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Trends in family policy in Estonia and Lithuania

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Abstract. Estonia and Lithuania offer an interesting case to study family policy development. Both countries have started with an identical family support system inherited from the Soviet era. However, currently they are exhibiting not only similarities, but also significant differences. Thus, they have a common past in terms of policy design, but have developed differences during the course of the post-Soviet period. This paper explores differences and similarities in family policy and, in particular, family benefits in Estonia and Lithuania. It investigates major theoretical questions: why do family policies differ across countries? What are the main causal forces that determine these differences?

The findings of this paper show that differences and similarities in family policies and, in particular in various family benefits in the Baltic States, are shaped by the different religious traditions and values, historical experiences, which dates back even to pre-Soviet period; by the demographic situation and the impact from the economy.

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1. Introduction

Public family support systems in many former socialist countries have undergone changes since the collapse of the Soviet regime in 1989-1991. Regardless of the fact that during Soviet times, many of those countries had more or less similar social policies aimed at families with children, today a great variety of ways can be found, in which these countries deal with the challenges arising in the family policy field (see, for instance, Fodor et al. 2002, on differences in the maternity and family policy regimes of Hungary, Poland and Romania, or Pascall and Manning, 2000, on distinctive gender regimes in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union). Estonia and Lithuania, as one of the examples of the development in Eastern European family policy, have started with an identical family support system. However, currently they are exhibiting not only similarities, but also significant differences. As it is well known, these countries were incorporated into the former Soviet Union and were subject to the same family policy regulations as the rest of the country. They, thus, have a common past in terms of policy design, but have developed differences during the post-Soviet period (Aidukaite, 2004). This paper explores differences and similarities in family policy and, in particular, family benefits in Estonia and Lithuania. It investigates major theoretical questions: why do family policies differ across countries? What are the main causal forces that determine these differences? The main focus is on demographic outcomes, political background, the influence from the economy and public attitudes and policy formation environment as explanative powers of family policy choices.

Development of family policy is influenced by many policy processes (see Korpi, 2000; Sainsbury, 1994, 1996). The three Baltic States, as an example of post-socialist social policy, have been experiencing social policy reform over a period of more than ten years. Such challenges as declining birth rates, ageing populations, increasing child poverty and declining family stability have put, in particular, family policy onto the agenda for policy-makers to discuss. Quick and profound transformation took place in all spheres and 15 years later we see that many post-socialist countries have chosen different solutions in terms of social policy and family policy structure (Cerami, 2006; Aidukaite, 2004). This extremely mobile period in development of societies gives at the same time excellent framework to study factors what shapes these transformations and policy decisions.

Estonia and Lithuania offer an interesting case to study factors behind formation of family policy in Eastern European countries. Two countries were incorporated into the former Soviet Union and were subject to the same family policy regulations until the beginning of 1990ies. Although having a common past in terms of policy design, belonging now both to European Union, they have developed different social policy structure during the post-Soviet period. An the beginning of the independence governments followed mainly family policy structures inherited from the Soviet authoritarian policy system (Aidukaite 2004), which were, however, not very extensive. As many authors have emphasised (Aidkaite, 2004; Fodor et al 2002; Stankuniene 2001), the goal of Soviet family policy was to ensure full employment for women. Therefore, the assistance for families with children was concentrated on the development of childcare institutions that, in turn, guaranteed employment for women with dependent children. But, the financial support, as Stankuniene has pointed out, was rather limited. Estonia and Lithuania inherited a paid pregnancy and maternity leave (112 days: 56 before the birth and 56 afterwards), which fully covered the earnings. There was also a birth grant (fixed lump sum) that was quite generous and doubled at the birth of the second and third child (see Daunaravicius and Lalaite, 1982: 308). The state provided monthly grants for families with many children from the fourth child on. During Soviet times single mothers

also enjoyed some privileges. Monthly state grants for single mothers were paid up to the child's sixteenth birthday (if the child continued to study, the grant was paid up to the eighteenth birthday). There was also paid childcare leave, which covered children up to the age of eighteen months, and unpaid child-care up to the age of three. Some means-tested benefits for low income families also existed (Aidukaite, 2004; Ainsaar, 2000; Stankuniene, 2001).

At the beginning of independence the three Baltic States, especially Lithuania, were very much influenced by the male breadwinner ideology (see Mikalauskaite et. al. 1999, Stankuniene 2001, Smelser 1994). This affected child-care facility. Child-care facilities were cut back due to the ideology that claimed that it was not only primarily a female duty, but also an enormous advantage for children as well as the family if the women stay at home and raise children (Aidukaite, 2004). Although in Estonia the accent was more on mother freedom to choose (Ainsaar 2001), the generally similar trend was followed. However, this ideology proved quite short-lived given the perceived need for a two-income family, but also rapid gender equality values coming from the West with the European Union commitment to equal treatment of men and women at home and in workplace.

Since the restoration of independence, family support systems have started to be reformed in different ways. Family policy was expanded, more schemes and programs were introduced and more of the population became covered by these programs. Since the 1990s family support systems in the Baltic States have been undergoing various transformational stages until they developed into today's support systems. The evolution of the family policy in the Baltic countries from 1990 up to the present day has been accurately described in a number of studies (Aidukaite, 20004; Ainsaar, 2001).

Overall, in Estonia and Lithuania the same schemes can be found that are in many Western European countries: employment support schemes like maternity and parental leave; transfer support schemes like child care benefits and child allowances; some schemes for single parents and large families, as well as other benefits, such as benefits for orphans and parents with guardianship duties (for detailed discussion on family benefits in the Baltics see Aidukaite, 2004). This study does not intend to give a comprehensive description of the family benefits of the three Baltic States. Instead, only the main striking differences will be mentioned in order to allow for further discussions. Despite a lot of similarities in family policy design, there are also significant differences among two countries that should be taken into account. The most striking difference that Estonia has uiversal support to every child up to his/her sixteenth birthday or (in the case of daytime study) up to the age of nineteen. Lithuania, meanwhile, had a universal family support system that only paid benefits up to the child's third birthday. However, from the 1 July 2004, the universal benefit up to the child's seventh birthday was introduced which was futher expanded up to the child's sixteenth bithday in 2006. However, this universal child benefit was quite short lived. Since 2009 it was abolished and currently is paid on means-test basis to only low income families.

Despite some common features 15 year later Estonia and Lithuania belong to rather different country types in respect of family policy (see Bahle 2008, Ainsaar and Riisalu forthcoming). Estonia obtained more family friendly policy with higher share of child benefits from the state budget and more universal policy profile, while Lithuania can be described as modest supporter of families, with rather large share of income tested benefits (see data Bahle 2008). Bahle (2008) also classified countries according to state support to the compatibility of work and family and universality principles and found that Estonia, Latvia and Finland were the most similar to each other, while Lithuania was closer to Poland. At the same time, the group of Estonia, Latvia, Finland can be

described as countries with very universal family policy with essential efforts towards work and family compatibility.

Comparison of principles of family and child related policy allocations in two countries show that means tested benefits are completely missing in Estonia in 2005, while in Lithuania, they are important. However, the importance of means tested benefits has been reduced from 18.6% in 2000 to 7.5% in 2005 as well in Lithuania. The share of cash benefits in Estonia (more than 90%) has always been higher than in Lithuania (more than 60%) and benefits in kind more important in Lithuania (20% and above) than in Estonia (4-6%). Also the share of periodic benefits has been always higher in Estonia (more than 80%) than in Lithuania (around 60%). In 2004 Estonia remained one out of three countries in European Union that did not have any income tested family policy expenditures, while Lithuania with 20.6% remained among average countries in respect of share of income tested benefits (Bahle 2008).

Family policy during Soviet Union period was built up on the state exclusive responsibility shared with services provided by enterprises. Indirect social security measures through low prices for goods and services, free medical care etc (Bernotas and Guogis 2007) were also part of the system. In both countries, the Soviet legacy was followed by reaction of negative attitude towards the paternalistic state (Aidukaite 2003) after liberation from Soviet Union. On the other hand, experience of past had shaped a stronger belief into general equality of people in society East-European countries and there existed still stronger believe that governments have responsibility to guarantee subsistence for people (Kornai, 1999). Practicality of transition countries was also very high social mobility during first decade of the independence and over helming beliefs, that economic advancement was widely available and that economic outcomes were determined by individual efforts and therefore, social security did not become always a priority issue (Aidukaite, 2003; Lauristin, 2003).

In the following discussion, we are going to review changes in family policy in Estonia and Lithuania in the framework of major factors affecting family policies: demographic outcomes, political background, the influence from the economy and public attitudes and policy formation environment.

2. Factors shaping family policy

Family policy form one type of general policy process and therefore, can be analysed in the framework of general policy process analyses. It is difficult, indeed almost impossible, to draw a distinction between family policy and social policy in a broader sense. Family policy is an integral part of social policy, and what is going on in the field of general social policy very much affects how family policy will be developed. Sudies tend to evaluate the development of social policies in the post-socialist world with respect to the economic affordability of those countries' programs, global pressures from the IMF and the World Bank, the legacy of the past, the political orientations of governments, weak civil society, overall attidutes towards social policy and demographic outcomes of the society (Deacon 1992a, 1992b, 1997, 2000; Chandler 2001; Ferge 2001b; Standing 1996).

Generally two views about how policy process occur can be distinguished: either step by step input-output process from emerge of policy issue until implementation of process where everything is

connected in every time moment with everything, like “medieval soup” (Lindblom and Woodhouse 1993). Despite of preferred approach, majority of authors see policy environment, administrative and unofficial actors in policy and institutional structures as main factors behind the policy outcome. Yet, political orientations form important framework for social policy development.

“Inputs from the political system from the environment consist of demands and supports. Demands are claims for action what individuals and groups make to satisfy their interest and values. Support is rendered when groups and individuals abide by election results, pay taxes, obey laws, and otherwise accept the decisions” (Anderson 1997:26).

Policy environment shapes the general framework for policy arguments and determines problems, which can become public policy issues. In this paper, we see family policy as embedded into society’s society's general political, demographic, economic and social background and therefore shaped and formed by it. We analyse demographic circumstances, general values and attitudes of the Baltic citizens as well as fiscal resources and political environment in order to give an overview about general policy making framework in Estonia and Lithuania.

2.1. Demographic environment

Many European countries have witnessed a decline in the birth rates and in general depopulation of its societies since 1990s and onwards. Therefore, it is not surprising that the rhetoric towards pronatalist fertility became more popular. Decline of population numbers in Baltic countries was severe, especially in Estonia and Latvia (Aidukaite, 2004). Therefore, we can expect that demographic argument could shape the general policy making environment and increase the importance of family policy as public policy.

Figure 1. Change of total population (%) and total fertility rate (Data source: Statistics of Lithuania, Statistics of Estonia).

Figure 1 proves population decline was much more severe in Estonia than in Lithuania. Furthermore, birth rate in Estonia dropped to a lower level compared with Lithuania. Depopulation has been the overwhelming argument for the support of family policy in public debates in Estonia. It is, therefore, not surprising that a remarkable majority of Estonian people supports measures to increase fertility as the main tool to find solutions for the future need of employees (Testa 2006). This could be one reason why the family policy system was/is more universal in Estonia than in Lithuania. The negative demographic development characterised by decreasing and ageing of the population affected very much developments of pension insurance and family policy in Estonia (Trumm, 2006; Trumm and Ainsaar, 2007). For such a small nation as Estonia the negative demographic development is the most threatening social trend. Therefore, family policy has been always a priority in Estonian social policy (see Ainsaar??, Lauristin, 2003). As a result, it is probably not surprising that family benefits are more generous in Estonia than in Lithuania, where the decline of population was not so drastic (Aidukaite, 2009). Yet, previous studies (Aidukaite, 2004) have indicated Estonian policy makers and government seek to address all major motives of family policy. Namely, family policy in Estonia is meant to increase the birthrate, reduce poverty among families with children, and increase gender equality. This makes Estonian family policy comprehensive and universalistic.

On the turn of century we, however, see some changes. Official statistics demonstrate an increase in the birth rate in Estonia and a decline in Lithuania. Furthermore, share of total population change

lines crosses in 2002-2003 and after this period Lithuania looses more people per annum than Estonia.

Assuming that need for population replacement would encourage a public opinion towards supporting family policy measures, we would expect more active family policy measures in Estonia during 1990ies and some changes in Lithuanian family policy during starting from 2000. However, this demographic influence might be missing in Lithuania because of a common belief among Lithuanian experts that the family support system does not reflect the birth rate. Expert interviews carried in 2002 in three Baltic States revealed that Lithuanian experts considered a country's economic growth, securing employment, better housing opportunities and, in general, improving every individual's well-being as preconditions for improving the birth rate in a country, but not additional support from the state for those who have children or benefits for large families (Aidukaite 2004). Yet, policy makers in Lithuanian seek to reduce poverty among families with children and enhance parents' responsibility for the upbringing of their children. Consequently, the emphasis was put more on earnings-related, category-targeted and means-tested benefits than universal ones. Nevertheless, the decline in a birth rate partly affected family policy design in Lithuania too. As it was mentioned, from the 1 July 2004, the universal benefit up to the child's seventh birthday was introduced, which was further expanded to all children up to the age 9 and from 2006 even up to the child's 16th birthday. One motivation behind this was the desire to encourage families to have more children, but, it could be argued that the improved economical conditions of the country could have played a role here too. Since 2000 Lithuanian economy have experienced a rapid grow of GDP, which created conditions for expansion of social policies (Aidukaite, fc. 2009). Nevertheless, a current economic crisis forced government to implement retrenchments in family policies. Today the child benefits up to child's 16th birthday are means-tested and only poor families are entitled to it.

2.2. Fiscal resources

Social policy is a redistributive by its character. Therefore, this is obvious that resources are needed in order to implement social policy without economic restrictions. Lack of economic restriction is hardy imaginable, but the amount of them can probably shape the environment where policy decisions are made. Therefore, we can assume that decision in more promising economic situation are different, from the decisions with severe economic circumstances. Furthermore, the content and effectiveness of public policies often depend upon the amount of funds provided (Anderson 1997).

Political changes in the beginning of 1990ies were accompanied with sharp decline of gross domestic product in transition countries. The sharpest decline occurred between 1991 and 1992 and was around 35% in Lithuania and 14% in Estonia. Constant decline continued until 1994, then was short increase in GDP, which felt again in 1999 due to economic crisis in Russia. Since 2000 in all three Baltic States, a rapid increase in GDP was observable and this continued up to 2008 (see Figure 2 and Eurostat data).

Figure 2. C*hange in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the Baltic States at constant prices in comparison with the corresponding period of the previous year (%)*

The decline in GDP was especially severe in Lithuania and its recovery was longer and more difficult. Estonia, however, suffered less in its GDP fall and recovery was much faster as in comparison to Lithuania. Yet, previous studies indicate (Aidukaite, 2004) that Estonia spends, in absolute terms, most on benefits for families and children, while Lithuania and Latvia follow behind in that order. Total expenditure on cash benefits per capita in 2000 in Estonia was 305 PPP, in Lithuania 117 PPP and in Latvia 109 PPP. In absolute terms, the expenditure for cash benefits, including services as measured in purchasing power parities per capita, is again highest in Estonia (228 PPP), then comes Lithuania (157 PPP) and Latvia (140 PPP) is at the bottom (Aidukaite, 2004, p.). In relative terms, Estonia is also the leader as compared to the other two Baltic countries. In 2000, Lithuanian and Latvia spent 2.1 per cent and Estonia 2.5 per cent of the GDP on family support, including cash benefits and services (Nielsen 2003, Table 4.11: 41). Although, Estonia is a leader in terms of spending on family policy as compared to Lithuania, overall, spending on social protection in all three Baltic States are very low, lowest in the EU (see Aidukaite, fr. 2009).

Aidukaite (2003) found that it is difficult to deny the consequences of the economic limits on social security development during 1990ies, especially during the first years of independence. Aidukaite uses lack of resources in Lithuania also as an explanation to spread of selectivity in social security systems and loss of universalism. This argument is also supported by expert interviews from Lithuania who claimed that for a country with limited economic resources and high income inequality it is better to make improvements by way of targeting and providing higher benefits for those families who are really in need, instead of paying every family a very-low universal benefit (Aidukaite, 2004).

2.3. Political parties at power

Several surveys demonstrate that parties in power have a significant impact on the expansion of family policy (Korpi, 2000; Wennemo 2004). The particularity of new democracies in Baltic countries was, that the party system just started to develop since independence, and therefore, it was immature and often without settled profile in the 1990ies. However, it was predicted that the influence of political parties will increase in the future, while they establish their platforms and electorates (Aidukaite 2004:118). In case of Baltic it has been argued that the bureaucrats had a more significant impact on social policy development than political parties and other actors (Aidukaite 2004). For example, the programs of political parties did not have a clear vision of the social security model for their respective countries for quite a long time. In Estonia first political coalition agreement what included family policy statements was signed in 1999. After 1999 this type of agreements before coalition formation became one of the most powerful family policy documents in Estonia.

Table 1. Parties which dominated the parliamentary elections in Estonia and Lithuania

Table 1 demonstrates, which parties have dominated the parliamentary elections in Estonia and Lithuania since independence. Estonia was dominated by the right wing parties, which historically support traditional family values and therefore, nuclear family model. Lithuania is one of the post-socialist countries, where left wing parties has also managed to dominate several elections. Left-wing parties support a dual family model and egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles (see Korpi, 2000). However, family policy arrangements do not support the latter theoretical prepositions at all. Estonia, despite having dominated by the right-wing parties, has a quite generous and universal

family support system that resembles features of social-democratic welfare model. Lithuania, having dominated by the left wing parties, has the family policy model which resembles a mixture of liberal and conservative-corporatist welfare models. Thus, the political background could hardly explain changes in family policies in Estonia and Lithuania.

In Lithuania study as states by Guodis et al. (2000), majorityof parties were against the universal (social-democratic) model of social policy and were in favour of the liberal model. Even left-wing parties did not support the universal model of social policy. Even no party declared its support for the predominance of the corporatist model based on social insurance, which actually prevails in the country. Thus, there is little evidence that one or another party in Lithuania has made a significant impact on social policy or family policy development (Aidukaite 2004: 117-118). Other actors such as policy-makers, bureaucrats and scientists has made more significant impact on family policy development in the Baltics.

2.4. Institutions

Governmental and non-governmental institutions might have an important impact on a policy process, because of many powerful influence of institutionalised roles and interest to policy than individuals. Therefore, the institutional structure is an important determinant of the policy process. Institutional setup defines the how decisions are made, institutional constraints, attributes of the decision making process, policy making capabilities, policy choices and correspondingly also policy outcomes (Weaver and Rockman 1993).

Already in 1992 the post of Minister of Population Affairs was established in Estonia. During first years the main task of this minister without ministry was to solve possible ethic problems, but from 1996 the office of the minister worked more actively also with demographic questions including family policy. Although the amendment of laws is mainly the initiative of the Ministry of Social Affairs, the cooperation between the Ministry of Social Affairs and Office of the Minister of Population Affairs is very active in Estonia.

More than 100 non-governmental organisation were involved to the work with children and child protection in Estonia. However, only Union of Child Rich families can be named as politically active. During 2000-2003 several discussions initiated by minister of Population Affairs about establishment of Child Ombudsman position were held, however without any practical results.

Some studies (Evans et al. 1985; Skocpol 1992; Skocpol 1985; Weir and Skocpol 1985) even advocate that the state is an autonomous and purposive actor and performs through its bureaucratic and structural apparatus. Yet, autonomous initiatives by the state are not always acts of compulsion or control. Instead, it is the intellectual activities of bureaucratic state elites, with co-operation from scientists (employing expert knowledge in public policy making), engaged in diagnosing various societal problems and framing policy options to deal with them (Evans et al. 1985; Skocpol 1985).

2.5. Values and attitudes towards family and family policy

Attitudes towards the role of family and state in family affairs might be powerful policy designers. Traditionally Lithuania has been seen as more familiarist country, mainly because on more religious background. The analysis of the expert interviews in Lithuania (Aidukaite 2004) revealed that

children were seen as primarily the parents' responsibility and duty. Accordingly, it was believed that the state should play just a minor role in this respect, and intervene only if parents are not able to cope with the difficulties. In Estonia the prevailing public opinion was “raring of children is responsibility of a family, by state should guarantee at least average income for a such a family” (Kandla et al 2000). Almost half of the population supported this attitude and only 9% found that every family should coup itself with child rising task. We can assume that family policy is closely linked to understandings how the role family members and state should be properly divided in taking care of members of society. Several studies (Aidukaite 2004, Olagnero et al 2008) point here to the higher expectations to the role of family member as care givers and social security network in Lithuania, than Estonia. Olagnero et al (2008) even classify countries to different clusters. The main difference between groups is importance of family networks. While Estonia belongs to the group of “Mutual help”, Lithuania is a member of “closeness group”. In the mutual help cluster, the relevance of non-family networks as sources of support, the widespread ability to maintain contact also at a distance, the well-balanced experience of giving/receiving, shape a pattern of sociability based on mutual cooperation also outside the family. In the closeness cluster, the relevance of family networks as sources of support, the strong relevance of face-to-face contacts, a quite unbalanced flux of giving/receiving material/financial help, point to a pattern of sociability mostly restricted to the family (Olagnero et. al. 2008: 292).

Wennemo (1994) has highlighted four main arguments that explicitly influence family legislation discussion: population reproduction, poverty reduction, the breadwinner ideology and gender equality ideology.

Aidukaite (2004) had found previously that in the Baltic countries the attitudes of bureaucrats, policy-makers and researchers had greatly influenced social policy. However the countries might differ significantly with regard to the motives behind of policy. While Lithuanian decision-makers usually seek to reduce poverty among families with children and enhance parents' responsibility for upbringing up their children, Estonian policymakers were more motivated to create equal opportunities for all children and also the desire to enhance gender equality is more visible in the case of Estonia (Aidukaite 2004: 113). Estonian experts were concerned about the low birth rate in Estonia, and the point was also emphasised that children from rich families are equally important to the state. Another crucial aspect was the awareness of the problems related to gender inequality within the family, and the position that universal benefits seek to address the issues related to gender equality. Unlike in Lithuania, where it is commonly agreed that universal benefits are too costly and inefficient in the case of a country with small resources, in Estonia it is conventionally felt that means-tested benefits, because of the high cost of administration, could be much more costly. Estonian experts were of the opinion that means-tested or income-tested benefits create a stigma and social exclusion, and that all children have an intrinsic value and equal rights whether they come from rich or poor families. However, there were different opinions in Estonia and some of the experts underlined that this pro-universal system is not as good for Estonia as many politicians, scientists and policy-makers would like to believe, and that this should not be considered the only alternative for the future.

While most Eastern European countries stress higher fertility as the main aim of family policy (Ainsaar 2002), Estonia adopted officially family welfare and the gender equality approach in 1999–2004. From 2004 however the pronatalist direction was adopted once again.

Policy makers can be influenced by the experience of neighbouring countries. For example, the early ideology of the Estonian family policy was very pro-Scandinavian. Neighbourhood and

frequent contact with Scandinavian countries were essential factors in setting up the family policy system in Estonia (Ainsaar 2001). The current legislative framework of family policy, consequently, includes many principles from the Nordic welfare model: equal rights, universalism, and the central role of the state combined with the responsibility of local governments as service providers. Surprisingly, the influence of other international agencies was almost missing in Estonian family policy. Although the guidelines from the European Union about the employment of women and gender equity were relevant for family policy as well, they hardly shaped the actual policy process.

The cooperation with other countries, such as the UK and Ireland and high-level contacts concerning social policy were fairly frequent in Lithuania and could also have made an impact. In Lithuania the social security was reformed also at a slower pace in comparison with other Baltic countries and all social security systems was inspired more by German system, than by Scandinavian one (Aidukaite, 2003). And although the decision-makers also in Lithuania were fully aware of policy of the neighbouring Scandinavian countries, only Estonia adopted in practice Scandinavian principles.

Empirical results about public attitudes are quite controversial in the light of expert attitudes in two countries and point to the possibility that different values can be used in case of different socials policy domains. For example, empirical data about attitudes (Aidukaite 2003) indicate that in Estonia population should support more individualistic and less solidarity related solutions than in Lithuania. Survey conducted in 2002 demonstrated that 68% Estonian respondents and only 56 Lithuanian population agreed with the statement that “in a just society people, who diligent and intelligent, have a higher standard of material well-being, while people, who as lazy and stupid, have a lower standards of material well-being”. Especially large differences in attitudes were recorded in the beginning of 1990ieas when two times less Estonian than Lithuanians agreed with the statement that “in a just society the well-being of every citizen is more or less the same”. These results allow doubting in the argument that family policy is always a product of the prevailing ideology in a country. The ideology of the family support system showed clear signs of solidarity and universalism in Estonia during 1990ies. Furthermore, the analyses of the public media show that equality and security have been the most important public values in the public family policy process in Estonia (Ainsaar 2002).

Parental leave policies are influenced also by gender attitudes. Previous studies show, that although people in Lithuania tended to be more conservative than people in Estonia in the beginning of 1990ies, this gap diminished in the end of 1999ies (Motiejūnaitė and Höhne 2008).

3. Conclusions

This paper reveals that Estonian and Lithuanian family policy is shaped by the major factors which affect social policy development. Obviously, the differences in the economic affordably, demographic outcomes and differences in the policy- makers’ preferences shape family policies in the Baltics. Yet, policy makers are often supported by the general attitudes in society, which have roots in the society’s religious and cultural traditions and consequently form gender attitudes, which also important for family policy formation. The moderate influence of Europeanization and globalization can also be observable while shaping family policy context in Estonia and Lithuania through learning the best practices around the world.

This study shows that the demography of the country, attitudes, which have its roots in religious values and cultural traditions, which dates much back than just Soviet period, as well as economic affordability of the country determines major differences in family policy arrangements in Estonia and Lithuania. Thus, this study claims that Soviet past is not the most decisive variable to explain changes in social policies of the Eastern European countries. Even two Baltic States, which were subject for 50 years to the same social policy regulations under the Soviet rule, show significant differences.

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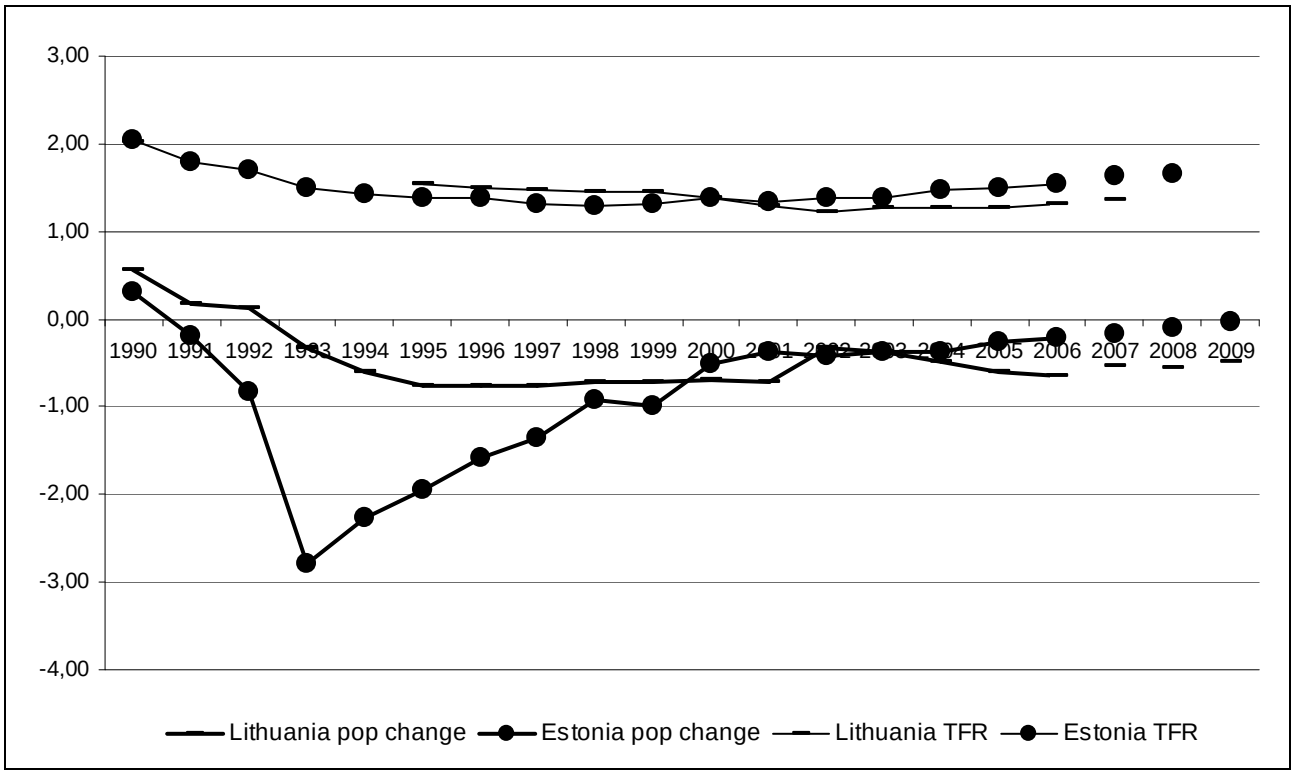

Figure 1. Change of total population (%) and total fertility rate (Data source: Statistics of Lithuania, Statistics of Estonia).

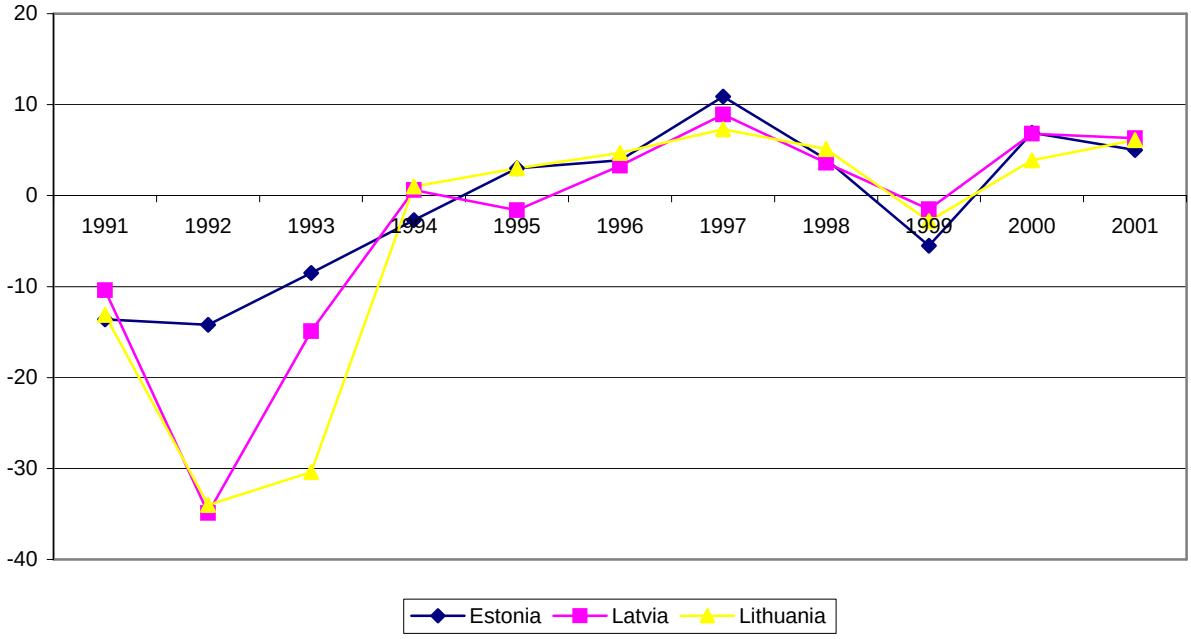

Figure 2. C*hange in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the Baltic States at constant prices in comparison with the corresponding period of the previous year (%)*

Source: Latvijas Statistika 1997; Statistical Office of Estonia 1999; Statistical Office of Estonia 2002b.

Table 1. Parties which dominated the parliamentary elections in Estonia and Lithuania

Party	Year	Ideology
Estonia		
National Coalition Party *Pro Patria*	1992	Right-wing
Coalition and Rural People's Party	1995	Centre-right
Estonian Centre Party (EK)	1999	Right-wing
Estonian Centre Party (EK) Res Publica (RP)	2003	Right-wing
Estonian Reform Party (R) Estonian Centre Party (EK)	2007	Centre-right
Lithuania		
Homeland Union (TS)	1990	Right-wing
Lithuanian Democratic Labour Party (LDDP)	1992	Left-wing
Homeland Union (TS)	1996	Right-wing
Brazauskas Social Democratic Coalition (ABSK)	2000	Left-wing
Labour Party (DP) For a Working Lithuania: Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP) New Union (NS[SL])	2004	Centre-left
Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) National Revival Party (TPP)	2008	Centre-right

Source: Aidukaite, fc. 2009, Table 6.3; European Election Database (http://extweb3.nsd.uib.no/); Parties and Elections in EU (http://www.parties-and-elections.de/).