

### The role of political elites in the development of politics of memory in the Baltic States

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**THE ROLE  
OF POLITICAL ELITES  
IN THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF THE POLITICS  
OF MEMORY  
IN THE BALTIC STATES**

**V. Smirnov\***



*The article focuses on multiple cases of the politicization of history by the Baltic political elites. Three states of development of the politics of memory in the Baltic States are identified. Problems of political exploitation of the past are scrutinized in the context of political life and international relations. It is concluded that the narratives of the past where Nazi and Soviet legacies are equated are actively promoted on the pan-European level. Elites of the Baltic states play a salient role in this process and enhance ties with the elites of the Eastern Europe, expert and political communities of the Western Europe and USA. The dominant trends in the development of the historical politics in the Baltic countries are the administrative and legislative instruments for approval of the preferred narratives of the past, as well as an active political work at the international level aimed at the inclusion of the Baltic narratives of the past into the European politics of memory. Historical politics of the Baltic states shows the Baltic countries as the victims of "two totalitarianisms" ("Nazi and Soviet occupation"), and this point of view is widely used as a foreign policy tool. The politicization of the "anti-totalitarianism" issue is now a popular foreign policy tool that not only serves the interests of the Baltic and Eastern European politicians, but also finds ideological supporters in Western Europe and the United States.*

*Key words:* politics of memory, political elites, Baltic states, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia

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Interpretation of history is an important element of building a state and determining the ideological aspect of this process. In Eastern Europe, after the disintegration of the USSR, the politicisation of history took on a distin-

ctive character [11]. The policy of memory<sup>1</sup> pursued by the Baltics presents the essence of this process and thus deserves special attention.

The research interest in the problems of consolidation of political and national communities increased in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Constructivism — the primary theory in studying nationalism — became very influential in political science. Its key thesis suggests the ‘artificial’ origin of national communities, which are ‘invented’ by elites using myths and symbols transferring (and creating) the memory of the past [22]. The state is at the core of this process<sup>2</sup>.

Despite the ongoing discussions about the ‘artificial’ or ‘natural’ origin of national communities<sup>3</sup>, it is evident that the political consolidation of a society requires elites to pursue a consistent policy. Such efforts are not limited to the political goals of members of power groups, but they also use the available resources — material, administrative, and symbolical ones.

It is important to differentiate the notions of ‘politics of memory and ‘politics of commemoration’, the latter being a system of rituals, practices, and patterns used in teaching history (commemorative days, holidays, award system, etc.). Politics of memory can be defined as a range of measures to promote certain interpretations of the events of the past to achieve certain political goals<sup>4</sup>. The agent of the politics of memory is either the state or political parties/influential social groups. The objectives of the politics of memory and the intensity of their achievement can differ as well as methods to achieve them. In a broad sense, the politics of memory facilitates the ‘invention’ of traditions<sup>5</sup> in line with certain political goals of the power groups. According to E. Hobsbawm’s classification, the ‘invention’ of traditions can serve three purposes — the consolidation of communities, legitimation of authority, and inculcation of values and norms of behaviour. However, in practice, these purposes are usually combined.

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<sup>1</sup> The notion of the ‘politics of memory’ (Geschichtspolitik) gained common usage in Germany in the 1980s as the ‘Historians’ Dispute’ about the origins of Nazism arose. German chancellor H. Kohl presented the German society with the idea of a moral and political turn to encourage patriotism and alleviate the guilt complex. The critics of this approach — including J. Habermas — reproached the advocates of the ‘turn’ for politicising history through using the term ‘politics of memory’. Over the next two decades, the initially negative subtext of this notion blurred. The politics of memory was increasingly interpreted not as the politicisation of memory but rather as preserving the memory of the past necessary for the political consolidation of the nation. The term gained common usage in Eastern Europe in the course of nation building and developing the ideological framework for new regimes after the disintegration of the USSR.

<sup>2</sup> The construction of a centralised bureaucratic state was necessitated by wars and economic development, which required an ideological and worldview unity of the social groups residing on its territory. For more detail see [6; 38].

<sup>3</sup> For more detail, see [7].

<sup>4</sup> For more detail, see [15].

<sup>5</sup> E. Hobsbawm defines the ‘invention of tradition’ as “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition” [26, p. 165].



A major theoretical and methodological problem is the development of a clear definition of the subject area and the criteria for collecting empirical material for studying the politics of memory. The interdisciplinary nature of this research area complicates the operationalization of conceptual approaches. This article focuses on certain public incidents interpreted as part of systemic efforts of political elites<sup>6</sup> to affect the politics of memory and politicise history<sup>7</sup>. This takes place at four basic levels: establishing and supporting institutions dealing with the politics of memory, adopting laws focused on the past and the politics of memory, participating in or supporting certain measures directly affecting the politics of memory, participating in debates on the past and addressing the past in the political rhetoric. The object of research determines the set of research methods: case analysis, discourse analysis, and institutional analysis. This approach makes it possible to describe the key features of the politics of memory in the Baltics and identify major trends and prospects.

All countries of post-Soviet space are active in the field of the politics of memory [3]. However, the models applied differ significantly. In Central Asia, a widespread practice is publishing books about heads of state giving an unambiguous interpretation of national history. In Eastern Europe, the space for academic and public discussions is much broader; therefore, power groups use a wider range of tools.

After the disintegration of the USSR, the politics of memory became a popular tool for achieving domestic and foreign policy goals in Eastern Europe<sup>8</sup>. These include the legitimation of authority, distracting public attention from the actual agenda, improving the position of the state in international negotiations, etc.<sup>9</sup>. Despite the differences in the goals, there is a number of commonalities giving the politics of memory a practical dimension. As Russian historian A. I. Miller stresses, the politics of memory can be pursued only from the position of a 'victim', since it requires using past suffering not only as a mobilising force but also for 'guilt export' [14].

<sup>6</sup> This article uses the definition of political elites formulated by O. V. Gaman-Golutvina, "a social internally cohesive groups comprising a minority of the society and having sufficient resources to affect major strategic decision within the polity [5].

<sup>7</sup> The author considers the politics of history from the perspective of political science and focuses on the politicisation of history — addressing the past by political actors in political contexts. For more detail, see [41].

<sup>8</sup> A rather accurate generalisation of the Eastern European politics of memory is made by A. I. Miller, "In many neighbouring countries, there are political forces consciously turning history into a tool of political struggle. In international relations, they strive to secure the role of the 'guilty party' for some countries, primarily Russia, and that of a 'victim' for their own trying to gain certain moral advantages. Through demanding that Russia repent and compensate for the actual and imaginary sins, describing the country as an incurably aggressive imperial nation, and creating an image of Russia as a hostile 'alien', the advocates of the politics of memory regard it as a handy tool to develop the national identity of the country's population, to struggle with their political rivals, and to marginalise certain population groups, including the Russian minority, if any" [16].

<sup>9</sup> For more detail on the goals of the politics of memory, see [11].



G. V. Kasyanov identified the features which are common to the current politics of memory of Eastern European states [12], which include ethnic exclusivity of suffering, confrontation with elements of xenophobia, emphasis on ‘sacred’ suffering of the nation’, and the responsibility for all evil placed on external forces, primarily communism, etc.

Let us analyse the politics of memory in the Baltics. Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia are often classed under limitrophe states [32] as a cultural area that has few or none of the attributes of historical statehood [40, p. 80]. The ‘deficit of history’<sup>10</sup> results in the Baltic identifying themselves at the current stage as ‘Europe, but not completely Europe’ and necessitates major efforts to ‘create a new history’ of statehood.

One cannot ignore the fact that, with the disintegration of the USSR, the Baltics became the last boundary for the US to employ the ‘grinding strategy’ in the post-Soviet space to fragment potential opposition to American interests<sup>11</sup>. This also affects the policy pursued by the Baltic elites, calls for an instrumental approach to history, and necessitates its political ‘adaptation’.

The development of the politics of memory in the Baltics has three main stages. The first stage covers the period from the early 1990s to the early 2000s. This was the time of the formation of new political regimes in the Baltic states and the time of increasing aspiration towards integration into the Euro-Atlantic space. The ‘singing revolutions’ brought to power the so called ‘moral politicians’<sup>12</sup> — members of the scientific and artistic community. Their primary goal was the symbolical formalisation of new political regimes, the *de facto* invention and governmentalisation of nationalism<sup>13</sup>. One of the most ardent advocates of this approach is V. Landsbergis, who served in key government positions in Lithuania in the 1990s and considered himself a follower of A. Smetona<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> In the case of Lithuania, it is the single-minded cultivation of the legacy of the Great Duchy of Lithuania, which allows the members of the elite to state that “when we celebrate the Millennium of Lithuania, we are celebrating our millennium in Europe” (from a speech delivered by the president of Lithuania V. Adamkus on July 6, 2009). However, this point of view is not universal. As E. Hobsbawm comments on the situation in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “The victorious Germans set up three small Baltic nation-states for which there was no historical precedent at all, and— at least in Estonia and Latvia—no noticeable national demand. They were maintained in being by the Allies as part of the ‘quarantine belt’ against Bolshevik Russia” [26].

<sup>11</sup> A. D. Bogaturov defines ‘grinding strategy’ as ‘a policy towards the formation of and support for a network of not particularly strong or stable states... valuing the US support, which makes them susceptible to American recommendations’ [4, p. 364].

<sup>12</sup> The ‘moral politician’ phenomenon emerged in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus in the early 1990s. For more detail see [20]. On ‘moral politicians’ in the Baltics see [21].

<sup>13</sup> In the Baltics, ethnicity was widely used as a resource for political mobilisation even before the cessation from the USSR in 1991 in the course of establishing parallel governmental bodies. See, for example [2].

<sup>14</sup> Antanas Smetona was a dictator who seized power in Lithuania in 1926 by coup and fled the country for Germany in 1940. On V. Landsbergis’s symbolical succession to A. Smetona see [29].



In these conditions, the politics of memory was in demand primarily by the new political leadership who were in desperate need for resources available from the cost perspective, effective in terms of mass results, and necessary for the ideological justification of their position in power and the new policy. The Baltics declared a new continuity doctrine establishing a connection between the new political regimes and the governments of the independence period before World War II. The central ideologemes were those of 'returning to the West' and 'Soviet occupation'.

In the mid-1990s, the positions of 'moral politicians' mostly weakened. The new leadership (most of whom had been part of the nomenklatura not long before) were faced with the need to strengthen power against the background of political and economic transformation and instability. The path of excluding national minorities from the political process<sup>15</sup> chosen by the Latvian and Estonian elites was embodied in the 'alien' institution.

In that period, the politics of memory was institutionally formalised. Under the auspices of the governments, special institutions — museums and commissions promoting and aggressively protecting a certain historical interpretation — were established. Later, they were given an increasingly sacred status<sup>16</sup>. National parliaments establish commissions that calculated the damages from 'Soviet occupation'<sup>17</sup>. The 'communist legacy' became a universal political response of the elites to current problems in the economy and institutional development. However, this is also a means to reconcile the democratic ideology necessary for the Western integration with the ethnic nationalism excluding national minorities from the political process (the 'alien' institution in Latvia and Estonia, the problem of Polish minority in Lithuania)<sup>18</sup>. The 'Russian threat' is also actively exploited as part of the

<sup>15</sup> In the early 1990s, Latvia and Estonia adopted the laws establishing the institution of 'aliens' — residents of the republics with limited political, economic, and social rights. Almost all residents of the republics not descending from the pre-war residents of Latvia and Estonia were affected by the law. They were labelled 'Soviet immigrants'. According to some estimates, their accounted for 40% of the Latvian and 30% of the Estonian population in the early 1990s [33, p. 33].

<sup>16</sup> The best-known institutions are the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, Commission of the Historians of Latvia, Estonian Institute of Historical Memory. Museums of Nazi and Soviet occupation were established in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. They are regularly visited by Western politicians. In 2013, following an eight-year hiatus, the International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania resumed its activities according to a decree of the President of Latvia D. Grybauskaitė.

<sup>17</sup> In Estonia, the process of estimating the damages from the Soviet occupation was launched in 1992. In Lithuania, the Seimas adopted the law on compensating the damages from the Soviet occupation in 2000. In 2005, a commission on estimating the occupation damages was established according to a declaration of the Latvian Saeima.

<sup>18</sup> Following the Baltics' accession to the EU, the traditional criticism for mass violation of human rights in =Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia was expressed by international organisations. Critical reports and statements were made by the relevant bodies of the UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, PACE, European Commission, and various international human rights organisations.

‘securitisation discourse’ justifying the aspiration of the political elite to join the Euro-Atlantic security space<sup>19</sup>.

The second stage in the development of the politics of memory in the Baltics began with the accession of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia to NATO and the European Union in 2004. Despite the common expectations, this did not make the Baltics’ politics of memory less confrontational. An alternative path was the discussions on the ‘Baltic identity’ of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia originating in the ‘historical Baltic region’. However, it did not attract close attention of the Baltics politicians [35].

M. Mälksoo stresses that the existential politics of becoming Europeans did not lose its significance after the Baltics’ accession to NATO and the EU. However, today its purpose is not joining the European identity, but extending this identity to the borders of Russia. ‘The self-conceptualization of the Baltic states as victims of Russia’s historical wrongdoings and European indifference has strong repercussions for their vision of the EU’s foreign policy: the EU is placed in the position of owing a debt to the Baltic states, and persistent quests are consequently made to have Baltic claims accommodated within the common foreign policy of the Union’, M. Mälksoo argues [31, p. 289].

The goal of ‘rejoining the Western family of peoples’ was a powerful element of the legitimisation of political elites in the Baltics. The achievement of this goal could not but create an ideational vacuum that had to be filled. In effect, the Baltic elites faced an institutional trap (the so called ‘bad infinity’). The taglines of ‘Soviet occupation’ and ‘Russian threat’ were effectively the foundation of the ‘alien’ institution in Latvia and Estonia. The loss of usual attention to these topics would very likely result in a deep political crisis. The Baltic politicians understood the seriousness of these risks<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, appeals to the past and nationalism became a universal argument. These taglines served the purposes of not only legitimising public institutions but also retaining their attractiveness as tools of everyday political struggle. Latvian scholars B. Zepa and I. Supule argue that the political elites “still use ethnicity to win votes. Thus politicians become a key catalyst of increasing ethnic tensions” [10, p. 9].

The Lithuanian scholar V. Safronovas stresses that the Euro-Atlantic integration of Lithuania necessitated a massive campaign for “memory processing” and “inculcating pro-Western attitudes.” Moreover, regular efforts were made to turn ‘resistance to occupations’ of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century into the

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<sup>19</sup> For instance, the role played by the Soviet legacy factor in Lithuania can be illustrated with an excerpt from the memoirs of the former US Secretary of State James Baker. When reminiscing about his first visit to the Baltics, he writes that the members of Latvian and Estonian political leadership would speak of expanding trade and economic cooperation, whereas the heads of state focused on the ‘Soviet threat’. For more detail, see [28].

<sup>20</sup> A conspicuous statement was made in 2005 by the Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Latvian Seimas, Vaira Paegle: “If we abandon the concept of occupation, we will threaten our policy on citizenship, aliens, their rights, and other key issues. Of course, we cannot take this step” (Vesti segodnya, May 21, 2005).

highest value. ‘Historical justice’ was attained through denying the previous regime (also through criminalising alternative evaluations) using the procedures of lustration, etc. [18].

Since 2004, the politics of memory pursued in the Baltics and Eastern Europe in general has become increasingly confrontational [17]. One of the most apparent manifestations of the confrontation was the infamous ‘memorial wars’ in the Baltics<sup>21</sup>. However, major trends were of a greater scope and included the ongoing glorification of Nazism<sup>22</sup>, exploitation of the ‘Soviet occupation’, and the identification of the Soviet regime with the Nazi one. Members of international diasporas joining the Baltics’ political elites in the 1990s-2000s accelerated these processes<sup>23</sup>. Nazi collaborationists and their descendants were very influential in the Baltic diaspora communities.

The famous Lithuanian historian Č. Laurinavičius stresses that the interpretation of the events of World War II in Latvia is politically driven. He emphasises the political underpinning of the position adopted by the Lithuanian power groups. On the one hand, the then policies of the Baltic states are justified by any means. On the other hand, blame is placed on the Soviet Union whenever possible. As a result, the ‘Eastern neighbour’ is pictured as an eternal enemy, which is used later for manipulative purposes depending on the political situation in the country [13].

The feeling of uncertainty after the accession to NATO and the EU, which led to a series of political crises, strengthened the ‘anti-totalitarian’

<sup>21</sup> The major incidents taking place alongside a large number of smaller ones include the removal of the memorial to Soviet soldiers in Tallinn in 2007 (the ‘Bronze Soldier’), numerous attempts to remove the monument to Soviet liberators in Riga’s Pārdaugava district, the plans of Latvian authorities to remove the Soviet statues (also those of the Red Army soldiers) in Vilnius. At the same time, new monuments are erected, for instance a monument to the Latvian SS members in the town of Bauska.

<sup>22</sup> The most remarkable events included regular marches of SS in the Baltic capitals and the pompous funerals of Nazi collaborators. In 2014, SS veteran H. Nugiseks was buried with ceremony in Estonia. In 2012, J. Ambrazevičius was reburied with ceremony in Lithuania. The Lithuanian Activist Front headed by Ambrazevičius was behind the massacre of Jews in Lithuania during World War II. The ideology of this organisation is concisely expressed in the article “What do the Activists fight for?” by the chair of the propaganda commission of the Lithuanian Activist Front B. Raila published on May 10, 1941: “The repercussions of the past centuries and especially the Bolshevik occupation caused considerable damage to the body of the Lithuanian people, contaminated Lithuanian soil with disgusting microbes, and spread numerous weeds. Therefore, the Lithuanian Activist Front is determined — having restored new Lithuania — to cleanse the Lithuanian people and Lithuanian soil of Jews, parasites, and degenerates. Therefore, the principal objective is cleansing of Jews.” For the full text, see [39].

<sup>23</sup> The position of president has been held by former US diaspora members US citizens V. Adamkus (1998—2003, 2004—2009) and T. Ilves (2006 — present). Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, a citizen of Canada, served as President of Latvia in 1999—2007. Members of international diasporas have also served high positions in the parliaments and diplomatic and law enforcement agencies of the Baltic states.

rhetoric of the political elites [1]. These processes coincided with the ‘colour revolutions’ in the post-Soviet space, which produced a new wave of history politicisation<sup>24</sup>.

The third stage in the development of the politics of memory in the Baltics is associated with the beginning of the 2010s. However, its prerequisites were emerging throughout the previous two decades. The key trend is the promotion of local ‘version’ of the past at the European level. To this end, the international platforms of the OSCE, European Parliament, PACE, European Court of Human Rights, and NATO Parliamentary Assembly, etc. are used<sup>25</sup>.

The processes of European integration taking place over the past two decades have contributed to reconciliation and an active dialogue between the ‘national versions’ of the past in Western Europe. The formation of the so called ‘post-national policy of remembrance’ suggesting a variety of interpretations of the past based on acknowledging the — to a degree — common responsibility of the European states for the Holocaust. The accession of the Eastern European states to the EU led to a gradual transformation of the established model. The historical debates became increasingly heated [37], as the Eastern European states started to promote their ‘national’ histories presenting these countries as victims of ‘two totalitarianisms’ — the Nazi and primarily the Soviet ones.

An accurate definition of this process was given by the German scholar K. Volk: “the nationalisation of remembrance of the terror of the Soviet occupation [in the Baltics] ... tends to establish a cultural memory of universal victimhood, ignoring the dark sides of the nation’s history, i. e. the collaboration with Stalin’s Russia as well as with the Nazi regime, but especially the long tradition of anti-Semitism in these countries” [42]. These historical contradictions were coupled with the aspiration of the Baltic elites to improve their status and expand their resource opportunities in the EU, which resulted in the intensification of the politics of memory at the European level. The efforts of the Baltic leadership were targeted at both the level of the EU institutions and the intergovernmental level of Eastern European states. The Baltic elites were given a greater opportunity to promote their ‘historical agenda’ in the context of the Ukraine crisis, which increased distrust of Russia and reduced the number of research and diplomatic contacts between the EU and Russia [17].

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<sup>24</sup> In particular, under the presidency of V. A. Yushchenko, Ukraine embarked on the ‘Baltic path’ in the politics of memory opening museums of ‘Soviet occupation’ and trying to establish the idea of the Holodomor as the cornerstone of state legitimacy.

<sup>25</sup> A good example is the reaction of European institutions to the celebration of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Victory Day in Moscow. The European Parliament adopted a resolution (May 12, 2005) on World War II stressing the “magnitude of the suffering, injustice and long-term social, political and economic degradation endured by the captive nations located on the eastern side of what was to become the Iron Curtain” [24]. PACE adopted a resolution (June 22, 2005) calling for Russia to provide compensation to those persons deported from the occupied Baltic states and the descendants of deportees (*italics mine.* — *V. S.*) [34].

However, one cannot say that the Baltic politics of memory have been shifted from the national to supranational level. The latter rather became a new platform for implementing the approaches to the politics of memory tested and still developing at the national level.

In the Baltics, politicians continue to exploit the ‘Russian threat’ tagline in the framework of the populist programme for mobilising the voters [27]. R. H. Simonyan argues that manipulations with the ‘concept of occupation’ make it possible for the radical national parties to mobilise a significant part of voters in the course of the parliament election [19]. However, shifts that are more dramatic also take place: a politicised interpretation of the past is formalised at the legislative level assuming a normative, binding character. In 2010 and 2014, the parliaments of Lithuania and Latvia respectively adopted laws on criminal liability for the denial of ‘Soviet occupation’. In summer 2015, Lithuania plans to try in the court of law the Russian citizens, who participated in ensuring security during the unrest in Vilnius in January 1991. The politically driven trial is aimed at discrediting Russia as the ‘legal successor to the criminal state of the USSR’<sup>26</sup>.

In 2013—2014, the Lithuanian parliament discussed replacing the ‘Lithuanian SSR’ with ‘occupied Lithuania’ in the place of birth entry of Lithuanian citizens’ IDs.

Earlier the interest in the politics of memory was stimulated through political declarations, cultural and educational policies, and sporadic censorship in the mass media. Today the process has ‘matured’ to criminalising the denial of the ‘versions of the past’ sanctioned by the government. In effect, the Baltics’ space of the politics of memory is gradually contracting under the pressure of administrative and legislative mechanism bordering on state ideology.

The ‘historical and ideological’ innovations in the legislation of the Baltics could be considered as an attempt to ‘tighten the screws’ on the domestic policy. However, a more probable explanation relates to the course towards drawing an equivalence between the Nazi and Soviet regime. Hence the Holocaust and the ‘crimes of communism’ go under the common label of the ‘crimes of totalitarianism’, which was adopted by the Baltic elite. This hypothesis is corroborated by the attempt to pass similar laws in the European Parliament. In 2010, the European Commission rejected calls to introduce a

<sup>26</sup> The prosecution is based on the thesis that, in January 1991, the USSR committed an act of ‘aggression’ against Lithuania as an independent state. Alternative interpretations of the 1991 events are forbidden. Former Vice-Mayor of Vilnius A. Paleckis, who questioned this interpretation, was prosecuted, stripped of state awards, and made the target of a discrediting campaign in the mass media. The case of January 1991 events was classified in Lithuania in 2010 as a military crime and a crime against humanity, which has no period of prescription. Approximately 80 Russian citizens are suspects in this case. Several dozen arrest warrants were issued through Interpol. This criminal case alongside ‘minor’ cases of an attack on a Lithuanian customs point in the village of Medininkai in July 1991 (seven Lithuanian died in the attack, former OMON officer Mikhailov was convicted in Lithuania) create the ideological and propaganda backbone of the modern political regime in Lithuania.

so-called double genocide law drawing equivalence between the ‘crimes of communist regimes’ and the Holocaust and introducing criminal liability for their denial and trivialisation. This law was drafted by Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and the Czech Republic.

The pro-European course of the Baltic elites coupled with the condemnation of the ‘crimes of totalitarianism’ contradicts, at first sight, practices of glorifying Nazism, which are widely spread in the Baltics. A symbolic example is the so-called ‘Lihula crisis’ of 2004. This Estonian town erected a bas-relief depicting a soldier in the SS uniform with the inscription ‘*To Estonian men who fought in 1940–1945 against Bolshevism and for the restoration of Estonian independence*’. In less than two weeks, the monument was taken down by the Estonian authorities without a public discussion. This gave rise to heated debates about the weakness and dependency of the national government. Estonian ultranationalists desecrated several monuments to Soviet soldiers.

The analysis of this collision makes it possible to see the bigger picture behind the pro-European course of the politics of memory adopted by the Baltic elites. Two years prior to the publication of the law on double genocide, in 2008, an issue of the Estonian *Diplomaatia* journal, which was dedicated to the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Estonia’s independence gained in 1918, published an article by J. Luik [30] — a former Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defence.

The reasoning presented in the article rests on the thesis that the acknowledgment of the Holocaust was not only a result of the Nuremberg trials and the contribution of historians but also a product of political struggle. J. Luik suggested abandoning the attempts to revise the history of Nazism in the Baltic states and focus on superimposing the ‘Nuremberg principles’ on the ‘crimes of communism’. The key objective is reaching an international political consensus on the issue. The new doctrine should have been supported first by the post-communist societies as ‘victims of totalitarian crimes’. Major efforts were to be focused on the social sphere rather than the legislative level.

The recent initiatives prove that the Baltics’ political elites pursue this course of action both in their domestic and foreign policies. Therefore, the ‘Russian threat’ serves as a logical complement to a wider political agenda. The Baltic elites strive to appeal not only to the interest but rather to the identity of Western partners [1].

A universal argument is the ‘Nazi and Soviet occupation’ constructed within the politics of memory at the European level. It is paradoxical but Moscow is not the key target of this policy, although the Baltic elites demand compensation only from Russia. The basic premise of this approach is the ‘equivalence of the crimes’ of Hitler’s Germany and the USSR and the acknowledgement of the European’s responsibility for failing to prevent the ‘two occupations’ of the Baltic states. However, the Baltics often see the US only as a guarantor of the ‘European status’ and the patron of small states that ‘fell victim to totalitarianism’. Positioning themselves as victims of ‘totalitarianisms’, the Baltic leaderships strive to make Europe atone for ‘con-

nivance'. In this case, the priority is not only the 'targeted' attempts to influence the attitudes of the European decision-making elites but also the impact on the public opinion and the political circles in the EU and the creation of a corresponding political atmosphere in Europe.

This influence is manifested in numerous resolutions of European international organisations, some of which were discussed above. With a wide support from the Baltic politicians, the topic of 'communist totalitarianism' is put on the agenda of international conferences stirring a broad European political intellectual discussion. A good example is the 2013 European parliament hearing 'David and Goliath: small nations under totalitarian rule' organised by I. Vaidere, a European Parliament member from Latvia<sup>27</sup>. At the same time, the European Parliament held the exhibition 'Totalitarianism in Europe'.

It is also worth mentioning *The Soviet Story* documentary directed by a far-right Latvian historian (today, a politician) Edvīns Šnore. The central idea of the film dubbed in English and targeted at the European audience is drawing equivalence between 'Hitlerism and Stalinism'. Russian historians produced ample evidence of the biasedness in selecting 'historical facts' and falsifications used in the film [8]. However, the director's political career received a boost. E. Šnore was elected as the For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK party member to the Saeima; in 2014, he was appointed the chair of the Latvian Commission for Calculating the Damage Inflicted during the Soviet Occupation<sup>28</sup>.

Despite the attention paid to the politics of memory by the highest Baltic officials, the attempts at an independent analysis of the facts underlying the sanctioned version produce a defensive response. In February 2015, the website of the Centre for Geopolitical Studies connected with the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs published an article entitled "Immoral attempts to rewrite history" [23]. The author voices concerns over Russia publishing and studying documents corroborating the facts of 'collaboration of Eastern European countries with Nazis'. The article stresses that these findings are attempts to change the traditional interpretation of the history of Eastern Europe and dubs the historical research 'immoral'. This eliminates the possibility of a scientific dialogue, which is being replaced with 'moral censorship'. 'The dissemination of this propaganda is becoming dangerous. It does not only affect Russia, but also extends to the global community', the author argues. Therefore, the analysis of the solid fact of the active participation of Baltic units in the Nazi crimes is called 'propaganda' that is 'immoral'.

The politicisation of 'anti-totalitarianism' is a popular foreign policy tool serving the interests of not only the Baltic and Eastern European politicians but also attracting followers in Western Europe (the New Philosophers) and

<sup>27</sup> The emphasis was placed on the discrimination of the Chechen, Crimean Tatar, and Karelian small nations. According to I. Vaidere, the conference aimed "to bring to light the fact that many people were persecuted, deported, tortured, or killed during totalitarian Communism" [25].

<sup>28</sup> For more on Latvia's politics of memory see [9].

the US (the Neoconservatives). The accusations of totalitarianism fit the ‘grinding’ strategy used by the US throughout the post-Soviet space<sup>29</sup>. A new stage in the development of the politics of memory in Eastern Europe began in 2015 against the background of the Ukraine crisis. Its specific features is the inventions and declaration of historical ideologemes at the level of the Eastern European leadership<sup>30</sup>.

In conclusion, one can stress that the key trends in the development of the politics of memory in the Baltics include the use of administrative and legislative tools by the political elites in order to support the preferred ‘version of the past’ as well as political efforts at the intergovernmental level aimed at including the Baltic ‘versions’ of the past into the European politics of memory.

The politics of memory pursued by the Baltic regimes depicting the Baltics as victims of ‘two totalitarianisms’ (the ‘Nazi and Soviet occupation’) is widely used as a foreign policy tool. In the Baltics, the politics of memory developed in three stages. The first one (the early 1990s-mid 2000s) formalised the doctrines of ‘returning to the West’ and ‘Soviet occupation’, which were instrumental in consolidating the voters and legitimising the Baltic elites that had replaced the communist leadership. The second stage following the Baltics’ accession to NATO and the EU in 2004 made the politics of memory increasingly confrontational rather than expanded the conflict-free space. In the late 1990s, the premises for the third stage emerged, namely, taking the discussion of the equivalence between Nazism and Communism to the European level. In this process, the Baltic politicians have a rather remarkable role alongside the elites from other Eastern European states playing the political card of the ‘victim of totalitarianism’. This rhetoric is targeted at the West, whereas the image of ‘Russian aggression and totalitarianism’ serves as means to stimulate the discussion. The political intention of the Baltic elites is to exploit the combination of the ‘guilt complex’ and ‘external threat’ to secure close attention of the West to the Baltic states and accumulate additional resources.

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<sup>29</sup> All potentially powerful states and alliances beyond the Euro-Atlantic military and political space are declared heirs to totalitarian ideologies. A side effect of the struggle with the ‘germs of totalitarianism’ through the active ‘anti-totalitarian’ politics of memory at the European level is the rejection of the idea of strong statehood. This logic covers not only the traditional criticism of Russia and China for ‘authoritarian tendencies’ but also prevents a rapprochement between Russia and Germany.

<sup>30</sup> The Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs G. Schetyna stated that Auschwitz had been liberated by Ukrainians, whereas the Ukrainian Prime Minister A. P. Yatsenyuk spoke of the “Soviet invasion of Ukraine and Germany.” It is worth noting that the ‘historical escapades’ of the Eastern European officials were preceded by the statement made by the US Ambassador to Serbia M. Kirby in September 2014 claiming that “Belgrade was liberated by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ukrainian Army”. At the same time, against the background of the blunt statements and the anti-Russian campaign in the mass media (also taking place in Poland) the Massacre in Volhynia moved to the periphery of public debates.

The active politics of memory justifying the institutional discrimination of national minorities in the Baltics and serving as a foreign policy tool created an institutional trap. The rejection of the role of an 'outpost' ('frontline states') in the struggle against 'Eastern threat' and the historical past of 'totalitarianism' is fraught with a deep political crisis in the Baltics. The active politics of memory legitimise not only the political regime but also the Baltics' political system in general.

Today, there are trends towards a more conformational politics of memory in the Baltics and Eastern Europe. As the analysis shows, these processes had started long before the Ukraine crisis. Currently, one of the key objectives of the Baltics' politics of memory is to influence the public opinion of the EU states to inculcate the idea of equivalence between Nazism and Communism.

This confrontational politics of memory gradually diminishes the opportunities for the Baltic elites to adjust this course. The conflict of geopolitical interests of the major powers in Europe will toughen the politics of memory pursued by the Baltic elites and bring about new attempts to formalise its ideologemes at the European level.

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