

Ukraine-Baltics: Practices of Persecuting National Minorities*Andrejs Starikovs**Researcher of the Center for Socio-Political Studies “Russian Baltic”*

Ladies and Gentlemen!

The ODIHR OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meetings on multiple occasions have articulated the problem of national minority status in the Baltics, mostly concerning the Russian-speaking minority. The set of issues is standard: language rights, the right to receive an education in your native language, the “noncitizen” institute, which limits, among others, political rights of national minorities.

Despite the numerous focus on these limitations by OSCE, as well as during other platforms, the problem remains. Aside from that, for a long time now, we could observe the “export”¹ of the aforementioned Baltic political practices to Ukraine.

Notable political figures, namely the leader of the All-Ukrainian Union “Svoboda” Oleg Tyahnybok or the leader of the “Radical Party”² Oleh Lyashko, on numerous occasions have proposed instituting a Ukrainian version of the Baltic “noncitizen” status for the Russian-speaking residents of Eastern Ukraine

There is a steady increase in the strictness of the language policy: in February 2014, the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada³ cancelled the law On the Foundations of State Language Policy, which ensured the option of official bilingual regions, where the national minorities constitute more than 10%. May 2017 saw the adoption of new amendments, requiring that national and regional TV channels, as well as news broadcasts have 75% of its content in the Ukrainian language; local TV channels have this quota at 60%. Early September 2017, Ukraine’s Verkhovna Rada adopted the new law “On Education”, which establishes strict limitations on using national minority languages with the goal being to completely exclude them from the education system by 2020. Examples of Ukrainian government’s policies becoming stricter can continue on.

As it was noted previously, the Ukrainian government uses the experience of its Baltic neighbors when drafting legislation on national minorities. In particular, the media ran stories that Latvia helped Ukraine in developing the school reform. A month ago, the graduating classes of national

¹ The Baltic countries are part of the European Union Advisory Mission to Ukraine; people from Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania hold high government posts in Ukraine.

² Official name of the party is Radical Party of Oleh Lyashko

³ Ukrainian parliament.

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minority schools in Latvia were barred from taking their final exams in any language other than Latvian.

In the provided context, it is necessary to focus on the new risks and challenges. While previously, the national minority practices of the Baltics were exported to Ukraine, then today we can talk of a reverse process – exporting Ukrainian internal political practices into the Baltic countries. These practices are quite unsightly: glaring forms of “hate speech” towards the Russian-speaking residents of Eastern Ukraine; assault and so-called “trash lustrations”, where the target, after being beaten and insulted is humiliatingly thrown into a trash container; overcoming the taboo on murder – a series of political murders in Ukraine (former Verkhovna Rada member Oleg Kalashnikov, journalist and social activist Oles Buzina), including ones targeting national minority rights activists, see almost no investigation.

The “export” of these political practices into the Baltic countries, with their high percentage of Russian-speaking national minorities, - into Latvia and Estonia, - will be assisted by the so-called “bezviz” – the non-visa regime for owners of Ukrainian biometric foreign passports for short-term private trips to European Union countries.

The Baltic ruling elites’ loyal approach to radical Ukrainian nationalism makes the quality and quantity of Ukrainian emigration into the Baltics unpredictable. Also, it is obvious that the Baltics will not conduct any strict immigration policies on Ukrainian nationalism. The Baltic countries need an urgent “boost” to their population, because the demographic situation in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania is unsatisfactory. Due to this, the risks for national minorities in the Baltics, and foremost, the Russian-speaking minority, in becoming the targets for the exported internal policy practices, currently seen in Ukraine, are increasing exponentially.

Further information on this can be found in the report “‘Ukrainization’ of the Baltics: An Export of Political practices.”

<http://info@rubaltic.ru>

<http://www.rubaltic.ru>