

## **The social and political situation in Europe and Estonia in the beginning of 17-century**

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Dear Friends!

I am honoured to speak in this conference on Estonia, Baltic Sea and Europe in XVI – XVII centuries. Discussing and describing Estonian history we often forget that to understand what really happened here – in Estonia – we must know significantly better not only Baltic but European history as well.

Secondly, describing Europe and its neighbours, like Russia, historians are quite often not making difference between them. At the same time was Russian policy determined not by the same principles than Europe – ideology, religion, markets, trade – but by the wish of Russian czars to rule bigger and bigger territories or please their own complexes or desires.

Basing our short overview on those two principles we must first describe Europe as it was in the XVI century. It was a time of the biggest changes. Some big powers started to go down, new superpowers emerged. Dividing line layed here in the start of reformation, which started from attempts to reform the catholic church and was then used by secular powers in their purposes.

At Speyer in 1536 famous formula “Cuius regio, eius religio” (whoever rules has the right to determine the religion) was introduced.

To fight reformation catholic church started counter-reformation, which actually as the second stage of a movement for Church Reform (catholic church had a continous history of reformes in XIV century); The Society of Jesus was built up. The aims of Jesuits were to convert the heathen, to reconvert the lapsed and above all, to educate.

Livonia was in XVI century most normal and important part of Europe. The Baltic countries played a major role in expansion of international trade, above all as a supply area for the countries of Western Europe. Europe was starting to explore the World, Mexico was conquered, enormous amount of ships had to be built. The Baltic areas were of fundamental importance for a ship-building industry’s demand for naval stores. Timber, flax, hamp, pitch, tar and wax – all these were needed for ships. From the XVI century corn started to play significant role for consumption areas in West-Europe – a considerable proportion of wares trade passed in those days through Helsingör in Danish hand.

Those markets and trade lines were for the long time controlled by strong Teutonic Orden. In the XV century Teutonic Orden was under pressure of various quarters. At the beginning of XVI century foundations of Teutonic Orden were shaken by the

reformation. Teutonic Orden was secularized and lost thereby the meaning of its existence. The power vacuum in the Baltics was strengthened by the big Baltic trade cities – specially Riga and Reval – not looking for cooperation with other European countries and following only their own interests.

Hope to manage by it's own between emerging superpowers was ofcourse doomed from the beginning. During the XV – XVI century there was a powerful consolidation of Muscovite empire, after the new czar of Russia Ivan IV, called the Terrible, has finished his attacks to the cost and conquered Kasan, he started preparations for attacking the West. In this moment the so-called human factor started to change European history. Poland-Lithuania was in XVI century one of the largest countries in Europe. In the world of growing religious intolerance Poland-Lithuania occupied a place apart. At the same time that cardinal Hoziusz, president of the Council of Trent, was introducing the Jesuits, Poland was receiving by the statute of permanent and universal toleration all manner of religious refugees from all Europe.

At the same time non-violent counterreformation, developing through teaching and explaining was very succesful. In lot of places, as in Lithuania, it based on the work of Jesuits and on their collegiums, by example in Vilnius 1579.

In this period of history Poland could rightly boast of it's role as the bulwark of Christendom against Turk and Tartar and as Europe's prime haven of toleration.

This ofcourse did not make Poland very popular among it's neighbours, specially in Russia. On the great Russian monastery at Zagorsk, near Moscow, a commemorative tablet underlines the popular Russian view of the counter-reformation: "Typhus – Tartars – Poles – Three plagues".

Polish king Sigismund August did not have children, but many sisters. Katharina Jegelonica rejected proposals of nearly all rulers of Europe and married in 1561 Duke Johan of Finland. Ivan IV was furious. In negotiations with Erik XIV the czar was prepared to make consessions with Erik, if he would hand over to him Duke Johan's wife Katharina.

In 1570 war started between Sweden and Russia. Sigismund died on 7. July 1572 and after this some Polish circles had plans for Johan III to obtain Polish crown. But Swedish candidate was unsuccessful and Henry of Volais was elected.

But in the same Year he left the country to succeed Charles IX in France. New elections had to be held and after his marriage to Anna Jegellonica – Stephan Bathory emerged victorious.

On 21. October 1578 Poles and Swedes defeated Russians by Wenden.

Stephan Bathory conquered Polotsk, and moved in the summer of 1581 towards Pskov. The Popes envoy, Antonio Possevino, presented himself to the czar and in 1582 Zapolski peace threaty was signed: Russia gived to Poland all Livonia.

Sweden conquered North-Estonia.

Sigismund was elected to Polish king, but 1600 rejected in Sweden and replaced by his uncle Duke Carl IX.

1600-1601 attacks were launched against Polish territories, but could not conquer Riga.

Poland started conquered back most of lost territories 1605 in Kirkholm.

What to say in conclusion? What can we learn from all this?

- 1) We are and have been more connected with Europe than we think.
- 2) If Europe is divided and not united – serious problems arise.
- 3) If Estonia or Latvia – or other bordercountries of Europe and Russia – are not trying to make a clear choice between two of them, they will create a power-vacuum and go down, sooner or later.
- 4) Human factor – it means human feelings, hate, love – can play bigger role in history than we sometimes expect. Because the biggest among all is love.