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Between the Address and the Struggle for Belonging: Russian Diaspora in the Baltic

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Master's in International Studies

Supervisor:

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September, 2025



SOCIOLOGIA
E POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS

Department of History

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RESUMO

Esta pesquisa estuda a minoria russa nos países Bálticos, tentando compreender o impacto da guerra da Ucrânia de 2022 nesta comunidade diaspórica e como a conjuntura atual, em conjunto com raízes históricas e configurações políticas e sociais específicas, moldam a identidade nacional das minorias russas na região. Este trabalho foi executado a partir de uma análise qualitativa que evidencia a vulnerabilidade política e social da minoria russa na Estônia, Letônia e Lituânia. Nesse sentido, foram analisados fatores essenciais para o desenvolvimento da pesquisa, como a mobilização e capacidade de ação sociopolítica da minoria russa, considerando sua posição em relação aos Estados soberanos onde residem, os quais se encontram muitas vezes em conflito com a Rússia em um contexto internacional turbulento. Desta forma, tenta-se entender porque a minoria russa se encontra em uma posição periclitante na afirmação de uma identidade coletiva autônoma no contexto de Estados-nacionais que se vêem ameaçados por aquela que consideram sua pátria mãe.

Palavras-chave: Minorias; Rússia; Báltico; Identidade Coletiva; Ucrânia

ABSTRACT

This research consists of a study of the Russian minority in the Baltic countries. It aims to understand the impact of the 2022 war in Ukraine on this diasporic community, relating the current situation to several historical roots existing between the actors that create an intriguing scenario. This was carried out based on a qualitative analysis that highlights the vulnerable situation of the Russian minority in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. In this sense, essential factors for the development of the research were analyzed, such as the capacity for sociopolitical action of the Russian minority, considering their position in relation to the sovereign states where they reside, which reject their state of origin in a turbulent international context. In this way, an investigative result can be established that understands why the Russian minority finds itself in a precarious position, which is influenced by external factors and has an interesting panorama regarding its representation and identity in the Baltic.

Keywords: Minority; Russia; Baltics; Identity; Ukraine

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1- INTRODUCTION

The international landscape is undergoing a period of intense turbulence. Perhaps not since the 1940s have international analysts faced a scenario as volatile as the present state of world affairs and international alignments. After several decades of peace that almost completely erased from European society the spectrum of bloodshed, the first half of the 2020s saw Europe once again engulfed in a war culminating severe ethnic conflicts and widespread human and material destruction that are leaving an enduring mark on the continent.

Throughout the approximately 80 years that separate the end of the Second World War and the outbreak of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, various issues have emerged that in some ways connect the two moments. Among these, territorial disputes, changes in ethnic composition in various nation-states, state disintegration and the redrawing of the European political map, and, more important to the focus of this work, the persistence of identity conflicts shaping past and ongoing tensions across the European continent, especially in its eastern part.

These challenges are particularly evident in the largest military conflict in the European continent since World War II: the escalation of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine with the military operations initiated by the former in February 2022, which remains ongoing at the time of this thesis's completion (September 2025). The current war in Ukraine serves as a stark representation of unresolved social and political fractures that European leaders overlooked in the last decades, ultimately escalating into a full-scale conflict that has sent shockwaves across the continent and the world, reigniting deeply rooted divergences that remained unaddressed.

One issue closely intertwined with the historical and current dynamics of the war in Ukraine, is the status of the Russian minority in the Baltic States, a European region in close proximity to the conflict, in geographical, political and social terms. Much like the Ukrainians, the Baltic populations have long endured the pervasive influence of the Russian state, which they tend to perceive as a threat to their sovereignty and the maintenance of their national identity. In this sense, the interconnectedness of the situation of the Baltic states and their Russian minority, Russia's relationship with Ukraine and the international affairs of Europe as a whole, presents a compelling case study that encapsulates the dynamics of national identities, state building and independent sovereignty and the turbulence of the current international landscape.

Thus, this research aims to explore the question of how are the Russian minorities in the Baltic States affected by the outbreak of the 2022 war in Ukraine? By delving into historical, social, and political dimensions, this study seeks to explore how minority national identities in post-soviet eastern Europe continue to mark the social and political landscapes of Europe and especially the newly formed eastern European nation-states and the relevance of national identities in understanding the broader instability of the contemporary international order.

1.1 Goals and Research Question:

The main goal of this study is to understand the position of the Russian minority in the political life and society of the Baltic States, addressing the mobilization of the group into common action in the face of the turbulent international situation that directly influences them. Not only the mobilization of the group into common action in the face of the turbulent international situation that affects the diaspora, but also their perceptions, identity struggles, and patterns of social and political representation.

For secondary objectives, it is sought to comprehend the historical roots of the minority national identities existing in today's Baltic region and observe the complex international relations arising from the existing dilemma of group identity in those nation-states. To examine how an event that occurs outside of a country's territorial border, in this case the Russian invasion of Ukraine, can significantly influence society and politics at a regional level. Finally, to identify how the international context influences the identity and vulnerability of a national minority in the diaspora.

The research question of this work is to explore how the Russian Minorities in the Baltic States were impacted by the outbreak of the 2022 war in Ukraine. It is aimed to identify how the Russian minority in the Baltic states positions itself within the context of the confrontation between Russia and Ukraine and how the politics and society views of the countries in which they live impacted their existence and identity as a group. Therefore, the hypothesis guiding this study is that after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, in 2022, the Baltic States due to historical reasons increasingly identify Russia as a threat to their integrity and sovereignty. As a consequence of this, the significant Russian minority living in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania is severely socially and politically impacted. Moreover, Baltic national governments promoted changes in the political and social representation of the minority group in order to counter the Russian influence in their own countries.

1.2 Literature Review

The core methodological approach of this research is qualitative, relying on both primary and secondary sources. This choice was made based on the understanding that such an approach would offer the most appropriate framework for examining the experienced realities of the Russian minority in the Baltic States. Accordingly, significant and gradual effort was executed to identify the elements most compatible with a content analysis strategy that would keep the research focused and coherent.

Before delving into the substantive works that frame this research, it is worth clarifying the process of selecting the literature mobilized and discussed in this work. The first two chapters of this study rely primarily on secondary sources. This selection was not arbitrary but facilitated by the author's prior academic engagement with related subjects, as well as personal experiences, most notably an academic exchange in Estonia at Tallinn University during the second half of 2021. Although this period preceded the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, it provided valuable empirical exposure to the local context and sparked a deeper interest in understanding the position of the Russian minority in the Baltic region.

The literature concerning Russian minorities in the Baltic States and their political, social, and cultural positioning is multifaceted, combining historical analyses, sociological perspectives, and theoretical frameworks in international relations. The study of these groups has long been tied to broader discussions on identity, memory, and the geopolitics of the post-Soviet space. It is sought to highlight the main works that constitute the backbone of this research, evidencing their contributions, complementarities, and limitations, while situating the study within the existing academic debate.

From a historical perspective, the works of Andres Kasekamp and Andrejs Plakans are fundamental to understand social and cultural divisions within the Baltic region. Kasekamp's *A History of the Baltic States* (2010) provides a comprehensive narrative of the region, tracing the social and political development of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, including the emergence of large Russian-speaking minorities during the Soviet period. His account is indispensable in clarifying how the legacies of Soviet demographic engineering continue to shape current debates on citizenship and national belonging. Complementing this, Plakans' *A Concise History of the Baltic States* (2012) expands on similar themes but pays closer attention to the arduous history of the Baltics, showing how repeated occupations and shifting borders created layered identities and contested narratives of belonging. Together,

these works supply the essential historical foundation for understanding the present-day position of Russian minorities, while leaving space for complementary analysis on contemporary developments.

The historical dimension also benefits from works addressing the Soviet era and its legacies, particularly in terms of identity and memory politics. Timothy Snyder's *Black Earth* (2015) offers insight into how memory and history intersect in shaping modern political identities in Eastern Europe. While not specifically about the Baltic States, Snyder's study on memory politics are highly relevant for understanding how the Russian minority is often perceived through the prism of historical trauma, occupation, and the Soviet legacy.

The enduring linkage between the Russian Federation and ethnic Russians abroad is informed by these deeper historical memories, which frame the minority not only as a domestic issue but also as a perceived geopolitical risk. Gerner and Hedlund's *The Baltic States and the End of the Soviet Empire* (2018) further reinforces this perspective, documenting how independence struggles were marked by identity polarization and by a strong drive to distance the newly independent states from Moscow. This provides context for why Russian minorities remain in an ambivalent position, simultaneously distanced from Russia yet not fully integrated into Baltic national projects.

Moving from historical foundations to theoretical perspectives, constructivist thought in international relations plays a central role in framing the analysis of this dissertation. Alexander Wendt's seminal works, *Anarchy is What States Make of It* (1992) and *Collective Identity Formation and the International State* (1994), provide key conceptual tools for understanding how identities are socially constructed rather than fixed. This approach is particularly useful for analyzing diasporas and minority groups whose identities are negotiated between multiple national narratives. Constructivism helps uncover how the Baltic States' strong identification against Russia influences not only foreign policy but also domestic policies toward Russian-speaking minorities. Thus, its emphasis on socially constructed identities is especially pertinent here, as it allows for the analysis of not only state policies but also the subjective experiences of minority populations.

In more recent scholarship, particular attention has been given to how the Russian-speaking minority has responded to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. A noteworthy contribution in this regard is Māris Andžāns' article *Do Baltic Russian Speakers Blame Russia for the War in Ukraine?* (2024), published by the Foreign Policy Research Institute. Based on survey data, this study provides valuable empirical insight into the diversity of opinions within the Russian-speaking communities of the Baltic States. It

confronts an assumption that Russian minorities support Moscow's actions, instead showing a more nuanced picture in which generational differences, language use, and local political integration play decisive roles.

At the intersection of historical memory, identity construction, and current geopolitical conflict, the reviewed literature highlights both strengths and points of continuity. The historical works (Kasekamp, Plakans, Snyder, Gerner & Hedlund) provide indispensable background, while theoretical literature (Wendt and constructivist thought more broadly) equips the study with tools for understanding the dynamics of identity and otherness. More recent empirical contributions, such as Andžāns (2024), help to complement these perspectives by illuminating how Russian minorities themselves perceive current events.

This heterogeneous literature helps the understanding that the study of Russian minorities in the Baltic States cannot be reduced to a single dimension. It requires a multi-perspective approach that incorporates history, identity, memory, and international relations, and that is complemented by empirical evidence drawn from the present context. The existing scholarship has laid a strong foundation for this, but important questions remain regarding the perceptions of minority groups, the effects of state actions, and the implications of the ongoing war in Ukraine for European security. By drawing on both secondary and primary sources, this dissertation contributes to filling this space, presenting the Russian minority not only as an object of geopolitical contention but as active agents navigating a complex and evolving political and social environment.

1.3 Methodology

The methodological framework of this research is primarily qualitative, grounded in both primary and secondary sources. This approach was selected as it provides the most suitable means for exploring the complex social and political realities of the Russian minority in the Baltic States, allowing for an in-depth understanding of identity construction, political participation, and societal positioning. Building on the insights from the literature review, the methodology seeks to translate conceptual and historical analyses into empirically informed observations, bridging theoretical perspectives with tangible contemporary evidence.

This dissertation will also make use of a set of primary sources, including opinion polls, official census data, and policy actions taken by the Baltic States to provide an updated and empirically grounded account of the current situation. In this way, the analysis will not be limited to secondary literature but will integrate first-hand observations that directly capture

the evolving political and social landscape of Russian minorities. Among these primary sources are joint diplomatic statements and actions issued by the Baltic States in response to the war in Ukraine, which underline their unified stance of support for Ukraine and condemnation of Russian aggression.

For the primary sources, their selection was a more gradual and laborious process, refined as the research evolved. Before settling on the sources that will be detailed below, there was a broader attempt to explore a range of materials. Ultimately, the final selection prioritized those that most accurately reflected the condition of the Russian minority and allowed for a rigorous academic representation of their current situation. For instance, an initial aim was to identify online expressions of Russian minority communities in the Baltics reacting to their increasingly precarious condition. However, this proved to be challenging due to the limited online visibility of Baltic Russians (a noteworthy finding in itself) and the difficulty of accessing more restricted platforms such as Telegram, which often require advanced language skills and domestic familiarity.

The research design follows a content analysis strategy, oriented toward identifying patterns, themes, and narratives across a variety of textual and documented sources. This strategy enables a coherent examination of the Russian minority's position without oversimplifying the multifaceted interplay between identity, political behavior, and state policies.

In this sense, primary sources were selected with particular attention to their capacity to capture both the state-level actions and the experiences of minority communities. A set of joint diplomatic statements and actions issued by the Baltic States in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine constitute one major set of sources. These documents provide insight into official positions, highlighting the political alignment of the Baltic States and offering a backdrop against which minority responses can be assessed. Another essential source is the electoral results of the Latvian parliamentary elections of October 2022, held after the war's outbreak. These results enable the analysis of political participation and minority representation, shedding light on the ways in which Russian speakers navigate domestic political structures during periods of heightened international tension.

Additional primary sources include opinion polls and census data, which allow for a more granular understanding of public perceptions, political preferences, and socio-demographic characteristics within the Russian-speaking population. These sources are particularly valuable in capturing the ongoing dynamics of minority integration, attitudes toward both local and international actors, and the broader implications of recent geopolitical

developments. The combination of official statements, electoral data, surveys, and census statistics provides a multi-layered empirical foundation, ensuring that the study moves beyond theoretical speculation to a rigorous, evidence-based analysis.

The selection of secondary sources for methodological guidance was highlighted by a review of qualitative research frameworks in historical and social studies. As shown in the literature review, by integrating documented content analysis with constructivist theoretical perspectives, the study aims to achieve consistency between theoretical constructs and empirical exploration.

Hence, the methodology of this research combines qualitative content analysis, carefully selected primary sources, and theoretical guidance from constructivist literature to provide a comprehensive framework for examining the Russian minority in the Baltic States. By bridging historical, identity-based, and political perspectives with empirically grounded evidence, it ensures that the study addresses both conceptual and real-world dimensions of the research problem in a coherent and methodologically rigorous manner.

1.4 Thesis Structure

This work is structured into three main chapters, followed by a concluding section. It is organized around historical, social, and political dimensions, which are essential for understanding the position of Russian minorities in the Baltic States and the effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on their public representation and political engagement.

The first chapter examines the historical development of Russian minorities in the region. It traces demographic and political factors that led to the formation of a distinct Russian-speaking minority, highlighting the legacies of occupation, Soviet migration policies, and early post-independence state-building measures. This historical context provides the foundation for understanding contemporary social and political dynamics.

The second chapter focuses on the social formation of the Russian minority. It explores demographic patterns, cultural markers, and elements contributing to community cohesion, such as language and education, as well as challenges such as social tension and restrictive legislation in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. This analysis links historical developments to the political realities discussed in the following chapter.

The third chapter integrates historical and social perspectives to analyze the minority's current political participation. It considers electoral behavior, representation, and engagement with state policies, using both secondary literature and primary sources such as opinion polls,

official statements, and election data. This chapter highlights the interplay between identity, political agency, and external geopolitical pressures, particularly in the context of the war in Ukraine.

Finally, the concluding section synthesizes the findings, reflecting on implications for theories of identity, minority politics, and international relations. It situates the study within broader academic debates while suggesting avenues for future research. Overall, the thesis structure conjectures a coherent progression from contextual foundations to empirical and theoretical analysis, offering a comprehensive understanding of the Russian minority in the Baltic States.

2- THE RUSSIAN PRESENCE IN THE BALTIC REGION

This chapter intends to historically introduce the presence of Russians in the Baltic region. To understand the group identity and public mobilization of the Russian minority in the region it is important to introduce the historical process of how such a presence was socially, politically and economically formed and developed over the years. The aim is to obtain a historical summary highlighting the main points of development, which in a certain way still influence how Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania states position themselves today in face of demographically, socially and politically relevant Russian minorities in their national territories.

2.1 The enduring lack of independence in the Baltics and the beginning of the Russian presence

With the dawn of the Medieval Age, starting in the 5th century, a general feeling of belonging to the territory began to be more present in Europe. During this period, the continent was in an important position in human and social development activities. Initially, focusing on Feudalism¹ as a social-political regime, and ultimately resulted in the creation of a state apparatus that formed the concepts of nation and empire (Plakans, 2012, p. 53).

There are many examples of European territories that, in the second half of the Medieval era, gradually consolidated into independent states, such as France in Western Europe, Spain and Portugal in the Iberian Peninsula and Russia in Eastern Europe. However, there were regions where there was a constant change of different social groups gaining control of different territories. The Baltic region is a prominent example of such processes, marked by a continuous flow of competing political influences shaping its unique social and cultural fabric. Historically, this region has served as a crossroads where local populations have long interacted with, and been shaped by various influential actors, with a notable example being the Russian. This dynamic civilizational development makes the Baltic region, and the modern countries within it, a compelling subject for a chronological analysis of the Russian presence in this region (Plakans, 2012, p. 68).

¹ Feudalism was the predominant system of social-political governance in Europe from the 9th to the 15th century. It consisted in a hierarchical rural system with a lord ruling the land and vassals following its lead (Merriam-Webster, 2024)

Therefore, the Baltic region - currently composed of three independent nation-States²: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania - is an intriguing location to analyze when faced with the discussed context of European historical nation-state formation in the continent. Considering that the first political independent formation that fully represented the people living in this region was only established in the 20th century, after the end of the First World War, it is relevant to question the evolution of group identity and political influence in the region. Historians and other social scientists tend to agree that Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians faced a history of political underrepresentation that lasted centuries. Thus, this sub-chapter aims to identify how and why the people living in the present-day Baltic states have constantly struggled to achieve sovereignty, while the region was always marked by the presence of prominent and influential foreign groups, being the most notable, the Russians (Kasekamp, 2010).

With this in mind, in order to dig deeper into the development of the three States in the Baltic Region, it is important to note some factors that made up this region before the formation of the eventual independent States. First of all, we should consider that it was one of the last to be integrated to the European continent, and due to this late development, it did not achieve a certain level of social-political statuses that began to emerge in European society during the medieval period. In terms of the religious beliefs, for example, in an European continent that became mostly Christian, the Baltic people were considered as "Europe's Last Pagans". The first interactions between the Baltic folk and the rest of the continent was precisely with the religious crusades, in which armies traveled to present-day Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania seeking to Christianize the people living in this region (Kasekamp, 2010, p. 11).

Over time, the politics of the region developed into three European powers exerting influence in the Baltics: The Polish, The Swedes and, more importantly for this study, the Russians. Beyond diplomacy and warfare, there was also one pivotal socio-cultural group which through intra-European migratory movements began to inhabit the region and gained political prominence in the upper class of the forming society: the Baltic Germans, whose presence, together with the influence of other powers, started to make it difficult for a consolidated group identity to emerge, whether in terms of language or in the political sphere (Kasekamp, 2010).

² Nation-States can be referred as a sovereign country that is populated by a homogenous large group consisting the same language, cultural, tradition and history (Cambridge Dictionary,2024)

By the the end of the Medieval Age and at the entrance in the early-modern era the Baltic was influenced by the three above-mentioned European powers, encompassed by an elite formed by ethnic Germans, with the Polish maintaining a commonwealth with Lithuania, the southernmost State of the Baltics and the Swedish possessing a substantial amount of what today equals to Latvia and Estonia. Alternatively, despite not having a concrete territorial possession in the region, the Russian State, under the leadership of the Tsar Peter I, ambitioned to expand westwards and eyed the Baltic as a region of opportunities (Plakans, 2012, p. 119).

This ultimately resulted in what was known as the Great Northern War, which lasted from 1700 to 1721 and culminated in a Russian victory against the polish and the swedes, solidifying the empire of Peter I, and especially its presence in the Baltic. Hence, despite the Baltic German elite still exerting political and economic influence in the region, the Russian State became the main landholder in the Baltics, with the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth rapidly diminishing culminating in a dissolution in 1795, and began its history of influence and exertion of forces against the Baltic People, something of fundamental value for this research and still relevant in current national identity of the Baltic nation-states (Plakans, 2012, p. 119).

In the aftermath of the war, the Russian Empire gained control over large extensions of Baltic territories for more than a century, precisely from 1795, when achieved total control of what is today Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, to 1918, when historical events that will be discussed further occurred and caused the first integral independence of the three Baltic States (Tulun, 2013, p.141).

During this period that lasted 123 years, political reforms and practices of colonization started to shape the Baltic societies into a Russian model and identity. These changes had different characteristics and were particularly significant in the area of agrarian reform, given that the Russian Empire sought an agricultural system that was favorable to the growth of the State as a whole, without giving much importance to the interests of the local peasantry. Russian reforms also impacted the religious sphere, with Orthodox Christianity, the religion of the Russian Empire, being imposed on the Baltic citizens, who, for the most part, followed other religious faiths connected to western European dogmas. Finally, it is worth mentioning the linguistic issue. In this respect so powerful in shaping group identities, the Russian Empire made a concrete effort to make the local population use Russian instead of their native languages (Tulun, 2013, p.142).

All these cultural and administrative changes being imposed on local populations by a regime and its personnel perceived as foreigner, gradually awakened in the local population of Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians a feeling of nationalism that was not so strong or present until the nineteenth century. Under imperial Russian rule, the values of Baltic populations were denigrated and subjected to mandates that came directly from Moscow. Therefore, the Baltic population developed a sense of belonging to its territory and their cultural roots. With the arrival of the 20th century, due to internal and external factors, an opportunity to gain political independence from the Russians emerged, something unprecedented in Baltic history that would bring key political and identitarian developments to be discussed in this work (Tulun, 2013, p.144).

2.2 The First Independence and the interwar period

In 1918, the end of the First World War constituted a window of opportunity for the Baltic community to seek independence through national sovereignty. Led by United States of America's president Woodrow Wilson who proclaimed right to national self-determination, the post-war international scene gave something unprecedented in the history of the people of the countries that today comprise Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania: the chance to be independent countries. Internally, this was only possible due to the weakening of the surrounding states, such as the Russian Empire after the war effort and the revolution of 1917. The historical change of power provoked a feeling of nationalism and group belonging, the European context of 1918 translated it into sovereign nation-states (Kasekamp, 2010, p.95). The Wilsonian moment³ was increasingly influential in society, triggering nationalist movements, fostering the reclaiming of sovereignty by previously marginalized peoples and paving the way for the establishment of new nation-states (Manela, 2007).

The First World War had ended in November of 1918 with the European continent heavily damaged and the German State defeated - which by its part maintained a close relationship with the local elites of the Baltic, given that a sense of nation was shared between them - defeated. However, the Baltic region was still subjugated to a conflict within its larger State, namely Russia, where a Revolution had broken out: the Russian Revolution. The Bolshevik revolution overthrew the Tsardom and led to a subsequent Civil War. With a

³ The Wilsonian moment refers to the global diffusion of the North-American president Woodrow Wilson's principle of national self-determination after World War I, which directly influenced the claims for sovereignty among Eastern European peoples following the collapse of defeated empires (Manela, 2007).

civil war with intense foreign intervention and the state extremely fragmented, nationalist leaders of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania saw a window of opportunity to achieve independence, a political process that developed between 1918 and 1920 (Kasekamp, 2010, p.100).

The process of independence of the three Baltic states can be divided into two distinct political processes: Estonia and Latvia on one side, and Lithuania on the other. In the case of the former, they had a similar development, in which a war was fought against the Bolshevik Red Army, the group that ultimately took control of what would become the new Russian State, with strong and decisive assistance from western European powers. Estonians and Latvians were especially helped by the United Kingdom, a European imperial power that emerged victorious from World War I and had the interest to diminish the power of competitor States such as Soviet Russia. There was a fear of Bolchevisation of Europe which played a key part in these dynamics. The role of the Baltic Germans elite was quite important in this moment, participating in the struggle for independence. Normally a conservative group, while initially they did not decisively take a stand in the conflict, they ultimately went against the Russian red menace (Kasekamp, 2010,p.102-103).

The case of Lithuanian independence presents specific characteristics. In this case, the country fought three separate wars between 1918 and 1920. It shows how external influence had a significant impact in Baltic politics and constitutes an important way of understanding why these countries feel their sovereignty threatened today (Kasekamp, 2010, p.104). The first conflict lasted from December 1918 to August 1919 and had the strong support of the Baltic Germans and resulted in a victory against the Russians. The second was in the final semester of 1919 and, surprisingly, the biggest enemy were the above-mentioned Baltic Germans, given that a group called the Bermothians fought against the Lithuanians. Bermothians had the sympathy of the German elites, wanted a German control of the region, but were swiftly defeated by a community identifying themselves as Lithuanians and not Germans or Russians. Finally, between May 1919 and November 1920, the Lithuanians also waged war against Poland due to territorial disputes, noting that these two nationalities had maintained a commonwealth state in the past that had lasted for centuries (Kasekamp, 2010, p.104). Again, distinct identities – Lithuanians and Polish – were at the core of the conflict.

This last war was the only one in which Lithuania lost territorial possessions, with great significance being the fact that in this first phase of Lithuanian independence its capital was not Vilnius, the current capital, but Kaunas, as the former city was taken by the Polish in the conflict (Kasekamp, 2010, p.104). This symbolizes the broader climate of instability and

contested borders across Eastern Europe in the aftermath of World War I, as newly formed states struggled to assert sovereignty amid the collapse of empires and competing nationalist claims.

After a turbulent process of independence, the subsequent period in which the Baltic countries had gained national sovereignty for the first time was also a very unstable period. Geographically speaking, the countries were positioned on a powder keg ready to explode. In the East, despite being defeated in the above-mentioned independence wars, the new iteration of the Russian State, the Soviet Union, was a looming threat to the Baltics, with a territorial reconquest being aimed by Moscow. In the West, the rapid growth of the new German State was also a threat to the young Baltic republics, especially after 1933, with the rise of Adolf Hitler to power and the development of an exclusionary German nationalist sentiment, powered by Nazism. This, in particular, represented a substantial issue in the Baltics: given the presence of the Baltic Germans ethnic group and the ambition to the *Lebensraum*, a united living space to all Germans and the exclusion of all other ethnicities, promoted by Nazi Germany (Kasekamp, 2010, p. 122).

With these latent threats, the three Baltic countries had difficulties developing socioeconomically, especially considering the world financial crisis of 1929 and Great Depression. Furthermore, the governments of these countries became increasingly authoritarian with the growing political risks coming from the Germans and the Soviets. At the dawn of the Second World War, the three countries were basically in a dictatorship (Plakans, 2012, p. 330).

The end of the first independence period of the Baltic countries was a treaty between precisely the two states that mostly threatened them. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, signed secretly between the Germans and the Soviets, in August 1939, determined a division of the lands in Eastern Europe between these two nations, with the Baltics falling into the sphere of the Soviet Union. (Snyder, 2015, p.130).

The Molotov-Ribbentrop treaty was, however, far from being a stabilizer factor in the region. On June 22, 1941, the agreement was broken. With the so-called Operation Barbarossa, the Germans took full military possession of the region. Under these conditions, measures were imposed by the Nazism regime that changed the populational composition of the Baltic states. The Baltic Germans, who had been an elite since the time of the Crusades, became a unified entity within the German Nazi regime and they either joined the German army or moved to parts where Germany had unquestionable territory control. In addition, the

Jews of the region (significantly demographically more present in Lithuania and Latvia than Estonia) suffered intensely from the Holocaust (Kasekamp, 2010, p. 140).

In the midst of this conflict, a paradigm that represented the social and political complexity of the Baltic region was fully visible. The Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians did not have a clear side to fight for in this conflict. The Soviets posed a real threat of territorial annexation and loss of sovereignty for a long-term basis, while on the other hand, the Germans practiced genocidal acts against different segments of the population in the region (Snyder, 2015, p.255).

Therefore, there were Baltic people fighting on both sides of the war, the German and Soviet, in a bloody period that ended the lives of hundreds of thousands of individuals, leaving a deep mark on the populations of the region. Ultimately, the victorious state in the Second World War in the Baltics was the Soviet Union, which managed to expel the Germans from the region and went on to exercise control over Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania for the next five decades. It can be argued that the subsequent period is the one that most impacted the current condition of the Russian minorities in the Baltics. Not only politically but also demographically, the period after 1945 was one when the Russian minority fully developed, and this fact will be analyzed in the next section.

2.3 Soviet Times and the “Russification” of the Baltic

As demonstrated above, the Baltic Region was a focal point in the confrontation between two totalitarian powers during the Second World War. This confrontation intensely impacted the social, cultural and political contours of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and left a deep mark on the society of these three nations. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the period following the Second World War brought more desolation and still deeply marks the historical memory of the Baltic societies and it is of utmost importance to examine national identities. During the Cold War (1945-1991) the Baltic fell under Soviet leadership, but historians have noted the increasing presence of a nationalist feeling built in opposition to the major representative of the Soviet Union: the Russians. (Plakans, 2012, p. 362).

When the Second World War ended (1945), the ethnic⁴ composition of the Baltics was the most homogeneous in its history, with all three countries having a considerable amount of

⁴ The ethnic composition of a certain group consists of a large group of people sharing a common sense of belonging to specific traditions and cultures that are shared between a community (*Ethnicity*, s.d.). In the case of the Baltic States, it can be pointed out three main local ethnicities, being Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian.

population coming from their own nationality (Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians). In fact, due to the massive deportation and extermination of former minority groups in the region, such as the Baltic Germans and Jews respectively, the population in the region had become more homogeneous than ever. However, this situation would not last long, given that the Soviet Union would change the ethnic composition of the Baltics, causing effects and debates that are still ongoing today (Tulun, 2013, pp. 145–147).

The period in which Josef Stalin, the soviet leader, started to take control of the Baltic in 1940, forced deportations of Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians began to be carried out by Soviet forces during and after the end of the second world war. These movements would result in the migration of millions of individuals from the Baltic to locations far from their origin in the vast Soviet territory, ending in forced labor camps known as Gulags. It is also important to note that the reason for deportation to these camps was usually justified on false grounds of conspiracies and subversive politics. Between 1940 and 1953, when Stalin's dictatorial rule came to an end, there were many people in the Baltics leaving their land in a forced manner (Brüggemann, 2017, p. 361).

In this sense, it should be noted that the mass deportations from the Baltic was a government strategy based on a comprehensively devised plan. In what was known as Operation Priboi, from March 1949 onwards the Soviet government aimed to stop local nationalist revolts against the regime. Another notable objective of Operation Priboi was to enforce the agrarian system of collectivization, one of the key dogmas of the Soviet rule that prioritized a State without private society or economy, with its people being highly dependent on governmental agencies. In this series of deportation it is estimated that approximately 3% of the Baltic population was sent to a location within the gigantic Soviet territory, noting that a considerable portion of these forced migrants were women and children (Kasekamp, 2010, p. 145-146).

In the midst of massive population deportations and change in ethnic composition in the Baltic states, it must be noted that there was a tremendous counter-flow of migration of Russians to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Something central to the argument of this chapter and this thesis overall is that the Russian minority has a long and strong presence in the region. Migration of Russians to the Baltic had already begun during the era of Russian Empire control over the Baltic territories, but ultimately got more intense when it emerged as a state strategy during the period of the Soviet Union. The Russification of the Baltics was thus part of the Soviet control and governance of the Baltic (Tulun, 2013, p.149).

We need, however, to discuss more thoroughly the term “Russification”. According to Weeks (2010), it is possible to observe three types of Russification: administrative, cultural and unplanned. The first refers to the measurements of centralization of the political Russian Rule, primarily present in the times of the Russian Empire but also present in the Soviet Union. The second consists in the practices of cultural assimilation of Russia into one entity, meaning that it was intended to create a common feeling of being Russian out of non-Russians, such as Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians. Finally, unplanned Russification is related to an assimilation of Russian values by non-Russian through a voluntary process, not necessarily by imposing norms and practices from above. This process would be more visible in further generations of Baltic people, who were born into a reality that the Russian culture was already a vital part of Baltic societies (Weeks, 2010).

Moreover, it is important to reiterate that when the Soviet Union took control of the region, it was not the first time that the Baltic States were in a position of satellite and submission to a state that held its centralizing power in Moscow. During the Russian Empire, which dominated the lands of the region from 1795 to 1918, there were significant administrative practices of Russification of the population, especially concerning the language used in state bureaucracy and in everyday life. Since the Russian was a symbol of governmental representation and was used mainly in state matters, the local population, who did not speak Russian in their everyday life, was thus excluded from holding positions of power and social status. In addition, during this period between the 17th and 19th centuries, there were practices imposed by the empire that overrode the will of the local population, especially in respect to agrarian economic activities. However, it is important to emphasize and compare that this primary process of Russification was not of such great magnitude when compared to what occurred during the Soviet period (Tulun, 2013, p.157).

The Russification of Baltic societies that occurred during the imperial period was more of an ideological nature and did not impose populational migration, a key issue when analyzing the Russification promoted by the Soviet Union. During the soviet period, large numbers of individuals of Russian origin migrated to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania with the intention of participating in industrial and agrarian development undertaken by the State and materializing a total transformation in the socio-economic composition of these three republics (Gerner & Hedlund, 2018).

Thus, in addition to the massive migration of Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians to places within the Soviet Union but far from the Baltic Region, there was also an influx of Russians into the region. As a result of these parallel movements the growing Russian

minority gradually became an inseparable component of Baltic societies. Stalin's plan was based on leaving the Soviet population at a certain homogeneous level, with the goal to avoid revolts in satellite republics. While promoting social and economic interconnectedness, the Soviet state was in fact defending its own political stability. It should be noted that during this period the migration of the Russian population into the Baltics was more present in the states of Estonia and Latvia - at one point these countries had the Russian population making up more than 30% of their inhabitants -, while in Lithuania this number did not exceed 10%, due to particular migration flows and industrial development. Nevertheless, the process of Russification was present in all three countries and is something that continues to mark the region, profoundly affecting life in the Baltic countries to this day (Kasekamp, 2010, p.146-155).

After 1953, with Stalin's death and the subsequent change of power in the Soviet Union, there was a considerable relaxation of the state policies in terms of forced migrations and population exchanges. However, these movements became an inseparable reality for the social configuration of the Baltics. The change in the population paradigm became something of relevant debate in Baltic society. Over time, a division was established in the Soviet Union between the population of local ethnic origin and the Russians who arrived due to the Soviet political control (Kasekamp, 2010, p.146-155).

Paradoxically, the soviets intensified in the Baltic something already discernible during the Russian imperial times: a feeling of nationalism was gradually growing within Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian populations, who, in a situation of political and social submission in which their culture was denigrated in favor of an all-encompassing Soviet-Russian ideal, begun engendering more strongly a common identity. Hence, with the dawn of the 1980s, external factors contributed to make decades of submission to a Russian-centered ideal increasingly unbearable. As a result of this, the Baltic states and their local national identities began to appeal in the direction of greater independence movements. This demand stood in stark contrast with the situation of the Russian minority that between 1953 and the 1980s became deeply rooted in these countries, establishing a sociocultural and political dynamic that became the study field of a wide range of scholars (Brüggemann, 2017, p. 361). This diasporic group, the Russians, came to represent the very antithesis of what Baltic nationalism sought to affirm. The phenomenon began to take hold of society and from the 1980s onwards the opportune occurred for the restoration of the independence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to take place (Kasekamp, 2010, p.146-155).

To give more context of the external factors that helped trigger the nationalistic movement in the Baltic we need to consider that the Soviet Union was a geographically and culturally very large political entity made up of 15 republics with distinct peoples, customs and languages. While it existed, it had the largest state territory in the world. A large-scale state with regular political and social turbulence like the Soviet Union would be unsustainable and this proved especially right from the dawn of the 1980s. Seeing its gradual growing weakness, the government in Moscow began to adopt policies of economic and social reform, such as Perestroika and Glasnost, with the aim of saving the Soviet Union from disintegration. These reforms ended up failing and demonstrations of desire for independence began to emerge in several republics, with the Baltic countries as pioneers in these contestation movements (Gerner & Hedlund, 2018).

In the latter part of the 1980s, the first mass demonstrations in favor of the independence of the Baltic countries began especially in Estonia. One of the forms of the population of this country to express politically was through music. A sense of belonging and identity associated with the land was established through local festivals and songs that emphasized Estonian identity, which had been very fragmented throughout history but grew through dissatisfaction with the soviet state. While more strictly connected with Estonia, the relationship between politics and music ended up naming this period for the whole Baltic Region, now known as the Singing Revolution. Multiple manifestations and protests for independence took place in the three Baltic states between 1986 and 1991, the year in which all had their independence restored (Gerner & Hedlund, 2018).

During the “Singing Revolution”, an event in 1989 marked the Baltics in the search for independences. In August of 1989, on the 50th anniversary of the fateful Molotov-Ribbentrop Treaty, a protest movement against Soviet control was organized with the participation of people from the future three independent states, something very significant . After the restoration of their independence onwards, the three Baltic states have maintained a very similar foreign policy, something foreshadowed by the articulated independence movements in the early 1990s . The event basically consisted in a human chain in which Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians joined together throughout the territorial extension of the region to form a chain holding hands and symbolizing that they were fed up with the Soviet regime and ready for a new era of political independence (Gerner & Hedlund, 2018).

After years of protest and struggle for sovereignty, the Baltic states restored their independence and were recognized internationally, with Lithuania having its restoration of

independence on March 11, 1990; Latvia on May 4, 1990 and Estonia on August 20, 1991; being the three Baltic republics pioneers in demonstrating dissatisfaction with the Russian-led Soviet Union (Gerner & Hedlund, 2018).

During the Baltics independence process, the rise of nationalism clashed significantly with the presence of a substantial Russian minority, whose ideals, practices, and customs had been firmly established during the Soviet era. While these processes of independence were largely pacific and unfolded without direct confrontation between the local populations and the Russian minority, an increasingly complex situation regarding this diasporic group began to emerge in the following years (Plakans, 2012, p. 386-401). The conflictual dynamic between the Baltic population, now independent and the Russian minority, shaped the formation of the contemporary Baltic states. Significant societal tensions warrant close analysis, particularly in relation to the social position and political representation of the Russian minority. It could be argued that this group does not fully identify as Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, nor entirely as Russian, but rather as post-Soviet, a category that presents an intriguing subject of analysis throughout the course of this research (Smith et al., 2018, pp.45-47).

Nonetheless, the independence brought the Baltic population much hope. Unlike the time when they first achieved full sovereignty, the Baltic states were facing a globalized world, with a much greater opportunity to prosper socio-economically. However, behind this there were also many challenges, mainly related to their population composition, given that the presence of the Russian population, which now saw itself in an unfavorable position, became a central point of debate (Plakans, 2012, p. 386-401). This dynamic leads to the last section of this chapter.

2.4 The New Baltics

For the first time in 52 years the Baltic countries found themselves in a position of full national sovereignty, something that resulted from nationalistic movements nurtured in these States that gradually grew with the dissatisfaction of the Soviet ideal. With a much different international context from the beginning of the 1920s, when Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania obtained their first independence, the beginning of the 1990s presented many opportunities to the citizens of these countries.

The optimistic outlook of the 1990s was helped by the international environment with the end of a long time of bipolarity and constant tension between the Soviet Union and

the United States of America ceding way to a period of capitalistic economic liberalization and globalization. A renowned example of this atmosphere is the work American political scientist Francis Fukuyama, who wrote the famous book “The End of History and the Last Man”, arguing that democracy reached a worldwide and human society accomplished what it seemed to be a final point of collective development, meaning that liberal democracy and western values were the final form of government for all States and no conflict of significant magnitude would appear in the future (Fukuyama, 1992). Fukuyama’s argument proved to be wrong but was and still is widely debated, nevertheless the fact is that a certain level of overestimated hope was hovering around the international environment, and this was evidently the case of the newly formed Baltic countries.

To establish their new form of governance, just like in the independence movement, the Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians sought a joint format, following the models of Western European countries, especially the Nordics such as Finland, Sweden and Denmark, which became a reference for the newly re-independent states. The three adopted a parliamentary liberal democracy and had their sights set on strengthening their ties with western Europe. However, behind this powder keg of hope and change were undeniable great obstacles from the past that the recently formed states had to deal with (Plakans, 2012, p. 404-418).

The main obstacle to these political reforms was the population demographic change caused by the Russian led Soviet Union. In these new nation-states, Russians that had initially moved to the Baltic region with the intention of maintaining strong connections with Soviet Russia, many who were already in their second generation living in the Baltic region, found it difficult to adjust to living in a country that repels connections with Russia. This group had incongruent customs with the local people of the Baltic region, who in turn were living a moment of nationalism dawn, with a major reason for this nationalist awakening being the massive presence of Russian culture looming under the Baltic Shadow (Plakans, 2012, p. 404-418). The new political elites of the recently reformed Baltic countries identified themselves as ethnically Estonian, Latvian, or Lithuanian, thus facing complex challenges regarding debates on how the Russian diaspora relates to cultural, linguistic, educational, ethnic, and social dynamics within these societies.

From another perspective, it is also important to highlight the geopolitical rationale that the Baltic countries' governments began to adopt from the 1990s onwards. Since the re-independence of the three countries, there has been a rapprochement with Western European political culture and, in a way, it can be said that Estonians, Latvians and

Lithuanians were opportunists and took advantage of an integrationist movement that existed on European identity after the dissolution of the Soviet bloc. Treaties of great importance, such as the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, created an international organization, the European Union, a continental entity that seeks to achieve the interests of European citizens as a whole, distancing their members from possible alternatives outside the axis, such as a rapprochement with Russia (Kasekamp, 2010, p.188-197).

Consequently, a desire to follow Western politics led the Baltic States to join the European Union in 2004. Once again this happened all three together, on May 1st. Furthermore, the EU was not the only international organization the Baltic countries joined that year. Perhaps the accession that most poignantly symbolizes how the Baltic countries position themselves geopolitically and how this is based in an anti-Russian ideal is their entrance into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This international defense organization is the main military alliance in the Western World, a symbol of the bipolarization of the Cold War and the organization that went against the Soviet led Warsaw Pact. By joining NATO, the Baltic countries clearly pointed to the severe change that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania imprinted on their foreign policy. Previously under Soviet military influence, they now joined an organization (NATO) that historically represented the Western military bloc in opposition to Moscow interests (Kasekamp, 2010, pp. 188–197)

After its independence, it was clear that the Baltic countries sought to get closer to a reality that stood in direct opposition to Russia, an approach that would inevitably strain their relations with Moscow (Gerner & Hedlund, 2018). Nevertheless, until the events of February 2022, this tension had never resulted in a complete rupture in diplomatic relations with Russia. It is crucial to emphasize that in 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a country which, like the Baltic states, was once part of the Soviet Union. The feeling that this could be something Russia could eventually do to the Baltic republics could not be more blatant. This sequence of events provides essential context for understanding the central focus of this research.

Thus, the central question arising from the historical evolution in the Baltic region is how a significant Russian minority, which needed to adapt to the new political reality after independence, reacted to these changes. Understanding that integrating this minority into the new national framework is a complex issue with multiple factors to consider. Perhaps the biggest being the contemporary Russian State itself and its actions, considering that, as will be observed in the following chapters, the Russian Federation, which has had Vladimir Putin as its head of state since 1999, carries out actions that threaten the Baltic States, creating

tensions between the local ethnic population of this region and the part of the population that identifies itself as Russian living in these nation-states.

Hence, the history of the Russian political, economic, social and cultural presence in the Baltic is very peculiar in the European historical context. A clustered location that throughout its history has remained under the influence of a regional hegemonic state with great power. With the rare exception of the interwar period, the political situation established after 1991 constitutes the first time that the Baltic population have achieved long-lasting sovereignty and independence of values. This independence, however, clashes with the people that identified themselves with the hegemonic power, maintaining an influence due to the reasons that marked the history of the Baltics and changed the population composition of the region. Especially when analyzing the issue of the Russians present in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, who for centuries have exerted influence in the region and are currently of security concerns for the functioning of sovereignty in the three countries. The next chapter will analyze in more depth the current situation of this minority, especially their cultural and social characteristics, understanding the obstacles present in the Baltic society and how external events can influence the diaspora dynamic.

3- THE CLASH BETWEEN THE BALTIC OFFSPRING IDENTITY AND RUSSIA

After a thorough analysis of the historical presence and the political, social, and economic roles of the Russian state in the Baltic region, it is possible to perceive the significance of the existing group identified as Russians within the Baltic populations that emerged as a result of broader socio-cultural dynamics. This presence gradually influenced various relationships in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania greatly affecting contemporary dynamics in the region.

Seeking to broaden the discussion focused on the Russian minority in the Baltics, this chapter intends to present a debate around the sociological characteristics of this group identity, exploring factors that shape the individuals in the Baltic, such as language, citizenship and so on. This will be done first by addressing a theoretical framework of international relations, i.e. the constructivist approach. In addition, recurring to statistical data and events in the recent past we aim to comprehend the position of the Russian minority within the Baltic countries covering turbulent currencies in all three countries.

3.1 The theoretical meaning of identity in International Relations and the connection to the central topic

In order to further dissect the topic of the situation of Russian minorities in the Baltic countries after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, it is necessary to have a theoretical basis in the field of international relations and it is proposed to do this based on a constructivist thought, a theoretical current in global politics that came to prominence after the end of the Cold War presenting an international conception focused on identity.

After the end of the Cold War, which coincided with the restoration of the independence of the three Baltic countries, works that came to be known as constructivism theory were published within the field of International Relations. Among them, the work of the North American scholar Alexander Wendt stands out, contributing significantly to the evolution of constructivism as a theoretical current of International Relations. His main works include the articles “Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics”, from 1992, and “Collective Identity Formation and the International State”, from 1994 (Wendt, 1992; Wendt, 1994). In his works, Wendt discusses a term that is essential to the topic addressed in this research: “Collective Identity”. To sum up, this concept suggests

that State entities are capable of having a common sense of identity, which is shaped through interactions that influence the behavior of a given government (Wendt, 1994, p.386).

The concept can be applied to the reality of the Baltic countries and their conduct towards the Russian minority, considering the argument that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania act collectively regarding the problem of the minority group of Russians present in all three countries. Such a statement can be explored by noticing that there are equal similar prerogatives and situations, in which the three States hold a consistently similar position: summarized in an approximation with identity values that are contrary to the Russian state of mind. This will be covered in depth, influenced by the idea of “Collective Identity” developed by Wendt.

Furthermore, another constructivist concept that helps to better understand the situation of the Russian minorities in the Baltic countries is the condition that international politics is a Social Construct, with identity shaping how States define their interests and perceive their role in international politics. Such socially constructed identities shape how States think about their interests, which in turn relates to how State actors will possibly react and behave when faced with a certain problem (Wendt, 1992, p.394).

Once again, applying the Wendt’s international relations principles of Collective Identity and the Social Construct to the reality of the relationship between Russian minorities and the rest of the population in the Baltic countries, it can be seen that the Baltic countries collectively identify themselves as being far from rapprochement with the Russian identity present in their country and to extent the Russian State itself, which is close to their borders. Therefore, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have an interest in breaking away from a Russian ideal, which brings them closer to regional integration with the rest of the European continent, who have international organizations such as the European Union and NATO that symbolize an alternative opposed to Russia. This places the Russian minority present in the Baltic States in a difficult situation, given that the States in which this group lives do not have the same interest and identity values as them.

In this respect, it is also important to emphasize that in the constructivist thought in International Relations the identity of a State encompasses on values of amity and enmity, considering that States have their identities and interests sociologically constructed based on relations of affection or animosity (Wendt, 1995, p.74). Such duality can explain a lot about how a State or States act in the international environment.

Anew, in the case of the Baltic States, understanding that there is a clear enmity with Russia due to various historical and cultural reasons caused a distance from Russian identity

values, which consequently affects the experience of the Russian minority group in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. From an amity perspective, it can be argued that the Baltics seek an approximation with Western Europe, with a participation in organizations such as the European Union and NATO, which offer a safeguard against the Russian threat and that became a greater reality after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Commercio, 2022). Thus, there is a direct connection between the Baltic States and major elements that symbolizes ideals contrary to Russia. A great example of this is the fact that the governments of the Baltic countries were among the ones that provided most assistance to Ukrainians since the war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine began in February 2022 (Trebesch et al., 2023).

The constructivist approach makes evident that the tensions involving the Russian minority in the Baltic States are not solely about ethnicity, language or citizenship, but are fundamentally rooted in the deeper processes of identity construction, historical memory, and perceptions of enmity. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have collectively shaped a national identity that aligns with Western institutions and values, defining themselves in opposition to Russia both as a state and as a cultural legacy. In this process, Russian-speaking minorities come to represent not only a demographic remnant of the Soviet past but also a present-day challenge to the coherence of the national narrative. Consequently, the very presence of these minorities is perceived as a source of internal tension, particularly in a post-2022 geopolitical context where enmity toward Russia is further intensified.

Therefore, it is clear that constructivism theory helps to highlight how the Baltic States identify vehemently against Russia and, as a consequence, how this affects the Russian minorities living in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. This theoretical approach makes it clear that the animosity present in the Baltic region has deep and multifarious layers of identity that need to be analyzed. Also, it helps to understand how Russian minorities in the Baltic countries are inserted in a situation of extreme peculiarity, living in an environment in which their identity is a matter of tension and primordial discussion. Therefore, to deepen the analysis and understand this problem, it is intended in the following section to demonstrate how the Russian minority is deeply present and how their existence causes a significant division within Baltic society.

3.2 Russian minority in the Baltics States

This section aims to highlight the significant presence of the Russian minority in the Baltic countries. Governmental statistical data will show the ethnic divisions in the region's societies, with elements of distinction that mark social coexistence: language, citizenship, education and other socio-cultural values.

According to the most recent census data from each of the three countries, the percentage of people who are identified as part of the Russian minority is approximately 23% in Estonia (Statistikaamet, 2021), around 23% in Latvia (Oficiālās statistikas portāls, 2024) and 5% in Lithuania (Oficialiosios statistikos portāls, 2021). These are significant numbers when placed in the perspective of the entire Baltic region, adding up to roughly 900 thousand people out of 6.1 million individuals residing in the region (Statistikaamet, 2021; Oficiālās statistikas portāls, 2024; Oficialiosios statistikos portāls, 2021).

Such a significant number of Russian individuals in the Baltic allows for the interpretation of the term minority, which is defined by the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2019) as follows:

“A non-dominant group which is usually numerically less than the majority population of a State or region regarding their ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics and who (if only implicitly) maintain solidarity with their own culture, traditions, religion or language.” (p.132)

Therefore, despite being present in large numbers, the Russians still find themselves in a minority position because their representation is subjugated to a State that holds another group as an assertive entity. This can be evidenced by social factors that surround the reality of the Russians in the three countries of the region.

One of these factors is the issue of language. Considering that during the Soviet Union, the Russian language was imposed on Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania for State bureaucracy, also taking into account that there was the migration of many Russians to these countries. The policy of Russification discussed in the previous chapter, the transformation of state language after independence and the use of Russian became a disputed subject not only politically but also in a more broad cultural sense. Studies on nation-state building and nationalism have shown how language is an element in defining a person's ethnicity (Anderson, 1985). Therefore, assessing one's belonging in the Baltic context, whether they

are of Russian origin or ethnically Estonian, Lithuanian and Latvian, is a key element in the disputes examined in this dissertation (Tulun, 2013, p 148-149).

With the restoration of independence and the end of the Cold War, these countries returned to having their mother tongue (Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian) as a governmental instrument, noticing that the Baltic native languages come from a completely different language tree and alphabet when compared to the Russian dialect (Gerner & Hedlund, 2018).

However, remnants of the Soviet linguistic past continued to exist causing divisions in Baltic societies. This was especially visible in a major debate that emerged in the aftermath of independence: the issue of schooling, in which there are schools that teach children primarily in the country's native language and there are schools that teach young people in Russian (Rozenvalde et al., 2023, p.12-13). This division in language education is present when analyzing neighborhoods and cities that have a greater presence of the Russian minority (such as the district of Lasnamäe in the Estonian capital of Tallinn), that make increased efforts to preserve Russian values and cultural identities more diligently (Kunitsõn & Kalev, 2021, p. 4).

It is significant that the greater tension regarding education in Baltic societies emerges in regard to teaching in the local language or in Russian (Kunitsõn & Kalev, 2021, p. 3). A great example of this is what is happening in Latvia with the government promoting measures to end the teaching of Russian in public schools, enacting measures that expand the teaching of languages from countries that are in the European Union and are more geopolitically aligned with Latvia (German, French and others) in contrast to the historical presence of the Russian language in the country (LSM, 2024).

Another topic where the contours and characteristics of the Russian minority emerges is in the question of citizenship. There have been substantial problems with citizenship within the Russian minority, given that a substantial amount of the Russian population of the Baltic countries does not possess citizenship at all. The main reason for this is due to after the Baltic countries had their independence restored, confusion regarding the new documents that guaranteed the right to citizenship in the three newly formed countries was a focal point. Many individuals – especially those of Russian origin or that identified themselves as Russians - were still skeptical about the new state formation and remained with a certain Soviet nostalgia, by consequence they did not obtain Russian citizenship or the new Baltic citizenship. Gradually, they ended up living in a country of which they were not citizens but also did not formally belong to the Russian diaspora, dynamically positioning themselves in a

position where the individuals were not Russian and much less of Baltic nationality. They were in a grey area that came to be known as “post-Soviet” (Barrington, 2000, p.260-265).

As an example of this “no man’s land”, in Estonia, according to the 2021 census, 15% of the population does not have Estonian citizenship, of which 6% have Russian citizenship (demonstrating the presence of this minority), 5% possesses other nationalities and, perhaps most astonishingly, 5% have their citizenship classified as undetermined. It is inferred that the “undetermined population” of Estonians is a result of the aforementioned problem established in the 1990s, in which many individuals who migrated to the country in Soviet times and probably had Russian roots did not obtain citizenship of the new sovereign state. This hypothesis is even more feasible when analyzing data from the 2000 census, in which the population with undetermined citizenship was even higher, making up 10% of Estonia's inhabitants (Statistikaamet, 2021).

There is no doubt that citizenship of the country in which a given individual lives is one of the most essential elements to foster a sense of belonging and obtain his/her basic rights of modern welfare states, such as basic income, housing, health services and education. Therefore, this situation highlights the challenging panorama in relation to the Russian minority in the Baltic countries, considering that this example of Estonia also permeated similar paths in Latvia and Lithuania (Barrington, 2000, p.270-275).

Thus, the demographic, linguistic, and citizenship-related dynamics of the Russian minority in the Baltic States illustrate how historical roots continue to shape present-day challenges of identity and national belonging in this group. Despite their numerical significance, Russian-speaking communities are clearly symbolically and politically treated as outsiders within Baltic societies, with important institutional mechanisms, such as language laws, educational reforms and citizenship policies, functioning as tools for reinforcing a national identity explicitly distanced from the Soviet and, by extension, the Russian past.

These practices also reveal a selective memory that emphasizes rupture over coexistence. As a result, the Russian minority is frequently caught in an existential threat space: too Russian for full inclusion in the national narrative, and yet too embedded in Baltic society to be considered foreign. Basically, they are positioned and position themselves in a nebulous “post-Soviet” reality. This unresolved tension fosters not only identity fragmentation, but also a latent aversion to the continued presence and influence of Russian culture in the region, which is amplified as a geopolitical threat considering external factors like the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. It is therefore clear that this minority is an inseparable

part of society but tensions are an integral part of its existence and should be debated more thoroughly. In what follows, we intend to mention three episodes in the three respective countries of friction between the local status quo and the Russian minority.

3.3 Demonstrations of the tension created between the local Baltic Population and the Russian Minority

In this section we aim to analyze tensions currencies of Russian minorities in the Baltic countries in more contemporary times. In order to do this it is relevant to observe distinct situations that occurred in these countries putting the situation of the Russian minority in question. Despite having intrinsic similarities, each nation has certain peculiarities in how it deals with its Russian minority, and thus the events analyzed here help understand the heterogenous context in a diversified way, as they bring a dynamic analysis and identification of different problems that the Russian minority in the Baltic region experiences. This section thus seeks to explore existing tensions before and after the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022 between the three Baltic countries and the Russian identity - whether represented by the minority or by the Russian State - explaining how such embroilment is a pertinent reality to examine the situation of the Russian Minority in the region.

3.3.1: Bronze Night of Tallinn

The first episode took place in April 2007, in the city of Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. A tense episode that directly involved the Russian minority in the city occurred due to the transference of a monument that carries a deep historical significance for Estonian society. In terms of context, it is important to observe the demographic composition of Tallinn, where the presence of the Russian minority is extremely noticeable. Approximately 35% of the population belongs to this group (Statistikaamet, 2021). In terms of language, this situation is even more impressive, considering that 47% of the city have Russian as their primary language (Statistikaamet, 2021). Therefore, the municipality is a massive representation of the presence of the Russian minority in the Baltics, having certain neighborhoods where the presence of this group is even greater than the native ethnicity.

What became known as the bronze night constitutes a microscope of the dynamics between the Russian minority and the nationalities present in the Baltics. In the end of April

2007, riots started in the city center of the Estonian capital due to the government deciding to relocate a World War II memorial of the “Bronze Soldier of Tallinn”, a monument that pays homage to the soviet soldiers that liberated Tallinn from Nazi occupation, in 1944 (Ehala, 2020). The monument was erected in Soviet times, in 1947, and positioned in a central garden of the Estonian capital. With the governmental decision, the monument was moved to the Tallinn Military Cemetery, undoubtedly a less meaningful and popular place in the city. It is also worth mentioning that shortly after the entire process of monument relocation, in 2009, a new monument was placed in Tallinn's central square, also known as Vabaduse Valjak (Freedom Square, in Estonian), entitled “The Cross of Liberty and the Monument to the War of Independence”, honoring the Estonians who fought in the country's war of independence between 1918 to 1920 (Ehala, 2020). In this movement it is possible to identify a shifting in public memory sites from a Russian past to commemorate specifically Estonian national heroes.

On the night of April 27, 2007, there were riots and massive protests by the population against the relocation of Tallinn's bronze soldier monument, with a considerable portion of the protesters coming from the city's Russian minority. It was an episode with the most severe occurrence of public violence in Estonian territory since the Second World War, resulting in thousands of people injured, hundreds arrested and one dead. Furthermore, as a form of retaliation, websites of Estonian institutions such as the parliament, banks and media channels suffered at the same time cyberattacks from Russians, which further demonstrated nationalistic basis of the conflicting situation (Ehala, 2020).

This incident carries several meanings when we try to understand the place and identity of Russian minorities in the Baltic region. First, the fact that Tallinn is one of the most important cities in the Baltic and has such a large presence of the Russian minority demonstrates the magnitude of this community in the region. But the events of April 2007 also show that the Russian minority is capable of group mobilization in the face of joint indignation, which was the case with the relocation of the monument that commemorates the actions of the Red Army.

On the other hand, the Estonian government's initiative to relocate a monument with strong connection with Russian presence in the city also demonstrates that there is a policy of memory reconstruction directly connected with the Russian Soviet symbols in the country, something also noticeable in other Baltic States. As previously mentioned, the monument was relocated and promptly another monument, but this time with Estonian nationalist

characteristics, was placed in the central location of the city, which symbolizes a manifestation of valuing a national feeling from Estonians, erasing a lapse of Russian culture.

It is also worth mentioning that in April 2022, two months after the start of the ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia, the same Bronze Soldier of Tallinn monument that is now located in a military cemetery was vandalized by individuals protesting against the Russian state military movement (ERR, 2022). Therefore, this episode is an important event to highlight how the tensions of the Russian minority are present in the Baltic in a large urban center, addressing a certain threat to identity on the part of Estonians, which by extension can also be applied by Latvians and Lithuanians, who seek to value their culture in relation to the Russian in a new reality in the Baltic region.

The episode of the Bronze Night exemplifies how the dynamics of identity and memory are deeply contested in the Baltic context, particularly in Estonia. The relocation of the Soviet-era monument did not substantially represent a change in the urban landscape but symbolized a deliberate act of memory politics that sought to redefine national identity by minimizing symbols associated with Russian Soviet heritage. From the occurrence of public violence it can also be inferred that, for the Russian minority, the Bronze Soldier stood as a marker of historical presence and collective memory, while for many Estonians it represented an unwanted reminder of long-lasting foreign domination. Furthermore, the resulting unrest and the subsequent vandalism in 2022 highlight how unresolved historical grievances, amplified by contemporary geopolitical conflicts, continue to fuel aversion to Russian presence and sharpen identity boundaries in the Baltics.

3.3.2: Attacks on Latvian embassy in Russia

The contemporary tensions surrounding the Russian minorities in the Baltic states did not begin with the Russian State invasion in Ukraine in 2022, but have been incrementing for the past decade, when Russia annexed the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea. It can be argued that in this recent context the first incident of tension directly and diplomatically involving the government of one of the Baltic countries was the case of attacks on the Latvian embassy in Russia, in 2014, after the annexation of Crimea by the Russian state.

Since this date, Latvia has condemned Russian actions on the Ukrainian territory and has applied several sanctions, as has most of the European continent. Thus, it is interesting to establish why the attacks were specifically directed at the embassy of this Baltic country, with

a hypothesis being retaliation for the possible repression that the Russian minority present in Latvia is suffering.

The Crimean crisis of 2014 occurred between February and March of the same year. Since then, with the increase in tension in relations between Russia and Latvia, there have been three major attacks on the embassy of the Baltic country. First in May 2014, in St. Petersburg, when extremist groups attacked the building with smoke grenades and flares, while carrying a flag of the Soviet Union (The Baltic Times, 2014). Then, in June 2015, a similar attack was carried out in the same location (LSM, 2015). Finally, in May 2018, during national holiday celebrations in Russia, another attack on the Latvian embassy occurred, this time in the capital Moscow, containing similar attacking procedures using homemade bombs (Medium, 2018).

These attacks were carried out by Russian citizens dissatisfied with the geopolitical conduct of the Latvian government. The meaning of these acts of vandalism, undeniable connected with a certain feeling of animosity of a part of the Russian citizens towards the Latvian state, lies also in how the Russian minority is being treated in Latvia. There is a contingent of more than 400,000 people in Latvia who are part of a Russian minority, (Oficiālās statistikas portāls, 2024). These attacks not only highlighting the persistent animosity from certain Russian citizens but also exacerbate feelings of insecurity and marginalization among the Russian minority, influencing their social integration and relationship with the Latvian state.

The Latvian situation will be explored in greater depth in the next chapter, especially by presenting how the situation of Russian minorities in the Baltic countries is demonstrated institutionally, considering that it is key for such a group of people to have an instrument of representation in the state environment, to align their interests and express their opinions in the face of events in the international context that directly affect their experiences, such as what is happening in Ukraine. Therefore, the situation of the attacks on the Latvian embassies in Russia demonstrates how the problem of this research presents complex values that are significant to analyze.

3.3.3: Lithuanian concern with Kaliningrad and the Suwalki Gap

When putting the situation of Russian minorities in the Baltic countries in perspective, it can be argued that Estonia and Latvia have intrinsic similarities and Lithuania is positioned in a more peculiar way (Oficialiosios statistikos portalas, 2021). This argument considers that

due to historical, social and geographical reasons (it is the only Baltic country that does not have a territorial border with mainland Russian territory), Lithuania has not had a massive migration of Russians when compared to the two other Baltic states. Nonetheless, the Lithuanians still find themselves in conflict with their Russian minority, with an ongoing geopolitical dispute with the Russian Federation and its biggest ally, Belarus.

Lithuania is the southernmost country of the Baltics, bordering allies Latvia to the north and Poland to the south. The southern border establishes a connection between the Baltics and Western Europe - meaning the European Union and NATO - by the so-called Suwalki Gap, a strait of approximately 100 kilometers. Therefore, vertically its borders are relatively peaceful and surrounded by allies, but horizontally the problematic looming of the Russian threat appears, with a Russian exclave and Belarus⁵ bordering Lithuania to the west and east, respectively (Buciunas, 2023).

To the west, Lithuania faces the westernmost territory of the Russian Federation, the Kaliningrad exclave, a region that belonged to the Soviet Union due to international treaties since the end of World War II and, after the dissolution of that country, continued to belong to Moscow. Kaliningrad has always been a point of intense international debate, as it is a territory that further intensifies Russian interest in the Baltic region and Eastern Europe as a whole (Buciunas, 2023).

After the Crimean War of 2014, tensions arose in the region, given that the Baltic countries strongly condemned the Russian attack on the Ukrainian peninsula. In February 2022, with the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, unrest on the border between Lithuania and Kaliningrad increased even more, with a military reinforcement by the Lithuanians, who felt threatened by Russian aggressiveness in the macro region (Buciunas, 2023). Such tensions are present and can be reported until January 2025, when the president of Lithuania, Gitanas Nausėdas, stated that the city of Kaliningrad (capital of the homonymous exclave) is “historically a Lithuanian city”, causing a backlash on the part of the Russian government (EADaily, 2025).

As to the east, Lithuania shares its longest border with Belarus, with more than 650km separating the two countries. Considering that Minsk has an extremely close relationship with Moscow, this border is quite problematic. Regarding this, it is interesting to observe that the

⁵For this matter, it is important to contextualize that Belarus is considered Russia's greatest ally, in several possible areas, with the head of state Aleksander Lukashenko establishing essential bonds with the Russian Federation, to the point that when the invasion of Ukraine began in February 2022, a contingent of Russian troops was launched across the border between Belarus and Ukraine. Lukashenko's government is accused by several international entities of being authoritarian and the Baltic countries, especially Lithuania, provide assistance to political individuals who are persecuted in Belarusian territory (Zogg & Benno, 2022).

Lithuanian government does not take a defensive stance, repeatedly welcoming political and media refugees from Belarus. The candidate to overthrow Lukashenko's power, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who was persecuted in the country's 2020 presidential elections is a name worth mentioning. Just like Kaliningrad, after the 2014 episode and especially after the 2022 instance, the military presence on this border gradually increased, with a looming threat of Russian representation through its greatest ally being a significant issue (Buciunas, 2023).

In the middle of the border between Kaliningrad and Belarus, there is the Suwalki Gap, which, as previously mentioned, is the connection of the Baltic region to the rest of continental Europe and consequently a border that symbolizes European integration, being a connection between the Baltic States and organizations such as the European Union and NATO. Therefore, after the growing tensions resulting from Russian actions in Ukraine in 2014 and 2022, the Suwalki Gap has gained an even more important meaning and is also a constant threat to the Lithuanians, as this piece of territory is surpassed by more expansive borders of Kaliningrad and Belarus. Therefore, it is interesting to analyze how important Lithuania's role is geographically in the reality of this research (Buciunas, 2023).

Hence, the current tensions in Lithuania should be emphasized. Even though the country does not have a significant Russian minority when compared to its Baltic peers, it is still a strategic point that cannot be left out of the analysis. Furthermore, these frictions will undoubtedly reflect on the experience of the Russian minority in the country. This is especially true considering that Lithuanians carry a collective Baltic identity of feeling threatened by the Russian State and having problems with the Russian minority present in their territory.

4- 2022 OUTBREAK OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND THE RUSSIAN MINORITIES

This chapter aims to assess more directly how the outbreak of the war in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, has been affecting the situation of Russian minorities in the Baltic countries. This will be done by analyzing the stance of key actors involved in the dynamics of the Russian minority in the region, mentioning the governments of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Additionally, methodologically it is essential to examine the electoral composition of these countries, assessing the participation of the Russian minority in the political sphere, which is an important factor in understanding their representation and ability to act within the contemporary landscape. Finally, the goal is to bring these two elements together to outline an overview of the situation of minorities in the Baltic countries, allowing for well-founded reflections on the hypothesis at hand.

4.1 What the Baltic States said after February 24, 2022

A way to analyze how the Baltic States are involved in the Ukraine conflict that began in 2022 is by starting from examining diplomatic discourses uttered at the time . They expose the official position of the Baltic state regarding the current conflict, the Russian State and consequently helps to understand how this affects the Russian minority present in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

During the period under analysis, the governments of the Baltic States issued joint statements that represent primary political sources reflecting their shared stance on the topic. These coordinated declarations indicate not only a convergence of governmental positions but also suggest the presence of a common regional perspective. This interpretation is supported by Wendt's concept of "Collective Identity," which posits that state entities can develop a shared sense of identity through continuous interaction, an identity that, in turn, shapes their political behavior and responses (Wendt, 1994, p.386). These joint statements can thus be understood as manifestations of a collective identity among the Baltic States.

These statements are discussed here as a primary source. They fall under the adequacy of speeches and testimonies, in the sense that through them it is possible to empirically analyze a speech, understanding what is between the lines of this text and how it is relevant to the given actors involved (Dobson & Ziemann, 2008). Here we will examine in more detail

three joint statements from the States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania issued in the aftermath of Russia invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

These three statements were selected at different times since the Ukrainian war broke in the region. This was done with the aim of enriching the analysis and adding a chronological sense to the sources, establishing a line of reasoning between the selected statements. The first statement analyzed is from February 24, 2022: the day the Russian invasion of Ukraine started. It was released on the official website of the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, representing all the Baltic States. At the beginning, it is clear the position of the Baltic States regarding the conflict:

We, the foreign ministers of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania condemn in the strongest possible way the open large-scale Russian aggression against the independent, peaceful, and democratic Ukraine. (Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022)

It can be said that there is a narrative strategy by instantly taking a vehement stance against Russia, accusing it of causing an aggression and placing Ukraine in a victim position. This is evident throughout the statement:

All of us in the whole international community need to condemn it in the strongest possible way, to impose the strongest possible sanctions on Russia. [...] (Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

Again, the term “strongest possible” appears in the statement, but this time referring to sanctions and the plea for the international community to repudiate Russian actions. Additionally, something that is repeated in these statements is the solidarity with Ukraine, identifying the country with a threatening and extremely vulnerable situation, as seen in the final phrase of the statement:

Dear Ukrainian friends, we are in your historic capital Kyiv, we support you and do anything possible so that the aggressor will pay the highest possible price. Slava Ukraini! (Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

This vulnerability warrants attention, as it not only shapes the foreign policy of the Baltic countries but also directly affects the Russian minority living in the region. In turn, this

minority experiences the consequences of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania's rejection of the country from which its diaspora originates.

Moving further in the analysis of diplomatic discourses, the second statement addressed the reality of the Russian elections which took place in February 2024. This joint statement primarily asserts that the electoral process in Russia is fraudulent and reinforces the country's continued war practices in Ukraine, which are in total opposition to the values upheld by the Baltic governments. Additionally, the statement highlights that Russia's provocations in Ukraine did not begin in 2022 but have deeper historical roots:

Russia plans to organize so-called elections on the dates coinciding with the 10th anniversary of the illegal annexation of Crimea, which is yet another blatant provocation by Russia. (Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024)

Moreover, the foreign ministries of the Baltic countries take a firm stance on the lack of democracy in Russian elections, emphasizing that the Baltic countries do not consider the Russian government to be an institution that values sovereignty and democratic principles. This issue is particularly sensitive not only due to the geographic proximity of these nations but also because of the significant Russian minority population in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. This perspective is further reinforced in the following excerpt:

The upcoming presidential "elections" in Russia will be neither free nor fair. In the environment of total crackdown on opposition and independent media, with lack of credible alternative candidates and without international monitoring, these elections will lack any democratic legitimacy. (Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024)

More recently, there is a statement about Russian operations in Ukraine from the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, from November 2024, made during the meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, in which the main topic of the meeting was not the war in Ukraine (it was about global communication). Once again, the Baltic States, in unity, expressed their repudiation towards Russia:

Strengthening independent, pluralistic media should be at the center of our common efforts. At the international level, the Baltic States – both governments and civil society – support independent media in the European Eastern Neighborhood, including Ukraine. (Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024)

In the latter part of the statement, the mention of Russian activities continues, and it is significant to observe that, for the first time in this analysis, the Russian people are mentioned:

Baltic States host and support significant groups of independent media from Russia. Despite being banned, exiled, and threatened with persecution, they remain strongly committed to delivering facts and telling the truth to people inside Russia. (Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024)

Hence, considering the statements above, it is possible to draw some conclusions. The first is that, as vehemently demonstrated in the first statement, the Baltic Countries strongly position themselves against any Russian movement, in every sphere. Keeping in mind the traumatic history that these States have with Russia, this causes a very problematic situation regarding the Russian minority that is in the Baltic region, taking into account that this diaspora cannot be held responsible for the actions of the Russian State but the diplomatic discourses to relate them with the events happening in Ukraine.

Furthermore, it is possible to notice that among the three statements there is a single mention of the Russian diaspora . This leads us to the question of how this absence impacts Baltic society? Even more so regarding the principle that even though this group is considered a minority, it is an integral part of the society of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and, by consequence, should be theoretically taken seriously in discussions of domestic and foreign policies. Finally, it is interesting to discuss whether the primary source mentioned in this section is truly effective or a more condescending and simplistic way for States to act. This is said in the sense that the joint statements of the Baltic countries are aggressive and accusatory in nature, but in reality do not imply any direct confrontation with the Russian State.

Therefore, it should be discussed how much the states that make such statements properly execute what is described in such manifestations. In the case analyzed, it must be noted that the Baltic states proportionally are one of those that most help Ukraine in the humanitarian and military field, while in addition, condemning Russia with a plethora of sanctions and repudiations (this will be addressed in the next section). Thus, their actions are in a certain way in accordance with the joint statements analyzed. Amidst this, as explored in this research, there is the big issue of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania having a massive diaspora of Russians, which makes the whole situation more intriguing.

These joint statements are a very relevant source for an analysis of the situation of Russian minorities in the Baltic States after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Diplomatic statements are a direct way of obtaining the joint opinion of actors inseparable from the topic, understanding how they collectively position themselves, with enmity against Russia and amity for Ukraine. These statements are important for what they say, but also for what they omit. There is a clear political gap in these official narratives: the near absence of references to the Russian minority living in the Baltic region reveals a deliberate or uncomfortable omission, despite this group's undeniable relevance to the social and political fabric of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. This absence cannot be overlooked, especially considering that these minorities are central to the domestic implications of the conflict and occupy a substantial space in the broader process of identity construction driven by the Baltic States' foreign policy.

4.2 What the Baltic States did after February 24, 2022

As seen previously, the Baltic States have spoken out strongly against the Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, to understand the full implications of such discourse, particularly regarding their impact on domestic contexts, it is essential to analyze the concrete geopolitical actions taken by Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania since the beginning of the conflict. This analysis is relevant because these actions not only reveal the practical extent of their opposition to Russia but also help to assess how this stance might influence the treatment and perception of Russian minorities within their borders.

On the one hand, regarding the assistance provided to Ukrainians, it should be reiterated that the Baltic countries are proportionally among those that provide the most support to the government of Ukraine, considering that such aid can be provided in military, humanitarian and financial manners. As an illustration, when analyzing the percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) that is being allocated to donations to Ukraine, the Baltic countries occupy 3 of the top 4 spots worldwide, with Estonia leading globally (2.2% of GDP), alongside Lithuania (1.8% of GDP) and Latvia (1.5% of GDP) positioning themselves in third and fourth respectively in this indicator (Trebesch et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the assistance to the calamitous situation in Ukraine also comes in a domestic manner, given that since the start of the war, the Baltic region has been receiving a considerable number of Ukrainian refugees who flee the territory that was invaded by Russia in February 2022. The numbers on a survey made at the beginning of 2024 from the U.N. The

High Commissioner for Refugees indicates that, due to the war, 83,750 Ukrainians migrated to Lithuania, 57,725 to Estonia and 52,120 to Latvia. To accommodate such a contingent of people, numerous integration measures were promoted in Baltic civil society, with considerable government readiness on this issue which is particularly relevant when analyzing how state institutions mobilize to satisfy foreign populations (UNHCR, 2024). This willingness can be contrasted with the historical and ongoing challenges faced by Russian minorities in these same societies, offering insight into how different ethnic groups are positioned and perceived within the public sphere and political landscape of the Baltic States.

The massive number of Ukrainians who migrated to the Baltic due to the war poses the question of how such a group of people will fit into society given the presence of a large Russian minority. Considering that the countries that represent the two nationalities mentioned in this paragraph are in a war, this could generate tension within the Baltic territory. Furthermore, it should also be noted that the integration of Ukrainians into the society of the region was done with the full approval and direct help from the local governments. Something very different when analyzing the political representation and social integration of the Russian minority in these countries, causing yet another point of friction in this situation. This circumstance should be closely observed, especially considering that with the eventual end of the war, it is possible that a large contingent of Ukrainians will remain in the Baltics and become part of Baltic societies, which could generate more complexities in the entire social and political situation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

In this sense, on the other side of the conflict, the Baltic countries are among those that most condemn Russian actions in Ukraine. This can be seen when analyzing the sanctions that the Baltic States, through the figure of the European Union, propagate against Russia. Since February 2022, there have been 15 packages of sanctions against the Russian Federation targeting the most diverse means, being entities, goods, territorial issues and transport (Council of the European Union, 2025).

In addition to the sanctions, there is a clear distancing of Baltic relations with Russia, understanding that ontologically this has already been effectively done since 2014, with the Crimean War. But in recent times concrete actions have been advocated so that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania become dissociable from the bordering Russian Federation.

A great example of this is the event in which the Baltic States turned off their electricity grid that was historically linked to Moscow, completely plugging into the European Union's electrical system. This event, which occurred in February 2025, is symbolic not only due to being an essential mean of the Baltics no longer connecting to

Russia, but also because it prevents such an electrical situation from being used by the Russian government as a form of threat, inducing a possible cut or illegal distribution of energy (Bennett, 2025).

Thus, analyzing the concrete actions of the Baltic States in the face of the war - considering the actions towards the Ukrainians and the Russians - the idea of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania holding a collective identity in which the Ukrainians and the figure of the European Union are seen as amity, while Russia is clearly seen as enmity is reinforced. This situation is evidenced in several attitudes that these three actors have been promoted since the outbreak of the war. And it must be said that the strong proclamations analyzed in the previous section are in a certain way faithful to the measures that these States implement.

In conclusion, the set of geopolitical measures taken by the Baltic States since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, ranging from strong diplomatic condemnations to concrete actions such as economic sanctions and symbolic infrastructure realignments, reveals not only a firm positioning against the Russian Federation, but also a broader process of identity consolidation in which Russia is constructed as the “other.” This dynamic is crucial when analyzing the internal consequences of such a posture, particularly for the Russian minorities living in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. These communities, already historically marginalized in various ways, find themselves increasingly entangled in a socio-political environment where the state apparatus and public discourse are aligned against the very nation with which they are often culturally or linguistically associated.

In contrast to the proactive and welcoming integration policies extended to Ukrainian refugees, the Russian minorities continue to face a complex and often exclusionary landscape. The comparison between these two groups: one framed as victim and ally, the other as outsider and aggressor reinforces the perception of an inclusion based on geopolitical alignment. Thus, analyzing the Baltic States’ external actions is not only essential to understand their regional strategy, but also to expose how such decisions reverberate within their own societies, affecting the identity, and belonging of a significant part of their population. It is within this tension between foreign policy and domestic social cohesion that the role and fate of Russian minorities in the Baltic region must be critically examined.

Ultimately, the greater issue of this discussion again lies in the fact that within the Baltic countries there is a massive presence of individuals that identify themselves as Russians, which is a major question mark, since they are idiosyncratic to something that the Baltics collectively identify as hostile. Hence, it is worth discussing in more detail the role of this minority is in this whole panorama, understanding how it positions itself in the face of

the war that began in 2022 and analyzing socio-politically how its reality is affected, and its presence is very interesting for the social sciences scenario in the Baltic region.

4.3 The War and the the Russian Minority in the Baltic States

As demonstrated in the previous sections, the state apparatus of the Baltic countries – in its multiple institutions, from diplomacy to the education system – can be characterized as strongly against Russia. Not only in direct opposition to Putin’s leadership but also in its condemnation of the actions committed by the Russian Federation in Ukrainian territory, the antagonism against Russia is strongly imprinted in the identity of the Baltic states. Hence, the presence of the Russian minority in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania is identified, and the main problem of this research is raised: How are Russian Minorities in the Baltic States affected by the outbreak of the 2022 war in Ukraine?

With this question in mind, the main hypothesis posed is that after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, in 2022, the Baltic States due to historical reasons increasingly identify Russia as a threat to their integrity and sovereignty. As a consequence of this, the significant Russian minority living in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania is severely socially and politically impacted. Moreover, Baltic national governments promoted changes in the political and social representation of the minority group in order to counter the Russian influence in their own countries.

These effects manifest themselves in multiple dimensions, political, social, cultural, and even economic. Politically, Russian minorities have experienced intensified scrutiny and marginalization, especially regarding citizenship policies and loyalty to the state. Socially and culturally, there has been a rise in narratives portraying the Russian-speaking population as a clear outsider, leading to identity-based tensions and stigmatization. In many cases, measures have been adopted to diminish the use of the Russian language in public spaces and education, reinforcing a symbolic distance between the minority and the majority populations. Although economic exclusion is not always institutionalized, it often emerges as a consequence of these broader political and social tensions. Therefore, the impact of the war reverberates well beyond international relations, deeply affecting the daily lives and self-perceptions of Russian minorities in the Baltic region.

In view of this question, to verify the hypothesis, the final part of this chapter will address the key considerations regarding the political and social conditions faced by the Russian minority in the Baltic States following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. This will

be done through an in-depth analysis of one of the Baltic States. This option is based on the argument that these countries have a shared collective identity towards Russia, but also recognizes the importance of selecting a single case study for a more precise and detailed examination.

Thus, the country in which the socio-political changes after the Ukrainian war in the situation of the Russian minority will be analyzed is Latvia. The selection is due to methodological factors, as qualitative evidence regarding the political and social presence of the Russian minority is more prevalent in the Latvian context. Furthermore, quantitatively speaking, this country is the one with the largest population of the Russian minority in absolute terms, with 400,000 individuals, therefore, it is the one with the most substantial material to be analyzed.

4.3.1. Political Changes

In the political sphere we need to revisit the discussions from the first chapter of this research, highlighting historical factors that contribute to the Russian minority political problem. As previously mentioned, the Baltic countries have a deep historical and social relationship with Russian influence, which only began to decline in the early 1990s following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This reinforces the notion that Russians have maintained a lasting presence in the Baltics, with roots embedded in significant areas of society (Kasekamp, 2010, p.162).

Therefore, even after the Baltic States gained independence in the early 1990s, political parties and representatives advocating for a Russian identity have continued to exist in the Baltic political spectrum. For instance, in Estonia, political parties such as the now-defunct Russian Party in Estonia (*Vene Erakond Eestis*) and the United Left Party have represented Russian-speaking communities, albeit with limited electoral success (Smith et al., 2018). These entities either support the interests of the Russian minority within these countries or align with the Russian Federation itself. However, as discussed in the historical section, Russian influence in Baltic politics has gradually diminished over time, particularly as the newly independent states implemented restrictive citizenship laws, prioritized native languages in public life, and sought integration with NATO and the European Union, which marginalized pro-Russian political actors and narratives. (Kasekamp, 2010, p.163).

A notable illustration of this dynamic can be seen in Latvia's parliamentary elections since the 1990s. In the early years of Latvia's democratic parliamentary system, parties

strongly advocating for the interests of the Russian minority were prominent. One party that stands out is the Latvian Russian Union (LRU). It was formed in 1998 and until 2014 was known as “For Human Rights in a United Latvia” (ForHRUL), a very appealing name that also directly addresses the defense of the Russian minority. Its main agenda included the right to Latvian citizenship for all Russians in the country, a rapprochement of foreign policy with Russia and a consequent distancing from NATO (Europe Politique, n.d.). The question that arises is whether such a party, which openly defended the interests of the Russians in Latvia, had significant support among the general population in Latvia. Theoretically, such backing would seem logical, given the significant presence of the Russian minority and the challenges they face in integrating into Latvian society. However, in practice, this encountered several obstacles.

The LRU's best result in parliamentary elections⁶ was in 2002, in its second electoral race (at the time the ForHRUL), when it obtained 22 of the 100 seats in the Saeima, the Latvian parliament. This result was significant, but it still did not place the Russian minority in Latvia in a position of governance, as other parties formed coalitions to keep ForHRUL in opposition. Not surprisingly, the party's strongest support came from Latgale, Latvia's easternmost region bordering Russia, which has the country's highest concentration of Russian minorities (Saeima of the Republic of Latvia, n.d.).

Following the 2002 success, the LRU's influence declined, securing only 6 seats in 2006 and not being able to meet the 5% vote threshold required for parliamentary representation in 2010 and 2014 (Saeima of the Republic of Latvia, n.d.). The key factor behind this decline was the growing feeling of anti-Russian sentiment in the Baltic region, which had a major milestone after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. As a result of the escalation of Russia's threatening position in the international sphere, a party that strongly defended the Russian minority interests lost its ability to influence Latvian politics, leading the Russian minority to seek alternative political representation.

At a more pragmatic level, a party formed in 2009, the Social Democratic Party, known as Harmony, took the place of the main political representative of the Latvian Russian minority's votes for the following elections. As its denomination suggests, Harmony pursued a more conciliatory approach, advocating for policies that sought to integrate Russian minorities into Latvian society rather than promoting a pro-Russian stance (Saskaņa. n.d.).

⁶ The Latvian parliamentary elections were chosen as the main element of analysis for this political section, given that they highlight the different trends of opinion that the population displays in the face of the reality presented.

This shift indicated that the Russian minority increasingly recognized the challenges of gaining power under the ForHRUL's approach and instead opted for a more negotiation-based political strategy. Between 2010 and 2018, Harmony had a strong presence in the Saeima, securing between 23 and 28 seats in each of the four elections held during this period. However, much like ForHRUL, Harmony was never included in a governing coalition, remaining in opposition throughout its parliamentary tenure (Saeima of the Republic of Latvia, n.d.). It is possible to observe that being in the opposition spectrum of the government is a recurring one of Russian minority backed parties and this came even more to the forefront with the most recent parliamentary elections in Latvia.

The 2022 Saeima elections are the most recent and relevant for the purposes of this chapter. They took place in October, 8 months after Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine. This event undoubtedly became a central theme in the election, drastically reshaping the political landscape.

Harmony, the established party representing the Russian minority's interests in a pragmatic manner, suffered a catastrophic loss: its 23 seats from 2018 were reduced to 0 in 2022 (Saeima of the Republic of Latvia, n.d.). This dramatic shift is particularly relevant in the context of political science, as it represents the total collapse of a party that had previously been the largest in the Saeima. Such a collapse reveals that political representation of the Russian minority in the Baltic states, based on ethnic or linguistic identity, can be highly vulnerable to both internal divisions and external geopolitical pressures. The primary reason behind this downfall was internal fragmentation within Harmony, with disputes over how the Russian minority in Latvia perceived the war in Ukraine - a topic that will be further explored in the next section.

It is clear that the war in Ukraine affected how the Russian minority in the Baltics expressed itself politically, looking for alternatives in the search for political representation. The redistribution of Harmony's former electorate led to the rise of a new political force: the "For Stability!" (ST!) party, founded in 2021. Much like with the transition from ForHRUL to Harmony, For Stability! emerged as a centrist party, adopting moderate policies while subtly advocating for Russian minority rights. A clear example of this is found in a statement on the party's official website:

"A just, honest, democratic country is a home for all its citizens. Respect for all nationalities and religions. Respect for all citizens, regardless of the

language they speak at home. A country where everyone will be sure – I AM HOME! (Rosļikovs, 2021)”

This statement made by party leader Aleksejs Rosļikovs highlights the underlying issue of representation for different ethnic groups in Latvia, with a clear subtext referring to the Russian minority’s situation. Aleksejs Rosļikovs is a prominent Latvian politician known for his active role in representing the interests of the Russian-speaking minority; prior to leading For Stability!, he was involved in local politics and advocacy focused on minority rights, which has positioned him as a key figure in this political segment. In the 2022 elections, For Stability! secured 11 seats in the Saeima, drawing strong support from the Latgale region, which has been previously the stronghold of ForHRUL and Harmony (Saeima of the Republic of Latvia, n.d.).

After the analysis of the evolution of electoral results of parties prominent in the Latvian parliament representing the interests of the Russian minority, the following conclusions can be drawn. On the one hand, over the last decades, as Latvia (and the rest of the Baltic States) solidified its national identity and strengthened ties with NATO and the European Union, political parties that openly supported Russian interests saw a steady decline in influence, reflected in their diminishing parliamentary representation. Additionally, the Russian minority itself gradually began voting for more pragmatic parties, understanding that radical pro-Russian positions would not gain traction in Latvian politics. Moreover, even with a combination of a moderate stance, possessing substantial electoral support in the two first decades of the 21st century and a strong presence in key electoral districts like Latgale, Russian minority backed parties have never been part of a governing coalition, always remaining in opposition, raising the idea that the Latvian population in general makes political movements so that the minority Russians do not hold power in executive institutions.

On the other hand, from an outside-in perspective, the Russian Federation, during the period under analysis in this section (2002-2022), was gradually carrying out aggressive and threatening actions, whether in relation to Ukraine, an important actor for the purpose of proving the hypothesis, or in relation to the Baltic countries themselves, as identified in examples in the last section of the previous chapter. Consequently, it can be said that this Russian State stance ended up suppressing the power of action of the Baltic Russian minority, which in turn had Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians frightened and unwilling to support parties that had pro-Russian representation. Therefore, the Russian minority became less

politically identified with explicitly pro-Russian parties, leading to a fragmentation of their political support and a weakening of unified minority representation in the region.

Finally, it is particularly noteworthy to point out how the sequence of parties representing the Russian minority in Latvia reflects a broader identity crisis and a gradual loss of political influence. The transition from the “Latvian Russian Union” to “Harmony”, and now to “For Stability!” illustrates this shift, as each successive party has adopted a more moderate and centrist stance, moving away from overtly pro-Russian positions and becoming less explicitly based on their identification with Russia, by seeking broader appeal within the Latvian political spectrum. This evolution is evident not only in their political rhetoric and strategies, which have become increasingly cautious, but also in their names, which have progressively distanced themselves from an explicit association with the Russian minority. Amidst this scenario, the war in Ukraine of 2022 has dealt a severe blow to the political standing of the Russian minority in Latvia and the Baltics as a whole, further deepening their challenges in securing representation and influence.

Hence, with the political situation highlighted, the analysis should be complemented with social issues, understanding how the Russian minority comprehends the war in Ukraine and what conclusions can be drawn from this.

4.3.2 Social Perceptions

The political representation of the Russian minority in the Baltic countries, particularly in Latvia, has gradually declined over time. This decrease is evident in the diminishing number of parties and policies that strongly favor Russia politics and Russian identity in the Baltic. At the same time, as the Russian Federation has adopted increasingly autocratic and controversial actions in the macro region of the Baltic, the capabilities of the Russian minority in the Baltics for greater political influence and support has also gone down.

This observation of the political representation of the Russian minorities is essential to this research, as its analysis plays a fundamental role in shaping the hypothesis of this thesis. However, beyond the more strict dimension of political representation, it is also crucial to explore the social aspects that highlight the identity transformation of the Russian minority in the Baltic region. A key focus in this regard is the war in Ukraine (2022) and its impact on the socio-political landscape of the Baltic states. Thus, we sought here to analyze a survey

that examines how Baltic Russians perceive the war in Ukraine and how this conflict affects them.

The survey in question focuses once again on Latvia. Conducted annually since the beginning of the war (2022, 2023, 2024), this study allows for a comparative perspective. However, for a more up-to-date and relevant analysis, this section will concentrate on the most recent results available at the time of writing (March 2025). The research was carried out by the Latvian institute SKDS, with academic support from the University of Riga (Andžāns, 2024). The most recent survey aimed to explore the perspectives of the Russian minority on the war in Ukraine. It is important to note that the study categorizes the 1,004 respondents based on their native language, being either Latvian or Russian. Taking into account that this classification does not necessarily determine whether an individual belongs to the Russian minority, as other ethnic groups in Latvia (Belarussians, Ukrainians and even Latvians) also have Russian as their mother tongue. Nonetheless, it is identified that a considerable majority of the Russian speaking participants are of Russian descent. Thus, the findings reveal significant insights that should be analyzed with this context in mind and deserve closer examination (Andžāns, 2024).

First of all, it is crucial to analyze the Latvian-speaking community's perspective. A significant majority (82%) blame Russia for the ongoing war in Ukraine. This figure strongly indicates that most Latvians oppose the Russian invasion, which, in turn, influences local ethnic relations with the Russian minority in the country. As a result, tensions have emerged, exacerbating pre-existing societal divisions through increased mistrust between ethnic Latvians and the Russian minority, leading to social polarization, public debates over language use and citizenship rights, and incidents of discrimination or social exclusion that further strain community relations. (Andžāns, 2024).

On the Russian speaking side, the results of the survey are illuminating. Contrary to expectations, there is no overwhelming support for Russia. This suggests that the Russian-speaking minority is increasingly less identified with Russia, reflecting a diversification of political and social attitudes within the community. While 38% of Russian speakers identify Russia as the primary instigator of the conflict, opinions among the remaining respondents are more fragmented. About 22% remain neutral, neither agreeing or disagreeing, inferring that these individuals may even agree with the other 38% but choose to remain neutral out of fear of potential reprisals. Another 21% do not blame Russia, while 9% responded with "I don't know," and 10% preferred not to answer (Andžāns, 2024). This dubious stance highlights the complexity of the Russian-speaking community's perspectives

and suggests a diverse range of opinions within the community. The uncertainty surrounding these responses reflects an ongoing debate about identity and belonging, which remains a critical issue of analysis.

This puts into evidence a central discussion of this work: Baltic Russians are often associated with the Russian Federation due to shared ethnic origins and historical reasons. This identity burden is significant, especially given the historical context that frames Russian presence in the Baltic region as a potential threat. As a result, the Russian minority finds itself in a difficult position, being distanced from Russia while also struggling to gain full acceptance in their host countries. This dynamic is particularly intriguing, as it leaves them caught between two conflicting national narratives. Consequently, this contributes to the evolving identity of the Russian minority, which is becoming increasingly less defined by its traditional minority status and more characterized by a complex, hybrid sense of belonging.

A certain confusion on the part of the Russians is evident when compared to the other side of the survey. The Latvian-speaking majority exhibits a strong consensus, overwhelmingly blaming Russia for the conflict in Ukraine. This viewpoint has been shaped by decades of historical experience and a deeply ingrained perception of Russia as a threat. Meanwhile, the Russian-speaking minority, already grappling with identity challenges, faces even greater uncertainty as they navigate life in a country where their identity is often scrutinized or even condemned. These tensions reached a breaking point with the onset of the Ukrainian war in 2022.

Furthermore, relating the outcome of the survey with the results of elections examined in the last section, it is clear that the tendency evidenced in the survey of the Russian minority of a certain uncertainty in the face of current problems is exposed in the political evolution that this minority community has had in the gradual elections of the Latvian parliament, increasingly finding itself in a socio-politically fragmented situation without the tools to position in a stable condition. In light of these findings, it is possible to draw conclusions that align with the initial hypothesis of this study, paving the way for the final considerations of this research.

4.4 Verifying the hypothesis

In the beginning of this work, we have posed the following hypothesis: after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, in 2022, the Baltic States due to historical reasons increasingly identify Russia as a threat to their integrity and sovereignty. As a consequence of

this, the significant Russian minority living in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania is severely socially and politically impacted. Moreover, Baltic national governments promoted changes in the political and social representation of the minority group in order to counter the Russian influence in their own countries.

The following inferences can be made about it:

Firstly, this research has demonstrated that the Baltic States share a collective historical trauma linked to Russia, which has been compounded by the gradual influence exerted by the Russian State over the Baltic region. This long history has left deep scars, and today the foreign policies of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are strongly shaped by a desire to distance themselves from any influence or maneuvers originating from Moscow. As a result, these countries have increasingly aligned with Western European ideals and institutions. Amid this context, it is important to emphasize that the Baltics possess a collective identity that binds the three nations together.

Furthermore, the policies of the Baltic States have a direct impact on the Russian minority within their territories. This minority suffers from a fragmented and divided sense of identity, which places them in a precarious position, leaving the diaspora uncertain about their place in Baltic societies. It can be concluded that the Russian-speaking minority is socio-politically weak, and the actions of the Baltic governments contribute significantly to a situation of progressive national disidentification.

It is clear that the 2022 war in Ukraine serves as a major catalyst for the ongoing issues in the region. The war has intensified existing tensions in the Baltic States regarding Russian identity, which is often seen as a threat. As a result, increasing actions by the Baltic governments that could further isolate a community already in a critical state were observed.

With this in mind, it has been seen that the hypothesis formulated brings up a problem that is plausible to the reality of the content analyzed, with the objectives of this research being achieved, primarily understanding the clash of identity present in the Baltic Regions between their three nation states and Russia, the regional power that exerted an historical influence towards them.

Furthermore, as for the objectives of this research, it is believed that the Baltic Region is a key region to observe the complex international relations dilemma of identity in the nation-state. The problems of the Russian minorities in the Baltic are central for the analysis in International Studies, basically demonstrating how ethnic dynamics, particularly regarding Russian minorities in the Baltic states, directly influence state behavior, foreign policy, and regional security in the international system. This work has also shown how an event that

occurs outside of a country's territorial border can significantly influence the social-politics at a regional level, with the war in Ukraine in 2022 being a major cataclysm to raise this issue.

Thus, the main research question: “How are the Russian Minorities in the Baltic States affected by the outbreak of the 2022 war in Ukraine?” can be answered by recognizing that the war has brought long-standing identity issues within the Russian minority in the Baltic States to the forefront. The everyday struggles of this community have become more visible, making it clear that this is a pressing issue in Baltic society. The Ukrainian war has turned what was once more of an implicit, under-discussed issue into an aggrandized blatant and open topic of debate. Ultimately, it can be concluded that the situation has made the Russian minority even more vulnerable, caught between being perceived as a threat by their host societies and not necessarily feeling represented by the Russian Federation. This created a complex and intriguing contemporary subject for analysis.

5. CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored the situation of Russian minorities in the Baltic countries after the 2022 Ukrainian war; it is now time to outline some final considerations, explore potential future scenarios, highlight encountered challenges, and present relevant debates that deserve to be further explored.

The first is that, as observed extensively in this work, the Baltic countries have provided significant support to Ukraine while expressing strong disdain for Russia. One consequence of these actions has been the reception of many Ukrainian refugees into Baltic territory. It is argued that this may generate new tensions within Baltic society. The local ethnic populations may start to develop complex political and social relationships not only with the Russian minority but also with the growing Ukrainian minority. Additionally, the dynamic between these two minority groups, Russian and Ukrainian, would be of significant interest for further analysis, especially considering the ongoing conflict between their respective nations.

Another point to note regarding the chronological procedure of this thesis, having the final draft written in the third semester of 2025, and thus, it does not address events that might unfold regarding the outcome of the war in Ukraine. It is important to recognize that the war could end in a way that either exacerbates or improves the situation for the Russian minority in the Baltics. This evolving context will be crucial for future studies.

It is also concluded that specifically regarding the Russian minority in the Baltics, there is a lack of representation and a fragmented sense of identity which is both intriguing and worthy of deeper analysis. In a way, the war in Ukraine has helped to bring this issue to light, underscoring its prominence in Baltic society and making it a topic desirable for further debate.

Finally, it is understood that this thesis has contributed valuable academic insights into identity issues within Europe, with the Russian minority in the Baltics serving as a compelling subject for analysis. It is hoped that this work will spark further interest in the topic and inspire continued study of the issues surrounding this community.

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