ARTICLES AND ESSAYS

FROM PERSONALITY TO ANTI-COALITION.
EXCLUSION AS PRINCIPLE OF COALITION MAKING: THE BALTIC CASE
Part II
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Political Culture Approach

The only way out of this situation is to focus on single issues, why concrete decisions were made like it happened. Before it was always easy to find a coalition partner as far as everybody wanted to be in power. In Latvia the leader of the Democratic Party *Saimnnieks*, Ziedonis Čevers, was in 1995 ready to work together with everybody for this purpose. In spite of the pro Eastern (Russian) attitude he cooperated even with Joachim Siegerist's populist right wingers, who's program was to get all old cadres out of politics. And Čevers was the former leader of Komsomol.[1] Often also minority governments were formed because there was no such big difficulty to rule with changing majorities. The faction discipline is still comparably low. So in Latvia Valdis Birkavs and Māris Gailis ruled that way during the whole first legislation period after independence. In Estonia the ruling Alliance Party had no problems to replace the Centre Party of Edgar Savisaar after he resigned for his recording scandal with the Reform Party and later to continue as minority government even after the change of prime minister from Tiit Vähi to Mart Siimann.[2]

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[1] Matthes, Claudia-Yvette: Politisches und Rechtssystem Lettlands; in: Graf, Heike / Kerner, Manfred (Hrsg.): Handbuch Baltikum heute, Berlin 1998, S.77 and Kerner, Manfred / Gobiņš, Mārcis: Politische Parteien in Lettland. Persönlichkeiten, Programme, Perspektiven; in: Osteuropa 47 1997, S.147

[2] For details about this governments: Reetz, Axel: Wahlen im Baltikum seit 1990. Parlamente in den Paradoxien der Selbstbestimmung; in: Sonderband der

The present parliament in Estonia is dominated by an Anti-Savisaar coalition when at the same time the lives of Latvian governments continue to be short. Governments are thrown over not by the opposition but by the coalition partner For Fatherland And Freedom / National Conservatives, the nationalist party, for the reason of dissatisfaction with the prime minister or in order to keep a certain party away from power. The Lithuanian case is not comparable because during two legislation periods the parliament faced bigger leading factions and therefore simple majority governments or a relatively stable two party government with an informal third partner for certain political questions. Only in 2000 a government without the winner of the elections, the Social Democrats, was formed. But in Lithuania the president influenced by the nomination of the prime minister candidate this decision. Another reason may have been the higher weight of Socialliberals in the coalition with the Liberals in comparison with the Social Democrats. But after less then one year the coalition of Rolandas Paksas' Liberals with Artūras Paulauskas' Socialliberals failed and the latter changed to the Social Democrats electing former president Algirdas Brazauskas as prime minister.

So when after independence in 1991 the political game was dominated by finding partners and changing them, the situation changed to the goal of exclusion of certain persons and parties. Of cause, to avoid the Centre Party in Estonia or the Peoples Party in Latvia means generally no to work together with these parties' leaders Edgar Savisaar and Andris Šķēle. Laar told this even officially that the Centre Party is no partner because the leader is Savisaar.[3] And this principle spreads out. The Baltic republics are too small for more than elected councils on the local level. There aren't any provinces or other legislative bodies. But the existing

Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen 1995, S.300-324 and Reetz, Axel: Demokratische Transformation im Baltikum, Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen 4/1999, S.924-955
[3] Paet, Urmas: Mart Laar õpib eelmise valitsuse ajal tehtud vigadesti, Postimees 5. März 1999

councils already were politicised before. Now it is very important in Estonia, who is in power in the capital Tallinn and the second largest university town Tartu as well as in the Latvian capital Riga. In Lithuania the capital's Vilnius' council is important as well. A crisis of coalition here may also influence the political game in the national parliament.

In Estonia the partners share usually the mayor and the council's speaker position. After the national-conservative parties lost the general elections in 1995 the so called "leftist" came into power, more or less liberal parties basically run by former reform communists. The following local elections brought a difficult situation, where the conservative wing of party system managed to get in power in the city of Tallinn. Former prime minister Mart Laar became the speaker of the council. But just within two weeks the opposition was able to crack the coalition and to overthrow him because they manage to convince the Alliance Party to stop cooperating with the opposition of the national level.

After winning in general election in spring 1999 the ruling Fatherland's Union of prime minister Mart Laar managed to form a coalition in Tartu only with the Reform Party, which was here more successful and so far a representative of this party is mayor. In Tallinn the so called "Triple coalition" of Fatherland's Union, Reform Party and Moderates has no majority. The Centre Party is the biggest faction in the city's council as in the national parliament. The ruling coalition managed to maintain power since local election in autumn 1999 thanks to the two represented Russian factions. But already once the partner was changed, when it really was not clear, whether mayor Jüri Mõis from Fatherland's Union would win the vote of non-confidence.[4]

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[4] For details: Reetz, Axel: Faktoren der Entwicklung der baltischen Parteiensysteme; in: Neuss, Beate / Jurczek, Peter / Hilz, Wolfram (Hrsg.): Entwicklungsstrategien in Nordosteuropa – Baltikum und Finnland, Tübingen 2000, S.15-41

After the local elections in spring 2001 the situation in the Latvian capital became very difficult. The so called "left" won as Social Democrats and pro Russian For Human Rights In A United Latvia leaving the nationalist party in the third place. The problem to form a ruling coalition resulted from the willingness of the Nationalists not to leave the coalition partners of the national government in opposition. Only the cooperation of Social Democrats with the pro Russian party made some deputies of the nationalist faction to change their mind and start negotiations. The surprising reason is that Social Democrats in Latvia are actually quite nationalistic too concerning questions of citizenship and language laws. A certain power within the nationalist party couldn't allow the pro Russian party to stay in power after a representative of them was already elected vice mayor. So now Social Democrats form finally a coalition with the For Fatherland And Freedom / The Conservatives and several other smaller parties. A politician of the nationalists is the second vice mayor, while the first one from the Russian party is still in power as well keeping a cooperation agreement between this faction and the Social Democrats. The difference between coalition and cooperation is not yet explained by mayor Gundars Bojārs.

This sand box games in councils with less important competencies and finally less responsibility may seem as the same less important. But more serious seems the problem on the national level. While the parliament of 1993 was characterised by a relative large majority of the Latvian Way with 36 seats the next parliament was so fragmented that there was no other way then to form a coalition of national unity. But after 1998 election the situation became more complicated and favourable for political games. At first it seemed to be clear that the winner, the new Peoples Party of former prime minister Andris Šķēle, would lead the government. But obviously to many politicians remembered his "authoritarian" style as the head of two rainbow-coalitions between 1995 and 1997 and were in fear of his leading ambitions. Maybe politicians were embarrassed because parties were unable

in 1995 to agree about a representative of one party and invited Šķēle as a business man from beside. The Latvian Way and the nationalists formed again a minority government with The New Party. But the cabinet of Vilis Krištopans from the Latvian Way was overthrown even before the partners could agree with the Social Democrats on joining the coalition. The initial happening was the election of a new president in 1999.[5] While suddenly a prime minister Šķēle for the nationalists was more acceptable than the existing coalition they once more changed their mind within less than one year. The prime minister resigned before any faction could initiate a vote of non-confidence and the mayor of Riga, Andris Bērziņš, was invited to form a new cabinet with the same partners. Now the Peoples Party was ready to support a government without their leader as the head. Bērziņš represents also the Latvian Way.

Personality can be seen as main impulse for the formation of a party system in the Baltics and must be certainly taking into account as an inside and outside factor at the same time. It is the main reason for voters volatility as well as one of the main motives for coalition making.[6]

Therefore it is not sufficient to know what the parties claim to stay for. The comparison of regions less divided only by geography than by similar cultures and within them unwritten rules the political behaviour seems to be more helpful, if distinguishing different historical roots of certain phenomena.

For the understanding of the political understanding of local people it is very interesting to check the explanations of political scientist from inside of the societies in which party systems emerge. It's very wide spread to accuse politicians for

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[5] For details of the presidential election: Reetz, Axel: Faktoren der Entwicklung der baltischen Parteiensysteme; in: Neuss, Beate / Jurczek, Peter / Hilz, Wolfram (Hrsg.): Entwicklungsstrategien in Nordosteuropa – Baltikum und Finnland, Tübingen 2000, S.15-41

[6] A similar idea of "open and available" as characterization of the electorate and the elite can be find in: Mair, Peter: Party system change. Approaches and interpretations, Oxford 1996, S.187, 189

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representing concrete economic interest as Laķis does.[7] Other authors formulate the same a bit more friendly as financial dependence, which degrades parties to "peculiar latent lobbyism institutions".[8] While surely in transformation countries the possibilities given by holes in the legislation leaving elsewhere illegal action without sanctions are much bigger than in the West Laķis even calls the connection between the political and economical elite unofficial and partly illegal. But he tattles his misunderstanding of lobbyism by defaming it as a general problem of modern industrial societies difficult to fight against. As a representative of this ideology in Latvia he sees the „Klub 21", which was the organisation the party Latvian Way was growing out from.[9] Always open to all sides the old cadre political scientist Ašmanis explains that politicians have not to represent their own political interest but the interest of a certain class or even the whole society.[10] Only Nissinen from the west follows these ideas, but she judges quite carefully: "it is difficult to make a distinction between bribery and normal lobbying in Latvia."[11]

Ostrovska argues as well that political parties don't orient themselves by ideologies but they represent the interest of very concrete enterprises. She even figures a congruence between an economic east orientation to qualify the Party of Peoples Harmony as "left wing". Ostrovska sees this fact on the opposite of ideological orientation among the electorate, which alienates the

[7] Laķis, Pēteris: Vara un sabiedrība. Varas maiņa Latvijā astoņdesmito un deviņdesmito gadu mijā, Riga 1997, S.123ff.

[8] Broks, Jānis / Ozoliņš, Uldis / Ozolzīle, Gunārs / Tabuns, Aivars / Tisenkopfs, Tālis: Demokrātijas stabilitāte Latvijā: priekšnoteikumi un izredzes; in: Aivars Tabuns (Hrsg.): Sabiedrības parmaiņas Latvijā, Riga 1998, S.168; („savdabīgu, latentu lobisma institūciju").

[9] Laķis, Pēteris: Politiskās elites veidošanās mehanismsi postkomunistiskajā sabiedrībā; in: Aivars Tabuns (Hrsg.): Sabiedrības parmaiņas Latvijā, Riga 1998, S.194f.

[10] Ašmanis, Miķelis: Personība Politikā, Riga 1991, S.11

[11] Nissinen, Marja: Latvia's transition to a market economy. Political determinants of economic reform policy, London 1999, S.202ff.

people from the political scene. The analysis is not very helpful for it's poor results to call the spheres of interest risk zones without any further explanation or definition. For the level of the voter Ostrovska doesn't offer more than the truism that everybody had his own reason for the own voting decision[12] but expresses the indifference quite clearly: "If the price for sovereignty (understood as a nation state), is democracy – let it be democracy."[13]

In spite of this quite "Eastern" approach she accepts the necessity of broad support from the masses for a liberal democracy and sees this ideal on the contrary of manipulation by any certain economical or political grouping. But anyway she fails to give a definition of this unclear term and doesn't distinguish it clearly from normal lobbyism.[14] At the same time Ostrovska explains the difficulties with such an organisation of interest with the experience from socialist time, when as a result of the marxist-leninist politics an alienation of individual and group interest took place. As a result of nationalisation developed a type of mass always in fear of the state's power expecting at the same time supply in all spheres of live. This is the basis for political passiveness and alienation from any political power. For Ostrovska this is not a result of collective propaganda.[15]

A bit more sophisticated than just accusation is the attempt of identification of oligarchies, which wasn't yet done on a scientific neither on a journalistic level. Peniķis correctly says that only precise information about the happenings in politics and economy help to understand. Otherwise there will be conspiracy theories, cynicism and political apathy. Therefore political

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[12]Ostrovska, Ilze: 6. Saeimas vēlēšanās: izvēle un rezultāti; in: Socioloģijas un politoloģijas žurnāls Nr. 7, Mai 1996, S.46f.; („ass no centra pa kreisi").
[13]Ostrovska, Ilze: Nationalism and democracy: The choice without choice; in: Latvijas Universitātes Filozofijas un Socioloģijas institūts, Riga 2000, S.156
[14]Ostrovksa, Ilze: Politiskā vara, Riga 1991, S.16,18
[15]Ostrovska, Ilze: Politiskā vara, Riga 1991, S.26, 28

scientist are the „explainer" of democracy and the most important defence of the state.[16]

But as for a too normative understanding of democracy representing interest, groupings, unions and even just "earning money" is not accepted as normal within post-communist society. So it is as right as wrong, when Šteins writes that politics means that each citizen takes part in solving problems.[17] The very idea is democratic, but it is understood too normative that really each single person participates e.g. realises her own interests. This approach is a result of the time of national awaking from 1988 till 1991 when the interest of independence united people.

Ten years after independence the problem of inability to define own interests is less virulent than their acceptance. As the fragmentation in the parliaments shows the search for a strong hand has no success just because of the fact that differing interests don't allow to find a compromise. So democracy is left as „the only game in town" nearly against peoples will. Here proves as Mair says the tendency of the elite towards confrontation instead of compromise.[18] The best example is the quarrel between Aivars Lembergs and Andris Šķēle in Latvia.

The hope that "everything will be all right when freedom comes" was childish and gives evidence that "many people in society have a paternalistic perception of democracy, believing that ‚if the right people are in power', the situation will improve". The result is a deep disappointment of politics because no East European state has enough resources to fund support for broad parts of society. Therefore "most residents perceive such policies as an unwillingness of the elite to understand the ‚ordinary

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[16]Peniķis, Jānis: Pētījums Baltijas politikā: Baltijas neatkarības atjaunošana un Rietumu teorētiskās metodes; in: Baltijas valstis likteņgriežos, Riga 1998, S.597
[17]Šteins, Valdis: Partiju spektrs Latvijā, diena 19. März 1992
[18]Mair, Peter: Party system change. Approaches and interpretations, Oxford 1996, S.193

people'".[19] And this is by no way only a phenomena of ordinary people. Also scientist draw the same result: "Structuring the political landscape, developing a clear cut right-left political spectrum now remained much less important than retaining the power in the hands of those who had once grasped it".[20] Such an approach doesn't take into account that politicians are democratically elected neither that each government in the Baltics was yet overthrown at least by the next elections and so far left without chances to maintain power.

Merkel is right that poor results of politics may disturb the growing of confidence into democratic institutions or even prevent them. This is the basis for alienation from the political elite and so far "favourable conditions for legal and moral nihilism".[21] Ostrovska says also: "there has been a process of social disintegration, accompanied by gradual loss of legitimacy for the parliamentary democracy, and this, quite possible, may provoke authoritarianism."[22]

But in this misunderstanding of democracy lies the biggest danger for the system, if people don't participate at all.[23] Shortly accentuated: normativism may cause authoritarianism. People don't stop to search for new leaders, who will coincide with their

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[19]Tabuns, Aivars / Tabuna, Ausma: Estraged europeans - socilogical investigation of Latvian society; in: Humanities and Social Sciences 1(22)/99, S.26ff.
[20]Aarelaid-Tart, Aili: Political generations in Estonia: A hostorical background to the formation of the contemporary political scene; in Frentzel-Zagórska, Janina / Wasilewski, Jacek: The second generation of democratic elites in Central and Eastern Eruope, Warschau 2000, S.117
[21]Tabuns, Aivars / Tabuna, Ausma: Estranged Europeans - sociological investigation of Latvian society; in: Humanities and Social Sciences 1(22)/99, S.26ff. Tabuns asks the right question: „And how can we achieve a situation in which members of the public not only feel full responsible for their social environment, but are also able to influence it?" S.33
[22]Ostrovska, Ilze: The State and it's civil society: Priorities in a period of transition; in: Humanities and Social Sciences 4(13)/96 1(14)/97, S.78
[23]Segert, Dieter / Machos, Csilla (Hrsg.): Parteien in Osteuropa. Kontext und Akteure, Opladen 1995, S.303
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ideal more. And if the hopes are not fulfilled they will maintain a negative attitude towards the political power.[24] This is the paradox of not believing in politics and politicians being ready to solve that problem by giving the whole power in one hand. And that may be the second paradox that there just isn't that person to believe in.[25] Participation is fading and as well Nørgaard thinks that the support for democracy is more the result of a lack of alternatives than of being convinced.[26] Aarelaid-Tart describes the problem as follows: "Now we live in conditions of free market economy and democracy, but people cannot yet cope with this change very well, and therefore the elite has to push in around and act within the limits of a restricted democracy."[27]

There is a too normative understanding of democracy as a result of socialist experience and this background is the reason of constant volatility. The people are mentally still in the time of umbrella-movement politics. This means much more than Merkel's difficulties to abstract from the normative idea of democratic theory defining especially Latvia a defect democracy for a comparable high amount of migrants left for uncertain reasons as non citizens without participation possibilities. He forgets the certainty of who has why to apply for citizenship and the functioning of the institutions is not influenced by a high number of people not participating especially if the situation doesn't touch the common sense and participation isn't popular anyway.

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[24]Birkavs, Valdis: Vara un sabiedrība, Riga 1993, S.12

[25]Juchler, Jakob: Global Processes, the transformation in Eastern Europe and the European Unification, Manuscript 2000, S.20

[26]Nørgaard, Ole (Hrsg.): The Baltic States after Independence, Brookfield US 1996, S.106, S.117

[27]Aarelaid-Tart, Aili: Political generations in Estonia: A hostorical background to the formation of the contemporary political scene; in: Frentzel-Zagórska, Janina / Wasilewski, Jacek: The second generation of democratic elites in Central and Eastern Eruope, Warschau 2000, S.118

For the political culture it means basically that there isn't any beside sitting in front of the TV accusing the government for all personal problems. For the political landscape it means that there is a system of permanent changes, let us call it the stable instability. For the reason that the political elite in a small country is small as well there is even no sense in founding again and again new parties. Their leaders will always be the same well known faces. But the impact of this fact are certain problems for coalition making because all formation possibilities were already realised following some strange kind of trial and error method mostly reported and understood as "the political game". So it's "Game Over" for the coalition poker because there is no alternative than to continue working. While Aarelaid-Tart thinks "the political landscape is more then ever in order and the main power contours are becoming clear",[28] I don't really see that. It will be interesting to see, how this dead end will influence again the decision of the electorate.

The model of Lipset and Rokkan explained party systems in societies which democratised and formed a party system during that period. As the structures became consolidated the party system was frozen. Following this idea I wonder, whether the three step model of democratisation, transformation and consolidation is still valid because East European societies as still deeply undemocratic.

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[28] Aarelaid-Tart, Aili: Political generations in Estonia: A hostorical background to the formation of the contemporary political scene; in Frentzel-Zagórska, Janina / Wasilewski, Jacek: The second generation of democratic elites in Central and Eastern Eruope, Warschau 2000, S.120

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