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# THE POSITION OF INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY ON THE RESTORATION OF INDEPENDENCE OF THE BALTIC STATES

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*The separation of the Baltics from the Soviet Union was a difficult process accompanied by both political and economic conflicts. The third party in the negotiation process was represented by Germany and the USA. This article sets out to identify the role of the USA and Germany in the restoration of Baltic independence. Historicism and objectivity principles serve as the methodological framework for the research. The regional approach was applied in order to integrate the features of regional development into the overall picture of world politics. The scientific and practical significance of the article lies in a scientific evaluation of the Soviet-Baltic relations in 1989—1991. This study can help understand the mechanisms of formulation of foreign policy by the USA, Germany, and the USSR, as well as the practice of political interaction between these countries and the Baltic States. The materials and conclusions of this article can be used for further research on the foreign policies of the USA, Germany, the USSR, and the Baltic republics. In the process of the Baltics gaining their independence, western countries showed an ambivalent position and hesitancy regarding support for the struggle for liberation. As a result of internal contradictions in the USSR, Baltic leaders managed to achieve independence without any effective support from western powers. The research significance of this study lies in a diverse selection of sources and a new formulation of the problem of Baltic independence. The practical significance of the article results lies in the applicability of its materials in the development of Russian foreign policy in the Baltic region, further research on the history of the Baltic region, Germany, and the USA, and preparation of lectures.*

***Key words:*** "Baltic" question, struggle for independence, perestroika, collapse of the USSR, international community

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In 2011, the Baltic republics had been independent states for 20 years. The 'divorce proceedings' of the Soviet Union and the Baltic states ran extremely painfully, as a result of which today there are a lot of unresolved political, economic and military conflicts. The 'Baltic issue' was the Achilles' heel for the international and domestic policy of the Soviet Union. The position of the international community was crucial to the Soviet leadership. Measures taken by the Soviet leaders were not least based on the reaction of the major players on the international scene, Germany and the USA. The growing centrifugal tendencies in the Soviet Union forced its leadership to seek the support of Western leaders. The governments of the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States for their part had feared to openly support the struggle for the independence of the Baltic States. Each country pursued its own interests in the dialogue with the Soviet Union and used the 'Baltic issue' to manipulate the Soviet leadership while the Baltic States were relying on the help of the Western powers. The dual position of international actors in the acute relations between the USSR and its Baltic republics was manifested by the fact that the governments of the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States became middlemen in the dialogue between the USSR and the Baltic States.

However, in the national historiography the position and role of Germany and the U. S. in the restoration of the independence of the Baltic States were virtually unexplored. Most of relations between the USSR and Germany in the period of perestroika and the early 1990s in the research literature are discussed in the context of the reunification of the German state. The relations between the U. S. and the Soviet Union are analysed in the framework of confrontation between the two blocs in political and military terms. The issue of acquiring independence by the Baltic States in a dialogue of the USSR, Germany and the United States remains unsolved; the position of the Western actors in a dispute with the Baltic republics of the Soviet Union in their struggle for independence has not become clearer. Thus, the aim of our study was to investigate the meaning of the 'Baltic issue' in the bilateral relations in 1989—1991 between the USSR and Germany as well as the USSR and the USA as the main stakeholders in this issue. This problem was analysed based on the sources of personal origin, the memoirs and letters of politicians who used to take part in the events. Those are primarily the diaries of A. Chernyayev, the assistant of Mikhail Gorbachev, in which he focused on the fight for the independence of the Baltic republics and provides his interpretation of the events noting the significance of assessments of the Western society to generate the political position of M. Gorbachev. A. Chernyaev stresses that Gorbachev sought support in the 'Baltic issue' from the Western powers and found it in Germany [1]. The memories of the FRG Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher are of great interest [2] in which he addresses the problem of recognition of the independence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the letter of Chancellor Helmut Kohl and French President Francois Mitterrand [3]. The 'Baltic point of view' is represented by the collection of memories of the Baltic social and political activists of the late 1980s and early 1990s published in 2006 [4]. The U. S. role in tack-

ling the 'Baltic issue' can be analysed on the basis of secret messages and phone calls collected by the American politician and historian S. Talbott and M. Beshloss. The authors emphasize that by pursuing the purpose of disintegrating the Soviet Union, the Bush administration did not hesitate to use any means. Based on the minutes of negotiations presented in the book, it can be concluded that the 'Baltic issue' was also used as a tool for manipulation of the Soviet leadership [5].

Western Europe and the U.S. did not recognise the inclusion of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union, temporised on granting them independence in 1989—1991. This was due to the fear of a change of the course which was launched by Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union. German Chancellor Helmut Kohl reasonably believed that the open support to the independence of the Baltic republics on the part of Western Europe and the United States may result in a growing controversy in the Soviet leadership where there was no consensus on the 'Baltic issue'; moreover, there was a growing dissatisfaction with permanent climbdowns of M. Gorbachev in favour of the West. H. Kohl himself noted that although 'the support of the Lithuanian population in Germany is great, we need to build our policy in such a way that it does not run counter to the policy of Moscow' [6, p. 377]. At the same time, Western politicians could not completely abstain from being supported by the Baltic peoples in their quest for independence as this, in turn, could lead to a decline in their popularity with the electorate who were full of enthusiastic feelings about the democratic processes taking place in the Soviet Union and Europe as a whole. That is why German Chancellor stuck to the policy of 'small steps' stating that 'in the next five years due to the wisdom, patience and mental skills they [Baltic republics] will be able to achieve their goals' [6, p. 379].

The American public and Parliament also demanded that President Bush would 'let the Balts go' [5, p. 145]. He also believed that 'there are certain realities of life, and the Lithuanians used to know about them well, and they should negotiate' [5, p. 147]. The position of the U.S. government was clearly expressed by the U.S. President's National Security Advisor B. Scowcroft: '... Americans can only wish the Balts success because in terms of the U.S. national interests quite a lot was put on the balance' [5, p. 198].

The Baltic politicians and public figures themselves were very disappointed with the ambiguous position of the Western countries, especially Germany. Let us see how a member of the parliament 'Sąjūdis' and a member of the Supreme Council of Lithuania Bronislaw Gyanzyalis described his impressions of the visit to Germany and a meeting with German politicians (including the German 'Ostpolitik' policymaker E. Barch), 'The meetings were held according to all the rules of conspiracy... the Germans listened to us very carefully suggesting not to hurry and not to impede the democratisation process initiated by Gorbachev. It was obvious that the figures of both the opposition and the ruling majority in Germany would not have done anything if we had been subject to retaliatory actions. Sympathy was the only thing we could hope for' [7, p. 310].

Indeed, the leadership of Germany was entirely for linking the 'German' and 'Baltic' issues. Germany set priorities in favour of good relations with Moscow, and therefore it was not in a hurry to recognise the independence of the Baltic republics. Promoting the processes in the Baltic States by the German leadership could complicate negotiations between Germany and the Soviet Union on the issue of German reunification. That is why the response to the Declaration of Independence adopted by Lithuania in March 1990 was the letter from Chancellor Helmut Kohl and French President Francois Mitterrand to the President of the Supreme Council of Lithuania V. Landsbergis with a request to suspend the declaration and enter into dialogue with the Soviet leadership [3]. At the same time, German diplomats tried to reassure the Soviet leadership that Germany was not going to interfere in the internal affairs of the Soviet Union. During the meeting of Mikhail Gorbachev with H. Teltschik, Chief Adviser to Chancellor on Foreign Policy stated that 'in Europe no one was interested in the destabilisation which might arise due to Lithuania. Therefore, the German Chancellor was frank to say to Prunskiene that in place of the Lithuanian leadership he would not have taken such decisions which had been taken by them' [8, p. 515]. Lithuanian public figures called the statement of the German and French leaders the 'death knell of all the hopes that the West will act for the benefit of Lithuania' [9, p. 399]. The reaction of the U.S. government was more decisive in that case. The U.S. Congress decided to deprive Moscow of the most-favoured-nation until the Soviet Union begins negotiations with Vilnius [5, p. 201]. The 'Baltic issue' was used by the Americans to achieve economic benefits, because signing the trade agreement was at stake. During the visit of Mikhail Gorbachev in Washington in May 1990, President Bush agreed to sign the agreement only if there was a peaceful resolution of the 'Baltic issue' [5, p. 203].

By supporting Mikhail Gorbachev in the 'Baltic issue', H. Kohl was able to demonstrate his commitment to Gorbachev's 'perestroika' and the intention to help in resolving the conflict between the Soviet Union and the Baltic republics. On the other hand, the 'Baltic issue' became a kind of lever for the FRG to put pressure on the Soviet leadership. The Baltic independence movement directly threatened the integrity of the Soviet Union. In that situation, the Soviet Union's policy priorities had changed, and the topic of German unity was no longer paramount. It was what the German politicians cleverly took advantage of in the negotiations on the reunification of Germany and its membership in the NATO military bloc, 'Given the results of a coherent policy of H. Kohl concerning the German question and specific problems in the USSR... The Soviet Union is prepared to accept membership of a united Germany in the changed NATO' [10, p. 312].

Indeed, for the Soviet party leadership the 'German issue' was not as important as the 'Baltic' one. A. Chernyaev described the problem as follows, 'The Baltic issue was extremely important for us because for the Soviet Union it was crucially decisive like to be or not to be' [11, p. 324].

In addition, the reaction of Western countries with regard to the situation in the Baltic was very important for Gorbachev. The 'Baltic issue' provided fodder for conversation at many meetings between the Soviet president and

his counterparts from Europe and America. M. Gorbachev himself very harshly criticised the processes occurring in the Baltic republics calling, for example, the Lithuanian politicians 'not serious people, adventurers'. However, the mechanism of separation of the republics was already triggered, and it was impossible to solve the problem by signing a new treaty of union. Although the Lithuanian leadership made concessions because of the negotiations with H. Kohl and froze the Declaration of Independence, the Lithuanian-Soviet talks ended inconclusively. The Soviet leadership was prepared to consider granting of independence in the constitutional process, without any prior concessions and refused to recognise the illegal occupation of the Baltic States. The relations between the Baltic States and the Soviet Union centre further aggravated after the chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR Boris Yeltsin supported the full sovereignty of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

However, even after the signing of the treaty of reunification of Germany and the use of force in the Baltic region, Germany was slow to make any official statements in support of the independence of the Baltic republics. In response to the events in Riga and Vilnius in January 1991, the Chancellor carefully noted that 'the further use of force will lead to confusion and end the dialogue' [6, p. 310]. This wait-and-see attitude was due to the on-going ratification of the Treaty on the Final Settlement with respect to Germany in the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Representatives of the Baltic republics were critical about that position of the Federal Chancellor. In an interview for the German magazine 'Der Spiegel' V. Landsbergis said, 'Now we see that we cannot expect any serious support from Germany. The German government is too focused on the Soviet Union' [12].

The August coup in Moscow had the last word in the German leadership's hesitancy, when it finally became clear that the policy reforms of Mikhail Gorbachev failed and he would not be able to stay in power. Estonia and Latvia expressed their full sovereignty. Lithuanian Prime Minister K. Prunskiene, who was at that time in Bonn, urged the German leaders to take a final decision on the recognition of the independence of the Baltic republics. [13] Only then the German government was able to re-prioritise its policies and abandon its unilateral support of the Soviet Union. German Foreign Minister H. Genscher on 23 August contacted his Danish counterpart U. Ellemann-Jensen to discuss the restoration of diplomatic relations with the Baltic republics. It was just about the restoration of relationships and not about their establishment. The Americans decided to increase the pressure when they realised the failure of the Soviet policy. President G. Bush sent a letter to Mikhail Gorbachev urging to recognise the Baltic republics. At the same time, President G. Bush called President V. Landsbergis in Vilnius and said that the 'recognition of Lithuania was getting close'.

Diplomatic relations between the FRG and the three Baltic states were restored on 28 August 1991, when representatives of the Baltic republics came to Bonn for the formal signing of treaties. As early as 2 September, the German Embassies started to operate in Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius. That was before the official recognition of the independence of the republics by the

Soviet Union which occurred on 6 September. Since then Germany became the 'chief patron' of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and the EU accession of these countries. As early as September 1991, during a brief visit to the Baltic States, Foreign Minister Helmut Genscher spoke for their associate membership in the European Union with the apparent prospect of further full membership [2, p. 974]. In addition, in the initial phase the cooperation vector in the field of security became visible. In 1993, agreements were signed on the basis of bilateral cooperation that specifically addressed the issue of security, 'If there is a situation which, in the opinion of the parties, may endanger the freedom of... they [the states] can resort to mutual cooperation and coordination of their actions' [14, p. 123]. In the early 1990s the Baltic region was intended to become 'a single political and economic space, as well as a single safety and security community... in particular, a solution could be in the democratisation of the Baltic Sea Region' [15, p. 2]. The relations of the states in the cultural field had developed rapidly. In 1993, the agreements on cultural cooperation between Germany and the three republics were concluded [16—18].

On 2 September 1991, George Bush declared the United States would be ready to establish diplomatic relations with the Baltic republics; as early as 12 September the United States formally recognised them. At that, G. Bush said, 'When history is written, nobody is going to remember that we took 48 hours more than Iceland or whoever else it is'. [5, p. 311]. Since the restoration of diplomatic relations with the Baltic States, the USA began the process of military and political integration of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in NATO.

Thus, while the negotiations between the Soviet Union and Germany on the unification of the two German states were held, the German politicians were of the opinion that support the aspirations for independence of individual Soviet republics was 'dangerous nonsense' [6, p. 312]. The Baltics became a unique mechanism of pressure on the Soviet leadership in the negotiations on the reunification of the German state. Showing support for Mikhail Gorbachev in the 'Baltic issue', H. Kohl could hope for a speedy resolution of the 'German question' without any concessions from Germany. Kohl sought to solve the problem of the reunification of Germany in the most favourable way for their country also at the expense of the Baltic republics. Germany until the last moment did not recognise the independence of the Baltic republics, and only when it became clear that the Soviet Union was on the verge of collapse, German politicians officially declared the resumption of diplomatic relations. The Foreign Minister H. Genscher stressed that there was no need to recognise those states as Germany had never recognised their Soviet occupation.

In the confrontation with the Soviet Union the United States actively utilised the 'Baltic question'. It became the topic of discussions in all negotiations and meetings between the two leaders. At that, the U. S. government was slow to deal with 'Baltic issue' but raised it to either reassure the American public or obtain economic advantages in relations with the USSR. Brent Scowcroft recommended George W. Bush when dealing with Mikhail Gor-

bachev 'to use this telephone conversation to 'once again come to light' in the Baltic issue... When reporters learn about Gorbachev's call, they will immediately ask if he has raised the Baltic question. And it would be better if the answer were 'yes', otherwise you'll have to pay a damn expensive' [5, p. 44]. Thus, the positions of Germany and the U. S. in the negotiations with the Soviet Union on the 'Baltic question' were very similar. Motivated by their own national interests, Western powers used the Baltic republics as a tool of pressure on the Soviet leadership. Germany aimed at achieving its own unity and the U. S. at obtaining the economic benefits.

The leaders of the Baltic republics realised the hopelessness of the whole situation and the fact that you should not count on the active support of the German and U. S. governments. As a result, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were able to achieve independence only through internal contradictions occurring in the Soviet Union, with minimal assistance from the Western states. At the same time, the use of the 'Baltic question' in relations with the Soviet Union helped Germany more effectively solve the problem of their reunion.

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