

BOOK REVIEWS

Ethnic politics in the Baltic States, edited by V. V. Poleshchuk and V. V. Stepanov, Moscow, Nauka, 2013, 407 pp., py6 485 (hardcover), ISBN 978-5020380448

The politics of the Baltic States present puzzling questions about regime stability in political systems where majority–minority relationships are shaped by both democratic and ethnic principles. The volume entitled *Ethnic Politics in the Baltic States*, co-edited by Vadim V. Poleshchuk and Valery V. Stepanov, published by the Nauka press in Moscow, presents a comprehensive overview of the evolution of ethnic politics in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania since 1991, and their consequences for the status of ethnic minorities in these states. The volume contains 16 chapters addressing political, historical, demographic, and discursive aspects of the politics of the Baltic States. The contributors represent a broad spectrum of scholars and provide a wealth of information and insight about diverse aspects of ethno-politics in the Baltics.

Tishkov and Stepanov preface the discussion on ethno-politics in the Baltic States by situating it within the broader literature on state and nation-building processes in the Western European (democratic) context. Agarin reviews the broad body of literature on the politics of the Baltic States. Poleshchuk, Zepa, Berdnikov, and Hanovs present discourse analyses of ethno-politics in the Baltics from three distinct perspectives: the status of Russians in Baltic States and societies, the discourse of migration politics, and the scientific discourse of Russian scholars on the Russian minority in the Baltics, respectively. Nikiforov, Poleshchuk, Volkov, and Marcinkevičius provide in-depth analyses of the demography of Russians and their social status in each of the Baltic States over the course of the past century. Järve evaluates the influence of the Soviet legacy on the democratization of the Baltic States, and the challenges these young democracies face in protecting the rights of minorities. Poleshchuk and Dimitrov focus on Baltic legal systems and emphasize the importance of continuity as the basis of statehood in the Baltics. Nikiforov illuminates the relevant actors and their aims in the institutionalization of the politics of memory in the ethno-politics of the Baltic States. Helemäe focuses on the role of ethnicity in the labor market, and adds to the understanding of the socio-economic status of Russians in Estonia. Bogushevitch's chapter on protest mobilization in Estonia adds social movement theory analysis to the volume. Finally, Kochenov and Cilevics focus on the influence of the European Union and the European Council on the ethno-politics in the Baltic States, respectively.

Two important common themes emerge from the book. One is that ethno-politics in these states bear the legacy of Soviet rule. The other is that majority–minority relations in such settings represent a continuous struggle for sovereignty, in which ethnic demography plays a significant role. This struggle is thoroughly examined and evaluated in this volume. Rather than evaluating each of the 16 contributions separately, the goal of this review is to summarize the key findings and assess the contributions of the volume as a whole.

The authors focusing on domestic aspects of politics in the Baltic States shed light on the processes of ethnic boundary-making in these states after 1991, emphasizing the salience of the politics of memory in the way state-minority relations became institutionalized, and analyzing the implications of those processes for various forms of exclusion that ethnic Russian and Russian-speaking minorities have experienced. In the political systems that emerged in these states, the main demarcation between groups is based on ethnicity and language, where the titular Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian groups are seen as the legitimate owners of the state and the Russians are seen as “immigrants” that arrived during the Soviet occupation. The illegitimate Soviet occupation was used as the legal foundation for the restoration of the formerly independent Baltic States and thus justified the formation of ethnic politics and restrictive citizenship laws.

The politics of memory played a crucial role in the historical justification for the preservation and securitization of the titular nations through the politics of restitution. In the historical accounts, the authors argue that restitution in practice aimed for the maximum possible restoration of these states as they had been in place in 1940, including territory, ethnic demography, and government institutions. The politics of restitution was directed at correcting the demographic balance in each state in favor of the titular groups, in order to eliminate the threat posed by the Russian minority and in securing the nation-building processes in these states. As a result of ethnic policies in the spheres of citizenship, education, and language, the socio-economic and political rights of Russians became highly restrained. Socio-economic disadvantage was particularly significant in Estonia (where Russians were less likely to get high positions in their occupations than Estonians despite similar characteristics and skills), though “glass ceiling” effects were encountered also in other states by ethnic Russians in their attempts to climb professional and socio-economic ladders. Politically, the access of Russian speakers in the Baltic States to centers of political decision-making and key governmental positions was also significantly restricted. The authors warn that these implications of ethnic politics and of the growing unrest among the ethnic minorities (rooted in their inability to influence political decisions and realize their economic and professional potential) are likely to engender political instability and ethnic conflict.

Authors focusing on the international dimensions of these issues address the significance of international organizations, specifically of the European Union and the European Council, on minority rights, and the legal and political systems of the Baltic States. Beyond adding to a growing body of literature on these institutions and their impact on post-Communist states, the authors make several important arguments. The inconsistency in demands for the protection of minority rights, coupled with the lack of persistence in monitoring the implementation of demands made by the EU commission, left the problem of minority rights unresolved. In other words, the authors argue that the Baltic States became EU members without abandoning ethno-politics as the operating principle of their political system. In contrast, acceptance into the Council of Europe was based on a more objective estimation of the Baltic States’ performance in applying and honoring the commitments of membership. Thus the Council of Europe played a significant role in the ethno-politics of the Baltic States, influencing their legal framework relevant to minority rights, in particular the situation of non-citizens in Latvia and Estonia.

The longitudinal demographic analyses combined with the analysis of the politics of restitution constitute the main strengths of this book, as well as its main contribution to the literature on ethno-politics in deeply divided societies. *Ethnic Politics in the Baltic States* provides an in-depth historical analysis of state formation and ethno-national politics, and of the impact of Soviet rule on each of the three states. The well-balanced comparative analysis of all three Baltic States offers explanations for the variation in the outcomes of

ethnic politics in these states regarding their treatment of ethnic minorities. The authors convincingly argue that the demographic composition of the Baltic States, in particular the proportion of Russians in each state, stands at the center of the explanation of ethnic politics. While Estonia (and even more so Latvia) has pursued intolerant policies toward the Russian minority, Lithuania has followed a more liberal path. This volume is also innovative in its focus on the discourse of political and academic elites in the Baltic States as well as Russia in an effort to explain the processes that have shaped the situation of the Russian minorities.

The contributors to the volume have generally succeeded in achieving the goals they set out in their chapters; however, the edited book suffers from several weaknesses, some of which are inherent to edited volumes generally, and others that are particular to this one. A broad overview of any region and topic by multiple scholars inevitably incorporates diverse premises, methodological approaches, and emphases on some areas of competence at the expense of other vital areas desirable for a comprehensive understanding. Some central arenas of ethno-politics in the Baltic States, such as Russia's influence on the domestic politics of these states, the media, and political parties, are only indirectly addressed in the book. A more thorough analysis of these domains would have strengthened the volume. Similarly, a discussion of broader implications of the main findings about ethno-politics in the Baltic States for other states or regions would have been highly beneficial. These cases provide significant lessons about the implications of majority–minority relations on regime stability in ethnically divided societies – an issue of growing significance not only in the post-Communist region but in several other regions of the world. Despite these weaknesses, an English translation of this volume would be of great interest and relevance to students of the politics of the Baltic States.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2015.1132621>

Becoming Muslim in Imperial Russia: conversion, apostasy, and literacy, by Agnus Nilufer Kefeli, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2014, 314 pp., \$52.50 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0801452314

Agnes Kefeli has written a first-rate monograph examining an issue in Russian imperial history that has generally been described in terms of “apostasy.” The “lapsing” of Tatar Christians in the nineteenth century, and the need for tens of thousands of baptized Tatars – or Kräshens, as they are known – to live unofficially as Muslims, is actually a rather old story in the historiography of Russia, with the most recent full-scale treatment of the issue coming in the form of Paul Werth's *At the Margins of Orthodoxy* in 2002.

But whereas Werth and other Russianists working on the Kräshens have relied mainly upon Russian-language sources – especially state archival materials – to examine interactions between state officials and Tatar communities in Russia, Kefeli has brought a fresh perspective to this topic by drawing from a more diverse mix of both Russian and Tatar-language materials. In addition to employing state archival documents from St. Petersburg, Kazan, and Orenburg, Kefeli utilizes Tatar-language personal archives,