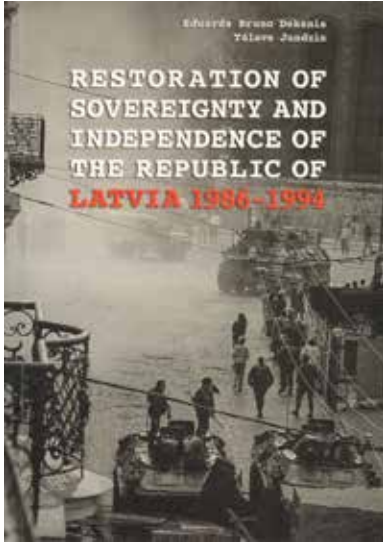


RESTORATION OF SOVEREIGNTY AND INDEPENDENCE OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA 1986–1994



Restoration of sovereignty and independence of the Republic of Latvia 1986–1994

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This review is perspectival. The review's meanings of "perspective" derive from the philosophy of Ronald Giere (*Scientific Perspectivism*, 2006). The reviewed volume (RSIRL from now on) or this review contain two perspectives on historiography. The first is biographical. The other is methodological with application to the restoration of the independence of Baltic States.

The biographic perspective of the book's first author is that of a Latvian exile born in Germany, educated in North America and the United Kingdom, a doctor of applied mathematics, a retired scientist and administrator with the European Commission, and a researcher of Latvian identity and European integration. The second author's perspective is that of a native Latvian, a doctor of political

science and of law, a prominent participant in the restoration history of RSIRL, an author, editor, and contributor to a dozen and half other works on restoration. The reviewer's perspective is that of a Latvia-born American exile, a chemistry doctor, a history-of-science teacher, a former member of BATUN (Baltic Appeal To UN lobbied at the UN against Soviet occupation of the Baltic States), a retired Latvian diplomat at the UN, and a co-author of a historiography-in-progress of BATUN. (The two authors have sought and received the reviewer's assistance with documents on nonviolent resistance against Soviet occupation.)

The historiography of the restoration of the sovereignty and independence of Latvia, 1986–1994, is an industry that since the

early 1990s has produced many proceedings of scholarly conferences, and other collections of scholarly articles, reminiscences, and documents, as well as volumes on the juridical or other aspects of the restoration. The volume under review is the first scholarly book-length survey of the restoration in Latvia.

The authors tell their restoration history in two hundred pages that are divided into eleven chapters containing text and sixty photographs. The photographs are conveniently located within the relevant text. A second convenience is footnotes, easier to access than endnotes. The over 270 footnotes refer to numerous informative Latvian and foreign primary and secondary sources, many found on the web. The authors note one foreign source in particular: the George Bush Presidential Library.

Around three-fifths of the text covers domestic restoration events and policies, one fifth — restoration-promoting international relations and negotiations. Well over a tenth — the restoration role of Latvian exiles in the West. The rest is the introductory and concluding chapters that provide a condensed version and a foreign context of the restoration history.

Of the remaining nine chapters the first three cover 1987–May 1990 public activities that ended in a declaration on the independence of Latvia. In circumstances where many Latvians feared that they were soon to become a minority in their own country, the year 1987 saw the first public protests organized against historical injustices such as the deportations in June 1940. The protests grew into large meetings and demonstrations, the largest being the Baltic Way that protested the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact on 23 August 1989. In the previous October the Latvian Popular Front had been founded. Rather than a “legal approach” — ask the international community to end Soviet occupation of Latvia, the LPF decided in Oc-

tober 1989 to pursue full independence on the “parliamentary road”: LPF would gain independence through Soviet parliamentary institutions. After the successful March 1990 elections of the Supreme Soviet of the Latvian SSR, on 4 May the now pro-independence Soviet (from then on: Latvian Supreme Council) declared Latvia in transition to full independence under the authority of the 1922 Constitution of Latvia.

The next three chapters cover the transition period that ended on 21 August 1991 by decision of the Latvian Supreme Council. One chapter describes the dual governance in Latvia after the Supreme Council had appointed a pro-independence Government that had no power over Moscow-controlled institutions in Latvia, first of all the Soviet military. The Supreme Council’s and the Government’s limited power was in part due to Moscow’s dealing with both as normal Soviet institutions, except for condemning their pro-independence aspirations. The next chapter describes international relations during transition. The third chapter covers attempts to restore the rule of Communists/Moscow in Latvia.

Two chapters deal with post-restoration problems. The first chapter covers international relations and domestic governance during the post-restoration period that ended with the convocation of the Fifth Saeima on 6 July 1993. The Saeima is the parliament specified in the 1922 Constitution. The second chapter covers the negotiations on the withdrawal of the Russian, formerly Soviet, military stationed in Latvia and the withdrawal itself ending on 31 August 1994. Inserted between these two chapters is one on the role of Latvian exiles in restoration history. The chapter covers exile communities in the West starting with the end of World War II and ending in the early years of restored independence.

Beside the restoration history, the book includes a foreword, English translations of nine restoration documents issued in 1990

and 1991, a bibliography of foreign language sources predominantly in English and Russian, a sketch of the history of Latvians and Latvia for the foreign reader, a chronology of key events 1918–1999, and an index. The foreword is by medical doctor Georgs Andrejevs, a pro-independence politician during restoration and foreign minister of Latvia 1992–1994.

The reviewer sees two technical deficiencies in RSIRL. Adding subjects to the Index of persons would have made it more useful. The quality of the generally readable English suffers uneven editing. The readable English of the introductory chapter is now and then absent in subsequent chapters.

The reviewer's methodological perspective on history in general and that in RSIRL emerges from the evidence-and-analysis-supported conclusion that humanity's ignorance far exceeds its knowledge about the extremely complex world it lives in. The modern traditional history that Leopold von Ranke and others began in the 19th century is about a far simpler world. Its historiographies narrowly peruse written records as sources for a historical truth about a Hegelian world of wise men, nations, and states. Its "unlimited" truths ignore the vast ignorance about history outside its sources.

In recent decades alternate historiographical perspectives, more complex than the traditional one, have emerged. Two widely sourced examples that inspired the reviewer are big history that begins with the Big Bang (initiator: David Christian) and deep history that is about humans and their hominin ancestors before written records (initiator: Daniel Lord Smail, contributors: Andrew Shryock and others). The perspective used below models the Baltic restoration history as multi-causal hierarchies of stakeholders, of their human and material resources. The feedback causes are stakeholders' coinciding and conflicting self-interests, limits on their resources. The resulting multi-disciplinary

historiographies are provisional knowledge, dynamically bounded by known and unknown ignorance.

RSIRL is a traditional one-nation history from diverse Latvian and foreign written sources. It is strongest on restoration in Latvia and on Latvian political perspectives or interests. It could be a promising start for a broader historiographical effort to explain the unique Baltic restoration history 1988–1991.

A sketched model of restoration history follows. Future research could elaborate, modify, or reject the model. Compared to RSIRL, it has a wider range of stakeholders, it recognizes the self-interests of all stakeholders, and incorporates the stakeholders' resources; it is multi-causal. The model's particularly detailed description of West's role includes the reviewer's experiences.

The Estonian and Latvian popular fronts and the Lithuanian Sajudis led euphoria-motivated restoration movements that democratically pursued their simple interest, as identified in RSIRL (p. 67): at first true sovereignty within the USSR, from mid-1989 on — independence. The results of elections and referenda held 1989–1991 show that over two-thirds of Baltic States' residents were stakeholders in the movements. A stakeholder to varying degrees was a follower and a leader. The stakeholders formed a complex hierarchy — pure followers at the bottom and trusted, nearly pure political leaders at the top. In between were near-bottom to near-top leaders with diverse political, cultural, or technical functions. The euphoric movements produced far-from-perfect, yet reasonably stable, qualitative-enough and productive governments. After restoration the Baltic States became immature democracies. That this Baltic achievement was a difficult one is implied by the lesser successes of the former Soviet republics and the failures of the Arab Spring.

One cause of the movements' rapid success was access to the human and material

resources previously under the formal control of Soviet leaders.

The stakeholders acquired their basic human resources in the Soviet education system and developed them while working in Soviet educational, cultural, economic institutions. During restoration these resources were used for pro-independence goals. Restoration leaders came out of the formally Soviet creative unions and institutions of science. There were even top “bridgers” — Communist leaders of the Soviet republics such as Brazauskas, Gorbunovs, Rūitel. They bridged the Soviet-Baltic chasm and even became the heads of the renewed Baltic States.

The movements acquired considerable Soviet material resources. The movements' activities were carried out in Soviet buildings. They extensively used Soviet communication and transportation infrastructures. Even during the tense nine months from December 1990 on, the non-strategized, sporadic Soviet efforts to regain control of the resources had few successes.

Of primary significance was the movements' passage through two Soviet-generated bottlenecks. In June 1988, the 19th CPSU Congress decided to promote perestroika via largely free elections to Soviet legislative bodies and thus created the election bottleneck. The movements bravely began a long and complex passage through the bottleneck. They established the popular fronts/Sajudis that functioned as political parties. Against resistance by conservative Communists, they campaigned to elect legislative bodies that could pass pro-independence laws.

The failure of the August 1991 putsch created the second bottleneck that allowed a quick exit to full independence by means of the Baltic Supreme Councils' timely independence declarations. Hesitation at this time could have left Balts in the quagmire that was the on-off asymmetric “negotiations” with Moscow yielding an uncertain result, at best, conditional independence.

Also essential to Balts was deliberate support from within the Soviet Union. The Yeltsin-led sovereignty-then-independence movement helped protect the Balts against Soviet violence in 1991 when the interests of the Baltic and Yeltsin-led movements briefly coincided.

Western stakeholders were of secondary significance in restoration history. As did Yeltsin's movement, they also protected Balts against violence. They helped train Baltic officials, hosted Balts in international governmental fora, and recognized the renewed independence of the Baltic States. The secondary role was due to the limited non-violent resources they could deploy within the Baltic republics and to their large bouquet of global interests. Support for Baltic interests was secondary. A primary interest of the disarmament-oriented, nuclear-war-fearing United States and the rest of West was to avoid the violence and chaos in a collapsing Soviet Union that might lead to dangerous consequences, worst of all — nuclear weapons falling into the wrong hands. It helped that, as recognized in RSIRL (p. 217), Gorbachev was desperately seeking assistance from the West and therefore would not defy the West publicly. RSIRL describes (mostly on pp. 103–112) Western–Baltic relations during restoration history in an idealistic tone that is more judgmental about Western and even Baltic officials than elsewhere in RSIRL.

Given their secondary interest in Baltic restoration, Western governments arrived at a common Baltic policy late – after Lithuania's declaration of independence in March 1990. The policy was: discourage Soviet violence against Balts, who thereby gained space for developing the governance of Baltic States and negotiating agreements with USSR. The US and the European Community issued statements in March 1990 that urged negotiations as a nonviolent means to settle the differences between the Soviet Union and

Lithuania. Subsequent non-violence statements covered all three Baltic States. Non-violence was the common policy of Balts and the West.

Western governments' major violence-discouraging pro-actions supported Balts in three international fora. The first pro-action lasted from June 1990 to June 1991 when an ever-increasing number of Western governments repeatedly sought admittance of Balts as observers at meetings of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe. At some meetings Balts were seated as guests of Scandinavian or other countries. At the start of the Paris Summit of CSCE in November 1990 the pre-planned seating of Baltic Foreign Ministers as guests of France, the host country, encountered a last-moment ultimatum by Gorbachev: he will leave unless the Balts sit with the USSR delegation. The Balts would not sit with the USSR delegation. France followed its primary interest and responsibility for a successful Summit and apologetically disinvited the Baltic FMs. These events generated enormous publicity for the Balts at a press conference organized by Denmark and Iceland, a Latvian Independence Day reception attended by many European Prime and Foreign Ministers, and elsewhere. RSIRL (pp. 106–107) judges France's self-interested action as "an infamous example of Western perfidy".

The second pro-action, actually three separate bilateral pro-actions, grew out of Western contacts with Baltic homeland and exile representatives (briefly noted in RSIRL, p. 112). During 1990, it led to the establishment of host-financed Baltic proto-embassies or information bureaus in Stockholm, Copen-

hagen, and Brussels. The bureaus had information, training, and other roles in 1991 and after restoration.

The third, not in RSIRL, was the West's condemnation of Soviet violence in Vilnius and Riga in January 1991 at the annual session in February of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. Under pressure, Soviets unprecedentedly agreed to report to CHR the results of its investigation of the violence. The condemnation continued as a draft resolution at CHR's expert sub-commission in August, until the failure of the Moscow coup.

These Western pro-actions relieved the intergovernmentally inexperienced Baltic governments and their exile assistants from the need to develop their own initiatives.

A multi-disciplinary Baltic, even international team is needed to research this restoration model. Building a high-quality integrated research team will be a long-term effort that can learn from research/authors teams in the natural sciences. Multi-disciplinarity will produce historiographies with broadly interpretative perspectives based on many sources — diverse written, oral (as interviews of the hierarchy's stakeholders), visual ones, and more.

RISRL is a good achievement. It may inspire further educational historiographies that will yield lessons about Baltic survival in a historically dangerous neighborhood, including on how to sustain Baltic independence, a concern of RSIRL (p. 217).

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