
The Peculiarities of the Baltic States' Political Situation

On December 6, 2011, **Edvardas Špokas**, professor of geopolitics at the Political Science Department of Mykolas Römeris University in Vilnius, delivered a lecture at the Faculty of Political Science "Roberto Ruffilli" in Forlì in the framework of the Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Research and Studies on Eastern Europe (MIREES).

The lecture "**The Peculiarities of the Baltic States' Geopolitical Situation**" focused on contemporary geopolitical situation of the Baltic states. The speaker analyzed the situation of the Baltic states in the analytical framework of general geopolitical theory.

Introducing the topic, the guest invited the public to a debate on identifying regions. Different geographical and symbolic definitions of Europe were discussed.

Proceeding to the **Baltic region** and its states, the guest raised the question of the Baltic political and security landscape. In this regard, he discussed Russia's position, interaction between the West and the East, transatlantic security arrangements, the Baltic states' relations with Belarus, infrastructural projects and energy security policies.



The **Baltic security dilemma** was given a special attention during the lecture. The Baltic defense cooperation, issues of military neutrality and transatlantic orientation of the Baltic states were discussed. The speaker paid particular attention to sea boarder disputes, related to economic interests (oil, fishing rights, etc.). He also argued that contemporary security and foreign politics of the Baltic States seem to be similar.

Power dependency was another fundamental issue discussed during the lecture. The guest assessed the high degree of institutionalization in the Baltic region as a positive feature,

whereas the weakness of a common self-image and self-identity of the Baltic region states was named as a negative one.

A particular attention was paid to the relations between the Baltic states and Poland, Russia and the Nordic states. **Policy visions** of different countries were presented. Thus, from the Polish perspective, issues characteristic of the Baltic region include its counterbalance against Russia, a formal strategy partnership, ethnic minority-related disputes and common strategy projects. In Russia's view, the Baltic states are connected by regional cooperation, neighborhood relations, problems related to the Kaliningrad region, minority problems in Latvia and Estonia and economic diplomacy (natural gas and oil resources). Finally, the Baltic and the Nordic states are united by geopolitics and economical investments.

Summing up the peculiarities of the Baltic region, the speaker presented his vision of numerous common features of the Baltic states: bordering on the Baltic Sea, common values (except Russia), Western orientation (except Russia), common 'soft threats' and common history embodied in 'the Baltic Way'. On the other hand, numerous differences between these countries

were named, including different aspects of history, geopolitics, values, foreign policy and the problem of regional leadership. In conclusion, the guest identified **three main problems** of the Baltic region: dependence on Russia's policy, the cooperation between Poland and Germany as a problem of confidence in region and the weakness of self-image and self-identification of the Baltic region states.

During a lively discussion following the lecture, many more questions were raised and debated with interest.

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