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**GEROVĖ IR SAUGUMAS
XXI AMŽIUJE:
POSTDEMOKRATIJOS
KONTEKSTAI**

**WELFARE AND SECURITY
IN THE 21ST CENTURY:
THE CONTEXTS OF
POST-DEMOCRACY**

MOKSLO DARBŲ RINKTINĖ

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THE EUROSCEPTICISM IN THE BALTIC STATES: MANIFESTED AND LATENT

Gediminas Vitkus

Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University

ABSTRACT

The paper contributes to the discussion on Euroscepticism. It looks for causes and explanations why the level of Euroscepticism in the Baltic states is lower than the European Union average and addresses latent nature of the Baltic Euroscepticism. The main conclusion of this reflection is that the Baltic states seek to coordinate two things that can hardly be coordinated. On the one hand, they are interested in permanent existence of the European Union. On the other hand, being latent Eurosceptics they take the risk of encountering a hard-to-resolve dilemma in case France and Germany, that make the nucleus of the European Union, would agree to move towards a deeper integration or even federation.

KEY WORDS: Baltic States, European Union, Euroscepticism.

Introduction

The objective of this paper is to contribute to the discussion on Euroscepticism by answering to the two interrelated questions. On the one hand, we will look for causes and explanations why the level of Euroscepticism in the Baltic states is lower than the European Union average (Eurobarometer; Austers et al., 2017: 147-194). On the other hand, we will try to identify the fundamental qualities of the “Baltic” Euroscepticism by proposing to expand the commonplace hard and soft Euroscepticism taxonomy with concepts of manifested and latent Euroscepticism.

1. The Roots of Baltic Euroscepticism Weakness

To understand and explain why the Euroscepticism of the Baltic states is weak is not that difficult. It is sufficient to take into consideration several important objective factors such as the historical experience, geographic location and the size of the countries.

It is possible to sum up the historic experience by the fact that although in 2018 the Baltic states celebrate their centennial, half of that time they spent under the occupation and differently for instance from Finland could not develop freely and independently.

The geographic location of the Baltic states is also controversial. On the one hand, huge possibilities for prosperity lie in it, but, on the other hand, it hides great

dangers. Huge prosperity possibilities are associated with the fact that the Baltic states could be participants-intermediaries of the exchange between Europe and Russia (Mauricas, 2015). Therefore, the Baltic states would be objectively very interested in the good relationship between the European Union and Russia. On the other hand, the collapse of their independence in 1940, when their successful economic, social and cultural development lasting from 1918 was brutally interrupted, just testifies how dangerous and fragile the situation of the Baltic states is.

In other words, everything depends on broader systemic factors – on relations between the great Western powers and Russia. The Baltic states themselves can hardly do anything in this situation. Because of their small size, they cannot be influential political players and effectively counter unfavorable tendencies. The size of states objectively determines that their security largely depends on what is happening around them while their successful economic and social development is inconceivable without the involvement and maintenance of constant relations with the wider world.

The restoration of the Baltic states' independence in 1990 was a real miracle that until then very few expected. However, the restoration simultaneously meant the reemergence of the old worries and problems. Fortunately, the restored second Baltic Republics “found” a completely different Europe from the one they “had left”. In 1940, the Baltic states “left” the Europe that had not any possibilities, structures or institutions that could have helped the Baltic states to resolve their security problem and stop the raging aggressors. However, in 1990s they “found” a new much more favorable structure that provides a more tangible solution to the problem. The trans-Atlantic defensive Alliance and the institutionalized Europe granted the Baltic states what they lacked most in the interwar period – a favorable international environment. Besides, the European Union is one of the most important building blocks of this environment.

Therefore, in this context, opposing the European Union for the Baltic states would equal to losing their sound mind. At present, the existence of such structures as NATO or the European Union is an existential interest for the Baltic states. One may say that the Baltic states are characteristic of the existential Euro-enthusiasm. The political elite of all the countries without greater hesitations chose to seek the membership in the European Union and, since they became members of the EU, the Baltic states have always supported the unification of Europe. Lithuania was the first to ratify the Treaty establishing the Constitution for Europe (EUObserver, 2004). Latvia and Estonia did the same (EUObserver, 2005; EUObserver, 2006) notwithstanding that the Treaty had already been doomed. In spite of the fact that the crisis in Greece tarnished the reputation of the common European currency, the Baltic states, as soon as they met the Maastricht criteria, became members of the

Eurozone without greater hesitations (Estonia in 2011, Latvia in 2014, Lithuania in 2015). Civil societies of the Baltic states have always been and remain pro-European. The Referendums on the membership in the EU won with the great landslide in all the countries, while the public opinion constantly demonstrates a greater trust in the European and not national institutions.

2. Euro-pragmatism or genuine Euroscepticism?

On the other hand, if everything were so simple, then there would be no explanation why in the Baltic states a certain level of Euroscepticism (although smaller than in other countries) still exists. The answer to this question would be dual distinguishing two main forms of Euroscepticism in the Baltic states – *manifested* Euroscepticism and the *latent* Euroscepticism.

The *manifested* Euroscepticism in the Baltic states is actually slight due to the afore-mentioned circumstances. In the referendums on the EU membership voted “No” in Lithuania – 8.9%, in Latvia – 32.5%, in Estonia – 33.2%. The greater opposition in Latvia and Estonia is usually explained by resorting to more numerous Russian minorities in these countries (Austers et al., 2017: 195-207). The reasons for this type of Euroscepticism in the Baltic states most probably differ but little from that in other EU members states. Like in other EU member states, the manifested Euroscepticism that reveals itself in the Baltic states can be divided into hard and soft forms.

Hard Euroscepticism is usually based on the conviction that the European integration, the European Union are in principle a harmful and dangerous process for a national state that should better be not participated in. In case of the Baltic states, hard Euro-sceptics tend to refer primarily not to the most pleasant experience of the Baltic states’ existence in the Soviet Union. “From the empire to the empire” was the title of the Manifest of 1997 prepared by the National-Democratic Movement for Independent Lithuania (ND, 1997). When the Baltic states prepared to enter the EU, Euro-sceptics invited to drop this ambition putting forward arguments that the European Union is the same “camouflaged” Soviet Union just waiting to transform the republics that have restored independence into its colonies (EUobserver, 2002). However, the number of such hard Euro-sceptics in the Baltic states is in fact small, and their voice was listened to by very few. Still, even now, when the membership of the Baltic states in the European Union has reached the middle of the second decade, this political trend has not completely disappeared. A series of 2010–2015 crises of the European Union itself provide new impulses to the hard Euroscepticism. Hard sceptics have an opportunity to return to their favorable argument of identifying the EU with the USSR again. Yet now they prophesy that,

sooner or later, the fate of the USSR is awaiting the EU – the latter will crumble just as the former has done (Radžvilas, 2017: 136). Brexit has become the most suitable argument for them. The Referendum organized in 2014 on the ban to sell land to foreigners most probably can be regarded, at least in Lithuania, as their greatest achievement. After the voting, the Referendum was declared null and void as only 14.98% of voters participated in it (Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania, 2014). However, it was valuable because it demonstrated of approximately what extent the social base of Euroscepticism is.

Soft Euroscepticism, that publicly criticizes not the Union as such but individual aspects of its operation or public policy, in the Baltic states as, most probably, in other EU member states, rests on economic interests rather than convictions. In case of each of the Baltic State it is possible to find the decisions of the European Union that were not popular with societies of the countries and were met with public debates or even public actions. For example, in Estonia the decision of the European Commission regarding the illegitimacy of state support to the “Estonian Air” was treated very negatively (Postimees, 2016); in Latvia – considerable attention has attracted the dispute over pay of Latvian construction company “Laval” workers in Sweden (Eurofound, 2005); in Lithuania, much controversy was provoked over the EU requirement to close the Ignalina nuclear power station followed by arguments concerning the financing of the dismantling process. Baltic farmers are also dissatisfied though they get the greatest benefit yet think that they are incorrectly wronged as the allowances they receive are much smaller than the European Union average (Arc2020, 2012; ERR News, 2012). The list of similar examples could be endless.

Speaking in general, the Baltic states, in terms of Euroscepticism, differ but slightly from other states. However, one difference should be mentioned. Soft Euroscepticism that in the Baltic states is more expressed not by the official structures but by business or civil society is rather dampened down because the advantages of the EU membership (security, cohesion policy), notwithstanding all the tensions, in the Baltic states obviously outweigh those costs and inconveniences. Therefore, Baltic societies still put up with EU rules and unfavorable resolutions. For example, contrary to Visegrád countries, the Baltic states agreed with the decision on the refugee acceptance quotas in spite of the reservations expressed by civil society (OSW, 2015).

Thus, in the Baltic states, both the forms of manifested Euroscepticism are rather weak. However, rounding up it is worthwhile mentioning that it would be erroneous to think that the Baltic states are unconditionally Euro-enthusiastic, that their societies, political parties and parliaments are populated by Euro-federalists and proponents of the European superpower. It is nothing like this. Just as there

is no more influential Eurosceptical movement or a political party, the Euro-federalists of the Baltic states are also equally weak. Those that most experts call Euro-pragmatists obviously dominate in the Baltic states. However, in our opinion the Euro-pragmatists should be truly called genuine Euro-sceptics. Only their Euro-scepticism is not manifested but latent.

We would apply the term *latent* Euroscepticism to such a posture that essentially accepts the present architecture of the European Union but is not actually interested in the continued deepening of the integration. The leaders of the Baltic states have emphasized more than once that they are rather for the intergovernmental but not supranational Europe (Paulauskas, 2006; Kerikmäe et al., 2018). The Baltic states are enthusiasts of the international institutions where they have “a place at the table” but they skeptically assess the granting of new empowering to supranational institutions (Veebel et al., 2014). The same position is recorded in the strategic documents of the states (Republic of Estonia, 2015; Republic of Latvia, 2018; Republic of Lithuania, 2015). The Baltic states do not support the sanctions proposed by the European Commission to Poland (EurActiv, 2018). The Baltic states are also among those countries that are suspicious towards the reforms of the European Union proposed by the President of France Emmanuel Macron and did join the rallied by the Netherlands member states’ opposing “club” that the *Financial Times* called the “Hanseatic League 2.0” (Financial Times, 2017).

Concluding Remark

Thus, the choice and position of the Baltic states is quite clear but at the same time problematic. The controversy lies in the fact that they seek to coordinate two things that can hardly be coordinated. On the one hand, the existence of the European Union is the existential interest of their own. Furthermore, the Baltic states have always sought not only to become members of the EU but also to participate in all the projects including the Eurozone or PESCO (Joint Statement, 2018). On the other hand, being latent Euro-sceptics they take the risk of encountering a hard-to-resolve dilemma in case France and Germany, that make the nucleus of the European Union, would agree to move towards a deeper integration or even federation.

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SANTRAUKA

EUROSKEPTICIZMAS BALTIJOS VALSTYBĖSE: MANIFESTUOJAMAS IR LATENTIŠKAS

Publikacijoje prisidedama prie diskusijos apie euroskepticizmą, ieškoma priežasčių ir paaiškinimų, kodėl Baltijos šalių euroskepticizmo lygis yra mažesnis nei Europos Sąjungos vidurkis. Baltijos valstybių manifestuojamas euroskepticizmas gali būti tvirtas arba švelnus, nors jie yra silpni. Tačiau būtų klaidinga teigti, kad Baltijos šalių visuomenės, politinės partijos, parlamentai yra besąlygiškai euroentuziastingi. Eurofederalizmas šiose valstybėse yra taip pat silpnas. Daugelio ekspertų įvardytas dominuojantis europragmatizmas iš tikrųjų yra latentinis Baltijos valstybių euroskepticizmas, nes nėra suinteresuotas tolesniu integracijos gilinimu. Pagrindinė šio apmąstymo išvada yra ta, kad Baltijos šalys siekia suderinti du dalykus, kurie sunkiai gali būti suderinami. Viena vertus, jos yra suinteresuotos nuolatiniu Europos Sąjungos egzistavimu. Kita vertus, būdamos latentiskai euroskeptiškos, jos rizikuoja susidurti su sunkiai išsprendžiama dilema, kuri kiltų, jei Prancūzija ir Vokietija, kurios sudaro Europos Sąjungos branduolį, sutiktų pereiti prie gilesnės integracijos ar net federacijos.

REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: Baltijos šalys, Europos Sąjunga, euroskepticizmas.

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