
Interview: Paulis Klavins

Most Latvians live below the poverty line

Mr. Klavins is a member of the Latvian Parliament and State Secretary in the Defense Ministry. He was among the speakers at the conference on "The Heritage of Dictatorship and Domestic Peace," during which he gave an interview to Angelika Beyreuther-Raimondi.

EIR: You said in your speech that your country is dying.

Klavins: Yes, that is the statistics. They prove that the death rate in recent years, is twice the birth rate. The general economic situation affords only a small percentage of our people a secure income and well-being: These are businessmen, entrepreneurs, and people who earn large (and perhaps undeserved) income from state-run firms. But 80% of the people live below the subsistence level, and a large number of them are pensioners or handicapped. Also in this category, are the people who do not work in factories, that is the entire educational workforce—all teachers are underpaid—the medical professionals—from doctors to nurses—as well as the judges. That causes problems in the courts; there are too few jurists, not all judges' positions are filled. Good lawyers are not available in the district attorney's office or in the courts; they go into private practice.

EIR: How do the Russian economic sanctions affect you?

Klavins: At first, the Russians threatened economic sanctions. When they noticed that that was not appreciated by the West, they rescinded them quickly, but continued them in practice. It didn't operate through a ministry, but very simply, at the border, certain goods are not let in. So, you cannot import goods anymore. Or, other tricks are played: For instance, all documents must be notarized and presented in Russian, such international documents as drivers licenses, customs documents, and so on. And so, with these things, one can affect whole areas of the economy, which, of course, causes unrest in the country. And, it affects the Russian-speaking population, many of whom work in the factories. One could survey exactly who is being affected by these sanctions. . . .

And why? Even during the Tsars, there was a Russification policy. During 50 years of Soviet occupation, the Latvian population was culled by deportations; many, of course, were killed in the war, or fled east or west, or overseas. And, now by the artificial industrialization: Latvia is an agricultural country; in spite of the fact that it was economically irrational,

factories were built, such that everything had to be brought in from outside—energy, raw materials, and manpower. That is completely uneconomical, but thereby one could increase the Russian population, and what they did was to increase the population of Russian-speaking peoples from Russia, Ukraine, and Byelorussia to 46%, and reduce the Latvian population to 54%; of the Russian-speakers, 30% are from Russia, and the rest from the other republics. Russian was supposed to be the dominant language, which it was until independence. Now we see that it is Russian policy that these people should be recognized as citizens. But, among those who are eligible to be naturalized citizens, only 7% elect to do so. . . .

EIR: What is the situation with the secret police records in the three Baltic states?

Klavins: The situation with the records is as follows: The KGB transferred documents from Estonia and Latvia to Russia as early as 1988-89. What remained in Latvia, is in Riga, that is a file of agents; that is, "agents" is the designation for unofficial collaborators, who are compelled or who signed on. We don't have their working files, so we can't tell what they did or didn't do. Anyone can file a request and find out whether he was listed as an agent or not. We cannot say, who betrayed whom; that is not possible at this time.

In Lithuania, there were more KGB files left over, and the Lithuanian state spends more money for the documentation center, and to employ more people in the processing. . . .

EIR: You also talked about the change of elites in your country.

Klavins: The change came about through many factors. First of all was the economic heart attack in the Soviet Union, in the centralized economy, which all countries went through. Secondly was Gorbachov's realization that the state could no longer be held together by force, that one must allow the possibility of free thought and free discourse, that is, perestroika and glasnost.

An important factor on our side was what our citizens have suffered. The fuse were the dissidents, who immediately uttered thoughts about independence, at first, not as political demands, but rather in memory of the victims of Stalinism. . . .

When independence was achieved, and the elections for the Supreme Soviet brought the People's Front to power, when the Latvians, and also the Russians, the old citizens who had striven for independence, as these people came into power, then the first stage was reached; so that one could begin to change the laws, and achieve independence and self-determination. This was not yet completed, when it was almost lost again, had the August 1991 putsch succeeded. Only after the final collapse of the putsch was independence de facto achieved. Only afterwards did we establish the Defense Ministry. The first elections in an independent state were conducted in 1993. . . .