Divisions Count, but Personalities Decide?

Cleavage Crystallisation and Mass-Elite Linkages in the Baltic Countries

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Workshop 2:
The Political Representation of Social Interest in Central and East Europe

Kjetil Duvold and Professor Sten Berglund
Department of Social and Political Sciences
Örebro University, SE-701 82 Örebro, Sweden
Tel: +46 19 30 13 43,
kjetil.duvold@sam.oru.se
sten.berglund@sam.oru.se

Abstract
This paper concentrates on horizontal divisions (‘cleavages’) and vertical ties in contemporary Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Initially we will explore social diversity in the Baltic countries and assess to what extent these divisions are being felt within the party systems. In the second part of the paper, we will scrutinise links between citizens and elites. Thus, we will make an attempt to bring together the issue of cleavages and political representation with the issue of regime support. The New Europe Barometer allows us to tap both dimensions: general perceptions of cleavages – in other words, to identify the dimensions that are relevant for distinguishing between parties; and attitudes to multiple levels of regime support. The paper will demonstrate that current distrust towards leaders and institutions is, somewhat paradoxically, matched by strong prevalence of authoritarian and technocratic preferences. We assume that levels of support for institutions, regime performance and democracy as a form of government are related to political representation. Poor horizontal links may breed severe scepticism towards political elites and state institutions. Vice versa, awkward vertical links may hamper the flourishing of ties between different social interests. The type of social alienation we find in post-communist Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania may thus serve to weaken the mass-elite linkages further. Finally, we ask if there is a case to be made for a specific Baltic model of democracy.
Introduction
All the countries that are in line to join the European Union are widely perceived as consolidated democracies (Berglund, Aarebrot, Vogt and Karasimeonov 2001; Berglund, Ekman and Aarebrot 2004). Consolidation involves not only that democratic politic institutions are in place, but that the presence of these arrangements are not under serious challenge by counter-forces or are being questioned by significant strata of the population. In the strategy paper, *Towards the Enlarged Union*, the European Commission states that the functioning of the democratic systems of government in the candidate countries is confirmed and that they meet the so-called Copenhagen criteria.\(^1\) Robert Dahl (1971, 10ff) has developed one of the most widely used definitions of democracy, in which he replaces the term democracy with ‘polyarchy’ - rule by the many, but not all the people. There can be no doubt that all EU candidate countries fulfil Dahl’s notion of polyarchy. But however crucial for the establishment and survival of democracy, Dahl’s criteria do not give many clues about the linkages between citizens and elites. Although he argues in favour of institutions that give citizens a fair chance to formulate their preferences and interests, it remains uncertain to what extent elites and institutions are genuinely receptive to the kaleidoscope of social interests. If the mechanisms to channel preferences and interests from below are inadequate – not least within the party system – there is a significant possibility that frustrated citizens will become dissatisfied with the political regime at large, and not just with regime performance (Fuchs and Klingemann 1994, 3; see also Norris, ed. 1999). Moreover, democracy also requires a certain degree of trust among citizens and between citizens and elites. Collective action – indeed, democratic decision-making – is virtually impossible without some mutual understanding and trust between citizens and elites. The question is what sort of ‘glue’ ought to underpin such collective understanding. The issue we raise here boils down to representation and congruence between elites and citizens. In this essay on the Baltic countries, we will make an attempt to bring together the issue of cleavages and political representation with the issue of regime support. First, we will explore social diversity in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and assess to what extent different social divisions are being felt within the party systems. In the second part, we will scrutinise links between citizens and elites. Levels of support for institutions, regime performance and, most intriguing, democracy as a form of government, are in all likelihood linked with citizens-elites linkages. Poor horizontal links – not least, lack of a vibrant civil society – may breed severe scepticism towards political elites and state institutions. Vice versa, awkward vertical links may hamper the flourishing of ties between different social interests. However, we will leave out the issue of possible causal links between vertical and horizontal integration.

We will concentrate on the Baltic countries with some references to Central and Eastern Europe in general. We believe Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in many ways are typical of the entire region, at the same time as they clearly stand out in certain respects. To what extent, say, Lithuania resembles Estonia more than Poland is a matter of contention – which we will not pursue further in this context. But one factor that evidently sets the Baltic states apart from the other new EU countries is the fact they have been Soviet republics, governed by elites whose loyalty and tasks were above all tied to the Soviet regime. It is particularly noteworthy that the Soviet Baltic republics did not control the in- and outflow of people on their territories. As a consequence, several million non-indigenous Soviet citizens, mainly Russians, moved in and out of the republics between 1944 and 1991. The population shifts were most significant in Latvia and least in Lithuania. These patterns and variations are clearly felt in Baltic politics today.

Cleavages after Communism

Seminal studies by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) and Rae and Taylor (1970) may serve as a theoretical backdrop for this analysis of cleavage crystallisation in contemporary Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Rae and Taylor’s definition includes three components: (1) the ascriptive level; (2) the attitudinal level; and (3) the behavioural level. It covers, in other words, underlying socio-structural ‘traits’, popular opinions and political action. According to Bartolini and Mair (1990, 215) a full cleavage requires that all three levels actually coincide. The presence of just two elements may be classified as a partial cleavage or a divide (Krause, 2004, 257; Berglund et al, 2004). Ascriptive divisions such as ethnicity and – to various degrees – religious affiliation and socio-structural position, certainly exist even in societies that have undergone intensive Soviet homogenisation. The extent to which these elements can provide a sound basis for cleavage-based politics after communism is another matter. Attitudes and values, the second aspect, are changing at a dramatic pace in new democracies and must unavoidably appear rather fluid compared with those found in more established societies. Whereas ascriptive and attitudinal aspects of cleavages essentially are sociological, the behavioural aspect is linked to the organisational level of politics. If democratic consolidation requires political institutions that are roughly compatible with the values and interests of the citizenry, as Klingemann and Fuchs (1995, 3) claim, we must address the issue of match between the ‘sociological’ and ‘political’ levels of cleavages. In other words, to what extent do political parties mirror and channel popular preferences and interests? A key question in this analysis is to what extent ‘sociological’ and ‘political’ aspects of cleavages actually coincide in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania: to what extent do elites, not least those represented by political parties, mirror and channel popular preferences and interests?

Perhaps somewhat naïvely, it has been suggested that party systems in post-communist countries emerged within a framework that can be described as tabula rasa. Advocates of this perspective claim that communism created homogenous, egalitarian – even atomised – societies, which made it impossible to formulate group interests (Schöpflin 1991). Parties emerged from scratch and political actors became involved in not only the aggregation of partisan interests, but even in creating such interests. Unlike in established democracies, where parties rose from distinct social interests, post-communist parties surfaced without distinct roots in society (Mair 1997, 193-8; Rokkan 1970). The very same leaders were also engaged in formulating the rules of the political game. This situation made it rather simple for political leaders to manipulate the configuration of party support. The party landscape was wide open and the skills and charisma of individual leaders became decisive (Mair 1997, 181-7). Electoral volatility, i.e. the proportion of voters who change party preference from one election to another, tends to be very high – an indication as good as any of poor links between parties and voters (Bartolini and Mair 1990, 147-51). The role of the communist legacy represents a different set of arguments, based on the assumption that communist rule generated political passivity, authoritarian and patriarchal political values, and a deep suspicions towards elites (Eckstein, Fleron, Hoffman, and Reisinger, 1998; Roskin 1991).

Against this rather pessimistic perspective on post-communist party development, typical of much of the early literature on transition in Central and Eastern Europe, later empirical studies have found much stronger links between party voting and social structure, thus seriously challenging the notion of ‘tabula rasa politics’. Kitschelt and associates, for instance, draw attention to a diverse social structure, predictable policy preferences and party choice, and, moreover, ‘striking patterns of political representation’ (Kitschelt, Mansfeldova, Markowski and Tóka 1999, 394) and ‘a limited set of permanent players who have rather well understood appeals and reputations’ (Kitschelt et al 1999, 402). The authors conclude that the
development in Central and Eastern Europe rather resembles that of Western democracies. Although we agree with the notion that social diversity indeed matters in terms of party politics in Central and Eastern Europe, there can be little doubt that the party systems are much less structured along socio-political axes than in long-standing democracies of Western Europe. Perhaps most striking (and ironic), the socio-economic cleavage – the most salient of all cleavages in virtually every West European polity and the basis for ‘Left’ and ‘Right’ – lacks roots in post-communist countries because the property-owning classes were absent (Wessels and Klingemann 1994; Zielinski 2002, 185). Political parties emerged as an integral part of the process of democratisation and acted as agents promoting the development of political dimensions. Hence, party competition in new democracies is essentially shaped and driven by parties and party actors (Sitter 2001, 87).

**Mapping Issue Divides in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania**

Even if political actors are in a more favourable position to engineer the political agenda under rapidly changing circumstances than under more settled conditions, they are never unrestricted by contextual factors. Borrowing Rae and Taylor’s classification (1970), we will study the role of issue divides – or, more ambitiously – cleavages in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania from three angles. More concretely, we will offer an examination of underlying socio-structural ‘traits’; scrutinise popular attitudes; and discuss manifestation of issue divides within the party systems. There are good reasons to assume that political parties in the Baltic countries are poorly linked with their electorates. Membership is low by West European standards, although a handful of parties have throughout the 1990s had membership pools that make them at least reminiscent of traditional mass parties (Krupavičius and Žvaliauskas 2003, 118). Additionally, the bulk of the parties are elite creations – initiated and run by ambitious political leaders with weak loyalty to party organisations. A large number of party splits and recurrent factionalism in the parliament testify to this pattern and make it almost imperative to question the *raison d’être* of the political parties. Many Baltic voters may do just that, but the vast majority of them seemingly manage to make at least some sense of the political parties in terms of issue dimensions or cleavages. Perceptions of cleavages represent one way of studying the linkage between parties and voters. If cleavage crystallisation is relevant for the development of party systems, we must assume that voters have their own perceptions of cleavages and, moreover, are in a position to locate parties according to at least some of these cleavages. The New Europe Barometer (NEB) of 2001 enables us to tap general perceptions of cleavages – in other words, to identify the dimensions that are relevant for distinguishing between parties.
Table 1: Relevance of Cleavages in the Baltic countries. Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Estonia</th>
<th>Latvia</th>
<th>Lithuania</th>
<th>CEE average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legacy of the communist regime</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State intervention versus market</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban versus rural</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic representation or not</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nation versus European integration</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality versus political ideals</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opinion on cleavages</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The exact introductory question is: ‘Here are some reasons that people give about the difference between political parties. Which of the following best explains these differences?’. The respondents made two choices. The figures above show primary and secondary choices of cleavages.

Source: New Baltic Barometer/New Europe Barometer (2001)

One of the most striking patterns revealed in Table 1 is that cleavages seem to be much more important for Lithuanians than Estonians and, in particular, Latvians. Only 6 per cent of Lithuanians have no opinion at all of cleavages, as opposed to a staggering 31 per cent in Latvia. As a matter of fact, the two countries represent opposite extremes in Central and Eastern Europe. More respondents among low-income and low education groups, and within the highest age-brackets, tend to have no opinion about cleavages. Similarly striking, the role of state intervention versus market solutions seems to be of far greater importance to Lithuanian citizens than to Estonians and Latvians. Left and Right – the most salient of all cleavages in Western Europe, but a dimension often assumed to be of much smaller importance in Central and Eastern Europe – is indeed perceived as the single most important issue dimension of Lithuanian politics. Notably, it is particularly the highest income-groups who are likely to consider the issue to be important (61 per cent). Territoriality – the urban-rural dimension and nation-state versus Europe stand out among Estonian respondents. It is, not surprisingly, rural residents who deem the urban-rural dimension important, whereas age seems to matter most for the evaluation of the European dimension – younger people consider it more important than older people. Ethnicity is considered more important in ethnically mixed Estonia and Latvia, but to a surprisingly limited extent. Finally, citizens in all three countries acknowledge a solid division between personalities in politics and political ideologies. This fact may indicate that strong personalities, not necessarily conducive for cleavage-based politics, seem to be a strong factor behind party choice throughout the Baltic countries.

Economy, Territory and Identity Count, but Personalities Decide?

If we follow Lipset and Rokkan’s (1967) notion of cleavages, we must make a distinction between latent and manifest cleavages, where only the latter are expressed through the party system. There are evidently many issue dimensions that do not carry over into the party system, either because they have been suppressed, have been resolved, overlap with other dimensions, or simply have not surfaced yet. Post-communist politics offers a treasure chest of latent cleavages. New inequalities, urban-rural discrepancies, ethnic and linguistic differences and, perhaps most intriguing, the legacy of communism, give plenty of space for politics based on social divisions. Some of them may indeed surface and be given political
clout at some point in the future, while others will remain dormant. A study of latent cleavages and their potential impact is by nature a speculative exercise. However, it can be fairly instructive to examine cultural, social and political divisions and contrast them to the issues that indeed have manifested themselves in the party system – to the extent that the party systems offer clear cleavage patterns at all. In the following section, we will examine some dimensions we believe are relevant to the Baltic countries (although Estonia and Latvia clearly differ from Lithuania along the ethnic dimension). By and large, the dimensions echo the attitudinal issues we examined in Table 1. Some of them are manifested in the party configurations, while others are not so visible in the party landscape. The issues are often overlapping and, borrowing from a title of Rokkan and Urwin’s (1983) work on peripheries in Western Europe, we have chosen to classify them according to economy, territory and identity.

Economic issues dominate the political agenda in virtually every advanced democracy, providing a necessary condition for ‘normal politics’ – i.e. tax issues, welfare, redistribution, etc. Economic issues also include the urban-rural dimension, which in its turn overlaps with the territorial dimension. The national question, essentially a territorial issue, represents yet another multi-faceted dimension: nation-building clearly plays a pivotal role in the political life of recent state creations like Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The process that led up to membership of the European Union is inexorably linked with the course of state- and nation-building that followed independence from Soviet occupation. The process of simultaneous nation-building and EU adaptation also echoes the dimension we label ‘identity’. Identity politics is particularly detectable in Estonia and Latvia, which have not only less history of state-building to draw on than Lithuania, but also are compelled to handle comparatively large minority groups. This brings us to yet another aspect of the identity dimension: the role of the communist past. Foreign policy objectives, notably memberships of NATO and the EU, are very much motivated by identity politics. Samuel Huntington’s notion of ‘civilisation clashes’ may have been met with contempt and ridicule by many Western scholars, but it certainly seems to strike a chord among many Baltic politicians, who have convinced themselves that they represent the Eastern outpost of Western civilisation, whereas Russia represents an altogether different culture and mentality. Therefore, creeping Russian influence, or perceived influence, in the Baltic countries – economic, cultural, political, let alone military – becomes highly emotive in the political discourse in all three countries. As we will shortly take in, the importance of the Soviet past is certainly diminishing as time goes by, but it continues to play an important role in several very different ways – be it security, corruption or identity-formation.

The legacy of communism was the first political divide to appear after independence, a conflict borne out of divisions that manifested themselves already towards the end of the 1980s. In all three countries, popular fronts were created for the chief purpose of loosening the ties with the Soviet Union. Although the movements argued over the speed and extent of this objective, the issue essentially united the native-speakers in all three countries. The predominantly Russian minorities were divided and the pro-Soviet inter-movements never managed to attract the bulk of the Russian-speakers. But as the Soviet Union started to crumble, the independence movements became increasingly divided. The Estonian Rahvarinne and Latvian Tautas fronte met competition from more radical Citizens’ Committees which, in the Estonian case, even challenged the parliamentary framework of the Supreme Council by setting up a competing Congress. In Lithuania, Sąjūdis became the broad political platform for opposition to the Soviet regime, but large sections of the reformed Communist Party endorsed the idea of independence as well. Not surprisingly, the three popular fronts started to disintegrate after independence, although some of their heirs, the Estonian Centre Party, Latvia’s Way and the Homeland Union/Lithuanian Conservatives
continued to enjoy high support in subsequent elections. However, the regime divide all but disappeared from Estonian and Latvian party politics. For sure, the issue was intimately linked with minorities, citizenship and language, which continued to dominate — but not so much divide — the political agenda of both countries. Meanwhile, the predominantly Russian minorities remained politically dormant for a long time — and continue to be so in the Estonian case. In both countries, the communist parties quickly collapsed into pitiful, small groupings without political muscle. The hot issue of ethnic minorities appears to have played a significant role in eliminating the communist parties from the political scene. The Soviet legacy and the role of the Communist Party came to overlap with the question of ‘illegitimate’ immigrants from the Soviet Union. The situation was somewhat different in Lithuania, where it proved trickier to ‘externalise’ the communist past. A significantly lower rate of immigration from other Soviet republics, coupled with a more indigenous communist party leadership, brought all these issues closer to home. For all intents and purposes, it was harder to discredit communist elites that by and large were of Lithuanian background, although it surely did not prevent several Sąjūdis leaders from highlighting the issue. The regime issue consequently remained stronger in Lithuania than in the other two countries. The bipolar nature of Lithuanian politics in the 1990s was to a large extent driven by a zealous anti-Communist Right on the one side, and a reformed communist party on the other (Duvold and Jurkynas 2004).

At any rate, the legacy of communism could hardly be sustained as an enduring political divide even in Lithuania. The role of the past is by its very nature a transitional phenomenon (Hellén, Berglund and Aarebrot 1998, 370). Although the regime divide corresponds with a Left-Right division, it may not so easily translate itself into a ‘traditional’ dichotomy of a state-centred and egalitarian Left and a libertarian Right. The economic priorities of the Left and Right are, in the Baltic countries as in so much of the post-communist world, sometimes bewildering: national-minded conservatives have often turned out to be more protectionist and egalitarian than the former communists. Nor does Left/Right easily correspond with the labour/capital distinction. Jakub Zieliński (2002, 185) notes that conflict between labour and capital in new democracies is likely to emerge well after party system consolidation. His argument rests on the fact that the communist regimes put an end to private property and that, after communism, free elections were introduced before new social divisions were established. During communism, it was the workers who — nominally — owned all property and production. Compared with the party development in Western Europe, there is then an almost inverse relationship between party development and socio-economic divisions.

Table 2: Relevance of markets versus state intervention for distinguishing between the parties by income quartiles. Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Estonia</th>
<th>Latvia</th>
<th>Lithuania</th>
<th>CEE average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The exact sub-question reads: ‘Some parties want government to manage the economy, while others prefer the market’. See note under Table 1 for exact introductory question

Source: New Baltic Barometer/New Europe Barometer (2001)

Table 2 indicates that the conflict between state intervention and free market solution is deemed significantly more important among Lithuanians than among respondents of the other two countries. How can we explain this difference? After all, Latvia – Riga in particular –
appeared to have the most significant working class movement during the interwar era and Social Democracy was always stronger in Latvia than in her neighbouring countries. After Soviet occupation, however, former communists in Latvia and Estonia aligned themselves with different parties and groups, which ruled out a party system dominated by the pro- versus anti-communist division (Smith-Sivertsen, 2004; Lagerspetz and Vogt 2004). Additionally, the ethnic dimension seems to have overshadowed – and to some extent overlapped with – the socio-economic division in both countries. Parties that call themselves ‘left-wing’ have been associated with the Russian minorities and are even thought of as ‘unpatriotic’. Consequently, the Estonian and Latvian party systems have had very limited presence of explicit left-leaning parties, although it should not necessarily be seen as evidence of a generally right-wing oriented public. The situation was different in Lithuania from the very outset: always more national-oriented and native-dominated than its Estonian and Latvian counterparts during Soviet times, the Lithuanian Communist Party managed to translate its considerable organisational network and professionalised leadership into a credible political alternative (Duvold and Jurkynas 2004). Noteworthy, the fact that the party system in Lithuania does have a left/right dimension may also explain why more Lithuanians perceive market versus state intervention as important to distinguish between the parties. If so, party labels are indeed reflected on the attitudinal level.

Considering new and rapidly progressing inequalities that are currently in the making, there are good reasons to expect the socio-economic divisions to become increasingly powerful in the Baltic party systems – just as in many other former communist states. The last 10-15 years have entailed enormous societal changes, not least brought about by market reforms. Income differences have increased dramatically – to a level where the Baltic countries have higher income inequality levels than the EU average: quite a change for societies that had comparatively small income differences some 15 years ago. The rapid transition to market economy has certainly produced new ‘winners’ and ‘losers’. Failing industrial enterprises have created soaring unemployment, often concentrated in industrial ‘pockets’ once designed by Soviet planners. Many people are too old to readjust to this entirely reshaped labour market. Recent labour market surveys reveal that unemployment remains relatively high. At the same time, something reminiscent of a middle-class has emerged. Young, educated city-dwellers have accessed high-ranking positions in business and politics. Many of them are unlikely to have much affinity for the Soviet past, but also little understanding for the emotionally charged anti-Soviet claims made by the front-runners of the old popular fronts or members of the émigré communities.

Perhaps more intriguing, former members of the Soviet nomenklatura make up another ‘winning’ group. From the outset, they had social and political capital at their disposal, and were able to profit personally from many privatisation arrangements (Matonytė and Mink 2003, 52). ‘Nomenklatura privatisation’, prevalent in virtually every post-communist country, infuriated many anti-communists and produced a rather curious situation in which it was the old communists who went ahead with ambitious privatisation plans, whereas the anti-communists appeared to drag their feet because they opposed the way privatisation was handled. Notably, it shows that the regime divide played a significant role in shaping the socio-economic axis from the very beginning. As we have pointed out, the irony is that many old nomenklatura members turned out to be cunning capitalists and rather hard-nosed market-reformers.

It is important to keep in mind that privatisation has had significant repercussions on the general political climate of the three countries, in the sense that sell-offs of state properties have given birth to numerous political scandals, cronyism, alleged corruption affairs and, at the end of the day, vanishing trust in the political class. Another point is that it has helped sustain elements of the old regime dimension, where former nomenklatura appointees have
been accused of exploiting their channels, networks and influence for their own personal benefit. The issue has yet another side: fear of excessive Russian influence. Several political actors are alarmed by the prospect of making the small states vulnerable to Moscow by being dependent on Russian raw materials and Russian investments in the energy sector. The privatisation question has often been rather emotive and tangled up in a ‘West versus East’ discourse, despite an almost unanimous desire among the elites to loosen the ties with Russia and be anchored to the ‘West’.

Privatisation is surely a matter of contention on the attitudinal level as well. Winners of the new economic regime are likely to be in favour and losers against it. By way of illustration, NEB data from 2001 clearly show that attitudes towards the present economic system are contingent on income: those who are comparatively well off are evidently more in favour of market economy. Generation matters as well, but perhaps less than we would expect. Individuals in the lower age brackets are slightly more pro-market than are individuals who started their career within the Soviet system, but it could nevertheless be maintained that surprisingly many young people seem negative about market economy and positive about the Soviet economic system (New Europe Barometer 2001).

Table 3: Relevance of urban-rural issues for distinguishing between the parties by type of settlement. Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Estonia</th>
<th>Latvia</th>
<th>Lithuania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Villages and small towns</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large towns and cities</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* The exact sub-question reads: ‘Some parties represent big cities, while others defend rural and peripheral regions.’ See note under Table 1 for exact introductory question

*Source:* New Baltic Barometer/New Europe Barometer (2001)

The divisions between urban and rural areas are closely related to the new socio-economic lines of conflict. Most foreign investments go to the capitals or other major urban areas, whereas the countryside lags further and further behind. Currently, the primary sector accounts for the bulk of income for almost 20 per cent of Lithuania’s workforce and for somewhat less in the other two countries – but significantly above the average level in the European Union. On the other hand, the share of agricultural production of the GDP is rapidly decreasing. Significantly higher poverty and unemployment levels than urban areas also mark the Baltic countryside. Presumably, the urban-rural disparity is a source of salient political divisions in all three countries. The question is what kind of rural representation we find – and can expect to find in the future. In Estonia the People’s Union (*Rahvaliit*) – founded by Arnold Rüütel, former President of the Soviet Estonian Supreme Council and now President of Estonia, whose personal popularity undoubtedly became a major asset – has proved to be most successful. The party has campaigned for moderately protectionist policies, like state subsidies for agriculture and a more active regional agenda (Lagerspetz and Vogt 2004). In Latvia, the Farmers’ Union (*Latvijas Zemnieku Savienība*) has been the standard-bearer of rural protection, promoting state subsidies of agriculture products. However, the People’s Party – the brainchild of Andris Šķēle, a former prime minister, managed later to become a catch-all party with both rural and urban appeal. In Lithuania, the Peasants’ Party (*Lietuvos valstiečių partija*) has managed to build up a substantial body of electoral support, doing particularly well in certain rural districts, but – perhaps for entirely sentimental reasons – a majority of the party’s sympathisers voted for the former communists (the LSDP, previously the LDDP). Given the sheer scale of the urban-rural division, and the fact that many rural
voters give it weight (see Table 3), it is easy to explain the presence of at least one significant party for rural protection in each of the countries, but the electoral strength of specific agrarian parties has remained limited. They do not attract anything like a plurality of votes among farmers, and their organisational ties with other rural interest groups seem limited.

What kind of policies are rural dwellers and farmers likely to support? Most of the people in the primary sector were collective farmers during Soviet times and are likely to consider themselves as ‘workers’ even today. Many of them are negative towards market economy altogether. By way of illustration, according to the New Europe Barometer (2001), more rural dwellers than urban dwellers are positive towards the communist regime and socialist economy of the past. In a similar vein, considerably more rural dwellers admit that they would prefer to abolish parliament and install a strong leader instead – an issue we will return to below. The rural dimension is obviously not going to vanish, but it is difficult to make any predictions about the extent of rural representation in the future. As of early 2004, Lithuania’s troubled president, Rolandas Paksas, seems to spend much of his energy on crisscrossing the countryside in order to build up solid grass-root support. His victory over the incumbent president, Valdas Adamkus, in the second round of the 2002/2003 presidential elections also showed a conspicuous urban-rural division in terms of support: the latter managed to obtain a majority of the votes only in a handful of fairly urban, well-off constituencies, including the capital. We may be witnessing the emergence of a rural mobilisation and the rise of a particular brand of populism. How it might affect the overall political configuration is a moot question, but EU integration, commercialisation of land, and continuing depopulation of the countryside are factors that in all likelihood will have profound consequences for the issue – and for the countryside as a whole.

Table 4: Relevance of ethnicity for distinguishing between the parties by language groups. Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Estonia</th>
<th>Latvia</th>
<th>Lithuania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian-speakers</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The exact sub-question reads: ‘Some parties represent ethnic minorities, while others oppose special policies for minorities’ See note under Table 1 for exact introductory question

*The figures are calculated based on language of interview – indigenous and Russian, while Polish was not used in Lithuania. A closer scrutiny reveals that 21% of the Russian minorities and 15% of the Poles think ethnicity is an important marker between the parties. This is somewhat surprising, given the heavier concentration of Poles and the fact that they are more inclined to vote for specific regional/Polish parties

Source: New Baltic Barometer/New Europe Barometer (2001)

Geographical variations in the Baltic countries also have an ethnic component. Minorities tend to live in compact settlements, including the capitals, where they make up almost 50 per cent (Tallinn and Vilnius) or more (Riga). They are also heavily dominating in some eastern interface regions, notably Estonia’s Ida-Virumaa and Latvia’s Latgale regions. These regions are poorly integrated with the rest of the countries, are socially deprived and have soaring unemployment rates. These ethnic-regional imbalances may well create some turbulence in the future. As already noted, the Soviet Baltic republics did not control the in- and outflow of people on their territories. As a result, several million non-indigenous Soviet citizens, mainly Russians, moved in and out of the republics between 1944 and 1991. Latvia, where the prospect of Latvians becoming a minority became a distinct possibility, has ended up with a demos containing well over 40 per cent ‘non-Latvians’. Estonia is not far off, with more than 30 per cent ‘non-Estonians’, whereas Lithuania, with 8 per cent Russians and 7 per cent Poles, almost looks like a nation-state by comparison. Many of the Russians, who
suddenly found themselves detached from their homeland, were rather hostile towards the breakaway states. Likewise, many Baltic citizens felt uncertain about the loyalties of the Russian minorities, fearing that they could turn out to be some kind of ‘fifth column’ (Lieven 1994). Estonia and Latvia imposed severe restrictions on citizenship laws, stipulating that only pre-Soviet citizens and their descendants were eligible for citizenship. Others had to gain their citizenship by passing certain requirements, notably sufficient knowledge of the national language. Both countries received rather harsh criticism from international bodies, such as the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. But the most vocal objections came, unsurprisingly, from the Russian Federation. On the whole, the citizenship issue was not a matter of contention on the elite level in Estonia. Legislation was passed without significant upsets. Various governments all followed a determined, yet pragmatic course. Latvia, on the other hand, faced much greater internal strife over the citizenship question. Not only was the Russophone minority more sizeable in Latvia, enjoying a majority or plurality in most significant towns and cities. The Russophones were also more powerful politically and economically. Riga was for instance an important hub not only for the Latvian Soviet republic, but also for the Soviet Union at large. Furthermore, Latvian political elites have appeared more divided, and also considerably less pragmatic, than their Estonian counterparts. Partly as a result of this strife, much of the international spotlight has been on Latvia, rather than Estonia.

Nevertheless, both Latvia and Estonia seem to have escaped potentially very destructive ethnic divisions, which could have led to an increasing bifurcation of politics and society. Vocal opposition made by some pro-Soviet organisations in the early 1990s, including a non-recognised referendum on secession in the North-East of Estonia, has quietly disappeared. Several observers had predicted severe ethnic strife, but it failed to materialise. The underlying causes are complex. Some would point out that the Russophones simply are better off in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania than in the Russian Federation, Belarus and the Ukraine). Others might stress the lack of political mobilisation among the Russophones (Lieven 1994; Danjoux 2002). With the exception of recent arrival of the For Human Rights in Latvia, the absence of distinct non-indigenous leadership is remarkable. Lack of political organisation could perhaps be explained by the fact that many of the Russophones remain non-citizens and, thus, excluded from the political arena. But other factors matter too: messy bureaucracies, unclear legislation, lack of financial and human investment in teaching, and sheer separateness of minority communities (particularly north-east Estonia). Moreover, there is also a tendency among many Russophones, particularly in Latvia, to engage in economic activities and stay out of mainstream politics (Duvold and Berglund 2003, 258). Arguably, business has become an alternative, perhaps more attractive, ladder of opportunities for many non-citizens, possibly offering some temporary space for societal tranquillity. In any case, a growing number of non-indigenous residents will eventually become citizens over the coming years. To what extent they will form distinct Russophone political communities, stressing specific minority interests, or become increasingly inseparable from the Estonian and Latvian political communities at large is a question that will remain unanswered for yet a while. But in Latvia, at least, the last general election showed clear tendencies among the Russian voters to opt for Russian-oriented parties (For Human Rights in Latvia, in particular) and for ethnic Latvians to support right-wing parties with Latvian-oriented appeals. According to Table 4, Russian-speakers are indeed more likely to stress ethnicity as important to distinguish between the parties, but still only 19 per cent of Russian-speakers in Latvia deem the issue important. Perhaps they conclude that the issue indeed does not divide the mainstream parties?
The respondents in the New Europe and Baltic barometers were also asked about the role of personalities in distinguishing between the parties: do personalities matter most, or is politics essentially driven by ideological divisions? It is a somewhat moot question, since the role of personalities can be interpreted differently. When people are asked about market versus state intervention or urban versus rural issues, there is little doubt that they tend to interpret them according to what they think is politically important. Hence, rural dwellers are far more inclined to think that the urban-rural division is important than their fellow citizens in the capital. It is less clear when it comes to the role of personalities. There are those who might think that personalities are decisive after all – whether they endorse it or not. Others may think that the issue is important because they see the political configuration as a battle between ideas and charismatic politicians. A closer inspection reveals that those with the highest education, urban dwellers and high-income groups are most inclined to hold this view (see Table 5). We read this as an indication that the role of personalities is estimated to be of great importance, but that those who hold this view do not necessarily endorse it.

A quick look at party development in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania makes the issue of personalities in politics fairly comprehensible. With a directly elected president, the Lithuanian political system has perhaps the strongest incentives for strong personality-orientation. Although the Lithuanian presidency is largely ceremonial, it still represents the ultimate prize for many ambitious politicians (Duvold and Berglund 2003). Widespread popular support for the idea of giving the presidency more political clout makes it even more imperative for ambitious politicians to pursue their personal political agenda, rather than following partisan interests. However, Lithuania is hardly an exception in the region. The continuous rise of new political forces – ‘nobilities parties’ that essentially are vehicles for ambitious leaders – is fairly striking. Lithuania has had Artūras Paulauskas’ New Union, Rolandas Paksa’s Liberal Democratic Party and, most recently Viktoras Uspaskihiš’s Labour Party; Latvia has had Andris Šķēle’s People’s Party and Einar Repše’s New Era; and Estonia has had Siim Kallas’ Reform Party and Juhan Parts’ (and Rein Taagepera’s) Res Publica. Longer established parties like the Social Democrats and the Conservatives (both Lithuania); Latvia’s Way and For Fatherland and Freedom (both Latvia) and the Coalition Party, Pro Patria and the Centre Party (all three Estonia) have also relied heavily upon their political leaders. Volatility scores, tapping the electoral instability of the party system, confirms this trend – that the Baltic party systems to a large extent are driven by new political platforms that seemingly come from nowhere to become major forces, before they eventually fade. As we have already pointed out, it is also worth bearing in mind two other factors: a large number of party-splits and fractionalisation within the parliaments and rather low levels of party membership.
There are also some people who have no opinions of cleavages at all – possibly as a result of the above-mentioned personalities-driven politics. At any rate, lack of opinion on factors that divide the political parties is clearly contingent on issues like education, as Table 6 shows. However, it is trickier to explain why so many more Latvians are inclined to have no opinion on cleavages. It might well be taken as an indicator of lack of political alternatives. As noted above, Latvian politics seem to be somewhat paralysed by ethnic divisions. Nearly every ethnic Latvian voter opt for right-wing parties even if they have left-wing preferences (Auers, 2003). The left appears to be ‘tainted’ by the Russian vote (Smith-Sivertsen 2004). By contrast, the Lithuanian party system has, thus far, offered much clearer alternatives – at least if we judge the parties according to labels and self-placement along an ideological scale.

Cleavages are important, but the structure of cleavages is even more important. The three Baltic countries offer a complex array of cleavages or near cleavages – communists versus popular fronts, left versus right, rural versus urban, ethnic majority versus ethnic minority, national versus European identity – that structure votes as well as party strategies. Lithuanian voters primarily differentiate between parties in terms of two cleavages familiar from the contemporary Scandinavian setting, state interventionism and urban/rural. Estonian and Latvian voters emphasise the importance of cultural cleavages, ethnic representation or not and nation versus integration. The party systems have by no means ‘frozen’ yet, but some of the Baltic parties have been around for quite a while and seem to have carved out stable electoral niches for themselves. We would in fact argue that the Baltic party systems are much simpler and much more straightforward than generally assumed.

The sheer number of issue dimensions, near cleavages and cleavages is as such conducive to a high level of political fragmentation, as is the proportional method of representation adopted by all three Baltic countries after they had regained their independence from the Soviet Union. The political flux in the wake of the breakdown of the popular fronts has added fuel to the process of political fragmentation. But the party space is nevertheless constrained by a relatively simple structure of cleavages. Lithuanian politics may be defined in terms of left/right and urban/rural, but identity politics is not that far removed and the cultural cleavages tend to correlate with dominant left/right dimension of conflict. And in a similar vein, Estonia and Latvia may currently be a playground for identity politics, but the hard economic realities nevertheless loom large in the background (Lagerspetz and Vogt 2004; Smith-Sivertsen 2004).
All in all, the three Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – would seem to live up to the standards of normality offered by Western Europe. They have a complex pattern of crosscutting issue dimensions, near cleavages and cleavages, but a relatively simple cleavage structure. There is one major difference, though. East European party politics is strongly personality centred. In Latvia personality is the single most important factor differentiating between parties; in Estonia and Lithuania it ranks second (see Table 1). For now at least, this makes Baltic ideological space open-ended and Baltic party systems malleable, leaving fertile ground for all and sundry populist movements. It also serves as yet another reminder that it might be worthwhile to take a close look at the relationship between the voters and their representatives, as perceived by the voters.

**Alternatives to Democratic Rule**

The relationship between the rulers and the ruled – the elite-mass linkages – is crucial for the survival of any political regime, but more so for democracy than its alternatives. All political systems are based on at least a minimum of popular support or trust; and political leaders always have to display at least a minimum of responsiveness to the preferences of the people (Easton 1965; Norris 1999). In a democracy this is not enough, at least not in the long run. Democracies call for elites who see themselves as representatives rather than rulers and for citizens with an interest in holding their elected representatives accountable. Trust, responsiveness and accountability are thus more important in democracies than in other political regimes.

The new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe are recent arrivals to democracy. Many of their political leaders have a communist past, some of them in top-level positions; and the majority of the voters in the region got their civic education under communist rule. This is a problem and an asset all at once. It is a problem in the sense that leaders and citizens alike may operate under the sway of role models, less suitable in a consolidated democracy. The totalitarian past makes it possible for most East Europeans to test Winston Churchill’s hypothesis of democracy as the ‘lesser evil’ in a way not open to most citizens of Western Europe – a unique asset for comparative research. The New Europe and Baltic barometers were designed to take advantage of this unique opportunity (Rose et al 1999). The questionnaire thus counts a number of questions about support for alternatives to democratic rule, namely communist, military and ‘strong man’ rule. The questionnaire also includes a fourth alternative – a unity government of experts. This option may not necessarily be undemocratic, but nevertheless represents an alternative to representative democracy. We will discuss this at some length below.

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2 The difference between Eastern and Western Europe should not be exaggerated. The once ‘frozen’ party systems of Western Europe have been undergoing a process of gradual ‘unfreezing’ ever since the 1960s. Class, religion and other entrenched cleavages have given way to issue voting and highly personalised campaigns.

3 The citizens of Spain, Portugal and Greece found themselves in a similar position when democracy was re-introduced in the 1970s after a period of authoritarianism under various auspices.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Communist rule (N=10426)</th>
<th>Army rule (N=10541)</th>
<th>Strong-man rule (N=10304)</th>
<th>Elitist rule (N=9913)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estonians</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonian Russophones</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvians</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvian Russophones</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuanians</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuanian Russophones</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CEE average</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td><strong>54</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The exact question was: “Our present system of government is not the only one that this country had. Some people say that we would be better off if the country was governed differently. What do you think? For each point please say whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree. (We should return to Communist rule/The army should govern the country/Best to get rid of parliament and elections and have a strong leader who can quickly decide everything/A unity government with only the best people should replace government by elected people)” Only ‘agree’ (strongly and somewhat) answers are included in the table.

Source: New Baltic Barometer/New Europe Barometer (2001)

Table 7 shows that certain segments actually want to return to communism, although the number of people who give positive evaluation of the communist past is much higher. In other words, many people seem to be fond of several aspects of past communist regimes, but this does not necessarily equate a desire to return to communist rule (Linde and Ekman 2003). This trend is more noticeable in the Baltic countries than in other Central and East European countries. In the absence of realistic army alternatives, other non-democratic alternatives might be envisaged. A brief inspection of our data discloses a surprisingly high support for ‘strong man’ rule in several of the countries that are covered by the New Europe barometer. But nowhere is such support more visible than in the Baltic countries, where as many as 40 per cent of the respondents admit that they would prefer to abolish parliament and elections altogether, and install a powerful leader. These figures may indeed be worrisome to most advocates of democracy, but we might cautiously suggest that the notion of ‘strong-man rule’ can have other connotations than outright dictatorship. Arguably, only a small minority actually calls for a full-fledged dictator, but many – perhaps an absolute majority in certain countries – would in all likelihood prefer to see a Gaullist-style president: a strong, decisive leader with whom they can identify with. Perhaps even Vladimir Putin represents a ‘model president’ for many Baltic citizens – particularly those of Russian extraction (Duvold and Sedelius 2004).

Although we should be careful with our interpretations, certain thorny historical parallels linger. Like most of Southern, Central and Eastern Europe, the Baltic countries declined into authoritarianism in the 1920s. The authoritarian regimes in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were unitary governments, borne out of crises with parliamentary democracy. Compared with Nazi-Germany, they were fairly traditional and moderate, primarily concerned with keeping control over divided societies, weak institutions and poor economies (Hellén 1996, 74). During the subsequent Soviet occupation, the place of the rightwing dictatorships became buried under official rhetoric and facts were distorted. The collapse of interwar democracy re-surfaced in public only after independence. For half a century, society was deprived of any chance to conduct a public discourse about the past, or to re-interpret the role of authoritarianism. Consequently, it is hardly surprising that the interwar dictatorships are somewhat glorified among people who currently are disappointed with the economic performance, dismayed by greedy leaders, and disillusioned with the direction of democratic
rule (Duvold and Jurkynas 2004). In countries with weak institutions – and where only tiny minorities are members of any organisations, including political parties – conspicuously many citizens identify with specific political leaders, rather than vague parties or governments (Hadenius 2001, 97). Hence, it is small wonders that some people are looking for a ‘rescuer’ – someone who can solve problems quickly.

Table 8: Trust in Political Institutions, by ethnicity. Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>MPs</th>
<th>PM</th>
<th>President</th>
<th>Courts</th>
<th>Police</th>
<th>Army</th>
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<td>Estonians</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonian</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russophones</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvians</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvian</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russophones</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuanians</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuanian</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russophones</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CEE average: 12 14 34 48 25 29 42

Notes: The exact question was: “To what extent do you trust each of these political institutions to look after your interest? Please indicate on a scale with 1 for no trust and 7 for great trust.” Ratings from 1-3 have been coded as ‘distrust’, and ratings from 4-7 have been coded as ‘trust’. Percentages above represent ‘trust’.

Source: New Baltic Barometer/New Europe Barometer (2001)

Symptomatically, the New Baltic Barometer clearly shows that the levels of trust in parliamentarians and political parties are low. Conversely, trust in the president seems to be far more solid. The Baltic presidents have for a long time benefited from the image of being disassociated from a single party and, in the much-admired Gaullist manner, have projected themselves to be above party politics, being somewhat elevated from the usual political mud-slinging. So far, there have been relatively few presidents in the region after the break-up of communism and, thus, the institution represents greater continuity than parliamentary politics (Vogt 2003). Still though, the greater popularity of the presidents, as compared with prime ministers and parliamentarians, undoubtedly owes something to the very limits on their governmental powers: the presidents are not closely associated with unpopular economic decisions or with the day-to-day partisan squabbling in parliament (Sedelius, 2004). Some of them have, on the contrary, acted as mediators during potentially damaging conflicts. In fact, their positions often allow them to act as spokesmen for popular discontent (Baylis, 1996, 304).

This fairly bright picture of the Baltic presidents was somewhat shattered by the elevation of Rolandas Paksas as President of Lithuania in 2003, seeing off incumbent Valdas Adamkus – a well-respected émigré with a handsome record of foreign-policy achievements under his belt. Paksas fought a surprisingly aggressive campaign, stressing domestic issues like law and order. Despite a meagre turnout, the expensive Paksas-campaign managed to mobilise many rural voters, turning the election into a sort of ‘establishment versus anti-establishment’ or ‘urban versus rural’ conflict. A quick glance at the electoral map of the country after the second and decisive round testifies to a surprisingly clear-cut pattern: apart from the two largest cities and two comparatively affluent resort towns, Paksas swept the board. Financial aspects of the electoral campaign kept hanging over Paksas after the election, before the issue practically speaking exploded towards the end of the same year. We will not
dwell on the details of the scandal that led to the impeachment of the president in 2004, but it is imperative to point out that it may well have shaken up the widespread trust the presidency has enjoyed in Lithuania over a number of years.

Nevertheless, trust in MPs, prime ministers and presidents is inevitably rather volatile, contingent on the current performance of the legislature and executive as it is. A brief inspection of the huge variations in the evaluation of the prime ministers makes it clear that the respondents give their answer according to a particular person rather than the institution as such. Perhaps more curiously, the current President of Latvia, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, is endorsed by the vast majority of ethnic Latvians, but seems to be strangely unpopular among the Russian-speaking population.

Table 8 also reveals that the support for state institutions remains low, although the trends are not significantly different from the Central and Eastern European average. It is, at any rate, worrisome that more than three-quarters of the population do not trust the country’s courts. Within-country variations seem fairly negligible. Russian-speakers seem to trust – or distrust – core institutions, like courts and police, just like the rest of the populations. But in any case, specific regime support is, as pointed out, highly contextual and cannot be analysed further without extensive time-series data. Besides, specific regime support is in acute decline also in Western democracies (Klingemann 1999).

Table 9 provides mixed findings when it comes to regime performance. Again, the trends do not differ widely from the Central and East European average. Moreover, the minority populations do not appear to be more distrustful than the core populations. Overall, the majorities are not satisfied with the way democracy is performing. Only 50 per cent of the population hold the belief that human rights are respected in their country – perhaps a good measure for how well the rule of law is performing. Corruption and bribery remains a major issue throughout the region, but it seems particularly grave in Latvia and Lithuania. The general public has rarely voiced its opposition to these phenomena, but it has certainly built up disdain for politicians, public officials and business people. More than nine out of ten Latvians and Lithuanians believe public officials are generally corrupt. Witnessing the turmoil around Rolandas Paksas, there is little reason to assume that this issue can be washed away very quickly.
Table 9. Regime Performance, by ethnicity. Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Satisfaction with democratic performance</th>
<th>Confidence in public officials</th>
<th>Respect for human rights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estonians</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonian Russophones</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvians</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvian Russophones</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuanians</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuanian Russophones</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CEE average</strong></td>
<td><strong>38</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td><strong>52</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The exact questions were: 1) **Satisfaction with democracy**: “On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works (in our country)?” 2) **Perceived corruption**: “How widespread do you think bribe-taking and corruption are in this country? (Almost no public officials are engaged in it/A few public officials are engaged in it/Most public officials are engaged in it/Almost all public officials are engaged in it).” 3) **Perceived respect for human rights**: “How much respect is there for individual human rights nowadays in (your country)? Do you feel that there is a lot of respect for individual human rights, some respect, not much respect or no respect at all?” Only positive values are included in the table.

Source: New Baltic Barometer/New Europe Barometer (2001)

Low support for institutions and the performance of the regime may come as a result of disappointment and exaggerated expectations. But such a trend may not rock the support for democracy as an ideal form of government. If we follow Pippa Norris’ classification of political support, regime principles represent the core values of the political system (Norris, 1999, 16). In the case of democracy, this equates support for values like freedom, tolerance, participation, equality before the law, and the rule of law. Lack of support for regime performance – as we see in table 8 and 9 – does not necessarily turn people into non-democrats. Many people may simply be disappointed that democratic politics has not changed their lives for the better – or that it has even made things worse. That may well be a reason why the core populations appear to be as negative about corruption and human rights as the minorities. Particularly in the latter case, we might have expected non-citizens to be more inclined to complain about lack of human rights (just like officials in Moscow seem to do). As it stands, the differences are generally small. Perhaps core- and minority-populations simply have very different expectations about democracy in their country? All the same, we have also disclosed fairly low, albeit increasing, support for the current regime. As noted, the estimation of the previous communist system is considerably stronger. Moreover, we have also demonstrated that there is substantial support for an altogether different regime type – namely one that spells greater efficiency, possibly at the expense of democratic institutions.

It will be remembered from Table 7 that surprisingly many support at least one regime type other than democracy. Not many favour the idea of returning to communism, although positive evaluation of the communist regime of the past appears to be very widespread. However, what many people do seem to welcome is the idea of ‘strong-man rule’ and as many as three-quarters of the people in the Baltic countries appear to believe that a unity government of excellence should replace elected politicians. It is somewhat moot to interpret the meaning of ‘elitist rule’ – and respondents may indeed have interpreted it in different
ways. In one sense, a ‘unity government of excellence’ might not imply the abolishment of democracy as such. It could conceivably mean ‘rule by the best people’. If that is the case, the request for elitist rule is actually a plea for more competent elites. There are clear indications of widespread dissatisfaction with the political and economic performance of the post-communist regimes, and with the current political elites. Plausibly, therefore, many people believe that more capable people can improve the performance rate. According to such an interpretation, elitist preferences are not so much an indication of ideological position, as a pragmatic solution to a problem – namely poor regime performance (cf. Rose 2001).

But however we twist and turn the question, it can hardly be interpreted as a call for more democracy. Elitist rule is not the same as meritocracy, and it is explicitly non-representative in nature. A yearning for ‘elitist rule’ as a response to dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs would certainly sit oddly with many democrats. Presumably, lack of trust in political elites and negative evaluation of regime performance ought to be backed up by a call for more openness, accountability and – ultimately – democracy. In order to get a clearer picture of ‘elitist’ preferences, we must scrutinise the relationship between elitist preferences and regime satisfaction. A closer inspection may give us more clues about the level of support for the regime principles in the Baltic countries.

Elitist Preferences: Authoritarianism or a Call for Greater Competence?
What do they stand for – those who want more elitist rule? In Figure 1 we distinguish between ‘elitist’ and ‘non-elitist’ respondents. It is something of a methodological simplification to label those who happen to ‘strongly agree’ and ‘somewhat agree’ with the statement that ‘a unity government with only the best people should replace government by elected politicians’ – and, conversely, those who ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘somewhat disagree’ with the statement – as ‘elitists’ and ‘non-elitists’ respectively. Nonetheless, it may facilitate our task of identifying different reasons for pondering that a unity government of excellence should replace representative democracy.

Figure 1. Number of Positive Attitudes among 'Non-Elitists' and 'Elit

Figure 1 reveals systematic, albeit not staggering, differences in attitudes to regime. ‘Elitists’ are less supportive of the current political system and less satisfied with the way democracy is performing. But although people with ‘elitist’ preferences appear to be more
negative about the current state of things, this tells us little about the direction of their malcontent: do they want to improve democracy or would they prefer to diminish – even abolish – democracy in favour of greater efficiency? In other words, do ‘elitists’ convey alternative regime preferences, or do they merely call for better elites? 72 per cent of those who reject ‘elitist rule’ also reject the notion of ‘strong-man’ rule. By contrast, only 53 per cent of those who are in favour of ‘elitist rule’ reject ‘strong-man’ rule. These differences give us a clear indication that many ‘elitists’ happen to favour authoritarian rule.

How can we explain the prevalence of elitist attitudes among people who also tend to distrust the current political elite and its institutions? Dissatisfaction with government and lack of trust in institutions in Central and Eastern Europe is sometimes explained in terms of the communist – and even pre-communist – legacies (cf. Eckstein, Fleron, Hoffman, and Reisinger, 1998, DiFranceisco and Gitelman 1984), which presumes that authoritarianism people cynical about the ruling elite and its institutions. The ruling elite was not actually under popular scrutiny or responsibility, which alienated citizens further. Although barter economy and friendship communities to some extent compensated for the absence of alternative channels for delivery of goods and services, virtually every citizen was dependent on state institutions, thus turning them into clients rather than citizens. Yearning for some kind of expert rule or other alternative regime types may seem paradoxical, but could be interpreted as a legacy of one-party rule (Duvold 2004).

Moreover, the very notion of elite had a rather different connotation in the communist world: the nomenklatura assumed a highly patronising role vis-à-vis the population at large. Its role was to implement and safeguard the interests of the party-state, certainly not to compete for societal interests. Under communism most people grew accustomed to the idea of a monopolising and secretive ruling class, rather than a pluralistic elite that is supposed to serve an array of societal interests on a conditional and provisional basis (Matonytė and Mink 2003, Kryshantanovskaya and White 1996). It does not seem far-fetched to assume that this notion of elites has lingered on after the fall of the nomenklatura system. In short, we may expect citizens of former communist regimes to be more than average equivocal – or outright hostile – about democratic elites even after more than a decade of competitive politics. They may, one the one hand, carry a deep suspicion towards any ruling clique, whom they believe is primarily serving its own interests rather the general population. At the same time, they may well expect the very same leaders to take decisions for them. Somewhat paradoxically, despite a clear lack of trust between elites and citizens, many respond to the problem of trust and responsiveness by demanding more competent elites, not by demanding more accountable and open elites. As we have argued, this phenomenon might be explained in terms of ‘communist legacy’: many people who grew up under an authoritarian regime are likely to be affected by the values they were taught from early childhood (Almond and Verba 1963, Eckstein 1988). Even if they do not consider themselves as communists today, they lack experience with democratic governance and might be unaccustomed to the notion of ‘accountability’ and ‘responsiveness’.

However, the legacy of communism cannot alone account for high distrust in public institutions. The ‘revolutions’ of 1989-91 created enormous popular expectations, shattered by poor economic performance, alleged corruption scandals and a generally heated political climate, disappointed many citizens who, eventually, developed a rather cynical approach to their political leaders. Institutional perspectives reject the notion that political trust is a deep-seated cultural phenomenon. On the contrary, institutionalists emphasise performance as the decisive factor (cf. Rose 2001, Miller, Hessli and Reisinger 1994). Some have also argued that the quality of institutions and choice of institutional design have profound consequences for performance and, ultimately, public trust (Lijphart and Waisman 1996, Stark 1995, Evans and Whitefield 1995). If this is the case, the future might not be so bleak: continuous
improvements of living standards will in all likelihood enhance the relationship between the governed and the ruling class. If so, it would be a matter of years, but not necessarily of complete generational changes.

Then again, even if we accept the institutionalist argument, namely that improved performance will produce higher levels of trust, it remains a mammoth task to forge satisfactory links between citizens and elites in the Baltic countries. The links between political parties and citizens are evidently in a poor state. If there are no efficient mechanisms to channel preferences and interests, the prospect that frustrated citizens will become dissatisfied with the political regime and its principles, not just its performance becomes quite alarming (cf. Fuchs and Klingemann 1994, 3; see also Norris, ed. 1999). We have indeed disclosed that elitist preferences are more prevalent among those who are unsatisfied with the performance of the regime. And although this may be a call for better, more decisive leaders, not the abolishment of democracy as such, we have also seen that elitist preferences correlate well with other authoritarian preferences, ‘strong man’ rule in particular. This trend is even more pronounced in the Baltic countries than in most of Central and Eastern Europe. If there is a genuinely authoritarian streak among large shares of the populations, it may well take more than a few years to improve regime satisfaction – and the citizens-elite linkage.

It is also well worth keeping in mind that the ideological space in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania is rather open-ended – which makes for rather malleable party systems. President Paksas’ expeditions to the Lithuanian countryside after the impeachment process took off in late 2003 testify to the fluidity of Lithuanian party politics. The aim is clearly to mount support among the many dissatisfied and disaffected citizens (Donskis 2003). The brand of populism that Paksas and other, new political entrepreneurs in these countries represent, runs counter to the notion of ‘cleavage-based politics’, well beyond the confines of left and right (Markowski 1997; 227). The type of social alienation we find in post-communist Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania may thus serve to weaken the mass-elite linkages further.
Conclusions
Only a little more than a decade after the triple transition of the early 1990s – from Soviet republics to independent states, from plan to market and from dictatorship to democracy – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have repositioned themselves squarely within the (West) European community of states. They clearly qualify as consolidated democracies and are likely to remain consolidated democracies in the foreseeable future.

But consolidated democracies are not interchangeable. The problems they face may be of the same nature, even of the same magnitude, but the democratic framework allows for a wide range of practical solutions. We focus on a small set of countries on the rim of the Baltic Seaboard, united by geography and history, yet in many ways different from one another, at a critical juncture in history. On an abstract level, the overall objective of this essay is to determine whether there is a distinct Baltic model of democracy that somehow sets the three countries apart from the (West) European mainstream. More specifically, the investigation revolves around the two most crucial dimensions of representative democracy – cleavage crystallisation and elite-mass linkages. The emphasis of this short section will be on the possible Baltic model of democracy, but first a few words about our major findings.

The Baltic countries offer a treasure chest of issue dimensions, near cleavages and even cleavages. The latter – the full cleavages – are manifest not only on the social level but also in the political arena, where they structure voting behaviour and party strategies. Cleavage crystallisation is thus well underway. And, though the sheer number of cleavages may seem bewildering, the structure of cleavages is in fact rather simple and straightforward. In Lithuania, the socio-economic cleavages are dominant, and in Estonia and Latvia the cultural cleavages. Other cleavages do matter, but they are intertwined with the respective dominant cleavage to the extent that they are of limited significance. This ties in neatly with the pattern prevailing in Western Europe, but the Baltic countries stand out as deviant on at least one count. Political life revolves around personalities to a degree in all likelihood unparalleled in the West. A closer inspection of the relationship between the Baltic voters and their representatives, as perceived by the voters, provides corroborating evidence of this phenomenon and draws our attention to what may indeed be a paradox of Baltic politics today. Baltic citizens are, on the whole, rather dissatisfied with their leaders and political institutions, and nevertheless call for more elitist rule.

There is thus a case to be made for a specific Baltic model of democracy with the emphasis on elitism, somehow reminiscent of ancient elective kingdoms. There are strong preferences for strong leaders, chosen by the people to serve for as long as they enjoy popular support. But the differences between the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe and the established democracies of Western Europe should not be exaggerated. The latter are by no means static and have in fact gradually moved in the direction suggested by the current state of affairs in the Baltic countries. The ‘frozen’ party systems of Western Europe as of the 1950s and 1960s have been replaced by party systems with a much more open-ended ideological space and a greater degree of freedom for political entrepreneurs.
References


