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BALTIC STATES IDENTITY THROUGH BANAL NATIONALISM: POSTAGE
STAMP ICONOGRAPHY ANALYSIS

MA thesis

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Authorship Declaration

I have prepared this thesis independently. All the views of other authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere, have been cited.

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Abstract

This paper researches the reflection of nation-based discourses and national symbolism in the postage iconography of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania from the perspective of banal nationalism practices. There are two main research questions this paper seeks to answer. The first one is: What are the main postage stamp iconography themes used to construct and popularize the national discourses of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania? For that, a database consisting of 3069 stamps issued by Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania between 1918-1940 and 1991-2018 was analyzed, applying Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis to postage imagery and the official catalog inscription. The dominant patterns revealed common practices of banal nationalism in the selected states. The results revealed that national coats of arms remained a continuous trend in national symbolism manifestation in all states, also covering the subnational level of municipalities and cities. In addition, authoritarian regimes affected the iconography patterns, elevating the leader's role in collective memory. In contemporary practices, discourses became more inclusive at the subnational level by introducing new patterns of commemoration of people, heritage, and anniversaries. The second question is: how political developments within the state and participation in supranational organizations affected the postage stamps iconography of the Baltics States concerning national, regional, and European scales? The finding shows that authoritarian regimes emphasized the role of the leader and boasted the nation's pride via celebrations of independence accompanied by constant reminders of the collective trauma the Independence wars left. The new developments emphasized the inclusion of subnational symbolism in postage iconography alongside the promotion of European integrity and shared regional heritage.

Keywords: *banal nationalism, philately, Baltic States*

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Introduction

Right as King's Charles III coronation was over, dozens of printing houses all across the British Commonwealth got busy printing out commemorative stamps and preparing facilities to gradually produce legal tenders and postage stamps with the portrait of the new monarch. Considering the length of the reign of Queen Elizabeth the Second, there are currently over 27 billion coins with the profile of a dead monarch in circulation worldwide (Price, 2023). Replacing them is a significant challenge that requires substantial investments.

Parallel to that, the war between Russia and Ukraine, exacerbated in February 2022, also left its imprint on iconography with over thirty themed series of stamps being issued by Ukrposhta since the beginning of the war. The most recognized one, showing a heroic Ukrainian soldier facing a Russian warship, a motif inspired by actual events at Snake Island, became one of the dozens of symbols of Ukrainian resistance and resilience (Harding, 2022).

These two cases demonstrate iconography's importance in millions of people's daily lives. Something as routinized and familiar as the design of cash or postage stamp is directly involved in non-verbal communication indirectly supervised by the state authority. Moreover, political regimes could utilize this iconography to promote narratives shaping group identities by implicitly penetrating the collective memory and supplementing the national cultural landscape. The process of routinized, almost subconscious ritualistic practices that affect people's connection to the nation is represented by banal nationalism, a concept introduced by Michael Billig to provide a new framework for studying nationalism in a globalized world.

While banal nationalism is manifested via the diversity of means, the postage stamps iconography remains unjustly misrepresented in academia. The topic of nationalism in the Baltic States has been researched extensively both on the local level and by international scholars, experiencing the peak of interest during the collapse of the Soviet Union. The focus of those studies considered the state's specifics and approached the topic of nationalism from several perspectives, researching it as a matter of security concern (Kuus, 2002), as an indicator of ideological transition (Kencis, 2019) or as the opposition against globalization (Buhr, Farbykant & Hoffman, 2014). A relatively minor amount of research was dedicated to comparing nation-building and nation-branding practices Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania implemented. Banal nationalism practices utilized by states seem almost wholly neglected by

scholars despite presenting a fruitful field of studies related to identity-building and nationalism presence in the globalized world. Since the postage stamps iconography of the Baltic States represents a continuous discourse moderated by different political regimes throughout the different eras, they provide a detailed insight into how changes in the political climate within Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania influenced the most popularized narratives embedded in the postage stamps designs. By investigating those narratives, one could extract the core practices of banal nationalism used by states to promote the prioritized part of national identity in different eras. This research focuses on the postage stamps iconography of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania during the different periods of their sovereignty. It investigates the differences and similarities of their nationalism-related narratives promoted by the said iconography within the framework of banal nationalism.

With the subject of nation branding via tools of banal nationalism being revitalized due to massive geopolitical changes and the ongoing debate over the success of promoting the European identity among the EU members, the trends in postage iconography of the Baltic States may reveal the hidden patterns of national narratives that present an alternative view on the ways of regional identity formation and the role of supranational institutions in this process.

The following research questions should be answered to meet the demands of the research puzzle.

1) What are the main postage stamp iconography themes used to construct and popularize the national discourses of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania?

2) How political developments within the state and participation in supranational organizations affected the postage stamps iconography of the Baltics States with respect to national, regional, and European scales?

Considering the commonalities in the political and historical development of the Baltic States within the past two centuries, it is expected that the states would share similar approaches to framing the national discourse via postage stamps iconography. Considering the changes in political regimes within the States during the interwar period, the research is expected to reveal the reflection of the political transition from a democratic regime into an authoritarian one. In addition, it is expected that EU membership directly impacts the moderation of the discourses and the promotion of shared European values.

In order to approach the topic, this work utilizes the small comparative analysis model based on the most similar system design. The national discourses are collected via the multimodal critical discourse analysis, and the summary of reoccurring trends in iconography is aligned with chronologically-structured changes in the representation of regional nation-building and nation-branding practices through the lenses of banal nationalism.

First, the thesis introduces the conceptualization of nation and nationalism since those two concepts are essential for understanding the roots of European nationalism. Next, it introduces the scholarly discussion around the feasibility of nationalism studies in the modern context and labeled subtypes of nationalism essential for analyzing nation-states. This part is followed by introducing banal nationalism with an expanded list of national symbols. Next, the work draws a connection between iconography on currency and postage stamps concerning the functions of banal nationalism. To conduct the research, data collection was compiled based on the digitalized stamps catalog. The duality of the postage stamp iconography and catalog inscription is discussed in the methodology chapter. The stamps from the gathered sample are analyzed using the Multimodal Critical Discourse analysis. The findings of that analysis are presented in the third chapter of this work, complemented by an analysis of the political context in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania during the corresponding eras.

1 Theoretical framework

This subchapter introduces the theoretical background behind defining and conceptualizing nations, including different perspectives introduced by nationalism scholars. This chapter also discusses the distinction between nations and ethnic groups and introduces the relations between nations and states. Later, this subchapter introduces the concept of nationalism, its roots, history, and the forces behind its formation. It also introduces the historiography of European Nationalism and the main forces that defined its development. The second part of nationalism conceptualization introduces the Ethnic and Civic Nationalism dichotomy and the concept's development in Europe. The third part provides an overview of the contemporary views on nationalism, its relevance, feasibility, relation to globalization, and alternative dimensions of its utilization. The following subchapter introduces the concept of Banal Nationalism and broadens the scope of the observed practices to include a broader representation of national symbols. The final subchapter of the theoretical framework introduces postage iconography as a viable narrative source within banal nationalism practices.

1.1 Nations and the states

A clear understanding of the concept of nation is vital in the context of researching nationalism as a phenomenon, yet it seems unreachable. The intricate part of conceptualizing a nation is represented by the diversity of approaches used to define a nation's characteristics based on the context of the research framework. The first obstacle in clearly conceptualizing a nation is commonly occurring confusion between nations and ethnic groups. Tracing the concept's development paths through the scholars' lenses is crucial to understand the difference between ethnic groups and nations. The concepts of nationalism and nation presented a puzzle for political scientists due to the necessity of limiting the inclusivity of groups that could be identified as nations based on usually ambiguous criteria. Generally, a nation could exist as a community united by shared cultural, linguistic, and territorial integrity, deeply incorporated into the collective memory (Barrington, 1997, p. 713).

In that case, the aspects that distinguish a nation from an ethnic group could be summarized as territorial sovereignty and control over the correspondent institutions (Barrington, 1997, p. 713). Deriving from that definition, if the political representatives of an ethnic group demand command over a state, that group transitions into a nationalist movement

(Guibernau i Berdún & Rex, 2011, p. 48). Due to this embedded transition possibility, the clear distinction between the nation and the ethnic group remains puzzling. The processes associated with this dichotomy also suffer from the blurry boundaries between the definitions. As Katherine Verdery (1994, p. 42) stated, rephrasing Max Weber, nationalism might be viewed as "an ethnicity backed by an army." Following the debate around nation versus ethnic group identification, one could state that nationalism, as a movement, pursues two primary goals: to determine the territorial boundaries belonging to a nation and to define the inclusion barrier that separates members of the nation from other population represented by other ethnic groups (Barrington, 1997, p. 714).

Alternative ways of conceptualizing a nation suggest the expansion of key defining characteristics of a nation while also providing an overview of how the concept and the meaning behind it evolved. In the European context, the early nations could have been defined by the dynasties, which decided the political actions that shaped the correspondent nation's border and identity (Renan & Thom, 1990). As Catherine Palmer (2007) describes it, the role of royal families is to represent the nation domestically and internationally. This view on the nation's concept highlights the issue of elitist division between the representatives of a single nation. Liah Greenfeld (1996) also acknowledged the class-related distinction embedded in the early definitions of the nation and argued that elitist representation of the nation was an inevitable step in the nation's formation. However, she also emphasized that within the conceptualization of modern nationalism, the nation represents a particular community or 'the people' instead of the secular and political elites of the given community. Nevertheless, it is necessary to point out that with the transition of political regimes to more authoritarian ones, the head of the state might become a symbol of the nation due to the deliberate incorporation of his persona in collective memory narratives (Hellmann, 2020).

Benedict Anderson described the process of transitioning from dynasty-represented nations to a broader, more abstract community uniting many heterogeneous ethnic groups under one name in his outstanding monograph titled "Imagined Communities." Anderson (1983) argued that the most prominent powers behind the development and popularization of national identities were capitalism and book printing, conveniently united by the author under the 'print capitalism' label. Many dynasties discovered the national identities they were willing to assume by popularizing a particular vernacular language and turning it into the state language. According to Anderson, other factors that influenced nation-framing processes included drawing borders on maps to define sovereignty (ibid). Once the state borders appeared

on the map, those borders became symbols of nationhood. Anderson also listed monuments as signifiers of the former colonies' identities, which inherited the tangible symbol embedded in collective memory and the colonizer's erasure of historical traditions.

Ernest Renan (1961) proposed a definition of a nation that exists outside of physical boundaries or any temporal attachments to particular places. According to him, a nation is represented by large-scale solidarity prevalent in a particular community, striving from the joined heritage and shared perception of past and future (ibid 19). Anderson's definition of a nation corresponds to Renan's idea in outlining the necessity of nation members to have a shared sense of belonging to the commune. Anderson (1983) viewed the nation as an imagined political community, where the word 'imagined' belonged to the semantical field of creativity instead of fabrication. The emphasis on the enhanced sense of unity and intangible heritage that exists in rather cognitive definitions of a nation is essential for understanding the roots of nationalism. Nevertheless, it is also important to discuss the role of institutional entities in forming and shaping nations.

The terms nation and state are commonly misused as interchangeable entities. Alexander Motyl (1992, p.314) suggested the following distinction, naming nations as communities united by cultural self-consciousness and states as territorially-defined political entities with the monopoly of violence to be the basis for understanding modern nationalism. According to Motyl, democratic regimes' legitimacy relies on public support and approval, which requires a transformation of the heterogeneous public into a collective with shared definitive traits. This way, the state agency in nation formation is essential, as the inclusivity barriers and boundaries of united communities depend heavily on the political decisions made on behalf of the state. Regarding the connection between states and nations, Ernest Gellner (1983, p.7) stated that states emerged independently of nations, while some nations emerged without the host state's consent; therefore, they represent different degrees of communal contingency. Greenfeld (1996, p.20) further develops the idea of state/nation distinction, claiming that despite the diversity of nationalism and the difference in their targeted political institutions, all nations share a standard instrument of controlling the state - national government. The national government, in this context, stands for the manifestation of national sovereignty and the ultimate goal of any nationalistic movement.

Eric Hobsbawm (1990), in his imperative framework for the *Nation and Nationalism since 1780* book, provided a convincing argument claiming that nations as artifacts, or rather

abstract communities, do not emerge by themselves and that the agency of the state is vital for the emergence of nations. Another important highlight of Hobsbawm's take on nations is that their existence was possible or, to some extent, even dictated by certain technological and economic development levels. Therefore, nations, as phenomena, must be analyzed through multidisciplinary approaches, reaching beyond the political aspects. Hobsbawm took the work of Ernest Gellner on nations and nationalism as the basis for his conceptualization, also incorporating part of Anderson's perspective. Meanwhile, Gellner's definition of the nation breaks down to recognizing mutual rights and responsibilities by a group of humans bonded by conviction and solidarity and sharing the same system of cultural attributes, beliefs, and ideas (ibid).

It is vital to acknowledge the diversity of perspectives and the discussion around the appropriateness of using the term nation to synthesize a middle-ground definition. In general, the nation exists as a community of people that share a common heritage, usually represented by language, culture, and collective memories, possess territorial sovereignty over certain land, and maintain a system of commonly recognizable symbols which serves as the barrier, distinguishing one nation from another. Undoubtedly, the whole unit of the nation is suitable for identifying a community of people within particular historical and sociological contexts of the recent centuries. The ability of an ethnic group to transition into a nation, alongside the uncertain role of the state in its interaction with the nation, represents significant challenges for defining nationalism as a phenomenon. The following subchapter deals with tracing the development pattern of nationalism as a concept and reveals its direct connection to the concept of nation

1.2 Nationalism, its conceptualization and its role in European context

1.2.1 The origins of European Nationalism

Considering the controversial views on the definition of nation and the appropriateness of its contextual usage, it is fair to assume that the conceptualization of nationalism also possesses a certain degree of pluralism that corresponds to the situational nuances of its use. The interconnected concepts of nations and nationalism exist in the unbreakable duality. Nevertheless, if a nation's conceptualizations focus more on the communities and the common attributes they share, then nationalism concepts consider the roots of the formation of national consciousness and reveal the reasons behind the feasibility of a nation's emergence. As Ireneusz Karolewski (2011) pointed out, the main focus of nationalism studies has been associated with tracing the connection between nationalism and modernity. He identified two dominant schools of thought among nationalism scholars introducing opposite views on the mentioned connection. The modernist-nationalist perspective suggests that nationalism, as a multidimensional phenomenon, is a derivative of technological, economic, and social processes brought in by modernity. In contrast, the nationalist-modernist perspective supports the reversed connection, implying that using nations as the unit of identification and building the national identity became a vital foundation for consolidating power that enhanced the socioeconomic processes that led to modernity (ibid, 58). The modernist-nationalist perspective is the most relevant for finding the roots of European Nationalism.

Ernest Gellner (1983), a notable representative of the modernist-nationalist school, suggested that the roots of nationalism could be found in the socioeconomic development of the human race, heavily connecting it with Marxism. Social mobility that brought a labor force consisting of ethnic minorities' representatives to large imperial cities in the XIX century set the foundation for forming intellectual elites that later contributed to national awakening movements in their land of origin (Muller, 2008). The universal standards of basic education and the rising literacy rate elevated the cohesion within culturally-defined units that sometimes existed across the state borders, creating the desire to obtain territorial sovereignty and therefore facilitating the emergence of nationalistic movements (ibid). Thus, an argument could be made that high culture was the catalyst of the nationalist movements, at least in the European context. Correspondently, solidarity based on the shared knowledge and beliefs that members

of the community could comprehend without requesting additional cultural context is one of the core driving forces behind nationalism in its classical understanding.

According to Anderson (1983 p.40), the story of using technology for promoting nationalism begins with the Reformation movement that revealed the potential for vernacular printing capabilities, making the centralized authority of the Vatican lose the war on heresy and simultaneously diminishing the role of Latin in favor of regional languages. The increased amount of publications printed in vernacular languages provided a new platform for new communities to interact and consolidate around, as printing capitalism played the role of natural selection, gradually diminishing the popularity of less appealing or less common dialects. Besides emphasizing the importance of linguistic aspects in developing national consciousness, this viewpoint highlights the necessity of in-group communication channels to ensure contingency maintenance within the community. Following the idea, Hobsbawm (1990, p.54) claimed that national languages represent artificial constructions made to standardize communication. What unites these authors in their perception of the nationalism roots, besides the firm belief in the vital role of linguistic contingency, is their viewpoint regarding the emergence of nationalism in the European context. In this regard, both Anderson and Gellner stated that the socioeconomic conditions formed by the transatlantic trading routes facilitated the chain of antidynastic revolutions. Hobsbawm also stated that nationalistic rhetoric dominated international politics following the Napoleon era. Moreover, Hobsbawm (1990, p.101) identified several ways of national aspiration being manifested by communities in the Old World, among which linguistic and cultural unities stood next to the desires to become sovereign or fulfill the historical mission of resurrecting a sovereign state. Based on the viewpoints described above, it is viable to consider the French Revolution as the event that marked the emergence and wide spreading of nationalism in Europe.

It would be incorrect to assume that the nationalistic movements and practices would remain static over a long period, especially considering that the socioeconomic factors that contributed to their emergence have been extensively changing the environmental conditions of European politics. Anderson's comparison of different nationalist movements in European states in the middle of the XIX century demonstrates that intellectuals of the groups deprived of national status utilized vernacular languages to represent national aspirations. In that struggle for recognition, turning a vernacular language into a literary language was a massive achievement on the path toward forming a national identity (ibid. 74). Henceforth, early collectors of folklore and indigenous narratives directly contributed to preserving vernacular

languages and popularizing similar folk tales shared by larger ethnic groups. With such development, communities reinforced the foundations of their national aspirations with national epics, a powerful symbol of communal solidarity and a collection of shared beliefs.

In Gellner's view on the early stages of nationalism development, the lyrics of folk songs played the role of memory storages, capable of preserving the memory of the collective struggles but also sharing collective humor often based on the appropriation of the dominant state culture's elements. However, with intensified urbanization, the introduction of standardized education, and enhanced contact between holders of folk narratives and specialists who graduated from art institutions, the issue of preserving communal identity became visible. As the Industrial Revolution spread across Europe, intensifying social mobility, the process of assimilation of ethnic groups and rural communities became a new barrier to national aspirations. In Hobsbawm's (1990, p.102) summary of the late XIX-century nationalism tendencies, he also highlights the rising number of unhistorical national movements whose claim of sovereignty derived from ethnic-linguistic criterion. Another notable feature of the nationalism of the late XIX century was its similarity with anti-imperialistic movements that became especially common in Europe in the decades preceding the events of World War One.

Based on the different perspectives on the early stages of European Nationalism provided by the representatives of the modernist-nationalist school of thought, several important conclusions could be made. First, the socioeconomic processes that created a welcoming environment for the era of Nationalism to emerge could be traced back to the Reformation times. With the ideals of the Enlightenment and a chain of antidynastic revolutions, the late XVIII century truly ignited the flame of nationalistic movements across Europe. The commonality of language and culture remained the most significant attributes of the communities that aspired to become nations. The institutionalized rivalry of vernacular languages with state languages was usually conducted by the representatives of the ethnic intellectual elites and often pursued the same goals as anti-imperialist movements. Enhanced social mobility was mainly caused by the industrial revolution facilitated the emergence of nationalistic movements by making education more accessible for the representatives of the ethnic elites, but simultaneously became the main power behind the assimilation process, weakening the communal solidarity of ethnic groups.

1.2.2 Ethnic and Civic Nationalism

Nationalism as a process of forming a national consciousness and aspiring to obtain and maintain territorial sovereignty also includes the dimension of justifying the rights to belong to a nation. The discussion surrounding the origins of the mentioned rights resulted in the emergence of yet another conceptual dichotomy, separating ethnic and civic versions of nationalism. Acknowledging this distinction is helpful since it represents two trends in viewing nation belonging as a right from the Western perspective and an obligation from the Eastern perspective. Initially, the importance of the ethnic dimension of nationalism and its impact on international relations became relevant in the years following the introduction of the Versailles-Washington system (Le Bossé, 2021). At the end of World War One, ethnic groups across former empires started to mobilize forces, transitioning into full-fledged nationalistic movements. The new principles of self-determination endorsed by Woodrow Wilson in his Fourteen Points aimed at making the political landscape of Europe more welcoming towards democracies (Lynch, 2002). The most reliable way of achieving this was by allowing ethnic groups to form their nation-states and allowing them to represent their interests in European politics.

The scholar's interest in multidimensional studies of nationalism resulted in the emergence and popularization of the diversity of subtypes of nationalism, which are often criticized for being redundant or too case-oriented (Barrington, 1997). Nevertheless, the emergence of a more diversified classification of nationalism and the necessity to distinguish between them had a legitimized reasoning rooted in the ideological origins of nationhood belonging. Therefore, it is crucial to highlight the historically formed dichotomy between the civic and ethnic models of nationhood that was prevalent among the early researchers of nationalism, particularly Hans Kohn, and adopted by later scholars (Jaskułowski, 2010). In Kohn's conceptualization, nationalism was based on the individuals' supreme sense of loyalty to the nation that surpassed their personal interests and concerns (ibid). It demonstrated the direct connection between an individual and the collective body represented by a nation, which remains an unchanged element in modern nationalism conceptualization. However, due to the ambiguity of Kohn's definition, the criteria and attributes that would guarantee the presence of a solid national feeling remained undetermined (Baron, 1944).

The dichotomy between civic and ethnic nationalism, endorsed by Kohn, has derived from the source of the mentioned loyalty and differences in nation-building processes across

Europe (Jaskułowski, 2010). Civic nationalism, according to Kohn, was focused more on political processes and institutional indoctrination, leading to a voluntary acceptance of nationality as a societal construct (ibid). Based on this description, civic nationalism emphasizes the state's role in framing and sustaining the collective body of a nation. This point of view is close to the modernist-nationalist school of thought, as the right to have a nationality could be attributed to the standards of European ideals of liberalism, meaning its root is embedded in the socioeconomic progress associated with modernity.

Ethnic nationalism, on the other hand, had deeper cultural roots, originating from the idea of assigned identity and territoriality, which provided attributes required to develop a sense of belonging. Such perspective corresponds more to the nationalist-modernist perspective, as the source of national identity seemed to be positioned deep within the communal consciousness long before the socioeconomic processes of modernity were forced to surface. However, the feasibility of such a dichotomy has been criticized by contemporary authors because of its disregard for regional specifics (Zubrzycki, 2002). Moreover, according to Gal Gerson and Aviad Rubin (2015), the coexistence of liberalism and nationalism is common in modern politics, confirming that the mutually exclusive dichotomy is obsolete. Nevertheless, the liberal perspective on nationalism that led to the creation of cultural nationalism is also criticized for its lack of universality and hierarchical discrimination of minorities' heritage (ibid). Considering the specifics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, it is feasible to suggest that ethnic nationalism might affect the symbolism used to promote the national identity, since all three nations experienced a long period of being subjugated by empires.

Walker Connor (1970) stated that ethnic nationalism is a form of self-determination of communities that aspire to become independent via obtaining territorial sovereignty. His idea also directly addresses the distinction between nation and state, emphasizing the role of the political organization of the state in containing the self-determination movements of minor ethnic communities. In the case of multinational or rather multiethnic states, the political institutions might oppose the ethnic groups' interests by broadening the propagated national traits and being inclusive towards the minorities' heritage (ibid, p.96–97). Another essential distinction between a nation and an ethnic group is the list of actors who could define them. According to Connor (1973), other political agents could define an ethnic group from abroad, while nations must be self-defined. Despite such a drastic difference, the principles behind identifying the group's uniqueness and separating insiders from outsiders largely remain

common between nations and ethnic groups. This is a crucial observation since it finds a representation in the banal nationalism practices. Using the national language to identify the state's name is another part of routinized nationalism practices that tend to be neglected.

Another viable distinction used for alienation and serving nationalism is culture. Cultural nationalism emerged as an attempt to broaden the boundaries of ethnic nationalism, combining it with liberal values (Gerson & Rubin, 2015). This concept moves away from confirming ethnicity's detrimental role in defining national belonging and switches it to a more neutral and inclusive 'culture.' This concept has been criticized because of the relative negligence of minorities' heritage and the inability to represent ethnicities in national culture comprehensively. Thomas Eriksen (1991) also emphasized the duality of nationalism and its inappropriate appraisal from liberal theorists. He claimed that while ethnic nationalism may indeed provide a lesser discriminatory basis for people's identity within one community, it can also be utilized to deny non-citizens human rights and discriminate against cultural deviants. Such an oppressive measure against internal others represented by ethnic minorities resembles the oppressive 'Russification' policies practiced by the Romanov dynasty in the XIX century (Anderson, 1983). Since the Russification campaign directly affected people living in the territories of the Baltic Provinces, the surge of ethnic nationalism could be detrimental to the early stages of the state formations and identity framing. Based on that, an assumption could be made that the early forms of national identity manifestations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in XX century may represent the resistance against the discriminatory practices of the Russian Empire.

The nationalist-modernist school of thought, as an opposition to prioritizing socioeconomic factors over deeply-incorporated national sentiment that naturally existed in a dormant state before the era of Nationalism, also vividly supports the ritualist and symbolic character of nationalist movements. Ethnosymbolists, as Anthony Smith (1998) puts it, view ethnic heritage with all collateral symbols, ritualistic practices, and collective memories as a source of political validation and public support of nationalist movements. In his opinion, ethnic ties from the pre-modern era sustain the feasibility of national policies and create an appealing sense of belonging for the public. This perspective on the role of ethnic ties in sustaining national consciousness and maintaining communal integrity is also valid in the context of globalization. As Gal Ariely (2020) puts it, within the strong competitive environment dictated by the development of the globalized market, some disadvantaged groups

from the lower social strata consider the expansion of foreign capital and the arrival of foreign specialists as a threat to their national identity and national integrity. Hence, the emphasis on ethnic ties and culturally-embedded connections to the land became the dominant rhetoric among the far-right populists.

A summary of the dichotomy between civic and ethnic nationalism could be broken down to the philosophies that were positioned behind the given concepts and the specifics of European historiography that defined how these concepts were applied. Civic nationalism, predominantly common in Western Europe, hence obtaining the label 'Western' derives from the Enlightenment era standards of liberalism, where self-determination was considered an individual right. In metropole states, unbothered by the hegemony of foreign invaders and the repressive promotion of foreign culture, nationalism as the right of individuals to choose nationality was not associated with an existential threat posed against the smaller communities' cultures. Ethnic nationalism, respectively labeled 'Eastern,' found its roots in the anti-imperialistic struggle of ethnic groups overrun by larger empires, where belonging to a nation meant opposing the repressive erasure caused by the metropole's policies. In these circumstances, belonging to a specific group was not a self-conscious decision but rather an assigned obligation dictated by blood and vernacular language proficiency. The main enemies of ethnic nationalism were the process of assimilation facilitated by socioeconomic development and the aggressive cultural policies introduced to degrade the degree of cultural sovereignty of ethnic groups within the empires.

In the later uses of civic-ethnic dichotomy, several authors suggested that the distinction between them was rather artificial. In the globalized world that prioritizes liberal values, the remnants of nationalism are represented by a merge of civic and ethnic subtypes. Ethnosymbolist, according to Smith (1998), represented the contemporary reflection of ethnic nationalism mainly manifested via the popularization of symbolic systems of meaning exclusively understandable to a limited group of people and transmitted via a multiplicity of channels and in multiple languages. Within the context of national identity building, such symbolic systems might include national and subnational coats of arms, traditional crafts or the any region-specific parts of the cultural landscape that foreigners would have hard time interpreting. The iconography of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, as nation-states that were oppressed by the imperial cultural policies, is likely to introduce symbols exclusively meaningful for the nation members.

1.2.3 Nationalism in contemporary context.

The beginning of contemporary European Nationalism could be dated back to the end of World War One, when the old political entities represented by obsolete empires collapsed, introducing multiple nation-states to the European political landscape. It was the time for the Baltic States as the young democracies to obtain national sovereignty alongside many other newborn states. The pinnacle of nationalistic movements' success in obtaining independence represents the core interest for this research, as the first stamps of the independent states were produced during the Independence wars, a chain of conflicts that the young democracies in the Baltic region had to take part in to defend their independence from the foreign oppressors. Anderson's argument regarding the Final Ways of Nationalism that followed the collapse of empires used Marxist logic to explain the success of the newly emerging nations. The bureaucratic system of empires could not keep up with economic progress. At the same time, educated intellectuals with ethnic origins, who often used to be bilingual, could copy and adapt the institutional basis of states to organize their nation-states (Anderson, 1983, p. 140). Coming back to the original concept of printing capitalism, Anderson acknowledged that capitalism transformed the communication models on a global scale, which made the national elites change their strategy and promote the sense of belonging to a particular imagined community to people with different mother tongues, which signified a step away from the ethnic-linguistic model.

In Hobsbawm's view, the wave of separatist nationalism that engulfed Europe at the late stage of World War One and remained active throughout the 1920s produced many successor states destined to be exposed to the revitalization of imperialism. He draws parallels between the collapse of the Russian Empire and the collapse of the USSR, claiming that nationalism issues exacerbated in the late 1980s were rooted in the international treaties signed between 1918 and 1921. Hobsbawm also claimed that the universality of nationalism within an empire is not a must, bringing a comparison of the Baltic States' boundaries established with the support of foreign intervention with the artificially drawn borders between the Middle Asian Soviet Republics as an example. Furthermore, he highlighted the fact that the Soviet Union collapsed due to economic factors, namely the inefficiency of the centralized economy and not internal national conflicts. He also pointed out that most states emerging from the

USSR were multinational. This argument supports the modernist-nationalist perspective, which positions the socioeconomic element above the nationalist movement.

The technological, social, political, and economic developments associated with the spreading of globalization have contested the relevance of nationalism as a product of self-determination (Sabanadze, 2010). With extensive international trade, cross-cultural online communication, and the multiplication of international organizations and supranational institutions, the way people perceive national identities and approach the issue of self-determination transformed. Some authors suggested that the weakening of the state's role in maintaining cohesion among citizens and extensive exposure to foreign and popular cultures significantly diminished the role of nationalism in the identity-framing processes of the globalized world (Spencer & Wollman, 2002). That viewpoint was also supported by Hobsbawm (1990), who argued that with the expansion of states' economies beyond the boundaries and even more frequent social mobility dictated by the migration of the capital, nationalism, as a tool of defining boundaries between communities, lost its initial relevance.

An alternative meaning to nationalism's role in a globalized world could be found by analyzing how globalization can facilitate the alienation process between communities, revitalizing the necessity for communal solidarity. As such, when globalization connects the world economically, market relations create a situation where nations that do not share a border and otherwise would not create inconveniences for one another have to compete, therefore bringing a nation together via alienation of the commercial rival (Motyl, 1992, p. 315). Liah Greenfeld (2011) stated that competitiveness is the inherent trait of nations, which incorporates the alienation process in its design. Another factor that contributes to maintaining a high degree of competitiveness is the dignity granted by membership in the nation. Greenfeld also claimed that individual identity relies heavily on the image of a nation's collective identity, forcing individuals to contribute to enhancing the representation of the nation internationally. In a globalized world, transnational competition has expanded beyond commercial specialization and revealed itself in fields like science, culture, environmentalism, and sports, depending on the international platforms created for these purposes.

The external socioeconomic factors that define how nationalism functions in a globalized world introduce new dimensions to operating with nations as units of identification. Per Ståhlberg and Goran Bolin (2015) allocated the role of nationalism as an identity-framing tool to inward communication channels utilized by the state governments, while external

communication aimed at promoting the most marketable side of national identity among the foreign audience became nation-branding. The separation of national branding from nationalism seems justified, as the two phenomena occur simultaneously but aim at representing nation in opposite ways, emphasizing different symbols and operating with different audiences. Nevertheless, transforming a national unit into a marketable commodity could fit into nationalism's role under globalization. Christopher Browning (2015, p. 84) stated that globalization transformed how national identities are constructed and perceived, emphasizing the distinction between nation and national portrait. In its essence, nation branding only focuses on the traits of a nation that enhance its marketability, forcing it to validate only the specific heritage of a community. (Jansen, 2008)

If extensive exposure to the global market resulted in the adaptation of nationalism according to common demand, dividing the nation-framing and nation-branding processes based on the correspondent audiences, then another characteristic of globalization created a full-fledged rival to national identity. The end of World War Two signified the rise of international organizations' significance in international relations. Through the UN structures, many new nation-states emerged while dismantling colonialism in Africa and Asia (Lucas, 1999). In recent history, international organizations and treaties have been used during the Cold War as a source of deterrence and a platform for semi-authorized negotiations between rivals (Gordenker, 1968). In the years following the Cold War, international organizations and institutions were actively utilized to intensify regional development and alleviate the consequences of the Cold War. In the Baltic Sea Region context, international organizations provided an institutionalized basis for cross-cultural cooperation, uniting the Baltic States first with Scandinavian countries and later incorporating them into the European market (North, 2015).

With a substantial part of continental Europe being united by tight economic, cultural, political, and institutional ties, the process of developing the European identity as a complement or a direct opposition to the national identities within the economically-integrated entities seemed to be inevitable (Fligstein, Polyakova & Sandholtz, 2012). The conceptual puzzle behind European identity's actual relation to European states' national identities derives from the difference in ideologies behind ethnic and civic nationalism. Smith (1992) points out that the way different nationalities perceive European identity depends on the origins of nationalism in a particular state. For states with 'Western' civic nationalism, based on liberal values and treating national belonging as a right, European identity represents a set of values

shared across borders. It could be organically incorporated via correspondent law and institutions into the daily life of citizens. States with the 'Eastern' model or ethnic nationalism may perceive European identity as a threat to a unique ethnic character and yet another attempt to assimilate the population of the sovereign state. The trauma of being under imperial rule and struggling to obtain sovereignty has been deeply imprinted in the collective memory of the nations that gained sovereignty from empires (ibid, 61).

A summary of views on the current role of nationalism from a modernist-nationalist perspective demonstrates how the socioeconomic process turned the phenomenon in its initial form into an obsolete construction. It is true that, in the European context, the collapse of the Socialist block and the following separation of multinational entities such as the USSR and Yugoslavia created a dramatic rise of nationalistic movements in Eastern Europe. And while an argument could be made that these movements pursued the unreached goals of the 1918-21 events, a demographic review of the emerged states demonstrates the multinational character of the new entities. What is more, the recent decades that ignited a new way of interest in researching the globalization impact on nationalism brought in alternative perspectives on the nation's roles in international relations and how identity politics adapt to the demands of the globalized market. The phenomenon of national branding became a prominent logical development of nationalism that turned the shared heritage of communities into a marketable commodity, entering the competitive market of digitalized cultures. Another innovation caused by globalization and propagated by international institutions is the creation of a European identity that could be perceived as a threat by states with the historical trauma of being overrun by an empire. The relation between the European identity and the multiplicity of national identities across Europe remains a relevant topic of contemporary nationalism studies.

1.2.4 Banal Nationalism and National Symbolism

The ways of transmitting narratives and imagery associated with national identities vary, and the evolution of means of communication diversify them even further. When researching the tangible representation of systems of meanings shared within one nation, the issue of ritualistic and symbolic practices becomes of great importance. Michael Billig (1995) summarized the diversity of routinized practices associated with national symbols, such as the national flag, that correspond to maintaining cohesion within a nation under the concept of 'Banal Nationalism.' It exists outside the scope of the history of nationalism studies and instead

provides a new approach to identifying practices used to maintain the sense of national belonging (Knott, 2015). Nevertheless, the main argument against Billig's universal applicability is highlighting the present dichotomy between banal nationalisms and what he refers to as 'hot' nationalism, represented by aggressive practices of alienating and discriminating outsiders based on national belonging. Such distinction, to some extent, correlates with the civic/ethnic nationalism dichotomy endorsed by Kohn. Indeed, maintaining the image of the nation and regulating discourse that defines the prioritized national narratives is an intricate process that, for the longest time, has been viewed as a top-down process. David Butz (2009) pointed out the lack of consensus among scholars regarding measuring the public's response to national symbols' demonstrations. Since routinized exposure to the flags may have both explicit and implicit effects on the respondents, measuring the precise degree of public response is problematic. A wide range of events might affect the frequency of national symbols usage. Terror management theory, for example, suggests that individuals' attachment to national symbols intensifies when they experience external threats (Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997).

Billig's (1995, p.133) argument about the current state of nationalism derives from the declining power of states, unable to maintain national identity uniformity while facing globalization. The collection of economic and social factors that transformed modernity into postmodernity created severe competition for national identities, pressuring them from outside with supra-national identities backed up by international institutions and regional boundaries. In addition, the competition derives from within, with multiple identities emerging from sub-national attachments to smaller communities, represented, for example, by municipalities and cities (ibid, 134). Under these circumstances, imposing a strict national identity limited to aged national attributes is less feasible than providing freedom of voluntary identification within the established nationhood. Billig also suggested the distinction between national symbols and national signals, both of which, in his example, were represented by national flags. In a broader sense, the difference between the symbols and signals derives from the reactions of the targeted audience. While symbols require a specific semi-ceremonial or ritualistic response, then signals could remain largely unnoticed while still maintaining the purpose of framing the cultural landscape within a nation or hinting at a particular event embedded in collective memory (1995. p.40).

National symbols are not limited to the flags and coats of arms, which are considered the most relevant for foreign identification. They include more comprehensive cultural and

ideological references, beliefs and folklore, memories, and even historical figures (Kolsto, 2006). A diverse selection of national symbols pursues several main goals, including accommodating individual's identity inside the group, manifesting a tangible representation of group identifier, accelerating the alienation by providing a base for identifying insiders and outsiders, and, finally, communicating the existence of the group to the outsiders (Schatz & Lavine, 2007). As for the means and media utilized for communicating with the public and spreading national symbolism among the targeted audience, Billig's conceptualization has been criticized by Michael Skey (2009), who argued that Billig's concept needs to reflect the complexity of the potential perception of various groups within one nation. It is true that the issue of heterogeneity of the receiving audience was neglected in Billig's concept. Billig's statements regarding the coherence and stability of the nations also did not provide any supportive empirical evidence either. In this regard, it is possible to argue that Billig's ideas derived from positivist observations based on the practices that are still adopted by the states and intrastate communities. Disregarding the agency and the intent behind those practices, displaying national symbols remains essential to daily life (Butz, 2009). Despite the critique addressed at Billig's conceptualization, his concept is still valuable within the framework of this research because postage stamps are produced in large quantities on an annual basis, meaning that the distribution of narrative presented by postage stamps iconography is conducted disregarding the potential inefficiency of such communication channel and without a direct focus at the public's perception.

The topic of national symbolism is closely connected with cultural landscapes and the systems of meaning developed within specific communities aspiring to become nations or already possessing territorial sovereignty and international recognition. Symbols, in their essence, cannot always remain static as they are exposed to shifts in public values and memories that can significantly alter the symbols' interpretations (Rowntree & Conkey, 1980). The range of symbols that a particular community may adopt can include territorial, temporal, historical, and mythological indicators shared within the community or actively promoted by the high-ranked community members as a tool for drawing boundaries and separating the foreigners (ibid. 463). Val Plumwood (2006) highlighted the complexity of the cultural landscape concept since its dualism implies both natural and anthropogenic inputs, making it an ambiguous category. The symbols inserted in the cultural landscape may possess various features; they might be represented as the creations of humans or some natural objects that have accumulated narratives around them and became of great importance for a community. In other

words, cultural landscapes may include various architectural structures, such as strongholds, manors, churches, parliament, and natural spaces, appreciated by the people, such as parks and unique geographic occurrences that are present in the community's folklore.

Historiography endorsed by state officials and actively promoted through institutions connected with mass communication and education also produces auxiliary national symbols. The role of the individual in creating a national identity is uncertain, and it remains a subject of polemics since the contemporary view on nationalism suggests nations stepped away from elitist dominance in their representation (Greenfeld, 1996). This development would suggest that the royal families and secular authorities no longer remain viable representatives of the nation. Nevertheless, there are certain exceptions directly connected with the cases when the royal family was turned into a nation-branding tool, such as the case of the United Kingdom (Balmer, 2007). Nevertheless, it is crucial to highlight another development in incorporating outstanding individuals into the list of national identifications - creating the pantheon of national heroes.

The state-endorsed historiography incorporates the various outstanding individuals claimed by the nations to be their correspondent representatives (Barnard, 1997). In postcolonial states, national heroes tend to represent the aspiration of a nation to obtain sovereignty, reflected in retrospective narratives (Valenzuela, 2014). Leaders of resistance against the colonial powers and contributors to the national awakening movements become the manifestation of national resilience and illustrative examples of patriots for the newer generations. Moreover, within the context of contested heritage, the creation of national heroes and their promotion within the collective memory might serve as a tool for opposing the dominant narrative of empire (Jansen, 2016). The list of potential national heroes is not limited to certain professions, achievements, or international status. The criteria selected for promoting historical figures fluctuate depending on political regimes, but specific patterns could be identified.

Incorporating narratives about national heroes in daily communication contributes to the promotion of specific role models, constructing the ideal to follow. National heroes represent the shared moral ideals that are incorporated into the national consciousness as the fundamental framework for perceiving the collective future and enhancing the sense of solidarity within the nation (Yair et al., 2014). The origins of national heroes might be diverse as they may represent multiple professions, backgrounds, and periods of life. What unites them

is the centralized promotion of their achievements that could be conducted either via publishing biographies, producing other forms of easily absorbed media, incorporating them into educational programs, turning their anniversaries into celebrations, or conducting alternative remembrance practices (Yair et al., 2014; Valenzuela, 2014; Jansen, 2008). Maintaining the hero's portrait visible and accessible to the general public is also an essential step toward popularizing it in collective memory, which derives from principles of banal nationalism.

Despite the principles outlined in the Treaty of Westphalia 1648, an essential document that ended the Thirty Year's War and outlined the pattern of nation-state formation alongside the norm of international law, the current state of nationalism studies invites researchers to find connections between religion and nationalism from new perspectives (Himmelfarb, 1993). Despite Hayes' (1926) statement that nationalism represents the new civic religion, the more conventional view on religion and nationalism within the European context tends to observe them as a dichotomy since both religion and nationalism demanded unprecedented allegiance and solidarity while shaping the European borders and defining the patterns of social mobility over the centuries (Stålsett, 1992). In the postmodern era of declining nationalism, faith could once again represent the uniting force behind promoting European identity and expanding beyond ethnic and political boundaries (ibid. 9).

Barbara-Ann Riffer (2003) suggested the existence of Religious Nationalism, a fusion between nationalistic and religious movements that aspire to gain territorial sovereignty. Within this framework, the role of religious symbols of the dominant national or ethnic confession also becomes a symbol of resistance against the colonial order. In a globalized world, religious symbolism has multiple representations, starting from the conventional religious art represented by calligraphy, icons, frescoes, and ceremonial jewelry and reaching as far as depicting secular heirlooms, portraits of the saint, and various temples of Gods (ibid). Within the context of banal nationalism manifestation, churches and other places that are surrounded by the sacrosanct aura within the cultural landscape of a nation-state represent another cluster of national symbols that emphasizes the deep cultural roots of shared national values. What is more, depicting and celebrating religious architecture in media broadens the boundaries of a nation, inviting ethnic communities and regional representatives of vernacular conventions to find common elements with the national consciousness or identify another distinction (Farina, 2021).

National symbols promote national identity in a variety of ways. The functions of national symbols are primarily focused on ingroup identification and forming a sense of belonging (Schatz & Lavine, 2007). Tangible national symbols are the manifestations of a nation's defining features capable of making the distinction between the member of the group and an outsider visible (ibid. 332). National symbols, in that case, perform the role of common identifiers that can become the catalyst of the alienation process within the community or, in reverse, enhance the unity within the group based on the shared sentimental attachment to the symbol. According to Billig (1995), the primary role of national symbols is to invoke the emotional bonds between the nation's members and the means of representing that nation. Following the ideas of Anderson and Hobsbawm, national symbols represented an integral part of national self-identification, as they represented the system of meanings that possess a strong sentimental context for the group that shares it and eventually produces the boundary between the ingroup member and outsiders based on an ability to relate to the embedded narrative behind the symbolism.

In its essence, banal nationalism, despite being criticized for not being indicative in terms of revealing the public response and the depth of implications of corresponding celebratory practices on the population within a state, represents a crucial part of allocating the role of nationalism in the postmodern era. Similar to other 'labeled' subtypes of nationalism studies, banal nationalism possesses contextually-defined characteristics that could be criticized for the lack of universality or even inconsistent application. Michael Billig (2009) addressed this critique of banal nationalism by outlining that even in relatively homogenous communities, individuals have different degrees of exposure to the media, and the communication channels they use may transmit controversial information due to political rivalry within a nation. He also agreed with Skey's suggestion to focus on multiple levels of nationalism manifestation, including the sub-national and supra-national dimensions that may fall out of the scope of state-run institutions. This detail is vital as it shows that in a globalized world, practices of identifying oneself and demonstrating one's allegiance have an inward direction and the outward one.

Banal nationalism, a concept that tackles the issues of routinized manifestation, represents a valuable tool for reviewing contemporary practices of maintaining a sense of belonging and promoting national identity on the state level and, in some cases, going beyond the state boundaries. The limitations of the initial conceptualization associated with a short list of symbols selected for analysis were dictated by the demand for simplifying the concept and

not the strict exclusivity of the selected categories of symbols. Once applied to a broader field of national symbolism, with its diversity and originality, the analysis of the banal nationalism concept might reveal peculiar patterns of direct and indirect national identity promotion conducted by state-run institutions and independent actors on multiple levels.

1.2.5 Philately as the sources of Banal Nationalism iconography

The XIX century produced yet another means of value exchange that served as a direct promoter of state-endorsed iconography: postage stamps. Soon after, they became a desired commodity for enthusiasts since people could track the political changes in the world based on the change of symbolism and language on stamps. In the early stage of the European postage stamps iconography formation, the range of symbols utilized in the stamps' designs represented an abysmally small selection of well-established imperial symbolism. British Empire issued the first postage stamp, Penny Black, which entered circulation in 1840 and bore a profile portrait of Queen Victoria (Pencak, 1988). For the longest part of the XIX century, the trend of unelaborate stamp design persisted, utilizing monarch portraits, states' coats of arms, states' names, and occasional personifications of the states as the compositional core (ibid). In that sense, the conservative usage of state symbols in early postage stamp designs resembled the attitude towards national currency iconography, as the main purpose of used symbols was to indicate the stamp's origins and ensure easy recognition of the symbols among foreign and domestic audiences.

An essential step in diversifying the iconographic themes on stamps was the establishment of the Universal Postal Union (UPU) in 1874, which granted an institutional basis to the centralized exchange of domestic and international correspondence between the member states (Libera, 2020). With the formation of international institutions that regulated the exchange of correspondence followed the appearance of the correspondent associations of philatelic enthusiasts that began collecting and studying the new identifiers of states (Davidson, 1986). The most important role of the UPU was to regulate the tariffs and promote innovations associated with the mail delivery process. In 1948, UPU¹ became an agency of the UN, officially merging with the entity and adopting its agenda. Although UPU has no direct impact on the volume of produced stamps each state is allowed to issue, the Universal Postal Convention highlights the necessity to align the stamps' iconography with principles of cultural

¹ Universal Postal Union historiography retrieved from the official webpage: <https://www.upu.int/en/Universal-Postal-Union/About-UPU/History>

promotion and maintenance of peace (Libera, 2020. p.227). The expansion of international correspondence exchange brought changes in stamp typology. Robert Jones (2001, p.404) suggested the fundamental distinction between the two most common types of postage stamps. According to Jones, the stamps that utilize state symbols or any motifs that could serve as identification of a particular state belong to the category of definitive stamps, as they define the state's self-representation. Stamps that celebrate a specific event or an anniversary belong to the category of commemorative stamps, as their prime role is to revive important dates in the collective memory of the correspondent community.

With the gradual expansion of postal service capabilities and relatively affordable tariffs that ensured affordability for the general public, postage stamps, alongside other philatelic products, became an active participant in international communication, spreading parts of diverse national symbolism across the borders (Yardley, 2015). Jan Perone (2011) claimed that nowadays, institutions responsible for designing stamps experience a relatively higher degree of freedom of expression than a century ago. That statement is also supported by Ekaterina Haskins' (2003) review of the process of democratization of the postage stamps' iconography that took place in the 1970s and provided ethnic and other minorities access to greater representation on the state level. However, despite seemingly being more democratized, postage stamp production represents a crucial link between nation and state, which derives from the direct endorsements of the postage stamp iconography on behalf of the state authority represented by the approved placement of the country's name or special insignia on every stamp. In other words, each stamp printed and issued to circulation by the state gets to be authorized by bearing the state name and being used similarly to currency.

Such a characteristic of postage stamps makes them a valuable tool for tracing certain states' social and political climate changes by reviewing the dominant patterns of national symbolism depiction. Michael Sommer (2017) formulated the idea behind postage stamp usefulness in political studies by claiming that monuments and school books could be destroyed in a centralized manner, but once stamps are issued and entered circulation, the government can not withdraw all of them, meaning that approved stamps also represent a political message directly or indirectly approved by the contemporary political regime. Pauliina Raento (2006) concludes that postage stamps could be considered official state documents due to the abovementioned characteristics. She also stated that postage stamps iconography aligns well with the initial concept of banal nationalism, as the main focus of studying such iconography must be paid to the national elites involved in approving designs. This statement implies a

strong top-down structure of messaging represented by the iconography themes issued by the state. Nevertheless, since stamps are used in international correspondence circulation, they also represent the horizontal model of sending a message when two representatives of different states exchange parcels or letters.

Pauliina Raento and Stanley Brunn (2008) concluded that postage stamps iconography represents a powerful tool for promoting a sense of national belonging. They claim that the political nature of postage stamp iconography has a strong positive connection with collective identity within a certain national discourse. In other words, what foreigners might perceive as a representation of unfamiliar historical figures or landmarks, natives would recognize due to the overall background formed by banal nationalism and enhanced by education as well as collective memory (*ibid*). Therefore, messages directed through the iconography reinforce the sense of being an insider by expanding the identity-political landscape accessible by the majority of nation members (*ibid*, 49). The content of messages and the correspondent iconography changes over time, adapting to the new political regimes and prioritizing certain narratives. Some authors identified several stages of postage stamp iconography developments, pointing out that the promotion of national identity and heritage to foreign audiences emerged around the 1940s but truly gained power in the late 1950s thanks to the restoration of the international events hosting traditions (Dietz, 2007).

Postage stamps also bear the officially endorsed historical narrative of the state, remaining an auxiliary tool for remembrance practices surrounding the most significant anniversaries (Skagestad, 2013). The auxiliary character of postage commemoration derives from the fact that the historical narrative embedded in the stamp's imagery and description only truly reveals its full meaning within a certain master narrative that members of the nation retrieve through institutionalized indoctrination through education systems and mass media. Moreover, commemorative stamps' celebratory function could cover national, international, and subnational levels by targeting particular themes. Postage stamps iconography can reflect both civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism, as it promotes human rights while also providing representation for indigenous people of local ethnic groups united by ritualistic practices or traditional costumes (Maloney, 2013). The duality of communication direction intended by the narrative behind postage stamps imagery resembles the way nation branding is conceptualized, and indeed, postage stamps are actively utilized for national promotion in a globalized world.

Stanley Brunn (2017), in his analysis of commemorative practices conducted by the US postal authorities, mentioned that the range of subjects promoted by stamps is quite significant, and the process of selecting the preferred themes is similar to the driving force behind nation branding practices – the most marketable and useful for the current political regime themes get to be popularized and represented in iconography. As for the precise categories or clusters of stamps used for nation branding, they include multiple themes that fall under the definition of the cultural landscape. This implies promoting architectural heritage and monuments, national parks, geological oddities, and geographical sites promoted for tourism and cities (ibid, 33). Moreover, stamps iconography promotes national heroes and outstanding representatives of nations alongside their contribution to the field of their specialty (Jones, 2001).

A massive campaign aimed at promoting European identity in postage stamps iconography dates back to 1956, when the first stamps from the "European Conference of Telecommunications and Postal Administrations (CEPT)²" series were printed. This conceptually innovative international campaign developed from close economic cooperation between the Western European countries. In the early 1993, a sub-branch of the UPU was formed to unite the European postal market, reforming the way joined practices of issuing stamps worked (PostEurop, n.d.). In 2002, European Parliament approved establishing the EUROPA stamp competition, which is a voluntary competition between European postal authorities for the title of the most beautiful designs of a stamp issued to commemorate a particular theme each year (ibid). Within the framework of this competition, every state in Europe voluntarily produces joined issues of stamps annually promoting shared ideas and heritage.

A summary of practices associated with studying postage stamps iconography reveals multiple connections to the study of banal nationalism. First, the state's role in postage stamp production is significant. The production process relies heavily on the approval of the state authorities, who endorse the published imagery by allowing it to be distributed on behalf of the state. Since many European states, including the Baltic States, still place currency values on postage stamps, the permission to assign the national or supranational currency value to postage stamps represents yet another level of state approval. The guidelines that dictate the

² The History of EUROPA/CEPT stamps development is a lesser researched topic. Nevertheless, stamps from this series have been thoroughly catalogued. An official overview on behalf of the EUROPA campaign officials provided here: <https://europa-stamps.blogspot.com/2007/01/europe-europa-stamps-history-part-i.html>

boundaries of acceptable iconography are regulated by international organizations such as UPU and PostEurop, but the states still possess the highest authority in selecting the themes and designs of postage stamps. The range of narratives embedded in postage stamp imagery varies greatly and could fluctuate over time, as it is sensitive to shifts in political regimes and political censorship. Postage stamps iconography operates with national symbols and cultural landscapes accessible and understandable to the members of the domestic audience while simultaneously making the presented narrative comprehensible for foreigners deprived of the national master narrative.

The previous studies of postage stamps historiography in the Baltic States were mostly conducted by philatelists and other enthusiasts, who published their findings in the correspondent philatelic journals. Each country has a unique set of philatelic journals. For Lithuania, it includes *Phillit*, *Bulletin Lithuanian Philatelic Society of New York*, *Pastas ir Filatelija Lietuvoje*, and *"Lithuania" Philatelic Society (of Chicago) Journal*. Latvian philatelic research is represented in *Latvian Collector*, *Het Baltische Gebied*, *Philatelia Baltica*. Estonian philately is promoted by *Mitteilungsblatt ArGe Estland*, *Eesti Filatelist*, and *Het Baltische Gebied*³.

The general trend in local philatelic research prioritizes history studies over the field of nationalism. The majority of publications made by the philatelic journals consist of postal history research or the narrow exploration of the rare anomalies found among the stamps of one time. This research, however, utilizes postage stamps as a source of embedded narrative that is used in banal nationalism practices. Approaching stamps iconography from this angle is a completely new way of studying the Baltic States' philatelic heritage within the framework of nationalism studies.

1.2.6 Previous studies of nationalism and national identities in the Baltic States

The topic of nation-building and post-colonial developments in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania has been extensively researched from various perspectives. The role of banal nationalism practices, however, remained relatively neglected. What is more, many previous studies do not emphasize the continuous nature of national identities because of the lack of a universal means of tracing their development. The patterns of nationalism research in the

³ The compilation of relevant resources is synthesized based on the vast collection of literature about the Baltic States philately gathered by Jan Kaptein. Accessible via <http://www.jkaptein.nl/literatuur/lite.html#genpos>

Baltic state could be represented by several substantial clusters, each of which was strongly connected to the region's historiography. Within this accumulation of studies, specific topics were of predominant focus, including the early stages of national awakenings in the former provinces of the Russian Empire, the Interwar period policies, and the cultural resistance under Soviet rule.

The first cluster of research deals with forming national identities in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The main focus of this research was to investigate the formation of cultural associations and unions elaborately and summarize the processes that led the Baltic self-determination movements to success. As Thaden (1985) mentioned, a significant part of the correspondent research was published in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia since 1945, but due to the specifics of the Soviet censorship, a considerable amount of those studies has been affected by inappropriately obvious ideologically-related bias.

Monographs written on the history of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania after the collapse of the Soviet Union pay close attention to the independence movements of the XIX century. Michael North (2015) specifically emphasized the role of popularizing vernacular language via newspapers as an essential force behind uniting the community, alongside organizing public events, such as song festivals. The institutionalized basis of the national awakening movements was also pointed out in studies. Associations of the ethnic intellectual elites that were established all across Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania during the Russian rule became a vital force that propagated the ideas of independence and contributed to standardizing the cultural aspect of national awakening by introducing symbols of resistance (Kirby, 2002).

Social mobility of the Baltic Provinces' elites was also listed as an essential contributor to the national awakening movements since it enhanced the exchange of expertise and capital across the region (Palmer, 2006). In this context, the role of cities as the centers of political and intellectual life has elevated during the late XIX century Russification campaign and right after the first Russian Revolution of 1905 (Leppik, 2008). Local ethnic intellectual elites had to compete against and collaborate with historically-formed elites, the Baltic Germans, who also contributed to the national awakening process via, for example, contributing to creating the early folklore collections in the provinces (*ibid*).

The summary of defining characteristics of the Baltic States' national identities provided by Hank Johnston (1992) suggests that these communities demonstrated outstanding resilience of national consciousness, managing to preserve narratives of foreign oppression

within the collective memory. Moreover, the Russian state-initiated repressive measures against the national consciousness achieved the opposite results by providing the Baltic people an enemy to unite against. Capital-based migration and positive economic conditions provided the Baltic States with an opportunity to marginalize nationalistic extremists and efficiently integrate the subnational groups.

The interwar period brought in new contests to nationalism in the Baltic states. It was the active phase of resistance against the foreign powers represented by Soviet Russia and the German Empire (Piiromäe, 2017). The positions of foreign politicians were divided as the recognition of the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian sovereignty was a tough challenge since the projection of their national consciousness rarely exited the boundaries of the Russian Empire.

Once Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania gained independence, they faced multiple issues posed by economic and political turbulence, which inevitably turned them from young democracies into authoritarian regimes by the late 1930s (North, 2015). Nevertheless, the first independence that coincided with the Interwar period of European historiography brought substantial development to national symbolism and national identity in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, to the point where former elites were turned into ethnic minorities within the new nation-states (Feest, 2017). However, World War Two changed the development path of the Baltic States, making them subdued by the USSR (Piiromäe, 2017).

The liberation from the Soviet authority launched a new wave of interest associated with nationalist practices within the Baltic States. Johnston's (1992) insights on the anti-Soviet resistance in the Baltic States suggest that these movements' success relied on internal alienation and forming a parallel civil society that had minimal connections with the Soviet master narrative. The return of the Baltic States to the 'West,' manifested by the state's membership in the EU and NATO, presented another framework for analyzing Baltic nationalism (Lamoreaux & Galbreat, 2008). As small states in the Eastern flank of Europe, the Baltic States have consistently been exposed to the danger arising from the potential conflicts between the West and the East. The most efficient way of alleviating the threat and facilitating European integration for the Baltic States was to actively join international institutions and promote their shared values with other Western states (ibid).

Even within the family of European states, the Baltic States still maintain a close connection dictated by the shared history of resistance against foreign oppression. In that

context, the joined celebrations become of great importance for regional politics of memory, as they provide a solid foundation for regional identity formation. A picturesque example of such a celebration is the Baltic Way, a public manifestation of the Baltic people's solidarity against the oppression in the USSR (Eglitis & Ardava, 2012).

2 Research Design and Methods

2.1 Research Design

The current research represents a comparative analysis of banal nationalism manifestation in the iconography of Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian postage stamps issued between 1918-1940 and 1991-2018. Such selection of timeframe used for analysis provides comprehensive coverage of different stages of political development in chosen states and also grants an opportunity to review the remembrance practices associated with a centenary of sovereignty celebrations since all three states declared independence in 1918. This research provides a new perspective to studying the Baltic States' national identity representation and discovers alternatives channel of state-endorsed national identity promotion and commemorative practices within the scope of banal nationalism. The Baltic States have experienced political and cultural oppression under the Russian Empire and the USSR's colonial orders and managed to combat the oppression twice, gaining and restoring sovereignty within 80 years. Due to the continuous nature of postage stamp issuing tradition, one could construct a direct link that connects modern-day practices of banal nationalism on stamps with how similar practices were conducted during the interwar period.

The Baltic States emerged from the former territories controlled by the Russian Empire at the end of World War One and had to fight for their independence in the following chain of conflicts involving Soviet Russia, the remains of German imperial forces, and the West Russian Volunteer Army as the common rivals. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania declared their independence in 1918. However, the struggles caused by the fight for independence delayed the normalization of internal political and economic processes. Nevertheless, on the European map drawn after the end of the local conflicts, the three states stood as young democracies. Common traits in the states' development during the interwar period and their reintegration into the European political, economic, and cultural landscape after the collapse of the Soviet Union provide a strong inclination to share patterns of nation-building processes within the states. Consequently, the most appropriate model of comparison would be the Most Similar Systems Design.

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania did not issue postage stamps during the imperial era since the process of developing, printing, and distributing stamps was supervised by the highest authority of the state. Similarly, during the Soviet period, stamps were produced in a centralized manner, and the artists commissioned to design the stamps often had no attachments to the

nations and ethnic groups they meant to represent on stamps. The first independent postage stamps issued by sovereign Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania date back to 1918. Due to the lack of experience in regulating the postal authorities and issuing stamps, the Baltic States had similar starting points in utilizing postage stamps as tools of banal nationalism. Nevertheless, it does not mean that the way they approached the matter was identical. Postage stamps iconography of the selected states represents a collection of distinct approaches to depicting the essential national symbols and commemorating crucial events in the state historiography. The differences in said historiography directly impact the patterns of commemorative stamp themes.

Comparing the dominant patterns of postage iconography manifestation serves multiple purposes. The duality of postage stamps iconography and its correspondent contextualization issued by the postal authorities represents a continuous narrative that reflects the cultural landscape of a nation and provides a foundation for collective memory analysis. The shifts in iconography patterns that occur over time demonstrate the social and political climate changes within the states, serving as indicators of authoritarian shifts or highlighting the transformations in remembrance policies of the state. Overall, narratives promoted in postage stamps iconography represent the state-endorsed portrait of national identity that is popularized among both domestic and foreign audiences. In that context, postage stamps serve as means of indirect communication between the states and audiences represented by both the general public and particular enthusiasts.

2.2 Data collection and sampling

The primary source of collecting data for this research is the digital catalog of stamps moderated by the community of the colnect.com platform, which represents an online forum that unites over three hundred thousand collectors across the globe. This platform has open online access, guaranteeing that any researcher can operate with the same digitalized data to replicate the study. The platform's trustworthiness derives from the cross-catalog checking system, which provides each catalog inscription with a correspondent reference to the mainstream philatelic catalogs, such as *Michel*, *Stanley Gibbons*, and *Yvert et Tellier* catalogs. Reviewing inscriptions from the specialized volumes of the named catalogs in comparison to visiting the specialized forums of Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian collectors ensures several

levels of contextual immersion and confirms the feasibility of the provided inscriptions' relevance.

The total number of stamps retrieved for the analysis consists of 899 Estonian stamps, 1021 Latvian stamps, and 1149 Lithuanian stamps. The difference in the total number of stamps is caused by the difference in printing volumes of stamps issued by the states and not by the sampling bias of the research. It is, nevertheless, important to highlight the certain constraint of the sampling caused by the matter of originality. It is a common practice of the states to produce multiple emissions of standardized definitive stamps by switching the bare minimum of the iconographic features. Within the Baltic States context, such practice became extremely common in the later stages of iconography development. However, since the New Year was identified on the definitive stamps and their volumes of productions were significant, their correspondent inscriptions were added to the coding sheets despite the repetitive patterns of the displayed imagery.

The sample of the analyzed stamps included postage stamps and semipostal stamps issued by Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania within the period of the states' sovereignty between 1918-1940 and 1991-2018. Political entities that existed in the region but were alienated from the nation-states or subsequently absorbed by the states (such as Memelland and Central Lithuania) are excluded from the sample, as the national government did not approve the iconography of those stamps of the selected states. The sample also excludes local postal office stamps issued during the early stages of World War Two since their printing volume and circulation were limited. Subsequently, cinderella stamps⁴ issued by organizations, diasporas, and individual enthusiasts were also excluded from the sample of the study since their production was not approved by the national governments. An additional limitation of the sample derives from the recently introduced opportunities for private clients to order their own stamps supervised by the central postal authorities of the state. This research excludes all stamps issued within *Minu Mark* (EE), *Mana pastmarka* (LV), and *Asmeninis pašto ženklas* (LT) campaign in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania since those stamps were not designed by the postal authorities as part of stamp plan, endorsed by the state.

⁴ "A Cinderella stamp is any kind of label which bears a resemblance to a postage stamp yet doesn't hold any validity for postal purposes". Definition retrieved from: <https://goodcollector.com/articles/what-is-a-cinderella-stamp/>

The sample excludes stamps issued by the Soviet Union and Russian Empire. Although Soviet postage stamps iconography did appropriate ethnic cultures and produced multiple stamps with direct cultural and national references to the Baltic States, those stamps were designed by a centralized entity of an authoritarian state and were not approved by the national governments of the states (subjugated by the Soviet regime). Following that logic, the sample also excludes stamps issued by the Russian Empire, despite their broad circulation in the Baltic provinces. It is important to point out that Soviet philatelic tradition had a massive impact on postage stamp iconography in the states since the ideological shift toward iconography's role in promoting nations took place in the 1970s (Haskins, 2003). Therefore, the postal authorities of the independent states had to get integrated into a changed world of stamp imagery in the early 1990s.

2.3 Method of analysis

Previous research conducted on postage stamp imagery and its role in the promotion of national identity utilized a similar approach but framed it as a synthesis of visual anthropology methods (Raento, 2006; Raento & Brunn, 2008; Yardley, 2015), semiotics (Brunn, 2000; Brunn, 2017; Brennan, 2018) and communication studies (Yardley, 2015; Sommer, 2017). Those studies allocated reading imagery on postage stamps as a valid tool for reviewing changes in the socio-political climate and how diverse the political regimes' strategies of maintaining a consistent portrait of a state could be. Previous research on banal nationalism appearances in different media also included the public perception part, commonly extracted with ethnography due to the fear of affecting the minds of respondents by asking precise questions (Skey, 2009).

Due to the specifics of banal nationalism manifestation in postage stamps iconography, this research prioritizes the process of national symbolism production and promotion at the state level. The scope of the study also justifies such an approach since analysis covers multiple decades worth of postage stamp iconography, and it is physically impossible to measure the public perception of national symbolism depiction on postage stamps in retrospect. To analyze different modes of meaning and comprehend them in conjunction as a type of social practice, the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) presents a convenient framework.

Considering the selected media's specifics, the postage iconography analysis has to combine linguistic and visual/multimodal basis. For that reason, the Multimodal Critical

Discourse Analysis (MCDA) represents the most suitable choice. The duality of meaning systems represented by language and images is considered an obstacle to discourse analysis, as mental representations might get intertwined (Hart, 2016). However, since the stamp imagery and the catalog description represent isolated clusters of meaning, they could be approached and analyzed independently, considering the systematic structure of catalogs and themed cluster as unified representations. In addition, the uniformity of the institutionalized contextualization of stamps eliminates the ambiguity of interpretations that may occur while reading the images outside the context. It is crucial since misinterpretations caused by alienation from the context of the analyzed categories represent another weak point of multimodal analysis (Machin, 2016).

The continuity and the universality of the Baltic States postage stamps' shapes and functions create a relatively homogenous media for analysis where the core language elements consist of the country name, the year of production, and the depiction of the stamp's face value. Any additional background information, including the series title, the stamp name, and the details of the object or a person depicted on it, is extracted directly from the international catalog, making it accessible for researchers and also ensuring the replicability of the study, due to the convenience of digitalized databases hosted online. Based on the imagery-description duality of the analyzed data, the implemented MCDA approaches both modes of visualized narrative, matching the occurring patterns with the correspondent events from the states' historiography.

The analysis consists of two essential phases. The first stage is to collect postage stamp iconography data from the online data set and codify it according to the suitable themed category. As for the defined categories, they are allocated to a correspondent cluster, which represents a broader category that unites similar categories. Following this logic, flag, coat of arms, and head of state categories belong to the State Symbols cluster; historical figures and people representing traditional costumes were allocated to the People cluster; Anniversaries also represented a separate cluster, including the celebrations of establishments, diplomatic relations, and independence. The cluster of architecture included churches, manors, castles, and other buildings of significance. Nature cluster hosted all the nature-related stamps. Christmas and EUROPA clusters include the stamps of the corresponding theme, disregarding their imagery, as these themes derive from the international tradition and could not surely be attributed to the particular state's practice of banal nationalism. The grouping of clusters represents the second stage of analysis.

The grouping of sampled stamps is represented by three clusters aligned with generalized chronology. The first cluster represents stamps issued during the interwar period (1918-1940). The Second cluster represents stamps issued after regaining independence (1991 - 2004). The third cluster represents stamps produced after obtaining EU membership (2005 - 2018). Such a grouping approach provides a comprehensive foundation for analyzing changes and fluctuations in the frequency of national symbols' depiction in iconography. It also grants a framework for comparing three separate stages of international recognition of the Baltic States and the prevalent trends occurring during each. The structural foundation ensures clearly identified boundaries between the development periods but also ensures the continuity of the iconography.

2.4 Research Limitations

The fundamental difficulty with studying nationalism was vocalized by Lloyd Kramer (2011) in his research on European and American nationalism, where he claimed that researchers could quickly identify nationalistic narratives and symbols in foreign cultures while remaining oblivious to the one present in their own. That feature of nationalism provides a good opportunity for a foreign researcher to get the essence of each state's prioritized iconography without being familiarized with the historical master narrative. The main limitation of the foreigner perspective in similar studies is represented by the lack of exposure to the cultural landscape and the master narrative propagated by the state institutions (Brunn & Raento, 2008). Due to that limitation, this work outlines the general patterns of national identity manifestations in postage stamps, as viewed by a foreigner, and encourages researchers with deeper expertise in the regional context to advance the research further.

The nature of stamp classification, as pointed out in previous studies (Jones, 2001; Raento, 2006; Perone, 2011), indicates two primary categories. Definitive stamps are the most direct manifestations of banal nationalism as they portray state symbols, such as a flag and coat of arms. They remain almost static, disregarding the change of political regimes within the state. Commemorative stamps introduce the historical discourse and celebrate essential anniversaries, events, establishments, and outstanding historical figures that are directly connected to the national historical discourse. All those remembrance practices become an axillary side of the state's national identity, yet they remain a relevant source of banal

nationalism discourse since commemorative stamps are more diverse and inclusive, which grants them a better potential for being used for ethnic group representation.

The coded categories, such as state symbolism, heads of state, independence anniversaries, and historical figures, are synthesized and standardized to make them universally applicable to each state. Repetitive themes occurring in postage stamps iconography of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are allocated to corresponding clusters, which provide statistical data for comparative analysis. Joined issues between the three states represent a separate cluster that manifests the basics of regional identity. Joined issues exclude the CEPT and EUROPA stamp series, as their role in promoting European identity derives from the existing international institutions. Meanwhile, the closer collaboration between the Baltic States postage authorities outside of those campaigns signifies more elaborate cultural ties.

With respect to the current research, the problematic side of philatelic studies in the Baltic States consists of several crucial barriers posed by the regional specifics. The language represents the first barrier since most publications were made in local languages or German. The second barrier is connected purely with the accessibility of resources since philatelic journals represent a highly-demanded commodity among philatelic enthusiasts. Therefore, some previous studies conducted by local enthusiasts are accessible to the public, thus representing no value for potential researchers. Even standard postage stamp catalogs could only be purchased from authorized dealers, which also significantly limits their accessibility. That is why this study utilized an online database for gathering materials for analysis.

3 Empirical Findings

The following chapter presents the findings of the discourse analysis conducted based on the sampled stamps of the Baltic States with respect to chronological division. The first section introduces the patterns of iconography dominant during the interwar period and the context behind their prevalence. The second section demonstrates the revitalization of the postage iconography tradition after the collapse of the Soviet Union, showing the new trends in the national portrait of the Baltic States. The third section shows the trends that persisted after Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania joined the European Union and facilitated the promotion of European identity.

3.1 The young democracies and the authoritarian transition (1918 – 1940)

3.1.1 The iconography of the newly established states

The first shared pattern of the stamps produced by the Baltic States during the period of political turbulence in the region at the end of World War One was using the national language. The only common element of the first stamps issued by Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania was the appearance of the state name written in the local languages on the stamps. They were manifested as "Eesti," "Latvija," and "Lietuvos," which was a significant step towards promoting cultural sovereignty. According to Anderson's theory, the elevation of the vernacular language to the national status is the defining factor in forming a nation. This appearance of the former vernacular language on the stamps, used for international correspondence, played a role in elevating the young nation-states demonstrating the fully formed nations' identity and placing themselves on the philatelic map of Europe. The placement of the state name of stamps remained an ongoing tradition throughout the Interwar period as an essential element of determining the stamps' origins.

Country names were the first national symbols in all states, but the placement of national coats of arms swiftly followed them. Latvia and Lithuania were the first ones to introduce the state coat of arms as a motif for postage stamps in 1918 and 1919, respectively. However, the Latvian coat of arms was introduced at the end of the Independence War, so significant changes were added to Latvia's 1921 series of definitive stamps. Meanwhile, Estonian postage stamps iconography lacked the depiction of the national coat of arms within the first decade of independence. The hesitancy of placing a coat of arms on stamps in the

Estonian case could be explained by two factors. First, the Estonian State Assembly adopted the official design of the coat of arms only in 1925, which inevitably caused a delay in its universal acceptance on the institutional level. Second, the first series of Estonian definitive stamps depicting the coat of arms was issued in 1928, marking denominations in the new national currency – Estonia kroon, adopted the same year. Prior to the 1928, the first Estonian currency, Estonian mark, had been unstable, suffering from intense inflation, which decreased people's trust in the national currency⁵. Promoting the new stable national currency by incorporating a coat of arms in bills and stamp design could have been a deliberate attempt to enforce the trust in the Estonian kroon. By 1930, Latvia had issued 45 variations of definitive postage stamps with the national coat of arms, Lithuania got the second place with 20 variations, while the Estonian set of definitive stamps with the coat of arms consisted of 13 variations (figure 1).

In the later 1930s, a new trend of the coat of arms depiction formed, focusing more on the subnational level and providing greater representation to regional and municipal levels. The most significant representation of this trend belongs to Estonian iconography/ In the Estonian case, the Aid Fund series of 1936, 1937, and 1938 depicted a total of 12 coats of arms of the major Estonian cities. The same series also depicted eight coats of arms of municipalities in 1939 and 1940. In the Latvian case, the coats of arms of the most important regions were depicted on the commemorative stamps celebrating the 20th anniversary of Independence. The Lithuanian iconography did not provide a broader representation of the subnational division, instead promoting a limited selection of national symbols, such as Vytis, Columns of Gediminas, and various references to religious heritage, represented by crosses and churches that referenced the Grand Duchy's heritage. It is possible to suggest that the conservative approach toward symbols depiction was caused both by a strict identity policy introduced by Smetona, who viewed the Lithuanian Republic as the successor of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and the unpleasant political climate between Lithuania and Poland, based on the unresolved Vilnius conflict. With the revisionist policy being aimed at the Vilnius region, Lithuanian iconography was not encouraged to promote the internal divisions to avoid any potential aspirations of separatism.

⁵ According to Estonian Bank, Estonian mark was not backed by precious metals, which made it so vulnerable, unlike the Estonian kroon, that was pegged to the British pound. Retrieved from: <https://www.eestipank.ee/en/museum/history-estonian-money#the-estonian-mark---the-first-estonian-currency>

Figure 1

Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian definitive stamps



Based on the materials from colnect.com

The first Estonian definitives (EE1) with the coat of arms had a unified design, with the only changeable elements being denomination and the background color. The used coat of arms was based on the long-lasting heraldic tradition of depicting three lions that allegedly originated from the king's seal of Valdemar II produced in the XII century and later became the symbol of the Duchy of Estonia and Governorate of Estonia. The first Latvian definitive stamp (LV1) designed by Ansis Cīrulis, the artist who also created the Latvian flag, bore his vision of the national coat of arms of Latvia, symbolizing the aspiration to obtain nationhood (the rising sun) and three historical regions of the state: Latgale, Kurzeme, and Vidzeme⁶. The reflection of these symbols is visible on the stamp with the official coat of arms, designed by Rihards Zariņš (LV2) that also has the three regions represented by the stars and by a heraldic lion and griffin, while the rising sun, as a symbol of freedom, is still present in the upper part of the shield. Lithuanian definitives had different form factors (LT1 & LT2) but used the identical coat of arms, which represented a romanticized version of Vytis designed by Antanas Žmuidzinavičius. The decision to adopt Vytis as the main national symbol was made by Antanas Smetona, the first president of the Lithuanian republic, as an attempt to appeal to the historical origins of the Lithuanian nation and represent the bond between the new Lithuanian state with the heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Once the new national symbols were placed on stamps, another essential development in utilizing postage stamps began. Commemorative stamps began to be used for promoting narrative in the celebration of sovereignty. Since obtaining sovereignty is the primary goal of

⁶ The interpretation of the used elements retrieved from: <http://philaquelymoi.blogspot.com/2018/12/>

the nationalistic movement, as was pointed out by Greenfeld, political regimes of the young democracies were expected to promote the anniversary of the state formation. Estonia (5 stamps), Latvia (6 stamps), and Lithuania (7 stamps) issued a series of stamps celebrating the 10th anniversary of independence in 1928. However, celebrating independence anniversaries was not limited to those series. Latvia celebrated the first anniversary of the liberation in 1919 with a series of four stamps, with Latvia being represented as a woman with a sword wearing a traditional costume. The first commemorative stamps dedicated to the state's independence were issued by Lithuania already in 1920 within a series consisting of 11 stamps that used Lithuanian personification as an integral part of the composition.

The early independence of the Baltic States provided significant developments in the postage iconography of the young democracies. The elevation of vernacular language and the right to use it to name the state served as a powerful manifestation of national sovereignty. The nations became unified by language and borders, which are essential attributes of nations in Anderson's and Hobsbawm's views. The representation of the national coats of arms on stamps transmitted the policy embedded in their design. The Estonian coat of arms, adopted in 1925, was based on the appropriated heraldry of the Danish kings and referenced the long-lasting heraldic tradition. Lithuanian coat of arms also represented an homage to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's symbolism, claiming the successor rights over this entity's heritage. Latvian's coat of arms was a new creation, synthesized based on the heraldic traditions of the Latvian regions and enhanced by the attributes of fighting for freedom. Postage stamps iconography transmitted those approaches to symbolism. The aspirations of named nations to obtain sovereignty also got reflected in celebratory practices surrounding the 10th anniversary of independence, as defending the right to be sovereign was a fresh chapter of collective memory that also created a sense of solidarity so crucial for nation formation according to Renan.

3.1.2 The shift towards the dictatorship's identities

It is important to emphasize the fact that the first anniversaries of independence utilized an abstract representation of the state, significantly inspired by the romanticized trend to personify nations. That trend did not affect Estonia, where an overprint on top of the Weaver and the Smith series represented the commemorative series of 1928. Nevertheless, the later celebrations of independence anniversaries in Latvia and Lithuania highlighted the role of the authoritarian leader more, inevitably following the requirement of the dictatorship to promote

the cult of personality. The series of commemorative stamps celebrating the 20th anniversary of Latvian independence in 1938 consisted of seven stamps. One of them depicted President Kārlis Ulmanis, who became the sole leader of Latvia after the 1934 coup, turning Latvia into a dictatorship. A trend of incorporating the dictator's portrait in a series of stamps that celebrated significant state anniversaries was shared by Latvia and Lithuania.

Since Lithuania experienced the shift toward authoritarian rule already in 1926 with a coup that started the process of turning Antanas Smetona into a dictator, the emergence of the head of the states figure on stamps was a logical continuation of creating the reputation of father of the nation and promoting the ruler's role in obtaining and preserving the sovereignty. In 1932, a series of 15 stamps depicting episodes from the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was issued to commemorate 15 years of independence. In 1939, another series of 4 stamps were issued celebrating 20 years of Lithuanian independence (in retrospect), and half of the series once again bore the face of Smetona. Such a frequent appearance of Smetona illustrates the strong tendency of Lithuanian iconography to promote its identity in conjunction with the heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which followed Smetona's vision of national identity. It also reveals the frequent incorporation of the leading dictator's portrait into celebratory practices associated with gaining independence, emphasizing the importance of the leader in achieving and preserving independence, which could be identified as an auxiliary practice corresponding to the formation of the cult of personality.

The echo of the fight for independence and the consequences of the unresolved conflicts right after the end of World War One also found its place in the postage stamps iconography of the Baltic States. Latvia mapped out the history of the war of independence with three stamps (figure 2) celebrating the liberation of Riga in 1919 (LV3), four stamps celebrating the one-year anniversary of independence issued the same year (LV4), four stamps marking the liberation of Kurzeme region (LV5) and two stamps celebrating the liberation of Latgale region in 1920 (LV6). The series of war memorial stamps issued in 1937 (7 stamps) reinforced the joint resistance narrative and manifested the importance of collective trauma in forming national identity. The series dedicated to the 20th anniversary of Latvian independence, issued in 1938, also included the regional commemoration, as several stamps portrayed landscapes in Latgale, Kurzeme, and Vidzeme alongside the stamps depicting the panoramic view of Riga. Based on such a repetition, it is possible to suggest that maintaining the remembrance of the struggle narrative in the collective memory was one of the top priorities of the Ulmanis regime. What is more, considering the contrast between the peaceful landscapes depicted in the 1938

series and the resistance narrative depicted in the earlier series of 1919 and 1920, it becomes clear that the 1938 series strongly resembled the Lithuanian practice, where stamps dedicated to independence anniversaries included the portrait of the dictator as the figure that guaranteed the preservation of sovereignty.

Figure 2

Latvian stamps commemorating the Independence war



Based on the materials from colnect.com

Early Latvian stamps often used personifications as integral parts of postage iconography. The stamp dedicated to the liberation of Riga (LV3) depicts a couple of citizens standing next to a human skull with the silhouette of the Latvian capital in the background. The stamps celebrating the first anniversary of independence bore a similar image where a woman in a traditional costume holding a sword (LV4) represented Latvia. Stamps dedicated to the liberation of Kurzeme showed a white fighter slaying a black dragon, symbolizing the victory of Latvian forces against the dehumanized evil forces. The liberation of the Latgale region series received another personification of Latvia, and this time represented as a mother who greets the return of one of the daughters. Three daughters on the stamp represent the three regions, similar to the stars in the national coat of arms. The unity of the historical regions remained the dominant pattern in Latvian interwar iconography, signifying the sentimental attachment of the nation to land, a trait of national consciousness described by Anderson and Hobsbawm.

Lithuanian iconography included the series of Memelland (Klaipeda) reunification with Lithuania in 1923, consisting of 12 stamps depicting various parts of the region's landscape. In addition, the 1932 series included a map of Lithuania with the territory of Vilnius back then, possessed by Poland, being marked as temporarily occupied. Estonia's way of manifesting territorial sovereignty is represented in two stamps issued in 1923 and 1924 (EEm) depicting

the state's border according to the Tartu Peace Treaty. Moreover, Latvia (4 stamps) and Estonia (2 stamps) issued charitable stamps raising funds for the local offices of the Red Cross in 1920 and 1921 correspondently. Promoting participation in international institutions in postage stamps iconography is one of the prominent ways for small states to manifest involvement in supranational organizations, which additionally demonstrates the state's significance. Nevertheless, the Estonian and Latvian issues were motivated by practical necessity since people affected by the war required support. Unfortunately, World War One and Independence War left an impact on the Baltic States' demography. A similar trend is traceable in Lithuanian practices of issuing stamps to raise funds for orphanages.

Besides widely celebrating the success of absorbing Klaipeda, Lithuania also demonstrated an elaborate representation of international recognition on stamps. Lithuania's recognition by the League of Nations in 1922 was celebrated by a series of stamps, including the portraits of the most important figures who made Lithuanian independence possible. That series also featured the first depiction of Antanas Smetona, who has not yet become a dictator. International recognition on behalf of an essential international organization became a major victory for the political forces of Lithuania, especially considering the controversial situation with Poland that led to the Polish annexation of Vilnius. The tensions caused by this annexation were also got represented on the 1932 series of Lithuanian stamps, where a map of Lithuania, including Vilnius and the surrounding territories, got depicted on two stamps (LTm); however, they were marked as occupied (figure 3). In October of 1939, a commemorative series of stamps entered circulation, celebrating the recovery of Vilnius (LTv). Stamps celebrating 20 anniversary of independence were used for this emission, with an additional printing of "Vilnius 1939 X 10" on top of the stamps and the Columns of Gediminas, another symbol referring to the heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, being placed in the right part.

Figure 3

Maps on Estonian and Lithuanian stamps



Based on the materials from colnect.com

Estonian stamps with maps (EEm) presented a scheme of borders defined under the Tartu Peace Treaty signed on 2 February 1920. The borders are marked with solid lines, with no contested territories being placed on the map. In comparison, the Lithuanian maps from 1932 (LTm) illustrate two borders of Lithuania, the factual one being filled with brown and the contested territory under the Polish rule that included the historical capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – Vilnius. Claiming the rights over the historical heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania without controlling the historical capital was a massive ideological struggle of Smetona's regime. Therefore, the celebratory practices around the recovery of the historical territories were also reflected in commemorative stamps iconography (LTv).

The Baltic States' collective memory demonstrated remarkable resilience despite the damages associated with World War One and the following conflicts. During the Interwar period, the Baltic States tested the potential of the commemorative stamps and their role in promoting national heritage beyond the period of sovereignty. Estonia began active promotion of its past in the early 1930s with stamps celebrating the 300th anniversary of the University of Tartu (4 stamps in 1932), the 500th anniversary of St Bridget's Nunnery art Pirita (4 stamps in 1936), the 100th anniversary of Estonian Literary Society (4 stamps in 1938) and Parnu beach resort (4 stamps in 1939). Latvian iconography celebrated the 300th anniversary of Liepaja (5 stamps in 1925) and introduced the series of national writes (4 stamps in 1936). Lithuania discovered its own path by claiming the rights over the heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and celebrating historical figures such as Duke Vytautas (21 stamps in 1930),

Duke Kęstutis (4 stamps in 1921 and 8 stamps in 1933). These first attempts to expand the theme selection of stamps iconography represent an interesting tendency to explore the national cultural landscape and refer to parts of the cultural heritage that existed before the nations claimed sovereignty. Such a lean towards celebrating the heritage of the past might be associated with an attempt of the regimes to find the primordial national roots of the correspondent states, inspired by the trends in German philately of the correspondent period.

As visible from the paragraph above, the search for primordial symbols of the nation coincided with the period of transitioning towards authoritarian regimes in the Baltic States. The 1930s became more intense and less liberal in terms of postage stamps iconography. Heads of the state started to accumulate authority making themselves the representatives of nations (figure 4). Smetona appeared on Lithuanian stamps in 1928 (4 stamps), in 1934 (3 stamps), and ten more times between 1936 and 1940. Ulmanis appeared on Latvian stamps in 1937 (9 stamps), 1938 (1 stamp), and 1939 (1 stamp). The portrait of Päts appeared on 17 definitive Estonian stamps starting from 1936. Unlike Smetona and Ulmanis, Päts' portrait was not included in the commemorative series separating the head of the state from collective memory narratives. A potential explanation for such an approach derives from the general lack of commemorative stamps issued to celebrate the anniversary of Estonian independence. The commemorative series of Estonia celebrated the heritage that did not have any connection with the interwar political regime making them unsuitable for the Päts portrait's incorporation. Based on this data, it is possible to argue that heads of the state became a part of the national symbolism of the Baltic States, manifesting the transition from liberal ideas to authoritarian regimes and simultaneously shifting the focus of postage iconography to the primordial heritage of the nation-states.

Figure 4

Heads of states on stamps of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania



Based on the materials from colnect.com

In Estonian postage iconography, Konstantin Päts appeared exclusively on definitive stamps that have been entering circulation gradually, starting from 1936 (EEP). Latvian approach to depicting Kārlis Ulmanis had a broader range. In 1937, a series commemorating the 60 anniversary of Ulmanis was issued (LVU1) consisting of nine denominations. Celebrating the head of the state's birthday is a common practice in monarchies, but this practice was successfully adopted by the Ulmanis dictatorship and was reflected in postage iconography. Ulmanis also appeared in other series of stamps, such as the celebration of the 20th anniversary of independence and the 5th anniversary of the National Unity Day (LVU2) issued in 1939. Essentially, such incorporation of the leader's figure in state-wide celebratory practices positioned his presence as a significant attribute of national sovereignty. Antanas Smetona received the widest representation in postage iconography among the Baltic dictators. His portrait was incorporated into a series celebrating important national anniversaries. He also received a set of commemorative stamps celebrating his 60 anniversary (LTS1) in 1934. Later, his portrait was also placed on definitive stamps produced in the late 1930s (LTS2).

The shift towards dictatorship in the Baltic States has impacted the dominant postage stamp iconography trends. The celebratory practices around the independence anniversaries that initially stood for remembrance of the national solidarity success in defending a right for self-determination were gradually utilized to promote the dictator's personality. Incorporating the ruler's portrait in commemorative series associated with important state celebrations became a common practice in Lithuania and Latvia. This practice could be associated with the formation of a cult of personality. Estonia's iconography remained modest, only using Päts portrait for definitive issues. At the same time, Estonian iconography vividly represented subnational symbols, such as city's coats of arms and anniversaries of establishments founded become Estonian independence, revitalizing primordial narratives in the collective memory.

Another massive trend in postage iconography deriving from the first independence period is the role of conflicts that followed World War One in collective memory and associated remembrance practices. The consequences of the early XX-century conflicts found various representations in the Baltic States' iconography. All the states issued semipostal stamps to raise funds for locally-organized charities that helped families affected by the war. In Estonian and Latvian cases, series to benefit the national offices of the Red Cross were issued. In the Lithuanian case, stamps raising funds for orphanages were common starting from 1926. The stamps imagery of those stamps varied, from depicting nurses (Estonia) and states personification (Latvia) to portray the country's landscapes and famous people (Lithuania). The

more direct reflection in the iconography of conflict remembrance was connected with maps, and, in that case, Lithuania has the most outstanding heritage caused by a complicated foreign policy towards Poland. The postage iconography reflected the revisionist policy towards Vilnius and the successful absorption of Klaipeda. Estonian iconography was more modest, with just the country borders being placed on stamps. In the Latvian case, no maps appeared on stamps, but a series of war memorials issued in 1937 ensured strong positions of war-related narrative in the postage iconography. It is hard to suggest why Lithuanian and Latvian postage iconography paid much more attention to independence anniversary celebrations. The possible explanation could derive from the necessity of incorporating the leader's figure in collective memory. Nevertheless, Estonia's iconography provided significantly fewer stamps celebrating the independence and is characterized by the absence of dictator-independence links transmitted through stamps.

3.2 Restoration of independence (1991 – 2004)

3.2.1 Restoration of traditions

After half a century of being overrun by the Soviet authority, the Baltic States restored independence. A period of cultural resistance against Soviet control and several acts of the Baltic people's solidarity preceded the restoration of independence. One of the most symbolic manifestations of the Baltic solidarity against Soviet rule occurred in 1989 and became known as the Baltic Way. This event brought citizens of the Baltic Republic together, forming a human chain that connected Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius in a united front. Regained sovereignty meant the restoration of the national postage iconography. However, now the Baltic States had to face the struggles left by the Soviet era, namely the fact that the population of the republic became less homogenous, with Estonia and Latvia having a larger percentage of ethnic Russians than Lithuania. The following part introduces the dominant trends in the postage stamps iconography of the Baltic States during the period of second independence before joining the EU.

A substantial cluster of shared themes across all of the Baltic States consists of coats of arms depiction. Within the timeframe between 1991 and 2004, Estonia issued 61 stamps with national coats of arms and two stamps with the coats of arms of cities and municipalities. Lithuania produced 62 stamps of that format, while Latvia set the highest score of 76 (figure 5). It is crucial to mention that such a high number of definitive stamps with coats of arms in

the Latvian case is dictated by their extensive reuse of iconography over the years. An important development compared to the interwar period in this cluster is associated with the scale transition. If the interwar period, the state coat of arms dominated iconography, then the second independence period incorporated subnational iconography, making it more inclusive for smaller communities represented by municipalities or cities.

Figure 5

Definitives with coats of arms (1991 – 2004)



Based on the materials from colnect.com

Regaining independence revitalized the tradition of portraying national symbols on postage stamps of all of the Baltic States. The first series of Estonia definitives included nine stamps with the national coat of arms, the first appearance of the subnational coats of arms on stamps was in 2004, so it is possible to claim that within the first decade of regaining independence, Estonia followed a relatively conservative path of national symbols depiction on stamps. Latvia and Lithuania began placing subnational symbols on stamps in the 1990s, opposing the trends in Estonia. It is hard to identify the rationale behind such a difference in approaches toward national symbols. There are several potential causes, including the insecurities connected with ethnically homogenous regions that might experience separatist tendencies, the inability to develop a suitable format for the stamps or simple favoritism. Regardless of the minor differences, all three states produced stamps with the national coats of arms in the year of formal independence. The imagery used on those stamps was directly inspired by the interwar definitives, which served as a bonding point between the old and the new iconographic tradition. The restoration of the old national symbolism once again emphasized the nation's solidarity and shared collective memory, which is essential for

producing nations. The same logic applies to the usage of national language on stamps, a tradition that was also revitalized after regaining independence.

3.2.2 International collaboration

Starting from the very first years of independence, all the Baltic States introduced stamps to raise funds and promote the national committee at the Olympic games, making participation in international events an increasingly important part of nation branding. A tradition of commemorating every Olympic Games by combining the official symbolism of the event (Olympic rings) with national flags represents the next step towards integrating into international society. In addition, every state issued commemorative stamps celebrating lower-level sports events, for example, European Basketball Championship (Lithuania 2003), Worlds Ice Hockey Championship (Latvia 2004), Yachting World Championship (Estonia 1998). This trend suggests that national representation at international sports events represents a prioritized channel of nation branding and simultaneously helps integrate nation-states in the globalized world.

The Olympic Games provided small states with a platform for promoting their national symbols and delegating representatives of the nation to compete against equal rivals (figure 6). Such a competition brings a nation together because nations are inherently competitive, according to Greenfield. In addition, international events promote cultural exchange and contribute to the state's promotion. Winning an Olympic medal means standing in front of the broadcasting cameras while singing the national anthem and waving your flag, which represents the core activities defined by Billig as banal nationalism. Such an appealing opportunity to promote a nation on a global scale explains the eagerness of the Baltic States to commemorate their participation in these significant international events. Another way of getting engaged with international organizations derived from collaboration with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). Estonia (4 stamps in 1994), Latvia (4 stamps in 1994), and Lithuania (4 stamps in 1996) issued charitable postage stamps in collaboration with WWF to simultaneously raise awareness of endangered species and raise funds for the Fund's activities (figure 6). These series represent the adoption of new traditions, where charitable stamps benefit international organizations, which illustrates a significant step towards integrating into global politics connected with the preservation of biodiversity. States showed their support for

the cause by placing the logo of the foundation on the stamps, marking a new development in postage stamps iconography.

Figure 6

Olympic Games and WWF stamps



Based on the materials from colnect.com

Regaining independence opened new opportunities for the Baltic States, and the postage iconography depicted the first attempts of the independent states to collaborate with international institutions. Each state issues stamps promoting the Olympics Games every two years to commemorate the upcoming Summer and Winter Olympic Games. In the early period of regaining independence, the athletes from the Baltic States earned only a few Olympic medals. Nevertheless, the first golden medal earned by Andrus Veerpalu at Salt Lake City in 2002 started another tradition in Estonian iconography. Each champion received a commemorative postage stamp. Lithuania also celebrated its success by simply depicting the medals earned by athletes in Sydney in 2000. Latvia's commemoration was strictly limited to events, neglecting the achievements of sportspersons. All states collaborated with WWF and presented different wildlife on the postage stamps. What unites both series is the incorporation of the international institution's symbols in the postage iconography of the state, which manifests an active involvement of the state in global integrational processes.

3.2.3 Expanding the theme selection

Architecture and its role in shaping the cultural landscape also got represented on stamps. The most explicit presence of architectural elements was found in Estonian iconography, which included ten castles, five manors, 15 lighthouses, and 14 churches. Latvian and Lithuanian iconographies were less explicit about architecture counting 15

appearances of the buildings from the listed categories each. The introduction of architectural category into the list of postage stamps iconography represents a continuous tradition, started in the late 1930s, that celebrates the tangible heritage of the nation created beyond the lifespan of the independent state. Yet, the approach towards depicting the architectural heritage has changed and got transformed into a continuous series expanded annually without any attachments to anniversaries. Such transition followed the pattern of democratization of the postage stamps iconography described by Haskins. It enriches the iconography with new motifs that introduce the national cultural landscape and could be utilized as a tool for nation branding.

Another important development in how postage iconography became more inclusive compared to the interwar period was demonstrated by an increasing frequency of individual commemoration. Birth and Death anniversaries of outstanding representatives of the nation became a common motif in the postage stamps iconography of the Baltic States, and the series of stamps dedicated to people were issued annually throughout the period. Promoting the individual's role in the national historical narrative also provided role models for the new generations of citizens. It served as an auxiliary remembrance practice, combined with biographies, memorials, education programs, and particular celebrations meant to pay homage to the national heroes. Besides the stamps issued on special occasions, the individual's contributions to the national sovereignty, culture, and science were celebrated within larger themes. Moreover, the representation of people on stamps was not narrowed down to the individual level, as the themes of Folk Costumes appeared in every state, providing an opportunity for a broader ethnic representation and once again emphasizing the primordial nature of national consciousness (figure 7). Between 1991 and 2004, Estonia issued 22 stamps with folk costumes, Latvia produced 14 stamps and Lithuania issued 12.

Figure 7

Examples of traditional costumes on stamp 1991 – 2004



Based on the materials from colnect.com

Traditional or folk costumes promoted a higher degree of inclusivity in the postage stamps' iconography since the variations of the folk costumes could be attached to specific ethnic groups or regional communities. Placing folk costumes on stamps simultaneously promoted the broader national belonging and the cultural heritage of the minorities found inside the nation. It was yet another reflection of iconography's democratization.

All selected states adopted the tradition of issuing Christmas stamps, something that is common across Europe. While an argument could be made that the common celebration of religious holidays could be utilized as a promotional tool for European identity and that Christmas stamps convey a solid religious message, aligning the national borders with religious borders, the fundamental reasoning might be much more trivial. Issuing stamps celebrating New Year became a tradition in the USSR in 1962. Over several decades themed stamps and envelopes were produced to ensure a steady supply become the upcoming celebrations and to provide citizens an opportunity to send a sentimental postcards to their relatives and friends. Therefore, Christmas stamps could be regarded as continuing practices representing letter-writing traditions rather than a nationalistic narrative. That statement is not interchangeable with the argument that churches and religion-connected practices are still widely represented in the Baltic States Iconography.

A sophisticated development in the Baltic States' iconography is associated with anniversaries and the way commemorative stamps are utilized for promoting remembrance. Commemorating national heroes is one of many purposes of commemorative stamps. The states also utilized them to commemorate anniversaries of independence, the introduction of

national currencies, the foundation of governmental institutions, and crucial events from the national historiography, such as the Baltic Way or the Independence War. While the range of celebrated anniversaries got wider, the anniversary of independence remained essential since it manifested the national aspirations to obtain sovereignty and, within the context of regaining independence, also demonstrated the patterns of succession while justifying the right of a nation for self-determination.

The first stamps commemorating independence were issued by Latvia and Estonia in 1993, and they celebrated 75 anniversary of independence, taking 1918 as the starting point. Simultaneously, Lithuania did not release a stamp for the state anniversary. However 75th anniversary of the first postage stamp received its stamp. In 1998, Estonia issued a stamp for the 80th anniversary of independence with the state's coat of arms. Latvia issued two stamps, with the national flag and the national coat of arms the same year. Lithuania also celebrated its 80th independence anniversary with a stamp that contained the text of the Declaration of Independence published in 1918. Already in 2000, Lithuania issued another stamp commemorating independence. This time, it was the 10th anniversary of the 1990 Declaration of Independence. Lithuania issued four more stamps in 2001, celebrating 1000 years of Lithuania, which aspired deeper connection with primordial national roots. Despite the minor differences in remembrance practices connected with gaining independence, all states continued the tradition of issuing commemorative stamps celebrating their independence, and that tradition represents shared collective memory, which promotes national solidarity.

The final significant development in the Baltic States' postage stamps iconography that took place during that period was the introduction of joint issues of stamps between Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. These series included the Via Baltica Motorway project (1994), Historical Ships (1997), 10 Anniversary of the Baltic Chain (1999), and Baltic Coastal Landscapes (2001). The diversity of the presented themes is one of the defining factors behind including all the stamps issued by the states in the sample of the research. These series are supposed to represent the foundation of the collective regional identity promoted across Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The presented themes suggest that the uniting factors behind the collective regional identity are represented by a connection via an essential transit artery, shared history of active trade utilizing the sea routes, common natural heritage and shared access to the Baltic Sea, and, most importantly, a unity in fighting against the foreign oppressor.

The restoration of independence revitalized postage iconography traditions of the Baltic States and brought in new developments that were absent during the interwar period. Excessive usage of the national coats of arms on the early definitive stamps could be characterized as continuing the interwar tradition of using national symbols. There is another potential explanation connected with dismantling the Soviet-enforced heritage and eradicating the Soviet symbolism from the collective memory of the Baltic States' citizens. Regardless of the cause, the outcome resulted in a substantial number of definitive stamps bearing the depiction of the national coat of arms. This practice also covered the subnational level, incorporating the heraldry of cities and municipalities. The Baltic States' stamps also reflected the effort to promote the nation internationally, including collaboration with WWF and active promotion of the Olympic Games. Those steps could be explained by a desire to expand the reach of nation branding practices and, at the same time, demonstrate active involvement in international politics. The democratization of postage stamp iconography expanded the themes states used to promote their national identity. Architecture became more represented on stamps, which signified a step towards reevaluating the importance of the cultural landscape and finding new approaches for appreciating the tangible cultural heritage.

Democratization of postage iconography also expanded the list of individuals whose contribution to national development was marked by correspondent stamps. In that sense, the restored democracies significantly advanced compared to the dictator-dominated iconography of the late interwar period. What is more, the inclusion of folk costumes as a way of representing subnational minorities and diversifying the ethnic representation within states has definitely broadened the boundaries of the nation and diversified the abstract image of members of the nation. Anniversary celebrations also demonstrated the acceptance of interwar traditions, with all three states eventually celebrating the first Declarations of Independence adopted in 1918. This development signifies the resilience of the Baltic States' collective memory and reveals the link between the interwar states and the successor states. Such development follows the general doctrine of restoring independence adopted by Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Also, the shared traits of the Baltic States' identities based on geographical, historical, and political aspects were utilized to promote regional identity via joint issues of stamps. In essence, joined stamp issues are similar to other official practices indicating tight bonds between the states. The emergence of such practices in the Baltic States' postage iconography illustrates the existence of cross-national solidarity and mutually acknowledged similarities of the state's identities.

3.3 EU Membership and centenary of postage stamps (2004 -2018)

Joining the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 2004 was a defining event in the modern history of the Baltic States. Each state produced a commemorative stamp celebrating the official facilitation of European integration (figure 8). The designs of Estonian (EEU), Latvian (LVU), and Lithuanian (LTU) stamps were similar, and each presented the other two of the Baltic States' flags among the selected flags of the EU members. While the trend of commemorating sports events persisted, a new trend of marking the state's participation in international organizations such as the UN, WWF, or the Baltic Assembly became more visible in this part of iconographic development. An essential part of EU membership, as derived from the currency design policy, is to share the value and beliefs of the European identity and act correspondently. The ways how EU membership got reflected in the Baltic States' postage iconography are presented in the following part.

Figure 8

Stamps celebrating joining the EU 2004



EEU

LVU

LTU

Based on the materials from colnect.com

The design of the EU membership commemorative stamps was similar. Yet, Latvia issued a second stamp marking the same event with a depiction of three stars, which stood for the three Baltic States. This manifestation of regional solidarity was nothing more than a sentimental complement to the main stamp. Simultaneously, Lithuania also issued a second stamp packed with national symbolism, showing the national flag, coat of arms, and a map and commemorating EU membership as a crucial step in national historiography.

One of the most important developments during that period was attributed to gradual changes in the definitive stamp designs. All states revealed new themes of definitive stamp iconography. Estonia introduced flowers (2004-2008), textile patterns (2010), and neutral post horns (2010) as supplementing issues to the ones depicting subnational coats of arms. Latvia stuck to the coats of arms of cities and municipalities until 2014. In 2014, a significant number of definitives with flowers were produced. The Coat of Arms series was restored in 2016. Lithuania introduced wooden churches (2007), folk music instruments (2012), historical versions of Vytis (2016), and historical state symbols (2017). This progression illustrates the experiments with iconography that took place in the Baltic States since joining the EU. While Estonia and Latvia demonstrate attempts to introduce neutral definitives while maintaining the subnational coat of arms theme relevant, Lithuania's iconography experiments with building a bond with the heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, once again claiming the rights over its heritage and maintaining the interwar traditions. The identity-framing practices of aligning Lithuanian symbolism with the heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is a persistent trend that could be traced through all periods of the iconography development. This trait is significantly different from the narratives depicted by Estonia and Latvia, since the later states' iconography tends to be more neutral concerning the historical ties.

The celebration of individual's contributions to the state's development and promotion became more inclusive. The cultural heritage of the Baltics States received a broader representation in postage iconography, with Estonia introducing the "Treasury of the Art Museum" series in 2010, Latvia inducing Latvian Art and Latvian Museums themes in the 2010s, and Lithuania incorporating more stamps dedicated to traditional craft starting from 2010s and introducing the series of Lithuanian contemporary art in 2016. The new domain of cultural heritage reveals new degrees of the cultural landscape, introducing art as the category of invoking solidarity. In addition, postage stamps iconography started to include cartoons and other forms of animation that are relatable to the younger generations. The iconography depicting churches, manors, lighthouses, and strongholds remained essential to the Baltic States' stamp themes after joining the EU. In this regard, it is possible to claim that cultural policies applied to the postage stamps' iconography remained unchanged from before the EU membership.

The statement above could be applied to the majority of trends identified in the previous part. Even after joining the EU and NATO, two powerful international organizations, and

ensuring global and regional recognition, the Baltic States continued the practice of issuing stamps in collaboration with WWF. Olympic Games are also continuously represented in the postage iconography of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, with both Estonia and Latvia commemorating medalists' achievements by issuing commemorative stamps. This approach serves as a promotion of a healthy lifestyle, as athletes become role models for the youth.

3.3.1 Beyond the national discourse

An additional tool for promoting European integration and shared elements of European identity is represented by the CEPT/EUROPA stamps, a series of stamps that are produced by all the members of PostEurop each year. The themes of this series are unique every year, and the tradition of producing these joined issues dates back to the 1950s when the first attempts to consolidate European economies were made. Over the years, EUROPA stamps became an entertaining competition between the states to compete in the best stamp design. Since all the participants submit stamps dedicated to a single theme, it reveals the different approaches towards celebrating the diverse cultural heritage, promoting acceptance and mutual respect on an international level. This campaign attracted the Baltic States in the early 1990s, and Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have submitted their themed stamps to the competition each year since.

Despite becoming members of the EU, the Baltic States still practice the joined issues between the three countries. The diversity of themes issued after 2004 majorly follows the same patterns of the 1991-2004 era. The joined issues' themes included State Awards (2008), Railway Bridges of the Baltic States (2012), 25 Anniversary of the Baltic Way (2014), and 25 Anniversary of the Baltic Assembly (2016) series. The joined issues emphasized the connection between the three states that are enhanced by the common patterns of development in the XX century, transportation facilities that unite the states and enhance mobility, the history of showing solidarity while facing the external enemy, and institutionalized collaborative effort. In that case, the joined issues reinforce the regional identity elements while referring both to the past and present, combining the collective memory with a shared view of the future, something that Renan viewed as an essential attribute of a nation. Yet, in this context, those aspects identify three nations (figure 9).

Figure 9

Estonian part of the joined issue for the 25th anniversary of the Baltic Way



Identical design of the stamps produced as a joined issue promotes the sense on unity and ensures that people form different background can related to the same symbolism.

3.4 Concluding summary

Based on the results of the postage iconography analysis, several ways of promoting the national identity of selected states were identified. The first biggest contribution of postage iconography was to assist in elevating the status of national languages, which served as one of the key factors uniting the nation. Since the early stage of Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian sovereignty, postage stamps served as the promoters of national symbols bearing the depictions of national coats of arms. Manifestation of national coat of arms complemented by the usage of national language is the prime example of how ethnosymbolism got represented in the selected iconography. In the case of Estonia and Lithuania, maps appeared on stamp, showing the national boundaries, which was an essential national attribute according to Anderson, and also reflecting collective memory. All states issued commemorative stamps celebrating the tenth anniversary of Independence in 1928, celebrating the sovereignty and promoting national pride.

Due to the dismal political climate in the region at the end of World War One, all states iconographies preserved varied reflections of the war for Independence. Latvian stamps provided vivid illustrations for the essential battles that took place during the Independence War. Collective traumas were used as a tool of creating solidarity within the nation, and the state's personification reflected the shared vision of the future. Lithuania manifested its

revisionist foreign policy regarding Vilnius on postage stamps utilizing maps. Estonia also utilized maps to identify the state borders without any foreign policy projections.

Once the Baltic States experienced a transition to authoritarian regimes (LT 1926, LV 1934, EE 1934), the portrait of the dictator became a more prevalent element of the postage iconography, making the head of the state perform the role of the national symbol and incorporating his personality in collective memory. The shift towards authoritarian regime also reveals the cluster of references to primordial nationalism, as commemorative stamps celebrated anniversaries of people and places that existed before the states became sovereign.

Approaching the national coats of arms on Estonia, Latvian, and Lithuanian postage stamps from an ethnosymbolist perspective would reveal peculiar patterns of heraldic tradition adopted by the states, where Lithuania claimed the heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and appropriated the medieval state symbols. The bonds with the Grand Duchy remained a core of national symbolism depicted during all three eras, demonstrating a strong iconographic tradition. At the same time, Latvia synthesized the new coat of arms based on the subnational heraldic elements of the past, while Estonia utilized heraldry of the XIV century. In all cases, the postage stamps iconography reflected the symbols, institutionally approved by the governments.

The discourses were severely altered after 1991 when Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania regained independence from the USSR. While the national coat of arms was still dominant on definitive stamps, as a matter of eradicating the Soviet-enforced symbolism, the iconography became more democratized. States utilized stamps to demonstrate their cooperation with international organizations such as WWF. International sports events attracted the small states with an opportunity to promote the nation, so Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania began to issue commemorative stamps for all of the Olympic Games. The list of heritage included in the cultural landscape got significantly expanded and included more architectural heritage.

Commemorative practices also got expanded and applied to historical figures besides the former heads of state. What is more, the traditional costumes series introduced a broader representation of ethnic motifs in iconography. The Baltic States began the practice of issues joined to stamps based on the shared elements of identity. This development promoted regional identity formation based on close economic, historical, and geographical ties.

Obtaining EU membership did not substantially affect the postage stamps iconography of the selected states. The majority of trends, which started in the 1990s, continued after 2004,

including the practice of producing joined issues that celebrate the common heritage of three states. The only significant change in promoting European identity that took place in the 2000s was the formation of EUROPA series stamps, which brought together the majority of European states in an attempt to celebrate the shared heritage and cultivate cross-cultural exchange.

As for the role of political developments in iconography, based on the identified trends, it is possible to conclude that the transition to authoritarian regimes in the Baltic States led to the popularization of the dictators' depictions on stamps and a search for primordial national heritage. Liberation from the foreign rulers represented by Russian Empire and the USSR was followed by a massive emission of stamps with national coats of arms, as that was a way of manifesting national identity via practicing banal nationalism.

Once the states became independent, they decided to participate in or avoid international organizations. All three states demonstrated active cooperation with international organizations both during the interwar period and after regaining independence. However, it was only after experiencing solidarity in resisting the Soviet Union that the Baltic States started to produce joined issues, celebrating the common heritage.

Overall, the research demonstrated how the postage iconography of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania reflected the political and social climate changes that took place over the three distinct periods. The interwar period represented the most vivid cluster since the transition to authoritarian regimes was well articulated in postage stamps iconography, similar to the collective trauma associated with World War One. Constructing a national identity based on joined symbolism, a sense of solidarity, and shared collective memory is what characterizes the early stages of the Baltic States' independence.

The second independence of the Baltic States represented a more peculiar case of swift integration into a globalized world, where nationalism got represented via the succession of the first sovereignty symbolism and active nation branding on international scale. Nevertheless, the democratization of the postage iconography on the domestic level and the first steps toward promoting the Baltic States' identity via the joined issues are the two developments that represent a continuous process that may change its path in the future. Yet, it is possible to claim that the process of European integration is reflected on stamps parallel to the commemoration of particular national heritage. Therefore the reflection of both civic and ethnic nationalism can be found in the contemporary iconography of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

4 Conclusion

This work investigated the usage of postage stamps iconography in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania for promoting nation-based narratives within the framework of banal nationalism. The study approached dominant trends in the postage stamps iconography of the selected states throughout different periods of political development and revealed repetitive patterns of depicted symbols in each of them. The lack of comparative research on banal nationalism in the selected states represented a research gap that this research aimed to fulfill, selecting postage stamps iconography as the source of analysis.

Within this research, a database of 3069 stamps issued in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania between 1918-1940 and 1991-2018 was compiled, allocating stamps into themed categories and clusters using MCDA based on the imagery and catalog inscription. The repetitive patterns in postage stamps iconography were then analyzed within the political context of the correspondent era. The separation of clusters based on eras was motivated by the political developments in the states. The interwar period (1918-1940) included several subthemes. The rise of young democracies showed intense manifestation of national symbolism in the new states that were rediscovering their identities. The later stage of the interwar period, characterized by an authoritarian shift, illustrated the dominance of censorship and the head of state promotion. The second independence period (1991-2004) depicted a path of restoring the iconographic traditions of the states and manifested their attempt to integrate into the global community. The EU membership period (2004-2018) demonstrated the development patterns of iconography once Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania became members of the European Union, embracing the European identity parallel to national.

The main postage stamp iconography themes used to construct and popularize the national discourses of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania varied with attachments to the era. All three states introduced a long-lasting tradition of depicting coats of arms. This trend included both national coats of arms as a manifestation of sovereignty and subnational coats of arms, providing representation to smaller entities within the state and developing a system of meaning available to the national members. The authoritarian transition revealed the enhanced appearance of the heads of the state in iconography. Their portrait was incorporated in states' celebrations, embedding the role of a dictator into collective memory. This process was less vivid in Estonian iconography.

The 1930s was also the time when the investigation and manifestation of the primordial national heritage thrived, exploring the national historiography beyond the sovereign period. With the restoration of independence after 1991, the trend to explore the primordial heritage and expand manifested iconography persisted. Stamp iconography became more inclusive, incorporating a greater selection of elements of the national cultural landscape. Simultaneously, new trends emerged and got represented by a wider commemoration of individuals and broader collaboration with international organizations. Another crucial development in the iconography of the second independence is the beginning of the region's identity formation, signified by the production of the joined issues by Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The trends remained consistent after the selected states joined the EU with an additional introduction of the EUROPA series that promoted shared values among European states.

The political developments within the state and participation in supranational organizations affected the postage stamps iconography of the Baltics States in several ways. Gaining independence from a metropole state both times got represented by the massive issuing of national symbols on the definitive stamps and utilizing commemorative stamps to celebrate anniversaries of liberation. This way, postage iconography does reflect both the symbolic part of the national identity and shared collective memory within the states. The authoritarian era of the Baltic States was signified by the frequent appearance of the dictator's portraits on stamps, turning them into yet another national symbol, which was supposed to justify their right to reign. The European integration after the second independence affected the diversity of the depicted symbols and promoted broadening the national cultural landscape's representation both for domestic and foreign audiences. Simultaneously, the series promoted regional and European identities were launched, and Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania actively utilized both of them to enhance solidarity beyond the borders.

The present research identified the dominant patterns in Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian iconography in relation to banal nationalism practices. The results of the analysis revealed that the postage stamps iconography is sensitive towards oppression, both internal and external. Despite the skeptical claims that the postal service would die out with the emergence of the Internet and postage stamp would follow, the number of stamp variations produced by the Baltic States have been increasing since 1991. These dynamics show that postage stamp iconography could remain a valuable tool of comparative analysis in the future, as it represents a continuous tradition.

The results of the current research demonstrated that postage stamp iconography contains elements valuable to multidisciplinary research. Comparing trends in iconography is only one part of approaching the state's historiography and symbolism, but it represents a peculiar means of analysis. Within the framework of banal nationalism, this work identified several practices shared by Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian iconography. It is possible that a case-study approach may reveal a more detailed and nuanced review of iconographic trends in each state analyzed separately. This is one of the potential developments revealed by the outcome of the current work. Moreover, the foreigner's view on the banal nationalism practices might not be too profound, and future studies might be conducted by groups, which would include the analyzed nation's representative, to emphasize the difference between the perspectives. There are multiple alternative ways this data could be approached, as the themes depicted on stamps are great in their variety, especially the contemporary ones.

Overall, this research identified the trends in Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian iconographies with the connection to banal nationalism and provided a reflection on the iconography's development throughout different periods of independence of the selected states.

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