

är ett utslag av ett rationellt val från min sida eller om jag bara har helt rutinerat internaliserat de etablerade normerna från den rådande akademiska kulturen. Det kanske är som författaren hävdar "både-och". Hursomhelst, jag vill gärna framhålla att avhandlingen har ett antal viktiga förtjänster. Den bidrar med en synnerligen ambitiös teorigenomgång där författaren övertygande visar att han är mycket kunnig och väl inläst på den rådande diskursen. Det är också utan tvekan så att författaren har en imponerande kunskap när det gäller policy- och normutvecklingen inom såväl det svenska som internationella forskningspolitiska landskapet. Han har utfört en mycket stor empirisk kartläggning av såväl de centrala förändringsprocesserna i svensk forskningspolitik som på den lokala nivån. Vi får oss till livs många och delvis överraskande beskrivningar av de processer som skett, inte minst betydelsen av de lokala forskningsentreprenörerna. Det är således både empiriskt och teoretiskt ett mycket omfattande arbete bakom denna avhandling. Huvudresultatet, att "money talks" är inte precis överraskande men det är kul att höra en ny forskargeneration hävda att dagens (liksom gårdagens) universitet verkar i monopolkapitalets och dess lydiga stats tjänst. Det har sagts tidigare men det får gärna upprepas med som nu ny och intressant empiri.

Kjetil Duvold: *Making Sense of Baltic Democracy: Public Support and Political Representation in Nationalising States*. Örebro 2006: Department of Political Science.

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Description

As indicated in the title, this dissertation undertakes the task of making sense of contemporary Baltic democracy by examining the key issues of public support and political representation within the overall context of nationalising states. Kjetil Duvold asks what, if anything, is problematic about Baltic democracy and poses the question of whether the sense or meaning of Baltic democracy is somehow different from that of other democratic states. A further question raised is whether Baltic democracy can now be regarded as consolidated, the end-point of a process characterised by the acquisition of qualities of durability as well as the capacity to withstand the various threats to regime survival that internal dynamics and the interplay of international factors throw up. Baltic democracy between the world wars failed to consolidate and soon succumbed to internal dictatorial pressures, while relations between the major European and international powers held off any prospects of its restoration until the end of the 1980s. Great progress has been made since the demise of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991. Democracy certainly seems to be well established in the three states of the

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(sub-)region and it appears to be increasingly consolidated. Baltic democracy also 'makes sense' in any normal understanding of the phrase: there is clearly nothing non-sensical about it nor something inherently contradictory as, for example, the idea of Soviet democracy was to most people (or at least those accustomed to the practices of liberal democracy). Neither, on the face of it, is there anything particularly inauthentic about it. Just by virtue of EU membership and meeting the Copenhagen criteria, the Baltic states fall clearly into the more democratic half of the group of European post-communist states.

This achievement already makes Baltic democracy quite striking in view of the Soviet origins of the contemporary systems, which have not generally provided a conducive starting point for the construction of democratic regimes. Arguably, the only other current example of a full democracy to emerge from the Soviet Union is Mongolia. The Baltic states have therefore successfully coped with their Soviet legacy (unlike virtually all other Soviet Republics) but, Kjetil Duvold argues, that legacy has yet to be fully overcome, which has significant implications for contemporary democracy-building and regime development. One particular consequence of the Soviet occupation, as Dr. Duvold points out at the beginning of the dissertation, is that one in five of the residents of Baltic states is still excluded from the political process on the grounds of ethnic origin and language skill. This is one of the distinctive characteristics or – arguably – shortcomings of contemporary Baltic democracy, in which ideas of nationhood, civic inclusion and relations within and around the state are significantly contested.

It also leads directly to another leading topic signalled in the dissertation's title: how far and in what way do conflicting understandings of the nature of the national community affect the regime's democratic legitimacy. Consideration of these factors leads to less positive conclusions about the strength and quality of Baltic democracy. Because of this problematic conception, or at least in association with it, it is argued, democratic support is only partial in the Baltic states and much of the resident population remains somewhat unconvinced about democratic performance there. In this context the status of political representation is also questionable, particularly so far as it concerns the role of political parties and their relation to social interests, identifiable political cleavages, nationality and identity issues. The prominence of individual personalities in the party politics of the Baltic states is seen as a major feature, and possible weakness, of their form of democratic regime. Overall, then, a pattern of Baltic democracy is identified which is made up of divided political communities and characterised by ambiguous mass-elite relations, weak political representation and an ideological space that is open-ended and malleable, providing fertile ground for populism. So the practical question that underlies the thesis and is reflected in the phrasing of the title is whether this particular kind of democracy actually makes political sense. Does the Baltic system of political interaction represent a viable form of democracy and can it legitimately be described as such?

The main components of an answer to these questions are indicated in the lead topics identified in the second part of the title. The major argument concerning public support is that there is extensive popular endorsement throughout the so-

ciety of democratic principles while a significant part of the overall population remains less than fully impressed by the actual performance of the system. A range of evidence is offered to support this contention: that support for the idea of a return to communism is very limited, that there is a growing tendency to reject all authoritarian solutions to contemporary problems, and there is – not surprisingly – a positive correlation of political satisfaction with family status and household income. There are, nevertheless, some negative aspects that place a question mark over levels of public support. While, for example, support for the current system has increased over recent years so generally – and rather surprisingly – has endorsement of the virtues of the former communist regime. There are also strong perceptions of corruption, particularly in Latvia and Lithuania, and limited evidence of general respect for the rule of law, features that together provide grounds for doubts about the strength of popular endorsement of democratic performance.

Another complex topic examined is that of political representation, which is approached here in terms of the nature and effectiveness of political parties, as well as the yet more slippery question of how far political cleavages exist, how influential they may be if they can be detected, how dominant identity politics is, and the prominent role played by personality in party politics. The major evidence in this area concerns findings indicating that the majority of Baltic citizens do not identify with a political party, observations of higher levels of electoral volatility in the Baltic region than in most Central and East European countries, the relatively frequent appearance of flash parties capable of strong electoral performance like *Res Publica* (Estonia, 2003), *New Era*

(Latvia, 2003) and *Labour* (Lithuania, 2004). It is, further, also established that the Baltic party systems cannot be accommodated with classic cleavage theory, leave room for a stronger role to be played by personalities and show a distinctive tendency to produce populist tendencies in party politics, all characteristics that raise some doubts about the durability and quality of democracy in the region.

The idea also contained in the title, finally, of the Baltic democracies as nationalising states involves a somewhat unusual term taken from Rogers Brubaker. This points to distinctive features rather different from those implied by more conventional terms like nation-states (which are primarily associated with the long-established states of Western Europe) or states dominated by nationalists and governed on nationalist principles. Nationalising states, rather, refer to a context marked by the relatively specific and problematic factors of: a state or regime being new or unconsolidated, a situation where major external actors are engaged in an ongoing dispute about national status (which is generally the case with the Baltic countries in terms of Russian foreign policy), instances where the nationalising project is undertaken by a core ethnic group that sees itself as particularly threatened or vulnerable, and where the resulting form of interaction leads to a specific form of tripartite relationship. The adoption of this perspective supports the suggestion that there is something specific about the position of the Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia – that they are not just a standard ethnic minority or diaspora, for example, that they have had a specific and distinctive impact on the development and eventual nature of Baltic democracy (in terms of cleavages as well as the overall

context in which democracy has developed, been conceived and practised).

The scholarly background against which the thesis is conceived and articulated is therefore that of comparative democracy and of studies of post-communist change that involve reference to major topics like political transition, democratisation, as well as to debates about the nature and quality of contemporary democracy. It builds on existing studies and ongoing analysis of the role of popular support and the nature of political representation in relation to contentious issues of nationalism and national awareness as they impinge on the practice of modern democracy. There can be no doubt that Dr. Duvold's thesis presents a wide-ranging survey of an important area of democratic analysis and makes a well-written contribution to this key area of political enquiry.

Comment: Baltic democracy in comparative context

It is one of the main virtues of the thesis that it confronts major issues of contemporary politics in a rigorous comparative context and that the nature of Baltic democracy is analysed in broad terms with reference to a range of major international and comparative factors. It is from this aspect also that some major questions arise. One prime concern is how far it is actually possible to identify a specific phenomenon that might be called Baltic democracy. There are clearly major factors pointing to a specific regional identity in terms of common location and relative size, interwar status and Soviet legacy, which are of obvious importance in the immediate post-communist context. But it is not evident why or how far these factors feed into or sustain a specific form of regional

democracy, or why issues of historical legacy should continue to count as time passes and the immediate context of post-Soviet independence becomes more distant. This is especially problematic in terms of issues surrounding Soviet-era immigrants, whose role was far from uniform in the three countries and played little part in Lithuanian society (they currently are reported to make up 6.3 per cent of the population). From this point of view it should be asked if there really are enough *significant features common* to the three countries to sustain the claim that they share an identity in terms of ethnic composition and have common experience by virtue of the impact this feature has on the form of democratic regime and the quality of 'Baltic democracy'.

There is, indeed, further evidence within the comparative regional context to sustain arguments for a distinct Lithuanian identity. Lithuanians show different dynamics of regime support from the other two countries. This has strengthened markedly in recent years but the population also shows surprisingly high levels of endorsement of the former communist regime (pp. 197-202). Such findings seem to underline the significance of the broader substantive and methodological questions that arise concerning the status of ethnic minorities in Lithuania and the nature of their role in the overall political system – they are that much smaller in this country and are unlikely to play the same part that they clearly do in Latvia and Estonia, an observation that raises some doubts about the existence of a generic form of Baltic democracy. Dr. Duvold certainly recognises the particular position of Estonia and Latvia in this respect (see p. 330 for example), but it remains unclear if this should qualify the idea Baltic democracy more generally.

There are other significant differences within the Baltic category which relate to the Estonian case, where there are different patterns of regime support and consistently more positive views both about the current political regime and the post-communist economy. Interestingly enough, this is broadly true also for the minority as well as the native Estonian population (pp. 198 and 202). There are also strikingly different levels of corruption perceptions between the Baltic countries that raise questions about the importance of this factor in shaping a common form of politics – Estonia and Latvia have quite different experiences in this respect (p. 232). There is, then, major variation within the region in terms of the key factors that, it is suggested, give rise and ‘sense’ to a common form of Baltic democracy.

From the other perspective and turning attention to *factors of significant difference* it is also worth asking how distinct Baltic democracy actually is from the rest of Central and Eastern Europe: is the Baltic area sufficiently distinct from other post-communist countries to sustain the idea of a specific form of Baltic democracy? From this point of view the thesis contains only limited indications of the distinctiveness of a regional form of democracy. Baltic citizens do indeed seem to be somewhat more technocratic in terms of government preferences and are also more appreciative of their new freedoms than the inhabitants of other post-communist states (pp. 222, 226) but otherwise they show similar levels of satisfaction with the workings of democracy to other Central and East European populations. There are, nevertheless, some differences in the views expressed by the Estonian and Latvian minority populations in this respect that lend support to the idea that a

specific political dynamic has developed in at least those two countries (p. 229).

Such data suggest that Baltic political practices may not in fact be so very different from patterns of Central European democracy overall, apart from the major factor of the consequences emanating from Russian minorities existing in Latvia and Estonia – but this applies only to those two countries and not to Lithuania. Elsewhere we either see rather similar party system characteristics across the region or differences that cut through the Baltic region in terms of political instability, low levels of party institutionalisation, electoral volatility and susceptibility to populist incursions. A range of parties beyond the Baltic region can be mentioned here in relation to the role of populism: Self-Defence and the League of Polish Families in Poland, *Smer* and ANO in Slovakia, as well as the National Movement of Simeon II and *Ataka* in Bulgaria, and nationalist organisations throughout the region.

Party systems and government patterns are indeed far more stable in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia but these are specific cases and the regional pattern as a whole is highly differentiated. On many counts Poland emerges as the most unstable country of all in a number of respects, although conditions in Latvia and Lithuania are generally not much better. Estonia, however, together with Slovakia operates at a rather higher level (Lewis 2006). Precisely why these differences emerge is another question, but the main point here is that the situation throughout the Central and East European region is highly differentiated, and that signs of significant difference emerge within the Baltic region as well. Overall, too, there are few signs that Baltic democracy as a category is actually less consolidated than the others (see discussion in Chapters 6 and

7). Baltic political structures and processes are generally far closer to Central European patterns than to the rest of the former Soviet Union, for which a number of good reasons are indeed identified in the thesis (p. 55).

Quite strong similarities also emerge across the region in terms of democratic performance and outcomes. Latvia in common with Poland emerges as a country with a record of relatively unstable government (Müller-Rommel, Fettelschoss & Harfst 2004). It also scores consistently high on corruption perception scores – although Poland emerges even more negatively in this respect. Estonia, on the other hand (generally in association with Slovenia), remains the least corrupt of all.² This pattern of differentiation within the Central and East European area and across the Baltic areas tends to strengthen doubts about the robustness of the category of a specifically Baltic democracy.

Methodology: indicators of democracy

How much can we conclude from the key indicators Dr. Duvold proposes in the thesis to evaluate and define a particular form of Baltic democracy? Measuring the key factor of *political support* is, as pointed at the beginning of the relevant chapter, a difficult art and involves problematic, though critical, distinctions being drawn between sentiments expressed about the political community as a whole, the regime and political authorities. A wide range of statistical data is offered in Chap-

ter 5, which discusses The Challenge of Political Support, and much of it presents useful insights and correlates of support within the set of Baltic countries. As suggested above, though, there is rather limited comparative data to support the contention that the Baltic variant of support is indeed qualitatively different from that prevailing in the post-communist region as a whole. There is little specific evidence adduced to support the contention that the level of public support for democratic performance is unusually low in the Baltic states – Table 5.12 in fact shows substantial support for democracy amongst the dominant Baltic nationalities, if not the minorities, in comparison with the regional average (although there are admittedly some rather strange features in the series as a whole, as the European and World Values Studies show quite different levels of satisfaction from the Candidate Countries Eurobarometer). Further to this, there is little direct evidence about public support at all on a comparative scale. Perceptions of corruption are often linked in the literature with general judgements on political performance and overall support for democracy although in truth they really refer to rather a different phenomenon. But even here Estonia does not emerge as corrupt at all and broader comparison shows Poland to be a particularly poor performer in this respect in the context of post-communist Europe as a whole.

Comparative data on *political representation* across the post-communist region as a whole is rather patchy and the picture it provides of democratic quality generally inconclusive. Information on levels of party membership overall is sparse. Chapter 6 on Translating Social Interests provides extensive material on the development and current state of Baltic party politics, although it is difficult to determine

2 A ranking confirmed in the most recent edition of the Corruption Perceptions Index, see *EUObserver.com*, accessed 7 November 2006.

whether the situation there is greatly different from other parts of the post-communist region. An article published some years ago argued that membership levels were declining throughout Europe as a whole, although they were never high in Central and Eastern Europe apart from particular cases like the former communist parties (Mair & van Biezen 2001). Unfortunately, in any case, the Baltic states were not covered in this survey at all. But even if party membership levels in the Baltic states are low (p. 268), there is nothing very unusual in this. In fact there are some indications (p. 326) that levels of membership might be rising, a tendency that also seems to be developing in other countries recently (Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania), so the picture is not clear in this area. There is also some evidence provided by Richard Rose that Baltic populations in fact find it easier to identify a party to vote for than electorates of other countries, and that Estonians – once again! – are particularly strong in terms of party identification (Rose & Munro 2003: 57). Neither are patterns of electoral volatility particularly easy to read: current levels of volatility are not at all high in Estonia, but again the picture is different in Latvia and Lithuania (p. 269). There is also a strikingly high and persistent level of volatility in Poland.

Finally, the idea of *nationalising nationalism* taken from Brubaker raises some further questions: can this concept really be distinguished from nationalism in general as the motor of other nation-state building projects? A number of questions arise here including, for example, whether 'nationalising nationalism' really exists anywhere outside Eastern Europe and how far it is analogous to the ethnic nationalism discussed elsewhere. Neither is it fully apparent, in comparative terms, that the

Bosniaks were ever really nationalist (p. 132) or that Czechs were with regard to Sudeten Germans. Or were they not the primary nationalising nations? This is not at all clear. The basic question arises, then, of whether the concept really has much contemporary purchase outside the Baltic states – and again whether this really means anything more than Latvia and Estonia (as it hardly fits Lithuania at all, see pp. 179, 335).

General observations

The concluding chapter returns to the question of democratic consolidation – which is one that is critical but necessarily inconclusive, democracy being as Dr. Duvold points out: 'a process, not an end-product – constantly being re-shaped by factors such as the economy, external factors, technological progress and – obviously – the values and preferences of ordinary citizens' (p. 329). Three main criteria that determine the course of this process are spelt out: the degree to which democracy as a form of government enjoys basic legitimacy, the absence of significant forces either internal or external that pose a series threat to the regime and – a more specific factor here – the fact that all three Baltic states passed the threshold for membership of the European Union. It is not fully established how far these criteria are met. In one sense the least predictable of these conditions seems at present to be the most secure – no significant internal or external threats to the survival of the regime can currently be identified.

The part played by the European Union seems to be the most straightforward but is in some ways presented as ambiguous in this respect: the membership tests are 'quite crucial' and even have the force to make the promise of democratic consoli-

dation 'come true' but their relevance as benchmarks of consolidation is also 'highly debatable' (p. 331). In some ways, indeed, the role of the EU seems to be somewhat underestimated. In a rather counter-intuitive way, Russian-speakers in Latvia (the most critical country in this respect) are described as having generally taken a hostile view of the EU and adopting a negative stance to the country's accession process (p. 323). But there are some signs of this now changing, with for example the sudden change of stance on the part of the Equal Rights party in 2003 (Ikstens 2006: 90). It was certainly the case that strong pressure was exerted by the EU for a more inclusive, liberal policy to be taken towards the Baltic minorities and that EU policies have indeed had some effect. Even in the little postscript referring to Belarus (p. 349-50) the role of the EU is somewhat underplayed in my view, and in general there could be stronger arguments about how the nationalist conundrum is at least partly finessed if not fully solved by recourse to EU-based supra-nationalism. This also impinges on the problem of whether the ethnic minorities constitute a real threat to the quality and survival of democracy and continue to call into question the democratic credentials of Estonia and Latvia. As a complex work of analysis the thesis as a whole, though, certainly sheds considerable light on these important linkages and provides a wealth of evidence of which further discussion of this complex subject will have to take account. The dissertation as a whole represents a major contribution to our understanding of the diverse processes of post-communist political development.

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Comment Kjetil Duvold

I read Professor Paul Lewis' comments with the greatest interest. Obviously, I was practically forced to listen to – and comment upon – them when Professor Lewis acted as an opponent during my defence in June 2006. But in all honesty, not everything being said during that occasion stands so clear in my memory. Thus, to read his comments in an atmosphere of tranquillity gives me a new opportunity to reflect upon them and offer my response to what I think is a brilliantly articulated piece of comments.

I should perhaps point out that I will *not* comment upon the bulk of his points – simply because a) I happen to agree with them, or b) they are rather too flattering for comments. There are, however, two points in which I would like to add my remarks. The first concerns the notion of 'Baltic democracy': Lewis is clearly having some doubts about the utility of this term,

pointing out that the differences between the three countries are often too large to be ignored. Yes, indeed, Catholic Lithuania often seems to have more in common with Poland, her much larger neighbour to the south, than with the rather 'Nordic' Estonia. Moreover, the perceptions of democracy among the average Estonian seems to be rather different from those of the average Latvian or Lithuanian – as my study testifies to. However, to compare the Baltic countries is neither particularly controversial nor complicated. I have laid out my reasons for making a comparative Baltic study in the introductory chapter and do not feel compelled to repeat them here. Lewis' argument, however, seems not to be directed at my choice of cases as such, but my decision to discuss them under the label 'Baltic democracy'. I must confess that my intention was never to introduce a distinct model of democracy, exclusively enjoyed by these three states. In all honesty, the term 'Baltic democracy' should rather be seen as an attempt to capture the three countries under a somewhat eye-catching heading – in a similar way as the term 'Nordic model' has been in circulation for a long time. I still think 'Baltic democracy' is a rather fine term!

Towards the end of his string of comments, Professor Lewis brings up the European Union – an important issue that deserves a few comments on my behalf. In brief, he believes that I 'somewhat underestimate' the role of the EU in my study. I agree that the role of the EU in safeguarding democracy in Central and Eastern Europe is not to be underestimat-

ed. In the delicate context of Baltic minority policies, I make it clear that 'there can be no doubt that international agents – the Council of Europe, the CSCE/OSCE and the European Union – have been highly instrumental in changing the Estonian and Latvian approach to the minority situation...' (p.164). I return to this point on several occasions, hinting that liberal democracy might not have enjoyed as widespread acceptance as it has, if it was not for the continuous input from the European Union – and, it should be pointed out, from the Nordic countries. I would have thoroughly enjoyed conducting a more careful study of the external impacts on democracy in the Baltic countries – and may indeed return to the subject in upcoming research. However, when I wrote my dissertation, I decided to keep the attention on *endogenous* processes of democratisation. More specifically, I was interested in the attitudes and beliefs among ordinary Baltic citizens. I was also interested in how their preferences and interests were articulated via the party systems. Giving the EU dimension significantly more attention would have altered this framework, or added significant amount of 'calories' to an already quite lengthy piece of work.

I will once again take the opportunity to thank Professor Paul Lewis for his considerate, critical and, above all, constructive comments. They left me feeling rather more reassured than worried about the value of my doctoral work.