COSMOS WORKING PAPERS

The Unintended Consequence of the Struggle for Independence: the Transition to Democracy in the Baltic Countries

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Mobilizing for Democracy: Democratization Processes and the Mobilization of Civil Society

The project addresses the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in democratization processes, bridging social science approaches to social movements and democracy. The project starts by revisiting the "transitology" approach to democratization and the political process approach to social movements, before moving towards more innovative approaches in both areas. From the theoretical point of view, a main innovation will be in addressing both structural preconditions as well as actors' strategies, looking at the intersection of structure and agency. In an historical and comparative perspective, I aim to develop a description and an understanding of the conditions and effects of the participation of civil society organizations in the various stages of democratization processes. Different parts of the research will address different sub-questions linked to the broad question of CSOs' participation in democratization processes: a) under which (external and internal) conditions and through which mechanisms do CSOs support democratization processes? b) Under which conditions and through which mechanisms do they play an important role in democratization processes? c) Under which conditions and through which mechanisms are they successful in triggering democratization processes? d) And, finally, what is the legacy of the participation of civil society during transitions to democracy on the quality of democracy during consolidation? The main empirical focus will be on recent democratization processes in EU member and associated states. The comparative research design will, however, also include selected comparisons with oppositional social movements in authoritarian regimes as well as democratization processes in other historical times and geopolitical regions. From an empirical point of view, a main innovation will lie in the development of mixed method strategies, combining large N and small N analyses, and qualitative comparative analysis with in-depth, structured narratives.

The Unintended Consequence of the Struggle for Independence: the Transition to Democracy in the Baltic Countries

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Cosmos Working Paper 2012/11

Abstract: The Baltic countries' struggle was for independence more than any other thing. The achievement of democracy was a by-product of the secessionist project of increasing autonomy from Moscow. A possible explanation for this could be that representative democracy became an implicit and obvious ideal regime for the elites and local populations. As for the successes of the independence movements in the Baltic countries, five crucial events paved the way for independence as the only exit strategy for the Baltic SSRs. First, Gorbachev promoted the mobilization of civil society, expecting support for his reform program, but miscalculating the relevance of nationalism for the Soviet Republics. Second, after mobilization had become widespread, Gorbachev lost the opportunity to build the USSR as a confederation because he refused to accept that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was illegal. Third, this issue, plus the failure of attempts to repress mobilizations, led to increased unification among all the mobilized sectors, in turn leading to a two-million-strong human chain protest. Fourth, the first multiparty elections in the Baltic countries saw a clear majority support the pro-independence groups, allowing for a quick and institutionalized process of secession. Finally, after the failed coup against Gorbachev the project of a voluntary federation collapsed, making independence a *de jure* fact since the correlation of power favoured Yeltsin's decentralization model.

Keywords: democratization, secessionist movement, human rights organization, Popular Fronts, Catholic Church, USSR, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania

Introduction

The Baltic countries' struggle was for independence more than any other thing. The achievement of democracy was a by-product of the secessionist project of increasing autonomy from Moscow. The wave of protests that led to the independence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania was a result of the opening of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) regime to dissent, since Mikhail Gorbachev miscalculated that these mobilizations would support his reform program (Pabriks and Purs, 2001: 46-47; Lane, 2001: 96; etc.). Contrary to his expectations, "... the failure of the regime to prevent specific mobilizational challenges gave rise to new challenges by other groups. [Later on, the] Conflict

within the leadership of the state [in Moscow] and the success of some protest acts evoked a more serious explosion of public expectations –an amplification of demands from relatively benign concerns to issues more directly challenging the parameters of the national order" (Beissinger, 2002: 68).

Periodization

The independence movements in the Baltic countries were part of a bigger nationalist process that had emerged within the USSR and was facilitated by Gorbachev's policy of glasnost'. Glasnost' reduced the tight control of information coming from the west, allowed –and promoted- civil society mobilization, and was associated with a series of economic reforms that aimed at improving the efficiency of the economy –the perestroika. This opening was decided in June 1988 during the USSR's 19th Communist Party Conference, and represented a unique opportunity for the Baltic countries to claim further autonomy (Smith, 1994a; Beissinger, 2002).

The transition process in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, according to Runcis (1999: 38), "... has four components: (1) political transformation; (2) transition to market economy; (3) creation of an independent state; and (4) preservation of independence." Those few who consider that the Baltic struggle was one for democratization date the end of this process with the elections to the transitional State Councils in 1992 (Ruus, 1999: 23; Kaldor and Vejvoda, 1999; Dawisha and Parrott, 1997). All others date it in line with the Independence Declarations of 1990 (Beissinger, 2002; Smith, 1994a, 2001; Lieven, 1994; Pabriks and Purs, 2001; Lane, 2001; etc.).

The Baltic SSRs were early risers in a general wave of nationalist mobilizations within the USSR that were a result of the opening of political opportunities for expressing dissent generated by the glasnost' reform program. In addition, in the specific case of the Baltic SSR, higher degrees of coordination were achieved due to long traditions of resistance to Soviet occupation, the existence of links with the west (in Estonia), an active diaspora, a supportive Catholic Church (in Lithuania) and a nationalist population (in all three cases). Finally, the diffusion processes among the three countries were quick and effective due to the long-standing links among the three states.

Resistance period (1965-1986)

Even though the majority of the population had accepted Soviet rule since the 1950s, the Baltic Socialist Soviet Republics (SSRs) were among the few –along with Western Ukraine – that had some relevant experience of resistance during the Soviet period. According to Beissinger (2002: 54, n. 8), these mobilizations aimed at secession: "Out of 185 mass demonstrations identified with 100

participants or more that took place in the USSR between 1965 and 1986, only 20 raised the issue of secession, and all of these were located in the Baltics. The largest occurred in Vilnius on October 10, 1977, in the aftermath of a soccer game and included from ten to fifteen thousand participants... Before August 1987 only four other secessionist demonstrations mobilized more than a thousand participants: May 18, 1972, in Kaunas; November 1, 1975, in Vilnius; October 1, 1980, in Tallinn; and October 26, 1980, in Trakai, Lithuania".

In Lithuania the Catholic Church was the main organization involved in resistance to Moscow's policies of sovietisation. In 1972, *The Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania* began[1], a publication denouncing human rights violations in the country. It was printed without interruption until 1988 (Krickus, 1997) with the support of the Vatican (since the papacy of John Paul II), the Lithuanian diaspora in the United States and some intellectuals in Moscow, such as Andrei Sakharow and Sergei Kovalev (Lane, 2001: 89-90).

However central the Catholic Church during this period, Shtromas (1994, 115, n. 40) recalls other contentious events unrelated to the more organized struggle of the Catholic Church:

> "Another mass manifestation that developed into a full-scale riot took place in Kaunas in 1960, during the festivities devoted to the 20th anniversary of Lithuania's sovietisation. On that occasion militia forces started shooting at the demonstrators, killing and wounding several people, which outraged the crowds to such an extent that they attacked and smashed the forces of law and order present in the city. Two more such mass demonstrations that developed into riots took place in Lithuania. One, in May 1972, was the result of the self-immolation in the central square of Kaunas 'for the freedom of Lithuania' of a young student, Romas Kalanta; it was his funeral on 18 May 1972, that turned into a demonstration that literally took over the city and held it for almost two days, until the troops were sent in to disperse it. More than five hundreds arrests were made. The other, in October 1977, developed from a soccer match played in Vilnius between the local team and a team from the Russian town of Smolensk. On all occasions the overriding slogans were 'Freedom for Lithuania' and 'Russians out of our country'."

In addition to the Catholic Church, there were two other important resistance coalitions in Lithuania. The first was the Lithuanian Helsinki Group, founded in 1979 and one of many similar groups that emerged across the USSR in that period. The coalition was unable to organize relevant mobilizations because it was severely repressed, losing all its members by 1982. The second coalition was the Committee for the Defence of the Rights of Catholics, founded in 1980, and which collected 46,905 signatures against the trials of its leaders, Father

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[1] This was not the only samizdat publication. *Ausra*, a secular publication that had been in print since 1975, was another. In addition, there were at least nine other Catholic samizdat publications in circulation during the 1970s-1980s (Shtromas, 1994: 104-105; Lane, 2001: 91-92).

Alfonsas Svarinskas and Father Sigitas Tamkevičius, condemned to exile for anti-Soviet propaganda, in 1982 (Shtromas, 1994: 103-104).

In Estonia, the 1970s-1980s saw an escalation in independence claims by dissident groups. An appeal for the restoration of Estonia's independence was presented in the United Nations, and in October 1980 the "Letter of the Forty", an open letter to three Soviet newspapers by 40 leading Estonian intellectuals condemning the repression of university students and calling for policies to stop the decline of Estonian language usage in the SSR was published (Vardys, 1981; Raun, 1997: 341). There was no massive repression, but some dissidents were killed in this period. The most well-known case is that of Jüri Kukk, killed in a labour camp in March 1981 after being forced to eat while on hunger strike (Taagepera, 1984). Shtromas (1994: 115-116, n. 40) recalls the main contentious events as follows:

> "In Estonia a mass protest took place in the capital city Tallinn. It started as a result of the televised hockey world championship. When the Czech team defeated the Soviet team, hundreds of people, mainly students, burst onto the streets shouting "we won". Mass youth demonstrations took place in Tartu (Estonia) in 1976 and in Liepaja (Latvia) in 1977 over pop music events. The most significant Estonian youth demonstrations took place in Tallinn, Tartu, and some other places in October 1980 over the issue of increased time allocation to Russian lessons in Estonian schools. Subsequently, a letter from 40 prominent Estonian intellectuals expressed their full solidarity with and support for the demonstrators, who were extremely brutally dealt with by militia and army troops".

There were several main resistance social movement organizations in Estonia. The first, the Estonian Democratic Movement and the Estonian National Front, emerged in 1972. In 1974 the Estonian Patriots was created and in 1976 the Association of Concerned Estonians replaced the Estonian Patriots after they were crushed by the authorities. In 1978, two new social movement organizations were created: the White Key Brotherhood and *Maarjamaa*, both mainly concerned with cultural freedom. All these organizations were founding members of the Estonian Popular Front in 1987-1988 which later led the struggle for independence. In addition, four samizdat periodicals had been published in Estonia since 1971 (in Estonian: *Eestri Democraat, Eesti Rahvuslik Hääl, Poolpäevaleht*, and in Russian: *Luch Svodoby*) (Shtromas, 1994: 104-105).

Estonia's resistance movements survived because of a detail that marked the country out from the other two Baltic countries. Since 1965 Estonia had enjoyed a unique privilege within the USSR that allowed it to have contact with Finland, to receive tourists from that country and for Estonians to travel there by a regular boat connection between Tallinn and Helsinki. The connection between Tallinn and Helsinki was unusual for the USSR in several ways:

"Finnish tourists brought Western newspapers and literature, including some works by Estonian exile writers living in the West. Academics and other intellectuals were able to establish contacts with colleagues in Finland and were often able to keep abreast of developments in their field in the West. Most importantly, Finnish television was available in the northern third of Estonia, providing daily access to Western news reports and programming. The Estonian and Finnish languages are linguistically close enough that a native speaker of Estonian can gain at least a passive knowledge of Finnish by very little effort" (Raun, 1997: 342).

In Latvia, the situation was very different. There were no contacts with the west and, since 1965, the only relevant resistance movements were run by émigré Latvians. One of the main reasons for this dissimilar situation was that the Soviet military presence in Latvia was much higher than in any other Baltic SSR. The headquarters of the Baltic Military District was in Riga. In addition, Latvians formed only slightly over half of the population in the country, which had the highest percentage of Russian migrants in the Baltic region (Plakans, 1997: 254-255). However, there were a few social movement organizations in Latvia, created in 1975 (the Latvian Independence Movement, Latvia's Democratic Youth Committee, and Latvia's Christian Democratic Organization). As Shtromas (1994: 104) puts it: "By 1976 they started to co-ordinate their activities and issued joint statements addressed to the government of the Latvian SSR, the Australian prime minister (Malcolm Fraser), and others. Another, more activist body, the Organization for Latvia's Independence, organized throughout the 1970s and the 1980s various protest actions, petitions, and demands". Finally, there were no samizdat publications in Latvia. Thus, the resistance period in Latvia was not comparable to that of Lithuania –with its active Catholic Church coordinating several actions against the regime- or Estonia –with a whole network of dissidents both inside and outside the country.

The first cross-Baltic coordinated actions involving all these resistance coalitions, social movement organizations and networks were carried out on the 40th Anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact[2]. On August 29th, 1979 a joint petition by the three Baltic SSRs was issued in Moscow demanding the end of the Russia-Germany agreement assigning the Baltic States to the USSR. It was the emergence of this network in 1987-1991 that pushed the nationalist awakening into a pro-independence movement (Shtromas, 1994: 105-106).

First stage: nationalist awakening (1986-1988)

From 1986 to 1988 there was a national awakening in the Baltic SSRs as a result of the Tartar example and the openness produced by Gorbachev's glasnost' program. The struggle for independence (and by default also

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[2]   Cf. Kirby (1994) on the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and its implications for Baltic history.

democratization) of the Baltic SSRs was part of a cycle of nationalist mobilization that started in the summer of 1987 when Crimean Tartars exiled in Uzbekistan took their nationalist claims to Red Square in Moscow (Beissinger, 2012: 61-62). The opening of political opportunities for nationalist claims produced by the Crimean Tartars led to more open mobilization around Baltic nationalist claims.

Moscow's miscalculations were also crucial for the success of the Baltic cause. Gorbachev had underestimated the importance of nationalism and ethnicity in the USSR, never recognizing it as a relevant concern in the SSRs (Pabriks and Purs, 2001: 46-47). Since his first declaration on nationalist issues in the USSR in 1986 and up until August 1989, Gorbachev had considered this issue a minor one (Smith, 1994b: 139).[3] The Baltic States were also considered by Moscow as the ideal place to initiate the economic changes of perestroika, thus supporting the most reformist elites and promoting market-oriented reforms (Lane, 2001: 98). Moreover, he had supported the initial stages of the Popular Front struggles in the Baltic countries as he thought they would help him to fight resistance to his reform plans from the old guard of the USSR Communist Party. However, the result was that,

> "The Baltic republics represented a paradox for Moscow throughout this transitional period. On the one hand, of all the Soviet republics it was Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania that were envisaged as likely to be most receptive to perestroika. Indeed Gorbachev gave his blessing to the setting up of grassroots-based movements in the region precisely because the Baltic was considered as the most likely flagship which the other republics would follow. Consequently, for the first time in half a century Baltic civil society was invited to participate in an experiment in socio-economic and political reform. On the other hand, it quickly became apparent to Moscow that the Baltic peoples wanted to go much further down the path to national self-determination than the centre's reformers had envisaged or were prepared to allow. So underpinning this paradox was Moscow's miscalculation both of the scale of national feeling in the least Sovietised of the republics and the effectiveness of a programme of reform that assumed that embarking upon economic and social restructuring would somehow automatically resolve the question of Baltic national self-determination" (Smith, 1994b: 139).

The disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power station in April 1986 gave environmental concerns a central position in a Soviet Union more tolerant to the public expression of dissent. The Balts were also concerned about new large infrastructure investments in the region. Because of this the first stage of the struggle for independence was characterized by mobilizations with a focus on

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[3] The lack of Gorbachev's understanding of the national issue in the USSR was also clear to the Baltic elites. Gorbachev had visited Estonia in February 1987 to give a talk about the need to increase Russification in the Baltic SSRs and the deficit between Estonia and Russia, calling for increased production in Estonia (Smith, 2001: 43-44).

specific issues within an environmental frame. The first of these was a mobilization by Tartu University students against the threat of expanded phosphate mining in northern Estonia organized on August 23rd, 1987 (Raun, 1997: 345). Throughout 1988 further environmental mobilizations emerged on different issues in both Latvia and Lithuania. However, in all three cases these mobilizations were backed up with nationalist concerns:

> "At this particular stage, oppositional politics was usually of the single-issue type, in which organized opposition was mobilized against particular developmental projects which carried, in particular, environmental ramifications. This included opposition to the proposed expansion of the Ignalina nuclear power station in Lithuania, plans to construct a hydroelectric power station on Latvia's Daugava river, proposals to develop a phosphate plant in northern Estonia, and plans to construct a subway in Riga. Even where oppositional politics seized upon other issues, such as those linked to human rights or religious freedoms, their reference points were national in content. However, despite their national frame of reference, overall the politics and political actions in which civil society engaged were issue-specific with only limited inter-group co-ordination and organizational capability. This in effect was a product of a society experimenting with the politics of the possible in which particular issues, actions and agendas were judged as less likely to result in retribution by either Moscow or the local party-state machine" (Smith, 1994b: 129).

Environmental concerns in the Baltic countries were also linked to the fear of a new and massive wave of Russian immigration to build and operate the resulting infrastructure (Beissinger, 2002: 168; Pabriks and Purs, 2001: 50-51). This would mean a continued decrease in the indigenous population (due to a combination of low birth rates among Balts and massive immigration from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine). This issue was seen by most Balts as crucial, since they believed that the very existence of ethnic Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians (as well as their languages) would be extinguished if Moscow's centralized decisions were not stopped (Lane, 2001: 94; Pabriks and Purs, 2001: 52). As Eglitis (2008: 237) puts it: "the elevation of issues of nature and culture were profoundly symbolic: it can be argued that Soviet destruction of the natural and cultural environments was perceived as symbolic of the destruction the Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian nations themselves".

In addition, there were socioeconomic grievances. Despite Latvia's, Estonia's and –to a lesser extent- also Lithuania's economic successes, there was a perception in the three countries that they received much less than they gave to the USSR. For instance, production in Latvia had increased by 4600% compared to 1940, its GDP had increased by 1150% and labour productivity by 1009%. Moreover, in 1985, the per capita consumption in the three Baltic SSRs was on average 12-28% higher than the rest of the Soviet Union (Pabriks and Purs, 2001: 49). This same grievance was also present in Estonia and Lithuania.

As a representative example of the grievance perceived in the three Baltic SSRs, the situation in Lithuania is described as follows:

> "Lithuanians had been able to enjoy the fruits of rapid economic growth in the 1960s. This put them and the other Baltic states at the top of the economic ladder among Soviet republics. But, beginning in the 1970s and continuing into the 1980s, the rate of growth began to slow and shortages of goods in the shops became a regular feature of life. Food shortages were blamed on exports of food to other parts of the Soviet Union, raising charges of colonial exploitation by the center. Housing was also in short supply. The relative lack of consumer goods meant that there was too little to buy and no alternative but to save. Consequently Lithuanian savings accounts were bulging. This situation caused frustration rather than happiness, showing that the Soviet economy was incapable of achieving a steadily improving standard of living for all its inhabitants. At the same time the gap between Lithuanian and Scandinavian standards of living continued to widen. For many, Soviet control was just tolerable if the economy prospered. If not, the advantages of economic autonomy seemed increasingly appealing" (Lane, 2001: 94-95).

Glasnost' policies included the release of several political prisoners between November 1986 and February 1987. As Beissinger (2002: 169) puts it: "In the second half of 1987 and early 1988, these activists organized a series of demonstrations (known as 'calendar demonstrations') on the anniversaries of independence and occupation". The first event of this kind was held on June 14, 1987 when the first open protest against the regime was organized. On the anniversary of Stalin's 1941 deportations, Latvian dissidents held a meeting at the Freedom Monument in Riga. There was no violent repression, but most of the activists were arrested. Later called "calendar demonstrations", these events were coordinated again on August 23rd, 1987 in Tallinn and Vilnius on the anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (Lieven, 1994; Pabriks and Purs, 2001).

Second stage: the emergence of nationalist movements (1988-1989)

The development of a nationalist consciousness implied a process of increased coordination. This process started in Estonia in April 1988, "when a joint meeting of the cultural unions expressed its lack of trust in the Estonian Party First Secretary Karl Vaino for failing to defend the republic's interests adequately and called on the Communist Party, at its forthcoming Nineteenth Party Conference, to define the meaning of 'republican sovereignty' in the Soviet constitution" (Beissinger, 2002: 170). Later on, Edgar Savisaar, an Estonian economist, proposed the creation of a movement in support of perestroika on a television program. This movement, called *Rahvarinne* or Popular Front, was created in April 1988, and counted 40,000 members just six weeks after its creation (Beissinger, 2002: 171).

The Popular Front model was diffused to Lithuania and Latvia by the Estonian leaders. The Popular Fronts in the three SSRs were promoted by local communist leaders, but the grassroots were built upon the organizations of the resistance period (Shtromas, 1994). In Lithuania, "At the end of May [1988], two emissaries from Estonia arrived in Vilnius, sharing information about the organization of the Estonian Popular Front. This coincided with the efforts by the republican party leadership to stack the delegates to the forthcoming Nineteenth Party Conference, provoking outrage among reform-minded party members" (Beissinger, 2002: 170). This led to the creation of the *Sajudis* or Lithuanian Popular Front on June 3rd, 1988. From October, the Lithuanian Popular Front had additional support from the Lithuanian diaspora in the United States, which provided money, equipment and some access to journalists and government officials in the United States (Krickus, 1997: 296). This international support was not reproduced in Estonia and Latvia.

In Latvia the organization of a Popular Front started earlier with the Writers' Union demonstration of March 1988 to commemorate victims of Stalin's 1949 deportations. Latvia also had another organization –Helsinki 86- that was already active in the denunciation of human rights violations. Two years earlier, "Three workers from the port of Liepaja in western Latvia founded Helsinki-86, a human rights watch group. The group declared that their objective was to "monitor how the economic, cultural, and individual rights of our people are respected. The organization consisted of about ten people, but its presence made KGB panic. The group was placed under permanent surveillance. Repression and threats almost disrupted Helsinki-86's call for a popular demonstration to commemorate the Soviet deportations of Latvian citizens in June 1944" (Pabriks and Purs, 2001: 52-53). On June 1st and 2nd the Writers' Union publicly refused the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. In October, Helsinki 86, the Writers' Union and several other small informal groups organized the *Latvijas Tautas Fronte* or Latvian Popular Front (Lieven, 1994; Beissinger, 2002).

Since their respective creations, each Popular Front coordinated most national mobilizations. In Estonia, pro-independence mobilizations were carried out from February to September 1988. They started on February 2nd during a protest in Tartu commemorating the anniversary of the 1920 peace treaty that initiated the process of Estonian annexation to the USSR. As Smith (2001: 46) puts it: "Three weeks later, 10,000 people gathered in Tallinn to mark the 70th anniversary of Estonian independence. As the authorities again sanctioned discussion of the events surrounding the birth of the Estonian Republic, the Estonian Heritage Society publically displayed the still-prohibited flag of inter-war Estonia in Tartu during April". On June 10th the flag was widely used among the 60,000 spectators at Tallinn's song festival. This festival developed into a massive expression of nationalist sentiment that was followed by a smaller demonstration on June 14th (to commemorate the victims of Stalin's

deportations) (Smith, 2001: 45-46). This series of events led to Moscow's decision to remove the old guard leader Karl Vaino on June 17th. The same day, 150,000 people showed their happiness with this decision. His successor, Vaino Väljas, openly expressed his support for the demands for autonomy and initiated a series of reforms in that direction (Smith, 2001: 47). In September 1988, the Estonian language was declared the national language. This decision ended the contentious struggle for independence, and "from September 1988 the history of the Estonian independence movement is primarily an institutional history largely because of the widely shared and highly implicit nature of symbolic capital surrounding independence and the relatively swift transformation in public discourse that overtook local party and government institutions as a result" (Beissinger, 2002: 173). On November 16th, 1988 the Estonian Supreme Council declared the Estonian SSR's independence.

In Lithuania, demonstrations started just four days after the Estonian music festival. On June 14th, 1988 a demonstration to commemorate the Lithuanian victims of Stalinism marked the first public event against the USSR authorities. On June 24th, the Popular Front organized its first major protest against the Lithuanian Communist Party. As a consequence of these events, and in the same vein as in Estonia, Gorbachev decided to replace the old guard First Secretary Ringaidas Songaila with a pro-Popular Front candidate, Algirdas Brazauskas. The contentious dimension of the struggle for Lithuanian independence ended in September 1998, as in Estonia.

In Latvia, demonstrations organized by Helsinki 86 started in June 1988. These protests were much smaller than those coordinated by the Popular Fronts of Lithuania and Estonia, but they shared the rhetoric of secessionism. On June 14th, 1987, the first "calendar demonstration" was organized with 5,000 participants demonstrating at the Monument of Freedom in the capital city (Pabriks and Purs, 2001: 53). In the case of Latvia, elite support was less straightforward due to Russian ethnic counter-mobilizations. However, Latvian organizations were multiplying in the struggle for independence with the creation of the Latvian National Independence Movement in November. This organization called for a more radical and quick independence of Latvia from the USSR (Plakans, 1997: 256).

These events unfolded so quickly that Gorbachev's government was unable to respond with the necessary speed. While mobilizations were growing and the diffusion of nationalist mobilizations expanded from July 1988 to September 1989, Gorbachev called without success for a response to the claims with a reformulation of the USSR as a federation of autonomous SSRs or with economic decentralization. He was not able to propose any solution, and by 1989 nationalist movements were already consolidated in their independence struggles both in the Baltics and elsewhere in the USSR (Beissinger, 2002: 92-93).

Third stage: the collapse of the USSR and the achievement of independence (1988-1991)

The third and final stage in the secessionist movement started around June 1988 after a series of events contributed to the decisive breakdown of the Soviet empire. The first of these were the first semi-competitive elections for the USSR Congress of Peoples Deputies in March, which opened an institutional space of access to the parliament pro-independence Baltic groups. The second event was the Tbilisi massacre of April 9th, which showed the limits of massive violent repression, and was the last of its kind. The third was the 1989-1990 generalization of nationalist and ethnic struggles across the USSR, which debilitated Moscow and provided the Baltic nationalists with a more favourable correlation of power (Smith, 1994b). Within this setting the Russian elites began to accept the independence of the Baltic SSRs as inevitable (Beissinger, 2002: 85-87).

In Lithuania, the radical flank of the pro-independence movement was created after a protest on February 16th, 1988. "The [Lithuanian Freedom League] LFL was against participating in elections to 'illegitimate' Soviet institutions since participation meant collaboration with the occupier. Sajudis, on the other hand, believed in using existing institutions to further the cause of reform. Most Lithuanians agreed with them. However, in the course of the next two years the moderate reformers and even the great majority of the Communist Party of Lithuania (CPL) were pushed to the right by events, and ultimately accepted the LFL's independence programme though not his uncompromising refusal to cooperate with communists" (Lane, 2001: 99). Violent police repression suffered by both coalitions during a protest on September 28th, 1988 pushed the unification of the LFL and the Popular Front in a pro-independence struggle through moderate means. Repression during that protest was interpreted by both sectors as an attempt by the old guard of the CPL to regain control of power (Lane, 2001: 102). There was no more repression by local security forces after this time.

In Latvia a similar situation occurred on June 17th when the Latvian National Independence Movement (LNIM) was founded as the social movement organization calling for independence without any negotiations with Russia. The LNIM was the second biggest organization in the country, but far behind the 250,000 members of the Latvian Popular Front. However, the dynamics of the three Baltic SSRs led to the unification of claims and methods in Latvia under the leadership of the Popular Front, after the same fashion as Lithuania (Pabriks and Purs, 2001: 54).

On January 18th, 1989 the Estonian Supreme Council passed a law declaring Estonian the official national language. This produced a brief counter-

movement of Russians denouncing discrimination, but no changes were made to the law during the struggles for independence. In addition, a division emerged within the Estonian Communist Party (ECP). Named *Interdvizheine*, this sector of the ECP was led by the old guard, which refused glasnost' and perestroika. However small and limited the mobilizational capacity of this faction, it could control the ECP by imposing its stance within the national politburo, thereby causing a split in that body in March. The ECP organized one or two small counter-mobilizations and one large one in cooperation with the United Council of Work Collectives. On March 14th, around 50,000 Russian speakers assembled in Tallinn to demand the restoration of the Soviet Estonian flag and refuse the imposition of Estonian as the national language (Smith, 2001: 48-49).

As in Lithuania and Latvia, a second pro-independence social movement organization emerged in Estonia in February 1989, and called for immediate independence without any negotiation with Moscow. As Raun (1997: 346) puts it: "the Estonian Citizens' Committees, appeared on the scene, backed by the Estonian National Independence Party, the Estonian Heritage Society (founded in December 1987 for the purpose of reconnecting Estonians with a history they had been increasingly cut off from under Soviet rule), and the Estonian Christian Union. The Citizens' Committees, representing the right wing of the emerging Estonian political spectrum, feared that the Popular Front would make too many concessions to Moscow and the existing authorities". The Citizens' Committees, new and smaller organizations, questioned the Popular Front's more moderate strategy of gradual negotiations working towards independence. As a consequence, the Popular Front publicly endorsed the claim for full independence in October 1989. As a result, from December 1989 to March 1990 the Citizens' Committees and the Popular Front disputed over who would lead the struggle and had the best strategy towards Moscow. Because of Gorbachev's refusal to discuss Estonian independence or autonomy under any terms, both organizations started to cooperate with each other, with the Popular Front becoming the leader (Raun, 1997).

A last counter-mobilization was organized without success. On May 15th, 1989 a crowd of 5,000 people attempted to restore the Soviet Estonian flag to the building of the Supreme Council, and in response (after a Popular Front call on the radio) around 15,000 people took to the streets to defend the parliament. The protest ended without violence (Smith, 2001: 57).

Just three days after the Estonian counter-mobilization, the Lithuanian Supreme Council passed a declaration of sovereignty, and on May 31st the Latvian Popular Front called for complete independence. On July 27th, in a late reaction, the Supreme Soviet in Moscow accepted Baltic economic self-management as proposed by Estonia one year before (Smith, 2001).

The most massive mobilization of the whole struggle was a two-million-strong human chain organized by the three Popular Fronts together and

connecting the capital cities of the three Baltic countries on August 26th, 1989. This impressive act of unity and power (the total population of the three countries was around five million!) represented a massive refusal of the legitimacy of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact which gave the Baltic Countries to the USSR in 1939. Immediately after this human chain, the Supreme Soviets of the three republics declared their incorporation in the USSR as illegal. In December 1989 the Congress of Peoples Deputies declared the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact illegal. Soon after this protest, Moscow recognized that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact indeed had some secret protocols concerning the transfer of the Baltic States to the USSR (Lieven, 1994; Smith, 1994b). From that point on, the struggle for separatism became a cause of national self-determination. As Smith wrote (1994b: 133), "Theirs was 'a lawful struggle' against 'occupation' by a 'foreign power'. In short, the nationalist cause could appeal to rectificatory justice further legitimized by an international community, including the United States, who had never officially acknowledged their de jure incorporation into the Soviet Union. Once Moscow had acknowledged this fact, emphasis shifted from the struggle for autonomy within the Soviet federation to demands for the restoration of independent statehood".

The first institutional reaction came from Estonia. On November 12th the Estonian Supreme Council declared the Soviet annexation illegal. In Lithuania, in a clear signal of autonomy, the Lithuanian Communist Party declared itself independent from the USSR Communist Party on December 19th, 1989. On March 11th, 1990 Lithuania declared its independence, notwithstanding Gorbachev's visit to Lithuania in January 1990, and the later economic embargo and halt in shipments of oil to Lithuania. Lithuania seemed isolated when, on April 26th, France, Germany and the United States asked the country to reconsider its decision in a joint international appeal, and its independence was not recognized by these countries (Lane, 2001: 109-110). In parallel, Estonia (on March 30th) and Latvia (on May 4th) also declared their independence (Krickus, 1997; Plakans, 1997; Raun, 1997).

However, due to Moscow's economic blockade of Lithuania, the country had to accept a moratorium on the declaration of independence on June 29th, 1990. Fruitless negotiations were carried out between Russia and the three Baltic countries until December. Then, on January 12th, 1991, Estonia and Russia signed an agreement recognizing each others' sovereignty. In the meantime, two pro-Soviet paramilitary attacks had taken place. The first was in Vilnius, where troops under USSR command seized the TV tower and city centre, killing 15 people on January 13th. Second, in Riga, troops under the command of the ECP old guard attacked the TV station building and killed some civilians on January 20th. The same day, units attacked Latvia's Ministry of the Interior. Expecting a military attack from Moscow, the Popular Fronts and local governments called on the civil population to organize barricades in defence of the state institutions in the three capitals, mobilizing hundreds of

thousands of armed civilians for two weeks (Lane, 2001; Plakans, 1997: 257; Pabriks and Purs, 2001: 62-64). However, the feared blow from Moscow never fell.

On February 9th, 1991 Lithuania called for a referendum on independence, which resulted in 85% support (Krickus, 1997: 300). On March 3rd, Latvia and Estonia organized similar referenda with results of 73.7% and 77.8% for independence respectively (Raun, 1997: 347; Pabriks and Purs, 2001: 64; Eglitis, 2008: 240). Moscow attempted to react with a pro-Soviet referendum on March 18th, but this was boycotted in the three countries. On August 19th, 1991 a coup against Gorbachev by conservative actors within the party was stopped by Boris Yeltsin. These threatening developments in Russian led to the quick unification of all pro-independence organizations and one day later the Latvian and Estonian Supreme Councils declared full independence (Raun, 1997: 348-349; Smith, 2001: 55-56). In the following weeks the three countries were recognized by the international community as sovereign states and admitted to the United Nations. The democratic institutions of the pre-Soviet period were quickly restored as a result of common agreement among elites and the population over the need to return to the institutional setting of the independent period. Finally, on September 6th, 1991 the Soviet State Council recognized the Baltic States' independence (Smith, 2001: 60).

Structural conditions

The Baltic countries annexation into the USSR was bloodless. The three countries were forced to accept treaties of mutual agreement with the USSR in October 1939. These treaties were a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939 that defined the Baltic States as part of the USSR (Eglitis, 2008; Smith-Sivertsen, 2010).

During Stalin's mandate they suffered persecution similar to other Soviet Republics, while receiving high investments for industrialization (in Estonia and Latvia, though not in Lithuania). After Stalinism, the Baltics changed substantially:

> "Restrictions on cultural and social life were less stringent than before, though these areas were still controlled. In terms of economic life, the Baltics were considered among the most 'prosperous' republics of the USSR: they had better access to consumer goods and a generally higher standard of living. While, on the face of it, this was a positive development for the Baltic republics, it made them a magnet for more migration from other republics, further shifting the demographics and driving the titular population, particularly in Latvia, closer to minority status. One prominent consequence of this was linguistic: while most Balts learned and spoke fluent Russian, few Russians learned republic languages. The 1970 census in the Latvian SSR, for instance, showed that over

half of Latvians (and a higher proportion in younger generations) spoke Russian; however, less than a fifth of ethnic Russians in the republic could speak Latvian" (Eglitis, 2008: 236).

This decline of the native population was most acute in Estonia and Latvia due to higher investment in industrialization, unlike the more rural Lithuania. Estonians in Estonia accounted for 88.2% of the population in 1934, but just 65.7% in 1979, and even less in 1989 (61.5%) (Raun, 1997: 335: table 9.1). In Latvia, this issue was equally relevant for locals. The Latvian ethnic population in Latvia had decreased from 77% in 1935 to 52% in 1989, while the Russian population grew from 8.8% in 1935 to 34% in 1989, followed by 4.5% from Belarus, 3.5% from Ukraine, and 2.3% from Poland in the same year (Plakans, 1997: 249, table 7.2). In other words, Latvians made up just half of the local population. In a different pattern to its neighbours, the less industrialized Lithuania had no problems in this respect. Lithuanians represented 81.4% of the population in 1995, with two main minority groups: Russians (8.4%) and Poles (7%) (Krickus, 1997: 320, table 8.6).

Cleavages

During the transitional period, the main cleavage according to Eglitis (2008: 241) was between those in favour of the restoration of the pre-Soviet period institutions and those in favour of the establishment of new institutions. This issue divided the elites throughout the transition, and finally those in favour of the restoration of pre-Soviet institutions imposed their reform program.

Since independence (and democratization) new cleavages have emerged. In Latvia and Estonia, according to Smith-Sivertsen (2010: 456), since 1990 "The disadvantaged strata versus the managing, occupational elites is an emerging cleavage...". According to Whitefield (2002), the main cleavages are different in each country. In Estonia, they were organized around: 1. ethnicity (between Russians and the others); 2. age (between those who had lived under Communism and the new generation); and 3. class (based on an urban-rural distinction). In Latvia, they concerned: 1. ethnicity (between Latvians and all the non-Latvians, including a religious component); and 2. education and class (between urban professionals and rural populations and urban workers). Finally, in Lithuania they coalesced around: 1. ethnicity (between Russians and Poles, and Lithuanians); 2. religious (between Roman Catholics and Russian Orthodox); and 3. class (between liberal professionals and the working class). Finally, according to Choe (2003: 85-86), the cleavages in the countries are partially similar to those identified by Whitefield, yet more complex and dynamic:

"In Estonia, differences in stands on issues are clearly found regarding three socioeconomic categories, i.e. age, urban-rural and income, while the remaining four cleavages, i.e. gender, ethnicity, education and class, are believed not to be so important regarding issue perceptions. The religiosity variable is the only weak cleavage scored high regarding two issues –the citizenship issue and joining NATO. In Latvia, the pattern of relationship between social structure and the seven major issues seems to be quite different from that found in Estonia, where three cleavages are seen as dormant conflict lines. In Latvia, gender shows the most marked difference in stands on issues. Four cleavages – age, ethnicity, urban-rural and class- mark high scores regarding four issues. Ethnic cleavage is clearly seen regarding such integration issues as citizenship, joining NATO and the EU. Our empirical data confirm that Latvian society is deeply split on the integration and harmony issue between Latvians and Russians. Ethnic tension could be a potential source of domestic conflict in Latvia. In Lithuania, the eight cleavages proved to be of no importance in policy perceptions. In Lithuania, however, the EU and NATO issues were found to be a dormant conflict source. Five cleavage groups were scored high on these issues, which would imply that the Lithuanian people are deeply split regarding access to Western Europe. The Lithuanian people are divided regarding the security issue dealing with the potential military threat of Russia".

Actors in the transitions I: the elites

Local elites in the three Baltic countries were supportive of the secessionist claims and the Popular Fronts, while elites in Moscow were neither prone to repression, nor to accepting these claims for independence. Because the process was led by neo-communists and non-communists together within a nationalist frame there were no anti-communist elites or movements. In other words, because the enemy was agreed to be external to the Baltic countries (i.e., the authorities in Moscow), there was no internal persecution of local supporters of the USSR. Finally, while the Catholic Church was a very relevant actor in the resistance period in Lithuania, no religious organizations played a significant role in the other two Baltic states.

The military and the secret police

The secret police played no role, while Soviet military and paramilitary troops carried out two brief and failed armed interventions in Vilnius and Riga in 1991, as already described. Remaining counter-mobilizations were organized by the Russian minority and/or the old guard of the Communist Parties in each of the Baltic States.

The churches

Only in Lithuania was a religious organization relevant in the struggle for independence. The Catholic Church of Lithuania can be considered one of the

main organizations of the resistance to Moscow's decisions concerning civic and cultural rights.

The Catholic Church was very important in building the ecumenical Lithuanian Helsinki Watch Group in 1975, and in campaigning for the respect of human rights in the SSR (Lane, 2001: 90-91). Concerning the diaspora, "About 35,000 Lithuanians settled in the United States (another 15,000 in Canada), joining a Lithuanian-American community which had first arrived in the nineteenth century. In 1940, members of the first wave of immigration had lobbied President Franklin Delano Roosevelt not to recognize the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states, and they later helped reverse a war-time agreement which returned Lithuanian displaced persons to the USSR" (Krickus, 1997: 294).

From 1968 onwards the main protests of the resistance period in Lithuania were promoted by catholic activists due to the centrality of the Catholic Church, (Remeikis, 1980). There were permanent requests for respect of the freedom of conscience, which in 1968 led to a petition signed by 17,054 Lithuanian Roman Catholics. In 1971 this was sent to USSR diplomats through a delegation at the United Nations (Shtromas, 1994: 116, n. 41). This was followed by another petition in 1973 with similar calls for respect of the freedom of conscience, and yet another huge effort in 1979 with 150,000 signatures against the Soviet government's decision to use Klaipeda's church for non-religious purposes (Lane, 2001: 126, n. 4).

According to Girnius (1999: 63): "The leading role of the Catholic Church in the dissident movement during the 1970s and 1980s bears witness to the poverty of Lithuanian civil society under Soviet Rule. The Church became a haven for dissidents by default because it was the only organization free from government control. Defenders of human and national minority rights, even those of an anti-clerical bent, eventually gravitated to the Church because they could find comfort and support nowhere else". In a more positive vision of the role of the Catholic Church in Lithuania, Lane (2001: 92) considers it the main mobilizing organization during this period because: "The key to achieving working-class participation was religion, and it was the Catholic rights movement which above all distinguished Lithuanian dissent from other dissent groups in the Soviet Union".

Intellectuals

Intellectuals were relevant during the resistance period, and after the cycle of pro-independence mobilizations began local intelligentsia in the three countries became key actors. The intelligentsia coordinated the Popular Fronts in support of independence, and pro-Soviet intellectuals coordinated the brief paramilitary attacks of 1991.

Actors in the transition II: civil society

The mainstream perspective is that civil society was crucial and very active from the resistance period onwards in the three Baltic states. However, this differs by country. The common denominator among the three states was the role of the Popular Fronts as the main actor in both contentious and routine politics: that is to say that the Popular Fronts coordinated and led the main mobilizations as well as all the political negotiations with Moscow and other external actors during the struggle for independence.

The Popular Fronts

The main coalitions in the struggle for independence were the Popular Fronts. The Popular Fronts were created in the Baltic SSRs and later imitated in Ukraine, Armenia and Georgia. The Baltic and non-Baltic Popular Fronts coordinated their actions in all these SSRs, and had some contacts with dissidents in Moscow (Beissinger, 2002: 83-84). The Popular Fronts were coalitions of environmental and cultural social movement organizations, religious groups, the Catholic Church, neo-communist elites and dissident groups organized by local intelligentsia profiting from glasnost' to revitalize their reform agendas. As Beissinger (2002: 98) explains: "In Estonia, half of the 106 members of the leadership of the Estonian Popular Front were Communist Party members. In Latvia, thirty percent of the participants in the founding congress of the Latvian Popular Front were communists, whereas over half of the delegates to the founding conference of Interfront, the movement organized in 1989 to protect the rights of non-Latvians in Latvia, were Communist Party members". Claims for autonomy were intimately related to the Baltics communist parties' agenda within the USSR and the perestroika and glasnost' reforms offered them an opportunity to openly express them (Smith, 1994b: 130).

    The first Popular Front was created in Estonia, and almost immediately imitated by the other two Baltic countries. Although they played a similar role as the moderate flanks of the secessionist movements, there were important differences among them:

> "In Estonia, the front was called Rahvarinne, in Latvia Latvijas Tautas Fronte (LTF) and in Lithuania it was called Sajudis. Rahvarinne was mostly centrist already in the beginning, having a big independence movement outside it (to the right of Rahvarinne) organizing the citizens' committees (representing pre-war citizens and their descendants). To the south of Estonia LTF was by contrast very encompassing, probably because the small Latvian ethnical majority in the republic made it hard to achieve two-thirds majority in the republic soviet for independence. The Lithuanian Sajudis was more right-leaning than left-leaning in 1990, since the bulk of the communists in Lithuania supported independence already while remaining a unified group in a reformed party (LDDP

[Democratic Labour Party of Lithuania]) led by Algirdas Mykolas Brazauskas"
(Smith-Sivertsen, 2010: 452).

Even though the Popular Fronts were crucial in the mobilizations for independence and in the first months of independence, "... after 1991 the remnants of these fronts did not find similar placements inside the new party systems that emerged in the post-transition parliamentary elections" (Smith-Sivertsen, 2010: 452), and they have since disappeared.

Minority counter-movements

The only counter-movements to emerge during the process remained very small. In the three Baltic countries, small movements mobilized to represent the needs of the smaller ethnic groups, who felt that the claims for nationalist changes threatened their survival and/or privileges. These movements emerged in the first phase of the secessionist struggle, and in no case did they evolve into major counter-movements:

> "The ascendancy of ethnic nationalism however had a further reactive effect among minorities within all three republics, formalized in late 1988 with the establishment of Russian dominated counter-movements. At the Founding Congress of the Estonian counter-movement, Interdvizheine, held in March 1989, delegates complained about the "Estonianization of Soviet Estonia" and in particular of language and citizenship laws which threatened their social marginalization. Similar fears of "nativization" were voiced by counter-movements in Latvia (Interfront) and in Lithuania (Yedinstvo) where the republics' large Polish majority were also active. Unlike the popular fronts however, support for the counter-movements was more limited, both to particular places (especially strong in the large industrial cities and in north-east Estonia where Russians comprised over four-fifths of the population) and to particular social strata (blue-collar workers, army officers, economic managers, party apparatchiks)" (Smith, 1994b: 135-136).

Within this context, only the Russian minority in Latvia represented an important percentage of the population and was slightly more organized than its Estonian (Russian minority) and Lithuanian (Polish minority) counterparts.

Environmental and cultural movements

The emergence of nationalist struggles was related to the openings of glasnost', which made it less risky to protest about cultural and environmental issues. For this reason the first stage of the protests were framed as environmental concerns. However, these concerns had nationalist overtones. Moreover, the actors mobilizing in this period were the same ones that would later create the Popular Fronts. In Lithuania, for example, "... a decision in 1967 to replace

thousands of farmsteads with new rural settlements generated intense discussion about the impact of such radical change on the identity and traditions of Lithuanian people, particularly since the purest forms of Lithuanian architecture were believed to be found in rural areas" (Lane, 2001: 92).

While environmental movements were less relevant in Estonia, in Latvia the situation was similar to that in Lithuania: in 1986 a small group of artists, intellectuals and artisans organized a campaign to restore rural churches. This campaign led to the creation of the Environment Protection Club, a nationalist and environmentalist social movement organization. This group later grew and "In 1986, when Soviet authorities planned to construct a hydroelectric complex on the Daugava River close to Daugavpils, a sudden wave of fierce opposition led by Latvian intellectuals and greens appeared" (Pabriks and Purs, 2001: 52). The most relevant campaign of environmental movements in Latvia was organized

> "In October 1986, [when] the young journalist Dainis Ivans and his computer specialist colleague Arturs Snips published an article in the cultural journal Literatura un Maksla (Literature and Art). They raised cultural and environmental issues about the dam, as well as questioning the economic logic of the massive, long-planned project. Their point of view was quickly supported by more than 700 letters and 30,000 signatures sent by the population at large to the journal. Facing such unexpected popular resistance, the USSR's Council of Ministers cancelled the project" (Pabriks and Purs, 2001: 52).

Since the awakening of the pro-independence Popular Fronts in 1987-1988, these movements abandoned their environmental claims and took part in the general struggle for secession.

Conclusion

The intense resistance to the USSR and the struggle for independence in the Baltic States was a by-product of a pro-autonomy struggle. However, the transition to democracy in the Baltic States was not specifically sought out. A possible explanation for this could be that representative democracy became an implicit and obvious ideal regime for the elites and local populations. This could be a result of the Eastern European context of democratization and the Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian experiences of 50 years of rule by a strong authoritarian empire. In any case, there were no movements in favour of or against democracy, and representative democracy was simply a by-product of the achievement of independence that led to the restoration of pre-Soviet institutions in the three countries.

As for the successes of the independence movements in the Baltic countries, five crucial events paved the way for independence as the only exit

strategy for the Baltic SSRs. First, Gorbachev promoted the mobilization of civil society, expecting support for his reform program, but miscalculating the relevance of nationalism for the Soviet Republics. Second, after mobilization had become widespread, Gorbachev lost the opportunity to build the USSR as a confederation because he refused to accept that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was illegal. Third, this issue, plus the failure of attempts to repress mobilizations, led to the increased unification among all the mobilized sectors, in turn leading to the two-million-strong human chain. Fourth, the first multiparty elections in the Baltic countries saw a clear majority support the pro-independence groups, allowing for a quick and institutionalized process of secession. Finally, after the failed coup against Gorbachev the project of a voluntary federation collapsed, making independence a *de jure* fact since the correlation of power favoured Yeltsin's decentralization model.

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