A MODEL REGION THE BALTIC SEA

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THE MEDITERRANEAN UNION AND THE BALTIC SEA COUNCIL

The French plans for a Mediterranean Union, decided in Paris on July 13th as a (very reduced) version of the Union for the Mediterranean – the European Union and states situated along the Mediterranean's southern rim are included in the proposed union – have, in an indirect way, also put the Baltic Sea Region back on the political agenda. The Baltic Sea Region is, indeed, seen as an instrument to counterbalance arguments advanced by skeptics and opponents of Nicolas Sarkozy's new (and quite costly) strategy.[1] But this northern community of interests has gained little from its use as a foil, if one measures its success in terms of political attention, concrete political engagement, and lasting benefits from these political strategies.

One might even get the impression that political strategies for this region are unwelcome in official, political circles. Even the (co-)founder of the Baltic Sea Council (established in 1992), the former Danish Foreign Minister Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, has given sober, unadorned expression to his disappointment in Danish passivity and disinterest in matters pertaining to the Baltic Sea.[2] Occasionally, German politicians voice similar criticism with reference to the German engagement. It seems that the region's every-day political business includes the game pass the joker.

The last time that a German head of government appeared at a meeting of the Baltic Sea Council was the year 2000, in the Danish city of 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. It was, therefore, high time that Angela Merkel undertook her so-called "Baltic Sea Trip" to Sweden, Estonia and Lithuania, her first visit to these countries as head of state. The conflict in the Caucasus has, moreover, as could have been predicted, cast its long shadow over the Nordic countries.

It was, of course, generally accepted that the era of globalization has steadily increased the importance and incidence of regional cooperation on economic, political and cultural matters. This has given many observers the impression that the Baltic Sea Council has vacillated between political hopefulness and actual insignificance, as, again and again, its right to existence is called into question.

The Baltic Sea Council consists of representatives from the countries of the Baltic Sea Region. For historical and economic reasons, Iceland and Norway, as well as the European Union, have seats at the Council table. It is the only regional institution of significance in which Russia is represented, with its own seat and voice, together with other, Western states. In 1995, the Baltic Sea countries Sweden and Finland became members of the European Union. In 2004, they were followed by the three Baltic states and Poland, and the Baltic Sea thus became a European Union inland sea (excepting, of course, Kaliningrad and the region St. Petersburg). The deliberations concerning regional cooperation are increasingly directed more towards Brussels than towards the Baltic Sea Council's Stockholm headquarters.

"EUROPE IS NOT SAFE UNLESS THE BALTIC REGION IS SAFE"

The generally accepted idea that cooperation is something that occurs in and with Brussels as a matter of course, and that regional cooperation should, therefore, only be accorded minor significance, is a fallacy. Why should that which holds for the Mediterranean not apply to the Baltic Sea Region, as well? The ongoing conflicts and crises concerning the Baltic Sea gas pipeline, the Caucasus, and the recently concluded contracts for American medium-range anti-missile stations in Poland and the Czech Republic tell another story. If an incident should occur, the regulatory powers of the EU are very restricted; here, networks – sometimes, very informal in character – play a much greater role.

The conflict in the Caucasus shows that Russia has not yet come to terms with the independence of the former Soviet Republics. The Baltic nations are in the danger zone, and their integration into regional, institutionalized networks is necessary for their survival. Psychology plays a not unimportant role here. And so it is not by happenchance that Ukraine's government and state leaders, as well as those of the three Baltic states and Poland, traveled to Tbilisi in August in order

After the end of the Cold War, politicians prophesied about the "return of the Hanseatic League". The prediction did not come true.

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to participate in a mass rally demonstrating both solidarity with Georgia and a common rejection of Russia's geopolitics.[3] For these countries, it was bitter to note (as they did, not for the first time) that Paris and Berlin showed more consideration for Moscow than for them; in the eyes of the new nations at Russia's periphery, the European Union did not seem particularly forceful. Russia has stationed tactical nuclear weapons in the Russian enclave Kaliningrad, that is, directly on the doorsteps of neighboring countries,[4] something which may give an inkling of the region's security relevance and of the necessity of building up confidence and institutions, even if only – again – for psychological reasons. The recent weeks and months have shown that the Baltic Sea Region demands political attention. Now, as in the past, Madeleine Albright's 1997 phrase holds true: Europe is not safe unless the Baltic region is safe.[5]

It does not, for these reasons, require an excess of political imagination to understand how the Caucasus conflict might affect views on the Baltic gas pipeline. This mutual project of Germany and Russia – a project which is disliked (to put it mildly) by the other Baltic-coast countries – continues to become less popular. The current provocation has set seriously countervailing winds blowing against the soft course taken vis-à-vis Russia by Germany and the European Union, which the Union's eastern members always found overly timid. Obviously, the opportunities provided by this forum of Nordic consultation have been left unexploited. Some political china has been broken. Germany's need to secure its energy supply can hardly justify the Baltic region's loss of confidence in its politics. However unfair the anti-German accusations may be, the Baltic countries are drawing parallels, for instance, between present Russian-German relations, and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Treaty. The mere fact that the accusation is leveled shows how much sympathy has been gambled away since 1990.

In 2007-2008, when Lithuania held the presidency of the European Council (which the Danes took over in June of this year), the idea of Balticness was invented and utilized in an extensive cultural and political program[6] – a smart marketing strategy, a special region branding whose test-tube conception, however, cannot be completely concealed. The newly developed structural plans are, consequently, likely to be of greater importance. As formulated during the Danish presidency, these plans were to breathe new and enduring life into the Council's work.[7] They would, however, not lead to substantially more stability in institutional development, or to an increase in the Council's budget. At present, the Council has a budget of one million euros, that is, a sum that is far below the poverty level. (The original budget envisioned for the Mediterranean Union was 16 billion euros….)[8]

The lack of respect for and less-than-engrossing interest in the Baltic's regional, intra-European cooperation (both trends which, of course, no one seems willing to acknowledge) are serious political mistakes. There are several 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.

What is at issue here? It is an issue of a future consisting of roads that lead steeply up-hill – steep and stony paths for the energy sector, in ecology, in healthcare policies, in security policies, in the fight against international crime, in, of course, scientific and social matters – and, last but not least, in matters of political symbology.

To return, again, to the contrast between the Baltic Sea Region, and the Mediterranean, the fundamental political problem of competition can be found in the French argument for the southern union. Sarkozy's advisor Henri Guaino used fairly heavy fire to promote his boss's policies: It is here and nowhere else, he said, "that the future of Europe is played out, whether the issue is poverty eradication or control of the immigration flow, environmental sustainability, or the battle against terrorism".[9] One might wonder whether Guaino could not have used lighter artillery, and whether the fate of the political union is, perhaps, being determined in a different region. On the other hand, one cannot deny that he concerns himself with the solution of these problems, even if his political horror list, given the known problems, is drastically foreshortened.

In any case, this intervention confirmed what one had found in the editorials of the main newspapers: only bad news is good news. Places such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Tibet and the Caucasus are now certain to hold the global interest – regions, in other words, in which almost everything that can go wrong, politically and socially, has gone wrong. Political (and scientific!) interest, money and military are more easily mobilized for these regions – quite easily, in fact. There is always money for military crisis intervention, as Erhard Busek, former Austrian Vice-Chancellor and Head of the Stability Pact for the Balkans, critically observed; whereas there is usually insufficient insight – and almost always, money – for engagement in an administration of trust.[10]

The Baltic Sea Region, however, is a region of *best practice*. It has had and still has the character of a model region in more than one respect, and is often referred to as such – but that has usually ended it. The Baltic region was united in 1989/91, after more than 40 years of separation. This region demonstrated (in many political areas, indeed, the processes had been set in train even before 1989/90) how the process of political and economic transformation could proceed in a peaceful manner. Some political commentators and scientists predicted that the collapse of the Soviet Union would bring to the Baltic states a political scenario similar to that which became bitter reality in the Balkans during the nineties – just as people, today, still sometimes confuse the Baltic with the Balkans.

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. This should lead us to ask what is different here, what we can learn from this. Erhard Busek[11] notes that Europe's northern region is characterized by many regional initiatives, something that has already become a rock-solid historical certainty for the Scandinavian north.

Among the innumerable instances of cooperation across national borders, one can mention the Barents cooperation, the cooperation between different Chambers of Commerce, the so-called city-partnerships, transnational university programs, and, of course, the Nordic Council.

From the countless instances of cooperation across national boundaries, one can deduce that regional cooperation is also of psychological importance: It shows the public of an individual state that it is dependent on its neighbors and that it must show solidarity.[12] The neighboring countries' angry responses to the gas pipeline plans may have been provoked by Russia and Germany violating this traditional multilateralism, which gives the issue a psychological dimension. They had decided on the pipeline without consulting their neighbors. There is also such a thing as obligatory solidarity.[13]

THE ECONOMIC DYNAMISM OF THE BALTIC SEA REGION

It has been known for years that the Baltic Sea Region is a major economic power center.[14] It has been ten years since Marion Dönhoff pointed to this region's exemplary dynamics.[15] The riparian states' share in world trade – and we are only including the northern and north-western parts of Germany, Poland and Russia here – is an impressive six percent, despite the area's negligible share of world population. The share taken by Baltic trade is as much as ten percent for the German Federal Republic alone, a total that exceeds the Republic's combined exports to the U.S. and Japan. Germany is one of the most important, if not the most important, trading partner for almost all the Baltic states. Though a mere 103 million people live in this region, it boasts nine percent of the global gross national product[16] and an annual economic growth rate of 4.5 percent (2006).[17] When it comes to productivity, Central European countries lag six percent behind the Baltic Sea Region countries; the latter's positive growth figures are primarily owed to the economic catching-up of the new transition countries.

Generally speaking, the key factor in the Baltic region is a well-diversified industrial structure. The area boasts fully developed trade, service and information centers, networks of trade routes and traditional economic and cultural contacts. The industries, as well as the service sector, boast a high technological standard. Finland, and indeed Sweden, can be counted among the world centers of the IT industry. One example goes a long way towards demonstrating this: Nokia. Estonia is another country in the area that richly deserves the title knowledge-based society[18] – a country in which Internet coverage is nation-wide[19] and where citizens' access to the Internet is written into the law, a country in which the government uses the computer as a tool in almost all contexts. The citizens of Estonia vote with a click of the mouse on their home computer.[20]

The Baltic region's potential status as a global research center has already been realized. More than 100 universities and research institutes are located in its catchment 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 have 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 surrounded a multilingual, multicultural sea, where 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. The region around Öresund has, after the bridge was built, been the fastest growing region in Europe – this development has extended to Mecklenburg-Vorpommern – and has become the home of expanding biotechnological and pharmacology industries, as well as research centers that earn the region the names Medicon Valley and BioCon Valley. These industries and research centers contribute greatly to the region's prosperity and above all to its sense of optimism.

Signs of widespread economic confidence can be observed, for instance, in the development of the area's harbors: in 2007, the Copenhagen harbor saw an increase in freight and passengers of ten percent.[21] More than six billion crowns have been invested in the development of the harbor, where three new passenger terminals have been built. In 2007, 11.3 million passengers passed through the terminals, which made Stockholm the largest passenger port on the Baltic Sea. Stockholm harbor's cargo-handling grew by five percent to over six million tons, while its container-handling rose by 19 percent. Christel Wiman, Stockholm's harbor master, terms the Baltic Sea the world's hottest growth region.[22]

In Travemünde, similar developments can be found: new piers are being built – the port is being expanded by 29 hectares, which is an increase of more than 50 percent over the current area.[23] The federal government estimates an annual growth rate of 4.8 percent for the German RoRo ports between now and 2025[24]. In 2007, the shipping company Scandlines, which is the market leader in the southern Baltic, transported 20 million passengers and 4.3 million vehicles.[25] Tallink Silja, now the market leader not only of the eastern Baltic but of the entire Baltic Sea, has 21 vessels plying seven routes and a share-holding of 49 percent of the total freight transport.[26]

The Colorline's superferries, which sail between Oslo and Kiel, demonstrate a completely new concept in transportation, reflecting a changing market situation. Cruises in and on the Baltic Sea have become a very popular leisure activity, also among overseas customers. The historical attractions of Tallinn, Helsinki, St. Petersburg, Visby, Stockholm, and Copenhagen have laid the groundwork for unprecedented growth figures: the Baltic Sea is now third among the world's most popular cruise regions, trailing only the Caribbean and the Mediterranean. Those who observe the summer life along the coasts will readily believe tourist managers who claim that the Baltic coast has become Europe's most modern water sports area.[27] The Baltic region has more passenger ferry lines than any other region in the world; the Baltic Sea's transport figures are growing enormously.[28]

The Baltic region is characterized, more than any other region, by – among other things – its diverse, even incalculable flora of NGOs (non-government organizations). These concern themselves with local and regional labor market issues, environmental protection issues, research and education, town partnerships and interregional cooperation. The desire to expand cooperation beyond government-administrative institutional levels is probably more marked here than anywhere else in the world. A civic culture reaching beyond regions and borders is manifest. It has helped cushion the impact of the post-1989 transformation process.

However, the civil culture predates 1989, as the region already had a social network that reached across the Iron Curtain. Professional associations had collaborated all along, and after 1989 their cooperation reinforced and deepened existing personal relations.

Because these NGOs and personal contacts have existed in the periphery of the institutional system, and because they have worked on the development of common interests, the widespread lack of transnational institutions is of less dramatic importance. It is, therefore, by no means a stretch to see the Baltic Sea Region as a progressive laboratory for international co-operation.

The Baltic Sea Region could, in fact, function as a model for the crisis- and conflict-ridden Mediterranean region. The latter cannot boast an NGO flora that reaches across the region, much less across the sea, despite the initiation of the 1995 Barcelona Process. This alone casts doubt on the sustainability of the French policy in the south.

But (as a fly in the soup) it must also be pointed out that such NGOs function optimally – as has been conclusively shown in expert, scientific assessments – only in combination with both a strong *Western will* and the *requisite (Western) funding*.[29] It cannot be stressed strongly enough that the Nordic nations have been exemplary in both respects.[30] This is also a revelation derived from the transformation process: gentle pressure increases the willingness to cooperate.

THE BEST PROSPECTS: ON STINGING JELLYFISH AND BLUE-GREEN ALGAE

This year's annual report on the Baltic Sea tourist industry is once again expected to show an increase. As the effects of global warming have become noticeable – something that favors rich countries and badly hurts the poor – the recent (and much criticized) investments in hotel beds, ferries, cruise ships and communication infrastructure, etc., have been shown to be wise. It is getting too hot to spend the holidays in the south; rising temperatures make the north more attractive. The German Baltic Sea beaches, Poland, the Baltic and Scandinavian countries, all benefit from an extended holiday season.

That this is a somewhat ambivalent source of joy is evident, this year, from experiences on the ground, which have had immediate political repercussions. They confirm and motivate environmental cooperation between the riparian states (a cooperation which had, in fact, begun before the new state of affairs). Indeed, the joint successes on the issues of environment, on the issue of clean water, on the issue of a secure sea, have been substantial – if, still, no reason to rest on one's laurels, as was shown by the experiences of this past summer.

First the good news: While new reports are in on the presence of stinging jellyfish in the Mediterranean, experts can advise that those wishing to avoid painful contact with that particular jellyfish take their vacation at the Baltic Sea: the jellyfish that one finds there do not burn.[31] But then the bad news. Those who wished to escape the Polish summer's 30-degree heat by taking a dip in the 20-degree water of the Gulf of Gdansk could not do so. The blue-green algae saturated swell was full of dangerous bacteria. Just imagine – perfect weather, yet no one can take a swim. And so indeed it was: The beaches were crowded, the water was empty. This situation is repeated every year – while millions are invested in new hotels and tourism infrastructure in the Bay's hinterland. St. Petersburg's Bay is not alone in posting signs warning people against bathing, and former Soviet bloc states are not the only ones that pour untreated waste water into the Baltic. We have seen the annual algae photos and reports from Rügen, from Jutland and from the Gulf of Bothnia. Finland and Sweden have now been brought before the European Court for violating the rules for the treatment of municipal waste water.[32] In plain language, this means: many municipalities have no sewage treatment whatsoever. The Baltic Sea is a sewer for the holiday cottages in the archipelago. The region offers not just the most beautiful sceneries.[33]

For years now, experts have warned that the Baltic Sea is one of the most polluted, if not the most polluted body of water in the world – despite being located in one of the world's richest regions, and a region, moreover, which boasts an environmental profile. The balance sheet is indeed alarming. Here, one must take into account that virtually no industrial waste has reached the Baltic since 1989. Since 1990, emissions of heavy metals like cadmium, mercury and lead have fallen by more than 50 percent, simply because there is scarcely any coastal industry left.[34] Nonetheless, more than one-sixth of the Baltic Sea is biologically dead. The main polluter is agriculture.[35] The nitrogen input is still one million tons, phosphorus, 29,000 tons; the period after the 1990s has seen a reduction of only five and eleven percent, respectively, in these two pollutants. The eutrophication – that is, the nutrient enrichment of this very shallow body of water, which is a mere 415,000 square kilometers (compare this to the Mediterranean's 2.5 million square kilometers) – has reached intolerable levels. The Baltic Sea has long been unable to cope with, much less reduce, this over-fertilization; the renewal of the water of the Baltic Sea is a long-drawn-out process, taking place only through the Danish straits and requiring, for a complete replacement, no less than 35 years. Yet this is the only way in which salty, oxygen-rich water can enter into the sea.

At last year's meeting of the Helsinki Commission (Helcom) in Krakow, the Commission, which is the Environment Coordinator of the Baltic Sea, voted for the

first time (!) and with the unanimous vote of all participating governments (!) – for a significant reduction of nitrogen emissions (by 135,000 tons) and phosphorus emissions (by 15,000 tons), to be enacted by the year 2021.[36] This will be achieved by constructing sewage treatment plants and by reducing agricultural waste water (here, again, the key word is eutrophication).[37] In order to grasp the dimensions of this dream, as the Commission's Chair characterized it, it helps to know that it costs 150,000 euros to reduce phosphorus emission by one ton. The huge chicken farms in St. Petersburg's vicinity produce about 800,000 tons of manure per year, including 3,000 tons of phosphorus and 14,000 tons of nitrogen; the reduction of phosphorus will cost 5,000-6,500 euros per ton.[38]

Remarks made by the Swedish delegation made clear the Herculean nature of the task undertaken by Helcom members: If one closed down all Swedish agriculture today (scarcely feasible, of course), one would still achieve only less than half of the required reduction in phosphorus emissions.[39] This political path is both rocky and steep, and yet must be followed, for the alternative is an immeasurably greater disaster. How bizarre the ballet on the stage of environmental politics can sometimes be is shown by Uffe Ellemann-Jensen's criticism of the Danish government, in the (passionate) Swedish criticism of the German government's tardiness in entering into negotiations on Baltic Sea environmental protection, and in the subsequent skirmishes – which do not, one hopes, constitute rearguard battles. It is very much apparent that the game of pass the joker is underway, with each player worrying about serious loss of political face.

The weapons that were dumped in the Baltic Sea after World War II also represent a significant and continuous threat to animals and humans. In the past, Danish fishermen fished up chemical bombs on a weekly basis – a conservative estimate puts the amount of chemical weapons dumped in the Baltic at 40,000 tons. These have even forced planners to alter the route of the Baltic gas pipeline several times over.

THE PRICE OF PROSPERITY?

Another environmental problem in the Baltic Sea is linked to the area's increasing traffic and economic exchange – in other words, to the prosperity of the region. The most prominent problems are leakage from oil platforms and the consequences of oil tanker catastrophes. In November 2002, the 26-year-old tanker *Prestige* broke apart and sank off the Spanish coast. It carried a cargo of 77,000 tons of oil. This had disastrous consequences for nature and the environment; about 300,000 birds were killed and it cost 2.5 billion euros to clean up the mess.[40] The *Prestige* had taken in cargo in St. Petersburg, and then sailed through the ecologically vulnerable Baltic Sea. There had already been small accidents; a disaster on the scale of the *Prestige* would have brought Baltic Sea tourism, an industry on which the area is heavily dependent, to a halt.

Those responsible for environmental safety in and around waterways are well aware of this danger, and efforts have been made to improve safety. Safety standards implemented during the last years include the demand that tankers be double-hulled, that pilotage be obligatory (at least in the Cadet Channel) and that a certain distance be maintained between shipping routes. Helcom has calculated that 500 million tons of goods are handled in the Baltic region each year; at any given moment, 2,000 ships are navigating the Baltic Sea. Of these, 200 are oil tankers. Furthermore, the amount of cargo handled in the region is expected to double by 2017.[41]

THE MEDITERRANEAN OF THE NORTH

Following the works of Fernand Braudel (1902–85), the great French (Mediterranean) historian and member of the Annales School, the Baltic Sea has borne the title Mediterranean of the North. The title signifies that had there been a second cradle of European civilization, it would have been located around the Baltic Sea. Civilization would have been boosted by the spread of Christianity during the Viking period and the economic and cultural encounters between North and South and, during the Hanseatic era, between East and West. The north's brick Gothic edifices may constitute the most palpable evidence of a unique northern culture and art – including St. Mary's Church in Gdansk, which is the largest brick church in the world, and, not far from there, Marienburg, which is the world's largest brick structure of any sort. These late Middle Age Gothic-style brick buildings give substance to the Baltic region's claims to a common cultural identity.

Braudel wrote his brilliant, multi-volume description and analysis of the Mediterranean world, starting with the seventeenth-century reign of Philip II, from memory (!), after World War II had ended. He had worked out the history of the Mediterranean after the Germans had made him a captive in 1942, persevering in the task even after being sent to a concentration camp near Lübeck. He termed the Mediterranean an "outstanding personality". In his view, the Egyptian-Judeo-Hellenistic-Roman-Islamic cradle of European civilization is situated on the shores of the Mediterranean, where civilizational diversity sought its unity in cultural cooperation and exchange, and could even be productive. This was and is also (on a smaller scale) the case for the Baltic Sea Region.

In the Lübeck prison, Braudel anticipated the synthesis of different civilizations, nations, and cultures. A common climate, a kinship in landscape, a collectively suffered history, and even the experience of the sea – all had led to the discovery of a relatively uniform civilization along the coasts. The stranger, imprisoned in Baltic Lübeck in the mid-twentieth century, invented the Mediterranean world of the sixteenth century – at a time when twentieth-century European barbarians were reducing the cultures of the past, not only Lübeck, to ashes and ruins. (Braudel did not witness the Lübeck Palm Sunday night of 1942, when the city was destroyed: Lübeck received its first prisoner-of-war on April 1, that is, two days later. Braudel, who was initially imprisoned in Mainz, arrived at the Hanseatic city in June; the prisoner-of-war camp Oflag Xc was located outside of the city proper.)

When it comes to the origin of civilizations, we now have a better understanding of why it seems so difficult to establish a positive image of the Baltic region, and indeed the north of Europe as a whole, in public and political opinion. For why, despite the repeated proofs of the region's exemplary character, of the exemplary character of Scandinavia's political and social every-day political life, does it always require a special effort to attract attention and interest, to spark genuine engagement? The answer lies in history. During the "Third Reich", scientists were sent to the Baltic Sea basin in order to search for evidence of the Aryan origin of civilization. Up until 1945, the Baltic Sea, in Nazi ideology, was ranked as the very cradle of civilization. The Nordic World had its heart there, between Brunswick and Stockholm. The same blood and the same culture unified the peoples.[42]

The contaminated memories of this period's view of the Baltic Sea make it difficult, today, to reflect on the region's commemorative places, or even on transnational commemorative locales (something that there have been attempts to do). Members of the German Parliament decided, in 2001, that the German government must cooperate actively in the development of a common Baltic identity through the implementation of joint projects in education and research, transport and communications infrastructure, human rights, environmental policy, etc. They were informed, first, by the conviction that there is such a thing as common identity, perhaps that there even must be one; secondly, by the idea that it is possible to work for the development of such an identity; and, finally, that identity consists of recognizable elements and characteristics. But this is too simple a picture, for the ideological rubble of many years of indoctrination must be discarded first. To this debris must be added the mental legacy of the GDR, which, for reasons that are only too obvious, declared the Baltic Sea a "sea of peace" – something that the Baltic was far from being, either before or during the Cold War era.

An urgent, first task may be that of mapping the common places of commemoration of what are, in fact, more than a thousand years of far-from-peaceful encounters in the Baltic region. The moors, fields and forests along the southern and eastern Baltic Sea shores are particularly blood-stained – and not only by the armies of Napoleon, Hitler and Stalin. Those who today visit Grunwald learn nothing of Tannenberg. Knowledge of that particular transnational memorial site (German-Polish-Lithuanian), is, however, quite widespread. The German-Danish border region could be mentioned, as well, in this context – as could the Baltic itself, that multicultural transit area which has also been a multiethnic trading center for centuries.

So there is still much to be done, and there is hope for the future.

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FIRST BIOGRAPHY OF OLOF PALME

Olof Palme, twice Swedish Prime Minister (1969–1976, 1982–1986), has an interesting and by no means problem-free relationship to the Baltic Sea Area.

His mother's family, the von Knierems, belonged to the German-Baltic nobility; his maternal grandfather was the rector of Latvia's agricultural college. After the restoration of Latvian independence, the family estate in Skangal was returned, although the family later donated it to the Salvation Army. Olof Palme's paternal grandmother, Hanna Palme, was born a von Born, a Finnish baronial family who owned the Sarvlax Estate in Pernaja. Her brother, Victor Magnus von Born, was the last Lantmarskalk (or "Lord Marshall") in the Diet of Finland, replaced only after the revolutionary events in the Russian Empire in 1905, when the currently existing unicameral parliament was established. And the Sarvlax Estate would later be occupied by the Red Guard during the Finnish civil war, during which Palme's more "purely" Swedish uncle, Olof, a promising historian, died on the White side in the final battles outside Tampere in April of 1918.

The manor of Skangal — the estate of Olof Palme's maternal grandparents in Latvia.

ALMOST IMMEDIATELY AFTER Olof Palme had formed his second government, he was greeted by a weighty problem. The year before, a Soviet submarine had gone aground in the archipelago outside Karlskrona, a sensitive marine area and the location of a Swedish naval base. This precipitated a comprehensive military reconnaissance effort – prompted by reports that came in shortly thereafter of indications of other foreign underwater presences in Swedish waters, primarily in Stockholm's southern archipelago. Political protests were heard – from Sweden to the Soviet Union, which came to be regarded as the intruder – and in some places a media and popular hysteria developed surrounding real or alleged violations of Swedish territorial waters. Olof Palme was hardly a dominant voice in the chorus of protest, but he had to act with resolve against Moscow, even if, as a private individual, he may have had his doubts concerning the authenticity of the observations that were made public.

The first Baltic context is a starting point in Part One of Kjell Östberg's political biography of Olof Palme. It was published in the spring of 2008, and the second part is expected soon. Important studies of aspects of Palme's life have been done earlier – for example, Gunnela Björk's book on Palme in the media, and on his relationship to the media. But when Östberg's work is finished, it will be the first complete scholarly study of Palme and his time.

KJELL ÖSTBERG IS A professor of history at Södertörn University and was the first director of the Institute of Contemporary History, which, since it was launched in 1998, has been located there. His writings encompass research on bureaucracy within the labor movement, research on Swedish municipal administration during the 20th century, and an examination of the events of 1968, the year that Palme clearly emerges as the leading figure within modern social democracy, though this is also the time when he encounters mistrust within the new, extra-parliamentary left.

Palme could hardly be considered a politician who was primarily focused on Nordic or Baltic regions. On the contrary – and Östberg agrees with this assessment – he has been described as the first "American" politician in Sweden. One expression of this Americanism and internationalism was his great interest in the Third – colonial, or formerly colonial – World. The first Swedish cabinet minister in modern times with more obvious Baltic roots was Laila Freivalds, something that Palme's successor, Ingvar Carlsson, had the privilege of pointing out.

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