Obraz Drugogo – strany Baltii i Sovetskii Soiuz pered Vtoroi Mirovoi Voinoi [Образ Другого: страны Балтии и Советский Союз перед Второй мировой войной], ed. R. Krumm, N.A. Lomagin, D. Khanov Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2012, 206 p. ISBN 978-5-8243-1663

This book, published a year ago, so far, it seems, has not attracted great interest among historians or the general reading public, even though it truly deserves it, for these circumstances. We will not find in Europe many areas such as that between Russia and the Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia), in the sense that both sides in this area, perhaps more than elsewhere, evaluate the recent past so differently – the Soviet period, and especially the events of 1940. For the Baltic countries, it was an occupation; while for the majority of the Russian public, it was a voluntary, or at least determined by justifiable historical circumstances, integration into the Soviet Union. Of course, many states, often even very close ones, evaluate the past and their mutual relationships quite differently: for example, historians in England and France treat the Hundred Years War and the role of Joan of Arc differently. However, for those countries, it is only an academic discourse; while the approach of Russia and the Baltic states to the historical past influences strongly the world-view of today's society, for which inter-state relations are difficult. The most recent survey data just released shows that the Russian people include all three Baltic countries, Latvia (21 %), Lithuania (17 %), Estonia (16 %) among the top five unfriendliest states, along with the USA and Georgia.¹ Last year's survey also showed similar results.

The USA and Georgia are included mostly due to current policies, the Baltic countries more for historical stereotypes, which are still relevant today. In general, public sentiment affects foreign policy ever more. If we continue to hold the realist theory prevailing up to now explaining international relations, it will appear that this effect will not be significant, since it will be believed that strength, interests, and the principle of the balance of power determine these relations. Today, however, it is appropriate to take into account also the visions of liberalism, transnationalism and constructivism, in which the tangible dependence of the development of international relations relies not only on the activities of state institutions,

¹ 'Į rusų nepalankiausiai vertinamų šalių penketuką vėl pateko Lietuva', *News portal alfa.lt* <<http://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/15141401/I.rusu...>> [access through internet: visited on 18 Jun 2013].

but also of international public organisations. It is admitted that public sentiments affect these relationships, and they depend on the stereotypes of historical consciousness entrenched in the stereotypes of the past. The most obvious example is today's relations between Lithuania and Poland. Although both countries, as members of NATO and the EU, are interested in improving their mutual relations and expanding cooperation, they do not succeed in achieving this in any way, as on both sides there are public groups which, in accordance with the dictated stereotypes of historical experience, oppose the concessions necessary to achieving a rapprochement. Historical grievances and the mutual distrust based on them, suspicion like some kind of cramp, still enchain relations between Lithuania and Poland. The relations between Lithuania and the other Baltic states and Russia are also not free of the 'historical burden'.

Therefore, the attempt by historians to present in one book the images formed in the Soviet Union in the interwar period of its three small western neighbours, and in those neighbours the well-established approach to the great eastern communist country, is very welcome. This book, which is essentially a collection of scholarly articles, can be seen as being composed of two parts. At first, the authoritarian regimes of the Baltic countries, public sentiment, and in particular the assumptions and factors in the formation of the Soviets' image, are analysed in some detail and evaluated. Here also the public mood in the USSR and the assessments in historiography of the opposition to Stalinism are discussed. Afterwards, the images of both sides in the mentioned area are analysed.

Of the Baltic countries, probably Lithuania's authoritarian rule, formed after a coup in 1926, is analysed in most detail. A special article by Gediminas Rudis 'Antano Smetonos autoritarinio režimo susiformavimas' (The Formation of the Authoritarian Regime of Antanas Smetona, pp. 137–150) is devoted to it. Also, features of this regime are analysed in the article by two authors, Algimantas Kasparavičius and Česlovas Laurinavičius ('Rusijos/Sovietų sąjungos percepcija tarpukario Lietuvoje' [The Perception of Russia/the Soviet Union in Interwar Lithuania], pp. 121–136) and by Dangiras Mačiulis ('Autoritarinio režimo legitimacijos praktikos Lietuvoje tarpukario laikotarpiu' [Practices of Legitimizing the Authoritarian Regime in Lithuania in the Interwar Period], pp. 151–166). In them, the image of the Soviets in Lithuania, the change in the image, and the dependence of the change on government policy are investigated.

In these articles, Lithuania's authoritarianism is evaluated quite strictly, but also objectively. It is shown how it differed from totalitarian rule. Here, Rudis stresses: 'Smetona not only did not use rough methods to suppress political opponents, but he also did not seek to introduce total control of society, leaving sufficiently wide opportunities for expression. Only political activities opposing the regime were restricted, but they were not totally banned' (p. 144). The author quotes the accurate claim by the

well-known semiotics expert Algirdas Julius Greimas that Smetona 'saved Lithuania from fascism' (p. 145). Mačiulis also indicates that Smetona 'did not abuse the power of coercion' (p. 152). The same author reasonably and very correctly stresses: 'the merit of the government was that in interwar Lithuania, anti-Semitism did not spread' (p. 154). The articles explain convincingly that in Lithuania, only a gentle authoritarian rule formed, and control of all society was not introduced. In only a short period of time (the autumn of 1938 – p. 163) did a state institution of propaganda exist. It was abolished even before it could develop its activities.

In the book, the authoritarian regimes in Latvia and Estonia that formed in both countries after coup d'états in 1934 are also described. True, in this case the analysis of the regimes in the articles is immediately associated with the topics of the publication, i.e. trying to find out what forms and by what methods the government formed public opinion, and how those methods affected the development of the Soviet image. Here, Tartu University student Toomas Chios thoroughly examines the activities of Estonia's Propaganda Office in 1934–1940 (pp. 31–57), and shows how the institution formed an atmosphere of national awareness, and consolidated the Estonian identity in the land. Even Estonian last names were changed. In 1935–1940, about 200,000 last names were made more Estonian. In this way, by the beginning of 1940, 82 % of Estonians had Estonian last names (p. 46). Using the propaganda service, the Estonian government formed, and somewhat controlled, public opinion (of course, not completely), and that had an effect on the image of the Soviets. For example, in 1938, it was forbidden to publish caricatures of Stalin in the Estonian press, and it was also forbidden to publish texts unfavourable to the Soviet state (p. 41). The same fact also is presented in the article by the Estonian PhD student Luiza Rannast-Kask, devoted to the depiction of the Soviet reality in the Estonian press (p. 60).

Perhaps, of all the Baltic countries, Latvia's authoritarian regime is evaluated the most critically. In the article by Denis Chanov 'Commander, Enemy and War: Images of Stalin in the Press of Latvia's Authoritarian Regime (1934–1940)', the rule of Karlis Ulmanis is continuously, notwithstanding even annoying repetition, called authoritarian (pp. 79–81, and others). It is urgently argued that this regime especially created an image of Stalin as distant from the people, as a closed, mysterious politician, in order to contrast him with the image of Ulmanis as a leader who was open and accessible to all residents. In this way, they say, a mesmerising method was used to highlight the positive traits of this picture.

Thus, it can be emphasised one more time that in the reviewed publication the authoritarian regimes of the Baltic countries were evaluated critically and discussed in detail from all sides. Meanwhile, on the other hand, the system of the other side, i.e. the Soviet system remains essentially not analysed, no definition is even named or already definitely

that system is discussed to a far smaller extent than the governance in the Baltic states. This kind of inadequacy could be the most distinct deficiency of the whole book. Only in the first article 'Approaches to Research of USSR Sentiments in the Stalinist Period' (pp. 8–15), by Nikita Lomagin, is there a brief discussion about the Soviet regime, but in reality it is not analysed, only conceptions of the evaluation of the opposition to the regime are presented. In a few sentences in this context, there is mention of a version of totalitarianism, but immediately it is rejected, because later the opposing totalitarianism theories of 'revisionism', 'Stalinism as civilisation', 'resistance to the regime' and others are discussed in greater detail. The latter version is especially emphasized, even though some of the arguments are not persuasive. For example, it is stated that Stalinism cannot be called illegitimate, because not many opposed it. Here is an argument off target, so to speak. The unspeakable scale of repressions and violence, after all, determined the 'non-resistance'. It is pathetic that in this article the capitulating, shameless offer to postpone research into the causes of terror until the archives of the Soviet repressive structures are opened (p. 9) is left without comment. Maybe they will never be opened? What then?

The compilers and editors of the book perhaps thought that Stalinism is a well-known given for all, and therefore its characterisation is no longer necessary. However, such an idea, if it existed, is not fully justified, because a terminological confusion arose. Only in D. Chanov's article, devoted to the case of Latvia, is it clearly stated that in the 1920s totalitarian and authoritarian regimes were established in Europe; but nowhere are those regimes differentiated, their differences are not shown, and it as if one is avoiding calling the USSR government totalitarian. In some places, there are mentions of 'the Soviet dictatorship' (p. 80), elsewhere of the 'Bolshevik state' (p. 86), and likewise. The definitions of other processes and phenomena, even the 1940 events in the Baltic countries, are different; on p. 49 it is indicated that in 1940 'Estonia was occupied' while on p. 58 'In Estonia there occurred a coup d'état, to support the Soviet Union'. That is really an unseen treatment, because so far there was only talk about the occupation, annexation or socialist revolution. Anyhow, in the quoted extract, the role of the USSR in the 1940 events is clearly diminished.

Some of the authors of the publication, it seems, do not even explicitly distinguish authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. Chanov, at the end of his article completely compares, as if equating Ulmanis and Stalin, calling both of them 'leaders of the nations'. This article concludes with encouragement for Latvia and Russia to examine further the activities of their leaders, and not to idealise their strong-arm policies and the introduction of order (p. 97). On this occasion, I would like to recall the words of the famous Lithuanian historian Zenonas Ivinskis 45 years ago: 'The new generation of Latvians not only removed the bust of Ulmanis from

its pedestal, but smashed it into little pieces.’² In a word, Latvian society disposed of the idealisation of its ‘nation’s leader’ a long time ago, while the cult of Stalin is still alive in the great eastern neighbouring state. The nature of the activities of the two ‘leaders’ differed radically. So they are contrasted here inadequately.

We also miss precision of terms used in assessing the national consciousness in the Baltic countries. Nowhere in the book is there mention of patriotic education, but the outbreak of nationalism, its uncontrollable rage is stressed everywhere. In addition to the disclosure of this concept, the text mentions Lithuania’s Lithuanisation, and Estonia’s Estonianisation (эстонизация) during the interwar period. It is written that for a long time in Latvia and Estonia there was Germanisation, and in 1880 Russification began there, during which, throughout the whole administration, and particularly in the education system, the Russian language became dominant, pupils were even strictly forbidden to speak their native language during breaks. Was there anything similar in the Baltic States during the interwar period? Was one allowed to speak only Latvian, Lithuanian or Estonian? For example, in the article by T. Chios there is mention of Estonianisation everywhere. It would be interesting to see how the author understands this term. It turns out that the term identifies phenomena such as the promotion of the Estonian national flag, actions to beautify the land, Estonian book days, Mother’s Day, which began to be celebrated in 1935, events honouring large families, the declaration of independence (February 24) celebrations, and the like.

All of us understand this as the promotion of patriotism, vaccinations of love for one’s country. About what kind of nationalism (in a strictly negative sense) can we talk here, all the more since today, as the author himself writes, the activities are renewed again? For example, 2000 and 2001 were again celebrated as years of the Estonian book (p. 50). But the term Estonianisation is used in the same context as Germanisation and Russification. So, a reader who is not well acquainted with Baltic history could understand that the term Estonianisation covers fierce nationalistic violence, the persecution of foreigners, and assimilation policies. That would simply be biased, a distortion of concepts, and their indiscriminate rape. Due to the intricacy of the concepts, contradictions arise. At the beginning of p. 49, it is written that in the interwar period the cultivated affection for the Estonian flag was preserved during the years of the Soviet occupation, and naturally revived when the reconstruction began; but at the bottom of the same page, it is stated that supposedly the flag promotion campaign did not achieve the desired results. One can notice contradictions even in the summaries, directly related to the analysed theme, with the formation

² Z. Ivinskis, ‘Politinis nepriklausomos Lietuvos gyvenimas. Jo raida ir lūžiai’, offprint from *Šaltinis* (1968), Nr. 5, p. 3.

of the same images. For instance, the conclusion formulated on p. 132 that after the 1940 events, i.e. after the Soviet ultimatum and annexation, the first repressions in the political and cultural consciousness of the Lithuanians, especially among the national elite, the image of the Soviet, along with the Russian, suddenly worsened. However, after turning only one page (in the same article, only in a new section), another conclusion is now provided: somewhere in the middle of the 1930s, the perception of Russia/the Soviet Union in Lithuania began to double radically, to branch out in two directions. In one direction, there is a clear convergence with European streams of a pro-fascist nature, and the total denial of links with the Soviet East. The other stream, on the contrary, began to imagine the Soviet country as some kind of lighthouse for Lithuania, primarily in a social and cultural sense (p. 134).

At first glance, it might seem that the two conclusions do not directly contradict each other. Nevertheless, one comes after the other, so the question arises: when does the image of Soviet Lithuania change most distinctly, when it is its great turning point? There are no doubts about the first conclusion, while the other is quite unexpected, and demands empirical justification. The separation is perhaps some what hyperbolised, made more important, and does not cover the basic highways of the cultural process. These streams, we believe, were only trends, undoubtedly also strengthened by external influence.

The Soviet image formed in Latvia and Estonia in the book is revealed the best, because reflections of this image are analysed fully in the press organs of these countries. Meanwhile, in the Lithuanian case, no specific publication or other object of research is analysed. Of course, the contents of a publication are the prerogative of the compilers, but one should bear in mind that during the interwar period, Lithuania's relations with the Soviets (due to the Vilnius and Klaipėda problems) were closer than those of Latvia and Estonia, and thus the image in the latter countries could have been dimmer and less favourable than in Lithuania. So, we are missing the comparative aspect of the perception of the Soviets in the Baltic states.

The article by Vladislav Volkov, which analyses the image of the USSR in the Russian-language newspaper *Segodnia* published in Latvia, is interesting and quite objective, and we would say, the least ideological. Here, I would like to add that diplomatic documents held in the Russian Federation Foreign Policy Archive show that the Soviets treated this newspaper unfavourably. They were convinced that it issued information that was unfavourable to them and published articles hostile to them. Soviet diplomats always called *Segodnia* an anti-Soviet, White Russian publication; for them it was like a fishbone in the throat, so they tried in various ways to influence this publication, and sought to make it more favourable towards them. However, it seems it refused to be influenced, and basically did not change its political line. Therefore, the Soviets began to support

another Russian-language newspaper issued in Latvia *Novyi Golos*, which was considered as an alternative to the *Segodnia* daily. Clearly, the new newspaper failed to become a real alternative, but the Soviets supported it financially, for example, by 1931 they financed it completely, and in 1932 they devoted 13,843 US dollars to its publication³. In the same year, the Soviets also supported the Latvian-language newspaper *Pēdējā Brīdī* with a similar sum, and even earlier, as is known, in Lithuania they financed the *tautininkai* (nationals) press, the Russian-language publication *Ekho*, and in 1927 they began 'a massive campaign to regain the Estonian press'.⁴ Thus, the Soviets did not look passively at how their image was being developed in the Baltic states, but tried to influence its formation, to influence it in a direction that was favourable for them. But this, external impact on internal processes, aspect is completely ignored in the publication being reviewed.

Even in some places, it seems, the impact of the USSR authorities on the formation of the image of the Baltic states in the Soviet country is ignored. On p. 182 it is indicated that after the Second World War began, in September 1939, the metalworkers, craftsmen and foremen of Leningrad factories demanded that Estonia be 'punished' because the USSR steamboat *Metalist* was sunk near its coast. The authors of the book treat this fact as part of the Soviet public's distrust of the neighbouring country; meanwhile, the same Soviet government announced officially that it was necessary to maintain friendly relations with Estonia based on mutual trust. In short, it states that the provisions of part of society and the government towards the Baltic countries were different. But we cannot fail to see that the Soviet authorities declared their friendliness to Estonia when the latter had already signed their offered non-aggression pact of 28 September 1939, i.e. agreed to let in Soviet military bases. Meanwhile, the opinion of the workers and technical intelligentsia was expressed earlier, before the signing of the treaty, and that opinion had been used as a means of putting pressure on Estonia to make it agree to let the Red Army in. Thus, part of the distrust of the Soviet public towards Estonia was not natural, genuine, spontaneous public opinion, but without doubt inspired by the government's campaign, which sought to frighten the neighbour. When it capitulated, it was possible to declare friendship for it. So, here again, we face difficulties in knowing totalitarian Soviet society, which, unfortunately, there is no effort to study deeper.

Several factual errors testify to the difficulties in understanding the history of the Baltic states. On p. 28 it is incorrectly stated that Poland presented an ultimatum to Lithuania on 17 March 1939. This cannot be

³ 1931 12 16 SSRS pasiuntinio Latvijoje ataskaita Užsienio reikalų liaudies komisariatui, Rusijos Federacijos užsienio politikos archyvas, f. 0150, ap. 19, b. 39, segtuvas (sg.) 35, l. 23–25.

⁴ Z. Butkus, 'SSRS intrigos Baltijos šalyse (1920–1940)', *Darbai ir Dienos*, nr. 7(16), (1998), p. 9.

called a simple typographical error, because it is also inaccurately stated that allegedly on 19 March, Lithuania ‘opened its border to Polish citizens’. On p. 172, the last name of the Latvian minister of war Janis Balodis is given incorrectly, and on p. 197 it is written that a coup took place in Lithuania in 1936, i.e. ten years later than it really did.

These errors, some inaccuracies, and several questionable interpretations only show the complexity of the research undertaken and the difficulties of the start of the work. The relatively minor volume of the reviewed work is small for the ideas raised and the questions formulated, which beg for wider responses, and these are only possible by extending the scope of the investigation. A better understanding of the historical consciousness and the perception of the living memory of our neighbours would help to create a more favourable atmosphere for peaceful cooperation, and guarantee meaningful coexistence and shared progress. So the reviewed book, we hope, will become a stimulus for further research of this kind.

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