



EVOLUTION OF PARLIAMENTARY INSTITUTIONS IN THE BALTIC STATES EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF PARLIAMENTS IN ESTONIA, LATVIA AND LITHUANIA

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Abstract

This article is a work of comparative parliamentary study which focuses on legislatures of the Baltic States. It looks at parliamentary institutions of Estonia, *Riigikogu*; Latvia, *Saeima* and Lithuania, *Seimas* using historical approach of analysis and comparative method. The paper analyses historical evolution and development of parliaments of Baltic nations dividing it to two parts. The first part of this paper considers the period from 1917 to 1940 and gives precise information about emergence and activities of *Riigikogu*, *Saeima* and *Seimas*. The last part of the paper will look at the parliamentary experience of respective countries after 1990. In addition to comparative analysis of parliaments and parliamentary experience in the Baltic States, the paper gives an analysis of historical processes and political developments of these countries. This paper is an original comparative case study and it aims to expose workings of legislative and parliamentary mechanisms in the Baltic States. Other aim of this paper is to show regional cooperation and collaboration through parliamentary institutions.

Keywords: Baltic States, Parliament, *Riigikogu*, *Saeima*, *Seimas*

Introduction

The Baltic States are a group of countries on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea, in Northern Europe. It consists of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which have become independent republics with the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. The Baltic States which have a common past in many respects but differ in ethnic and linguistic origins were under the rule of the Russian Empire until the end of the First World War. The short period of independence between the First and the Second World War interrupted by invasion of the Soviet troops, was an invaluable experience of sovereignty for the Baltic States. Despite the mutual defence agreement signed between Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in 1934 and referred to as the Baltic Anthem, they were unable to maintain their independence and the three countries were annexed by the USSR during 1940-1944 (AnaBritannica, III / 1987: 273-275).

After the First World War, the Baltic nations faced various problems such as the change of the structure of the semi-feudal society, the adjustment of both economy policies and constitutional regulations to new political and economic circumstances. Constitutional

regulations were made toward precise institutionalization of the parliamentary regime in all the Baltic States. The legislative was undisputedly made superior to the executive function of the power. Pluralism or participation of various parties to the elections has become natural. However, with the Soviet-German pact signed in August 1939, the Baltic States found themselves under the Soviet influence area and Stalin demanded the establishment of pro-Soviet regimes on the territory of the Baltic States, shortly after the German armies occupied Paris in June 1940. After July 1940's elections, where only the candidates supported by the USSR were able to participate, newly established parliaments announced an inclusion to the Soviet Union (AnaBritannica, III / 1987: 277).

Along with the Awakening movement in the Soviet Union, the wind of national sovereignty became blow stronger which brought requests for independence to its peak in the end of 1980's and in the beginning of 1990's in almost all united Soviet republics. A number of political projects started to be implemented and there was no way to back since mechanisms of dissolution of giant "decaying state" have already started. After the Congress of Independent Baltic Movement held in Tallinn in May 1989, a peaceful political demonstration known as the Baltic Way or Freedom Chain, was launched by the Baltic Council on 23rd of August and supported by Estonian *Rahvarinne*, Latvia's *Tautas*, Lithuania's *Sajūdis* pro-sovereignty movements (Dreifelds, 1996: 34–35).¹ Nearly 2 millions of Baltic peoples have created one of the longest human chains in history that linked the cities of Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius. Peoples of the Baltic republics of the USSR, namely peoples of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania held hands together to form a human chain of 675.5 kilometers in length. By this peaceful protest action, the Baltic peoples exposed to the Soviet government that they initiated an irreversible national liberation movement which has no way back to the SU for the Baltic nations (Wolchik, Curry, 2007:238). At the same time, the protest was de-facto an announcement of independence and indeed in the months following the action Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania became sovereign republics.

Following the days after the coup in Moscow, sovereignty of the Baltic nations recognized widely in the world. In the Estonian capital city of Tallinn, the Baltic Assembly established on November 8, 1991 inspired by the regional experiences of the Nordic and Benelux countries in an attempt to develop the model of Baltic cooperation. The Baltic States through regain of the

¹ The Council of the Baltic Sea States is an overall political forum for regional inter-governmental cooperation. The Members of the Council are the eleven states of the Baltic Sea Region as well as the European Commission. The states are Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia, Sweden and a representative from the European Union. The Council consists of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs from each Member State and a member of the European Commission. The Presidency of the Council rotates among the Member States on an annual basis. www.cbss.org, retrieved 30.11.2016

independence started parliamentary workings, which was interrupted by the annexation of their countries by the USSR. After all necessary constitutional arrangements, the national parliament of Estonia Riigikogu, the national parliament of Lithuania Seimas and the national parliament of Latvia Saeima, began to work after a break of fifty years. A co-operation agreement was signed on 13th of June 1994 amongst the parliaments and governments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania on the basis of a regional cooperation project developed by the national parliaments of the Baltic States². Thus, the Baltic nations established a close cooperation in both governmental and parliamentary dimensions, enabled them to treat these countries as a single geographical and political community.

I. Parliamentary Experience of the Baltic States until the Soviet Occupation and Annexation

A) Estonian Parliamentary Experience (1917-1940)

The first parliamentary experience of Estonia started with Maapaev or in other name the Provisional Assembly of Estonia. It was the first parliamentary representative body in the Estonian Province of the Russian Empire and operated from 14 July 1917 until 23 April 1919. Maapaev proclaimed the sovereignty of Estonia and made a number of important decisions³. One of them is a declaration of Maapaev on 28 November 1918, as a supreme power of the Governorate of Estonia until the convocation of a Constituent Assembly. This decision was an essential and vital step towards sovereignty. However after the decision made, the Bolsheviks disbanded Maapaev. Nevertheless, the Provisional Assembly continued its activities underground. At the same time the Committee of Elders of the Land Council also continued its activities secretly and declared the independence of Estonia using the situation in Russia in 1918. Following the declaration, the Salvation Committee formed on 19 February 1919 and all the executive power in Estonia was given to it. The Salvation Committee composed a Manifesto of Independence which was read aloud in Parnu and Tallinn. Estonia was called an independent democratic republic for the first time in the manifesto. The Provisional Assembly or Maapaev handed over its mandate to the Constituent Assembly⁴ on 24 April 1919.⁵

² “Estonian Provisional Land Council or Maapaev”, <http://www.riigikogu.ee/en>, 24 November 2016.

³ The Constituent Assembly was the national representative body and the legislative power of Estonia from 23 April 1919 until 20 December 1920. It was the task of the Constituent Assembly to lay the foundations for the Estonian statehood, to adopt the Constitution and the Land Act.

⁴ “The Salvation Committee”, <http://www.riigikogu.ee/en>, 24 November 2016.

The Constituent Assembly prepared and adopted several declarations, laws and other documents that were essential for the sovereignty of Estonia⁶. The work of the assembly was completed on 20 December 1920 when 1st Riigikogu convened. Otto Strandman became the first President of the Riigikogu. The 1st Riigikogu held the legislative power in Estonia less than 3 years and its members belonged to ten political parties and alliances. The 1st parliament passed many vital legal acts as Estonian Flag Act, Citizenship Act, Print Act and Fishing Act⁷. Elections of the following parliaments of Estonia were held every 3 years and it continued to act in a normal routine until the 5th Riigikogu. Numerous important legal acts passed during the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Riigikogu periods. The new Estonian currency – kroons and cents and the metric system was introduced in Estonia. Despite the 5th Riigikogu started its work in on 15 June 1932, the new Constitution entered into force in January 1934 and the activities of Riigikogu were discontinued. According to the new amended Constitution, Estonia became a presidential republic. After martial law was declared in March, the Riigikogu was dissolved in October 1934. The keywords of the period were devaluation of Estonian kroon, economic crisis, political tensions and amending of the Constitution.

Konstantin Pats⁸, the Prime Minister acted as the State Elder, declared the martial law in Estonia on 12 March 1934. The declaration was a result of the conflict between the State Elder, the government of the Republic, the Veterans of the War of Independence and the 5th Riigikogu. The Union of the Veterans of the Estonian War of Independence was disbanded, political meetings and demonstrations were prohibited. Oppositionists started to name the situation in the country “the silent era” or “the era of silence” (Toivo, 2004:196-197). The Era of Silence or *Vaikiv Ajastu* in Estonian began with the coup d’etat of 1934, carried out by Konstantin Pats against feared takeover of the state apparatus by the Vaps Movement or League of Veterans⁹. Claiming that the Vaps movement was planning to seize power, they arrested several hundred

⁵ These documents included: Statement of the Constituent Assembly on the National Sovereignty and Independence of Estonia on 19 May 1919; A Temporary Constitution of Estonia on 4 July 1919; The Land Act on 10 October 1919; Peace Treaty with Soviet Russia on 13 February 1920; The Constitution of Estonia on 15 June 1920

⁶ I Riigikogu”, <http://www.riigikogu.ee/en>, 24 November 2016.

⁷ 1917-1918 Chairman of the Estonian Province Assembly (Eesti Maanõukogu). 1918, Chairman of the Estonian Rescue Committee. 1918, imprisoned by the German occupation powers, from July to November 1918 in a prison camp in Poland. In 1918, while the Prime Minister of the Provisional Government of Estonia, as well as the Minister of Internal Affairs, 1918 the Minister of War. 1922–1923 Chairman of I Riigikogu. 1917-1919 member of the Estonian Province Assembly, 1919-1920 member of the Constituent Assembly (Asutav Kogu), 1920-1934/37 member of the I-V Riigikogu. Finished the Pärnu State High School, studied at the Law Department of the Tartu University in 1894–1898, Candidate of Law. Publications in the field of state law and politics. 30.07.1940 imprisoned by the NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, here the Soviet State Secret Police) and deported to Russia, lived as deportee, then in prison, 1954–56 in the mental hospital of Kalinin, where also died. On 21.10.1990 was reburied to the Metsakalmistu in Tallinn. “Konstantin Pats”, <http://www.president.ee/en>, 28 November 2016.

⁸ Vaps Movement - the Union of Participants was founded as an Estonian association of veterans of the Estonian War of Independence (1918–1920). The organisation was founded in 1929, emerged as a mass anti-socialist and anti-parliamentary movement. “Vaps”, Encyclopedia Britannica, www.britannica.com, Retrieved 14 March 2015.

leading Vaps members and closed their organizations and newspapers. The era ended in 1938 or either with the Soviet occupation in 1940. The 1939 Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact placed Estonia in the Soviet sphere of interest and by military threats forced it to sign the agreement on the bases that considerably weakened the sovereignty of the Republic of Estonia and finally led to the loss of Estonian independence (Pajur, 2006).

The elections of the 6th Riigikogu held under martial law which was popularly known as silent era. The bicameral 6th Riigikogu –the Chamber of Deputies and the National Council – represented the Estonian people in the period from 7 April 1938 to 5 July 1940. Due to political situation in Estonia, the impact of the 6th Riigikogu was minor. The parliament remained in the shadow of the President and the Government¹⁰.

B) Latvian Parliamentary Experience (1918-1934)

The People's Council or *Tautas padome* in Latvian was the first legislative institution established on 17 November 1918 until 30 April 1920 as a result of a mutual agreement of 8 Latvian democratic parties and with a representative of the Latgale Land Council or *Latgales Zemes padome*. Each party had a certain number of seats in the Council and mandates were not granted to individual persons. The Council can be regarded as a complex political platform and can be considered as the first provisional Constitution (*Satversme*) of the Republic of Latvia. It adopted several important laws on rural local governments and their election, on Latvia's monetary system, on educational institutions, on citizenship, and on the election of Constitutional Assembly¹¹. If Tautas was the first legislative institution of Latvia, *Satvermes sapulce* or the Constitutional Assembly was Latvia's first elected legislative body. The Constitutional Assembly prepared a draft of the supreme law of the state – Constitution (*Satversme*) – as well as other laws (Sprudsz, 2001:139-165). It adopted a law on the election of the Saeima (Latvian parliament) and other laws. The Assembly functioned from 30 April 1920 until 7 November 1922.¹²

The legislative work begun by the *Satvermes sapulce* (Constitutional Assembly) was continued by the Saeima. According to the *Satsverme* (constitution) the Saeima was to be elected for a term of three years by equal and direct elections and by secret ballot based on proportional representation. Elections of the 1st Saeima were held on 7 and 8 October 1922. The first speaker of the Saeima was Fridrihs Vesmanis and succeeded by Dr. Pauls Kalnins. 2nd, 3rd and 4th Saeima elections were held every three years consequently in October months

⁹ “6th Riigikogu (Chamber of Deputies and National Council”, <http://www.riigikogu.ee/en>, 28 November 2016.

¹⁰ “History of the Legislature//The People's Council”, <http://www.saeima.lt/en>, 28 November 2016.

¹¹ “History of the Legislature//The Constitutional Assembly”, <http://www.saeima.lt/en>, 29 November 2016.

of 1925, 1928 and 1931. If 2nd Saeima focused on social and economic issues, 3rd and 4th Saeima concentrated on drafting laws. The work of the 4th Saeima was discontinued by the coup of 15 May 1934 and its functions were taken over by the Cabinet of Ministers¹³.

The 1934 Latvian coup d'état, known in Latvia as the May 15 Coup or Ulmanis' Coup was a self-coup by the Prime Minister Karlis Ulmanis against parliamentary system in Latvia. Kārlis Augusts Vilhelms Ulmanis was one of the most prominent Latvian politicians of pre - World War II Latvia during the interwar period of independence from November 1918 to June 1940. The legacy of his dictatorship still divides public opinion in Latvia (Murphy, Ronis, Liepins, 1999:46-54). His authoritarian regime lasted until the Soviet occupation of Latvia in 1940. After he took control of the main state and party offices, he proclaimed a State of War in Latvia and suspended the Constitution. All political parties and the Saeima were dissolved. Ulmanis established non-parliamentary executive authoritarian regime. (Rogainis, 1971)

C) Lithuanian Parliamentary Experience (1922-1940)

The supreme legislative body of the Republic of Lithuania is Seimas. The word acquired the meaning of a parliament in the course of the development of the Lithuanian State. The 1st Seimas was elected on October 10-11, 1922 and its existence was just for a short period of time of 5 months. Lack of mutual cooperation in Lithuanian politics and tensions between the government and opposition resulted by dissolution of the 1st Seimas on March 12, 1923. While the 1st Seimas was in session, Lithuania received the de jure recognition of Great Britain, France and Italy. The 2nd Seimas was elected on 12–13 May, 1923 and served full term of office until March 26, 1926. The 2nd Seimas resembled the Constituent Assembly (Seimas) in its productivity and continued the latter's legislative activity. The fundamental laws of the independent republic were passed, land reform was tackled with great intensity, more stability was introduced into the country's financial and economic situation, and the tax system was normalized. A great deal of attention was devoted to the development and expansion of the school network and institutions of higher education. Elections to the 3rd Seimas took place on May 8-10, 1926. One of the first things that the 3rd Seimas made was to revoke the Special Statutes of the State protection. The Non-aggression Treaty was signed with the Soviet Union in which Lithuania's rights to Vilnius, which was under Polish occupation at that time, were recognized. The new government

¹² “History of the Legislature//The 1st Saeima//The 2nd Saeima//The 3rd Saeima//The 4th Saeima”, <http://www.saeima.lt/en>, 29.11.2016.

abolished martial law and censorship of the press and even allowed freedom of activity to the Communists who were struggling with the Social Democrats for control of trade unions¹⁴.

Development of democratic traditions in the Lithuanian State was terminated by the coup d'état in December 1926. In the early morning on 17 December, the military in Lithuania revolted and broke up the parliament of the country, the Seimas. The headquarters of the coup participants established in the Ministry of Defence announced that “the coup d'état was effected exclusively by one army which was forced to do the same due to the Polonisation of the country and the pro-Bolshevik policy pursued by the government [...] which was a real threat to existence of the state”. Military required the total control of the state. The liberal President Kazys Grinius, who had been elected democratically, was forced to resign (Kasparavicius, 2007:115). The organizers of the coup elected Antanas Smetona¹⁵ (Eidintas, 2015:149), leader of the Nationalists, as the new President, and expressed a vote of confidence in the new government formed out of Nationalists, Christian Democrats and Farmers' Party members. However, this situation did not last long: after a vote of non-confidence, a few months later, the President dissolved the 3rd Seimas on April 12, 1927, without scheduling new elections as the Constitution of 1922 demanded (Laucka, 1986).

The 4th Seimas was elected only on June 10, 1936. President Smetona summoned the 4th Seimas on 1 September 1936, and stated that its main task would be to prepare a new constitution. Adopted on February 11, 1938, the Constitution emphasized the continuity of the authoritarian regime: Parliament had the exclusive right only to amend the Constitution and its own statutes. Issuing legislation, approving the budget and ratifying international treaties were all now in the hands of the President instead of the parliament. During the time of the 4th Seimas, to avoid armed conflict, Lithuania was compelled to renew diplomatic relations with Poland, and to give up the Klaipėda Territory to Nazi Germany. The 4th Seimas survived until June 27, 1940, when the pro-Soviet Government signed the dissolution act, citing the Constitution of 1938, and implemented a scenario for the annexation of Lithuania to the Soviet Union foreseen in the then secret Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact signed in Moscow on 23 August 1939. The basic tool for legitimizing the annexation of Lithuania legally was the so-called People's Parliament, chosen in elections without alternative candidates. This People's Parliament, usurping the right of sovereignty to decide the fate of the state, violated the still

¹³ “History of the Seimas”, <http://www.lrs.lt>, 29.11.2016.

¹⁵ Antanas Smetona was one of the leaders of the coup d'état of 1926, which deposed President Kazys Grinius, and Smetona once again became President on 19 December of that year. One year later he suppressed the parliament, and on May 15, 1928, with the approval of the government, he promulgated a new Constitution of the Lithuanian State with more extensive presidential powers. In 1929, he became authoritarian head of state. He was re-elected President in 1931 and 1938, and remained in office until June 15, 1940, heading a Seimas composed by his adherents.

valid provisions of the Constitution on the limited competence of Parliament. The annexation of Lithuania by the Soviet Union was finalized on August 25, 1940, when the People's Parliament declared itself the provisional Supreme Soviet of Lithuania¹⁶.

¹⁵“History of the Seimas”, <http://www.lrs.lt>, 29.11.2016.

II. Expansion of the Soviet Troops over the Baltic States

Attempts of the Baltic States to protect their sovereignty under overwhelming threats of aggressive expansive politics of Nazis Germany and the Soviet Union were not successful. Formation of the Baltic Alliance to maintain a policy of neutrality and defence did not prevent Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to be overrun first by the Soviets, then by the Nazis and again by the Soviet troops (O'Connor, 2003:108). The last Soviet occupation was de facto the end of the independence of the Baltic States until the collapse of the USSR in 1991. There were numbers of reasons for the control of the Baltic States for the Soviet Union but the main one is hidden in a relic of Tsarist Russian mentality as Baltic States were viewed as naturally belonging to the Union (Huttenbach, 1990:4) as well as Caucasian and Central Asian states. Under the full control of the Soviet Union, there were implemented a number of policies which were common to the other regions and states occupied and annexed by the Soviet troops. Similar policies were applied to the Caucasian and Central Asian states as well as to indigenous peoples of Russia. The most important policies to mention are Russification, cultural suppression and change in the ethnic composition.

It is notable that the ruthless Russification policy was never used by the Soviet officials openly as the founding doctrines of the Soviet Union were meant to defend internationalism; “the ideal of bringing together the working classes of various nationalities in an effort to build a well-functioning socialist system, which in turn would lead to communism” (Dzyuba, 1974:25,42) Henry Huttenbach briefly explains Soviet Union's approach by stating; “Commitment to a unitary state with a homogeneous citizenry lies at the heart of all Soviet nationality policies since Lenin, the belief that the hodgepodge of Eurasian peoples could be fused by shrewd government management into a single, essentially Russian-oriented, people” (Huttenbach, 1990:3). As mentioned in the previous passage, the Russification policy was followed by substantial cultural suppression and by change of the ethnic composition policies. The main goal of implementation of these policies was a penetration to the Baltic region and absolute Russian domination in the region (O'Connor, 2003:127).

Cultural suppression in the Baltic States was similar to suppression methods implemented in other states occupied by the Soviets. The language policy was a substantial element of cultural suppression. The following manner was in use in almost every state of the Soviet Union. First step of it was a declaration of Russian as the official language, so that the official correspondence language became Russian despite native languages at the specific country. Second, major institutions in all important spheres of social and political life was in Russian and consequently scientific, scholar and cultural works published dominantly in

Russian. Despite Russian language was not compulsory in the education system, it was expected to be bilingual to all non-Russians. The exact opposite situation was for Russians immigrated to non-Russian state, they were not expected to learn native languages. By the time, the lingual domination weakened the position of the other non-Russian languages which was the most influential cultural suppression policy (Otfinoski, 2004:15-16; Dzyuba, 1974:135-135; O'Connor, 2003:135).

It is noteworthy to mention an armed struggle of the Baltic peoples that began in 1944 and called "the Forest Brothers". It was collective partisan forces of Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians against Russian rule. The resistance movement carried out in a form of a guerilla war lasted until 1952 and ended as a result of large-scale Soviet operations. Approximately 50.000 residents of the Baltic States participated in the anti-Soviet armed resistance movement (Laar, 1992; Kaszeta, 1988). As a result of imprisonment, exile, out-right execution and emigrations of Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians after the Soviet occupation the ethnic composition in the Baltic States drastically changed. Parallel to the repressions, transfer of Russians and other Russian-speaking people to the Baltic States continued over the decades (Otfinoski, 2004:14-16, 64-65, 112). As a result of the Soviet Union's politics the ethnic demography situation changed to that level that ethnic native peoples in the Baltic States became minorities in their capitals and in their countries (Steen, 2000:68-87; Steen, 2006:187-207).

III. Post-Soviet Parliamentary Experience of the Baltic States

After the collapse of the USSR and regain of independence cardinal changes in the politics of the Baltic States occurred immediately. The Supreme Councils of the Estonian SSR, Latvian SSR and Lithuanian SSR adopted resolutions and declarations on their national independence. These acts were the most important legal acts of the Supreme Councils of the Baltic States elected during the last period of the Soviet era. They declared a period of transition to the restoration of the republics and repelled the Soviet names of their states¹⁷. Estonian SSR, Latvian SSR and Lithuanian SSR restored their names and became respectively the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Latvia and the Republic of Lithuania.

Elections of the Riigikogu, Saeima and Seimas held on the basis of the new Constitutions that were adopted by the Baltic States. The main task of the first post-Soviet Baltic parliaments after the restoration of sovereignties was to pass the acts for the implementation of constitutional institutions and for the establishment of the legal order based on the new Constitutions.

¹⁶ "History of the Riigikogu", www.riigikogu.ee; "History of the Legislature", www.saeima.lv; "History of the Seimas", www.lrst.lt, retrieved 10.12.2016.

Another stage in the politics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania started with the beginning of the accession policies to the European Union after 1999. The most important legislative acts adopted during these periods by Riigikogu, Saeima and Seimas were the Acts on the ratification of the Europe Agreement and the agreement on the withdrawal of the armed forces of the Russian Federation. During the mandates of the 9th Riigikogu, 8th Saeima and 6th Seimas, the long-prepared administrative, penal and civil law reforms were carried out and proceedings were conducted on the Bills connected with transposition of EU directives into the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian legal order and the amendments of the Constitutions that was necessary for accession to the EU was passed. The most important event during the mandates of the 10th Riigikogu, 9th Saeima and 7th Seimas was undoubtedly membership to the EU. After the accession to the EU, legislative bodies of the Baltic States continued its work on the path framed by the EU policies. The most important decisions in these periods were in spheres of employment, Euro adoption, traffic and finally on security. The principle of the NATO countries are obliged to spend %2 of GDP on defense was firmly adhered to¹⁸.

Study of parliamentary studies in the Baltic States will be incomplete without analysis of the Baltic Assembly organization. The formation of the BA had an important impact on both parliamentary institutions of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as well as on regional cooperation of these countries. The BA formed on 8 November 1991 had pre-history prepared it to the prominent activities in the region. In the late 1980's along with the Awakening movement in the Soviet states, the Popular Front of Estonia, *Rahvarinne*; the Popular Front of Latvia, *Tautas Fronte*; and the reform movement of Lithuania, *Sajudis*, began trilateral cooperation. The aim of this cooperation was to influence processes in the USSR, to represent Baltic interests, to solve common problems and to reach common goals. Following events took place within the process of cooperation; Assembly of the Baltic Independence Movement which was held on 13-15 May 1989 in Tallinn, resulted with establishment of the Baltic Parliamentary Group. The Baltic Council was formed on July 1989 in Parnu. It followed by the signing the Declaration of Unanimity and Cooperation of the Baltic States. Finally all these trilateral political involvements and workings crowned with the formation of the Baltic Assembly¹⁹.

In the process of development of institutional, legislative and executive trilateral cooperation, the Baltic States determined main courses of action. The most significant item on

17 "History of the Riigikogu", www.riigikogu.ee; "History of the Legislature", www.saeima.lv; "History of the Seimas", www.lrst.lt retrieved 10.12.2016.

18 "Formation of the Baltic States' regional organizations, 1988-1991", www.baltasam.org, retrieved 10.12.2016.

the cooperation agenda was strengthening of the independence and return to the international arena. Important treaties and agreements signed in the sphere of trade, executive and legislative powers²⁰. And one of the most important items on the Baltic cooperation agenda was the withdrawal of troops of the former USSR from the Baltic States²¹. Following the withdrawal of the army of the Russian Federation and the signing of the Association Agreements with the European Union, a new phase in the cooperation between the Baltic States began. This period can be described as a purposeful process of integration into the European Union and NATO. The process crowned with the complete EU membership and it became a driving force for regional cooperation in the following years to be continued. The most important international actors with whom the Baltic Assembly developed close partnerships were the Nordic and Benelux countries. Thus strengthening of cooperation with the Nordic Council and the Benelux Parliament was considered to be an additional recourse in integration not just to the EU and NATO but to the whole world beside post-Soviet world²². It is noteworthy here to mention that the Baltic States despite their imperial Russian and Soviet past or due to such a historical burden consciously refuse to be part of Soviet-Russian legacy in any term. It can be read through on-going language and minority policies in the Baltic States and in refuse to be a member in any organization related to the post-Soviet area.

Summary

Parliamentary institutions in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are not newly emerged political instruments appeared after dissolution of the USSR and their accession to the European Union and NATO. They were not created artificially with a wish to fit popular trends in politics and establish constrained democracy or to reward western countries. Baltic nations have a century long history of legislature founded in the early XX century and worked efficiently until the compulsory break lasted almost 50 years after the Soviet occupation.

An analysis of Riigikogu, Saeima and Seimas shows the Baltic nations have strong traditions of legislature and legislative mechanisms. Having established in 1917, 1918 and 1922 respectively, national parliaments: Riigikogu, Saeima and Seimas convoked 5 times until the beginning of the Soviet era. Convocations show us existence of legislative and parliamentary mechanism and various parties as an evidence of pluralism. Existence of parliamentary experiences no doubt is an opportunity for the Baltic States to avoid to fall in

¹⁹ A Free Trade Agreement on 13 September 1993, Treaty on Cooperation among the Governments and Parliaments of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia on 13 June 1994.

²⁰ "International Inclusion, 1992-1995", www.baltasam.org, retrieved 10.12.2016.

²¹ "European and transatlantic integration, 1995-2004", www.baltasam.org, retrieved 10.12.2016.

political instability and political crisis. 50 years of authoritarian experience during the Soviet period and a struggle to overthrow it over years just firm and strengthen the Baltic cooperation in the region. Bright examples of unity and common spirit of the Baltic nations have seen during the Soviet invasion by the Forest Brothers (*metsavennad, meža brāļi, miško broļiai*) and through Baltic Way or Freedom Chain in 1989. The regional cooperation crowned with the formation of the Baltic Assembly in 1991.

Analysis of parliaments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania clearly expose existence of Baltic parliamentary experience or Baltic way of parliamentary development. It shows important evolution of political tools and mechanisms of democracy.

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