



Roundtable on “Ethnic minorities in the Baltic Sea region”

PILLE PETERSOO, RAPPOREUR | OCTOBER 2025



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Introduction

At the end of September 2025, about twenty academics and policy makers with significant expertise in the field and from a range of disciplines gathered in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania. They considered the challenges facing ethnic minorities in the Baltic Sea region in the current geopolitical situation marked by Russia's instrumentalisation of minority issues beyond its borders.

The purpose was to explore what practical steps might best be taken to protect minority rights and build positive and constructive community relations in the region.

The roundtable was organised by the Baltic Geopolitics Programme of the University of Cambridge, together with the Faculty of History of the University of Vilnius, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and the European Centre for Minority Issues.

In the last 80 years - or since the Second World War - there has been a substantial movement of people in the Baltic Sea region. This change has been precipitated both by outflows (deportations, war-time refugee departures) as well as inflows (migration of new people from the rest of the USSR along with recent refugees from Ukraine). The consequence has been that a wide range of different ethnic minorities in different positions live in these countries today.

The purpose of the roundtable was to explore the history of this situation, to understand the contemporary challenges, both to the full civic rights of existing minorities and to the community cohesion upon which resilient modern democracies depend, to look at how practical solutions can be developed and to understand the geopolitical pressures which could exacerbate these issues.

The workshop began with a keynote address by David Smith, Alec Nove Chair in Russian and East European Studies at the University of Glasgow, UK, who reflected on how the Council of Europe and more specifically, its Advisory Committee (AC) on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) is responding to the current situation. This was followed by an in-depth discussion of different themes, which is presented here in a condensed version.

SECTION 2

Keynote: Minorities and *minority* protection: understandings, norms and current challenges

David J. Smith

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) is the world's most comprehensive multilateral treaty on minority protection and the only one in Europe that sets legally binding principles and standards in this area.

With the exception of present-day Russia¹, it applies to all the states bordering the Baltic Sea. As such, it constitutes the principal **normative framework** for any discussion of minority issues in a region that, since the end of the Cold War, has become synonymous with peace and stability within the context of European integration.

That normative framework is currently facing enormous challenges, as is the liberal multilateral

order from whence it originated during the 1990s. Nevertheless, FCNM remains an important reference point when reflecting on how best to address those challenges.

FCNM is legally binding, but it is a **soft law instrument** - it sets broad principles and objectives, leaving states with a measure of discretion on how to implement them, according to their circumstances.

¹ Expelled from the Council of Europe following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russia subsequently withdrew from the FCNM in August 2024.

Moreover, while the Convention talks about ‘national minorities’, it quite deliberately avoids defining the term, since there is no agreement among member states as to what it means. Some states define national minorities as those that are autochthonous/historically established, distinguishing these from so-called ‘new’ or ‘ethnic’ minorities arising from immigration.

Yet, looking across our region, this distinction is not always clear-cut, as ethnic minority communities often comprise both ‘old’ and ‘new’ members, being built upon multiple layers. Moreover, from the standpoint of fundamental human rights, this distinction can be regarded as moot.

In its work, the Advisory Committee (AC) on the FCNM encourages states to adopt a flexible approach in this regard – if there is significant demand from within a particular community to exercise certain rights, it calls on the authorities to enter into dialogue with the representatives concerned, and to consider applying relevant articles of the FCNM, irrespective of whether the community concerned is officially recognised as a ‘national’ minority.

Just as there are different understandings of ‘minority’ across states, there are **different understandings of minority protection**. This can imply **the rights of individuals** or **the collective rights of groups** to autonomous self-government.

Looking across the Central European space, we find states and minority communities that support the concept of collective rights. In the Baltic Sea region context, they remain an important reference point for the Sámi, who have autonomous status in Finland, Norway and Sweden and whose representatives routinely invoke the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in support of their claims.

The FCNM, however, explicitly refers to protecting the rights and freedoms of *persons belonging* to national minorities, who exercise their rights individually and in community with others.

This understanding acknowledges the communal

quality of identities but avoids painting minorities as homogeneous blocks of people. It positions minority protection as an integral part of the protection of individual human rights.

This understanding makes sense, because when talking about minority communities, it is always important to acknowledge the diversity of views and identities that exist within them. It is also in keeping with the scholarly state-of-the-art, which sees ethno-cultural and linguistic boundaries as fluid, fluctuating and contingent rather than fixed, and individual identities as multiple rather than singular.

FCNM seeks to capture this complexity under Article 3, which states that every person belonging to a national minority shall have the right freely to choose to be treated or not to be treated as such.

Where data is collected on ethnic affiliation, this should include the possibility to express multiple affiliations.

As the foregoing points suggest, then, the focus of FCNM is not on minorities as a ‘stand-alone’ category. Rather, the Convention is understood as an instrument for *managing diverse societies* in a way that balances societal cohesion with individual rights.

In its work, the AC adopts a holistic ‘whole-of-society’ focus that emphasises three overarching and interlinked dimensions. It calls on states to ensure that persons belonging to minorities can:

1. *Express difference and have that difference recognised;*
2. *Gain equal access to resources and rights despite difference;*
3. *Engage in social interaction across differences, based on mutual respect and understanding.*

The various articles of the FCNM work together to address these three dimensions.

Article 5 commits states to creating conditions for the maintenance and development of minority culture and identity and to refraining from policies and practices aimed at assimilation.

The normative framework of minority protection is currently facing enormous challenges, as is the liberal multilateral order from whence it originated during the 1990s

PROF SMITH

Article 5 informs further articles on freedom of religion, creation and use of media, use of minority languages with the authorities, use of names and topographical indications, as well as Article 14 on education. The latter entails recognition that every person belonging to a national minority has the right to learn their minority language; and where sufficient demand exists, ensuring adequate opportunities for being taught the minority language or for receiving instruction in this language.

Importantly, however, Article 14 must be implemented without prejudice to the learning of the official language or the teaching in this language.²

Across the Opinions and other commentaries of the AC, knowledge of the official state language(s) is framed as a *right* (not simply an obligation) that is crucial for minorities' *effective participation* in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs, as stipulated under Article 15 of FCNM.

The 'whole of society' approach is most evident under the FCNM articles dealing with non-

discrimination and promotion of effective equality (4); encouraging tolerance, intercultural dialogue and mutual respect and understanding among all persons on their territory (6); and fostering knowledge of the culture and history of both minorities and the majority (12).

Here, the AC typically applies a wide scope of application, irrespective of any distinctions between 'national' and 'ethnic' minorities

Diversity management is a challenging task for every contemporary state in the Baltic Sea Region and across Europe more generally. This has been particularly so for the Baltic States following the restoration of their independence, given the need to work through the historical injustices and collective trauma of the Soviet occupation and the legacies of societal segregation, be they linguistic, occupational or residential, and different frames of collective memory it left behind.

At the start of the 1990s, many outside observers feared that these challenges might prove insurmountable, notwithstanding the peaceful transition to independence described using the

² On good practices in minority education, see the AC's updated Thematic Commentary No.1, adopted in October 2024: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/thematic-commentaries-of-the-advisory-committee>

terms ‘Baltic Way’ and ‘Singing Revolution’. Just 13 years on from 1991, however, all three countries had progressed successfully towards membership of the Council of Europe, European Union and NATO, despite continuous attempts by Russia to use minority issues as a geostrategic lever to prevent their full integration with the West.

Finally, normative frameworks around human and minority rights are more likely to flourish under conditions of geopolitical stability.³

In this sense, the real cornerstones of FCNM are Article 2, which commits states to act in good faith and follow principles of good neighbourliness and international cooperation, and Article 21, which states that the Convention cannot be taken as implying a right to engage in activity contrary to the principles of international law, in particular the sovereign equality, territorial integrity and political independence of States.

Where these principles are upheld, it becomes possible for states to work bilaterally and multilaterally to advance minority protection, as envisaged under Article 17 & 18 – these articles open up the possibility for external ‘kin-states’ to offer cultural support to their co-ethnics abroad, but only on the basis of agreement with the home state where these co-ethnic minorities reside. Moreover, the FCNM and the AC are quite clear that such support can only serve as a supplement to policies of the home state, which bears sole responsibility for protection of minorities living within its borders.⁴

To illustrate this point in relation to the Baltic Sea Region, one need only cite the example of the Danish-German borderland region of Schleswig/Slesvig, where minority-related tensions within and across borders were addressed after 1945 through bilateral agreements that were further consolidated by European integration.

It is the core principles of Article 2 and Article 21 that Russia has egregiously violated since 2014 by launching aggression against Ukraine under the pretext of defending minorities. This action marked the culmination of a wider and long-standing policy of instrumentalising minority issues in neighbouring

states – a policy which serves geostrategic goals, has no concern with the interests or welfare of the minority populations concerned and takes little account of the actual situation within the states in question.

Indeed, Russia’s policy has aimed to harden ethnic boundaries and divide societies through propaganda in a way that is completely inimical to the principles of FCNM. Through its recent actions, Russia has not simply withdrawn from the normative space of liberalism, but has explicitly positioned itself in opposition to the values which this space embodies.

As well as the implications this carries for Baltic Sea States, let us not forget the implications for minorities within Russia itself – in the context of the Baltic Sea Region, particular mention could be made of the Finno-Ugric peoples of northwest Russia and the Sámi of the Kola Peninsula, who remain effectively cut off from transnational cooperation across state borders within the context of the historic Sápmi homeland.⁵

The external challenge to the region from Russia dovetails and intersects with growing pressure on liberal democratic and multilateral institutions from populist nationalist movements within European states. These movements cast diversity as a ‘problem’ and a security threat rather than an added value and enrichment.

However, it is difficult to see how such divisive narratives can do anything other than further *undermine* the cohesion, resilience and (ultimately) security of European states and societies. This situation makes it all the more important to reaffirm the broad principles of FCNM, which offer a far better long-term roadmap for meeting current challenges.

³ In this regard, see Jenne 2015. ⁴ See Udrea & Smith 2021. ⁵ See the AC’s declaration on Russia’s withdrawal here: 12 January 2024 “Council of Europe body regrets Russia’s withdrawal from the national minorities’ convention: millions left without protection” <https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/news-2024/>

SECTION 3

History of ethnic minorities in the Baltic Sea region

The first panel session focused on one of the many possible perspectives that shed light on the dominant group's attitude toward national minorities in Lithuania. Inevitably, contemporary society's relationship with different periods of Lithuanian history shapes the perception of historical ethnic and confessional communities in Lithuania today.

Antisemitism is a good example. Antisemitism has long been latent or confined to private conversations in Lithuania, but there is evidence that it is resurfacing in the public sphere, while populism and political forces promoting intolerance continue to enjoy electoral support. These developments are unfolding not only under conditions of political instability and Russian invasion in Ukraine, but also against the backdrop of a profound radicalisation within society.

If we compare the situation in interwar Lithuania - particularly on the eve of the Second World War and at its outset - we notice a fundamental difference: today, opposition to antisemitism, intolerance, and populist forces is expressed

openly, even through public protests. Jews and antisemitism (setting aside the events in Gaza) remain at the center of attention for part of contemporary Lithuanian society, despite the fact that the Jewish population barely exceeds two and a half thousand individuals.

For the average Lithuanian, encountering Jews - even if they were to express their identity openly and vividly in everyday life - would not be easy. As a result, opinions and pseudo-knowledge tend to form within close social circles, drawing on historical clichés, despite the proactive efforts of the education system. There is a generational gap - younger generations are more tolerant than older generations, be it towards the Jews or other

national minorities in Lithuania (Tatars⁶, Karaites⁷, Poles, Russian Old Believers, Belarusians and other ethnic and confessional communities).

Soviet-era Lithuania was oriented toward the ideal of “friendship of nations.” After Lithuania regained independence, it acquired multiple distinct identities: national communities consolidated and began to develop their public communal and religious life. Nevertheless, ethnic Lithuanians remained the dominant group, just as Catholicism continues to be the dominant denomination. The numerical dominance of Lithuanians is exceptional compared to Latvia or Estonia, where the proportions between titular nations and national minorities differ significantly (the share of the titular population in 2025 was 84.6% in Lithuania, 63% in Latvia, and 69,4% in Estonia). This is one of the reasons why multiculturalism - idealised as a desirable feature of social structure during Lithuania’s accession to the European Union - has been difficult to achieve.

Here, a brief historical excursus is necessary. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania was once a state stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea. In 1569, due to a complex geopolitical situation, it formed a union with Poland, creating the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. After three partitions at the end of the 18th century, this state was dismantled by the three major powers of the time: the Russian Empire, Prussia, and Austro-Hungarian Empire. What followed was the long 19th century, associated with imperial oppression and restrictions - a period that, in the Lithuanian historical narrative, could hardly contain anything positive. This stands in stark contrast to the idealised image of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and its multi-confessional character (not multiculturalism), which, in the early 21st century - or slightly earlier - was transformed into the phenomenon of multiculturalism. In this reinterpretation, an early modern Christian state was anachronistically proclaimed as a model of tolerance, a place where everyone supposedly lived in harmony. Forgotten were the limits of tolerance that applied only to Christians, excluding non-Christians, as well as the state-imposed mechanisms for managing intolerance

to maintain the stability of multi-confessional coexistence. Assigning the fashionable concept of multiculturalism to the Grand Duchy ignored the Christian dimension of Western civilisation, which, due to religion’s inherent tendency toward dominance, was fundamentally ahistorical.

Post-1990 Lithuania quickly embraced a heroic, idealised image of the Grand Duchy, stripped of ideological overlays, and filled it with as many ethnic and confessional groups as possible, as if quantity alone determined the quality of coexistence. The establishment of this idyllic vision of a tolerant Grand Duchy proved particularly convenient for explaining later events: for example, the Holocaust and Lithuanian antisemitism appeared as shocking anomalies to a supposedly “inherently tolerant” nation. After the Holocaust and the Second World War, intellectuals who emigrated to the West portrayed antisemitism as uncharacteristic of most Lithuanians. This alleged historical absence of antisemitism and intolerance continues to frame antisemitic remarks today as mere folklore - a harmless counting rhyme everyone knows - or as something otherwise excusable. This is problematic, because the elevation of antisemitism to the political level legitimises its emergence from the private sphere into the public domain, creating the illusion of its normality.

On a positive note, the younger generation in Lithuania largely rejects antisemitism. Unfortunately, the older generation, by contrast, appears to be gaining confidence in this regard. Since young people are generally reluctant to vote, those who could inspire change - graduates of schools and universities in post-1990 Lithuania - do not exert sufficient influence on the political sphere. An overly idealised notion of tolerance, perceived almost as a genetically inherited trait, prevents society from recognising manifestations of intolerance and from combating hate speech. Such expressions are dismissed a priori as alien and uncharacteristic of Lithuanians, even though in reality they exist, harming fellow citizens.

⁶ Lithuanian Tatars are descendants of various Turkic tribes. They have preserved their ethnic culture, national and religious identity; the majority of Lithuanian Tatars are Sunni Muslims.

⁷ Karaism is a non-Rabbinical Jewish sect. The estimated number of followers in Lithuania is 200-300, being the smallest of the traditional religions in Lithuania. Considered by many Jews to be a type of Judaism, the Lithuanian Karaism followers have always considered themselves to follow a different faith. See: <https://www.truelithuania.com/karaim-in-lithuania-104>

SECTION 4

Contemporary challenges

The panel focused on contemporary issues in the three Baltic countries as well as in Finland.

SECTION 4.1.

Developments in Finland

When thinking about the attitudes towards Russians and Russian-speakers in the Baltic Sea region, one tends to think of the Baltic states. However, Finland also has a long-standing relationship with Russia. Over the years, this relationship has witnessed hatred, fear and suffering, but also friendship, cooperation and mutual benefit. It is not just black and white, there are many shades of grey.

Russia's war in Ukraine has given a new dimension to this relationship: clearly expressed disapproval and disgust of the violent aggressor (Russia) and sympathy and support for the victim. As Finland has also been a onetime subject to Russia's aggression, it is a natural attitude to have.

There is a considerable Ukrainian minority residing in Finland - over 40 000 Ukrainian citizens as of 2024, most of them speaking Ukrainian as their mother tongue. To Finns, Ukrainian and Russian sound similar, so in fear of offending the Ukrainians, they are now more reluctant to express disapproval based on language alone. Consequently, the target for hatred against Russia and Russians has been blurred.

In general, people of Russian origin – with some exceptions among political activists - keep a very low profile in Finland. The majority experience a very solid firewall of Finnish society against anything coming from Russia⁸ and do not want to raise their voice to defend it. Many of them fear being treated unfairly because of their ethnicity, even if they are not for Putin and the war in Ukraine.⁹

From the point of view of resilience, more attention should be given to how to keep those Russian speakers who stay in the country integrated into Finnish society. In other words, how not to deteriorate the inter-ethnic relations and the general atmosphere in Finland.

Another worrying trend in Finland is the issue of racism. In that regard, the Russian speakers are not the most vulnerable group in Finland. According to the Sixth Opinion on Finland by the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities adopted in February 2025¹⁰, the most vulnerable are Muslims and people of colour. Finland faces a situation where it is and will be increasingly dependent on immigration, while at the same time the current policies try to make the country less attractive in all possible ways, including to the immigrants already present in Finland.

⁸ Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine has made Russia an untrustworthy neighbour in the eyes of the Finns. See: <https://www.eva.fi/en/blog/2022/04/12/finns-hold-russians-in-high-regard-but-perceive-russia-as-a-military-threat/>

⁹ See, f. ex. "Survey: One third of Finland's Russian speakers think Russia violated Ukrainian sovereignty," 6 June 2022, YLE <https://yle.fi/a/3-12478546>

¹⁰ See: <https://rm.coe.int/6th-opinion-finland-en/1680b65a0b>

This is politically short-sighted, and will lead in the course of time to a society where especially the migrant population is marginalised and experiences bitterness, leading to a non-resilient society.

The Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities has outlined the following recommendation for increased community cohesion in Finland (see the Sixth Opinion):

- Combat hate speech
- Develop and provide educational materials that accurately and adequately reflect Finland's ethnic and linguistic diversity and avoid stereotypes
- Enhance at all levels the effectiveness of consultation processes
- Effectively promote and ensure the provision of minority language education.

The Sixth Opinion on Finland states in paragraph 179 (p 41):

“ ... Several interlocutors stated that these families perceived these developments as a consequence of the rise of anti-Russian sentiment in Finland since the start of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine (see Article 6), while at the same time stressing that intercultural understanding and tolerance are needed more than ever. During its visit to the school's branch in Imatra, the Advisory Committee observed that the school is not only attended by Russian-speakers but is also a popular educational institution with a highly international student profile, providing an ideal venue for others interested in learning Russian and be taught in Russian.

In the view of the Advisory Committee, educational establishments like this bilingual school are not only important for the teaching of or in the minority language under Article 14 of the Framework Convention but are also a good example of the provision of intercultural education as they provide a learning space where students interact constructively with each other and thus contributing to societal integration in line with Article 12 of the Framework Convention.”

There are some ways Finland can enhance the compliance of these recommendations. It can intensify the dialogue between the government and the Advisory Committee of the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM), it can publicise the recommendations more widely, and create partnerships using independent operators and NGOs.

SECTION 4.2.

Developments in Lithuania

On November 7, 2024, the Lithuanian Parliament (Seimas) passed the Act on National Minorities. The adoption of the act had been long awaited by representatives of national minorities as well as by human rights organisations such as the European Foundation of Human Rights (EFHR), which has been advocating for comprehensive regulations on this issue for years.

For 15 years - a period from 2010 until 2024 - the rights of national minorities were only regulated by the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which Lithuania ratified without reservations in 2000.

The issue of national minorities was a politically sensitive subject during this legal vacuum, tossed around like a hot potato during every election by political parties with differing agendas. Some parties were advocating for broad minority regulations, others claiming that minorities posed a threat in Lithuania. This prolonged situation allowed both sides to mobilise voters.

However, in 2024, the passage of the National Minorities Act finally succeeded due to several strategic choices.

First, the issue was framed as a matter of state responsibility for its citizens' rights. Manipulative political narratives, previously linking the legislation to favourable relations with Poland, were decisively ended. In this context, crafting an appropriate narrative was crucial, especially considering the geopolitical situation in the region. Some of the challenges Lithuania had faced included the hybrid attack by Belarus that involved forcibly pushing

thousands of migrants across the border into Lithuania; the unprecedented number of refugees arriving to Lithuania from Ukraine; and safe asylum that was granted to members of the Belarusian opposition in Lithuania.

This was the ideal moment to clearly **distinguish migration policy from national minority policy**, as these groups face fundamentally **different challenges** requiring state support. Migrants seek to learn the state language, integrate into the labour market, and secure housing, whereas national minorities in Lithuania aim to preserve culture - they speak Lithuanian, are employed, but seek to maintain identity, nurture traditions, and have quality education and media in their native languages.

Second, Putin's brutal aggression against Ukraine prompted a reconsideration of tolerating foreign interference concerning national minorities. For example, Poland has been very active in financially supporting Polish-language schools, events, and media in Lithuania, while Russia exhibits equally strong influence attempts regarding the Russian-speaking minority. Hence, a clear policy framework was necessary to define Lithuania's role and obligations toward national minorities.

There were several alternative approaches on the table, ranging from banning native languages to protecting them, with harmonisation alongside national and security interests. This direction was endorsed by the Lithuanian government and the Ministry of Justice. Eventually, Lithuania adopted the National Minorities Act. It restructured media funding to provide dedicated support for minority-language media to counter propaganda from aggressor states; and secured guarantees for minorities to access education in their mother tongue. Simultaneously, learning European Union languages over Russian as foreign languages in schools was promoted. All these steps successfully prevented societal division during challenging times.

Some of the key provisions of the adopted Act included definition of a national minority as a group citizens of the Republic of Lithuania, residing on its territory, having durable, strong, and continuous

ties to Lithuania, whose population is smaller than the Lithuanian ethnic majority, and united by the will to preserve their national identity. The act recognises historical minorities who are lacking a current historical homeland for identification (e.g., the Romani¹¹ and Karaites). The Act also ensures that no provision may be interpreted as granting rights conflicting with Lithuanian laws, state sovereignty, territorial integrity, national security, constitutional principles, or universally recognised international law norms.

Lithuania agrees that while committed to protecting minority rights, it cooperates with international organisations and foreign states - except those designated as terrorist or supporting terrorism.

SECTION 4.3.

Developments in Latvia

Russia's invasion of Ukraine substantially changed both the situation of the Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltic states and the policies towards them. On the day the Russian aggression began, both the then Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia made strong statements stressing that it is Putin's Russia not Latvia's Russians who should be blamed and punished. However, it can be argued that this point was forgotten soon, as several legislative and administrative measures have been introduced in Latvia as a response to the atrocities committed by Russia.

To mention some of them:

- a number of monuments, both celebrating Soviet victory over Nazism and more ancient historical events (e.g. war against Napoleon in 1812) have been removed, street names and toponyms changed.
- requirements of the state language command have been extended as a precondition for residence permits, mainly to some additional groups of citizens of Russian Federation
- all remnants of compulsory education in Russian have been abolished, both public and private

¹¹ The Council of Europe estimates that there are approximately 3,000 Roma living in Lithuania (0.08% of the population):

schools must teach in the state language; Russian language, history and culture classes are optional to students, not mandatory.

- public broadcasting in Russian will be terminated, private Russian-language media will not be supported. VAT exemptions on printed media and books in Russian will be removed, leading to price increase.

- the Russian language has been prohibited in ATMs and removed from the websites of the state institutions, including social security and welfare agencies

- in healthcare, a patient who doesn't speak the state language now must ensure interpretation himself (with the exception of the cases of emergency)

Besides official measures, the policy of **de-russification** is actively promoted by some parties and activists, naming and shaming those private entrepreneurs who continue using Russian in communication with clients, as well as private individuals who keep speaking Russian publicly.

One can argue that these measures **target the Russian-speakers rather than the state of Russia**. Their practical impact on the security situation - and on the attitudes of this minority - remains to be evaluated.

In particular, it is not evident *per se* if some command in the state language automatically ensures loyalty to the state. Take the example of the newly introduced language requirements mentioned above. These apply to former citizens and non-citizens of Latvia - mainly elderly women, who opted for Russian citizenship during the crisis in 2009 in order to obtain an old-age pension from Russia, where the retirement age was lower. If they fail the language test, they have either to leave Latvia, or - if they have children in Latvia - must change their status to a different type of the residence permit - which, in particular, envisages much more limited state-funded healthcare. Therefore, they stay, but their children - who naturalised long ago - will have to cover much higher medical expenses.

In practice, these requirements apply to around 30 000 persons. As of the beginning of September 2025, about half of them either passed the tests or were exempted because of age or disability. 250 were refused residence permits on the grounds of security risk. Some 3000 chose to leave Latvia - accompanied by an unknown number of children, most of whom were citizens and tax-payers. Over 50 expulsion procedures have been initiated, and approximately 9000 cases are pending.

One can question whether all this indeed improves Latvia's security and encourages loyalty of the Russian-speaking citizens or not. This strategy is based on the presumption of **equating language with the state**. Loyalty is understood as willingness to accept cultural - rather than political identity. To put it simply - if you feel you belong to Latvia, you unconditionally switch to Latvian. **Willingness to preserve native identity**, reference to minority rights is perceived as **manifestation of the loyalty to another state**, Russia, i.e. an enemy. Diversity *per se* is considered a security threat. These policy changes are shaped by three major factors.

1. International influence, that was crucial for decades because of political conditionality, has virtually vanished. Russian invasion of Ukraine destroyed the system of minority protection.

2. Latvia is a democracy, and its principles as such put limits on possible policies. In practice, it is reflected in disputes over the regulation of the use of languages in the private sphere - more accurately, about where the border between public and private lies. For example - whether it is acceptable to prescribe the languages in which schoolchildren informally talk to each other during the breaks.

In a democracy, a state lacks leverage to always define the use of languages. This can be enforced for the persons engaged with public education, social security, or state employment. Independent professionals or entrepreneurs usually know Latvian (well over 90%, according to official data) but cannot be forced to use it permanently. Yet language activists aim to invent new restrictive measures.

3. High level of inter-cultural socialising, including mixed marriages, is typical for Latvia. Inter-ethnic relations remain rather friendly, no violence has been recorded. The calls for “de-Russification” are not always readily accepted – not many Latvians explicitly oppose but often these ideas are not followed in practice. In particular, many doctors prioritise the Hippocratic oath over the language requirements.

Impact of the new trends in two areas were highlighted:

1. Education

- There is as yet no system of monitoring the quality of education after the switch to teaching in Latvian only. The breakdown by the students’ mother tongue is missing in the PISA data on Latvia, contrary to numerous other indicators such as gender etc. In fact, the only source of data is the school administrations’ answers to the Ministry of Education and Science’s questionnaires. Support for the schools is rather declarative, in practice no real help is available - e.g. teachers’ assistants who are allowed to speak their mother tongue to students. Allegedly, the number of early drop-outs is growing, and marginalisation of the Russian-speaking youth is increasing, but no relevant data on Russian-speaking NEET youth are available.

- ironically, activities under the slogan of “desegregation” led to exactly the opposite outcome: i.e. co-existence of schools with identical curricula and the same language of instruction but separate for ethnic Latvian children and non-Latvians - with some exceptions like e.g. best high schools. Motivated non-Latvian parents are usually eager to send their children to Latvian schools, ethnic Latvian parents are not happy when the number of the Russian-speaking students becomes significant, and the school administration tries to limit it. On the other hand, Latvian parents, as a rule, try to avoid sending their children to former Russian-language schools, in particular, considering that teachers whose mother tongue is not Latvian offer lower standard of education. No concepts or plans of factual desegregation are discussed.

- the share of students who switch to home or remote schooling is growing fast. In practice, this means that they are taught privately, often without any formal registration or licensing, also by those former teachers of minority schools who left after the reform. The public education system is a sort of “privatised”. Moreover, allegedly Russian-speaking youngsters attend remote schooling in Russia’s schools – where, besides traditionally good lessons of math or physics, they receive ideological indoctrination and intoxication. Therefore, the ban of bilingual education helped Russian “soft power” with this regard.

2. Media

Contrary to Lithuania and Estonia, where the state heavily invests in both public and private broadcasting in Russian¹², Latvia chose the strategy of complete “Latvianisation” of the national media space.

After protracted debates, the decision was made to abolish a very popular public radio programme in Russian. Budgetary subsidies for private broadcasters in Russian are available only in exceptional circumstances and are really negligible – in comparison Latvian-language broadcasters. Moreover, the Regulator tends to exert pressure on some Youtube channels and blogs in Russian forcing them to register as media – although the law doesn’t require this. As a result, several Russian-language anti-Putin blogs and channels in Latvia not only receive no support but must also resist the Regulator’s pressure.

The question remains: are the Russian-speakers in the Baltics seen as a security threat, “Russia’s fifth column” - or a demographic, economic, intellectual and military resource? There is no one answer. The Russian-speaking community is very diverse, and the latest events only increased polarisation within this group. Educated, European-minded Russian-speakers tend to believe that the state’s policy towards them is neither just nor wise. In the meantime, Putin’s Russia is unacceptable to them, in this political confrontation they definitely choose the side of Latvia and Europe.

¹² See Polynin (2023) for the Russian language media in Estonia.

SECTION 5

Attitudinal change

The presentations in this section focused on attitudinal changes in Estonia and Latvia. Inevitably Russian aggression in Ukraine has had implications for political attitudes, ethnic relations and societal integration in the Baltic sea region.

There is a large ethnic gap in (geo)political attitudes in Estonia, but there is no homogeneous Russian minority. Instead, the Russian-speaking minority is diverse and divided. Interestingly, citizenship has almost no effect on these attitudes, when ethnicity is controlled for. Overall, ethnic gap in attitudes leads to erosion of interethnic trust, and to increased pessimism regarding integration.

SECTION 5.1.

Attitudes in Estonia

There are a number of data sources available for looking at the attitudinal changes in Estonia. Firstly, the Government Office has carried out 18 rounds of surveys on relevant issues during 2022-2025, with about 1200-1500 respondents per round¹³. Secondly, the Ministry of Defense conducts an annual survey “Public Opinion and National Defense” with around 1200 respondents per round. Thirdly, the reports of the Ministry of Culture’s survey “Integration Monitoring” for years 2020 and 2023 are a valuable resource, with around 1500 respondents each time.

The attitudes towards Russia’s military activities in Ukraine have been quite stable from April 2022 till June 2025. Of ethnic Estonians, 92-97% either strongly condemn or condemn the Russian military activities in Ukraine. In the “others¹⁴” category, 33-45% strongly condemn and 13-24% condemn

the military action. Among the “others”, there is a noticeable share of people who either support or strongly support Russia’s military activities in Ukraine, ranging between 9 to 22% of the respondents; however, the share of supporters has fallen and remained around 10% since autumn 2022. Between 20-36% of respondents either don’t know or refuse to express their opinion, which is quite a high proportion.

The share of ethnic Estonians who agree or strongly agree that allies should continue to provide military aid to Ukraine has remained quite stable since spring 2022, with 88% at its highest and 77% at its lowest. The divide between ethnic Estonians and others is quite noticeable here - the share of supporters of this statement has remained quite low among the latter, peaking at 29%, and being outnumbered by those respondents who either disagree or disagree strongly (56% in April 2022 and 54% in June 2025).

Attitudinal differences - and changes - are also evident when looking at the provision of humanitarian aid to Ukraine, reconstruction of Ukraine and supporting sanctions on Russia. The attitudinal difference is especially noticeable in regard to the sanctions on Russia. Just 25% of the “others” agree with the statement “I support sanctions on Russia even if this brings higher prices”, and this has remained so during the last 2 years. The share of those who disagree or

¹³ The Estonian-language version of the 23rd round is available here: <https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/documents/2025-06/2025%2006%20AA%2023%20seire%20raport%20-%20avaldamiseks.pdf>

¹⁴ Note the category ‘other’ does not distinguish between the ethnicity of the respondents.

strongly disagree among the other respondents is remarkably high 67% recently.

The Ministry of Defense has been surveying the support for NATO membership among ethnic Estonians and others since 2000. In all the years the survey has been conducted, the majority of ethnic Estonians have supported NATO membership. Since its NATO accession in March 2004, the support has been above 80%, and is currently at a high 94% among Estonians. Among other ethnicities, the support is lower, currently at 53%¹⁵.

Another survey covering the period from 2019 till 2025 looked at the combined impact of ethnicity and citizenship. The data indicates that Estonian citizenship does not seem to play a significant role in determining attitudes towards NATO for ethnic Russians. The trends are similar when looking at the perceptions of Russia as a security threat by ethnicity and citizenship. Ethnic Estonians are clearly distinct in their attitude, the three categories of ethnic Russians not so. That is to say, ethnic Russians with Estonian citizenship, ethnic Russians with Russian Federation citizenship and ethnic Russians with undetermined citizenship have rather similar attitudes, which diverge from the attitudes of ethnic Estonians.

Overall, when looking at the attitudinal change in Estonia, one can note a pronounced ethnic gap in attitudes towards the Russian war in Ukraine and in support for NATO (Estonians strongly pro-Ukraine and pro-NATO; Russian-speakers: mixed views, polarised). This has led to further erosion of interethnic trust and societal cohesion. In general, citizenship is not a significant predictor of (geo) political attitudes (Russia threat, support for NATO, trust in domestic institutions) when ethnicity is controlled for. Russians with Russian Federation citizenship and Estonian citizenship have very similar views.

The arrival of Ukrainian refugees has altered the ethnic composition of Estonia and impacted interethnic relations in various ways. The Russian attack on Ukraine was a critical juncture in Estonia's minority policies, leading to decisive reforms to reduce Russian influence, avert threats,

and accelerate societal integration. This has implications for electoral politics, as well as has led to further securitisation; return of several post-Soviet cleavages (ethnic, geopolitical, *mnemo-political*); and emergence of pro-Kremlin forces.

SECTION 5.2.

Attitudes in Latvia

Research shows that the number of Russian-speaking residents who are neutral towards the ongoing Russian aggression in Ukraine, is growing both in Latvia, as well as in Estonia. It is difficult to say whether this is ambivalence disguised as neutrality or a genuine hesitation or sympathy to both sides.

There is general distrust in the media - any media, be it Estonian, Latvian, Russian or international, so people are not sure what is really happening in Ukraine. The attitudes are mainly influenced by the social network (family, friends). As data from Estonia above showed, there is strong consensus among the ethnic majority, but the Russian-language minority is diverse and divided. This is the case in Latvia as well.

The trust of the Russian-speaking minority in political institutions has historically been very low, and this includes political parties. Previously "Saskaņa" or the Social Democratic Party "Harmony" was seen as speaking for the Russian-speakers, but since it condemned the Russian war in Ukraine, it has lost the support of the Russian-speakers. For the first time since regaining independence, Russian populist parties are on the rise in Latvia.

In today's Latvia, the Russian-speaking minority feels that Russian language and culture are being cancelled. The Latvians, on the other hand, are in a way expecting Russian-speakers to take the collective responsibility for the actions taking place in Ukraine (*cf. Kollektivschuld* or the collective guilt attributed to Germany and its people for perpetrating the Holocaust and other atrocities in World War II). Contrast this with the collective guilt expected from Russians and the atrocities of the Stalin regime, however - that hasn't happened.

¹⁵ See p 63: <https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/documents/2025-06/2025%2006%20AA%2023%20seire%20raport%20-%20avaldamiseks.pdf>

SECTION 6

Geopolitical pressures

There are geopolitical pressures on all three Baltic states, but different buttons are being pressed. The discussion focused on the cases of Lithuania and Estonia.

SECTION 6.1.

Situation in Lithuania

Compared to other Baltic states, Lithuania is fairly homogeneous, yet various minorities have their opportunities and their challenges. New arrivals are more vulnerable, as they have no citizenship, no social network, they are more susceptible to manipulation by external (Russian/Belarusian) media, and social media.

Russian Federation tries to manipulate Belarusians and Russians by instigating hatred against each other; Belarus is exercising Litvinism to narrate that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was a Slavic state, the medieval Lithuanians were Belarusians, and modern Lithuania is a consequence of a falsification of history.

One vulnerable group is the people coming from Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) - they are descendants of the Soviet era, Muslims by religion and mainly speaking Russian. According to the local Muslim clergy, they perceive the new arrivals as a threat, as they are much more radical.

SECTION 6.2.

Situation in Estonia

One of the questions that is often asked after the Russian invasion in Ukraine is the following: Is

Narva next? Narva, with a population of 52 000, is a municipality and city in Estonia. It is located in Ida-Viru County, at the eastern extreme point of Estonia, on the west bank of the Narva River, which forms the Estonia–Russia international border. About 95% of the population are native Russian-speakers, less than half are Estonian citizens and over one-third are citizens of the Russian Federation.

Russia's hybrid war influences the situation of the Russian-speaking minority in Estonia badly, as everything is being highly securitised. This situation is also exploited by some political parties as a way to increase their support and get cheap popularity. As an example, the recent constitutional change stripping all third country nationals of their voting rights, including Russian and Belarusian citizens¹⁶, was not thought through thoroughly. Surveys show that citizenship and attitudes are not as strongly correlated as ethnicity and attitudes are.

SECTION 6.3.

What is Russia doing in the Baltic sea region?

What is behind Russia's hybrid warfare against national minorities in the Baltic states? Several points can be highlighted.

¹⁶ See ERR News 26 March 2025: https://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/public_opinion_and_national_defence_2024_spring.pdf

1. Strategic Intent

Russia's overarching goals in the Baltic States are consistent with its broader hybrid warfare playbook. Russia aims to exploit identity fault lines to weaken state legitimacy, especially along ethnic and linguistic lines. It wants NATO and EU to believe that Baltic countries are "discriminatory" states that undermine Western values, thus undermining the current unity. It wants to erode support for Ukraine by reframing aggression as "protection of Russian-speakers" and positioning Moscow as a "guardian of minority rights." Also, it aims to justify potential escalatory actions by laying groundwork for "humanitarian intervention" narratives, as used in Crimea and Donbas.

2. Core Playbook or How Tensions Are Engineered

The Russian Federation's tactics are similar across the Baltics, but adapted to local demographics in each country. There are five main narratives:

A) "Protecting minorities" narrative, which in Lithuania is framed as discriminatory against Poles and Russian-speakers; in Latvia focuses on Russian language restrictions in schools and media and in Estonia targets the Ida-Viru County, where Russian-speakers are a majority, with "identity protection" rhetoric.

B) Inflammatory pranks and falsified incidents, accusing NATO troops of crimes in all three countries, as well as fabricating stories of minority mistreatment in schools or public services.

C) Amplifying the diaspora by supporting and recruiting various NGOs linked to Russia, Orthodox clergy, ethno-cultural groups, and Telegram/Facebook communities acting as "grassroots voices."

D) Migration instrumentalisation
Belarus-assisted migration pressure at Lithuanian and Latvian borders (2021–2022), framed as "racist" treatment of migrants.

E) Grey-zone coordination
Cyber attacks on municipalities (esp. Latvia and Estonia), as well as vandalism of Soviet-

era monuments, then narrating it as "fascist provocation."

3. When and why It Works – and When It Doesn't?

It works when grievances already exist (e.g. school language policy in Latvia; Soviet monument removal in Estonia; spelling/name disputes in Lithuania), where communication by state authorities is bureaucratic or delayed.

It fails when governments respond quickly in minority languages; when local target groups and validators (teachers, mayors, priests) are involved, and when Baltic solidarity and NATO backing are audibly expressed and visibly present.

4. Typical Attack Lines in the Baltic States are following:

In Lithuania - the bans on Russian media are framed as "persecution", disputes over Polish-language education and Polish language rights are manipulated, the state is accused in inhumane treatment of immigrants and there are fabricated stories of NATO misconduct.

In Latvia, the focus is on education reforms (transition to Latvian-only schooling) that are depicted as "erasing Russian culture", the non-citizenship status is exploited to argue systemic exclusion and there is a strong narrative of destroying the memory of Soviet "liberation".

In Estonia, the Ida-Viru County is depicted as "abandoned" by Tallinn; the social and economic inequalities of Russian-speakers are amplified and the removal of Soviet monuments (e.g., T-34 tank in Narva, 2022) are framed as evidence of "Russophobia."

5. Tactics, Techniques, Procedures (TTPs) These include:

- cross-platform cascades: Telegram → Facebook YouTube → local press
- **astroturfing**¹⁷ in "parents' committees", "language rights groups" and so on, which appear simultaneously.

¹⁷ Astroturfing is the deceptive practice of hiding the sponsors of an orchestrated message or organisation (e.g., political, economic, advertising, religious, or public relations) to make it appear as though it originates from, and is supported by, unsolicited grassroots participants.

- linguistic targeting, with narratives being tailored to Russian, Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian readers.
- crisis piggybacking turns unrelated crises, crimes and incidents into “proof” of ethnic bias.
- memory weaponisation is constantly attempting to exploit debates about World War II and Soviet history.

6. Indicators of an Engineered Campaign include the following:

- recycled visuals from other conflicts passed as “local.”
- identical slogans across regions (“second-class citizens,” “defend our schools”). bot spikes in minority-language social media.
- calls for protests via freshly created Telegram Facebook groups.
- external Russian media amplifying “local grievances” within hours.

7. Five possible counter-strategies for the Baltic States

A) **Two-track doctrine of resilience** (multilingual rapid debunks, minority-language explainers, transparent communication) and deterrence-by-punishment (fines, bans, prosecutions against malign influence; public attribution of tactics).

B) **Minority-centric communications**, requiring permanent communication teams in Russian, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian languages. This would have to target local media, including radio, TV and newspapers in minority regions (Visaginas, Šalčininkai, Latgale, Ida-Viru). There is a need to teach critical media literacy in minority-language schools.

C) **Regional trust architecture** could cover Lithuania–Poland joint briefings on education and language to pre-empt Kremlin narratives; Latvia–Estonia coordination on monument policies to avoid fragmented messaging; and visible reassurance in hybrid-threat monitoring in and by NATO/EU.

D) **Community early-warning networks** - this is all about pre-emption. Training schools, NGOs, and local governments to flag rumors early. Using

open source intelligence (OSINT) based monitoring to identify rumor lifecycles and pre-bunk before escalation.

E) **Civil society multipliers** - support “elves”¹⁸ and independent fact-checking networks and fund minority-language media projects that highlight local success stories.

8. Defuse tension through messages

This includes framing the common good (“Russian- and Polish-speaking communities are part of Baltic resilience”), shared security (“Disinformation divides us, unity defends us”), focusing on respect and clarity (acknowledge sensitive issues like names, monuments, schools with concrete steps and timelines) and encourage participation (minority-led forums, rapid publication of outcomes).

9. Response Pipeline (Baltic Application)

The six elements here are:

A) Detect → early-warning networks

B) Verify → fact-check cells within 2–4h

C) Localise → in RU/LT/LV/EE with trusted validators

D) Publish & Push → through schools, parishes, municipalities.

E) Measure → track rumor decay and sentiment.

F) Sanction → escalate against malign actors when identified.

10. Bottom Line

Russia doesn’t create ethnic divisions in the Baltics, but weaponises existing grievances. By targeting language policy in Latvia, minority rights in Lithuania, and memory politics in Estonia, Moscow aims to split societies, to weaken state legitimacy, and to undermine NATO/EU cohesion.

The antidote lies in a twin-track approach: rapid, localised, minority-language communication + credible penalties for malign actors. Added to this are regional coordination, Lithuania–Poland solidarity, and empowered local voices. Together, these measures can neutralise Kremlin attempts to turn minority issues into crises of national identity.

¹⁸ Lithuanian volunteer fact-checkers started calling themselves elves for their relentless fight against internet trolls. The community unites professionals from various fields: foreign politics, cybersecurity, IT, economics, environmental protection and other. The unique phenomenon of the elves was born in Lithuania in 2014. Read more: <https://www.debunk.org/about-elves>

Whither ethnic politics in the region?

Overall, the countries have taken a very different path. Lithuania tries to align its legislation with the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM).

Latvia is taking almost the opposite approach, resulting in the Advisory Committee's decision that Latvia could be seen as not complying with the FCNM. Estonia is somewhere in the middle - while Russian citizens have lost some of their political rights, they have not lost fundamental rights. These different approaches can be explained by different ethnic composition, different political and demographic environments.

The range of different responses is rather striking. Can these differences be rationally explained? The region is the same, the security environment is the same. Yet, the approach to the integration of minorities differs. How to measure which approach works the best, and what methodology or metrics to use to measure that kind of success? Overall, some kind of Baltic cooperation in national minority issues would be helpful and should be established.

SECTION 8

Concluding remarks or important points to take away

Minority national groups are hostages of geopolitical change. There are some critical positive examples (e.g. strong and improving inter-state relations between Lithuania and Poland) and some negative counter-examples (relationships between Baltic states and Russian Federation).

Migration between countries is easier when neighbouring countries have good and solid agreements in place (see Turkey and Greece).

It is important to monitor what is going on in individual countries regarding national minorities, as strong monitoring allows progress to be made. Ethnic Equality Monitoring, as introduced in the UK in 2015, is an excellent example to learn from. Estonia is doing a good job here with their integration monitoring programmes.

While the Russian-speaking minority is the most talked about minority in the Baltic Sea region, there are other minorities who must be incorporated in discussions, strategies and policies. These include the Jews, Muslims, the Roma, to name just a few.

Education is of central importance and an issue that has to be addressed, being one of the most important ways of building social cohesion. It is worth noting that policing and criminal justice system problems do not seem to be an issue in the Baltic sea area. Minority ethnic groups and their trust in the justice system is not considerably different from the majority's. Also, political representation seems not to be a major issue at this point. However, recent constitutional amendments in Estonia need to be followed, to see how these impact the social cohesion.

Mnemopolitics matters and the question of monuments and contested memories is a symbolic issue that has been an issue in these countries. Historical representation is significant and needs to be dealt with utmost care.

The role of international borders is important in the Baltic Sea region. Being the borderland of Europe, there are the Finland/Russia border, the Estonia/Russia border, the Latvia/Russia border, the Lithuania/Kaliningrad and Lithuania/Belarus borders. These all need to be monitored.

Bureaucracy counts. There is a need to find a way to foster dialogue between the FCNM advisory board and the states. There is a need to listen to the expert advice on the basis of knowledge and intelligence and how this would find a way to actual states that implement it. How can the series advice be put more into practice by the states. How is the FCNM actually applied “on the ground”?

Finally - it is important to develop the capacity to understand Russia much better. Russia and its actions were much better understood just a decade or so ago, and there has been a decrease from that time. There is a need to understand what Russia actually does when it tries to influence the Russian speakers in the Baltic countries, and to challenge Putin’s historical narratives.

Two philosophical questions remain. *Firstly*, how effective are international norms in this era? The international order is still a state-centric international order and ultimately all important decisions in this area fall on individual states. *Secondly*, is it time to think over the role and characteristics of the FCNM? Is the concept of minority rights as the main approach to manage diversity in societies still suitable? Or should academics and other experts come together and provide their academic input for a new way of thinking about non-discrimination and sustaining cultural diversity? After all, the current FCNM started with academic input all those years ago.

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Participants

Listed alphabetically by surname.

- Ambassador **Eitvydas Bajarūnas**, MFA of Lithuania, is also non-resident Senior Fellow with the Democratic Resilience program at the Centre for European Policy Analysis (CEPA, DC).
- **Boriss Cilevics**, minority rights activist, founder of MINELRES.
- Rt Hon **Charles Clarke**, former MP for Norwich South from 1997 to 2010, Visiting Professor at Lancaster University and Kings College London; Co-lead of the Baltic Geopolitics programme at the Cambridge University Centre for Geopolitics.
- **Ewelina Dobrowolska**, former Minister of Justice, Lithuania; Head of Public Affairs and Strategic Growth at Fabula Rud Pedersen Group
- **Piret Ehin**, Professor of Comparative Politics and Deputy Head for Research at the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies at the University of Tartu, Estonia
- **Mārtiņš Kaprāns**, senior researcher at the University of Latvia's Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Latvia
- **Kęstutis Kilinskas**, Department of New History at the Faculty of History at Vilnius University.
- **Donatas Kupčiūnas**, postdoctoral researcher, The Baltic Geopolitics Programme of the University of Cambridge, UK
- **Kadri Liik**, policy analyst, Estonia
- **Oliver Loode**, Managing Director of URALIC Centre NGO, Estonia
- **Beate Martin**, Director Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Baltic States
- **Inta Mierina**, Director of the Centre for Diaspora and Migration Research and a tenure professor at the University of Latvia
- **Akvilė Naudžiūnienė**, Assistant Professor, Faculty of History, Department of Historical Theory and Cultural History, Vilnius University, Lithuania
- **Pille Petersoo**, lecturer in Sociology at Tallinn University, Estonia (Rapporteur)
- **Vello Pettai**, Director of the ECMI (European Centre for Minority Issues), Germany
- **Andžej Pukšto**, Associate Professor and the Head of the Department of Political Science, Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania
- **Mikko Puumalainen**, Deputy Chancellor of Justice, Finland
- **Brendan Simms**, Director of the Centre for Geopolitics, and Professor of History of European International Relations, University of Cambridge, UK
- **David J. Smith**, Alec Nove Chair in Russian and East European Studies, University of Glasgow, UK
- **Margarita Šešelgytė**, Director of the Institute of International Relations and Political Science at Vilnius University, Lithuania
- **Jolanta Steikunaite-Babarkse**, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Head of Office, Lithuania
- **Elke Van Hoyer**, Baltic Administrator, Centre for Geopolitics, University of Cambridge, UK
- **Jurgita Verbickienė**, Professor at the Faculty of History, Centre for Studies of East-European Jewish History, Vilnius University, Lithuania
- **Raivo Vetik**, Professor of comparative politics at Tallinn University, Estonia