



WEZEL, Katja. *Geschichte als Politikum. Lettland und die Aufarbeitung nach der Diktatur* (The Baltic Sea Region: Nordic Dimensions – European Perspectives, vol. 15). Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2016. – 324 S. ISBN 978-3-8305-3425-9

TÖNSMANN, Susanne. *What is Citizenship for? Citizenships and Naturalization in Latvia* (The Baltic Sea Region: Nordic Dimensions – European Perspectives, vol. 16). Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2017. – 218 pp. ISBN 978-3-8305-3595-9

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Two new monographs have appeared in the series of books published by the Northern Europe Institute (Nordeuropa-Institut) of Berlin Humboldt University. Both are revised versions of doctoral dissertations¹ focusing on the approach of contemporary Latvia to its past and its citizens.

Out of the often compared three Baltic republics, Latvia became the most multinational during the Soviet period: the proportion of ethnic Latvians fell from 75.5% recorded in the 1935 census, to 52% according to 1989 census data. Obviously, this is one of the reasons why Latvia has the most radical version of its restoration of statehood that was interrupted by the Soviet Union in 1940: not only was the validity of the 1922 constitution (the Satversme) restored in July 1993, but also citizenship was automatically given only to those people and their descendants who had Latvian citizenship before the intervention of the Soviet army on 17 June 1940, and were permanent residents of Latvia in 1991. In essence, this meant that Latvia has adopted the most rigorous laws regulating the integration of Soviet-period settlers into the restored state. All this seems to be a good reason to analyse Latvia as a case study, and to enquire about the consequences of the proclamation of the continuity of the 1918–1940 period of statehood, and the radical rejection of the 1940–1990 experience.

In her monograph, published in German, Katja Wezel has borrowed Edgar Wolfrum's title *Geschichte als Politikum*² for this analysis. The book does not address all aspects of the politics of history in contemporary Latvia. Rather, it is about coping with the Soviet legacy and the sovietisation of Latvia by legal and political means, which has led to a polarisation of society and remembrance cultures, portrayed by the author (albeit in a simplified way, but revealing the main tendencies), primarily as the division between

¹ Katja Wezel defended her dissertation in 2011 at Heidelberg University, Susanne Tönsmann a year later at Bremen University.

² WOLFRUM, Edgar. *Geschichte als Politikum – Geschichtspolitik. Internationale Forschungen zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Neue politische Literatur*, 1996, Jhg. 41, Hf. 3, S. 377–402.

the Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking parts of society, a division that was deepened even more by Latvian laws and the political course adopted after 1988–1991.

The book consists of an introduction, discussing what was known from previous studies, posing research questions, and describing the methodology and the concepts used in the work, four chapters, and some concluding remarks. The author begins her consideration by presenting the main actors in the politics of history. Distinguishing between internal and external actors, she lists among the internal actors the Communist Party elite and the nomenklatura of the Latvian SSR, the reformist movement of the perestroika period, Latvian political emigrés (who, apparently, can also be regarded as an external actor), the historic Russian-speaking community (primarily in Latgale), and the new Soviet settlers in Latvia. The external actors are, primarily, the United States and Russia. Having come to the conclusion that the nomenklatura and the Russian-speaking settlers from the Soviet period were removed from the stage of active politics of history after the changes of 1988–1991, in subsequent chapters, Wezel shows the Latvian path of 'returning' the nation to the development that was interrupted in 1940, and how much support this nation-building project has received from different groups of society. We see that, while Latvia tried to create a single communication milieu to involve the largest possible number of loyal people, these efforts encountered an alternative, the Russian-influenced communication milieu, in which the majority of Russian speakers, and especially those who did not automatically receive citizenship in the restored republic, remained. The differences between these milieus are shown not only by referring to the disputes over the meaning of the events of 1939–1949 (in Chapter Four), but also by discussing the means of transitional justice. According to the author, they include many issues related to naturalisation, the status of the Latvian language, and educational reform, along with the elimination of the consequences of sovietisation, such as the withdrawal of citizenship from part of the population, the return of private property, dissociation from communism, and its condemnation.

One of the main arguments in the book, repeated in several places, is the author's idea of a failed or jammed legal means of coming to terms with the Soviet past. According to Wezel, the limited possibilities in Latvia to apply prosecution or lustration, due to the complicated situation with Soviet documents and the emigration of part of the communist elites and nomenklatura from Latvia, has led to a concentration on political and symbolic means of coming to terms. They include the introduction in 1995 of a voting ban on all those who remained members of the Communist Party and its associated organisations after 13 January 1991; legislation on minorities, use of the official language and naturalisation; and laws that sought to re-educate part of society through the historical narrative, to turn Soviet citizens into loyal Latvians through inclusion in Latvian culture, communicated by the Latvian language. To some

extent, continuing the efforts by Eva-Clarita Onken (now Pettai) to reflect on the Latvian case,³ and revising her arguments and predictions published in 2003 about the possibility for Latvia to pursue a pluralistic politics of history, and to become a mediator between the European Union and Russia, Wezel looks at Latvia's approach to its Soviet past and to part of its residents who are identified with this past, from a greater distance. Unsurprisingly, this distance, along with the achievements of inclusion, shows a deepening polarisation in Latvian society, the turning of Latvian politics of history into the antithesis of Russia, and Latvia's attempts to consolidate its concept of history at the EU level by referring the disputes to Brussels and Moscow.

One explanation why all this has happened can be found in Susanne Tönsmann's study, which reveals the importance of citizenship and naturalisation factors in the Latvian nation-building process. As we know, in October 1991, Latvia declared naturalisation as a means to integrate some of the Soviet-period immigrants, and established fundamental principles for naturalisation and categories of people to whom it was not planned to grant Latvian citizenship. They included criminals, individuals who had turned against the Latvian state, former Soviet troops who chose Latvia as their place of residence after demobilisation from the USSR's armed forces, and members of the Communist Party of the USSR and the Komsomol (Communist Youth) organisation who were sent to Latvia after the 1940 occupation. All of this was specified even more in the Law on Citizenship that was passed in June 1994. However, the naturalisation that the Latvian authorities hoped for was slow, and involved relatively small contingents of the population. This was for complex reasons: the fundamental principles for naturalisation required that those who wished to acquire Latvian citizenship should take an oath of loyalty to the Republic of Latvia, know the basic principles of the Constitution, and be fluent in the Latvian language (which many Russian speakers had no need to learn during the Soviet period). Since 1994, they have also included knowing the history of Latvia (the particular narrative that was officially defended in Latvia after 1991, of course). In addition, the Latvian Supreme Council Resolution of 15 October 1991 did not meet the expectations of some Russian-speaking Latvians, which earlier on 3 March that year had supported independence in the plebiscite, after hearing repeated promises that all permanent residents of Latvia would become citizens of the restored Republic of Latvia. The law passed by the Latvian Saeima in April 1995, which established the special status of non-citizens (*nepilsoņi*) for former citizens of the USSR who did not choose citizenship of Latvia or any other country, was, in fact, recognition of the scale and the essence of the problem. The Latvian authorities had to admit that hundreds of thousands of permanent residents (about a third of the population) do

³ ONKEN, Eva-Clarita. *Demokratisierung der Geschichte in Lettland. Staatsbürgerliches Bewußtsein und Geschichtspolitik im ersten Jahrzehnt der Unabhängigkeit*. Hamburg, 2003.

not seek naturalisation at all, and to somehow define their legal status. Tönsmann's book, based on the Latvian example, raises the question why people who are given the opportunity to naturalise do not do so, and why, on the other hand, it is not in the government's interest to turn permanent residents into citizens of the country.

This contribution to the political sciences, which is comprehensible and has a well-thought-out structure, consists of theoretical, empirical and concluding parts. In the theoretical part, which includes the first five chapters, the author formulates the problem, discusses the contents of the concept of citizenship, and explains her questions, methods and approach to the phenomena of citizenship and naturalisation. Chapters 6 to 8 cover the results of the empirical analysis. They explain the role that rights, membership and duties have in the content of the concept of citizenship. The role of these factors determining the possession of citizenship is examined from two perspectives: that of the Latvian authorities, and the people who are eligible for naturalisation. Chapters 9 to 11 sum up the study. One of the author's conclusions here is that the method of naturalisation chosen by the Latvian authorities has become not only a way of acquiring citizenship, but also a reason for not acquiring it, a factor reducing the motivation to become a Latvian citizen.

Wezel and Tönsmann deal with issues that are not fundamentally new or have not yet been addressed by previous authors. However, both books are primarily valuable as in-depth case studies of Latvia. Wezel only puts the emphasis on showing Latvia in the wider context of post-socialist and post-Soviet countries at the end of the book. It is not clear, however, what the author's sources are for the comparison and the statements that follow on from it. Some of the claims seem a bit exaggerated, or at least contentious. For instance, Wezel argues that in Latvia, 'occupation' has become a much more important slogan to define foreign communist rule than in Lithuania and Estonia (p. 269). I have no doubt that if the author had a better knowledge of the Lithuanian and Estonian contexts, she would retract this statement. The systems of meanings related to the concepts of 'occupation' and 'genocide' seem to be quite similar in these countries. Their public use in order to break the Soviet continuity and show the foreign nature of Soviet rule is characteristic of Estonia and Lithuania as well.

Tönsmann also sometimes yields to the temptation to compare Latvia with other countries. In the introduction, however, she explains convincingly why she concentrates on Latvia. In addition, the lack of an empirical context in her book is to some extent balanced by the broad theoretical context. In fact, the strength of her book derives from the aim, based on the Latvian case, to challenge stereotypes and established truths about citizenship and naturalisation as a means of acquiring citizenship, and to include the case of Latvia in debates about the nature of naturalisation and citizenship: what their purpose is, and how one engages to seek naturalisation and become a citizen.

Although the authors have different approaches, both books together allow us to take a fresh look at the modern Latvian nation-building process, the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, to look at the same phenomenon from different perspectives, and to try to understand the motives behind the actions. The answers provided by Wezel and Tönsmann will inevitably be returned to, both when explaining the further course of the nation-building process in the contemporary Baltics, and when deepening the analysis of issues already addressed by the two authors.