The Baltic Sea Region
Cultures, Politics, Societies
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1. The legacy of Rome

Pax Romana and the civilisation that gave the name to the world order in antiquity never included the Baltic Region within its boundaries, the limes, but the cultural impact was crucial and pervasive. With the introduction of Christendom, Roman civilisation came to the Baltic Region. In the contemporary era, Pax Americana is equally crucial and American civilisation equally pervasive as the original Roman civilisation once was. Wall Street in New York, the centre of American and of world capitalism, and the White House and Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., i.e., the sites of the American President and Congress, respectively, dominate Europe in general and the Baltic Region also militarily and culturally. American English is the main common language, American customs, lifestyles and values permeate society. The scholarly world and the world of business are almost totally Anglified. This is not only a contemporary counterpart to antiquity and Latinisation. There are also elements of continuity, because American civilisation ultimately goes back to Rome. It is not a coincidence that the founders of the United States of America named the site of Congress Capitol Hill. The architecture of the official buildings in the capital is typical of their epochs, but it is also reminiscent of antiquity. After all, neo-classicism also refers to Rome.

In the early 21st century, economically, militarily and culturally the Baltic Region is part of the American empire. All the states that surround the Baltic Sea are distinct political entities, most of the people do not identify with the American empire, and huge numbers of people actively detest it. Nevertheless, they live in its very real shadow. However, Americanisation is difficult to come to terms with for people used to talking about “historical roots”, “path dependence” and “cultural identity”. These concepts refer to uniqueness, to the notion that states can be viewed as closed systems with peculiar characteristics. “Roots” and “path” are concepts that suggest causality in history and that there is a straight, isolated line from an opaque beginning to a clear contemporary end.

So at the end of this story, it is necessary to return to the question: what to make of history, how to use it, what to learn from it?
Sonderweg and Path Dependence

Thus, to “explain” the emergence and triumph of Nazism, German historians coined the expression “Sonderweg” (“special road”). Likewise, in order to “explain” why both the Soviet order and post-Russian society have not adapted to the Western legal and political order, some economists have borrowed a concept from a theory about the effects of choices of certain technologies for the formation of steady patterns of interaction among people and talked about “path dependence”. Whereas both concepts have metaphorical value and may serve as plausible “explanations” of “deviation” from “natural” rules for societal development, they do not have any explanatory value at all. Such “explanations” are ex post facto, i.e., constructed in order to make sense of history. Their ideological impact is tremendous. In common sense thinking, we do believe in historical causes and in historically rooted differences between… Yes, between what? Between “civilisations”? “Cultures”? Ethnic categories? States? Regions? Cities?

2. What is history?

History is about facts, monuments, records and institutions. Historiography is about giving sense to facts, constructing meaning, creating a time dimension to concepts such as economy, politics, culture and society. Myth is about history as origin, fate and destiny. Its mode of expression is rites and rituals. The present is made meaningful because it is perceived as a bridge which links the future with a past that has foreboded it. “Sonderweg” and “path dependence” are mythological concepts in scientific disguise.

Usually, history is understood as narration, as storytelling. Naturally, historical narration is about actors, processes and societies. It must necessarily build upon facts, but it must also contain elements of mythological thinking to “make sense”. In the eighteenth century, two different modes of conceptualisation and presentation of history were launched with regard to whom should be regarded as collective actors and whose collective memory should be written down. In Montesquieu’s philosophy of society we find the idea that climate and urbanisation, i.e., nature and civilisation, condition social practices and politics and forge collective identities. In Herder’s philosophy, the organising principle is the notion that humankind consists of separate ethnic communities on the basis of language, Völker. Montesquieu’s object is territory, a state with citizens, whereas Herder’s is kinship. The crucial difference when it comes to narration is that according to the philosophy of Montesquieu, territory and civilisation come first and the development of a shared identity on the basis of collective memory second, whereas according to the principle laid down by Herder, a shared identity based upon collective memory comes first and territory second. One may say that in Montesquieu, the state is the given and thus the natural object of historiography, whereas in Herder, the people as an ethnic community is given and thus the natural object of historiography. History is assumed to be respectively about France, i.e., a state structure, and about the Germans, i.e., a hereditary linguistic community of people. Our view of history has been formed by both traditions. The tradition from the Enlightenment is rational, civic and forward-looking. The tradition from Romanticism is emotional, ethnic and backward-looking. The first enables us to explain why certain things have happened and why certain processes resulted in certain structures. The second imputes meaning to what happened and creates a collective memory of the past. It gives meaning to history.

Officially, the Soviet project was rational, civic and forward-looking. In practice, however, it was historicist, irrational and reactionary. Contemporaries both within and outside the boundaries of the Soviet Union were confused because on the one hand the picture was one of
technological progress and modernisation, and on the other hand public life was characterised by archaic religious rites, superstition and aesthetic anti-modernism. The Soviet leaders as well as a majority of Western scholars took it for granted anyhow that the Soviet Union was a sustainable state. Until the changes brought about by Gorbachev’s policies, neither ethnic nationalism nor history seemed to be important factors.

3. The metaphorical curtain of iron and die Mauer of concrete

The Iron Curtain was an expression that was used as early as 1920 to characterise the boundary of Soviet Russia (Brusewitz 1920). The concept won general recognition through Winston Churchill’s use of it in a speech in Fulton, Missouri, in 1946. It became the symbolic image of the partition between East and West. Its real image was the wall through Berlin, which was erected by the East German government on August 13, 1961.

Die Mauer was a very old-fashioned wall made of bricks, concrete and barbed wire, although it was equipped with sophisticated surveillance and killing facilities. The builders bragged that it was the most advanced border in the world. Its official name was “The Anti-Fascist Protection Wall” ("Die Antifaschistische Schützmauer"). When it was opened and demolished in 1989, the political and symbolic impact on most Europeans was great. It was not just a killing device which was demolished, but the partition not only of Germany but also of Europe and of course of the Baltic Region was finished. Björn Engholm’s ideas about the New Hansa seemed to have been vindicated by history. The idea was widely accepted that a sense of a regional Baltic identity could be created by invoking history, by interpreting the past as a shared memory for the people in all the states surrounding the Baltic Sea. “Roots”, “paths” and “culture” became popular words in political language.

However, with the possibilities of a new Baltic order opening, the inherent conflict between Enlightenment and Romanticism as formative concepts in our thinking about history became manifest. Would there be a shared and common Baltic history to recall, or would there be many national histories that, moreover, may be intellectually and emotionally incompatible with one another? Many political actors sought arguments and inspiration from the divided past, whereas others looked to the common future. The Baltic University Programme is forward-looking and axiomatically placing territory first and ethnicity second. It is a clear choice of the rational, civic tradition of the Enlightenment or even what has been known as post-modernism. Here the implication is that history is composed from facts and processes from diverse epochs and territories according to the principle of “soft ecologism”, i.e., that sustainability in the future is an aim consciously to work for. Accordingly, there is an ideological use of history in the respect that all the peoples living in the drainage area, which is a suitable entity for a project that aims at enhancing the protection of the natural environment from pollution, should be induced to feel and realise that they have this common task and thus belong together. This post-modern Baltic Region is designed as a definitive post-war region.
Fissures in the Soviet Empire

Kristian Gerner

The Soviet Union was one of the victor states in World War II. Its official ideology was Marxism-Leninism. This worldview dictated the foreign policy of Stalin. After the defeat of Nazi Germany, the United States was perceived by Stalin as the leading representative of capitalist imperialism. In order to prepare the Soviet Union for the next war, Stalin consolidated his grip on the states which were allotted to the Soviet sphere of influence at the Yalta and Potsdam conferences in 1945. By 1948, communist regimes controlled by the Soviet Union had been installed in East Central Europe. In the Baltic Region, Poland became properly communist in December 1948, when the Social Democrats were united with the Communists in the Polish United Workers’ Party. On 7 October 1949, the Soviet occupational zone in Germany became the German Democratic Republic. Also in this country, the Social Democrats were united with the Communists in the Socialist Unity Party of Germany.

Poland and the GDR were not incorporated into the Soviet Union. However, Stalin had them moulded in the Soviet form, the one-party system, the planned economy and ideological regimentation according to the tenets of Marxism-Leninism. The period up to the dissolution of the Soviet empire in 1989 was marked by conflicts between Polish and German society, on the one hand, and the Soviet leadership and their satraps, on the other.

National political traditions. Although the GDR emerged from the ruins of the Nazi dictatorship and although Poland had seen authoritarian rule between 1926 and 1939 and had then been occupied by the Nazis and the Soviets, in both countries there were national political traditions which differed significantly from the Soviet model. Above all, both Germans and Poles had experience and memories of a civic society. In both societies, there was contempt for the Russians, who were felt to be less developed. The behaviour of the Red Army soldiers in 1944-1945 both in Germany, which was defeated and occupied, and in Poland, which was liberated, served to reinforce these attitudes.

Stalin died in 1953. His successors changed the foreign policy doctrine from total confrontation with the Western powers to peaceful co-existence, which implied that contacts with the West were allowed. Concerning internal policies, there was a shift from outright terrorism and one-sided stress on the armaments industry towards dialogue with the subjects and production of consumer goods. The problem was that these changes were interpreted differently in the Soviet Union, the GDR and Poland. In the latter countries, the notion of a civic society came to life.

The first outbreak of local discontent with the Soviet Union came a mere four months after the death of Stalin. On 17 June 1953, workers in the capital of the GDR, Berlin, went on strike and arranged political demonstrations of protest against the regime and its continued Stalinist policies. Some trade unionists were active protesters as well. Both the East German and the new Soviet leaders understood the protests as a lethal threat to the whole Soviet empire. The Berlin uprising was violently crushed by military means, the German trade unions purged and strict Soviet control enforced. In 1961, East Berlin was effectively sealed off from West Berlin through the erection of the Berlin Wall. The GDR was to remain a crude post-Stalinist dictatorship until 1989.

In Poland, the waves of protest against Soviet rule and the Soviet social system were to return over and over again. In contrast to conditions in the GDR, where the local rulers knew that they lacked political legitimacy because the subjects were aware of a better alternative in the Federal Republic of Germany and realised that they had to obey Moscow, in Poland there was an unclear line of division between the local rulers and oppositional forces. The former even had some feeling of being Polish first and communists second.

Poland remained a communist dictatorship until 1989, but it was a soft dictatorship. Political discontent could not be articulated and aggregated in a democratic way through a free press, free and secret elections and the formation of independent political parties. Instead there developed a pattern of political cycles or “waves”. The discontent was
articulated in the form of strikes and demonstrations, and the rulers answered by giving in to some of the demands. Leaders were shifted from “conservative” to “liberal”, but the one-party system remained. Society became more liberal, but new causes of discontent emerged as the next generation of leaders became complacent. This was the case from 1956 to 1989.

The sequence was:

- 1956, demonstrations of workers in Poznan against low wages and high prices, put down by force. This was followed by protests of intellectuals against political and cultural repression, of peasants against collectivisation, and from the Catholic church against persecution. The party leadership changed, workers’ councils were permitted, collectivisation was halted and Cardinal Wyszynski was set free.

- 1968, demonstrations of students and intellectuals in Warsaw against the curtailment of cultural freedom. The demonstrations were put down by force – workers’ militia – their leaders imprisoned and a campaign of anti-Semitism – “anti-Zionism” – released. No change in the party leadership.

- 1970, demonstrations of workers in Gdańsk, Gdynia and Szczecin against low wages and high prices, put down by force. However, the party leadership changed and liberal reforms were introduced.

- 1976, demonstrations of workers in Radom and in Ursus in Warsaw against low wages and high prices, put down by force. However, intellectuals with their roots in 1956 and 1968, organised committees to assist and help the persecuted workers and their families, called the KOR. Underground activities increased, including the organisation of an independent trade union movement in 1980.

Solidarity

The Solidarity movement appeared in Poland in 1980. In the early summer, a worker at the Lenin shipyard in Gdańsk, Anna Walentynowicz, was dismissed from her job on political grounds. A peaceful strike of protest was arranged. It was organised by the Independent Trade Union Solidarity. Its local leader was an electrician at the shipyard, Lech Wałęsa.

The strike continued, spread to other places and developed into a countrywide movement of protest against political repression, bad social conditions and the anti-Church policy of the communist government. The shipyard in Gdańsk was transformed into a centre of oppositional forces. Because it was politically and ideologically impossible for the regime to resort to violent means and attack the shipyard with military forces, it had to negotiate with the strikers. A necessary precondition for this outcome was that the communist leadership was split. The reformist forces gained the upper hand.

Solidarity was recognised by the government as a legitimate counterpart. On 31 August, an agreement was reached in Gdańsk between the two parties, the 21 points. The right of the trade union to organise the workers was recognised as well as a number of rights and freedoms concerning social conditions, expression and the activity of the Catholic Church.

Theoretically, Solidarity was a non-political movement. However, in practice it not only assumed the role of democratic political opposition to the communist regime. It also emerged as a wholly alternative polity, encompassing both industrial workers and peasants, intellectuals and the clergy. By late 1980, it was estimated that Solidarity counted close to ten million members, one million of which came from the communist party, which counted three million members in all.

Solidarity meant a breakthrough for the forces of civil society. An alliance came into place, which had been formed in 1976 between protesting industrial workers and their dissident intellectual supporters, who organised the KOR movement. Among the latter were Jacek Kuron, Karol Modzelewski and Adam Michnik. The former two were veterans of the leftist opposition of the late 1950s, whereas Michnik had emerged as a political dissident in the 1968 student movement.

Solidarity’s success lay in a combination of a comparatively moderate political programme, an elaborated strategic goal, and skilful tactical moves. The intellectuals managed to bridge the gap to the workers by recognising the Catholic faith of the latter, at the same time as they channelled emotions in a democratic direction through a strong emphasis on local self-government and autonomy for different groups. A link was forged with the tradition of workers’ councils from the Polish October of 1956.
The Solidarity movement was based upon an ideology of Catholicism, social justice, democracy and legality. It represented a majority of politically conscious Poles. Its rise pointed to the demise of communist rule. That is why it was repressed by force by the government under communist party leader Jaruzelski on 13 December 1981. However, when the new Soviet leader Gorbachev made it clear that the Soviet Union would allow Poland to choose a democratic way, communist rule was doomed. Solidarity's leaders could work out a scheme for Poland's peaceful transition to democracy, and the government acquiesced. In early 1989, the round table negotiations in the Staszic Palace in Warsaw led to an agreement on democratic elections in June. This was a victory for the Solidarity movement. Communist rule came to a peaceful end in Poland.

4. Applying history and building social capital

The history of the Baltic Region is thus history in the Baltic Region. The Baltic Region is viewed as an arena for historical events and processes, as a space, where certain social structures have been built. However, there are a number of events and processes in the past to select from. The criterion of relevance must be to choose and concentrate on those memories of the past that may be instrumental in constructing a sense of community, a Baltic collective memory with a potential for contemporary and future identity-building. Here lurks the Romanticist tradition. In a certain sense, history strikes back. In the social sciences, theory-building and concept-formation come first and empirical facts second. This means that in principle, the scholar is aware of making choices when selecting historical facts. For the facts to make sense, they must be brought under concepts and placed into theories about correlations and causes. However, because historical facts represent events and processes that really took place in the past, concepts may be understood as real. Thus social science concepts may be treated as facts, as historical agents, as has been discussed above concerning “Sonderweg” and “path dependence”.

The popular concept of social capital is closely related to the concepts of learning, acculturation, socialisation and training, but also to the notion of collective identities rooted in history. It is a vague and nebulous concept. Introducing the concept, American sociologist James Coleman mentioned that the main point was the interconnection between the individual and society: “The function identified by the concept of “social capital” is the value of these aspects of social structure to actors as resources that they can use to achieve their interests” (Coleman 1988).

The borderline may easily be blurred between denotation and normative stipulations. There are different possible ways of operationalisation, i.e., of applying the concept on history. In this context, the concept should be understood as a generalisation of Western European experiences of the creation and maintenance of a civic society. It is defined partly by opposition to its alternative, the clan or tribe society. Social capital has the connotation of reason, contract and cooperation, whereas clan and tribe denote emotional and biological bonds, subservience and obedience. We note that here we have a case of the opposition between Enlightenment and Romanticism. On the other hand, the concept of soft ecologism contains components from both the scientific Enlightenment tradition and the religious Romanticist tradition, because sustainability has the connotation of eschatology or at least utopia; it belongs partly in the natural sciences, in reason, and partly in the religious world, in emotions. It is a non-confessional acknowledgement of the idea that “man does not live of bread alone”.

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5. Russia's different way

Russia, not least under the guise of Soviet socialism in 1917-1991, has refused to adapt to Western “normality”. Well before the demise of the Soviet Union, some Soviet scholars pointed to a basic characteristic in Russian tradition, related to the encounter between Russian and Western European cultures of their different origins. Thus, in a classic text, well known to scholars in the field of Russian culture, Soviet culturologists Yurii Lotman and Boris Uspenskii once wrote:

Russian culture in the medieval period was dominated by a different value orientation. Duality and the absence of a neutral axiological sphere led to a conception of the new not as a continuation, but as a total eschatological change. — Under such circumstances, the dynamic process of historical change has a fundamentally different character: change occurs as a radical negation of the preceding state. The new does not arise out of a structurally “unused” reserve, but results from a transformation of the old, a process of turning it inside out. Thus, repeated transformations can in fact lead to the regeneration of archaic forms. (Lotman, Uspenskii 1985)

In numerous works, Lotman and Uspenskii demonstrated that Russian culture did not represent a simple continuation of Byzantine culture, but also developed in opposition to it, in the manner described in the quotation above. Moreover, they demonstrated how the process repeated itself with Peter’s reforms in the early eighteenth century. A third instance was provided by the changes brought about by Lenin and Stalin in the twentieth century (Gerner 1986). Thus we have an explicit case of the thesis of a Russian Sonderweg or special path. It is certainly informative as an interpretation of the “meaning” of Russian history. If people believe in it and interpret it to imply the fate and destiny of Russia today, it may even have material consequences according to the Dorothy and William Isaac Thomas theorem which says: “If men define things as real, they become real in their consequences.” It is rather close at hand to interpret Russian developments after the introduction of the so-called shock therapy, i.e., the introduction of a market economy in 1991, as the consequence of external influence and reaction against the preceding social order.

The Russian historian Yurii Kagramanov has compared the Soviet experience with two major examples of an exogenous modernisation programme that failed in a downtrodden peasant society: Vendée in France and Sicily in Italy. Vendée was the province where resistance to the revolutionaries in Paris was strongest in the 1790s, and Sicily successfully resisted the northern Italian forces of democratisation, law and entrepreneur capitalism, not least during the regionalisation programme after 1970. In both cases an intermediary, a native bourgeoisie and trust in the legal state were missing. Primitive peasant society was directly confronted with the urban forces of modernisation (Schama 1989). Regarding the comparison between Russia and Sicily, Kagramanov observes: “... we find a great nearness in peasant psychology, and when we follow how it was fragmented, we discover significant parallels: the mafiasation of Sicilian society corresponds approximately to the mafiasation of Russian society in a period when trust in all universal values began to fall swiftly” (Kagramanov 1995).

In contemporary Russia, according to Kagramanov, mistrust in society is matched by disrespect for the value of the individual. The latter dimension may be viewed as a legacy from the Stalinist period of mass murder and its accompanying notion that the life of the individual is worthless (Kagramanov 1995). The reference is to the impact of a special shared memory, although it is of course not possible to argue that the past as such has caused what is going on in contemporary Russia. Furthermore, it would take comparative analyses with other post-Soviet societies and even with Western societies to validate the assertion that Russia is special concerning this “disregard” and how it materialises.
6. Europeanisation of Europe

The idea behind the shock therapy was to immediately introduce a market economy and spread and establish democracy and Western law – the so-called Rechtsstaat – in Russia in order to promote stability, peace and prosperity. A reviewer of a book from – but not at all about – this period by the Welsh historian Robert Bartlett with the title *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950-1350*, pointed out that the adequate title should be “The Expansion of Some Aspects of Western Europe in the Middle Ages” (Christiansen 1993). If we treat “Europe” not as a geographical but as a normative concept with the connotations of Latin Christian culture and all that goes with it in the political, economic and intellectual spheres even in the centuries after 1350, the criticism of the reviewer only adds to the significance of Bartlett’s own interpretation:

“The Europeanisation of Europe, in so far as it was indeed the spread of one particular culture through conquest and influence, had its core areas in one part of the continent, namely in France, Germany west of the Elbe and north Italy, regions which had a common history as part of Charlemagne's Frankish empire. — By the late medieval period Europe's names and cults were more uniform than they had ever been; Europe's rulers minted coins everywhere and depended upon chanceries; Europe's bureaucrats shared a common experience of higher education. This is the Europeanisation of Europe” (Bartlett 1993).

In the eyes of the chroniclers of the medieval Franks and Germans, the essential Europe was Western Europe. The mission of the Teutonic and Livonian Knights, the bishops and the monasteries was to civilise the Baltic Region. As we know, they were highly successful. Scandinavia and the eastern Baltic Region acquired Western Christendom and became incorporated in Roman civilisation. However, until Peter's reforms in the early eighteenth century, Russia remained outside this cultural sphere. After 1917, the pre-Petrine pattern was repeated as the Soviet Union isolated itself from the Western democracies.

During the Cold War the Iron Curtain thus took the place of the old cultural divide between East and West. For four decades, socio-economic development in eastern Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia was forced into the alien mould of Soviet society. Although the communists failed in their attempt to transform the societies concerned into perfect copies of Soviet Russia, a substantial “reformation” of a kind did take place. Both cities, buildings and institutions took on a special Soviet flavour in addition to the reconstruction of the economies, social life and politics. In spite of all difficulties, however, the Poles and the Balts in 1988-1989 quickly went back on the road, so to speak, towards reconstructing “normality” according to contemporary western standards but also according to what the actors perceived as the previous patterns of their own societies. The outcome was, evident ten years after the changeover, a new kind of society, neither Soviet nor Scandinavian, but a “post-modern” mixture of different life-styles.

7. Developments in Poland and Germany

In Poland, in some western and north-western counties and cities voters, local politicians and economic planners have revealed an interest in programs that would loosen Warsaw’s control and create a less centralised polity and strengthen economic cooperation with Germany and the European Union. One cannot discern any particular orientation towards the Baltic Region as such. It is relevant to note that historically, Poland has been directed towards Germany, East Central Europe and the Black Sea region rather than towards the Baltic
Region. The merchant cities on the Baltic littoral within the boundaries of contemporary Poland such as Stettin/Szczecin, Danzig/Gdańsk and Elbing/Elbląg were members of the Hanseatic league and oriented towards the German sphere in general. Of course, many Poles were active, but not as representatives of the Polish state. The cities in question and the local Pomeranian population of Kaszubians do relate to themselves as “Baltic”, but this may be interpreted as being of limited importance for the feeling of an eventual Baltic identity to emerge. It is rather a matter of bilateral communications across the Baltic Sea with Swedish cities such as Karlskrona, Kalmar and Nyköping.

On the border along the Neisse/Nysa and Oder/Odra rivers in the early 1990s Euroregions were formed. The idea was launched by the premier of the German Land Brandenburg. The aim was to attract attention from West Germany and the government in Bonn to the presumed development potential of the border zone. The regions were meant to create a focus for capital from West Germany and the labour force of West Poland, all to result in a booming local economy. Nothing much had resulted from all this ten years later. There is a well-functioning Viadrina University in Frankfurt an der Oder, but on the whole it is a matter of Polish students coming to Germany rather than German students learning Polish. (Viadrina is a Latinisation of Oder/Odra). There is also a well-developed cooperation between the frontier guards on the Polish and German sides of the Oder river against smugglers of tobacco, drugs, human beings and merchandise in general. However, it would be premature to speak of cross-border integration.

If we add to developments on Germany’s eastern borders recent developments on its north-western border, the picture becomes very complicated. Plans in Flensburg in Germany and Aabenraa in Denmark to create a Danish-German Euroregion with the name Schleswig/Slesvig have met with strong resistance from the local Danish population north of the state boundary. In opinion polls, roughly half of them have expressed a negative attitude. The reason given for the resistance towards further integration is fear of being swamped by rich Germans. Reminiscences of the German occupation of Denmark during World War II have been actualised and there have even been arguments to the effect that with the help of the new Euroregion, the Germans would re-conquer what they took in 1864 and had then to cede to Denmark as a result of the plebiscite in 1920. Similar concerns have been voiced in Poland, in this case with reference to the boundary changes in 1945.

8. Rethinking the Union of Lublin

In spite of the differences between the three Baltic states, they have one thing in common. The governments of them all have repeatedly expressed the ambition to join NATO and the EU. However, this common aim has not drawn the three states closer together. In the case of Lithuania the prospect of joining NATO promoted the idea that after seventy-five years of conflict with Poland regarding territorial and ethnic questions, the time had ripened for a Polish-Lithuanian detente. In 1994, the two states concluded an agreement of friendship and cooperation. The Vilna question was buried by not being mentioned. Speaking to the Polish sejm on 21 February 1997, the speaker of the Lithuanian Seimas, the renowned Sajudis leader, Lithuanian nationalist Vytautas Landsbergis, proposed the establishment of an interparliamentary commission. Cooperation between the two states was soon formalised through the creation of commissions that linked with one another the presidential chancelleries, the governments and the parliaments. The Union of Lublin in 1569 between the
Polish Crown and the Lithuanian Grand Duchy, the Polish-Lithuanian Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodów, may be revived, so to speak, with the small Lithuanian part allied with Poland but without any Belarusian and Ukrainian lands attached. Moreover, this is not primarily a matter of Polish expansion eastward, but rather of a Lithuanian tendency to approach Europe by way of Poland.

Landsbergis underlined the importance of the old traditional links between the two countries and stressed that Lithuania belonged to Central Europe rather than being a “Baltic” state (Karpinski 1997). Interviewed about his position, he had the following to say:

The Estonians stress certain things, while Lithuanian politicians stress other things, other geopolitical possibilities. Culturally, historically, and geographically, we are a Central European state. At the same time, we are a Baltic-region state. … Certain policies, such as our special relations with Poland, reflect this [reality] which is, perhaps, not the case with Estonia, but Estonia has special relations with Finland instead.

9. Scandinavisation of Estonia

Landsbergis’s assertions are historically well-founded as far as Lithuania is concerned. However, Estonia’s relationship to Finland is of quite another character, not as emotional and more based upon the fact that the Finnish language served, in the Soviet period, as a gateway to the west for Estonian intellectuals. It was possible to receive Finnish television in all northern Estonia, including the capital Tallinn. In order to understand the rather closely related Finnish language better, many Estonians acquired a working knowledge of Finnish. They were able constantly to compare Finnish and Soviet news reporting and to get an idea about life in a welfare state. However, one cannot speak of any “special relationship” between Finland and Estonia in the same sense as between Lithuania and Poland: the latter relation is more similar to the Swedish-Finnish relationship. The political impact of Landsbergis’s statement stemmed from the fact that it gave vent to the conviction that there was not any special common interest among the three Baltic states. We have noted earlier Poland’s analogous “tilt” to the centre of Europe by way of Euroregions on the border with Germany. It is not far-fetched to assume that Landsbergis’s idea of a new Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth grew out of the wish to let Lithuania join NATO and the EU by way of Poland. This would seem to be a safer way to gain alignment with the west than to be one of three “Baltic” states in a perpetual waiting-room.

On the other hand, after the prospect that opened up the possibility of their state becoming one of the first new members of the EU, Estonia’s political leaders have shown signs of trying to distance their country from the two other Baltic states. The argument is that Estonia is economically more advanced and thus more fit for an alignment with the West than the other two. Also traditions have been evoked both by President Lennart Meri and foreign minister Toomas Hendrik Ilves. In a speech delivered in 1999, the latter

Figure 23. Tallinn (etymologically ‘Danishburgh’), capital city of Estonia, was grounded by Danes in 1219. Photo: Katarzyna Skalska
grouped Estonia with the five Nordic countries and Britain among the Yule (Midwinter-celebrating) countries that presumably shared a common mentality that expressed itself in rationality, stubbornness and diligence. These societies also ranked lowest in the world in corruption. In another speech, Ilves showed that he was well aware of the importance of conscious image-making. He recalled the example of how Finland successfully defined itself as a Nordic and not as a Baltic country before the Second World War (Lagerspetz 2001).

The Estonian use of cultural and historical arguments belongs to the field of image-making. This is a conscious use of the Thomas theorem with the aim of convincing both Estonians and the Nordic public that Estonia is a Nordic country. However, Ilves was also referring to a corruption index. Using the term “state capture”, which places corruption in a wider societal and political context, Li Bennich-Björkman noted that in 2001, according to an international index of corruption, Estonia was a low capture and Latvia a high capture state (see chapter 26 in the present book). A low capture state is one with a political system that is capable of letting different political interests influence policymaking and a high capture state is a state where one category has monopolised influence over law-making and the executive, contributing to malfeasance and corruption. Latvian public institutions were “invaded by private interests”.

Bennich-Björkman concludes that the different outcomes, with Estonia having an autonomous institutional structure reminiscent of the Nordic states, and Latvia not, are not caused by different historical traditions but by recent history. In Estonia, the dissolution of the Soviet state and the re-establishment of the Estonian state were preceded by the growth in Soviet times of a network of students, EÜE (the Estonian Students Building Troops) who became important functionaries in society even before independence, and by the organisation of an informal “university” in Tartu, Young Tartu (Noor Tartu) along the lines of the famous underground “flying universities” in Poland under the Russian and Nazi occupations, respectively:

Clearly, the EÜE and the Noor Tartu group were crucial in that they assembled and gave opportunities for domestic, political young leaders to form who, at the time of independence, could initiate a reform process guided by norms and ideas other than those that dominated during Soviet rule (Bennich-Björkman 2001).

10. Latvia’s own way

The first post-Communist government in Estonia was formed by these people. They did not represent vested economic interests but were motivated by ideas about Estonia and her fate. In Latvia, in contrast to circumstances in Estonia, neither were similar groups formed nor were there any discussions about different ideological ideas. Bennich-Björkman underlines that “clear ideological political alternatives were never allowed to form, making democratic Latvian politics from the start less of an arena for ideological struggle than a search for political power” (Bennich-Björkman 2001).

In Estonia, the political system was “unstable” in the sense that political parties not only competed for power but also formed new governments. In Latvia, the amalgamation of former communists and businessmen called Latvijas Cels (Latvia’s Way) totally dominated politics and all successive governments: “The idea … was not to present a clear political alternative but to unite elite actors under one umbrella”. (Bennich-Björkman 2001). The elite in question captured the state so to speak. In addition to these important differences, Bennich-Björkman argues, the codes of behaviour in business also became different in the two countries. Estonians traded with Finns and Swedes, who became role models for decent
behaviour. The Latvians traded much more with Russia, replicating the practices of that highly corrupted business world (Bennich-Björkman 2001).

The different Estonian and Latvian cases show that history is important, but only as an argument for image-making and as direct continuity, i.e., in the shape of organisational patterns that remain in force in spite of a change of system. An additional important conclusion is that the concept ‘Baltic’ has not been a source of image making. Integration on the premise that there exists a ‘Baltic’ sense of community seems to be a precarious project. Moreover, integration of the three Baltic States with either the EU or NATO or with both would have as a consequence the risk of alienation from the region of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine.

11. Constructing North-West Russia

In order to counteract tendencies of isolation of the Russians from the Baltic Region, the Swedish government has led a policy during the last decade of symbolic separation of what is labelled “North-West Russia” from the rest of the Russian state. This construction of a “Baltic Russia” is clearly inspired by historical memories of the Swedish occupation of Novgorod in the early 17th century and the attempt to unite this Russian state with Sweden. The Swedish scholar Per-Arne Bodin has argued that the Swedish government’s assistance policy towards the Russian Federation “more or less consciously” relates to the Swedish occupation of Novgorod almost four hundred years earlier: “Today, exactly as in the seventeenth century, Sweden perceives Novgorod as her sphere of interest” (Bodin 2000).

As for Belarus, after coming to power as President of Alexander Lukashenka, Swedish assistance policy for this state has been directed towards strengthening the NGOs and civic society with the ultimate objective of seeing the people remove the authoritarian regime and introducing democracy. Concerning Ukraine, the policy has been more low-key, but certainly the country is treated as a legitimate object for Swedish attempts to build an enlarged Baltic community.

12. Creating a macro-region, or what Putin doesn’t do

Historical precedents, ethnic relations, political culture and economic developments point to the fact that the Baltic Region is a highly diversified region with little except location on the map as a common denominator. In spite of strongly increased contacts and the emergence of different kinds of networks in the economic, political, cultural and ecological spheres, the region remains highly diverse. Moreover, some trends point in different directions concerning the external orientation of the different states in the region. Whereas especially Swedish, but also Finnish, Estonian and some Latvian politicians seem to be interested in promoting the idea of a Baltic Region, one may discern in the cases of Russia, Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Germany, Denmark and Norway other preferences when it comes to identification with a macro-region.

The contemporary ambitions to create a self-contained and self-conscious Baltic Region are based upon interpretations of historical experiences, on the one hand, and concerns about the future, on the other hand.

The concept of sustainability is an expression of the striving to avoid social and economic disturbances caused by ethnic conflicts, economic corruption, uncontrolled migration
and pollution of the natural environment. Among Danes, there is fear that the nuclear power station near Copenhagen on the Swedish side of the straits of Öresund may break down and spread radioactive pollution. Among Estonians and Latvians, there is fear that the “Russians may come back”, i.e., that the Russian government would use the unsettled question of citizenship for some of the ethnic Russian population as a pretext for pressure or even invasion. Such fears were not mitigated by the declaration by Russia’s President Vladimir Putin in June 2001, at his meeting with American President George Bush in Ljubljana:

“In some countries of the Soviet Union, for instance, you probably know – we talk about this very often – in the Baltic states, for instance, we feel that human rights are damaged, especially those of the ethnic Russian populations. In Latvia, for instance, 40 percent of the population is Russian-speaking. A huge number of non-citizens, in other words, people who can’t even get citizenship. We don’t send weapons there. We don’t support those people. We don’t call it terrorism. We don’t try to get people to rise up on the basis of national or ethnic origin or religious feelings. We don’t encourage people to take up arms to fight against that.” (Jansson 2001).

The disturbing fact with Putin’s pronouncement was that it could be interpreted as a veiled threat. Putin insinuated that the Russian-speakers had well-founded reasons for grievances against the governments of the states they lived in, and that this was a matter of concern for Russia’s government and the President personally. In this there was an oblique reference to Hitler’s arguments for putting pressure on Czechoslovakia in 1938 and on Poland in 1939, i.e., that Germans were suppressed. It is obvious that Putin’s veiled threat was of no special concern to the Nordic states, Germany and Poland, the governments and public opinion which trusted Putin as the man bringing stability to Russia and hence security to the whole Baltic Region. However, it is equally obvious that trust in Putin as a reasonable leader of Russia was not exactly enhanced among the citizens of Estonia and Latvia and their governments.
13. Continuation states and successor states

Fear is a consequence of a perception of insecurity. Whereas the citizens of most of the states in the Baltic region experience that they live in states that have gained historical legitimacy in the eyes of all their neighbours, this is not the case with those living in Estonia and Latvia. According to the self-understanding and subjective state identity, these are continuation states. Their existence was suspended between 1940 and 1991, but after regaining sovereignty and international recognition they must be said to have really existed all through the intervening years as well, although occupied. However, Russia is not a continuation state, but one of twelve successor states of the Soviet Union. Russia inherited many institutions and most of the property of the Soviet Union, but it is not a continuation of the pre-Soviet Russian state. According to international law, Russia as a successor state has a right to grant Russian citizenship to former Soviet citizens in Estonia and Latvia who are not citizens of these states, and who want to be Russian citizens. On the other hand, if Estonia and Latvia are recognised by Russia as continuation states and not as successor states of the Soviet Union, Russia does not have any right to intervene in the domestic affairs of these states or to exert political pressures on them on behalf of the Russian-speaking population (Devynck 2001). Thus Russian recognition of Estonia and Latvia as continuation states is a necessary precondition for sustainability in terms of political stability in the Baltic Region.
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