

***The European Dimensions of the Baltic Sea Region  
Commitments for the Future Development***

***“The Future of the Baltic Sea Region in Europe”***

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**The *longue durée* of peaceful co-operation**

The year 2009 marks the events of 1809 – among others: the burst of the Swedish state. Europe was in these years, at the turn from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in many respects under re-construction, the divide between *old* and *new* became obvious, and is on the political and cultural agenda since then. The German romanticist Novalis claimed a united Europe in the name of Christianity; the medieval Catholic Church was in his mind the ideal of and for unity and freedom. But in many respects – the unifier was Napoleon; the French emperor even became the motor for the nation building process in Northern Europe. After 1809 it is undisputable, that Sweden and Finland became different states, they developed political, economical, social and cultural in different directions, but stayed kindred in one nation family.

The events of 1809 in the Northeast are analogue to events in the Northwest, the Danish-Norwegian dissolution of the union in 1814 – yeah 1905, when Norway gained full sovereignty – and 1917, which marks the independence of Finland, are interrelated. Research so far has laid only little attention to the two Nordic examples of nation building, the Finish and the Norwegian, even though it is obvious, how they do resemble each other, and – more important – how the Nordic cases differ from the European mainstream. Italy and Germany became the more typical examples.

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To my mind, it was a good idea, to mark – or to celebrate – the dissolution of the Swedish state, which formally happened 1809 in this town, after 200 years with a clear marking towards the future, towards a unifying Europe and a – after 1989 – re-established Baltic Sea Region. 1809 and the following years show a political habit, which was and became more or less typical for the political habit in the region. For sure, the brake up was a catastrophe for Sweden, to which Finland belonged since the 14<sup>th</sup> century; Sweden lost one third of its territory and one fourth of its population (Denmark lost proportionally even more territory and population in 1814, it became a national trauma for the Danish society). But: The year marks the end of wars for Sweden, since then neutrality became traditionally a major component in and for Swedish national identity. Sweden got a new king and Sweden became a constitution. History since then – not only in Sweden – became national, even nationalistic as a rule. Interestingly, the loss of Finland was not followed with an economic catastrophe – between 1810 and 1820 the commerce increased, Sweden imported more goods from Finland than ever before; marriages across the sea, across the borders still were on the agenda, people moved to study, to work or for other commercial reasons (the historians have counted 1.000 travels each year crossing the sea). Mobility got the upper hand; hostility was not on the agenda in news papers or in the public. Moderation and negotiation instead characterized the decennium; a sort of civilized habit became the usual. With the years of 1809 and 1814 all dreams of great power in Northern Europe have come to an end, since then no wars were fought ever between the nations of the North. The three nations at the North shores of the Baltic Sea and Norway experienced war by the invasion of foreign occupiers – Germany and the Soviet Union –, not by occupiers of the neighbouring countries, as this was the rule during previous centuries.

The history of Northern Europe, the history of the Baltic Sea region is a history of conflict – and a history of co-operation. The lessons, which could be told to the rest of the continent, if one draws into consideration the *longue durée* of this history, the lessons could be drawn from this history. When the Baltic Sea Region

after 1989 is characterized by the slogan 'best practise region', one can trace the best practise 200 year back. 1809 marks the beginning of a 200 year long period of peaceful development towards democracy, affluence and cultural homogeneity. After the political divide of the region between 1945 and 1989, the Baltic Sea Region success story could be seen as rooted in this *longue durée* of peaceful development – one could put the evidence in a more provocative statement: The Baltic is not the Balkan.

The fact is that the restoration of the sovereignty of the three Baltic States, the reinstatement of Finland's freedom of political action and Poland's political and economic transformation took place in a relatively civilized manner – at least compared to what the region had experienced earlier in the twentieth century. Without the – in some cases institutionalized – will to co-operate the state of the region would have been another. The policy of the Round Table, first practiced in Poland at the beginning of 1989, which marked definitely the end of the predominance of the communist regime, had its political and cultural roots in the tradition of Round Tables following the Saga of King Arthur in early modern times in the Eastern part of the BSR – just follow the traits in the cities of Danzig or Tallinn. The potential of our region could tell the rest of Europe quite a deal – best practice at its best.

The policy-tradition of Round Tables, the institutionalization of the will of mutual understanding is in our times related to the concept of civil society: The Baltic Sea Region is characterized, more than any other region of Europe or even the world, by its diverse, even incalculable flora of NGOs. These concern themselves with local and regional labor market issues, environmental protection issues, research and education, town partnerships and interregional co-operation. It has helped cushion the impact of the post-1989 transformation process. Because these NGOs and personal contacts have existed in the periphery of the institutional system, and because they have worked on developing common interests, the wide-spread lack of strong transnational institutions is of less dramatic importance, even though they are in need. It is, therefore, not far wrong to see the

Baltic Sea Region as a progressive laboratory for international co-operation. The firm installation of civil society strategies in the Baltic Sea Region could, in fact, function as a model for the crisis- and conflict-ridden Mediterranean region, not to talk about other world regions.

Today, the idea of a violent, military conflict among the states of the Baltic Sea region would seem to have become unthinkable. The process of increasing co-operation – and the horrors of war! – has led to a web of interdependence, held together by interest, policies, treaties etc. As a result, this region is now a model of peaceful transformation – and I would like to add: a sustainable transformation. In this way, the history of conflict in the twentieth century would seem to have contributed positively to the peaceful and co-operative situation which we enjoy today.

Insofar – the future of the Baltic Sea Region is shown in the *longue durée*, in the past. Looking into history opens up the perspectives for the future development towards peaceful transformation, mutual understanding and sustainable co-operation. The lessons to be learnt are written down in the history book of the BSR, they have to be read.

### **The natural homogeneity of the region**

Water unites, but land divides – this adage, which is known to every medieval historian as the *summum bonum* – expresses an idea which, for us today, is hard to fathom. Before the car and the railways, however, it was a plain and simple fact. It was easier to cross water – the only obstacles were storms and pirates – than to cross land. This leads us on to what is certainly the most important *unchanging* factor, if we wish to shed light on the cultural development of the Baltic Sea region: to the significance of *natural conditions*.

We tend to regard the Baltic Sea region as a unity, because the water has unifying function and because water connects. Fishing, navigation, sea trading – these were the activities which connected the people of the Baltic Sea. Culture came via water – and transcendental experience is best shared vis-à-vis high mountains and extensive waters. And – by the way – nutrition is another uniting phenomenon of the region; it more or less homogenizes life and culture of the whole region: fish as basic nutrition, butter instead of oil, fat and heavy meals, and big portions of not so good quality, to put it mildly. In this respect, the Mediterranean region is ahead of the Baltic Sea Region.

Back to my argument, the region is united by a relatively unified natural appearance. It is true that the coasts of the East and West, North and South are quite different in their geological and geomorphologic formation. However, the natural formations are unified, thanks the region's common, and fairly recent, origins. This relative unity goes back to the formation of the Baltic Sea and its surrounding coastlines during the Ice Age. The fascination which cities like Stockholm and St. Petersburg, or the Finish lake districts or the hilly Danish islands can arouse is all connected with the formation of the region during the Ice Age.

But it is not just water and land formations which exert a decisive influence on a cultural area but, as an extension of the region's natural conditions, also the climate and, even more important, the natural rhythm of light and darkness, day and night, sun and moon. The extreme variations of light – brighter than the rest of Europe in summer, but darker in winter – have had an impact on art and culture.

The *history* of Baltic Sea *culture* has not yet been written. Indeed, there is no such culture, just as there is no *homogeneous Baltic Sea identity*. What we can identify, however, are elements and constants in cultural development, productive dialogues which have taken place across the water, from coast to coast, dialogues which still exist. Identity provides security, calmness and order in times

of unrest and reorientation. Even allowing for the fact that it is now fashionable to speak of “identity” and of “identities”, it is nevertheless true that if we were to search for such an identity, we would find it in openness and flexibility. For a cultural area like the Baltic Sea, identity can only mean acceptance of regional peculiarities, allowing them to enter into dialogue with each other, and holding on to influences from outside. It is a mere fiction to work from the premise of historical continuity and to expect a homogeneous Baltic Sea cultural area, with a common, regional cultural identity. The cultural homogeneity of the BSR is hidden in the tradition of the cultural heterogeneity, a pluralistic co-existence of independent cultural resources. This could be or is already a strong commitment of the region to the ongoing process of Europeanization.

### **Globalization and the need for regional co-operation: BSR and EU**

It is, of course, generally accepted that the era of globalization has steadily increased the importance and incidence of regional co-operation on economic, political and cultural issues. The complexity of internationalization and globalization, not the least the enlargement of the EU request institutionalized co-operation instruments on a smaller scale. One should therefore guess that active regional and trans-regional co-operation in the realm of the EU would have been a matter of course. But quite contrary, the necessity of institutionalized regional co-operation inside the EU was steadily contested.

After the adoption of the EU Baltic Sea Region Program this uncertainty will cease – hopefully. The reason is that Baltic Sea regionalization itself came on the agenda by initiative of the Commission and the Parliament. There is no doubt anymore that the BSR has become a mega region of Europe, which will influence the further development of integration and widening. The papers, approved by the Parliament and the Commission in this respect, have to be read as strongest commitment to the future development of the region.

The lack of respect in the past for the Baltic's regional, intra-European co-operation (both trends that, of course, no-one seems willing to acknowledge) were serious political mistakes. There are lots of reasons why the Baltic region deserves greater public and political interest, as well as a more stable political and institutional anchor both in national politics and within the European Union. Just to mention: Energy security, human rights watch, social security and healthcare policies, economic uncertainties, ecology, security policies, the fight against international crime, and – of course – scientific matters.

Let my continue my reflections on regional and European commitments with the last catchword: Science and research.

### **BSR as knowledge based region**

The Baltic region's potential status as a global research center is often described and has already been realized. More than 100 universities and research institutes are located in its catchments area. Nor is this a recent development: some of the Continent's oldest universities are found around the Baltic Sea, including Rostock (founded 1419), Greifswald (1456), Uppsala (1477), Copenhagen (1479), Königsberg (1544), Vilnius (1578), Tartu/Dorpat (1632), Åbo/Helsinki (1640), Kiel (1665) and Lund (1666). A mutual exchange of research results, professors and students has contributed to the North – that is, the Baltic region – being far less peripheral, historically, than might be expected. Both academic networks and scientific travelers ensured a lively exchange of ideas and people. Johann Gottfried Herder (born in East Prussia in 1744, died in Weimar in 1803), began his expedition of European exploration in Riga. The Baltic region was a multilingual, multicultural sea, where nationalism or nationality was of little or no importance.

It was in this region that Nicholas Copernicus, Tycho Brahe, Carl von Linné, Immanuel Kant, Søren Kierkegaard, Niels Bohr and many others lived and did their research. The Nobel Prize has been awarded here every year since 1901. After the bridge was built, the region around Öresund, with some extension to Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, has become the home of expanding biotechnological and pharmacology industries, as well as research centers like “Medicon Valley” and “BioCon Valley”. These industries and research centers contribute greatly to the prosperity and above all to the region’s sense of optimism.

### **The reluctant region-builders**

As stated in the beginning of my reflections, I opted for reading in the history book. If doing so, it will become evident, that there are three special cases in our region, which observe special interest:

The first is Poland: Poland vanished because of the intervention of Austria, Prussia and Russia from the maps; the country did not exist as a sovereign nation between 1772 and 1918. This is – quite obvious – the reason, why the BSR is not in the centre of Polish political interests, the Polish intelligentsia and the Polish political elite is looking westwards and southwards, not towards the North or the East. The BSR is too near.

The second is Russia: As a third country to the EU and as a former imperial power, and as the No. Two during the Cold War, the BSR is too small for the Russian political ambitions. The ongoing Russian incapability to multilateral political actions, or better habits, and the ongoing political philosophy of bilateralism inhibits common actions, co-operations and sustainable common institutions – in any case to a great deal. Getting Russia “in” should therefore get high political priority.

The third case is Germany: The German economic centres are to be found in the South and the West of the country; the affinity of German politicians and economic leaders to the North is – to formulate it politely – not strong. The last time that a German head of government appeared at a meeting of the Baltic Sea Council was the year 2000, in Danish Kolding. That was when Gerhard Schröder had described the region's "prosperous present" and "important future", and declared the German trade exchange with the countries of the Baltic Sea region to be as significant as that with the United States. If it is the ambition to strengthen the regional capacity of the BSR, to make the region a strong political and economic actor, and I think, this should be the political ambition in and for the future – then the BSR needs a bigger, a stronger lobby in Germany, the German decision makers have to become more aware of the political and economic importance of the region – and last but not least: they have to become aware of the problems which are to be found right in their backyard. Energy security, pollution, eutrophication, trafficking, welfare decline etc.

### **Lessons for the future**

What then should be taken on the agenda, what are the measures to be taken for the future?

1. Strengthening the political will of the governments around the sea to cooperate on local, regional and national levels. This is a plea especially to the national level.
2. Regional co-operation is primarily not a function of financial incentives; it has its psychological premises.
3. Profitable business is a good underpinning for further co-operation – it sells.
4. Culture and cultural identity are binding together. Further common cultural activities will reinforce the co-operation.

5. The region needs definite telephone numbers, not only in cases of emergencies: Who is in charge and can talk for the region's universities, energy sector, climate questions, human watch, soft security and the like.
6. The institutional frame has to be strengthened. The CBSS office has to be strengthened, with hierarchical infrastructure and more visibility of regional co-operation. The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference could act as a driving democratically legitimized forum.
7. The region can become a forerunner for further education and training. We are in need of specialized personal for best practice measures, crisis management and – simply – governance and administration: A Baltic Sea High school, a Baltic Sea University is still in need. (The Dane N.F.S.Grundtvig formulated this need already in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.)
8. Co-operation, information, monitoring and consulting needs a solid basis of knowledge – I wonder, why still there is no cross-border Baltic Sea Region Thinktank, you may call it a Baltic Sea Region Center of Competence. With such an instrument of expertise knowledge about co-operation structures, about achieved goals, about the added values of best practice could spread among politicians and other experts of practice. This could be a call center of the region with a common telephone number. Climate change, energy security, maritime security, human rights, economic and social security are top ranking questions of the region – and the region could tell the rest of Europe something about sustainable solutions.