

REVIEWS

REVIEW: AGNIA GRIGAS, THE POLITICS OF ENERGY AND MEMORY BETWEEN THE BALTIC STATES AND RUSSIA

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Since the declarations of independence more than 20 years ago, besides others, the Baltic states are being pursued by energy dependency issues. Differently than was wishfully expected, accession to the EU and NATO for Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania did not mean suddenly improved relations with Russia, overcome domestic political weaknesses as well as fast solutions in the energy security sector. They still cause a notable predicament after accession to the EU and NATO. In the recent years, an especial focus on the energy sector could be observed in the Baltic states – energy security has become one of the main concerns for politicians and attracts a lot of attention in the Baltic media and public debates. However, when looking from the academic perspective and analysis, these issues seem not to have found their place among more serious and consistent scholarly interests, creating a strange paradoxical situation when constant daily topicalities in the media and political life were left behind a deeper academic analysis.

Fortunately, this year, this scholar gap has been filled by Agnia Grigas' study *The Politics of Energy and Memory between the Baltic States and Russia* (Ashgate Publishing, January 2013). Grigas, a PhD graduate in International Relations from Oxford University, firmly tackles the task to describe and systematically analyse the rich history of three Baltic states in the areas of energy dependency, relations as well as pursued politics of memory with Russia. In the focus of the author is the Baltic foreign policy making towards Russia (this is a notable difference from the majority of works dedicated to the Russian foreign policy and the Moscow factor in the Baltic–Russian relations). The cases of the Baltic energy and memory policies are analysed to assess the foreign policy of the three states and place them on the map of two axes: cooperative to adversarial, and pragmatic to principled. This informative and detailed study without any doubt is the first academic work of such a type in terms of the covered scope of the topic and the level of analysis. Moreover, Grigas' book successfully catches and includes most recent changes in the energy sector, making this study a contemporary and valuable source not only for academia, but also for policy makers from the Baltics and beyond.

The whole book research design is based on the comparative research analysis principle to find determinant differences among the most similar cases. Grigas in the book addresses

the main question why Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, having so many structural similarities (history, resources, the same geopolitical constraints), in the period from 1994 when the last Soviet soldier left the Baltic soil to up-to-date 2012 political realities, pursued different foreign and economic policies towards Russia. The author is interested to answer this question and to find the key causal factors which determined these differences. A. Grigas is not satisfied with suggestions and conclusions of previous researches who were highlighting the Russian ethnic minority factor as decisive in explaining the variations in the Baltic policies towards Russia. In order to analyse the main question in a new way, A. Grigas uses a liberal approach to international relations, which pays attention to domestic factors influencing foreign policy: presidencies, ministries, governments, political parties, business interests. Such approach and a detailed analysis of the above-mentioned domestic variables in her study reveal the eminent clash of interests among the public sector, business groups, and the state, all of them being especially prominent in the foreign policy making and in the energy sector.

The author argues that exactly domestic factors such as specific political alignments and business interests played the most significant role in determining the Baltic foreign policies. Among the most significant findings, this study in a well-argued way demonstrates that the political orientation of the governments was not an explaining factor of their pursued foreign policy towards Russia – this relationship was more complex than a simple assumption that the centre-right Baltic governments were more adversarial and the centre-left ones more cooperative with Moscow in terms of foreign policy issues. It is argued by the author that, often at the price of ideological inconsistency, the Baltic governments and political parties sought domestic political gains, rather than a principled foreign policy. A notable advantage of the book is also of business interests an analysis which is not often performed from academic perspective – in Grigas' study, examples of the business impact lead to a conclusion that, particularly in oil and gas sectors, they had a very important role and a multidimensional impact, especially in Latvia and Lithuania. The author vividly shows how politics and business, especially in the energy security area in the Baltics, are intertwined. Meanwhile, the variable of the Russian ethnic minorities, differently from other studies, in this book is assessed as a non-dominant factor in the Baltic–Russian relations.

A. Grigas in her book analyses not only the domestic factors, but also the external environment of the Baltic states, namely the EU and the NATO membership. The author proposes that in the Baltic foreign policy making towards Russia, membership in international organizations for three Baltic states had a rather indirect influence from the perspective of security, although its direct impact was limited and varied among the three states. The role of Russia and its foreign policy is also not left behind this study, although reasonably it is not in the main focus.

The research, analysis, data and examples of the book are based on four case studies which allow to compare the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian policies. The first two cases examine energy issues in the oil and gas sectors, and the second two look more closely at the historical Baltic states' tensions with Russia while analysing the attendance (or not) of the Victory Day anniversary celebrations in Moscow and the Baltic pursuit of compensation for the Soviet occupation. Although the author's intention to compare economic and non-economic

spheres and treat the latter as complementary in understanding the Baltic–Russian relations is obviously a fair ambition, however, the research of the book is notably more driven to the first energy part analysis. The second part of the study, focusing on historical policies, even though well analysed and important in the general context, remains not as well developed as the first one. A. Grigas is obviously an expert in the energy politics and could extend the whole book based only on the examples from the energy dependence area.

The first (oil) sector presents the general Baltic energy infrastructure and provides valuable and systemized data. A. Grigas traces back the Baltic energy dependence roots and the limits of the infrastructure. Russia's energy policies are also presented with the premise that energy is an important foreign policy instrument. However, this is done with a new perspective and a thought-provoking author's insight that Moscow's energy policy towards the Baltics does not rely only on political tensions, but is also driven by the new commercial Russian plans. In this part of the study, a close analysis of oil cuts to Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as well as its links to the political tensions of that time are presented. A. Grigas persuasively argues that Moscow's oil halts became a permanent practice when the political and the economic goals of Russia merged.

For the reader, the second (gas) section of the book is probably now the most actual part. Besides the informative presentation of gas pipelines and storage infrastructure and a historical comparison of the acquisition by Russia's Gazprom of the national Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian gas utilities, A. Grigas also provides a wide and deep assessment of various factors that influenced these privatizations. The most current and widely discussed in the media implementation of the Third Energy Package is also included in the author's study and, most importantly, gas diversification options are assessed. Here, observations by A. Grigas could be particularly important for current policy makers – the author stresses domestic institutional weaknesses in the Baltics, which are the major obstacle in pursuing a consistent energy policy and at the same time facilitate Russia's influence in the region.

The case of the Soviet Victory Day celebrations starts with, especially for a foreign or non-European reader, an important history of the Soviet occupation in the Baltics; also, the attitude towards it from the perspective of the Russian government is presented. A comparison of attendance by the three Baltic leaders of the Victory Day celebrations shows that Lithuania kept the most adversarial policy refusing to participate, while Estonians and Latvians pursued more conciliatory policies. A. Grigas notices that the main factor that determined these diverse policies was the domestic political conditions in the three Baltic states.

The fourth case analysed by the author is Soviet occupation damages and their compensation demands. A. Grigas in her analysis stresses that there was a little cooperation, and policy coordination among Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania towards this issue, and in consequence each of the Baltic states chose a different policy. The reason for policy variation, according to the book author, lies in different political conditions and party alignments – differently biased government compositions determined the different tactics.

The main conclusions by A. Grigas, which are worth of keeping in mind by every reader, concern the main factors that are influencing the dynamics of the Baltic–Russian relations. Three of them could be emphasised: firstly, these relations are impacted by energy security

issues and dependence on the Russian oil and gas; secondly, essentially different and conflicting attitudes towards the Soviet occupation; and, thirdly, specific domestic political conditions in the Baltics with their own weaknesses and vulnerability to the Russian indirect influence.

Without dispute, this study of A. Grigas has created a significant value-added for understanding the contemporary Baltic foreign policy and its key driving factors. Penetrating analysis, topicality, and detailed research could briefly describe this book. It is worth while to read this study as a valuable source of concentrated data on the Baltic states' policies towards Russia in the last twenty years. Also, with its deep insights and analysis of the variables, this book offers a guidance of how to assess the future tensions and what factors will have an impact on the Baltic states' relations with Russia.