republic and their descendants (irrespective of nationality). Citizenship was thus "reconfirmed" and not granted. Other residents were required to go through a process of naturalisation or remain residents. This applied even to those people who had been born in their country of residence. State policy towards the minorities

¹⁶⁷ Kolstoe, p. 283.

¹⁶⁸ Öst, p.8.

¹⁶⁹ RFE/RL Report on the USSR, Vol 3, No 5, 1 February 1991, pp 14-16 "Russia Recognises Estonia's Independence" (Riina Kionka). Kolstoe, p. 116. Russia used this treaty as a justification for its accusation of betrayal of trust in particular vis-à-vis Estonia when it changed this policy. The Russian Duma had never ratified the Latvian treaty so they could not use it as a political weapon against Latvia.

¹⁷⁰ Walter Clemens: *Baltic Identities in the 1990s: Renewed Fitness*, in the volume *National Identity and Ethnicity in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, (Armonk, N.Y 1994), p. 195.

treated the group as immigrants of a period of unlawful occupation who could not demand automatic citizenship.

In Estonia, the Law on Citizenship from 1938 was reconfirmed in February 1992. Naturalisation criteria included residence since 1990 and a language test. Restrictions included the denial of citizenship to both former and contemporary military personnel as well as to former members of the KGB.¹⁷¹ The language standard became the most contested issue, as non-citizens complained about the difficult level of the test and of the financial problems of finding teachers and textbooks. The renewed Citizenship Law that was passed in January 1995 stipulated that applicants must also pass a test on the Constitution.¹⁷²

The Law on Aliens (June 1993) defined the status of residents and stated their rights. All residents were secured social and economic rights, but they had to apply for residence permits. Similar restrictions were enforced as in the Citizenship Law: people connected to either the military or intelligence services were not included as potential applicants.¹⁷³ An important change in the law resulted from the way the negotiations on troop withdrawals were stalled until Estonia relented on the issue of granting residence for 10,000 retired officers.¹⁷⁴ Despite this, the protests lodged by the Russian Federation in international organisations against Estonian legislation only strengthened. Foreign minister Kozyrev claimed that what was taking place was “ethnic cleansing in white gloves”.¹⁷⁵ The international community did react, and the law was slightly modified after consultations with expert organisations (OSCE, Council of Europe).¹⁷⁶

In Latvia, the debate on citizenship and the status of the Russian-speaking minorities was protracted, and the first draft for naturalisation was not adopted until June 1994. Similarly to

¹⁷¹ RFE/RL Vol 1, No 50, 18 December 1992, p 28 “Citizenship legislation in the Baltic States (Dzintra Bungs, Saulius Girnius and Riina Kionka). An interesting detail is that expedited citizenship was promised for those who had been involved in independence movement. Dagmara Vallens, p.15.

¹⁷² Lowell Barrington, p.133.

¹⁷³ Izvestia, 23 June 1993, p. 2 “Law on Foreigners is perceived by many as a declaration of war” (Leonid Levitsky). (CDPSP, Vol XLV, No 25.)

¹⁷⁴ Vallens, p.19. This applied also to Latvia, where the number of retired officers was 22 000. See Nils Muiznieks: Latvia: Restoring a state, rebuilding a nation, in the volume *New States, New Politics* (Cambridge 1997), p. 55.

¹⁷⁵ Vallens, p.16.

Estonia's, it stipulated that only pre-1940 citizens and their descendants were citizens. The criteria for naturalisation were also similar to Estonia's, but included an oath of loyalty to the state and some harsher restrictions than Estonia's were introduced.¹⁷⁷ The most significant point in the draft law was that the number of non-citizens that could be naturalised in any one year was not to be more than 0.1% of the number of Latvian citizens. This quota system, as it was called, met with a wave of criticism from the West and the legislation was subsequently amended to include so-called "windows". These phased out the categories of people who were able to apply annually, beginning with the younger age groups.¹⁷⁸ Even these restrictions were hotly contested by the Russian Federation.

The problems caused by strict citizenship laws were political: economic and social rights were the same for citizens and non-citizens. The debates concerned issues like the right to join political parties and to stand for election in municipal elections (residents were allowed to vote in municipal elections).¹⁷⁹ For towns populated predominantly by Russians this posed great difficulties. Overall, the criteria for naturalisation meant that participation in decision-making was controlled by the titular nationalities. In Estonia, the situation led to people increasingly opting for Russian citizenship, which was granted to all former Soviet citizens. Approximately 80 000 Russian-speakers thus became Russian citizens before the end of 1996.¹⁸⁰ Russia consistently maintained that the Estonian and Latvian laws infringe on the human rights of the minorities, but international agencies and expert groups saw that in general, their legislation was not in violation of international law or human rights criteria.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ The influence of international organisations and single (western) states will be discussed more fully in the last chapter.

¹⁷⁷ Ineta Ziemele: *The Citizenship Issue in the Republic of Latvia*, in the volume *Citizenship and Nationality Status in the New Europe* (London 1998), p. 199-201.

¹⁷⁸ Those not born in Latvia would not be able to apply until the year 2000. Vallens, p.24.

¹⁷⁹ Emil Payin, p.29.

¹⁸⁰ Arie Bloed: *Citizenship Issues and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities*, in the volume *Citizenship and Nationality Status in the New Europe* (London 1998), p. 44.

¹⁸¹ Nikolai Rudensky: *Russian minorities in the Newly Independent States: An International Problem in the Domestic Context of Russia Today*, in the volume *National Identity and Ethnicity in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (Armonk, N.Y 1994), p.71. However, international reports usually pointed out that for "humanitarian reasons" citizenship should be given to permanent residents or at least to more of them than at present.

Lithuania, however, opted for a compromise. The laws on citizenship and foreigners, passed in 1991, did not create much controversy.¹⁸² They were based on a 1989 law whereby all residents, Lithuanians as well as non-Lithuanians, had a two-year period in which to apply for citizenship. The actual criteria of naturalisation in the new law did not differ greatly from the Latvian or Estonian, but in practice it has been easier to be granted citizenship in Lithuania. The less prominent numbers of immigrants and conceivably also the differences in its historical composition of inhabitants allowed Lithuania to provide a more inclusive citizenship policy than its Baltic neighbours. Russia consistently commended Lithuania for its legislation – implicitly comparing its law to the situation in Estonia and Latvia.

4.4 Conclusion

The problematic ethnic relations in Latvia and Estonia are historically conditioned. For the Russians themselves it has been hard to learn to live as a minority, without the privileges they enjoyed previously. Likewise, the extent to which the Balts regard all Russians as representatives of an occupying power who were used to suppress their nations, has added to the strain.

The most significant issue connected to the minorities has certainly been the question of citizenship – despite the fact that economic issues are of more immediate anxiety to the people themselves.¹⁸³ The idea of the *de jure* continuation of the state is a significant point in my thesis also in that it has led to problems in the security sphere as well: border questions were not settled because of it. The legal continuation of the state after a period of occupation is justified – however, it should not entail an attempt to return to the social structure of that state.

The Baltic States have interpreted Russian motives as an attempt to extend its influence in the internal affairs of its neighbouring states, economically to gain a foothold in Baltic markets and internationally to enhance its status as a great power with regional interests. The policy of the "near abroad" was couched in terms of the necessity for Russia to have a legitimate sphere of

¹⁸² RFE/RL, Vol 1, No 50, 18 December 1992, p. 40 "Citizenship Legislation in the Baltic States" (Bungs, Girnius and Kionka).

influence for the protection of Russian minorities. The Baltic fear of Russia attempting to exploit the minorities by threatening or implying territorial secession in north eastern Estonia, populated mostly by Russian-speakers, on grounds of ethnicity, was considerable at the beginning of re-independence.

Regarding Russian aims, my conclusions are separated into economic and political objectives.

In economic terms, Russian objectives have been to use the local Russians in order to expand its economic links to western areas and also to gain politically by binding the region closer to itself.¹⁸⁴ Russia's only hope to prevent the Baltics from "escaping to Europe" was the existence of the substantial minorities, for whom the natural direction was thought to be to orient themselves east, not west. The minority issue seemingly made the binding of the Baltic States to its political and economic sphere possible. However, the "Euro-Russians", i.e., the Baltic businessmen of Russian nationality, have become even more keen to join the European Union than the Balts themselves.

In terms of the influence of Russian minorities on Russian policy, they have been a convenient way of retaining a valid interest in the politics of the new neighbours and putting pressure on them. Some would go as far as to interpret Russian motives as a restoration of empire, and see the minorities as the instrument with which this was to be implemented. I agree that the Russian-speakers are regarded as an asset in interstate politics by the Russian leadership, and that Russia has sought to manipulate them as a geopolitical and constraining factor on the behaviour of the Baltic States. Such a substantial number of ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers live in the Baltic States that Russia would have justifiable reasons for concern about their welfare. The protection of Russian minorities is a stated policy objective, even a priority, but the way Russia has professed to help them has not been conducive to integration, which leads observers to believe that there is a hidden agenda somewhere. Even though a genuine concern for the wellbeing of the minorities exists, it is surpassed by strategic and economic considerations, into

¹⁸³ RFE/RL, Vol 2, No 18, 30 April 1993, p.20 "Estonia's Narva Problem, Narva's Estonian Problem" (Philip Hanson).

which the minorities as a leverage of Russian power fit closely. The purposes that this leverage will be used in the future, remains an open question. Perhaps it is simply seen as convenient on the part of the Russian leadership to have a potential lever or even a “5th column” in the Baltic region, for unspecified reasons, and the “hidden agenda” remains obscure for the decision-makers as well. Attempts to exploit the minorities in order to re-create an empire for Russia do not seem plausible, however, because the Baltic States are firmly on the path to European integration.

My justifications for asserting that the minorities have been used more as a leverage, and less as a cause important in itself, are based on my interpretation of Russia’s overall motives in its Baltic policy. In this policy, the Russian-speakers are the rationale for continued influence in the new neighbour states, but not in actual policy and relations, where economic and security aspects seem to dominate. The means of policy implementation have generally been diplomatic pressure either bi- or multilaterally or threats of economic sanctions. There does not seem to be a coherent policy towards the diaspora, but rather a reaction to specific events such as Baltic citizenship legislation. Regarding the rights of the minorities as a value in itself has not been translated into action. The continuous accusations of human rights violations have served a double purpose: to put pressure on Latvia and Estonia, and to weaken these states in the eyes of the international community. Russia has certainly been able to play the role of the victim as (for once) it was able to portray the Russian minorities as being discriminated against. The Russian Federation has clearly taken the initiative on protecting the rights of the minorities, speaking out against legislation before there had been any reaction from the Russians in Latvia or Estonia. An additional indirect and maybe even unintentional aim of Russian policy in relation to the diaspora was its contribution to national identity and state –building in Russian domestic politics. All these factors point to the issue being used in a more instrumental way. In addition, even if the will to implement a more practical policy existed, Russian resources to conduct a more active “defence” (be it cultural or political) of Russian-speaking communities in the Baltics would be severely limited.

¹⁸⁴ Pentti Joenniemi: The Baltic States as Deviant Cases; Small States in Search of Foreign Policies, in the volume

5 The Economic Factor

The economic element of interstate politics in the post-Soviet space must never be relegated to the background. This is particularly important when it comes to Russian policy towards the Baltic States, in which economic considerations have played a major role. In the context of the severe economic decline of the 1990s, factors such as the high dependency of the Baltic economies on Russia's energy resources, the importance of the Baltic ports for Russia's foreign trade, and the general level of economic interconnectedness in the area have gradually gained in importance in a sphere previously dominated entirely by traditional security concerns.

Indeed, as I will show in this chapter, these economic factors have had crucial political consequences. While they have enabled Russia to occasionally use economic pressure as a political lever, they have also contributed critically to establishing reasonable political relations among the countries concerned. I will argue that while the interdependency of economic systems in the area is real, the threats of economic pressure and sanctions have remained largely on a rhetoric level. The importance of the Baltic outlets for Russian exports and the interests of Russian private or semi-private companies that have established connections in the Baltic States constitute an enormous incentive for the state to refrain from harsh action against the Baltics, and there is no reason why this situation would change in the short or the medium-term.

The following pages intend to give a description of the contradictory forces that shape this multidimensional economic relationship between Russia and the Baltics. I will first look at the main sources of economic interdependency: the energy sector and the Baltic ports, giving a short analysis of the way these links were constructed during the Soviet era. The analysis of how trade developed and why economic pressure has been used in the period 1992-96, to what extent and with what degree of effectiveness, shows differentiation among the three Baltic states but no substantial correspondence to the stages constructed by political developments. I will also discuss the role of non-state actors in the economic relationship in order to give a fuller picture of the issues involved. The chapter has therefore the dual aim of arguing the hypothesis of

New Actors on the International Arena: The Foreign Policies of the Baltic Countries (Tampere 1993).

interdependency and assessing how far this goes in explaining Russia's overall policy towards the Baltic States.

5.1 Soviet structures

The high level of interconnectedness in the economies of the states concerned stems from the structure of the Soviet economic system with its unified energy and transport systems. The integration of Baltic economies into the Soviet centrally planned system during the period of occupation had been systematic and comprehensive. As is traditional in hierarchical trade relationships of empire-states, the three republics were linked primarily to Moscow, with few connections among themselves or to other republics of the Soviet Union¹⁸⁵ which left a legacy of trade and transit routes. The Baltic republics were economically the most developed part of the Soviet Union. Latvia and Estonia had extensive industrial production of higher technological products, heavy industry, consumer goods and textiles, for which labour and raw material inputs were acquired from the rest of the Union. Industrial and agricultural products were directed back to other Soviet republics (less than 10% being sold in Comecon or Western markets). This reliance on inputs and markets had profound consequences at the time of Baltic re-independence, as indeed did the fact that most enterprises were under all-union subordination, or at least primarily controlled and directed by Moscow.

At re-independence, the states claimed all enterprises operating on their territory as their own. Some factories belonging to the defence industry complex had basically been formerly cut off from republican supervision. Of all state-owned enterprises it was the factories producing for the military that faced the immediate prospect of closure due to the loss of markets and cheap resources as well as general ineffectiveness.¹⁸⁶ With the collapse of the Soviet economy and the partial disintegration of trade links between the former republics, the problem of acquiring supplies for industrial production became acute. The Soviet economic system had been scattered and its manufacturing units had been distributed all over the union, single factories often

¹⁸⁵ Seija Laine and Pekka Sutela: *The Baltic Economies in Transition* (Helsinki 1994), p.11;

Kristian Gerner and Stefan Hedlund: *The Baltic States and the end of the Soviet Empire* (London 1993), p.68.

producing a single item and having complete monopoly over that item throughout the union.¹⁸⁷ Part of the legacy of the Soviet economy was the way the system collapsed with such a great speed. The difficulties in obtaining components for production at the time of the economic breakdown made it impossible for many enterprises to function. An additional problem in the Baltic States relating to the threat of closure of industrial enterprises and mass unemployment was the ethnic factor: more than half of the labour force in Baltic industry was made up of Russian-speakers.¹⁸⁸

Baltic dependence on Russia pertains predominantly to fuel and energy sectors, in particular oil and natural gas, and to raw materials in the early phase. Baltic dependence on Russian energy supplies is all but complete, and has therefore served as a convenient way of exerting economic pressure. Estonia is completely reliant on Russian gas and almost totally for coal, but it gets most of its petrol from Finland. The continued supply of raw materials for industrial production and access to the eastern markets for finished products was essential for the Baltic States in the first years following re-independence. Russian imports were essential in metallurgy, fuel, forestry and paper products as well as construction materials, machinery and equipment.¹⁸⁹ The imports for agriculture and light industry were fertilisers, cotton and wool. The situation changed rapidly once the Baltic States began to diversify their trade and markets. However, Baltic dependence on Russian energy imports remained stable throughout the period 1992-1996, providing potential for economic pressure. Other elements of the Baltic dependency constructed by the Soviet system were the monetary system and infrastructure: roads, railways and telecommunications. After re-independence, attempts were made to reduce the telecommunications dependency. The separation of the Baltic states from the ruble zone was considered to be highly complicated, but Estonia became the first to introduce its own currency in mid-1992. Latvia and Lithuania brought in temporary national rubles and coupons at the same time.

¹⁸⁶ Neil Hood, Robert Kilis and Jan-Erik Vahlne: *Transition in the Baltic States: Micro-level studies* (Basingstoke 1997), p. 3.

¹⁸⁷ Anatol Lieven: *The Baltic Revolution. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and the Path to Independence* (New Haven 1993), p.334.

¹⁸⁸ Gerner and Hedlund, p.170-171.

¹⁸⁹ Brian van Arkadie and Mats Karlsson: *Economic Survey of the Baltic States: The Reform Process in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania* (London 1992), p. 253.

5.2 Dependence or interdependence?

All the above would suggest major difficulties for the Baltic States to extricate themselves from these well-established economic patterns and therefore leave a considerable leverage for Russia to use, as it often threatened to do. Besides, the Baltic States do not, of course, constitute a major part of Russian overall trade. Nevertheless, as in the security sector, they play a larger role than simple statistics would show. The ties that bind the Baltics to Russia work both ways.

The strongest argument for economic interdependence comes in the form of the transport and transit sector. Russia retained only half of the ports of the former Soviet Union, losing all the most important ports such as Odessa. The ones it lost on the Baltic Sea were very important to its western trade as they offer the most convenient and shortest route to European markets for its exports. The Russian transit traffic through the Baltic ports of Tallinn, Riga, Ventspils, Liepaja and Klaipeda, which had been developed to serve the needs of the entire Union, therefore retained their high volumes. The necessity to retain access to the Baltic ports for commercial purposes may be regarded as more essential and worthwhile an endeavour than attempting to re-establish or maintain the ports from a security perspective.

An estimated 80 million tons of Russian cargo, half of it consisting of oil and other fuels, flows through the Baltic ports each year. Of the total Russian sea trade, two thirds is shipped from ports along the Baltic Sea coast.¹⁹⁰ The Baltics' share of Russian transit traffic has risen from 35% in 1990 to 45% in 1997. The non-fuel exports channelled through Baltic ports are coal, timber and metals, imports consisting mainly of grain and foodstuffs. The Latvian port of Ventspils houses the largest and most modern oil terminal on the Baltic coast and Liepaja is in the process of transformation from a Soviet naval base to a major commercial port. Klaipeda, Lithuania's only port, is the most convenient one for most of the Russian regions.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Rene Nyberg: A study in interdependency: Russian transport and economic development in the Baltic Sea area. The Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences proceedings and journal, Vol 201, No 6, 1997.p.33.

¹⁹¹ Report on the Ports of the Baltic States, U.K Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), p.9.

During the Soviet period no thought was given to transportation costs when production lines were designed. Therefore factories could be situated far away from any transportation centres, widely dispersed throughout the union. The Baltic region has relatively good transport infrastructure - road and railway systems – and this is an additional factor for their advantage over other ports on the Baltic sea. Kaliningrad provides poor access to its commercial port and St Petersburg is less directly situated on the road to Europe in geographic terms as well as being icebound for part of the year.¹⁹²

Estonia and Latvia supply the north-western regions with significant amounts of foodstuffs (meat, milk and fish).¹⁹³ In the sphere of electricity it is of particular significance that Estonian electric power stations in Narva supply Leningrad and Pskov oblasts as well as the city of St Petersburg with electricity. Moreover, the power grid for electricity generation and transmission remains a single system shared among the former Soviet republics and therefore maintaining stability in the area has its dire economic imperatives.¹⁹⁴ The oil refinery at Maziekiiai in Lithuania provides Kaliningrad's petrol and the gas supplies to this Russian enclave also go through Lithuania. In addition, the vast Latvian underground storage for gas caters for a notable part of the needs of the Leningrad and Pskov oblasts.

The costs accrued to Russia in transit and transportation fees have been approximately \$500-600 million annually.¹⁹⁵ Russia, deep in its economic crisis, increasingly resented the economic advantages reaped by the Baltics from the re-export of Russian products. Hardliners in Russia characterised Baltic transit policy as “parasitic mediation” in Russia's foreign trade. Steps were initiated to lessen these costs: Russian policy was to intensify its share in Baltic transit business, including the fuel and energy processing enterprises (storage, refineries).¹⁹⁶ While reducing Baltic economic profits in the short term, this development would lead to a strengthening of the

¹⁹² None of the Baltic ports are guaranteed to be ice-free, but the use of ice-breakers has been extremely rare in the period after independence. Report on the Ports, DTI p.6.

¹⁹³ Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB), 1992, SU/1318, p. A2/2. Other imports include chemistry and petrochemistry products, computer technology, telephone exchanges, consumer radio equipment, railway cars.

¹⁹⁴ Nyberg, p.35.

¹⁹⁵ Report on the Ports, DTI, p.5; Rossiyskiye Vesti, 22 July 1997, pp 1, 3. (Foreign Broadcast Information Service, FBIS-SOV-97-210.)

economic interdependence of the countries concerned. The Lithuanian policy in 1994 of charging higher fees for the transport of cargo to Kaliningrad than to Klaipeda prompted Russia to link the question of commercial transit to the military one, which was already known to be the obstacle in the way of implementing the most-favoured-nation status for Lithuania.¹⁹⁷ Big plans for the construction of Russian ports along the Baltic Sea coast (projects Ust-Luga, Primorsk and Batareynaya Bay) and for improving the existing ones (e.g. St Petersburg) have been put forward by many Russian politicians in order to circumvent the transit expenses and, as is hoped, to retain the money in the Federal budget. This is not a viable option in the foreseeable future, but the prospect of transit traffic being redirected away from Baltic ports was a way of exerting pressure on the Baltic States to lower their tariffs and fees. For the Baltics, the Russian transit generates a significant share of their GDP¹⁹⁸, but has remained a volatile area.

5.3 Trade development

The Baltic republics had been primarily trading with the RSFSR, which accounted for over half of total trade turnover. The shift in Baltic economic orientation from East to West was evident immediately after independence: in 1992, more than half of Estonian and Latvian and nearly a quarter of Lithuanian exports were sold on western markets.¹⁹⁹ Russian policy since 1992 could not influence the Baltic States from re-orienting their exports towards western markets. Besides resulting from conscious efforts to transform trade patterns on the part of the Baltics, this development was also partially due to the fact that trade relations with Russia had practically broken down at the beginning of 1992.²⁰⁰ Complications in trade were caused by Russian demands for companies to apply for export licences before the shipment of goods was allowed, at a time when the procedures for licensing had not been developed.²⁰¹ In particular, the decreases in the supply of raw materials from Russia hit the Baltic economies hard. The “double shock” to the Baltics of these decreased energy imports from Russia coupled with steep price increases was

¹⁹⁶ Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 30 August 1996, p. 4. (FBIS-SOV-96-209-S.) ITAR-TASS World Service, 10 December 1996. (FBIS-SOV-96-239.)

¹⁹⁷ Izvestiya, 28 October 1994, p. 2. (FBIS-SOV-94-211.)

¹⁹⁸ In Latvia, transit accounts for 1/5 – 1/4 of GDP, RFE/RL Newline Vol 2, No 95 Part II, 20 May 1998.

¹⁹⁹ Piritta Sorsa: Regional Integration and the Baltics: Which Way? (Washington, D.C 1994), p.3.

²⁰⁰ Russia's Information Agency in English, 19 March 1992. (SWB SU/1335, 21 March 1992, p. A2/3.)

²⁰¹ Ibid.

further aggravated by the impact of Russian export duties levied on raw materials and heightened transportation costs.²⁰² Simultaneously, the major contractions of the eastern markets and the price increases of various industrial and agricultural inputs made it increasingly difficult for Baltic economies to function.

Growth in western trade happened mostly at the expense of contraction in the share of the CIS countries. By 1994 the share of exports to the CIS dropped to a third in Estonia and less than half in Latvia and Lithuania, while imports diminished to 20%, 30% and 50% respectively. EFTA (European Free Trade Association) was the major trading block for the Baltics until 1995, and thereafter the EU.²⁰³ Russia continued to be Lithuania's primary trading partner throughout the period, accounting for 1/5 – ¼ of trade turnover. Although in 1997 Russia still counted as the main trading partner for Latvia (17.3% of total trade turnover) and the biggest importer of Latvian goods, more than half of Latvian exports and imports were with EU countries. For Estonia, Finland rather than Russia constituted the major partner since 1993/94. The share of the Baltic States in total Russian trade turnover has been less than 3% and therefore these developments have not been economically drastic for the Russian Federation.

The momentous changes in the pattern of Baltic trade from a situation of near-complete reliance on markets within the Soviet Union is well illustrated by the Latvian annual changes in trade.²⁰⁴ In 1993, the CIS countries constituted 47.6% of total trade turnover and EU countries 24.6%. Two years later the CIS share of Latvian exports had decreased to 38.3 and imports to 28.2%, whereas exports to EU increased to 44.1% and imports to 49.8%. By 1996, EU total foreign trade turnover did not change (47.5%), but that of CIS countries decreased from 32.4 in 1995 to 29.5%, with the same pattern continuing in 1997: the EU share increasing to 51.5 and the CIS diminishing to 23.5%. Estonian trade with Russia continued to be important, but Russia's position as the major trading partner was overtaken by Finland already in 1993 in terms of imports, and the following

²⁰² Mikhail Korchemkin: *Russia's Oil and Gas Exports to the Former Soviet Union*. (Odessa 1995), p. 6.

²⁰³ The EFTA countries Finland, Sweden and Austria became EU members on 1.1.1995. *The Economist* 19.11.1994, "Estonia: In a Bear's Paw". See also <http://www.vm.ee/eng/economy/index.html>.

²⁰⁴ The following figures are from the Bank of Latvia, <http://www.bank.lv/izdevumi/english/year/index.html> for the years 1993, 1995 and 1996.

year with exports.²⁰⁵ From mid-1994 onwards, the Russian double customs tariffs set on countries without MFN-status impeded trade to some extent, decreasing the imports of Estonian products, especially foodstuffs. For both Estonia and Latvia, the food industry (dairy products, meat and fish in particular) is directed towards the eastern markets. Developments in Russian-Baltic trade do not seem to have corresponded to the political stages in relations. The decrease in trade at the start of the period was steep and other markets have assumed greater priority, even though Russia continues to constitute one of the major partners. Notably, reliance on fuel and energy products from Russia did not decrease meaningfully in the period.

5.4 Pressure tactics

An appropriate question is how Russia has used economics as a leverage in its policy towards the Baltics. It is evident that in the period in question, Russia has on several occasions threatened the Baltic States with sanctions and the cutting off of oil and gas supplies. Russia has also used trade tariffs and most-favoured-nation (MFN) status as an instrument in putting pressure on its neighbouring states. In essence, the motives behind threats and actual economic sanctions or discriminatory trade policy are a mixture of both political and economic concerns, and each case should be considered separately in its specific context.

The Russian leadership has stated clearly that it considers it has the right to take any necessary measures in the defence of the rights of the Russian minorities. In its arsenal, economic sanctions play as big a role as political actions. Russia's economic action can take three forms: a suspension or decrease of transit trade through the Baltic ports, a ban of commerce between Russian and Baltic firms, or the cutting off of energy supplies.²⁰⁶ Curtailing energy imports is the easiest line of action as it has direct consequences that affect the entire population. These threats have periodically been used by the Russian leadership.

²⁰⁵ Aare Raid: Security Policy of the Baltic States: the Case of Estonia, in the volume The Baltic States: Search for Security (Riga 1996), p. 19;

Estonian Foreign Trade in 1995, Bank of Estonia, <http://www.ee/epbe/bulletin95/3/russia/>.

²⁰⁶ The Baltic Independent, Vol 6, No 289, 10 - 16 November 1995, p. B4. "Estonian Transit most Vulnerable to Russian Sanctions".

In early 1992, the threats to supply cuts came predominantly straight from the Russian companies that were responding to the non-payment of Baltic debt. The oil supply to Lithuania's refinery at Maziekai was turned off for five hours as a warning sign.²⁰⁷ Latvia and Lithuania were under pressure to pay for gas supplies over the summer with a threat of cuts from Lentransgas. In this case, the company was acting in opposition to state policy, because concurrently negotiations were taking place on the Russian-Lithuanian trade agreement and a meeting of the heads of state was coming up.²⁰⁸ Also in July, the Russian Duma made its first call on the government to introduce economic sanctions against Estonia,²⁰⁹ and at this stage the Russian minorities question came into play. Only a few months later Russian official policy took up the call for the protection of compatriots. In November 1992, a week after president Yeltsin ordered a halt to the troop withdrawal process, Russia threatened to cut off deliveries of natural gas unless the Baltic States agreed to a new plan to finance the troops.²¹⁰ The following June, supply cuts were implemented by Gazprom.²¹¹ Speculation was rife, because this action came immediately after Russia's announcement that it might intervene to protect the rights of ethnic Russians in the "near abroad". In March 1995 and July 1996, the Duma repeated its call for economic sanctions against Estonia and Latvia²¹² and in January 1997 foreign minister Primakov made threats against Estonia. These instances are sound examples of how Russia used economic factors as a leverage in its Baltic policy, and similar threats occurred throughout the period from different sources. There is an evident correspondence between the threats of economic sanctions and the problematic issues at the political level - troop withdrawal and minorities – as the threats have been made explicitly to influence the outcomes of these issues. In terms of practical policy, the cases when supplies were actually halted, the pattern is more complex and ties in with the question of energy companies discussed below.

²⁰⁷ Lithuanian Radio, 28 February 1992. (SWB SU/1318, 2 March 1992, p. A2/3.)

²⁰⁸ Lithuanian Radio, 28 August 1992. (SWB SU/1473, 31 August 1992, p. A2/2.)

²⁰⁹ ITAR-TASS, 17 July 1992. (SWB SU/1436, 18 July 1992, p. i.)

²¹⁰ The price of gas supplies would be paid into branches of Russian banks in each of the Baltic States in order for the troops themselves to withdraw the money.

²¹¹ Izvestia, 30 June 1993, p. 1 "Russian gas deliveries to Baltic region halted". (CDPSP, Vol XLV, No 26.)

²¹² ETA, (Estonian News Agency/Eesti Teadeteagentuur) 26 November 1996. (FBIS-SOV-96-230 19 December 1996.)

The issue of most favoured nation (MFN) status has also been a component of Russian economic policy towards the Baltics. Through the period in question, Russia refrained from granting most-favoured-nation status to Estonia. This led to a significant decrease in Estonian exports to Russia after the latter imposed double customs tariffs on all countries without MFN status in mid-1995. In the case of Latvia, MFN was ceded in 1994, but Russia subsequently threatened to cancel the agreement in order to bring pressure to bear on the ethnic disputes. With Lithuania, MFN status was granted in the 1991 bilateral/interstate treaty, but enacted only after the transit agreement concerning Kaliningrad had been agreed in 1995. These processes perhaps most evidently mark the pattern of combining political motivations with economic pressure. Even if it is not economically profitable for Russia to be deprived of Estonian goods, foodstuffs in particular, Russia does not rely on Baltic imports in any sphere, and it can thus afford to introduce heavy tariffs that decrease imports.

Some level of reciprocity, however, does exist in terms of economic pressure options. Lithuania is in a position to cut off supplies of energy and other necessary products to the Kaliningrad oblast. Until the troop withdrawal process was over, all three states were able to use the issue of supplying the forces with electricity, communications and other services to apply indirect pressure. The reliance of Russian oil and other exports on the Baltic ports cuts both ways – alternative routes are expensive to develop, and therefore the Baltics can also rest assured that relations with Russia will hardly deteriorate to a point where Russia would forego the use of these ports.

5.5 Non-state actors

The Russian fuel and energy companies, such as Gazprom and Lukoil, have on occasion threatened the Baltic States with the cutting off of energy supplies, ostensibly for non-payment of bills. All three states were periodically indebted to these companies: Estonia for its natural gas deliveries, Latvia for both gas and coal and Lithuania for gas, coal and oil.²¹³ However, in such situations, one might speculate whether the companies are acting unilaterally out of genuine

²¹³ INFO-TEK AGENCY No 10, October 1994, pp 27-29: "Brief Summary of Results of Operations of Russian Fuel-Energy Complex in January-April 1994". (FBIS-SOV-95-037-S, 24 February 1995.)

economic interests, or take implicit or explicit cues from the state to make these threats. For instance, in 1996 Latvia and Lithuania were threatened with a suspension of gas supplies by Gazprom as a result of the debt they had run up.²¹⁴ Within the Baltic States such actions are viewed as a conspiracy between the Russian state and these companies (the two are indeed heavily interdependent.) There is no direct evidence of Gazprom following state policy on this issue, but it is a partly state-owned enterprise. The president of Lukoil maintained squarely in an interview that by working in his company's interests, he was also furthering Russian interests.²¹⁵ One might tentatively draw the conclusion that when objective economic interests of the company seem to coincide with official policy, there is a willingness to join in the intimidating chorus. However, whether this is coincidence or active co-ordination between state and business, is unclear. The size of state holding in these companies offers only partial insight into the amount of influence it has in them. The myriad of ties between these semi-private companies and the Russian government goes far beyond financial statistics and makes it difficult to determine which factors are significant in decision-making. On the other hand, as Gazprom has invested in the Estonian and Latvian gas companies, and the Baltic region is the only one of the FSU in which the company is operating at a profit, its inclination to react by reducing supplies would not be economically sound.

As during Soviet times, the Baltic region is more economically advanced than Russia itself and there are various forms of economic that can be gained by Russia by co-operation. These include Baltic investment, technology and general commercial co-operation.²¹⁶ Russian enterprises have established links with the Baltic States and the Baltic economies in ways that make them noticeable actors in Russian-Baltic trade. The major source of foreign direct investment into the Baltic States is Russia.²¹⁷ Investments have been made in port facilities, oil terminals in particular.²¹⁸ Banning trade with Baltic companies or restricting transit trade are measures

²¹⁴ The Baltic Times, No 4, 11-17 April 1996, p.10 "Lithuania Maintains Gas Supply" (Burton Frierson); The Baltic Times, No 13, 13-19 June 1996, p. 9 "Politics of the Gas Business" (Krista Taurins).

²¹⁵ Interfaks-Aif, 20-26 May 1996 No 20, p 5. Interview with Vagit Alekperov, president of the LUKOIL company. (FBIS-SOV-96-124-S, 25 June 1996.)

²¹⁶ Roy Allison: Russian interests and concerns in the Baltic Sea region after recent EU and NATO summits. (Helsinki 1997), p. 4.

²¹⁷ Laine and Sutela, p.20; Baltic News Service. Report based on the Baltic Business Weekly. (FBIS-SOV-95-019, 29 January 1995.) Russia accounted for 26% of total investment in Estonia in 1994, as opposed to Finland and Sweden with 11 and 9.5% respectively.

²¹⁸ Report on the Ports, DTI, p.5.

strongly opposed by Russian business circles. It would impede trade with western companies, as alternative routes would be inadequate and slow to establish. Reciprocity in terms of investment is naturally far from reality, with each Baltic state constituting from 1-2% of total foreign investment into Russia.²¹⁹ However, it is in Russia's interests to see Baltic investments in Russian areas close to the borders (Pskov, St Petersburg, Kaliningrad). Heightened levels of interdependence in the economic sphere can be seen as offsetting the antagonisms on the political level in a constructive way. The number of statements and threats of sanctions greatly exceeds the times when these were put into effect, which gives credence to the tenet that economic interests increasingly override political ones even in the Baltic sphere.

What can also be considered as a factor of economic rather than political importance, is the connection between the Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltics and Russia's recurrent threats of economic sanctions ostensibly for the protection of these minorities. Due to the structure of the labour force, it is precisely the Russians in the Baltic States who suffer most from economic sanctions or blockades. They are generally not only consumers of energy products imported from the Russian Federation, but also constitute the majority of the workforce in most factories and enterprises that would be hardest hit by such action (heavy industry, oil refineries, cargo trucking, ports and railways). In Latvia in particular, ethnic Russians are most involved in business with Russian companies in the form of joint ventures and general trading and therefore suffer from bans imposed by the Russian government.²²⁰

Other sub-state actors are regional ones, which may at times have an interest to pursue a diverging policy to that of Moscow. In particular, St Petersburg and the entire Leningrad oblast as well as other immediate neighbouring regions to the Baltic States do not wish to see trade disrupted for political reasons. For the Baltic States, regional links can serve as a way of bypassing Moscow. Regional considerations do not, however, play a major part in inter-state policy besides the aspiration on both sides for increased investments. Regional interests may place a check on Moscow's policy because of economic considerations, but do not constitute a constraint.

²¹⁹ *Ekonomika i zhizn*, No 50, December 1995, p. 1. (FBIS-SOV-96-004-S 5 January 1996.)

²²⁰ *The Baltic Times*, No 19, 25-31 July 1996, p.1 "Russia's Sanctions Hurt Russians" (Ilze Arklina).

5.6 Conclusion: "*Business increasingly lubricates sticky political relations*"²²¹

Does official Russian policy envisage co-operation and business in the Baltics in purely economic terms or is there an element of empire-restoration implicit in it? There is a discernible economic penetration into Baltic markets, but there are evident economic reasons for that to be rational course of action. The possibility of EU membership for the Baltic States provides their eastern neighbour with a definite impetus to invest and trade with them. Russian investment makes up a considerable part of overall foreign direct investment in the Baltic States. With the conspicuous use of Russian-speakers in the Baltics as partners in commerce, Russia is developing (or re-establishing) ties that bind the Baltic States to itself. What is at question is therefore a mixture of political and economic elements, both affirming the other. Rebuilding economic contacts in the post-Soviet space is indisputably in Russia's economic and political interests and it has shown that it is ready to use its economic leverage to make political gains. The issue of economic advantage comes into play in a prominent way, however, and decisions cannot be made on purely political grounds. The Russian government would need to override all the various interests of Russian regions, companies and investors when it pursues a policy of stringent economic pressure towards the Baltics. Therefore the question is not of economic forces prevailing over political ones, but rather of a precarious combination of various factors contributing to Russian policy.

The dependency on Russia's transit and energy imports, and in some cases its markets, places Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in a vulnerable position in terms of potential for Russian economic pressure. On the other hand, despite the obvious economic asymmetry between Russia and the Baltics, the dependence is mutual and in addition, the Baltic states have reorientated their trade to Western markets to a remarkable extent. This high level of interdependence of the Baltic and Russian economies is a major element in reducing political tension in the inter-state relations. The diversity of factors that speak for interconnectedness preclude the use of economic pressure as more than an aggressive threat.

²²¹ The Economist, 18 April 1998, p.48 "The Baltic Revolution".

6 The International Context

In this final chapter I want to argue that there exists a second dimension in Russian-Baltic relations. Russia does not devise policy solely according to the three main elements of its bilateral relations with the Baltic States. There is a third party – the international community²²² – whose attitudes and reactions constitute one factor that Russia must take into account when devising its policy. The international context is essential to look at because the West monitors Russia's actions towards the Baltic States closely. This kind of situation does not exist to such an extent vis-à-vis other corners of Russian foreign policy. The issues I want to discuss here are the following: how do Western responses impact on Russia's Baltic policy, how far does the international context go to explain Russia's policy, and what kind of influences it channels.

There exists no unified “West”, though. The level of support for the Baltic States varies among different groups: the U.S, the EU and the Nordic countries. Germany, a decisive factor in any EU deliberation, plays a smaller role in the Baltic region apart from its economic influence, in order to avoid Russian fears of its political prominence in the former Eastern Europe. Finland, Sweden and Denmark have consistently through the period demonstrated full support for the Baltics.²²³ In the U.S there is, to some extent, a degree of electoral pressure besides the widespread support for the democratisation process. For the purposes of this study, however, “the West” denotes North American and Western European governments and international organisations, and they are taken to represent the same core values and motives.

The topics that are critical in assessing the international context are related to security (troop withdrawal and NATO expansion) and the Russian-speaking minorities (human rights/citizenship rights). Troop withdrawal is the clearest case in which Western responses constrained Russian policy, whereas the other issues have been more complex in their causal

²²² The international community is used here synonymously with the “West”, including individual governments (the US, Germany, Nordic States), the EU and international governmental organisations (CSCE/OSCE, Council of Europe, United Nations). N.B. The CSCE became the OSCE in 1995.

²²³ Finland has provided assistance in various state-building projects such as border guard and customs development, whereas Denmark has been their main proponent for NATO membership, and Sweden has advised them on troop withdrawal negotiations and generally brought their cause to the international stage in the early days of restored independence.

relations. The internationalisation of the withdrawal and minority questions and the issue of expansion of Western institutions have given Russian-Baltic relations a complex pattern. This consists of bilateral links between Russia and each Baltic country as well as multilateral links both between the Baltics and the West, and between the West and Russia. At the beginning of the period the pressure was mostly from the West on Russia (troop withdrawals). Subsequently Russia began to return the pressure not only directly towards the Baltics, but also indirectly through the international community (minority rights). The inclusion of the international context in Russian-Baltic relations has been beneficial for and welcomed by the disputing parties, as they all can find positive aspects in direct contacts with the West to resolve the problems in their relationship.²²⁴

Russia is compelled to take into account the reaction of the international community for various reasons. Some analysts think of its policy towards the Baltic States as a “litmus test”: it shows how Russia reforms itself into a democratic state that plays by the rules of the international community.²²⁵ Furthermore, it has been imperative for Russia to establish itself as a democratic country in order to build and retain close links to the West for political support and because of the financial incentives of trade and aid. In order to secure the financial aid needed to overcome its economic crisis and to be admitted into world financial and trade organisations, a favourable international climate has been necessary. Because the West takes such avid interest in the Baltic States, Russia would risk having its entrance to these organisations barred if it pursued policies at odds with Western expectations. Thus my argument rests on the assumption that Russia’s perceptions of how the West views the Baltic States affect Russian policy.

In order to assess the impact of the international context, I want to answer two sets of questions. Firstly, why is a third part involved? First it has to be demonstrated that the West perceives the Baltic States as a special region. A short comparison between the reactions/attitudes of the West vis-à-vis the Baltics on one hand and the CIS states on the other is thus in order. Once this has been established, I will turn to the gist of this chapter. I will look at how the international context

²²⁴ Aivars Stranga: Baltic-Russian relations: 1995-beginning 1997, in the volume *Small States in a Turbulent Environment: The Baltic Perspective* (Riga 1997), p.193.

²²⁵ Carl Bildt: *The Baltic Litmus Test*. *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 73, No 5, 1994, p.72.

modulates Russian policy by discussing the following questions: What does the West want? How does it try to get it? What is Russia's response? What can you thus say about "influence"? My argument is that international involvement both constrains and harmonises Russian policy.

6.1 "Sui generis"

The Baltic States are perceived by the West as different to the other former Soviet republics by virtue of their European heritage in historical, cultural and religious terms. The Baltics have remained on the conscience of the West because of the abandonment of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to Soviet expansionism, notwithstanding the policy of non-recognition that most of the Western countries practised throughout the Cold War period. Thus, the protection of Baltic sovereignty is considered politically and *emotionally* important²²⁶ (my emphasis) and a certain responsibility exists to help the Baltic States on the road to democratisation.

Russia has supported the active involvement of international organisations in conflict resolution (and prevention) in Central and Eastern Europe, but is persistently suspicious of Western engagement in CIS affairs.²²⁷ Russia did ask for international mandate to act as peacekeeper (Yeltsin's Civic Union speech) but has not been keen on international involvement on the ground. This has led analysts to suggest that the financial benefits of receiving UN or OSCE mandates must have been behind the attempt to gain international recognition as a peacekeeper.²²⁸

Russian concerns about Western interference in its "near abroad" have been unwarranted. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which consists of all the former Soviet Union excluding the Baltic States, has been much less monitored by the international community than the Baltics. In parts of the territory of the CIS, Russia has taken over the responsibility of

²²⁶ Dimitri Trenin: Russian and Western Interests in Preventing, Managing and Settling Conflicts in the Former Soviet Union, in the volume *Commonwealth and Independence* (Portland, Oregon 1998), p. 181.

²²⁷ Lena Jonson: Russia and the "Near Abroad", Concepts and Trends, in the volume *The Baltic States in World Politics* (Surrey 1998), p.125.

²²⁸ Mark Almond: *Russia's Outer Rim: Integration of Disintegration?* (London 1995); Trenin, p. 184.

securing the outer borders – ie. the former border of the Soviet Union – unilaterally or jointly with the new states.²²⁹ The international community has not acted to prevent this process, which clearly works against the sovereignty of these states.

Besides providing border troops, Russia has also actively taken part in peacekeeping tasks in the CIS. This has usually been justified in terms of preventing the escalation of conflicts and their expansion into the Russian Federation. There has been inability on the part of the other CIS countries²³⁰ and unwillingness on the part of the international community²³¹ to take part in these peacekeeping activities. International involvement has been half-hearted in the attempts by the UN and OSCE to serve as observers or peace brokers in the conflicts in Tajikistan, Nagorno-Karabakh, Transdniester, Abkhasia, and South Ossetia.

The regional instability of the Caucasus and Central Asia is a powerful reason for Russia to take unilateral action – this situation does not exist in the Baltic region. However, in a scenario of possible crisis in the Baltic States and its environs, the West would not remain impartial, as it has in the CIS conflicts. There is no guarantee that the West would intervene if there should be a military conflict in the Baltics. However, Russian policy must take into account the international context in which it works, and the pervasive international/Western attitude has been of unconditional support for Baltic sovereignty. Therefore in the Baltic context, preventative diplomacy has gained a strong foothold. Numerous fact-finding missions sent by the UN, UNDP and the Council of Europe, and the permanent missions sent by the CSCE/OSCE to Estonia and Latvia in order to monitor nationality questions support this conclusion.

“Small states must work hard to be placed high on the U.S agenda.”²³² The Baltic States have managed this, whereas the CIS countries have not.²³³ The process of internationalisation of the

²²⁹ Alex Pravda: *The Politics of Foreign Policy*, in the volume *Developments in Russian Politics* (Basingstoke 1997), p. 209.

²³⁰ Andrei Nikolayev: *Military Aspects of Russia's Security*. *International Affairs*, Moscow, No 10, 1993.

²³¹ Trenin, p. 174.

²³² Bertel Heurlin: *NATO, Security and the Baltic States*, in the volume *The Baltic States in World Politics* (Surrey 1998), p. 66.

²³³ The West does consider Ukraine to be important, but this is through little effort of its own.

Baltic issue is analysed in the next part of this chapter, beginning with troop withdrawal and the expansion of NATO, then with a discussion of the minorities question.

Russia wants to protect its security interests in the Baltic region, but is aware that it must not risk ruining relations with the West by conducting a forceful policy towards the Baltic States. This situation presents Russian decision-makers with a “Baltic dilemma”: the more coercion Russia uses to enhance its security in the Baltic region, the more negative reactions it gets from the international community, further jeopardising its security.²³⁴ Both security-related questions of Russian-Baltic relations – troop withdrawal and NATO expansion – have demonstrated this dilemma in Russian policy.

6.2 Pressure for withdrawal

The first issue to be tackled was the continued presence of Soviet/Russian troops on Baltic territory. Western governments and international organisations put unequivocal pressure on Russia for speedy withdrawal. For a long time, the Russian leadership was talking about the years 1998-2000 as completion dates, yet it proceeded to withdraw much more quickly. The clearly stated opinion and pressure from the international community was a major factor in speeding up the process.

In the immediate period after the restoration of Baltic independence, Western endorsement of troop withdrawal was general and ill-defined, but by mid-1992 efforts to bring the issue to the international agenda and to gain prominence were successful. The high-level internationalisation of the urgency of withdrawal happened at the July 1992 CSCE summit meeting in Helsinki.²³⁵ The Baltic States succeeded in bringing their grievances to the forefront of the international agenda by getting a clause on the withdrawal of all former Soviet forces from their territory in the final declaration of the summit. At the subsequent G-7 conference, Russia was urged to set up a timetable swiftly and begin the withdrawal. The Western leaders’ assurance that they understood

²³⁴ Roy Allison: Russian interests and concerns in the Baltic Sea region after recent NATO and EU summits. Helsinki 1997), p. 2.

the logistical problems (relocating and re-housing the soldiers and officers, in particular) did not justify the stationing of troops on the territory of sovereign states.²³⁶ Along with the similar resolution passed by the UN General Assembly in November of that year²³⁷, the Baltic States received international backing and Russia's own commitment to the pullout, which constituted an important element of pressure.

In response to Yeltsin's decree on the suspension of the withdrawal in October 1992, the West, and in particular, the Nordic countries, were resolute in their statement that military presence and minority rights had to be treated as separate issues. The U.S put economic pressure to secure the continuation of the process by stating that the Senate would withhold further payments unless progress was made.²³⁸ In Lithuania, which had managed to conclude a treaty on withdrawal much sooner on bilateral grounds, international pressure was present only at the end of the process. Russia suddenly halted the withdrawal on 18 August 1993 (two weeks before the agreed deadline). Western countries made clear their perception that Russia needed to fulfil its commitments as spelled out in the treaty, and under pressure Yeltsin agreed to complete the withdrawal on the condition that Lithuania would drop its compensation claims.²³⁹

To secure a date for the completion of the pullout in the case of Estonia and Latvia, Western pressure was considerable. Individual points, such as the agreement on the Skrunda radar installation in Latvia, were concluded only after Western intervention in the negotiation process. As in the case of the Lithuanian pullout, Russia threatened to delay the completion shortly before the set date, stating the protection of ethnic Russians as the reason. The intervention of the Swedish Premier, Carl Bildt, and at his request, other Western statesmen, before a meeting between Presidents Yeltsin and Meri in July 1994 forced the necessary concessions from the

²³⁵ Klaus Törnudd's speech at the Conference on Baltic Security. Taken from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Vol 1, No 49, 11 December 1992, p.25 "Conference in Salzburg on Baltic Security" (Jan Arved Trapans).

²³⁶ The Washington Post 8.7.1992, p. A1 "G-7 Nations Set to Ease Russian Debt; Yeltsin Unlikely To Get Eight Seat" (William Drozdiak and Marc Fisher).

²³⁷ RFE/RL, Vol 1, No 48, 4 December 1992, p.58 "Military and Security Notes" (John Lepinwell and Alfred Reisch).

²³⁸ Pravda, 3 November 1992, p. 3 "Payment for Renouncing Obligations is \$417 million" (Sergei Filatov). (CDPSP Vol XLIV, No 44.)

Russian side.²⁴⁰ In addition, the decision of the U.S. Congress to require the completion of withdrawal from the two remaining Baltic States as a precondition for the continuation of economic aid to Russia put intensive pressure on Russia to conclude the process. The Latvian issue on Skrunda had been deadlocked for some time with Russia demanding a five-year extension on its lease with two additional years for dismantling, and Latvia offering three plus one years. The problem was not resolved until the Americans stepped in and brokered an agreement whereby the lease period was defined as a compromise between the opposing sides - 4 years and 18 months - and effectively persuaded the Latvian side to accept the arrangement.²⁴¹ Again, financial aid from Western countries was part and parcel of the final settlement.²⁴²

The substantial reason for Russian acquiescence was that the protracted process of troop withdrawal was eventually understood to be damaging for Russian interests and image. Russia's concerns centred on the threat of western aid being cut and, more generally, the threat of relations with the West and international financial institutions being undermined. In its economic situation it was a national priority for Russia to ensure access to these financial institutions and not be excluded. Its image on the international arena was threatening to become one of an obstinate and procrastinating partner. It was therefore considered prudent policy by the Russian leadership to bring the process to a conclusion. On the other hand, by stalling negotiations and issuing suspensions Russia was defining the limits of international involvement and response. Responses of the West to this issue clearly demonstrated that the Baltic States were considered to be fully independent, and Russia was demanded to renounce claims to continued military influence in the region.

²³⁹ Los Angeles Times, 31 August 1993, p.7 "Deal clears way for Russian pullout from Lithuania" (Richard Boudreaux); The Daily Telegraph, 24 August 1993, p.12 "West must make clear to Yeltsin that support depends on both enlightened foreign policy and economic reforms".

²⁴⁰ Nicholas Redman: Dilemmas of Engagement. Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian Approaches towards Russia, 1992 – 1996. Doctoral thesis, Oxford University (in preparation).

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² The Guardian, September 1994, p.13 "US cash brings happy ending to Baltic saga" (Ian Black).

6.3 “Betrayal by the West”

The security aspect of Russian-Baltic relations did not fade away after the completion of troop withdrawal. The prospect of NATO expansion, as exemplified by the active participation of the Baltic States in the Partnership for Peace –programmes and the obvious Baltic aspiration to join the military bloc, kept security squarely in the centre of Russian policy deliberations. Analysts correctly note that Russia felt betrayed by the West: Russia itself had relinquished its empire voluntarily, only to find the image of an alliance-free Europe being shattered by the expansion of NATO.²⁴³

The possibility of NATO expansion to the Baltic States has figured prominently in Russia’s policy towards the Baltics. Russia’s staunch and vociferous opposition to Baltic membership in NATO has been immovable throughout the period. In comparison to the withdrawal question, Russian recognition for the CSCE principle of self-determination (for instance, that all states have the right to determine whether they want to join any defensive bloc) has been much more lukewarm, and the Western stance has not changed Russian policy on the issue. Therefore it can be concluded that in spite of the economic imperatives that condition Russian relations to the West, Russia’s traditional security considerations are still very much in force.

In assessing international influence, what is important is that there is no clarity on the attitude of the West to Baltic membership. Alliance members have constantly emphasised that their intention is not to antagonise Russia, and that enlargement is not meant to be a confrontation. Furthermore, Russia’s opposition has led many members to fear a possible confrontation with Russia because of the Baltic States, with their unresolved minority problems and border disputes.²⁴⁴ In this issue, the West has not set itself decisively on the side of the Baltic States, as it did in the troop withdrawal negotiations. It is possible that this, and the disagreements among the present members of NATO on enlargement in general, have induced Russia to act resolutely.

²⁴³ Bertel Heurlin, p.80.

²⁴⁴ David Gompert and Stephen Larrabee: *America and Europe: A Partnership for a New Europe* (Cambridge 1996), pp 176 - 177.

Hesitations in the alliance surrounding the Baltic States are obvious. U.S. endorsement has not been unanimous: contrary to opinions on the spread of stability and other benefits of incorporating former communist countries into the Western community, notable reservations and negative consequences have been put forward. The usual phrase has been that the Baltic States are not yet ready for NATO membership – but NATO is “keeping the door open”. The danger of an inherent instability of a security system in Europe where one of the most important countries would feel isolated and aggrieved has been one of the most important factors why expansion can be seen as contrary to American interests. Within the alliance, Denmark has been the only forceful champion of Baltic inclusion in NATO.²⁴⁵ Support from other member-states has not been vocal. The European heavyweights – Germany, Britain and France – have likewise been more cautious in propagating the Baltic question. Germany has been restrained by not wishing to appear to be re-introducing its own political influence (as opposed to economic) in the region, which traditionally has been an arena for clashing interests between Russia and Germany, and thus careful not to intimidate Russian sensibilities. France has been involved in rethinking its own role in the European security community and Britain has perhaps acted the role of the eternal sceptic.

Therefore the international context of this question is far more complex than when the surrounding world was concerned with troop withdrawal. There is no unified body of opinion on Baltic (or pan-European) security options. The West seems to have internalised Russia’s Herculean objections to NATO enlargement within the borders of the former Soviet Union, and is in no hurry to give the Balts security guarantees. Russian fears of marginalisation and difficulties of accepting the loss of its dominance over the Baltic States have both generated a negative reaction in Russia. It has issued veiled threats about countering possible Baltic membership, although the lengths to which it would go in order to protect its security interests are unknown. Should the Western response to Russian insistence be more determined, international influence would be easier to determine. I would argue, however, that even if the West were to support Baltic membership in NATO unanimously, Russian opposition would not waver. The response would of course be constrained by various factors, but the prospect of

²⁴⁵ In addition, Denmark has been the most active country in the creation of BALTBAT, the Baltic peacekeeping

NATO – potential enemy – forces on its borders would entail a threat of serious proportions, for example with a capacity to strike Moscow with supersonic aircraft in 20 min.²⁴⁶ Therefore international influence is not straightforward even in a situation where Russia is the weaker counterpart. The conclusion to be drawn is that international opinion does influence Russian decision-making, but when something understood as a vital security interest is in question, this influence must be modified.²⁴⁷

6.4 Minority rights

The restoration of Baltic independence and the break-up of the Soviet Union faced the international community with challenges that were not only related to the security sphere, but also to the legacy of nationality dislocation and its political consequences. The question of the Russian minorities has been taken up because of a general recognition of the consequences of unmonitored ethnic conflict in the post-communist world.²⁴⁸ The involvement of international governmental organisations²⁴⁹ in this issue was thus an attempt to defuse both internal and external tension and to prevent the nationality problems from escalating into conflict. The security interests of the West itself have promoted active engagement, as stability has increasingly been seen to rise from co-operation.

battalion.

²⁴⁶ Alexander Pikayev: Russia and the Baltic States: Challenges and Opportunities, in the volume *The Baltic States in World Politics* (Surrey 1998), p. 152.

²⁴⁷ In contrast to the polemics on NATO, there have been no official objections by Russia to any or all of the Baltic States joining the European Union. EU enlargement is viewed mostly as a positive development and is considered mostly in economic terms. Despite the gradual development of a common foreign and security policy and the existence of the Western European Union (WEU), there has been no notable discussion in Russia of the implications of enlargement in politico-military terms. The absence of opposition can be explained by the fact that contrary to the issue of NATO expansion, EU enlargement cannot be claimed to present a threat of any kind to Russia. Even armed with a military force, the EU would not be a danger. Opposition would be perceived as a straightforward case of spheres of influence –thinking and a refusal to accept the self-determination of the Baltic States. The lack of knowledge of the EU is well illustrated by Ambassador of Russia to the U.K, Mr. Fokine's remarks on the near-total unpreparedness of the Russian government to deal with the introduction of the common currency of the EU, the Euro. (Lecture 25 November 1998, notes are held by the author.)

²⁴⁸ Paul Kolstoe: *Russians in the Former Soviet Republics* (London 1995), p.12.

²⁴⁹ IGOs that have participated in Estonia and Latvia: The United Nations, United Nations Development Program, The Council of Europe, CSCE/OSCE High Commissioner for Minorities and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, long-term OSCE-missions to Estonia and Latvia since February 1993 and November 1993 respectively, the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

In assessing the international influence on the minority question, we are faced with a mixed agenda. In this discussion it is easier to construct an overall pattern of Western opinion, but this opinion is not necessarily simple. This is due to the fact that international law-and-order consists of a multiplicity of global discourses, or “scripts”.²⁵⁰ This, in turn, and in practice, leads to slightly divergent analyses by international organisations on the Baltic minority issue. The UN, the Council of Europe and the CSCE/OSCE²⁵¹ have repeatedly rejected Russian condemnations of Estonian and Latvian citizenship policies as ethnically discriminatory, although they have periodically suggested specific amendments on the basis of humanitarian considerations.²⁵² The differences among the international organisations are demonstrated, for example, by the former Danish Justice Minister Ole Espersen, the human rights Commissioner of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, who has come out with strong statements against the Baltic citizenship legislation. This situation has enabled all parties (Russia, Estonia and Latvia) to claim international support for their own views.

The widely accepted Western opinion of the minority (citizenship) question is that Estonia and Latvia should permit their Russian-speaking residents to become nationals (citizens) without unnecessary obstacles.²⁵³ Despite their historical suffering, these countries have been told to ‘face the facts’ – although most observers do not put it as harshly – and accept that they are no longer mono-national states like they used to be.²⁵⁴ The Russian-speaking population cannot be “sent home”. This is the prevalent Western view, although there are no universal or even European laws on the right to citizenship. Moreover, declarations such as the Universal Declaration of Human rights from 1948, which legitimate the rights of “persons” regardless of their nationality,

²⁵⁰ Yasemin Nuhoglu Soysal: *Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe* (Chicago 1994), p. 7.

²⁵¹ The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) became an Organisation (OSCE) in 1995.

²⁵² Walter Clemens: *Baltic Identities in the 1990s*, in the volume *National Identity and Ethnicity in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (New York 1994), p. 195.

²⁵³ See for example Hanne-Marie Birckenbach: *Preventative Diplomacy through Fact-Finding How international organisations review the conflict over citizenship in Estonia and Latvia* (Hamburg 1997), p. 26; Margaret Killerby: *Steps Taken by the Council of Europe to Promote the Modernisation of the Nationality Laws of European States* and Arie Bloed: *Citizenship Issues and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities*, both in the volume *Citizenship and Nationality Status in the New Europe* (London 1998), p. 35 and p. 43; Graham Smith: *Nation-building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: the Politics of National Identities*. (Cambridge 1998), pp 1 - 3.

²⁵⁴ Yael Tamir: *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton 1993), p. 159.

are not legally enforceable.²⁵⁵ However, the need to prevent ethnic conflict on the scale of the former Yugoslavia, to defend universal human rights and to avoid refugees in Europe have surely led to an emphasis of this opinion.

The main juxtaposition is between human rights and state sovereignty. The traditional concept of sovereignty has faced a formidable challenge from human rights²⁵⁶, but it is still the state that decides the criteria for granting citizenship. This explains the sensitivity of the issue for the Baltic States, which have only just restored their independent statehood. After accepting the fact that the Russian minorities would stay in their countries, the attention of Estonian and Latvian parliaments turned to establishing the criteria for naturalisation. The West accepted that various criteria could be established, e.g. relating to knowledge of language, history and the constitution. The basic premise – that of state continuity and the granting of automatic citizenship only to pre-1940 citizens and their descendants – has not been questioned, and the critique forwarded by the international community has related to some specific categories but not the entirety of Baltic legislation.

IGOs, and the CSCE/OSCE in particular, have brought about several specific amendments to citizenship legislation. In the case of Estonia, the most prominent example was that concerning the Law on Aliens, first passed by the parliament in May 1993, which classified all non-citizens as foreigners, who were required to apply for residence permits within one year. This caused sharp criticism in the Russian-speaking communities, Russia and the West, whereupon the CSCE asked President Lennart Meri not to sign it.²⁵⁷ Meri proposed to both the Council of Europe and the CSCE to review the law and suggest amendments to it.²⁵⁸ Subsequently some proposals were included in the revised version of the law, even though all non-citizens still had to apply for the permits. In Latvia, the point that met the most criticism was a proposal for a quota system in the naturalisation process, which would have drastically limited the number of residents who could

²⁵⁵ Bloed, p. 51 and Soysal, pp 7, 149.

²⁵⁶ Ineta Ziemele: The Citizenship Issue in the Republic of Latvia, in the volume *Citizenship and Nationality Status in the New Europe* (London 1998), p. 187.

²⁵⁷ OSCE's High Commissioner for National Minorities, Max van der Stoep's letter to President Lennart Meri, Tallinn, July 1, 1993. In Birckenbach (1998).

²⁵⁸ Addendum IV to the Progress Report of the Bureau of the Assembly and the Standing Committee of the Council of Europe. 31 May 1994. Doc. 7080. Law on Aliens. Rapporteur: Mr. Binding. In Birckenbach.

have gained citizenship annually. The law was sent back to the parliament by the Latvian president Guntis Ulmanis after OSCE and Council of Europe criticism in 1994. The quota system was eventually eliminated from the draft law and replaced by a so-called “window” mechanism which stipulated that different categories of people (based on their place of birth and their length of residence) were entitled to apply for naturalisation annually.²⁵⁹

The involvement of the international community in this issue has worked to the advantage of Russia. The point is not that the West would support Russia as opposed to the Baltic States, but that they both (for whatever reasons) support the same aim: an inclusive vision of political community. It must be noted that all exaggerations on Russia’s part have been rejected by the international community (terms like ‘ethnic cleansing’ and ‘apartheid’ to describe the Baltic situation²⁶⁰, or the habitual accusation of ‘massive violations of human rights’). In addition, direct accusations of Baltic mismanagement of minority issues by the West have been very rare, and have mostly come from individuals, the most prominent of whom were former U.S presidents Jimmy Carter and Richard Nixon.²⁶¹ Occasional misrepresentation of the Baltic citizenship policies in western media cannot account for formal policy.

The effect of the international community in terms of minority rights has been more advantageous to Russia than in the security aspect. The recommendations of the OSCE have produced concessions in laws governing citizenship and the status of foreign residents that Russia could not have hoped to push through with bilateral pressure – due to the obvious Baltic determination not to let Russia interfere in their internal affairs. It was also profitable for Russia to have international organisations criticising its neighbours. All the states concerned were competing for aid and membership in various organisations so the way they were appreciated by Western states and organisations was important. Furthermore, with this issue, Russia found a convenient way of presenting itself (through its compatriots) as the victim of oppression and thus receiving positive media attention in the West. The flip-side of the coin is that Russian policy has been to discredit the Baltic States in the eyes of the international community.

²⁵⁹ Graham Smith, p. 109.

²⁶⁰ RFE/RL, Vol 1, No 40, 9 October 1992, p. 67 “Weekly Review” (Bess Brown, Suzanne Crow and Hal Kosiba).

²⁶¹ RFE/RL Vol 1, No 48, 4 December 1992, p. 60 “Weekly Review” (Hal Kosiba).

Russian pressure has therefore been indirect: the Baltic States have listened to the advice of the organisations that Russia has attempted to sway and influence. This can be construed as an example of a burgeoning belief in multilateralism in contrast to traditional pressure tactics. One reason why from very early on, Russia saw it as essential to bring in the international community, was that the foreign minister, Andrei Kozyrev, strongly advocated the mediation of non-partisan groups.²⁶²

The actual achievements of including the international community as an arbiter in the minority issue have not been remarkable - from the Russian point of view. Beginning with the UN report of November 1992, the vast majority of organisations have refused to condemn Estonian and Latvian citizenship policies as ethnically discriminatory. The implemented recommendations of the OSCE have not measured up to all that Russia has aimed for, but the very fact that the internationalisation of the issue has brought about some responses has helped to develop a more positive approach towards international mediation and co-operation in general.

6.5 Conclusion

There is no coherent structure of Western influence. In some cases it has pushed Russian policy in a certain direction. The international context can act as a constraint on Russian policy to a significant extent. The effect of Western pressure on the troop withdrawal negotiations in 1993 – 1994 was considerable in speeding up the entire process. Nevertheless, when confronted with what it perceives as a serious security threat, Russia retains its claims to influence decisions made by its independent neighbouring states, such as in the NATO question. This is emphasised in situations where Russia interprets the West as being indecisive or unconvincing, as Russia can then safely take advantage of the manifest ambiguities on the Western side. In the minorities question, Western influence on Russian policy has been different, and has provided some kind of support for Russian claims. In all, the international influence on Russia is a complex framework within which Russian policy is made.

²⁶² Andrei Kozyrev: Russia and Human Rights. *Slavic Review*, Vol 51, No 2, 1992, p. 290.

Russia has become mindful of the strength of Western support for the Baltic States, and this has entailed that Russia modify its behaviour towards the Baltics to some extent. In doing so, Russia has implicitly acknowledged that the Baltic States have escaped its immediate sphere of influence and cannot be treated in the same way as the other former Soviet republics. Nevertheless, Russia has used the available opportunities to regain influence in the area. The issue of Russian minorities is the most opportune way of putting multilateral pressure in Estonia and Latvia, and of influencing not only their internal affairs, but also the international status of these states.

Despite the fact that the main priority of the West is to support the Baltic States, a level of reciprocity exists concerning the use of international pressure between the two sides. Significantly, the international context has made both sides aware of limitations in their dealings with each other as states in the publicity of the international arena. In the period in question, the rules of the game were being laid out through Russian attempts to define the limits of its new role as the big neighbour state. Short of re-establishing dominance over the three states, the question has been more of retaining some influence in a region that clearly wants to “return to Europe”.

FINAL ASSESSMENT

Confrontation or Co-operation?

Assessing the first five years of Russian-Baltic relations after re-independence, it is interesting to attempt an evaluation of the basic thrust of Russian policy in terms of whether it has primarily been a matter of confrontation or of co-operation. On one hand, vocally publicised political disagreements and mutual recriminations concerning security, minority and economic issues built up an environment of hostility, which replaced the previous (albeit short-lived) phase of co-operation in the fight against Gorbachev and the organs of central power of the Soviet Union. Russian statements on the continuous ‘human rights violations’ and its threats to use economic sanctions against the Baltics were very harsh from the end of 1992 onwards. In terms of practical policy, Russia’s refusal to implement or even sign economic agreements with Estonia and Latvia was confrontational.

Nevertheless, there has been no serious conflict -seeking on the part of the Russian leadership, and its hostility has been largely rhetorical. Threats of a military nature – veiled references to a Transdnierster “scenario”, where the Russian army intervened in the conflict between the Russian minority and the titular population, or to outright aggression – have come from outside the government. Russia’s hard posture on troop withdrawal timetables and its constant criticism of even the amendments that were made to laws on citizenship or foreigners were not followed up by action: the troops left, and regional separatism in the regions with high percentages of Russians was not fostered. There is some correlation between Russia’s threats to impose economic sanctions and the legislative process on citizenship, but hardly any correlation to when gas supply cuts actually happened. On the occasions when there was an interruption, there was, at the very least, some kind of economic element included: the Baltic States were constantly running up debts to the oil and gas companies that supplied their energy. Finally, Russia has accepted the involvement of a third part – the international community – in its relations with the Baltics.

This can be considered to reflect a significant transformation in the range of policy options Russia has traditionally had vis-à-vis this region. Security interests clearly still exist, but the international factor has to be taken into account – no unilateral steps can be taken to combat perceived threats. Conversely, Russia can attempt to persuade the West not to ignore Russian security interests in the Baltic region. Also, the occasional but well publicised economic threats have obscured the reality of the economic relationship: the Baltic side has a passive economic leverage in its ports, and thus the interdependence of the countries leads the economic threat to be somewhat obsolete. An active “defence” of the Russian minorities with the intention of coercing Estonia and Latvia into granting more inclusive citizenship laws through bilateral negotiations (in connection with troop withdrawal) and through continuous protests failed, and the only way to secure progress was to involve the international community as mediator in the problem.

In essence, Russia’s policy has shown **relative** restraint – a degree of confrontation but no outright threats to the existence of the Baltic States as independent entities.

Evaluation of Russian policy as a reflection of a **coherent** strategy has its pitfalls, and the rationalisation of something irrational is not valid research. Nevertheless, my conclusion is that although the policy-making process did not come across as following a logical *modus operandi*, the task was to define the factors that created the environment of policy-making. By assessing these elements, one can arrive at an estimate on “rationality”. This rationality is portrayed by the way it has acknowledged the restraints that confound its options in its policy, while seeking to further its interests in all available ways.

The post-Soviet period began in Russia with general confusion over the separation of powers between various foreign policy actors, which led to occasional contradictions in its Baltic policy. Initially, the aim was to deal with the pressing issues at hand – withdrawal and the minorities – and this can be described as a reactive rather than proactive response. In connection with the development of strategic thinking on the “near abroad” and reorientation away from co-operation with the West, more emphasis began to be placed on the Baltics. Various tactics were

implemented, but it took until February 1997 for the government to produce an official strategy for the Baltic region. This strategy can be assessed to embrace a determination to prevent any further losses in the security sphere and an aspiration to retain what influence remains in the region.

Relative Restraint

The elements shaping Russian policy end up representing contradictory forces. Security matters and minority questions have been leading Russia to take a tougher stance towards the Baltics. History and geography dictate a major part of these considerations – it is a significant strategic region, and has experienced extensive immigration from Russia. Running counter to these stimuli are the international and economic aspects of policy, which constitute constraints that motivate Russia to modify its policy. These restricting influences have provided the backdrop for policy-making, and although it has seemed that the security and minority issues have made more impact on policy (as they have been continuously discussed through official statements and the media), their strength has not overridden the basic premises of policy that Russia has to deal with.

The security dimension of Baltic policy is surely a clear case of Russian interests in the region being counteracted by negative developments. The troop withdrawal process was concluded despite the major problems it caused for the Russian armed forces both in terms of defence and logistics. NATO expansion is considered a serious threat: the historical fear of the Baltic region being used as a base for intervention from the West, and the old enemy-image of the organisation, are still present. Therefore the potential enemy establishing bases on Baltic territory would increase Russia's already substantial vulnerability: it is hard enough to conform to the loss of its *cordon sanitaire* of the other Soviet republics and the Warsaw Pact countries. On the level of verbal interchanges, security issues have been prominent in Russian policy alongside minority problems. However, in practice the range of responses is more limited and therefore a hardening of practical policy, that could have been the expected outcome of such pressures, did not emerge.

The use of force, military intervention, is not an accepted policy tactic, but because of the legacy of Russian-Baltic relations, it is valid to consider whether it is still regarded as an option by Russian decision-makers. Does Russia's policy reflect implicit neo-imperial ambitions, or has it renounced its traditional objective of control of the Baltic region? It is not easy to define where legitimate interests end, and neo-imperialist tendencies begin. Military concerns have not disappeared, and security is still thought of in conventional terms – there is certainly no evidence of any tendency to replace these with a post-modern concept of “the new security” that would embrace environmental and welfare-related factors instead of territorial ones. On the question of NATO expansion, Russia's objections seem to reflect great power-thinking, because it sees its own security interests as overriding Baltic ones. On the other hand, from the economic point of view, territorial control is no longer that necessary: the interests of private business are well served by ports in Baltic possession, and possible EU-membership for the Baltic States would increase Russia's contacts with this economically important organisation (which Russia has scant hopes of ever joining itself). This juxtaposition between security and economics is at the heart of Russian policy. In this case, however, even the military considerations do not add up to a claim of “imperial ambitions” – such a weighty allegation would need more substantiation (for example, a forceful attempt to coerce the countries into a Russian-led security mechanism) to be justifiable.

The question of Russian minorities residing in the Baltic States with stringent citizenship laws to overcome is a more complex issue. Initial fears of refugee-flows were decreased after the first two years, and Russia has portrayed itself as only protecting the interests of its co-ethnics, “compatriots”, and not driving its own agenda. Increased rhetorical assertiveness has certainly been in evidence since 1993, but the issue has not acted as a stimulus for separatist claims or forceful action in official policy as might have been expected, given the significant numbers of Russian-speakers in the region. Thus Russia cannot be criticised for attempting to use the minorities as a subversive “5th column”. This is not to say that Russia does not find in the issue a convenient way to influence internal politics in Latvia and Estonia and a convenient potential lever in the future. In addition, Russian interest in the wellbeing of its compatriots is probably authentic, but in many respects its policy has not been conducive to improving their situation.

Russia has criticised each amendment (not constructively) and threatened economic sanctions that would hurt the Russian minorities more than others. It has also relied on biased information on the Baltic situation passed on from the extremist elements within the minority communities, because moderates have little media access and because Russia has not been interested in seeking more reliable sources of information. Therefore it cannot be maintained that Russia has acted resolutely in the protection of the minorities in the bilateral sphere: security and economic considerations have overridden ethnic ones. But minority and security issues are clearly closely linked. Ethnic conflicts can escalate and endanger international stability. Russia itself has throughout claimed its right to protect all its “compatriots”, all ethnic Russians or even Russian-speakers who consider themselves Russian. In Estonia’s case it is particularly noticeable that the high numbers of people who have decided to take Russian citizenship is an additional danger – Russia has better claims to come to the defence of its own **citizens**.

The second constraint on Russia is more intricate. The economic aspect in terms of Russia’s economic crisis, leading to its growing dependency on the West and its goodwill, has definitely had a moderating effect on Baltic policy during the period under consideration. The need for Western co-operation and the admittance of Russia into international financial organisations has been such critical bases of Russian foreign policy in general that even strong security concerns vis-à-vis the Baltics have not prevailed, as in the case of troop withdrawal. Similarly significant is the level of interdependency between the Baltic States and Russia. The existing economic links between the countries, dating from the Soviet planned economy, have acted as a constraining factor in Russia’s policy-making. On one hand, retaining and rebuilding economic contacts has been a reflection of attempts to attain influence in the region, but Russia’s capacity for economic coercion is less than it seems: dependency on Baltic ports for its trade with the West has made rediscovered trade links mutually beneficial. The important economic interests that different actors have in the Baltic region (Russian neighbouring regions, private enterprises and investors, semi-governmental companies such as Lukoil and Gazprom) have made it rather unprofitable for the Russian state to make any kind of intervention in the Baltics. Moreover, the Baltic region has always been economically advanced, and so far, Russia has attempted to

exploit the region's and peoples' capacities. However, the Baltic States would thrive economically as members of the EU in a way totally impossible under Russian control.

These economic aspects have affected Russia's policy during the period under consideration, but are transitory as opposed to the more permanent international aspect. In whichever direction the Russian economic development proceeds, the result can be expected to have an impact on Russia's Baltic policy. Russia has the potential to reinstate its economic power. In that scenario, its dependency on the West would be reduced and its own ports on the Baltic Sea built, leading to more possible assertiveness in action. If on the other hand, the Russian economy disintegrates further into chaos, the Russian leadership will find it even more expedient to nurture good ties with the West. The same scenarios cannot be painted concerning international involvement: the attitude of the West is unlikely to change, in particular as the Baltic States, particularly Estonia, are well on their way to membership in the EU. Russian policy has therefore presented a relatively restrained pattern, with economic threats and pressure taking the place of military ones in policy-making, although the significance of security aspect remains. In the case of the interconnections between security and economic, it cannot be conclusively maintained that economic calculations would have overtaken security considerations, but that the former have become much more important than before.

Western attention towards the Baltic States provides a permanent constraining influence on Russian decision-making. Western influence is very important in the evaluation of overall circumstances of policy-making: it establishes a second dimension, a triangular pattern. The West regards the Baltic region in different terms from the rest of the former Soviet empire because of their historical and cultural ties to Central and Northern Europe, and because their forced incorporation into the Soviet Union was never officially recognised by most Western countries. The importance the West attaches to the Baltic States was evident from the time of the troop withdrawal negotiations, when it was made clear by different states and multinational organisations that Russian military presence in the sovereign Baltic region was unacceptable. It can be maintained that the international aspect constrains Russia from taking harsh or violent action against the Baltics for fear of the West cutting its links with it in retaliation. Even though

Russia (nor the Baltic States themselves, for that matter) cannot be certain of a determined Western response in this kind of scenario, it does not consider it to be plausible to risk serious confrontation with the West. However, the conflicting pressures of the need for Western support and of Russia's 'vital' security interests have not been put to the test during the period in question. Even so, the validity of the point remains. International pressures and dependency on the West restrict action against the Baltic States. Even if the West does not support Baltic entry into NATO or does not always side with them, this does not take away from the conclusion that they have extended special care and support to the region. This is exemplified by the comparison to the CIS states.

The international context modifies Russian policy in another significant way. By taking the dispute on citizenship to the international arena, Russia has gained much more than with bilateral negotiations with Estonia or Latvia, and it can feel judged by the same rules. The modification that this brings to policy-making is the way Russia has not taken unilateral steps in defence of the Russian-speaking minorities. This can be maintained to have had worse results for the Baltic States (even in only in terms of economic boycotts and generally even worse relations than what they were). The acceptance of the inclusion of the third party as a mediator is interesting also in that Russian policy has become at the same time more constrained and more successful. This can be interpreted as a variation of the "if you can't beat them, join them" –axiom: Russia is unable to pressure the Baltic States as much as it wants to because of the protection extended to the region by the West. Hence it is very convenient for Russia to have an issue through which it can portray the Baltics as the culprits, and thus direct the western pressure on them.

The attitude of the West towards the Baltic States is also unique in that there is no other area in conflict with Russia that the West supports in a similar way. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe that previously belonged to the Soviet sphere of influence are not experiencing the same problems with Russia. This constellation would be an interesting one to do further research on – comparing the Baltic region to the former "Eastern block" in the 1990s. Following from here, another very interesting research project would be to compare Russia's policy towards Finland to the Baltics, considering the legacy of the recent past and of the Tsarist times. Such an

assessment would bring forth the reasons for the particularity of the Baltic case in much more depth. Certainly one must not forget that in my thesis, I have had to treat the Baltic region itself as too much of a single entity. I have attempted to make room for differentiation, and as the issues Lithuania faces are so different (more transit, less minorities) that it was not possible to include full analysis of this case. A variety of possibilities for further research exist: taking either one of the elements I have discussed and going into more depth in that specific theme, or choosing one of the Baltic countries and analysing Russia's policy towards it through the four themes I have worked on here.

Looking into the future, the most intriguing aspect of Russia's Baltic policy is the development of differentiation among the three Baltic States, or between Estonia and the two others. Throughout the period, Russian responses varied among the Baltic States, in a typical "divide and rule" –pattern. It is interesting to note that Russia's attention has turned away from Estonia and towards Latvia in the year 1998. The massive protests against alleged police mishandling of a pensioners' demonstration in Riga and the commemoration of the Latvian SS-troops in the summer were the most conspicuous examples of this shift. The reasons behind it lie in the EU acquis of June 1997, which set Estonia clearly apart from the other two states. How this constellation will develop in the future, and whether Russia will attempt to use Latvia as a wedge is worth a mention as a concluding thought, even though these developments have not been covered in my research.

Russian policy towards the Baltic States has differed considerably from its CIS-policy, as we saw in the brief description of the last chapter. On the other hand, despite attempts by western observers to describe Russia's Baltic policy as a "litmus test", Russia itself does not consider it to reflect any attitude towards the West. The Baltic States do not belong to the West in Russian eyes. They fall into a conceptual gap between the West and the CIS and constitute a unique corner of foreign policy, much more prominent than the small size of the region might imply, and containing a mixture of elements missing from the other areas.

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