

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE LITHUANIAN STATE FROM REGIONAL IDENTITIES

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ABSTRACT

The article examines how a search for identity attempted by Žemaitians (Samogitians), a Lithuanian local cultural group, eventually evolves into the demand that Žemaitian community should be recognised as an autochthonous nation, and Žemaitian dialect – as a separate language, with all implicit rights. Attempts to implement the idea of a self-governed region as a guarantee of reconstruction and protection of Žemaitian identity is the most recent and vivid representation of such proceedings. Since Lithuania's accession to EU is increasingly perceived as a threat to cultural identity, other local cultural groups also tend to support the idea of self-governed regions. A suggestion that four (4) self-governed regions covering respective local culture distribution areas should be created in Lithuania is promoted. The authors of such demands, due to a multitude of historical, political, and social reasons, still do not have many supporters in central government bodies, and even in local communities, although in Žemaitija their number is greater.

KEYWORDS: Regional identity • traditional culture • local community • Lithuania • Žemaitija

In all three East Baltic countries – Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania – ethnologists have distinguished several historico-cultural areas, as they call them. The names and location of the areas are specified in the first volume of *The historico-ethnographic Atlas of Baltic Countries (Istoriko-etnograficheskiĭ... 1985; map No. 2)*. If until quite recently Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians were interested in the existence and cultural variations of such units only as in the object of cultural heritage or study, today, the ethnographic regions themselves seek to enter the historical arena as the subjects of ethno-political operation. Issues raised by regional communities threaten to break the stereotypic understanding of ethnic identity and ethnic territory. The development of this process is more rapid in regions populated by communities standing out, in terms of culture, against an ethnic national background, and – what is more – having a definite ethnonym.

Ethnographers have distinguished four ethnographic zones in Lithuania. The areas of distribution of their traditional cultural characteristics do not differ much from the ones occupied by Lithuanian dialects. In Lithuania, it is the Žemaitians (*Žemaičiai*) who may be most clearly and easily distinguished among others by their traditional culture and dialect. Žemaitians inhabit the western part of the country, and they have an outlet to the Baltic Sea. The region occupied by them, that is Žemaitija, appeared in the mediaeval historical sources written in Latin or, later, in other West European languages

under the name of *Samogitia*; or *Žmudž* – in the Polish historiography, or *Жмудь* – in the pre-Soviet, and *Жемайтия* – in the Soviet historiographic literature. The awareness of distinctiveness in Žemaitians is fostered by the circumstance that Žemaitija appears to be the only Lithuanian region formed historically in the proper sense of the word: actually it was the only region within the Grand Duchy of Lithuania who managed to retain its political autonomy as long as until late 18th c. In the period of formation of Lithuanian nation in the 19th c., the Žemaitian dialect had a real chance to become the nation's literary language. It competed against a rival Aukštaitian dialect a considerable length of time. What is more, double ethnic awareness makes Žemaitians stand out among other Lithuanians even today: quite a big number of Žemaitians believe themselves to be, in the first place, Žemaitians, and only in the second place, – Lithuanians.

In late 19th – early 20th c., the process of Lithuanian national consolidation implied the levelling of differences among regional groups. Yet it would be wrong to assert that *the issue of Žemaitian ethnicity* was settled in the course of that period. Under the First Republic of Lithuania, especially before World War II, Žemaitians repeatedly sought to raise the issue of providing equal chances to Žemaitian and Lithuanian. However the outbreak of war and subsequent Soviet occupation coupled with the collapse of Lithuanian statehood buried *the Žemaitian problem* for decades.

The issue of regional identities emerged again in late 20th c., before the restitution of Lithuanian statehood following the outset of *singing revolutions* in the Baltic countries. Yet at that time the raising of that problem implied rather a concern about a neglected part of traditional culture the study of which had not been tolerated in the period of Soviet occupation. In the wake of Žemaitian Cultural Society established in 1988, similar societies, clubs, or countrymen's associations appeared in other ethnographic areas. Their plans of action included the studies of native regional culture and history as well as the promotion of local folklore. But Žemaitians were the only ones who managed later to expand the operations of their society up to the limit of definite steps made in the direction of its *ethnisation*.

The attachment of great importance to local cultures acquired new quality and forms after the penetration of regionalist movement ideas into Lithuania from West Europe. A closer look at the distribution and representation of such ideas in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Poland allows to contend that the regionalist movement is changing lodgings from West to post-Communist Europe retaining its original forms, yet with much delay. Relations with the requirements and ideas of West European movements are obvious: for example, the necessity to design national domestic policy so that the heritage of local cultures be not only a museum piece or the object of ethnographic, linguistic or folklorist research but also a cultural value demarginalised for the benefit of everyday cultural circulation is being discussed in Lithuania, too. It has been asserted more and more often that negative outcomes of globalisation may be counteracted not by confronting the national unity and its uniform *ethnic culture* with the globalisation process but rather by advancing the most important unit of *resistance*, the regional culture, through the inclusion of a multitude of elements of its heritage into the economic, environmental, social, or tourist programs. Indeed, the necessity to resist the principles of centralised national government rather than the threats to national identity that will eventually come from the West has been increasingly stressed in all public utterances by the promoters of regionalism. However, another thing is quite obvious: the devel-

opment and the metamorphoses of regionalist ideas in Lithuania are becoming fully adequate to the ones accomplished in the West. The scholars of regionalism indicate that in the course of past thirty years western initiatives for the recognition of cultural minorities have travelled a long way from tender care about tribal heritage, or museum organisation, or revitalisation of holidays and regional products to brutal nationalist demands making such argumentation more important than the issues of culture and identity. In many places aspirations to protect local identities take the form of cultural authoritarianism, *ethnic consolidation*, or demands for self-government. This seems to be a significant and disturbing paradox of the epoch characterised by the migration of humans and the creolisation of customs (Bromberger & Meyer 2003: 357–358; 361).

Under a democracy, the promotion of Žemaitian issue was fostered by the circumstance that not only in the period of Soviet rule but also in the pre-war Republic of Lithuania Žemaitians experienced rather rapid linguistic assimilation: the acceptance of standard Lithuanian by an increasing number of people inhabiting Žemaitian border areas or by Žemaitian youth living in the towns of the Žemaitian region produced a shrinkage in the size of area populated by the users of Žemaitian dialect. At the same time, the regional awareness of Žemaitians disintegrated. The Žemaitian dialect failed to deserve proper attention and tolerance.¹ It is quite understandable why nobody protested or disapproved of it: each and every Lithuanian understood that he or she had to stand firm against Russification, and to unite even more closely around national values and symbols. However when this menace passed regional patriotism-respecting Žemaitian leaders grasped an opportunity to remind that “... their rights were slightly infringed upon”.

At the turn of millennia, the influence produced by Lithuanian domestic policy and competing party programs played by no means the least role in the attachment of special importance to regional policy. Having noticed an emerging tendency towards placing the Žemaitianness opposite to the Lithuanianness (Pakalniškis 2001: 210), definite political parties decided to play the Žemaitian card in an electoral fight. Making use of the impoverished lower strata of society, and the relatively higher rate of unemployment in peripheral areas, compared to the capital city, they located the root of all evil – the central government bodies of Lithuania – and suggested the following alternative way out of the situation: to repeal districts in Lithuania and to establish, instead of them, self-governed regions having wide powers in the area of social policy. In the electoral propaganda, the necessity to secure “one’s own authority” as a guarantee of social justice turned out to be one of the main topics. According to definite political leaders, it was “one’s own authorities” and “ordinary people” who would be able to settle all issues delicately and honestly as they would have more information about the cultural and social media within which the above-mentioned authorities would be empowered to operate. When promoting such postulates the populist party of liberal democrats pinned many hopes on the Žemaitian region. Besides cultural expectations it offered a very favourable social situation in terms of electoral fights: with almost all industry decayed in several Žemaitian municipalities, the problem of unemployment became extremely pressing.

Currently, individuals or groups voicing their demands on the Lithuanian state in the name of Žemaitians are very diverse both in terms of their interests, social position, and education. The central office of Žemaitian Cultural Society (ŽCS), the most numer-

ous and influential one among Žemaitian organisations, is situated in the district town of Telšiai. It declares openly only the cultural goals of its operation, yet in separate cases the Society politicises them. The number of Society members totals several thousands, yet only several hundreds of them are activists. Other organisations, such as the *Samogitia* Žemaitian Academic Youth Corporation or the Žemaitian Academy (Žemaitian scholars' association) are not numerous. They do not show a tendency to formulate political demands, and even isolate themselves from such claims. The Žemaitian Parliament, a peculiar group in Klaipėda Town, claiming from Lithuania a status of economic autonomy for Žemaitija, full control of oil-bearing lands in Žemaitija, and compensation for damage allegedly made by Lithuania over many years does not find any significant support in society.

Structural pluralism determines the diversity of opinion on how the issues of local-cultural group identity protection are to be settled. Žemaitians are distinct from all other Lithuanian regional groups in one more aspect: in the name of Žemaitians not only the problem of retention of Žemaitianness but also of reconstruction of the former "real" Žemaitian identity is raised. The promoters of reconstruction of Žemaitian identity by way of education² limit their operations to the efforts to widen the cultural and communicative functions of the Žemaitian dialects. In contrast to their more radical brothers in arms, they do not keep harping on the responsibility of Lithuanians for the impaired Žemaitian identity, although the thesis about historical injustice or confiscated Žemaitian identity occupies by no means the least place in the rhetoric used by radicals.

The supporters of a moderate education-based way of action seem to be satisfied with the recognition by central government bodies of Žemaitian dialect as an independent language on equal terms with the standard Lithuanian. Seeking to prove the correctness of this postulate, linguists of Žemaitian origins compiled and published quite quickly a manual of Žemaitian spelling (Girdenis, Pabrėža 1998).³ Journalists and writers originating from Žemaitija were invited to publish their works in their native dialect. Basing on the distinctive qualities of Žemaitian dialect Žemaitians try to raise their local regional culture above the local culture level, to place their cultural community above the level of an ordinary ethnographic group, and to promote it to the national, not regional level. In their linguistic aspirations they are very much like Provençals, France, who seek to revitalise Provençal literature (Pasquini 2003: 417).

It is also believed that the functions of Žemaitian dialect should not be limited to the narrow area of belles-lettres or journalism. Practically, efforts have been made already to use the Žemaitian dialect, side by side with standard Lithuanian, in road traffic signs. Although not too assertively, yet more and more often incitement to revise general education curricula, or to familiarise at least primary school children with the elements of native Žemaitian dialect, and to teach them read and write Žemaitian is voiced. It is suggested that at least first and second-formers should be taught all subjects in their native dialect; and standard Lithuanian be gradually introduced only in higher school because today Žemaitian children having come to school for the first time have to study Lithuanian as a new language, sometimes even too hard to understand. However demands to introduce dialects into the system of education seem to be left, for the time being, on the level of timid speculation. This is partly because the authors of this idea still have not worked out any definite projects; on the other hand, they do not possess any clear vision how the idea should be put into life. Firm steps in this direction are

missing also for one more reason: though a manual of Žemaitian spelling is published, it is only its authors and a thin circle of enthusiasts who have mastered it. However the most weighty reason may lie in the scepticism of the greater part of Žemaitians

The absolute majority of Žemaitians taking part in Žemaitian cultural activities insist quite sincerely that their efforts to declare the Žemaitian identity are nothing else but a wish to have two identities – one Žemaitian and another – Lithuanian. The most remarkable representation of such declaration is the action of introduction of a Žemaitian passport, although this act is often treated by other Lithuanians as a representation of Žemaitian separatism. Such a passport is issued to ŽCS members or to other Žemaitians distinguished for scientific, cultural, or commercial achievements. In order to discharge the rising tension and to deny the incriminated separatism, the leaders of Žemaitian movement included a clause into Passport Issuance Regulations stating that a Žemaitian passport might be issued even to people without a Žemaitian background provided they supported the goals of Žemaitian movement. However in practice such occurrences are very rare. The number of issued Žemaitian passports totals several thousands. The passport represents a product of high polygraphic quality. It does not differ much from a national passport in terms of its outward appearance and contents. A Žemaitian passport contains a holder's photo and the following particulars written down in the Žemaitian dialect: name, surname, place and year of birth, height, and the colour of eyes and hair. The ethnonym *žemaitis* is stated without providing any additional information that it shows holder's ethnicity. All Žemaitians living in any place of Lithuania, including the Žemaitian region, have an inscription in their Žemaitian passports saying that they are Lithuanian citizens. The creation of a Žemaitian emblem, its incidental application, and its symbolism (a crown with a Latin inscription "Patria una" below might cause greater misunderstanding than the passport and corresponding inscriptions in it) has provoked a smaller number of emotions.

On the eve of general census Lithuania 2001, a national parliament member, having previously established a group of Žemaitian MPs, demanded that a permission be given to census takers to write down "a Žemaitian" in the "nationality" column of a Department of Statistics to the Government of the Republic of Lithuania questionnaire, in case the questioned person stated so. At the same time in definite districts of Žemaitija an agitation for recording oneself as a Žemaitian was carried out among people. The Department of Statistics rejected the demand for a permission to inscribe Žemaitian ethnicity by census takers side by side with other ones. Thus, the above-mentioned politician initiated a civil proceeding threatening to take the case to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. Almost simultaneously, a regular ŽCS congress adopted a resolution supporting a demand to legitimate the Žemaitian ethnicity in the Republic of Lithuania. Yet not only professional statisticians but also distinguished scholars of history interviewed by mass media representatives argued against the legitimisation of Žemaitian ethnicity asserting that "separate ethnicity implied a desire for separate statehood" (Gudavičius 2003: 18).

The issue of Žemaitian ethnicity has not emerged out of nothing. Almost all Lithuanian scholars had conceded long before these events that Žemaitians were "more than a local cultural group" and tried to define it by means of international terms suggested by definite ethnological schools, or to translate them into Lithuanian. It was argued that Žemaitians represented a Lithuanian *subetnosas* (subethnos) (Nikžentaitis 1996: 26), or

potautė (subnation) (Kalnius 1997: 12), or *subtauta* (subnation) (Gudavičius 2002: 14). From the point of view of more radical Žemaitians, such recognition means a weighty argument for getting delimited from the status of a Lithuanian local culture group, reminding at the same time that the “subethnic” contemplation only uncovers the aspirations of national unification supporters to contest the fact of existence of Žemaitian nation. So, in case of Žemaitians, we can observe the characteristics of a definite phenomenon considered by Anthony D. Smith several decades ago: where a national state consists of more than one ethnic group there we have a hotbed made ready for romantic protest against bureaucracy, with a smaller ethnic community raising its demands for wider ethnic nationalism (Smith 1994: 230).⁴

For all that, the greatest number of supporters is enjoyed by the group organised for the protection and promotion of regional cultures. We might call them regionalists. The group advances the idea that it is only a territorial-administrative reform carried out in Lithuania that may secure both the protection of regional identities and the solution of social problems on the periphery. It suggests establishing 4 or 5 self-governed regions within the limits of historical and cultural areas, and giving these newly-created regions the names of corresponding areas. While the promoters of this idea do not deny relatively pronounced cultural distinctness of Žemaitians, they persist in viewing Lithuanian communities living in all Lithuanian historico-cultural areas as ethnic groups, and territories inhabited by them – as ethnic regions. This is the starting point for raising the above-mentioned demands. That is why the rhetoric of Lithuanian regionalists is dominated by the motifs of “European Union directives”, or by the statements that it is the European Community that calls for such regions, and that the chief purpose of regionalisation is to maintain the “ethno-cultural identity.”⁵ This campaign involves also non-Žemaitians, yet the uncompromising Žemaitians are regarded as leaders, so, the reform promoters from other regions see in them a model to be copied. Supporters of the suggested reform think that even if the regions created within the limits of historico-cultural areas fail to win municipal rights at once and have to enjoy the status of regions formed only for statistical or planning purposes, still, the official power of current counties (their number totals 10) to represent Lithuania in the Committee on Regional Development or in the Assembly of European Regions might be questioned as counties are not regions. According to them, at Committee or Assembly sessions, instead of officials who actually represent counties, there ought to sit people elected and delegated by regional communities. Current participation of counties playing the part of regions is viewed as an anomaly, or as a Soviet relict, or wilfulness on the part of central government bodies, or a disregard for the interests of local communities.

In this respect, regionalists’ arguments are hard to parry: it is recognised in Europe that autonomous communities or municipalities with wide competence are the basic units of democracy (*Déclarations adoptées...*1999: 26). Obviously, Lithuanian promoters of ethnic regionalism, in this respect, do not differ from their European counterparts. Regionalists of all countries within which regionalist movements arise consider Brussels to be an ally in their fight against their national central government bodies. For example, Jozeph Yacoub, a French scholar, basing on an article in “Le Monde” indicates that a presentation given by French regionalists in Brussels secures a better lobby in Paris (Yacoub 2000: 189). Similarly, Lithuanian ethnographic group leaders do not keep from being known that their appearance at Brussels in the role of persons delegated



Figure 1. The Žemaitian Passport

by regions – should it ever happen – would secure a real chance of becoming national government partners in Vilnius, or participants in the area of national culture planning. At the same time they expect that such shifts would make the expansion of regional rights an irrepressible process. In 2001, representatives of several Žemaitian organisations handed in an Appeal to the President of Lithuania and the speaker of Parliament demanding that 4 self-governed regions, including Žemaitija, be created. The representatives threatened to seek help beyond Lithuanian borders if their demands were not met (*Kreipimasis...2001: 6–7*).

In contrast to their Western counterparts, Lithuanian regionalists do not have their own political party, such as “L’Union Démocratique Bretonne” or “Corsica Nazione” in France or “Parti Québécois” in Canada whose basic goals provided by their programs of action would include autonomy or independence for particular regions. Supported by such slogans, the above-mentioned parties show themselves very advantageously during elections. On the whole, the following particular characteristic of Lithuania, like of any other post-Soviet country, may be distinguished in terms of voiced regionist demands: any radical actions or declarations are generally viewed with a dose of fright and suspicion even by community members whose interests definite groups or separate individuals have championed to defend. Such a reaction is determined by a common painful historical past that has become an important factor of national consolidation. Thus such radical phrases as “internal colonialism,” “cultural genocide,” or “a demand for historical satisfaction” currently echoed openly throughout West Europe (Bromberger & Meyer 2003: 357) do not yet enjoy wider support in Lithuania. Lithuanian

regionalists, like their counterparts in a number of post-Soviet countries, encounter major difficulties emerging due to specific historical experiences suffered by communities respected at present by the above-mentioned regionalists. Similarly, a big number of Žemaitians believe that such sudden movements and dissociation from other Lithuanians for the benefit of better presentation of one's own identity may be dangerous in view of continuous external danger. Thus, it is thought that in order to support the recovered independence people must unite around the symbols of statehood to take care of and protect standard national language with equal zeal.

Under these circumstances, Lithuanian government is inclined to delegate the greater part of central authority functions not to self-governed regions but to regional municipalities as it is under an obligation to the European Union to strengthen local self-government. It would rather not introduce second-level self-government institution. While the Law "On the Principles of the State Protection of Ethnic Culture" of the Republic of Lithuania adopted in 1999 provides that ethnographic regions do exist in Lithuania (meaning the so-called historico-cultural areas mapped by ethnographers in The Baltic Historical and Cultural Atlas several decades ago), practically, this has been a matter of no importance. Subsequently adopted legislative acts, such as the Law on Regional Development of the Republic of Lithuania, or the General Plan of the Territory of the Republic of Lithuania approved by the Parliament, or Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania On the Outline of Lithuanian Regional Policy of 21 July 1998 state very distinctly that Lithuanian regions are nothing else but counties created in the course of administrative territorial reform 1993 (*Europos lėšos...* 2000: 4).

Indeed, Lithuanian authorities are inclined to discuss seriously a version of Lithuania's division into regions worked out by geographers. This piece of work is done to create several regions for statistical and planning purposes. However the regions are to be created not within the limits of historico-cultural areas, yet having in mind economic, social, demographic, and landscape-forming factors. Each such macro-region is to be composed of several meso-regions (totalling to 17). All of them are to be named after ancient historical Lithuanian lands (12th –13th c.). Meso-regions, in their turn, are to be made of current district municipalities (districts). As Estonia carried out its territorial administrative reform earlier than Lithuania, possibly, Estonian experience was used for the working out of the Lithuanian reform model because Lithuanian meso-regions are more or less equivalent to Estonian *maakond* in terms of size, formation principle, and consideration for historical tradition. Lithuanian regionalists arguing for the creation of self-governed regions in Lithuania are deeply concerned for the experience gained by Estonia and Latvia in the area of administrative territorial division. However it is obvious that proponents' and opponents' motives of concern as well as conclusions made by them on the basis of received information are completely different. Proponents of self-governed regions find the Estonian model undesirable because a territorial and administrative construct, very much like an Estonian *maakond* in terms of its size, is too small to be declared an "ethnic" self-governed region. Vygandas Čaplikas, one of the most ardent proponents of self-governed regions in Lithuania, writes in his article published in Lithuanian:

"In the area of co-operation on the regional level chances are not big because Estonians, compared to Lithuanians, do not have such large historical or *ethnic* (italicized by me – P. K.) regions. If we disregard Tallinn, Estonia's population will total

less than one million. Our Aukštaitian and Žemaitian lands have almost one million inhabitants each. Moreover, if in Lithuania the regional level is more or less distinct, this is still not quite so in Estonia. We need regional relations with Estonia for other purposes: by consolidating our forces and harmonizing our actions we may produce greater influence on authorized regional policy institutions in Brussels, and protect more effectively the interests of Baltic states on this particular level of management” (Čaplikas 2005: 53–54).

Opponents of regional self-government, on the other hand, consider the Estonian version of administrative and territorial division acceptable due to the above-mentioned reason: a unit of the *maakond* type is too small to declare political autonomy, consequently, it does not contain any separatist potentialities. Thus, Lithuanian proponents of regional self-government got more interested in a Latvian model for forming regions. Pursuant to it, Latvian regions were created within the limits of ethnographic areas⁶ (*Reģionu attīstība ...*2003: 7). The model appeals to Lithuanian regionalists. They especially admire its supposedly very appropriate first step – essential identification of ethnographic areas with the names of newly-created regions. Lithuanian regionalists reason in the following way: should a region be given an ethnographic name, even if it does not yet have self-government, or even if its borders do not coincide precisely with the ones of historico-ethnographic area, it would be possible to acquire, little by little, the functions carried out by the region.

Influential Lithuanian businessmen are ill disposed towards the new reform of administrative-territorial division, especially towards the creation of self-governed regions. They are afraid that the reform may be followed by changes in infrastructure management, budget composition, and fiscal policy. Such changes may be not useful to business people, or, at least, bring about the risk of losing their grip on Lithuanian economy.

After all, it is the disapproval of the reform by various strata of society that turns out to be the most important factor interfering with the creation of not only self-governed ethnographic regions but also of NUTS-2 (*The Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics*)-type ones in Lithuania. In the first place, people perceive in the reform a threat to statehood and Lithuania’s territorial integrity. Attempts to form a Polish political autonomy in 1991, and a corresponding referendum for withdrawal from the structure of Lithuanian state and joining the Soviet Union, not yet collapsed then, has left a deep imprint in the mind of Lithuanians producing a phobia about any type of autonomy. Recent discussions⁷ about the boundaries of regions to be marked on maps looked like an instance of such a phobia. Common people of Lithuania, including Žemaitians, do not generally think that there are any urgent cultural obstacles to or restrictions on respecting or declaring one’s identity of one or other type. In 2002–2003, the author of this article surveyed residents of a number of Lithuanian regions. The survey of 550 respondents revealed that only 22 per cent of Žemaitians supported the idea of creating self-governed regions within the limits of historico-cultural areas; 41 per cent of them argued against it; while the rest of Žemaitians stated that they did not care about this issue at all. In other regions only about 10 per cent of respondents argued for the idea. However, basic motives for the disapproval were almost identical everywhere: respondents found fault even with the country’s current division into regions because “*current territorial units were too large*” (10 counties – P.K.), or “*municipalities would be*

enough, because people did not need any counties or regions"; or there was "too much of red tape work"; or "the distance to county or regional administration centres was too long", or "communication with counties was too complicated"; or "current counties ought to be subdivided in order to increase their number", etc. No wonder that the greater part of common Žemaitians, especially those who live in rural districts, are against a macro-region: to get to Telšiai (the anticipated centre of Žemaitian region) many of them would have to cover a distance two times longer compared to the one separating them from the current four chief county towns – at present there are four counties in Žemaitija.

Common Žemaitians do not support actively the central government's attempt to formulate more or less reasonable cultural demands, such as the introduction of dialect studies into educational system, or – what is more – the teaching of primary school subjects in Žemaitian dialect. On the issue of dialect, quite often ordinary Žemaitians give the following answers: "this would produce a negative effect on standard Lithuanian", or "our dialect is hard to master", etc. About 10 per cent of Žemaitians supported the introduction of Žemaitian dialect into educational system. The absolute majority of surveyed Žemaitians stated that the basic problems encountered by them were neither cultural nor identity-related ones. They were definitely social, such as unemployment, or a search for a source of living, or health care, or the growing rate of criminal offence, or troubles connected with personal or family safety, or property protection. Maybe it is here that we find the basic answer why Lithuanian regionalists fail to develop their social basis and organise actions for the support of regionalists' demands on a more massive scale. Yet at the same time we have to concede that the greatest rate of regional self-government supporters originate from Žemaitian self-governed territories with a more vigorous local ŽCS and a more intensive and permanent promotion of regionalist demands.

Nevertheless, in spite of negative social opinion, Žemaitian aspirations and actions serve as a catalyst for other regional groups in Lithuania. They also organise their own conferences on cultural issues, or discuss problems related to their identity and position within the Lithuanian nation. Some of them, for example Dzūkians, try to use their native dialect in local papers. What is more, the humanitarian elite of other regional groups begin to speak that they also should seek after their own self-governed region.

The European Union supports decentralisation and regionalisation of national states as a fundamental principle of structural composition of Baltic countries (Féral 1998: 3–6). Yet it argues for the preservation of national state as a Community entity. Consequently, the inclination of European community to give the green light to self-governed regions as an alternative to endless institution of new tiny states – eventually UN members – may be considered a reasonable step for the meeting of the following two principles: one – the maintenance of identity, another – the preservation of territorial *status quo* in Europe. Obviously, the processes of regionalisation in West European and post-Soviet space are quite distinct. While regionalists operating in both spaces, first of all, focus on cultural issues and regional identity problems, in post-Soviet countries the process of regionalisation is hindered by painful historical past and the fears of possible interference of destructive forces.⁸

CONCLUSIONS

With the consolidation of democracy in Lithuania and Lithuania's integration into EU, a tendency towards overestimating local communities' and local cultures' importance to the life of society has emerged in Lithuania just like in other countries. In Lithuania this tendency manifests itself in the form of arising regionalist movement, a much-promoted idea to create self-governed regions within the territories of local communities, and aspirations to widen the cultural and public functions of Lithuanian dialects. The process has not affected separate local communities to an equal degree. Stronger aspirations to consolidate one's own "ethnicity" or to lift it up to the level enjoyed by the Lithuanian ethnicity can be recorded as yet only among Žemaitians; however aspirations and requirements formulated by them are still in bud. So far we cannot even speak about a large-scale regionalist movement arising from the bottom. The issue of creation of self-governed regions is raised only by separate interested groups or individuals. Yet they are not united in their formulation of demands addressed to central government institutions.

The most radical demands are raised during election campaigns. By promoting slogans about "our native", extremely deprived, region they probably purpose to mobilize a definite part of electorate. The motive of alleged inequality helps to gather together more supporters of regionalism. However in all regions, including Žemaitija, they are in the minority. The disapproval of regionalism by wide sections of population is dominated by urgent motives to preserve national unity and integration.

So far it is too early to contend that the Lithuanian state with its uniform structure is currently experiencing an identity crisis or identity erosion. The existing situation rather shows that Nationalism speaking in the name of Lithuanian nation is much stronger than Regional Nationalism. However we may not reject a possibility that in the nearest future we may witness here significant changes because the former is gradually getting weaker while the latter is gradually concentrating its force.

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NOTES

1 Up till 1960s some of Lithuanian National Radio theatre shows used to be given in the Žemaitian dialect, yet later Vilnius bureaucracy, intolerant of it, forced the dialect out of the Lithuanian Radio.

2 Strict distribution into moderates and radicals is absent in concrete organisations. In almost all of them one may find moderates and radicals coexisting.

3 The Žemaitian dialect had been used in mass media long before the emergence of this manual: in 1989 the “A mon sakaa?” (Are you speaking to me?) newspaper, and a little later the “Žemaičių žemė” (The Žemaitian land) cultural magazine came off the press. Yet, until the formulation of spelling rules, significant influence on the spelling was produced by subdialects used by Žemaitian-writing authors, and by Standard Lithuanian. Currently, on the grounds of Žemaitian spelling system, the above-mentioned magazine is published. It offers materials both in Standard Lithuanian and Žemaitian dialect. In 1998 an anthology of Žemaitian poetry (*Sava... 1998*) came out. All poems and poets' biographies contained in it are given in Žemaitian dialect.

4 A. D. Smith named this phenomenon “the Shetland effect” (after the Shetland Islands belonging to Scotland).

5 Yet even the Declaration on Regionalism in Europe indicates that regions located in different EU countries actually are and may be awarded different status, and that the Declaration text may not be treated as having the power to demand orientation towards one of these structures (*Declaration on regionalism... 1996: 3*). All documents defining the purposes of regional policy insist that its primary task is to eliminate consecutively the social and the economic differences among the regions (*Europos lėšos ir patirtis... 2000: 8*)

6 Actually, Latvian regions established within the limits of ethnographic areas are not administrative-territorial self-governed bodies, they are just units created for statistics and planning purposes. Moreover, when establishing regions on this principle, Latvia did not seek to achieve strict correspondence between the names of regions and the names of ethnographic areas (as a result of reform, the Riga Region was established, however, ethnographers have never recognised it as a distinct ethnographic area of Latvia; yet Augšzeme Area specified by researchers as an ethnographic area disappeared), or between the boundaries of regions and the boundaries of ethnographic areas (part of Vidzeme and Zemgale) lands were annexed to Riga Region).

7 In 2003, when the draft of the revised ethnographic map of Lithuania was made public, ŽCS leaders protested against it energetically arguing that preparations were made to rob Žemaitija of a big portion of its territory, and, with the creation of self-governed regions, Žemaitians would eventually lose it. At that time the "Delfi" Internet Portal teemed with all kinds of reproaches and insults addressed to Žemaitians. They were called the Zulu of Baltic Region, or suggestions were made to exclude Žemaitians from accession to the European Union; or Žemaitians were prompted to seek union with the Kaliningrad District, etc.

8 For example, within Lithuanian society, negative assessment of regionalism is consolidated even by the circumstance that regionalist rallies are sometimes attended, as if by chance, by persons who neither have Lithuanian citizenship nor speak official language. In such occasions journalists, politologists, and publicists like to remind people about the Georgian or the Moldavian Moldovan events, having in mind Abkhazia and Dnestr-shore area (Ivinskis 2004: 32; 36).