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# Is Islam a Part of Eastern Europe?

Thoughts on History, Religion, and National  
Identity in the Eastern EU Countries

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The refugee crisis revealed lines of division in the EU that had previously been hidden, especially with respect to the eastern member states. The discussion in Germany often fails to take sufficient account of the variety of experiences and perspectives in these countries. One significant explanatory factor for the reaction to the reception of refugees from Islamic countries is the historic understanding of national identity.

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The EU expansion eastwards was intended to finally remedy almost half a century of European division. However, in light of the refugee crisis and conflicting views it brought about on the placement of asylum seekers, stereotypes are returning, dividing in media discourse our continent into “progressive and tolerant Western Europeans” on the one hand and “backward Eastern Europeans” on the other. Despite the fact that populist and Islamophobic parties have even been successful in Western Europe as well, it is crucial to examine the matter in a nuanced light when considering the eastern part of the EU.

The purpose of this article therefore is to illustrate several explanatory approaches, the intent of which is to better understand the social and political framework conditions that shape relations with Islam and Muslims in eastern EU countries. To this end, the states in question are divided into three groups: the Visegrád Group, the Baltic States, and the EU members in Southeast Europe. Within these groups, the focus will be on Poland, Lithuania, and Bulgaria.

This article does not claim to establish general truths about the relationship of mainstream society to Islam in all eastern EU countries. Rather, the intent is to encourage a nuanced study of this complex and multifaceted issue through a mosaic of approaches. Particular attention will be paid to historic developments and internal and foreign policy. The results should serve to provide objectivity to a frequently emotionally-charged debate.

### **Visegrád Countries**

The Visegrád Group, founded in 1991 and still at a lower level of institutionalisation, consists of Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. After the four countries achieved membership in NATO and the EU, interest in the cooperation declined. It experienced no significant revival until the European refugee crisis of 2015.

What especially unites the four East-Central European countries is their objection to the majority decision of the Council of the EU Ministers of the Interior of 22 September 2015 regarding the placement of refugees. One justification for this stance is the assertion that those seeking asylum from predominantly Muslim countries pose a security threat from which citizens must be protected.

For example, in the autumn of 2015, the president of the Czech Republic, Miloš Zeman, characterised the refugee flow as an “organised invasion”<sup>1</sup> and made it clear in a number of interviews that he did not deem it realistic to integrate Muslim refugees. In the autumn of last year, he emphasised that he would rather do without EU subsidies than accept refugees.<sup>2</sup> Fidesz, the party of Viktor Orbán, who was re-elected Hungary’s prime minister in April of 2018, even plans to declare the redistribution of refugees unconstitutional via an EU resolution as long as it does not receive explicit approval by the Hungarian parliament.

The governments of the Visegrád countries can count on support from large swathes of their populations for restrictive refugee policy. There are a number of reasons for this.

## Politically, East-Central Europeans do not feel that they are equally treated within the EU.

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First, people have little contact with Muslims in their everyday lives.<sup>3</sup> Their most central source of information is therefore the media, whose portrayal of the Islamic world has been heavily influenced by terrorism and the wars in North Africa, the Middle East, and Afghanistan for many years. After their countries joined the EU in 2004, many East-Central Europeans migrated to Western Europe and came in contact with people of the Islamic faith for the first time. The heated debates on integration, parallel societies, and Islamic fundamentalism often reinforced existing reservations, but did not seem to affect the Visegrád states directly. This changed with the looming refugee crisis. After September 2015, Poland, for example, saw a balance between advocates and opponents of granting asylum to refugees from the Middle East and Africa.<sup>4</sup> As the number of refugees grew, however, concerns of becoming inundated grew. Hungary was in the centre of the action and later participated in the closing of the refugee route through the Balkans. Germany's crisis management was often perceived in the Visegrád states – quite contrary to the self-image of German policy-makers – as ruthless and irrational, since it allegedly overlooked concerns and made moral convictions absolute.

The refugee crisis fostered still deeper differences between old and new EU member states. Even today, the experience that the noble aims professed by the Communists usually concealed deceit, injustice and lack of freedom means that justifying policies using values-based arguments arouses suspicion among many in the

former Communist part of Europe. For instance, shortly after the German Chancellor's decision to grant entry to refugees stranded in Budapest, absurd conspiracy theories emerged purporting to expose Angela Merkel's "true" motives. Trust in the effectiveness of Hungary's own nascent national institutions also remains lacking. Although a modest level of prosperity has been achieved after difficult years of transformation and a rising middle class has emerged, great social inequalities persist. Every achievement seems fragile. The persistent lagging behind Western Europe is also agonising. Instead of native businesses, the cityscape is dominated by international chains and companies. Politically, East-Central Europeans do not feel that they are treated equally in the EU. In view of the Nord Stream natural gas pipeline and its planned expansion, which entirely bypasses the transit countries in East-Central Europe, many find German calls for solidarity less than credible.

Given inter alia these concerns, there is a growing conviction among the Visegrád states that their restrictive approach is the only one that represents responsible handling of the refugee crisis. This is clearly formulated in the Hungarian Visegrád presidential programme of 2017/2018.<sup>5</sup> Slovakia holds the rotating presidency for 2018/19. The only Euro member in the Group often strives to fulfil the role of mediator between the other three countries and the European Commission. At an April meeting with the new prime minister of Slovakia, Peter Pellegrini, Commission president Juncker expressed optimism that the relationship with the Visegrád countries "could enjoy continued improvement when Slovakia assumes the presidency on 1 July".<sup>6</sup> This could become significant in the context of the ongoing negotiations over the reform of the Dublin Regulation.

A closer examination of Poland is beneficial because of the country's political and economic prominence within the Visegrád Group. Poland is also Germany's second-largest neighbour and its most important trade partner in Eastern Europe. In the aftermath of the two Chechen wars in the 1990s, Poland absorbed almost





Need for orientation: The identity defining the Catholic Church in Poland is deeply divided on the refugee issue.  
Source: © Damir Sagolj, Reuters.

90,000 Chechen refugees, of which an estimated one in ten remained.<sup>7</sup> At the time, solidarity in view of the fierce Russian conduct of the war and the desire to enter the Western community of nations played a role. Although granting asylum to these people garnered a certain public awareness, it never led to conflict within Polish society. It was only the spotlight of the refugee crisis that triggered controversy over asylum seekers from Chechnya. It was primarily politicians on the right who capitalised on the fear of

Muslims and stoked it. Parliamentary elections were held in Poland at the end of October 2015. The victory of the national-conservative Law and Justice (PiS) was also due to the fact that, unlike the liberal Civic Platform (PO) which had preceded it as the ruling political force, the PiS strictly opposed the reception of refugees.

There are not many historic references to Islam in Polish history. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Muslim Tatars settled in what was then Poland-Lithuania,

which is why one occasionally comes across picturesque wooden mosques from the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Poland, Lithuania, and Belarus. The so-called Lipka Tatars assimilated over the course of the centuries, which is why today there are few Poles who identify themselves with this minority. The Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683, when a Christian army under the command of King John III Sobieski defeated the Ottomans, has an even stronger effect on the image of Islam in Poland. The rescue of Vienna by iconic Polish Winged Hussars created the myth that Poland is an *antemurale christianitatis*, a “bulwark of Christianity”, and the feeling that Europe owed Poland something.

This motif returned in the perception of the 1920 Battle of Warsaw, the “Miracle of the Vistula”, in which the Red Army’s western advance was stopped, a feat that, according to an interpretation of events popular in Poland, amounted to saving Europe from Bolshevism. What the country is most conscious of, however, is the experience of the Second World War, in which Poland’s Western allies provided no effective support against the German attack and accepted a partition of the European continent when the war was over. In doing so, they left the country *de facto* in the Soviet sphere of influence, a fact that Poland perceived as betrayal. Europe is in Poland’s debt: given this view, acceptance into the EU and the associated support for economic development is merely the fulfilment of a moral obligation.

In times of foreign rule, it was the church that preserved the national consciousness like in a cocoon. This has made Catholicism part of Polish identity. In Poland, the Catholic Church still possesses an authority that should not be underestimated. It is deeply divided on the question as to whether Poland should grant asylum to refugees from Muslim countries.

For instance, Bishop Piotr Libera warned in September 2015 that Polish history teaches, “If you once let a stranger into your house, a house that you have just built, a small house, a weak house, you can cause yourself great misfortune.”<sup>8</sup> The

Primate of Poland, Wojciech Polak, the symbolic head of the Polish church, has repeatedly expressed support for the openness of Pope Francis and said that he would suspend any priest in his archdiocese who participated in a demonstration against refugees.<sup>9</sup>

## The East-Central European countries are united by the constant threat to their national independence.

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One historical experience that East-Central European countries share is the constant threat to national independence.<sup>10</sup> The devastation of the Second World War was followed by almost a half-century of Soviet domination. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, hope arose that, by joining NATO and the EU, the country could finally escape this geopolitical dilemma: Europe was to be a safe haven of national sovereignty, not its incremental abrogation. Populists were adept at capitalising on these growing fears and moods. The resistance to the so-called forced quotas became a symbol of perceived emancipation from Western European paternalism. It scarcely mattered that the requirement of the *Visegrád* countries had been reduced to a gesture of solidarity in the form of relatively small refugee groups.

### Baltic States

The Baltic States are often underestimated in the political debates on EU cohesion. Only experts give their political positions the recognition they deserve.

Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians all look back on an eventful history. Foreign domination and the resulting injustices long governed societal conditions. In 1918, after the end of the rule of the Tsars in Russia and the redrawing of political borders in the aftermath of the war that broke out in 1914, new states arose in Europe – among them the Baltic republics.

Unlike Estonia and Latvia, Lithuania was able to construct a national identity based on, among other things, its own state traditions from the Middle Ages.

The failure of the political elites to establish harmonious cooperation 100 years ago created difficult conditions for the realisation of socio-political potential. The primary reason in domestic politics was that the democratic form of government in the Baltic States – given the circumstances – was unstable and allowed an authoritarian style of government to assert itself.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the tense Polish-Lithuanian relations also affected Estonia and Latvia, so that the countries were unable to present unified positions in the context of their foreign policies.

Due to the Hitler-Stalin Pact, people in the Baltic States fell once more under the influence of occupying forces centred in Moscow and Berlin, that, among other things, suppressed the cultural wealth of the just approx. 20-year-old republics, and robbed the people of their identity. The millions of crimes committed by the National Socialists changed Northeast Europe as well.<sup>12</sup> The experience of Soviet occupation that lasted for about half a century still influences the way the Baltic States perceive themselves.

After the collapse of the socialist economic and societal order, the governments of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania pursued a principle that might be summed up as follows: “As much integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures as possible!” For instance, all three countries are also part of the eurozone.

In the years since the Baltic States joined the EU and NATO, they have been challenged by a variety of problems – ultimately, 2015 drastically changed the language used within the Union so that uncalled-for and defamatory positions became part of the political debates. Right-wing populists are currently represented in the parliaments of many countries of the EU.

In the Baltic States, strong minorities are present. Many ethnic Russians live in Estonia<sup>13</sup> and Latvia<sup>14</sup>, and in Lithuania, also many Poles.<sup>15</sup> What is not well-known is that Muslims have lived in the Baltic region for several centuries. This is particularly true of Lithuania. The oldest mosque, built in 1815, is in the village of Keturiasdešimt Totorių, near Vilnius.

Until the Holocaust, Lithuania was one of the centres of Judaism in Eastern Europe. The capital Vilnius was given the nickname “Jerusalem of the North”. The Lithuanian parliament commemorated this fact in a resolution on 10 May 2018. The resolution called for the history of the Jews in Lithuania to be comprehensively memorialised<sup>16</sup> in 2020 on the occasion of the 300<sup>th</sup> birthday of Vilna Gaon.<sup>17</sup> So far, Islam has been unable to match this multiculturalism Judaism once enjoyed both in Lithuania and either of the two other Baltic States.

## Lithuania’s political leadership has expressed openness to granting asylum to refugees.

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The Muslims who live in Lithuania are primarily Lipka Tatars, a group which has not influenced the country’s national identity as it developed historically so far, not least because of its insignificant numbers. Mainstream society also had hardly any contact with Muslims, which is why there are cultural barriers. The proportion of Muslim Tatars has remained at about 0.1 per cent since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>18</sup> The situation is quite similar in Estonia and Latvia.

The September 2015 decision of the Council of the EU Ministers of the Interior to place refugees among member states has been perceived differently in Lithuania. Society rather rejected the decision reached in Brussels. However, Prime Minister Algirdas Butkevičius emphasised in the same month that Vilnius was sympathetic to efforts to place the load on the shoulders of the entire EU.<sup>19</sup> This meant that

the political leadership set the idea of solidarity within the European community above the principle of sovereignty. From a Lithuanian perspective, this decision was an advised and foresighted one, since Lithuania and the other two Baltic States benefit greatly from the solidarity of their allies. It should also be mentioned that it is not rare for refugees to leave the Baltic States in hope of being granted a protection status in Western European countries.

From the beginning of the refugee crisis, it was clear that solidarity was the top priority for Lithuania. An in-part painful history prompted the post-socialist political elite of the country to approach modern national identity from the perspective of a comprehensive multilateral declaration of solidarity. It is therefore illuminating that Lithuania's President Grybauskaitė, in a speech given during a visit by German President Steinmeier to the Baltic States in the summer of 2017, spoke of the "spirit of responsible solidarity" which Germany and Lithuania would preserve together.<sup>20</sup> Reading between the lines, the statement meant that solidarity in practice also meant reaching decisions that are controversial in society.

Estonia fulfils the NATO goal of spending two per cent of its national GDP on defence. Current forecasts indicate that Latvia and Lithuania will meet the alliance goal this year.<sup>21</sup> All three Baltic States are also maintaining their debt levels below and their deficit above the Maastricht limits. The decision to grant asylum to (Muslim) refugees is in line with these efforts.

Trust and reliability are stable resources in international relations. The Baltic States are conscientious in fulfilling their obligations in order to render entirely superfluous any accusations of having been lacking solidarity. Following Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, the political leadership in Vilnius is conscious of the fact that, in a crisis, the country is entirely reliant on support from its NATO allies.

## Southeast European EU States

Even after the closing of the Balkan route, the EU states of Southeast Europe continue to be considered transit countries for refugees and migrants on their way to Central and Western Europe. They have little significance as destination



countries themselves. Compared to the transit figures on the Western Balkan route for 2015/16, the route across the Turkish-Bulgarian border or from Turkey across the Black Sea to Romania played no significant role. Nevertheless, all Southeast European member states are located in the transit corridors, are thus hit harder by

(potential) migrations than many other EU countries and are therefore reliant on European solutions.

But the problems of transit countries are fundamentally different from those of destination countries. While destination countries are



Newcomers: Since the beginning of the refugee crisis, transit countries such as Bulgaria have been pressing for a joint solution to the protection of Europe's external borders. Source: © Stoyan Nenov, Reuters.

concerned with long-term social, economic, and political effects of refugee and immigration waves, transit countries face other challenges. Prominent among these challenges is an effective border regime, which involves, among other things, combating corruption – including within the countries’ own border protection authorities.<sup>22</sup> Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia are all desperate to enter the Schengen area and are therefore dependent on convincing other member states that their border regimes work well. Schengen member Slovenia, a transit country that was also greatly engrossed during the height of the refugee crisis, considers itself to be a “very good protector of the Schengen border”.<sup>23</sup>

### **In Bulgaria, Islam has stronger historical and institutional roots than in any other eastern EU country.**

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With respect to the composition of societies in the eastern states of the EU, Bulgaria occupies a special position. More than any other country in the region, its history and institutions have Islamic influence. For that reason, Bulgaria will be given special attention below.

While the Borisov government supported the distribution of refugees from Italy and Greece in 2015, it has said that Bulgaria will not participate in further relocations within the framework of the EU-Turkey agreement. The political leadership is taking steps to make permanent residence difficult, but also to prevent refugees from crossing the border in the first place. For instance, a residence requirement was introduced in 2017. On top of that, the Turkish border was patrolled not only by the border police, but by the military as well. Right from the onset, the Bulgarian EU Council Presidency in the first half of 2018, which also marks the debut of a South-east European state at the head of the Council of Ministers, was marked by the promotion of joint solutions for the protection of the external borders of the European union of states.

Although forecasts show that Bulgaria will not be a destination country for refugees and migrants in the foreseeable future, Prime Minister Borisov warned in 2015 that “Muslims coming from the outside could change the country’s demographics”.<sup>24</sup> These concerns are surprising because Bulgaria’s 15 per cent<sup>25</sup> Muslim population represents the highest share of Muslims of any EU country, and the number of Muslim refugees is comparatively negligible. Borisov combined his statement with assurances that mainstream Bulgarian society had nothing against the Muslim minority in the country.

This put Borisov in line with a widely-held view. Society and the media regard external influences on Bulgarian Islam as dangerous, view them with little differentiation, and confuse them with topics such as Jihadism and Wahhabism, even though Bulgaria’s Grand Mufti, Dr Mustafa Haji, exercises strict control over external influences.<sup>26</sup> Imams who were trained in Arab countries must gear their teachings to the beliefs of Bulgarian Muslims. The Office of the Grand Mufti strives toward a form of Islam that maintains its Bulgarian character. Participation in the political decision-making process also promotes Bulgarian Muslims’ self-image. This is made clear by the “Movement for Rights and Freedoms”, for instance, a de facto party of the Muslim minority. It was already part of the government for two full legislative periods (2001 to 2009, the Saxe-Coburg-Gotha and Stanishev cabinets) and again from 2013 to 2014 (the Oresharski cabinet).

The first Muslim settlers date back as far as the 11<sup>th</sup> century. After it was conquered by the Ottoman Empire in 1392, the area remained under Muslim rule for five hundred years – but Christians were able to maintain their cultural and religious identities across the centuries. Muslims in the area that covers modern-day Bulgaria adopted regional habits and customs. In some places, Christians and Muslims still share pilgrimage sites. The unquestioned dominance of the Ottomans ended with the Russian-Turkish war of 1877/1878 and the Congress of Berlin. The Principality of Bulgaria was liberated from

the Ottoman Empire. It attained de facto independence, though not de jure. In the aftermath of the demise of the Ottoman Empire and its defeat in the First Balkan War, the Principality of Bulgaria expanded its territories. There were forced conversions of the Muslim population with the intent of radically changing existing majorities.

Like the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Muslims suffered from limitations on religious freedom during the Marxist-Leninist domination, which reached its peak in 1984. Todor Zhivkov, Bulgaria's head of state from 1954 until November 1989 and First Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party, pursued a policy of radical assimilation into Bulgarian mainstream society. Muslims were forced to adopt Bulgarian names and abandon Muslims habits and customs. During this time, hundreds of thousands of Muslims left the country and emigrated to Turkey. The end of socialist rule meant the end of this assimilation policy. The Bulgarian parliament sent a strong message in 2012 by condemning this policy without a single dissenting vote.<sup>27</sup>

### **In Bulgarian society, worries about radical Islamist influences from outside are widespread.**

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In contrast to the West Balkan countries, even the transition and instability of the 1990s did not bring any conflict motivated by religion or ethnicity. Today, almost all Bulgarian Muslims are Bulgarian citizens as well. Muslim opinions indicate a clearly secular influence. For instance, religion does not play an overly large role in the lives of most Muslims, and more than 70 per cent of them say they want a pluralistic society. The approval rate among Christians asked was less than 50 per cent.<sup>28</sup> Islamist tendencies have so far been seen almost exclusively in a small group of Muslim Romani. A symbolic step was taken when the ban on full-face veils was passed with cross-party support in 2016. So although native,

historically developed and institutionalised Islam is considered a part of Bulgaria, there is still concern about radical influences from outside.

Islamophobic attacks reported from Bulgaria<sup>29</sup>, as well as right-wing parties trying to include fear of radicalisation and terrorism in their agenda do not necessarily imply general scepticism towards Islam or the majority Muslim states. For example, Bulgarians have favoured EU admission for Turkey in the past at significantly higher rates than Germany or France. The central government's policy in previous years was characterised by communication and dialogue. Efforts to avoid a societal separation into Christian and Muslim groups were the central thrust of the meeting between Borisov and the Grand Mufti in 2015. The Prime Minister emphasised, "We have a wonderful model of peaceful coexistence. It is our responsibility to preserve it."<sup>30</sup> Rumen Radev, Bulgaria's president, emphasised in March of this year that it is important for the state to support Muslim religious communities financially to prevent foreign interference. Islam in Bulgaria ought to develop on the foundation of its own traditions.<sup>31</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The various reactions of the Northeast European, East-Central European, and Southeast European states to the refugee problem ultimately reveal the heterogeneity of the eastern part of the EU. This situation can be traced back to the various compositions of these individual societies, deviating domestic and foreign policy circumstances, various historical experiences (including occupation), and disunity concerning what the core principles of the EU ought to be.

The governments in Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius agreed to the EU distribution mechanism primarily on the basis of a sense of solidarity across all areas of action. The Baltic States are dependent on their NATO partners, especially in matters of security policy, and therefore declared their support of the principle of solidarity in the context of the refugee issue. Although Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and the East-Central



Not representative: Despite repeated instances of Islamophobic attacks in Bulgaria, the case cannot be made that this has given rise to a general skepticism towards Islam. [Source: © Stoyan Nenov, Reuters.](#)

European countries have had some similar historical experiences, their attitudes towards and treatment of Muslim refugees vary. The example of the Baltic republics has the potential to invalidate the uncompromising positions of the East-Central European states.

The situation in the Southeast European member states is different today. Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia continue to be especially impacted as transit countries and still seek to enter the

Schengen area. To do so, they must demonstrate a functioning border regime in order to remove any grounds for reservations about their admission.

Despite the many differences, there are also similarities, especially those arising from their common history of transformation. It is important to remember that the new and re-established states that have arisen after the collapse of the socialist economic and societal order have only



also commemorating the founding of Czechoslovakia 100 years ago. Within German society, the significance of 1918 for our neighbours is often underestimated. For them, it was the beginning or the renaissance of an independence of which they were violently dispossessed two decades later. This experience of the possibility of losing everything so quickly creates identity and influences political thinking.

The refugee crisis has revealed hitherto unseen societal lines of division throughout the EU. No one should make the mistake of seeking simple explanations for these conflicts. Instead, the focus should be on the overall picture so that connections that are not obvious at first glance can be recognised. At its core, the problem is not solely refugees. Challenges seldom addressed during the first three decades after the fall of the Iron Curtain are now at the centre of attention.

The societal discussions triggered in Germany by the refugee crisis can lead to a better understanding of and greater empathy for our eastern neighbours. The challenge is to be much more conscious than we have been of the wealth of experience and unique potential of our own German, particularly East German, stories of transformation. No other Western European country can play a comparable mediating role between the old and the new EU member states. It is therefore Germany's responsibility to take its place as a rational voice in this highly emotional debate and to search for common ground with the eastern EU states.

*–translated from German–*

been independent for about 30 years. Societies that have experienced such radical transition, often accompanied by suffering, apply different values than societies that have lived in stability and prosperity for decades.

2018 is a special year for many states in Eastern Europe. The people of Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and other countries are celebrating the centennial of the regaining of their independence. The Czech Republic and Slovakia are

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- 1 Neue Zürcher Zeitung 2015: Flüchtlingsstrom ist laut Zeman "organisierte Invasion", 6 Nov 2015, in: <https://nzz.ch/1.18642349> [17 May 2018].
- 2 Cf. Willoughby, Ian 2017: Zeman: Loss of EU subsidies better than forced acceptance of refugees, Radio Praha, 6 Sep 2017, in: <http://radio.cz/en/article/524661> [17 May 2018].
- 3 The share of Muslims in the population varies from less than 0.1 per cent in Poland to 0.4 per cent in Hungary. Cf. Pew Research Center 2017: Europe's Growing Muslim Population, 29 Nov 2017, p. 4, in: <http://pewrsr.ch/2zABqwg> [17 May 2018].
- 4 Cf. Public Opinion Research Center (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej) 2017: Stosunek Polaków do przyjmowania uchodźców, in: *Komunikat z Badań*, No.1/2017.
- 5 Cf. International Visegrad Fund. 2017: 2017–2018 Hungarian Presidency, in: <http://bit.ly/2J7nHJ> [17 May 2018].
- 6 Cf. Gotev, Georgi 2018: Juncker upbeat on Slovak presidency of Visegrad, Euractiv, 13 Apr 2018, in: <http://bit.ly/2LZqjTp> [17 May 2018].
- 7 Cf. Stummer, Krisztián 2016: Forgotten Refugees: Chechen asylum seekers in Poland, in: *Political Critique*, 11 Feb 2016, in: <http://bit.ly/2tevIiH> [19 Jun 2018].
- 8 Cf. Wilgocki, Michał 2015: Uchodźcy jak Krzyżacy. Bp Libera: Jeśli wpuścisz obcego do słabego domu, możesz sobie zgotować wielką biedę, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 21 Sep 2018, in: <http://bit.ly/2lOfT3F> [17 May 2018].
- 9 Cf. Newsweek Polska 2017: Prymas abp Wojciech Polak chce karać księży, którzy wystąpią przeciwko uchodźcom, 18 Oct 2017, in: <http://bit.ly/2te3vYi> [17 May 2018].
- 10 After its partitioning by Prussia, Austria, and the Tsarist empire of Russia, Poland vanished from the map for 123 years. In 2018, the country celebrated the re-establishment of its nationality one hundred years ago. Hungary and Czechoslovakia were also granted national status at the same time.
- 11 Antanas Smetona in Lithuania, Kārlis Ulmanis in Latvia, and Konstantin Päts in Estonia are leading political personalities that should be mentioned in this context.
- 12 The fact that all three republics maintain trusting relationships with Germany is by no means a matter of course and should not be seen as such. Germany's assumption of the leadership role for the multi-national task force in Lithuania as a framework nation in NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence programme is an expression of the partner relationship. The commitment of Germany's armed forces 73 years after the end of National Socialism is a significant component of security in the Baltic region.
- 13 In 2017, around 330,000 ethnic Russians lived in Estonia (around 25 per cent of the society). Cf. Statistics Estonia, Population by ethnic nationality, 1 January, years, 9 Jun 2017, in: <http://www.stat.ee/34278> [17 May 2018].
- 14 In 2017, around 500,000 ethnic Russians lived in Latvia (around 41 per cent of the society). Cf. Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia 2018: Statistical Yearbook of Latvia 2017, 12 Jan 2018, p. 129, in: <http://bit.ly/2l0Jutq> [17 May 2018].
- 15 In 2017, 0.3 per cent of society had Russian citizenship and 0.1 per cent Polish citizenship. Unlike the other two Baltic States, the government in Vilnius provides no specific information about ethnic minorities. According to the last census completed in the EU in 2011, 6.6 per cent of the Lithuanian society indicated a Polish ethnic background and 5.8 per cent a Russian ethnic background, making the Polish minority the largest in Lithuania. Cf. Statistics Lithuania 2017: Statistical Yearbook of Lithuania 2017, Nov 2017, p.80, in: <http://bit.ly/2K2V3pe> [17 May 2018]. Cf. Statistics Lithuania 2017: Ethnicity, mother tongue and religion, 15 Mar 2013, in: <http://bit.ly/2yppJMW> [17 May 2018].
- 16 Gaon: Honorary title. Originally: Designation of leaders in rabbinical schools (Talmud academies) in the Middle and Far East between the seventh and eleventh centuries. The teachings of the Vilna Gaon, who lived in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, still influence Judaism.
- 17 Cf. website of the Lithuanian Parliament 2018: 2020 designated as the Year of the Vilna Gaon and the History of the Jews of Lithuania, 10 May 2018, in: <http://bit.ly/2lqq6Qe> [17 May 2018].
- 18 A census conducted by the Tsarist empire of Russia in 1897 shows, for instance, that only 0.1 per cent of society under the Kovno Governorate were Tatars. Cf. *Zentrales Statistisches Komitee des Innenministeriums* (ed.) 1904: *Erste Allgemeine Volkszählung des russischen Imperiums des Jahres 1897*, XLII. *Gouvernement Kowno*, 1904, p. 3. This demographic situation remains unchanged, so that the EU census of 2011 indicates that about 0.1 per cent of Lithuanians are Tatars. Cf. Statistical Office of Estonia / Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia / Statistics Lithuania (eds.) 2015: 2011 Population and housing censuses in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, May 2015, p.24, in: <http://www.stat.ee/dokumentid/220923> [17 May 2018].
- 19 Cf. website of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Lithuania 2015: Prime Minister Algirdas Butkevicius: we will address the current refugee crisis together with the rest of the Community, 9 Sep 2015, in: <http://bit.ly/2l2MHZC> [17 May 2018].
- 20 Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania 2017: Toast remarks by President Dalia Grybauskaitė at dinner in honour of Frank-Walter Steinmeier, President of the Federal Republic of Germany, speech, 24 Aug 2017, in: <https://lrp.lt/en/28298> [17 May 2018].
- 21 Cf. Zeit Online 2018: Nato-Länder erhöhen Verteidigungsausgaben nur langsam, 15 Mar 2018, in: <http://bit.ly/2JW5ozV> [17 May 2018].
- 22 Cf. U.S. Department of State 2017: Bulgaria 2016 Human Rights Report, 3 Mar 2017, p.21, in: <http://bit.ly/2K2Ezgy> [15 May 2018].

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