

18th Conference on Baltic Studies: The Baltic States in the Era of Globalization

An American religious historian of Czech descent who now teaches courses on comparative religions in Japan presented information on "Neopagan movements in Lithuania and Latvia". A Latvian American folklorist and cultural historian shared insights about Baptist and Lutheran Latvians in Brazil. A graduate student of Norwegian descent who had taught English in Lithuania presented thoughts on "Globalization and Popular Music in Lithuania", while an American doctoral student from Hawaii who had lived in Estonia and was now at the University of Aberdeen (Scotland) presented on "Rujaline Eestimaa: A Rock Band's Impact on Estonian Culture During Occupation". A Lithuanian anthropology professor presented his findings on socio-cultural panorama of Lithunian-ness in the USA (during different periods and waves of migration from Lithuania). A Lithuanian graduate student, now living in Norway, presented on "The Forces of Change in Higher Education in Lithuania". A Latvian American professor presented the topic "Globalization and the Baltic States. What is Myth, What is the Reality".

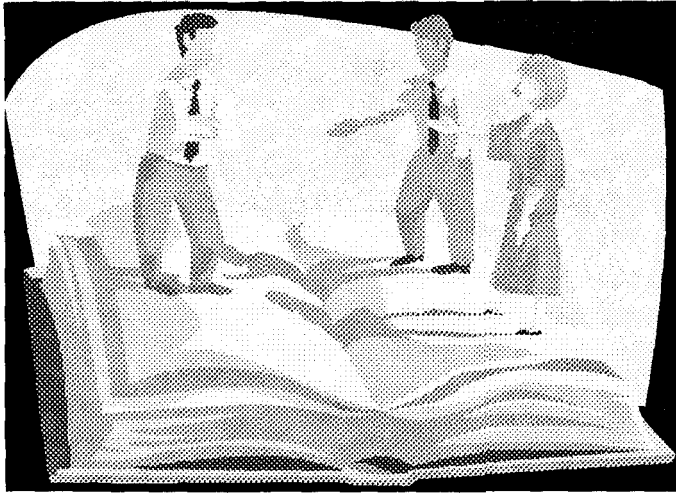
These were some of the speakers and their themes at the 18th Conference on Baltic Studies that took place at Johns Hopkins Univer-

sity-Homewood Campus (Baltimore, MD) June 6-8th. The overall conference theme was "The Baltic States in the Era of Globalization".

The Conference is sponsored every two years by the AABS (Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies) and presentations are given in English. Founded in 1968, in recent years, the 600+ member organization has changed and evolved (as any growing organization should). Since the re-establishment of independence in the Baltic countries, more and more scholars from the Baltic countries are participating at the AABS conferences (although there are also Baltic Studies conferences in Europe and Australia as well). The editorship of the organization's journal, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, is now edited in Estonia.

The incoming president of AABS, Prof Saulius Sužiedelis of Millersville University (PA) has indicated that he sees that AABS is going through a changing (guard) of the generations. Post World War II immigrants to North America made up the bulk of the membership until recently. As those scholars have retired, newer generations are taking their place.

Others have observed that the organization now interests researchers, graduate students, and scholars who have an interest in Baltic Studies and the Baltic States, but they also



look at issues affecting the entire Baltic Sea Region. The attendees at the 2002 conference included scholars not only from North America and the Baltic countries, but also those from Australia, Scotland, Sweden, Germany, and Denmark. One American-educated professor even traveled from Japan where he currently is teaching comparative religions.

AABS is an educational and scholarly organization, but it gives many students an opportunity to test their wings at the conferences, in the newsletter and journal. At this year's conference, one undergraduate student of Lithuanian descent in speaking with other attendees informally, indicated that he had just changed his major from computer science to history (to the consternation of his parents), but he felt drawn to the AABS conference as a way to look for research topics and faculty at other universities with whom he might want to network.

A number of graduate students and faculty were able to parlay Baltic themes into their research papers, master's degree theses and doctoral dissertations. Faculty and students alike found that although their research and teaching lay in other areas, they still felt the interest, need and compulsion to investigate topics of interest that had Lithuanian, Estonian, or Latvian themes- in history, psychology, education, literature, linguistics, political science, and many other social science and humanities spe-

cialties.

At a lunchtime address, former White House Baltic Desk expert (currently an advisor at Voice of America), Paul Goble, was very frank about current trends in the Baltics – overcoming the legacy, the return to the Western World and Europe, as well as the changed position of Russia in the world. He warned that perhaps there has been too much celebration and too little thought to the responsibilities and challenges of independence. He also expressed disapproval of the decision for Baltic and other former Soviet-occupied countries' athletes participating in athletic games in Moscow scheduled during the anniversary of the mass exiles and deportations to Siberia.

Two ambassadors (Lithuania and Estonia) and an embassy representative (Latvia) participated in a political science roundtable. They mentioned that diplomacy often goes its own route and in its own time, that history consists of "windows of opportunity". While military cooperation in the Baltic States is a priority, but economic interests (example investments) may put the three countries in competition with each other.

The ambassadors still hear a lot of questions about why the three countries still have three currencies and three militaries. One quoted a French official who stated that "we are not a superpower and we do not plan on becoming one". In any case, the Baltic countries are still proving themselves to other nations – showing they have values, democracy, and rules of law.

AABS always seeks new members. Interested persons should check out the website (<http://www.balticstudies-aabs.lanet.lv/>) and consider participating at the 2004 conference, scheduled to take place in Toronto, Canada or the 2006 conference, scheduled to again take place in Washington. Whether presenting or participating (or both), AABS conferences can be stimulating and provocative. ♦