

Chapter 4

Dimensions and Geopolitical Diversity of ‘the Baltic’: Then and Now

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Introduction

What is today called ‘the Baltic’ has various dimensions and geopolitical diversity. The term the ‘Baltic States’ have been used generally to refer to the three states on the south-eastern coast of the Baltic Sea: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. After attaining full membership in the EU and NATO in 2004, we can see other dimensions of the phrase ‘the Baltic’ developing, such as the Baltic Sea Region, the Baltic Sea Area, the Baltic Area, *Das Baltikum*, the Baltic world, the Baltic Sea States, the Northern and the Baltic, the Baltic Rim, North-Eastern Europe, the Baltic States, *Baltoscandia*, *Mare Balticum*, amongst others. They include many countries in the region surrounding the Baltic Sea. This phenomenon, which means the changing of the concept of the term ‘Baltic’, is a result of the ending of the Cold War as the division of the Iron Curtain had been removed and the border of the European Union shifted eastwards. These attempts to build another notion of ‘the Baltic’, which developed in the 1990s, have been worked out from above, such as EU policy or foreign policy.

According to a recent article in the Latvian newspaper *Diena* (11 Nov. 2005), there has been some discussion about Latvian history textbooks

these days in Latvia. Each teacher is allowed to choose his/her own textbook to use in class. It is not at all difficult to understand that many kinds of textbooks of Latvian history have been published since her re-independence in 1991. It seems that Latvian history could be taught separately, or could be taught as part of European history or world history. The discussion on the textbook for history of Latvia indicates that there are now two orientations in school education for history.

Latvia is now making full use of a diverse range of cooperative activities. In order to access the EU and NATO, Latvia sought active involvement in cooperation with the other Baltic States and the Nordic countries. Such an interest has led to multi-level cooperation around Latvia, such as cooperation among the three Baltic States, the Baltic Sea States, the Euro-region in the Baltic and cross-border cooperation with countries outside of the EU (e.g. Russia and Belarussia). These attempts from below, that is, the local level, show how a small country tries to pursue its security on the international stage.

Although 'the Baltic' is historically known as the crossroads, Russia's window to the West, or the place of conflict or cooperation, it was also a frontier in the west, in Russia and even in the North. 'The Baltic' was sometimes confused with 'the Balkan', as referred to by David Kirby in 2003 (Salmon and Barrow 2003: xvii). This reminds us of the Japanese diplomat Sentaro Ueda, who was a representative in Riga in the 1920s and in charge of was known as an expert for Russian affairs. According to his reports for the Japanese Foreign Minister in 1924, he expressed a similar opinion as Kirby (Gaimusho 1924). Placed as 'the Baltic' is in the centre of the Russian, German and Scandinavian spheres, they give to each a share of their cultural and material heritage.

The point at issue is why such kinds of cooperation have developed and why 'the Baltic' has had so much diversity and so many dimensions. We must be clear about how to deal with its history because the concept of 'the Baltic' has changed in response to external forces and international environment.

1. Building and Developing 'the Baltic' as a Region

1-1 What is 'the Baltic'?

There are some different schools of thought regarding the etymology of the word 'Baltic'. One school of thought is related to the Latin word *balteus*, which means a belt, and the other is related to the Latvian and Lithuanian word *baltas*, which means white. As is well known, Latvian and Lithuanian linguistically belong to 'the Baltic'.

The Latvian and Lithuanian word *Baltija*, which means Baltic land, was not used before the nineteenth century. Although it is true that the Latin name for 'The Baltic' (*Balticum*) was used in the Middle Ages, the name Baltic Sea was not commonly used by peoples who lived on its shores until the mid-nineteenth century.¹ Latvians called the Baltic Sea the 'Big Sea' (Lielā jūra) and Estonians called it the 'Western Sea' (Läänemeri). At the same time, Germans and Swedes called it the 'Eastern Sea' (Ostsee, Östersjön). The other term, *Baltisches Meer*, which Germans sometimes used as a geographical term, gave birth to the Russian term *Baltiiskoe more* in the eighteenth century, when much of the south-eastern Baltic coast came under the dominion of the Russian Empire.

One contemporary idea of 'the Baltic', or a narrow definition of it, could be found in the nineteenth century. The rapid economic development of the eastern Baltic coast had an impact on both Baltic-German and Russian societies. In 1859, the Russian word *pribaltiiskii* was used for the first time as an official name, while the Russian government increasingly pursued its Russification policy against not only indigenous people but also the Baltic German upper class in the Baltic provinces. It might be interesting that the position in Europe of Russia was changed from the North Europe to the East one in the first half of nineteenth century, adding the reference of Hans Lemberg's article (Lemberg 1985: 90). Around the same time, Baltic Germans started to call the three regions of Estland, Livland and Kurland *Baltische Provinzen* in the 1880s and themselves as *Balten*. According to Hain Rebas, this Baltic Germans' idea was most deeply influenced by inspirations of the current national-romanticism and even chauvinism of those days, and by the more

¹ Adam von Bremen referred to 'Mare Balticum' in the eleventh century.

or less parallel development of events in the German Union and in the German Empire from 1871 (Rebas, 1988: 103). In addition, one of the indigenous peoples, the Latvians, began to use the word *Baltija* for the Baltic provinces (Estland, Livland and Courland) in the 1860s.

1–2 ‘The Baltic’ after World War I

In the twentieth century, there were three turning points in the history of the south-eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. The first one was the emergence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania on the international stage. The second one was the effect of the incorporation of the three Baltic States into the Soviet Union. The last turning point was the restoration of their independence in 1991.

The limited usage of ‘the Baltic’ by both Baltic Germans and Russians began to diverge both in its dimensions and in geopolitics. There were political and economical factors at that time. The new political factor started in World War I, in the other hands, the economical factor remained as in the past. This was influenced by outside interests and the perception of the newly independent Baltic States. One trend came from the anti-Bolshevik groups in the former Russian western borderlands, which involved the three Baltic States (Butler 1919; Buchan 1923). There has also been an economic or commercial interest in ‘the Baltic’, which includes the Baltic Sea States, including Norway.² The above mentioned concerns are the reasons why the western powers were interested in the new states and the British navy was dispatched to the Baltic coast.

The Royal Institute of International Affairs, which was founded in 1920, published a book about the Baltic States in 1938 (RIIA [1938] 1970). According to this book, it stated that both Latvia and Estonia had reached a more advanced stage of development than Lithuania without unfair implication, and that the problems of external and internal policy were by no means identical in the three countries. Nevertheless, the book stated that there were certain factors in the situation of all three which tended to link them together—in the minds of the outside world at any rate, and to some extent, even in their own (RIIA [1938] 1970: 3–4). This book devoted many chapters to economics (about half the book); these had been specially prepared for the Information Department (RIIA [1938]

² *The Baltic Review*, published in London from August to December, 1920.

1970: 4). In the mind of the outside world, the three Baltic States also acted as a buffer between Germany and Russia, as they were in a common geographical position abutting these two countries. According to this book, it is not difficult to understand the British interest in the Baltic States at that time.

Revue Baltique/La Revue Baltique (Sept./Oct. 1919), which was published in Paris, carried articles and reports by the representatives from the three Baltic states in Paris. This journal was sponsored by French intellectuals. C.R. Pusta, who later became the Estonian foreign minister, was a regular writer among them (Pusta n.d.). The contributors to this journal were very interested in making the plan for the Baltic league and the Baltic confederation, which included Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. According to this journal, it seems that France had a stronger interest in security than in commerce or economics. Poland had a common interest with France in terms of security against Germany. Poland had oriented its own position among the Baltic countries towards a leading role because the Baltic Institute had been established in Torun in 1926 and published the *Journal Baltic Countries* (later renamed *Baltic and Scandinavian Countries*) in English from 1935 to 1939 (Parming 1987: 133).

One reason that the Baltic confederation couldn't be formed was that the Finnish identity, which belonged to the Scandinavian countries, hindered it. The other main reason was conflict between Lithuania and Poland, which wanted to play as a big power, during the Wars.

Between the two Wars, the three Baltic States had to be vigilant due to the threat from the Soviet Union. The concept of 'the Baltic' continued to retain its diversity in its dimensions and in geopolitics. At various levels there were some attempts to cooperate with each other. In 1919, the first Baltic conference was held by the foreign ministers from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Depending on the issue, Finland, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Soviet Russia and Romania sometimes sent representatives or observers to the Conference.

On the one hand, there emerged variations of 'the Baltic', while on the other hand, Baltic Germans or Germans from Germany still kept their own notion of 'the Baltic'. In other words, *Baltikum* did not mean Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, but rather the former Baltic provinces or the three regions of Estonia and Latvia. They intensified their claims, which emphasised the widespread need of the Baltic Germans and the

significance of their leading position in history. In the late 1930s, some Baltic historians did not have any opportunity to publish their articles because of the censorship under the authoritarian regime. Some of them became linked with the German *Ostpolitik* and published their articles in *Jomsburg*.³

1–3 ‘The Baltic’ after World War II

The notion of ‘the Baltic’ remained confined to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania after World War II. While they had shared, at least for a while, some common interests and experiences with Finland and Poland, on becoming independent states, the three Baltic States fell into the hands of the Soviet Union after the War. According to Gerner and Hedlund, in the Russian historical consciousness, the Baltic provinces have a special place in the minds of the Russians, which was the rim-land separating Russia from the Baltic Sea. Soviet historiography has provided the conceptual framework for the Soviet leadership’s perception of the ‘legitimate’ interests of Russia/the Soviet Union in the Baltic area (Gerner and Hedlund 1993: 60). After the signing of the German-Soviet Non Aggression Treaty in 1939, the Soviet Union had launched an attack on Finland and occupied the Baltic States and divided Poland. The Soviet Union thus restored the position that Russia had held before World War I. The Baltic States were forced to stay in the Soviet Union after World War II, while Poland could keep her independence and Finland’s position was recognised as the Western country.

The Baltic States have not yet shared enough common awareness of the issues to develop cooperation. This is due to the fact that they have been too wrapped up in their own independent status. By the same token, they did not have a common front to face the threat from both Germany and the Soviet Union in 1930s.

The new identity of the Baltic countries followed their incorporation into the Soviet Union. People from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had a shared past experience in the first half of the twentieth century. There were several factors behind the development of the Baltic identity; Firstly, the émigré community, which created the Baltic community outside their country; secondly, the common historical experiences in the international

³ *Jomsburg: Völker und Staaten im Osten und Norden Europas* was published in Leipzig (1937–42).

arena; thirdly, the Soviet Baltic Republics' position in the Soviet Union.

The Baltic émigrés made collective efforts to break the isolation of the three countries. They published several journals⁴ outside the countries and opened the Baltic University (Study Center)⁵ in Hamburg within the British zone of occupation in Germany in 1946 (Euro University 2004: 74; Parming 1987: 134–5).

From 1948, the considerable number of the people from the Baltic States emigrated to other countries, such as Great Britain, Canada, the United States and Australia and developed both their own ethnic community and a common Baltic community. Also important to the development of this émigré community was the Baltic diplomats, who had been stationed abroad at the time of their native countries' incorporation into the Soviet Union. They called on the international community to support the restoration of sovereignty as representatives of their own countries as well as a voice of the Baltic States as a unit (Bilmanis 1945; Rei 1972).

In 1968, the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies had been established in the U.S.A. and had published its journal (*Journal of Baltic Studies*) since 1972. Émigré researchers from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have presented their articles and books of research on the three Baltic States. Baltic studies are rather influential not only in the U.S.A., Sweden and Australia but also in the Latvian Soviet Republic (Shteinberg 1979).

Then, outsiders' concerns formed a political commonality in the period leading up to World War II, common experiences during that War and shared political struggle abroad after the War (Page [1959] 1970; Rodgers 1975, etc.). A famous Japanese historian described 'the Baltic' in the early postwar period as 'a buffer zone between the Soviet Union and the capitalist world' (Onabe 1955: 994). This was a common view, which was generally found in the books in the West after World War II, in treating the Baltics as one unit.

In 1970, the Baltic German historian, Georg von Rauch published a

⁴ In 1940, the Journal *Revue Baltique* was founded by the Bureau for Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian cooperation; The Journal's 'The Baltic Review' was published in Stockholm between 1945 and 1949.

⁵ The Baltic University was moved to Pinneberg in 1947. In 1949, the Baltic University was closed by decision of the British military authorities.

book about Baltic history, *Die Geschichte der baltischen Staaten* (Rauch 1970). Baltic Germans historically viewed ‘the Baltic’ as the Baltic Provinces or *Baltikum*. The publication of this book means that Baltic Germans have begun to acknowledge the reality of ‘the Baltic’. It might be a kind of breakthrough for the Baltic Germans. This is one reason that the concept of ‘the Baltic’ has continued developing.

In the Soviet Union, ‘the Baltic’ was first emphasised as a common geographical unit because geographers from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have regularly met for conferences since 1963 (Loeber 1987: 116). The U.S. Congress interim reports from 1953 and 1954 are interesting. In these reports, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were popularly referred as the Baltic States because of their geographical location (Parming 1987: 141). Returning to the Soviet Union, three Baltic Republics were compartmentalised into various fields, not only as geographical units but also as economic units, in postal communications, in Military Affairs and in the Field of Culture and Science.

According to Loeber, the Soviet leadership even went out of its way to avoid treating the troika as a distinct political entity (Loeber 1987: 118). The book about the social revolution, which was published in Moscow in 1978 (Mints et al. 1978), provides an example of Loeber’s point.

We also have to pay attention to the period from the second half of the 1980s. Because the independence process showed us the Baltic sense of common bonds. The ‘Baltic Way’ of the human chain from Vilnius through Riga to Tallinn of 23 August 1989 struck a chord with the people in the West. In the course of the independent movement, Latvians, Estonians and Lithuanians began to be proactive in using the term ‘Baltic’ and began to have a consciousness of solidarity, such as the Baltic popular front. The unforced cooperation started in the south-eastern coast of the Baltic Sea since 1988, although their activity was supported by the Nordic people. This followed the Baltic cooperation and the Baltic and Nordic cooperation in the 1990s and developed the establishment of the Council of the Baltic Sea States in 1992.

2. Dimensions and Geopolitical Diversity

As noted above, the notions of ‘the Baltic’ have a wide variety of definitions as the occasion may demand. The concept of ‘the Baltic’ has

been promoted by multilevel dialogues and cooperation, in keeping with changes in the international situation. The views of 'the Baltic' can be roughly classified into two: from above and from below.

The view from above is exemplified by the NEI. The Northern Europe Initiative (NEI), which was started in 1997, is a framework for U.S. policy. The U.S. Department of State took the initiative in integrating the Baltic States and north-west Russia into a regional network, which included Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, as well as German, Polish and Russian areas that border the Baltic Sea or Baltic States. NEI focuses on six priority areas; business and trade promotion, civil society, environment, law enforcement, energy and public health. The Northern Dimension, Interreg III and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) could also develop the concept of 'the Baltic'.

We turn to the various view from local levels. This concept is distinct in character as it relates more with concrete issues. The signs of dimensional and geopolitical diversity might already be found in the establishment of the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM). HELCOM were hardly able to develop their activities until the end of the Cold War because of the dividing line in the Baltic Sea. Nevertheless, environmental issues in the Baltic Republics became epoch-making developments in the process for democratisation and independence during the period of the last years of the Soviet Union. In addition, The Baltic human chain in 1989, their subsequent solidarity against Moscow and the negotiations with Russia on the withdrawal of Russian troops depended on Baltic identity. Such movements for independence were represented their desire of the Baltic people.

People in the Baltic republics found themselves in the mighty swell of changing times at the end of the Cold War, while people living around the Baltic Sea tried to find the new 'Baltic'. In 1990, the Hansa seminar was held at Kotka in Finland and many participants from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Schleswig-Holstein in Germany and Russia discussed the issues in order to promote cooperation around the Baltic Sea. With this issue as a starting point, the concept of the Baltic Sea Region has developed through the initiative of the Nordic Council.

In the 1990s, various attempts to create cooperation or a new concept of the region could be observed around the Baltic Sea. In March 1992, the establishment of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), which is an

intergovernmental forum, paved the way for further cooperation at various levels, such as the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, the Baltic Sea States' Sub-regional Cooperation (BSSSC), the Union of the Baltic cities and the Baltic 21 Process. These concrete developments are expanding the notion of 'the Baltic' again, from the three Baltic States to the Baltic Sea Region. These concepts are supported by the actualities in that region.

D. Kirby used the Baltic World as a title of his two books in the early 1990s and described a history of the Baltic Rim, including three Baltic States, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and part of Germany, Poland and Russia (Kirby 1990, 1995). Such a use of 'the Baltic' had been used since the end of World War I, especially from the British point of view. It is only natural that the actuality, which the end of the Cold War raised, introduced such notion of 'the Baltic'.

M. Lehti used the notion, the Baltic Europe in his article and explained its invention of the Baltic World from historiography and from the aspect of 'a much wider process of reacting to the drastic changes' (Lehti 2003: 11). Given this notion of the 'Baltic', which means the European North, he could proposed his idea on a new order in Europe.

My concern here is the reason why the cooperation of the three Baltic States has been expressed since 1991. Although the cooperation of the three Baltic States could not have been detached from the issues linked to Russia, they can't change their geopolitical position as the next-door neighbours of Russia. Due to the power politics or the western perceptions in the 1990s, the three Baltic States have been grouped together while the peoples living on the south-eastern coast of the Baltic sea started to try to contribute to building and developing the renewed notion of 'the Baltic'. They are now choosing their actuality under their international environment.

It is generally true that Estonia has a close relationship with Finland with regards to their language and culture and Lithuania has common history with Poland. In reality, Latvia is located in the middle of the three Baltic States, but she has no such similar relationships.

It is the most interesting and most important for the Baltic that the presence of the Soviet Union is the key factor in the past when we discuss an issue on the notion of 'the Baltic'. It is certain that the notion of 'the Baltic' has been become diverse in 1990s, as noted above. But then in the 1990s, three Baltic States cooperated with each other in order to internationalise of their issues and also in the concrete matters of the

various fields. Although they couldn't express their close relationships among the Baltic republics actively in the Soviet period, they could achieve their re-independence with their concerted efforts in order to separate from the Soviet Union and convey their message to the international society against the Soviet Union from the end of the 1980s.

In historical description 'the Baltic' relating the trade or the struggle for the dominant power in the Baltic had been often interested. W. Kircher pointed out that 'in the story of the rise of the Baltic Question the key to historical understanding is provided by Russia'. According to him, 'Empire and Hansa, Denmark and Sweden, Poland and the western sea powers, all were set in motion by Russian action' (Kirchner [1954] 1970: 254).

In addition to Kirchner's view, P. Luntinen's book on the Baltic Question (Luntinen 1975: 9) notes the discussions, negotiations to the agreement, in which Denmark, Germany, Russia and Sweden pledged themselves to maintain the territorial status quo in the Baltic in 1908, were 'at the time called the Baltic or, synonymously, the Northern question'. If we see the British interest in the Baltic, we could understand the Baltic question was used synonymously with the Northern question. As Niels von Redecker described, the term 'Baltic question' can be described as referring to 'the role which the eastern Baltic region played in world Affairs', and consisting of a 'conflict of interests in the power politics of great nations (Redecker 1998: 1).

The term 'the Baltic' is usually issued in the international environment when the south-eastern coast of the Baltic Sea is functioning as a unit or sharing her (or its?) fate. We could understand the process of the accession to the EU and NATO, as the Western perceptions would bear on the fate of the future over the long term as Trapans pointed out it (Trapans 1991: 7).

According to Joenniemi, there is generally the trend towards 'Baltisation' nowadays around the Baltic Sea Area (Joenniemi and Waever 1993:7). People living there want to establish their own initiative in order to use a mutual interest in actuality. At the talk of the ministerial Session of the Council of the Baltic Sea States between EU Commissioner Patten and Foreign Minister Fischer in 2001, it is showed that 'Baltisation' is recognised as the positive formation of East-West relations after 1989 comparing with 'Balkanisation' (Körber-Stiftung 2001: 22).

Conclusion

Although there are many signs of cooperation around the Baltic Sea since the end of the Cold War, each initiative and cooperative activity has tended to function independently. Each foreign ministry of the three Baltic States has had slightly different views towards Baltic cooperation. While Latvia has the most interest in cooperation among the three, Latvia also seems to have the most hard-line nationalism. The Baltic unit or cooperation of the three states cannot be detached from issues linked to Russia. They will have to diversify their risk because they can't change their geopolitical position as the next-door neighbours of Russia.

According to the handbook of the Baltic Sea Region, which was published in 2001 and financially supported by EU, it is said that the Baltic identity is based both on a common unfortunate past and common aspirations for the future (Euro University 2004: 59). The present day political phenomena in the Baltic Sea area can be understood easily from their history.

Some people might say that three Baltic States or the Baltic unit would not be important any more. However, this notion of 'the Baltic' would not be found so often in Europe, but in the international community, especially linking to the U.S.A. The notion of the three Baltic States might not fade in the international community, because the U.S.A.'s policy towards three Baltic States is becoming rather important in determining their policy in the future. Especially after the attack by terrorists in the U.S.A. in 2001, the three Baltic States were inclined to come together.

In conclusion, B. J. Kaslas wrote in 1976:

. . . the power structure of the Baltic has changed so profoundly that if somehow the Soviet Union was forced to release its hold, a true union of the entire Baltic community would be the only hope of the region for any chance of free and independent life (Kaslas 1976: 7).

Although Kaslas wrote about the Baltic Nations with Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland and Poland in mind, his opinion showed us the very suggestive outlook of the future of 'the Baltic'.

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