

Freedom of Religion in the Baltic States: A Sociological and Legal Analysis

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This article analyses freedom of religion in the three Baltic States – Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia – from legal and sociological perspectives¹. Its main aim is to research how freedom of religion was implemented in these countries after the 1990s; for this an analysis of legal documents and sociological surveys was applied. It appears that the best way to analyse freedom of religion is to research how it is implemented at the macro, meso and micro levels and focuses on the situation of minority religions, particularly new religious movements. Although the Baltic States had common historical experiences within the Soviet Union, where religion was removed from public life, different models of implementation of the freedom of religion were chosen and applied. From a macro perspective freedom of religion was implemented in the 1990s, but at the institutional level it was supported only after the countries entered the European Union. The issue of freedom of religion challenges these societies at the individual level, especially Lithuania. The analysis of the implementation of freedom of religion in the Baltic States reveals differences between these societies, existing borders between majority and minority religions.

Introduction

Freedom of religion, which we can define as a set of human rights to believe, to confess, to practise one's religion, and favourable socio-political conditions for implementation of these rights, is one of the basic values of democratic countries. The aim to become a democratic

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country and a member of the European Union was raised by the re-founded states of Lithuania (1990), Estonia² and Latvia (1991).

The unfavourable conditions that were created for religious life during the Soviet occupation in these countries made freedom of religion a special and very important issue in the lives of particular individual, religious communities and the development of the young state towards democracy and civil society. For this reason it is very important to analyse how the freedom of religion was implemented in these countries, what the current outcomes of this implementation are and what the forecast is. The main factor that indicates the level of freedom of religion is the situation of minority religions, which is a leitmotif of this analysis.

Freedom of religion in the Baltic States was analysed from different perspectives. We should mention here papers written by Balodis, Kiviorg and Glodenis and Žiliukaitė that discussed the Church and State relations in the Baltic countries³. Krumina-Konkova analyzed the situation of new religious movements in the Baltic States⁴. Ringvee analysed the legislation of the religious communities in Estonia and made a comparison of the legal acts in the three Baltic States⁵. All of these publications provide a worthy contribution to the topic of this publication. They do not cover in particular, however, the subject of this publication – the situation of freedom of religion, religious minorities and religious tolerance.

² Special gratitude should be expressed to Ringo Ringvee – Adviser of Religious Affairs Department at the Ministry of the Interiors of the Republic of Estonia for his help in gathering the material for this publication.

³ Žiliukaitė, Rūta, Glodenis, Donatas, "Church and State in Lithuania", *State and Church in Baltic States*, Ed. R. Balodis, (Riga: Religijas Brivibas Association, 2001), 67-94. Balodis, R. "State and Church in Latvia", *State and Church in Baltic States*, Ed. R. Balodis, (Riga: Religijas Brivibas Association, 2001), 13-42.

⁴ Krumina-Konkova, Solveiga, "New Religious Minorities in the Baltic States", *New Religious Movement in the 21st Century. Legal, Political, and Social Challenges in Global Perspective*, Ed. Phillip Charles Lucas, Thomas Robbins (New York, London: Routledge, 2004), 117-128.

⁵ Ringvee, Ringo, "State, Religion and the Legal Framework in Estonia", *Religion, State and Society*, 36(2) 2008, 181-196. Ringvee, Ringo, "Mainstreaming and Marginalization in the Legal Context – Legislation on the Religious Associations in the Baltic States". A paper presented at 2009 CESNUR international conference. http://www.cesnur.org/2009/slc_ringvee.htm. Accessed 05 09 2009.

The framework of the research

The research on the freedom of religion in the Baltic States was conducted by seeking to analyse its three levels – macro, meso and micro. The macro level was understood as consisting of the policy of the given state in the field of religion. The state policy is reflected in the main laws of the country – constitution and laws following it and implementing its main regulations. The main actors of the macro level are politicians and representatives of religious communities. In the analysis of freedom of religion at the macro level special attention should be paid to Church and State relations and their model, as this is the direct consequence of the interactions of the above mentioned politicians and representatives of religious communities.

According to Massimo Introvigne, there are three models of Church and State relations⁶. Firstly, there is a model of State religion which means that one religion is accepted differently, with special respect in comparison to others. This kind of Church and State relations is adopted in Scandinavian countries and the United Kingdom. Secondly, there is a model of Church and State separation which is implemented in France, the United States and the Netherlands.

Thirdly, there is a model of different recognition, whereby the State approaches religious communities existing in the society in different ways. Some religious communities might be considered to be more special, receive some or more privileges than others and named as “traditional”. Meanwhile other religious communities might be treated as “non-traditional” and for this also might be treated differently. Such a model of Church and State relations is implemented in Germany, Austria, Italy and Spain.

The meso level of freedom of religion is the organisational level where the issues of freedom of religion are covered and supported by different governmental and non-governmental organisations and religious communities. At this level the organisational activities that promote freedom of religion and work against discrimination based on religion or beliefs are analysed.

The micro level of freedom of religion is the level of individuals and their interactions. The nearest environment which helps or enables individuals to experience the freedom of religion, i.e. possibility to believe, to confess and to practise one's religion.

⁶ Introvigne, Massimo, „Religijos ir tikėjimo laisvė krikščioniškame Vakarų pasaulyje“ <http://www.religija.lt/content/view/41/45/>. Accessed 08 04 2009.

In the following subsections freedom of religion will be analysed at the macro, meso and micro levels from sociological and legal perspectives. For instance at the macro level the analysis provides insights into how the laws in the countries in question were created, what the social circumstances were when they were created, etc. For this a historical approach was also applied. At the meso level of the analysis the main actors of the organisational level are identified, their roles are discussed, etc. The micro level of the analysis discusses how individuals experience freedom of religion, religious tolerance or discrimination on the grounds of religion and beliefs. No surveys have been conducted recently in Latvia and Estonia on religious tolerance, but the one conducted in 2007 in Lithuania reveals the situation in this country.

Religious landscapes of the Baltic States

Usually perceived as one entity, the Baltic States in reality have different socio-historical peculiarities. Latvia and Estonia are Protestant countries, while Lithuania is Roman Catholic. Historical sources reveal that Christianity arrived in Latvia in the 10th and 11th centuries, and in 1071 the first Christian church was built⁷. The religious landscapes of the Baltic States illustrated in Table 1 reveal Lithuania to be a homogenous Roman Catholic society, while Latvia and Estonia are more religiously plural societies with visible Evangelical Lutheran and Russian Orthodox communities. In Latvia there is also a large community of Roman Catholics. The 2002 census in Lithuania revealed the situation of religious minorities in its society: it appeared that so called new religions⁸ have around 1 percent of followers.

Table 1. Religious landscapes of the Baltic States.

Religious community	Lithuania (2002)	Latvia (2000, 2002)	Estonia (2000)
Roman Catholics	79	20.8	0.5
Greek Catholics	0.01	-	-

⁷ Krumina-Konkova, Solveiga, Gills, Nikandrs, "Latvia" *Religions of the World. A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Beliefs and Practices*, Eds. Gordon J. Melton, Martin Baumann, (Vol. 1, ABC Clio, 2002), 82-83.

⁸ New religions – religious groups that were founded after the 19th century, they also include widely known new religious movements that were founded in Western world after the IIWW in the context of societal changes, rise of egalitarianism, utilitarianism, etc.

Russian Orthodox	4	23.6	16.5
Old Believers	0.78	2.69	
Protestants	0.76	23.8	17.2
Karaites	0.1	-	-
Sunni Muslims	0.8	0.4	0.3
Jews	0.01	0.6	0.2
Jehovah's Witnesses	0.1	no data	no data
Mormons	0.01	no data	no data
ISKCON	0.01	no data	no data
Non-believers	0.01	26.0	25.1

The religious landscapes of the Baltic States have also influenced the legal and sociological position of religious communities in the discussed societies.

Special attention should be paid to the non-believing part of the discussed societies. It appears that in Estonia and Latvia every fourth citizen claims to be a non-believer. Meanwhile in Lithuania the equivalent part of society does not form even 1 percent of the population. Such data reveals differences of the place and the role of religion in the discussed societies, and Lithuania in comparison with the other three Baltic States looks different, i.e. more religious.

Freedom of religion in the Baltic States. The macro level

After their re-founding, the newly independent states in the Baltic region implemented basic human rights in their Constitutions. In Estonia and Lithuania constitutions were adopted in 1992, and in Latvia in 1998. The constitutions declare the rights of individuals to believe, to confess and to practise one's religion. Almost all of the wording is similar to that found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and regulates the field of religious freedom.

Together with the statements on basic human rights, Church and State relations were also discussed in the constitutions of the Baltic States. In the Constitution of Republic of Estonia (CRE) Art. 40 declares that "there shall be no state church"⁹. Art. 99 of the Constitution of Republic of Latvia (CRLA) states that "the church shall be separate

⁹ Constitution of the Republic of Estonia: <http://www.president.ee/en/estonia/constitution.php>. Accessed 04 09 2009.

from the State"¹⁰. Meanwhile, Art. 43 of the Constitution of Republic of Lithuania (CRLI) presents the Church and State relations in a broader way. It asserts that the state recognises traditional religions and that "there is no state religion"¹¹. Thus the differences between Lithuania and the other Baltic States arises in analysis of the Constitutions, especially the articles regulating Church and State relations. The state recognition of religions type of Church and State relations according to Introvigne's model was implemented in Lithuania. In the Constitution there is a division between traditional and other religious communities, that are recognised after they provide information about society's support and when their teaching and practices are not in conflict with the law and public morals.

The Lithuanian case is special in the sense that the model of different recognition is already existing in the Constitution. There were unsuccessful attempts to mention traditional religions in the CRLI, because the authors of its text believed that "the list of traditional religions was final and would not be reviewed"¹². Following the CRLI different recognition of religious communities was also implemented and broadened in the Law on Religious Communities and Associations (LRCA), issued in 1995¹³.

Another important proposition in the CRLI is regarding Church and State relations. It states that churches and other religious organisations shall be established by agreement or by law. However, the main ideas about Church and State relations were implemented in the 1995 LRCA. After the ratification of three international treaties in 2002 between the Holy See and the Republic of Lithuania discussions began about the implementation of their regulations in the laws and in the relations of the State with other religious communities. Such discussions were also raised in 2005-2008, mostly inspired by other traditional religious communities which sought to ensure their special status in the society of Lithuania by strengthening it with agreement with the State. Though discussions did not end with a successful result, they actually attracted attention to the problem of the distinctive situation of the Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania.

¹⁰ Constitution of the Republic of Latvia: http://www.saeima.lv/LapasEnglish/Constitution_Visa.htm. Accessed 08 09 2009.

¹¹ Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania: <http://www3.lrs.lt/home/Konstitucija/Constitution.htm>. Accessed 07 09 2009.

¹² Aliulis, Vaclovas, "*Vieno žąsiaganio istorija*" (Vilnius: Aidai, 2007).

¹³ There are nine traditional religions, according to the 1995 LRCA, in Lithuania - Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, Russian Orthodox, Old Believers, Evangelical Lutherans, Evangelical Reformed, Jews, Sunni Muslims (Tatars) and Karaites.

Meanwhile in neighbouring countries such as Latvia, Estonia and Poland the notions of international treaties between the Holy See and the state were also applied for other so-called "traditional" religious communities¹⁴. For instance, in 2007 the Latvian Parliament adopted laws for the Latvian Old Believer Pomora Church, Seventh Day Adventist Union, Union of Latvian Baptist, United Methodist Church, Riga Jewish Community, and in 2008 for the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church and Latvian Orthodox Church.

In general, an analysis of the constitutions of the three Baltic States leads to the conclusion that they all implemented the liberal attitude towards basic human rights and freedom of religion. Regarding the main principles of Church and State relations in the discussed legal acts, there is a common notion that "there is no state religion". But it should be stated that the Lithuanian case differs from others in the sense that the division between traditional and other religious communities appears in the main document of the state. Thus it should be researched and discussed further how the theoretical and practical division between traditional and other religious communities is implemented, and what impact this has for freedom of religion in general, and especially in the organisational (meso) and individual (micro) levels.

The other legal acts that regulate religious life in the Baltic States are laws on religious communities. Usually they adopted the main notions found in the Constitutions and discussed the practical issues of Church and State relations, for instance, the registration of religious communities as legal entities. Firstly, in Lithuania the LRCA of 1995 regulated the differences of recognition of traditional, state-recognised and other religious communities, which actually ended in the presentation of three kinds of religious communities. The status of state-recognised religion requires a legal registration of at least 25 years, to have support in society and teaching and practices that are not in conflict with the law and public morals. In such cases the Lithuanian Parliament may grant the status of state recognition according to the conclusion of the Ministry of Justice. In 2002 this status was awarded to

¹⁴ Krumina-Konkova, Solveiga, "New Religious Minorities in the Baltic States", *New Religious Movement in the 21st Century. Legal, Political, and Social Challenges in Global Perspective*, Ed. Phillip Charles Lucas, Thomas Robbins (New York, London: Routledge, 2004), 117-128. Zielinska, Katarzyna, „Freedom of Religion and Beliefs in Poland – Ideologies and Reality”, *Religions, Churches and Religiosity in Post-Communist Europe*, Ed. Irena Borowik, (Krakow: Nomos, 2006), 209-220. Ringvee, Ringo, "Mainstreaming and Marginalization in the Legal Context – Legislation on the Religious Associations in the Baltic States". A paper presented at 2009 CESNUR international conference. http://www.cesnur.org/2009/slc_ringvee.htm Accessed 04 09 2009.

the Association of Evangelical Baptist Churches, and in 2008 to the Seventh Day Adventist Church. The granting of state-recognised status was denied, however, for the United Methodist Church in 2001, and for the pagan community "Romuva". There are also applications of the Pentecostals and New Apostolic Church for this status that were met with favourable conclusions by the Ministry of Justice but ended in waiting at Lithuanian Parliament. The discussions about corrections to the 1995 LRCA also include new requirements for the status of state recognition: it was raised from 25 years to 50 years based upon the decision of the Constitutional Court, which explained that tradition should be kept for more than one generation¹⁵.

Legal registration is required if religious communities want to have their own property, have a bank account, etc. In such cases the requirements for legal registration differ in the three Baltic States. In Estonia, according to the 1993 Churches and Congregations Act (CCA), 12 members are required for a newly founded religious community to be registered. It should also provide the statute with a doctrinal base, religious rites, membership processes, status of the clergy, etc. In 2002 a new CCA was adopted where a shift in the registering institution appeared, from the Ministry of Interior to the courts¹⁶. A refusal to register may occur if the activities of a religious community damage public health, morality or the rights and freedoms of others.

The Law on Religious Organisations and Associations (LROA) of Republic of Latvia of 1995 replaced the 1992 LROA and adopted the principle – "one confession, one church". This principle denies the possibility to register more than one association for the same tradition as for so-called traditional religions¹⁷. The list of such traditional religions appears in the legal regulation of the education sphere: only Evangelical Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Russian Orthodox, Old Believers, Baptists and Jews are allowed to give classes of religion in the public schools. The principle "one confession, one church" has resulted in the denial of registration for the Independent Old Believers Association, as well as the Latvian Free Orthodox Church and Confessional Lutheran Church. According to Balodis, this principle does not comply with the principle of religious freedom and

¹⁵ Glodenis, Donatas, "Administrative and Financial Matters in the Area of Religious Freedom and Religious Communities: Case of Lithuania", *Legal Aspects of Religious Freedom*, Ed. Drago Cepar, (Ljubljana: Office of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Religious Communities, 2008), 392-408.

¹⁶ Ringvee, Ringo, "Mainstreaming and Marginalization in the Legal Context – Legislation on the Religious Associations in the Baltic States". A paper presented at 2009 CESNUR international conference. http://www.cesnur.org/2009/slc_ringvee.htm

¹⁷ Ibid.

contradicts the CRLA¹⁸. In general the requirements for registration of a religious community in Latvia are 20 members, and the community should provide its statute with a doctrinal base, information about the structure, leadership, membership, etc. According to the LROA, ten communities may form an association; if not they should reregister every year for ten years¹⁹.

The LRCA of Republic of Lithuania of 1995 states that a religious community may be registered if it has 15 members, and it should also provide a statute with the doctrinal base, information about the structure, leadership, membership, rules of property ownership, etc. The registering institution is the State Centre for Registers, where the application for registration documents should be presented by the Ministry of Justice. Refusals to register are analysed in court. There have been few refusals, later analysed in court, one of which is the case of the Osho religious community, which was refused registration because of the requirement for its members to provide the information whether they have AIDS and the conclusion of the experts about non religious essence of community. The court decision was favourable for the Osho community, and it was registered in 2005.

Table 2. The hierarchy of legal positions of religious communities

Legal act	Lithuania	Latvia	Estonia
International treaty	Roman Catholic Church (RCC)	Roman Catholic Church	Roman Catholic Church
Agreements or laws for special religious communities of their associations	8 traditional religious communities (Russian Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Old Believers, Evangelical Lutherans, Evangelical Reformed, Jews, Karaites, Sunni Muslims (Tatars) - drafted	8 religious communities (Old Believers, Baptists, Jewish, Methodist, Adventist, Jewish Evangelical Lutherans, Orthodox)	Estonian Council of Churches
State recognition (but not "traditional" yet)	2 religious communities (Baptists & Seventh Day Adventists)	-	-
Registration in the	180 religious communities (in total	244 religious congregations	70 congregations

¹⁸ Balodis, R. "State and Church in Latvia", *State and Church in Baltic States*, Ed. R. Balodis, (Riga: Religijas Brivibas Association, 2001), 13-42.

¹⁹ Ibid.

governmental institution	27 religious traditions)		
Nonregistered religious communities or registered as NGOs	? Scientology, AoLF, SSB, Brahma Kumaris	? Scientology, SSB, Brahma Kumaris, Moonies, Christian Science	?

According to the legal position based on the legal acts regulating the situation of certain religious communities in the Baltic States, religious communities might be divided into five categories in Lithuania, and in Latvia and in Estonia into four (see Table 2). In all three cases special position is held by the RCC, which usually signs a bilateral agreement – an international treaty between the Holy See and the state. This is not possible for other religious communities because of the absence of a subject from their side for such a treaty. But the situation may be improved if the state applies the same notions that are discussed in such a treaty to other religious communities. In the Latvian and Estonian cases this has been done, while in Lithuania this possibility has been discussed since 2002. It should also be stated that such a division into different categories of religious communities existing in the discussed countries, but especially Lithuania, at a macro level creates a non-tolerant atmosphere at an individual level.

In general, analysis of constitutions and laws regulating freedom of religion and Church and State relations allows to conclude that Estonia has chosen a liberal separation model. Latvia has a mixed model between the liberal notions which appear in its Constitution and a different recognition model, where special conditions appear for some religious communities. Meanwhile, the Lithuanian case is a different recognition model with special conditions for some religious communities, especially the RCC.

Freedom of religion in the Baltic States. The meso level

The implementation of the notions of freedom of religion is usually related to the particular governmental and non-governmental organisations working in this field. As discussed above, freedom of religion at the macro level has been adopted in all three Baltic States. Some of the issues from the Church and State relations that contradict the main principles of freedom of religion might be discussed, but it should be very useful to analyse the institutional level and to indicate the main actors creating or not creating an atmosphere which is

favourable or not favourable for the main principles of freedom of religion to be implemented (see Table 3).

Table 3. The main actors of freedom of religion at the meso level

Institution	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania
Governmental organisation	The Gender Equality Commission (2005)	New Religions Consultative Council	Interministerial Commission to Coordinate Activities of Governmental Institutions which Deal with Issues of Religious, Spiritual and Esoteric Groups (2000 – present)
Governmental organisation	Chancellor of Justice	Ombudsman Office (former National Human Rights Office)	Office for Equal Opportunities Ombudsman (2005) (before – Office for Equal Opportunities for Men and Women Ombudsman (1999))
Non-governmental organisation	-	-	Spiritual Support Home (1999-2001), Office for Cult Observation (2004)
Non-governmental organisation	-	-	New Religions Research and Information Centre (2001)

The main phenomenon creating an unfavourable atmosphere for freedom of religion from the perspective of new religions is the anti-cult movement. The first wave of anti-cult movements, according to Ringvee, reached the Baltic States in the mid-1990s, and the second wave around the new millennium²⁰. This has received special attention in Lithuania, but in Latvia and Estonia it has passed by almost unobserved.

In Lithuania the first signs of an anti-cult movement showed up in the early 1990s as a reaction to the emergence of freedom of religion with the activities of new, unknown religious communities. Around the new millennium, the sectophobic atmosphere was strengthened by different actors, non-governmental organisations and politicians who followed France and proposed to accept a law which would „ban the activities of sects“. The social circumstances that became very favourable for discussions on the possibility of banning sects were mostly created by the mass media and the non-governmental organisation Spiritual Support Home, which was later changed by

²⁰ Ringvee, Ringo, „State, Religion and the Legal Framework in Estonia“, *Religion, State and Society*.36(2) 2008, 181-196.

another NGO – Office for Cult Observation. Although both organisations sought official support from the RCC they did not succeed and the dominant religious tradition was not involved officially in the cult wars.

Although the draft on banning the sects was not accepted in 2000, the Inter-ministerial Commission to Co-ordinate Activities of Governmental Institutions which Deal with Issues of Religious, Spiritual and Esoteric Groups was created. This institution is responsible for Co-operation between various governmental institutions concerning the activities of religious, spiritual and esoteric groups. Although it was expected that this institution would be an important actor in the battle with sects, it appeared that in reality there were not so many enemies to fight with. Thus the existence of this institution in theory and in practice does not provide for any changes in religious life, only showing the attitude of the government towards new religions as something that carries a threat, and that is why it should be looked at carefully.

Around the same time, the New Religions Consultative Council was created in Latvia, with no decision-making authority. It consists of doctors, academics and independent human rights ombudsmen. The activities of this institution are almost unobservable.

In 2001 the non-governmental organisation New Religions Research and Information Centre was created as a reaction to the sectophobic atmosphere in Lithuanian society, which lacked an objective and scientific approach towards the activities of new religions. This institution became one of the most authoritative actors in the field of freedom of religion and providing objective information about new religions.

The ambition of the three Baltic States to become part of the European Union was followed by changes in the field of freedom of religion, too. Starting with the problems of equal opportunities for men and women, new laws and new institutions observing the situation were created. For instance, in 1999 in Lithuania the Office for Equal Opportunities for Men and Women was created, in 2005 becoming the Office for Equal Opportunities Ombudsman (OEEO). Similarly, in Estonia and Latvia institutions observing the field of equal opportunities for all were created, and contributed to the strengthening of freedom of religion in these societies.

In general the meso level of freedom of religion in the Baltic States was mostly covered by governmental organisations which were created under two conditions. The first one is related to the sectophobic atmosphere in the societies that arose around the new millennium. The

second condition is related to the processes of integration to the European Union that determined the adoption of new laws regulating the field of equal opportunities for everybody and the creation of institutions observing the field. In Latvia and Estonia there were no non-governmental institutions working in the field. Meanwhile, in Lithuania the activities of non-governmental organisations which were not officially related to the dominant traditional churches might be observed.

Freedom of religion in Lithuania. The micro level

The micro level of implementation of freedom of religion may be well illustrated by surveys of public opinion and qualitative research. In 2007 a survey and subsequent qualitative research – semi-structured interviews with 17 members of different religious communities in Lithuania – were conducted. The research had the aim of researching discrimination on the grounds of religion or beliefs²¹. In the same year further research was conducted – a public inquiry which aimed to study society's attitude towards new religious movements²².

The research on discrimination on the grounds of religion or beliefs looked for “equal opportunities for people or groups of different religions, abolishing discrimination on the grounds of religion and realising the principles of freedom of conscience”²³. This research consisted of two parts – quantitative and qualitative – and was conducted in summer 2007.

The survey revealed that respondents would grant civil rights most readily to Traditional Christians (85%), atheists (46.6%) and Pagans (39.2%). Spiritual self-development communities were in fourth position – 37% of Lithuanians would grant them civil rights.

²¹ The research was conducted by the New Religions Research and Information Centre together with the market research company Vilmorus; it was ordered by the Office for Equal Opportunities by the programme “2007 – a year of Equal Opportunities for Everybody”. The research was conducted by dr. A. Sprindžiūnas (head), M. Ališauskienė et al. Internet: <http://www.lygybe.lt/?pageid=10&id=66>. Accessed 01.09.2008.

²² The report of the interrogatory of Lithuanian inhabitants about religious movements. 2007. It was conducted by Baltijos Tyrimai Ltd. according to the request of Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania. (The author of this paper worked in the Ministry and contributed to the creation of the questionnaire and to the analysis of the data). Internet: <http://www.tm.lt/?item=relig>. Accessed 10.08.2008.

²³ The report of the research “Discrimination on the grounds of religion or beliefs in Lithuania”. Internet: <http://www.lygybe.lt/?pageid=10&id=66>. Accessed 01.09.2008.

The group of Traditional Christians included the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox, Evangelical Lutherans, Old Believers, i.e. religious communities that survived the Communist period and remained the main bearers of tradition. The favourable evaluation of Atheists is related to the sentiments society express for the Soviet period when scientific atheism was the only legitimate world outlook system. It is still popular to consider atheism as "scientific" which approves the conviction that "religion is illusion"²⁴.

Meanwhile, the favour for Pagans may be explained by the society's interest in ancient Baltic religion and customs that remain a part of Lithuanian cultural identity.

The groups of Spiritual self-development consisted of the Art of Living Foundation, Scientology Church, the Academy of Parapsychology²⁵ and Transcendental Meditation. The public favour for the Spiritual self-development group was unexpected as usually they do not present themselves as religions, and this is maybe also one of the reasons why Lithuanian society does not see them as a threat to other religions and their followers.

A negative attitude was expressed by the respondents towards Satanists (68%), Muslims (40%) and Christian origin groups (37%). Similar results were expected by the researchers as the listed groups are usually opposed to Traditional Christians and are understood by the majority of society as a threat to their own religious *status quo*.

The resistance to grant some civil rights to certain societal groups may be understood as a presupposition for non-tolerance and discrimination on the grounds of religion or beliefs. From this perspective respondents would not tolerate or would discriminate Satanists, Muslims and Christian origin groups and their members.

The qualitative part of this research was aimed at the analysis of the stories of individuals who had experienced discrimination on the grounds of their religion or beliefs. It revealed that discrimination was faced by members of different religious communities, so-called traditional as well. They were discriminated against in different social contexts – in the family, work, educational institution, informants felt themselves discriminated against by representatives of governmental institutions and mass media. The most common reason for

²⁴ Ališauskienė, Milda, "The Peculiarities of Lithuanian Satanism: between Crime and Atheism in the Cyberspace", *Contemporary Religious Satanism. A Critical Anthology*, Ed. Jesper Aagard Petersen. (Ashgate, 2009), 121-128.

²⁵ Ališauskienė, Milda, "New Age Milieu in Lithuania: the Case of the Academy of Parapsychology", paper presented at CESNUR conference, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 17-20 June, 2004.

discrimination was the knowledge about the informant's religion and his or her non-provocative action. Also research revealed that the consequences of the discrimination that informants faced had an impact on their religious and everyday activities.

In general, analysis of the data from the quantitative and qualitative research about discrimination on the grounds of religion and beliefs in Lithuania allows us to conclude that the potential subject of discrimination may become a more religious person. According to the authors of the research:

...one should state that in general the majority of Lithuania society is xenophobic in the field of religion and beliefs. It was observed that almost half of the respondents are inclined to discriminate believers of other faiths, to not grant them certain civil rights. At the same time the majority of respondents would discriminate against the people of their own faith. This leads to the conclusion that in general publicly declared religion or beliefs in Lithuania may become grounds for non-tolerance and discrimination²⁶.

The second survey related to the subject of this paper – the freedom of religion – is the representative survey on Lithuanian society public opinion about new religious movements. This was also conducted in November 2007 on the orders of the Ministry of Justice²⁷. Its aim was to research the knowledge of society about new religious movements and its attitudes towards these groups. As the survey revealed, Lithuanians have more knowledge about such groups as Jehovah's Witnesses, Word of Faith, Baptists and ISCKON. But it should also be mentioned that one third of the respondents did not have an answer or answered negatively to the question whether they had heard anything about these groups. Thus it was revealed that the problem of new religions is not significant to one third of the population.

13 percents of respondents evaluated favourably the ancient Balt faith group "Romuva". Charismatic church "Word of Faith" (32.4%) and Jehovah's Witnesses (37.6%) were evaluated unfavourable. Although it is difficult to compare the two surveys, because of their different aims and questionnaires, some similarities are obvious. For instance in both surveys respondents revealed favourable attitudes towards Pagans and unfavourable attitudes towards New Christians ("Word of Faith") and Christian origin groups ("Jehovah's Witnesses").

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ The report of the interrogatory of Lithuanian inhabitants about religious movements. 2007. It was conducted by Baltijos Tyrimai Ltd. according to the request of Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania. (The author of this paper worked in the Ministry and contributed to the creation of the questionnaire and to the analysis of the data). Internet: <http://www.tm.lt/?item=relig>. Accessed 10.08.2008.

In the first survey respondents expressed their tolerance towards Spiritual self-development groups, while in the second survey they did not express their attitudes towards these groups. Two thirds of respondents did not evaluate the listed groups at all. The survey revealed that one third of respondents had not heard of these groups, and another third were not inclined to give an evaluation.

In general the analysis of the surveys conducted in 2007 in Lithuania revealed the population's attitudes towards different religious groups, showed the non-favourable conditions for some aspects of freedom of religion, i.e. expression of one's religion of beliefs publicly, xenophobic attitudes towards such expression. At the same time they revealed the lack of public knowledge about new religions and indifference towards them. The qualitative research revealed the social circumstances of discrimination on the grounds of religion and beliefs and also the gaps of implementation of freedom of religion at the macro and meso levels and what impact this has for the individual level in Lithuania. Unfortunately there is no possibility to compare similar data of surveys with Latvia and Estonia, as nothing similar has been done there. But this fact may also interpret the societal differences in the three Baltic States, as Lithuania is more religious than Latvia and Estonia, where religious affairs are not so important and do not raise so many questions.

Conclusions

The analysis of implementation of freedom of religion in the Baltic States revealed differences between societies of the discussed countries – Lithuania is more religious than Latvia and Estonia. This analysis also revealed existence of the boundaries between majority and minority religions in Lithuania and Latvia. Such boundaries are observable in macro as well as individual (micro) levels of implementation of freedom of religion in these societies. The existence of such boundaries suggests that the macro and micro levels of implementation of freedom of religion are interdependent and should be analysed inseparable from each other.