Chapter 3

The Baltic

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The Emergence of "the Baltic" as a Region

The toponym "Baltia" first appears in Greco-Roman geographical writings. Pliny the Elder writes in his *Natural History* that "Xenophon of Lampsacus tells us that at a distance of three days' sail from the shores of Scythia, there is an island of immense size called Balcia, which by Pytheas is called Basilia" (Plinius Secundus [77–79 A.D.] 1906, IV.95, 23–79). The alternative names mentioned by the geographers of antiquity are "Abalus" (used by Pytheas according to Pliny) and "Basileia" (by Diodorus in *Historical Library*) (Plinius Secundus [77-79 A.D.] 1906, XXXVII.11; Diodorus Siculus [60–30 B.C.] 1939, V.23). Common to all these references is that the authors mention great quantities of amber that are washed up on the shores of this "island," and therefore it is most likely that Balcia/Baltia was the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. The etymological origins of the word are not clear, as the root *balt* can in Baltic and Slavic languages refer to "white" (Latvian *balts*, Lithuanian *baltas*) or "lake, marshland" (Russian *boloto*), but it has also been associated with Germanic *belt* that originates from Latin *balteus* (Jansen 2005, 35).

The eleventh-century chronicler Adam of Bremen was apparently the first to call the sea *Mare Balticum*, and this usage was well established by the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries (Berkholz 1882; Jansen 2005, I, 35). The variations of *Balticum* became adopted as the name of this sea in English, Romance languages, Slavic languages, and also Baltic languages (Latvian and Lithuanian). A number of European nations, however, use a name that refers to the relative geographical location of the sea. For Germans (*Ostsee*, but historically also *Baltisches Meer*), Dutch (*Oostzee*), Swedes (*Östersjön*), Danes (*Østersøen*), Norwegians (*Østersjøen*), and Icelanders (*Eystrasalt*), it is naturally "the Eastern Sea," but curiously also the Finns, who live on its eastern coast, have

translated the Swedish term (*Itämeri*). The Estonian *Läänemeri* (the West Sea), on the other hand, refers to its correct relative geographical location.[1]

On the eastern shores of the sea, a relatively coherent political entity has existed since the fourteenth century, when the king of Denmark sold his possessions in Northern Estonia to the Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order. The Order was the leading player in the confederation of small states that formed the Livonian confederation known as *Livland*.[2] The word "Baltic," however, was not applied to any land area before the nineteenth century. The common identity of Livland was largely lost when the confederation collapsed in the Livonian wars (1558–83) and its territories were split up between Sweden, Poland, and Denmark. These partitions formed the seeds for the provincial division between Estland and Livland that was essentially preserved until the establishment of Estonian and Latvian ethnic provinces after the February Revolution of 1917. In 1561, the Swedes acquired the Teutonic Order's possessions in current Northern Estonia, which formed the bulk of the province of Estland. The dynastic union state of Poland-Lithuania acquired the territories in current Southern Estonia and Northern Latvia, which formed the province of Livland. Some sort of larger territorial unity was reestablished during the first half of the seventeenth century, when Sweden managed to conquer most of Livland from Poland-Lithuania (1629 Truce of Altmark) and the island of Saaremaa from Denmark (1645 Treaty of Brömsebro). Under the Swedish supremacy, these provinces retained their separate institutions, character, and identity, but from the perspective of Stockholm they formed a distinct entity, and the policy initiatives of the central government were usually simultaneously applied in all three provinces. Ingermanland, the fourth Swedish province at the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, with its Orthodox population and the lack of German nobility, presented largely different challenges.

The parts of Livland remaining in Polish–Lithuanian hands (in the present-day Latgale region in eastern Latvia) formed a separate province (*Livonia trans-dunensis* or the Duchy of *Inflanty*). In addition, the Duchy of *Kurland* was created south of the Daugava River, functioning as a semi-independent vassal state of Poland-Lithuania. The historical trajectory of Lithuania was different from the territories taken by the ethnic Estonians, Livs, and Latvians. In 1386, the rulers of the Lithuanian Jagiellonian dynasty also inherited the throne of Poland, forming a personal union between the two states. With the 1569 Union of Lublin, the personal union was transformed into a common state known as *Rzeczpospolita* (Commonwealth). The Grand Duchy of Lithuania was an equal partner in the union, but it lost a large part of its territory, as the Ukrainian lands were transferred to Poland according to the treaty of Lublin. Nevertheless, Lithuania still comprised a vast land area of approxi-

mately three hundred thousand square kilometers in present-day Lithuania and Belarus (see Kasekamp 2010, 43–44).

The "Baltic region," in its original form, emerged on the basis of three provinces on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea: Estland, Livland, and Kurland. They shared a common historical heritage in medieval Livonia, they all had a ruling class of German origin and a peasant class of native peoples, and they shared the Lutheran faith. The impetus for the emergence of a common regional identity was their incorporation into the Russian conglomerate empire during the eighteenth century. The Swedish overseas provinces Estland and Livland were incorporated on the basis of the 1710 capitulations, which guaranteed the preservation of the Lutheran religion, autonomous institutions and legal system, and the leading position of German elites. In 1795, with the third partition of Poland, the former Duchy of Kurland became the third so-called German province in the Russian empire. Polish Livonia (*Inflanty*) had already been ceded to Russia during the first partition in 1772. It preserved its Catholicism, but not its provincial autonomy, as it was fully incorporated into the Vitebsk governorate of Russia. Similarly, Lithuanian territories that were gobbled up by the Russian empire in the subsequent partitions of Poland in 1793 and 1795 did not acquire an autonomous status in the manner of the "German" provinces.

The idea that the three provinces of Estland, Livland, and Kurland formed a common region began to emerge in the late eighteenth century. The local political elites, it has to be noted, had developed a rather strong particularistic provincialism, which for a long time inhibited the formation of a common identity (see P. Piirimäe 2012). Hence the idea of a common region was first introduced by outside observers who, unlike the locals, tended to notice the commonalities between the three provinces rather than the differences. During the reign of Catherine II (1762–96), who attempted an administrative standardization of the provinces, the Russian central government began using the concepts *Ostzeiski krai* and *Pribaltiiski krai* (the region at the Baltic) in their official documents. In 1801, the provincial governments were submitted to the administration of a single governor-general. The similarities were also noticed by foreign travelers, such as the Englishwoman Elizabeth Rigby Eastlake, whose travel account, *Letters from the shores of the Baltic* (1841), was translated into German as *Baltische Briefe* (1846) (Berkholz 1882, 520; Eastlake 1842). About the same time, there was increasing interest in the study of the autochthonous peoples along the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea. Linguistically there were two different groups in the region, and there was no agreement at first as to which group should bear the name "Baltic." *Mayers Conversations-Lexicon* from 1844 speaks of "Baltische Finnen," consisting of "eigentliche Finnen oder Suomen" (actual Finns), Kuren, Liven, Esten, and

Lappen. However, in 1845, linguist F. Nesselmann recommended the use of "Baltic languages" (*baltische Sprachen*) for the Old-Prussian, Latvian, and Lithuanian languages, and this usage became established in the second half of the nineteenth century (Jansen 2005, 38). The perceived linguistic unity between Latvians and Lithuanians did not, however, affect the emerging regional "Baltic" identity, because this was borne by German elites rather than autochthonous populations.

Among the German inhabitants in the region, a common Baltic identity was most strongly felt and promoted by the intellectuals (*Literatenstand*) who founded German-language newspapers addressing the readership of all three provinces. The first such publications still referred to the provinces as distinct spatial entities: in 1823 *Ostsee-Provinzen-Blatt,* and from 1828 to 1838 *Kur-, Liv- und Esthländisches Provinzialblatt,* were published. In 1836, however, the newspaper *Das Inland* was founded, uniting the provinces under a single word. A significant institution for joint activities of Baltic intellectuals was the "Society for the Study of History and Antiquities of the Russian Baltic Provinces" (*Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Altertumskunde der Ostseeprovinzen Russlands*), founded in 1834 in Riga. While "Ostseeprovinzen" was still the preferred concept, "baltisch" was often used with the same meaning, for example by liberal scholar and writer Georg von Schultz-Bertram in 1852 in the title of his *Baltische Skizzen* (in Jansen 2005, 41). However, the concept "baltisch" was simultaneously used in a broader sense in Germany to signify all territories adjacent to the Baltic Sea—in North-Germany there were a number of "Baltic" societies and periodicals dedicated to local studies (examples in Hackmann 2015, 30).

1860s–1870s: The Formation of
Three "Nations" in the Baltic Provinces

In Estonian and Latvian national historiographies, the period from the 1860s to the 1870s has been hailed as their national "awakening," but it should be noted that it was also the period of the emergence of the third "nation" in the region: the Balts (*Balten*). It was largely the strengthening of Russian nationalism and the pressure to liquidate the special status of the Baltic provinces that impelled the provincial elites to view themselves as a common group. Thus the concept "Balts" acquired strong ideological connotations at the time. German unification under Bismarck increased the national pride of Baltic Germans, yet they never identified themselves with the new German empire, stressing their loyalty to the Romanov dynasty and their historical rights to govern the Baltic provinces. Nevertheless, the German character of the region was anathema to the Slavophiles, who urged the central government

to implement the policies of Russification in administration and education, and to advance the conversion of peasants to Orthodoxy in the provinces. In the words of the leading Slavophile Yuri Samarin, the Baltic provinces were "not an advance post of Germany ... but a western maritime borderland of Russia" (Hiden 2004, 3). The objection to a mental geography projected by German concepts "deutsche" or "deutsch-russische Ostseeprovinzen" is also apparent in the works of Russian authors who emphasize that "pribaltiiski krai" lacks definitive natural boundaries and is therefore a "natural continuation" of Russian territory up to the Baltic Sea (Hackmann 2015, note 56; Brüggemann 2012, 127).

The Balts in the original sense referred primarily to the nobility who were working toward the political union of the three governorates, including a common Diet of four noble corporations (*Ritterschaften*).[3] Baltic-German liberal thinkers, however, called for a Baltic unity that would break down the class boundaries, proposing reforms that would legally equalize the nobility, burghers, and literati. In 1859, they launched the journal *Baltische Monatsschrift* (1859–1931)—the first time that "Baltic" was used in a title, a fact that expressed its wide-ranging political program.[4] Yet even this liberal project excluded the local populations—Latvians and Estonians, who made up the peasant class and were considered by the Germans as people without nationality. The three groups went along three different paths, forming their own distinct national identities, with a strong antagonism emerging between the Balts (later also called Baltic-Germans: *Deutschbalten* or *Baltendeutsche*) on the one side and Estonians and Latvians on the other. There was an attempt in 1879 by an Estonian journalist Harry Jannsen to launch the concept "Baltia" that would unite all three ethnic groups in the provinces (Estonians, Latvians, and Germans), proclaiming that "we are all 'Balts.'" But he was sharply rebuffed both by Germans—who could not imagine sharing political power with peasants—and by more radical Estonian nationalist "awakeners," who refused any cooperation with the historical "oppressors," as the Germans were widely viewed up to World War II.[5]

It is therefore only natural that the concept "Baltia/Baltija," which the Estonian and Latvian writers had used in the 1870s in a neutral meaning as a geographical term for the whole region, subsequently went out of fashion as it was increasingly associated with the German institutions and culture in the region. The Estonians and Latvians replaced it with the geographical concepts "Estonia" (*Eestimaa*) and "Latvia" (*Latvija*), which were based on ethnic rather than administrative boundaries.[6] It should be pointed out here that the formulation of the idea of a cohesive ethnic nation with its natural territory was more straightforward in the case of the Estonians, whose area of settlement coincided rather precisely with the province of Estland and the

northern districts of the province of Livland. The Latvian speakers, on the other hand, faced the challenge of incorporating Latgalians, who had experienced a different historical trajectory. Their nobility was Polish, not German; their religion was Catholic, not Lutheran; and the emancipation of the serfs took place there in 1861, as in the rest of Russia, not in the years 1816–19, as in the Baltic provinces. The Latgalians developed their own identity and even used the concept "Baltic" for negative self-definition—at the time of their own national "awakening" in 1904–06, the Latvian-speakers in Latgale started referring to the Latvians in Livland (*Vidzeme*) and Kurland-Semigallia (*Kurzeme-Semgale*) as the Balts (Plakans 2011a, 276; 2011b). In the case of Estonia, the explicit aim of nationalist politicians in the early twentieth century was the unification of Estonian ethnic areas into a single autonomous province within the Russian empire. This was achieved after the 1917 February revolution, thus creating a clear-cut territorial basis for a future nation-state. By contrast, not all politicians in Latgale were sure whether to join a potential Latvian state or to create one of their own (Plakans 2011b).

1917–1920: Nation-States or Federations?

The new political order that emerged from the ruins of the Russian and Habsburg empires at the end of World War I rendered a number of prewar regionalist conceptions obsolete. The earlier subnational region *Baltikum,* consisting of three German-dominated provinces of the Russian empire, lost its inner cohesion when the independent nation-states Estonia and Latvia were founded in their stead. The concept "Baltic" did not disappear as a result, but its meaning changed to reflect the new reality on the ground. The process by which the subnational concept was transformed into a supranational one was far from straightforward. Although the concept "Baltic states" as comprising the three republics Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania became relatively clearly established by the late 1930s, this specific view of the region only emerged in competition with other conceptualizations, and it remained open to various interpretations and reinterpretations during the entire interwar period.

It would be anachronistic to view the emergence of new nation-states on the eastern shore of the Baltic coast as an inevitable outcome of the drive for independence of political elites in these countries. Quite the contrary, until the end of 1917, the national leaders in both Estonia and Latvia envisioned the future of their countries as autonomous parts of various possible federations, rather than as independent states. The Baltic rim (*Randstaaten*) was seen geopolitically as a frontline between the great powers Russia and Germany, where one or the other would dominate depending on their relative

strength. An independent existence seemed questionable here in the long term. For both Estonians and Latvians, domination by Germany was considered the worst possible option, as this would have strengthened even more the position of local German elites, diminishing the prospects for cultural and political development of the indigenous populations. Therefore, hopes were at first pinned on the achievement of political autonomy within a federal and democratic Russian empire (Tõnisson 1917).

Immediately after the fall of the Russian monarchy in February 1917, this seemed like an achievable goal. But the situation changed substantially in the autumn, when it became clear that the collapsing Russian state was unable to protect the Baltic provinces against the German offensive. This was the period of unprecedented regionalist dreams, as Baltic politicians started to look for a third way between Germany and Russia. Even now independent statehood was not the preferred option, and various federalist projects were proposed instead, the aim of which was to secure national self-determination within a larger political framework. A favorite construct was a Baltic-Scandinavian federation that would connect the Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian, Finnish, and Scandinavian nations (a case in point is Jaan Tõnisson's speech on 25 August 1917; see Kuldkepp 2013, 330; Lehti 1999, 82–85). This proposal, advanced mainly by Estonian leaders, but also supported by a number of Latvians, had its roots in the idealistic images of Scandinavia, the corresponding myth of the "good old Swedish times," and the notion of a natural closeness of Baltic, Finnic, and Scandinavian nations (for Estonia, see Kuldkepp 2013; for Latvia, see Ščerbinskis 2003 and 2012). More limited variants on the theme were a Scandinavian monarchy that would include Estonia, or an Estonian-Swedish union state. During the war, several Estonian "para-diplomats," as Mart Kuldkepp has called them, attempted to incite "Swedish patriots" to take up their historical mission and intervene on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea in support of such broad regionalist projects (Kuldkepp 2014, 23). Here it was possible to tap into the geopolitical visions of Swedish conservative politicians and scientists, most notably Rudolf Kjellén, who advocated the adoption of an ambitious "Baltic program" that would project Swedish economic and cultural power across the Baltic Sea (Kuldkepp 2015; Marklund 2015).

Another popular alternative, proposed repeatedly by the Estonians in the period from 1917 to 1919, was a Finnish–Estonian union state (Karjahärm and Sirk 2001, 357–63; Lehti 1999, 108–17; Suits 1917; Zetterberg 2004, 52–54). This reflected the deep-rooted solidarity of the Estonian national movement with their linguistic relatives in Finland that dated back to the mid-nineteenth century, frequently expressed with the metaphor "Finnish bridge." The Finns were seen as more advanced in their national cultural and

economic development. The Grand Duchy of Finland, which had a parlia-
mentary political system and enjoyed strong autonomy within the Russian
Empire, had served as a model for both Estonian and Latvian national aspira-
tions (Alenius 1998; Karjahärm and Sirk 1997, 278–80). A common state was
based on the idea of linguistic kinship, and therefore a federation with Finland
was never discussed by the Latvians. Instead, at the end of 1917, they consid-
ered the proposal by the Lithuanians to form a union of two Baltic-speaking
nations, the Latvians and the Lithuanians (Lehti 1999, 92). None of these
projects led to any serious negotiations with a view to their realization, be-
cause of a lack of interest on the part of the prospective partners. A federal
union with the Estonians was rejected by the majority of Finnish leaders,
who considered any commitment to their southern neighbors an increased
security risk (Zetterberg 2004, 53). There were a few who entertained the
idea of a "greater Finland," which would have included Estonia and Karelia,
but such a Finnish-dominated structure did not correspond to the Estonian
idea of a federation of equal states (Lehti 1999, 114–17). With regard to the
Latvian-Lithuanian union, there was little enthusiasm in the relatively indus-
trialized Lutheran Latvia to join with the agrarian and Catholic Lithuania
(Lehti 1999, 92). The broader union of Baltic and Scandinavian nations was
also a stillborn idea, because the Scandinavian states had no interest in being
drawn into the struggle between Russia and Germany over the control of the
eastern shores of the Baltic Sea.

Thus, the creation of fully independent Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania
only became the goal of local politicians in 1918, when all new proposed re-
gionalist models had failed and the old models were seen as a threat to vital
national interests. All three had to fight off Bolshevik attempts to restore Rus-
sia to its prerevolutionary boundaries, and at the same time they had to avoid
the reestablishment of the supremacy of former dominant nations in their
territories: Germans in the case of Estonia and Latvia, and Poles in the case of
Lithuania. The Germanization of the Russian Baltic provinces became a real
threat when they were occupied by the advancing German army in February
1918. Institutions such as *Baltische Vertrauensrat, Baltenverband* and *Deutsch-
Baltische Gesellschaft* had been set up in Germany during the war with an aim
to lobby for the annexation of *Baltikum.* One of the most active proponents
of this idea was the historian Theodor Schiemann, who in 1915 wrote in a
pamphlet that the three "German Baltic provinces of Russia" constituted
a single cultural region (*Kulturgebiet*) because "it does not matter that it is
populated by Estonians in the north and by Latvians in the south since they
both share the same German culture" (in Meyer 1956, 222). German geogra-
phers, for their part, took pains to prove the existence of natural boundaries
that separated Russia from its Baltic provinces, contrary to what the Russian

geographers had maintained. Albrecht Penck claimed that the Narva River, Lake Peipus, and the Velikaya River formed a sharp natural boundary, which he called *warägische Grenzsaum*. This divided Russia, with its continental climate, from the Baltics, which had more of a "mid-European" character (*mitteleuropäisches Gepräge*) (Penck 1917, 14–15; see Schultze 2006, 49).

The German government ignored the Estonian declaration of independence from 24 February 1918 and similar calls by the Latvians. Paying lip service to the Brest-Litovsk treaty, which stipulated that the future of the provinces should be determined "in agreement with their populations," they consulted a General Provincial Assembly dominated by Baltic German landlords. The assembly duly pleaded with the Kaiser to create a unified "Baltic state" under German protection and in personal union with the Prussian crown (Hiden 2004, 26). This project collapsed with the retreat of the German army after the German revolution in November 1918. Nevertheless, as late as June 1919, the Baltic German philosopher Hermann Keyserling proposed the idea of a supranational "cosmopolitan" Baltic state, citing the example of Belgium as a suitable model (Keyserling 1919; see also Undusk 2003). The sentiment that the only viable state in the region could be created out of all former Baltic provinces under Baltic German leadership was not, however, shared by all Germans. Liberal journalist Paul Schiemann, the nephew of the nationalist historian Theodor Schiemann, became by autumn 1918 absolutely committed to an independent Estonia and Latvia (Hiden 2004, 29, 36; Schiemann 1979), and in the subsequent war against Bolshevik Russia, Baltic Germans formed their own regiment that fought alongside the Estonian national army.[7] For liberal Baltic Germans, the national goal was to achieve cultural autonomy within new independent states (Housden 2014).

The Lithuanians, with their different historical heritage, were less sensitive about a possible German-dominated union, and they sought to advance their national cause under German occupation. The Lithuanian national council *Taryba* even elected a Catholic German duke as King Mindaugas II in the summer of 1918. After the collapse of the German military, the election was canceled and the Lithuanians also took the path to full independence. The other option, advanced by the Poles but also by some Lithuanians, was to pursue the reestablishment of the historical Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth in a federal form, which in some visions would also have united the Belarusian lands. In March 1921, the Foreign Ministry of Poland proposed, as a solution to the Vilna question, the establishment of a federal Lithuania, united with Poland through a common president (Senn 1966, 63). All such proposals were eventually rejected, as they were out of touch with the prevailing national sentiments of the time. Although the multilayered Lithuanian-Polish cultural and political identity was still strong among some Lithuanian leaders,

all solutions that did not recognize the Lithuanian character of the new state were found unacceptable.

The Interwar Period: The Emergence of "the Baltic States"

After the imperialist aspirations of Russia and Germany were defeated and the proposed alternative regionalist projects did not bear fruit, five independent nation-states—Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland—were created on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea. A certain unity between these states was perceived both by outside observers and by local political elites. The consciousness of the weakness of small states in international politics was continuously very high, which is why attempts were made to realize some earlier regionalist dreams in the form of an alliance system between independent states. When it became clear that the Scandinavian states were not interested in a broader Baltic Sea alliance, a series of conferences was held with the goal of creating an alliance that would comprise the five states on the eastern shore. For its supporters, such an alliance system represented a regional framework that would set them apart from a German-dominated *Mitteleuropa,* and at the same time offer a credible defense against Soviet expansion. The ostensible aim for the Baltic union, as argued by the Estonian and Latvian envoys to Britain and France, was to guarantee the "freedom of the Baltic sea," which would be in the interest of all European countries, fitting into the idea of a "cordon sanitaire" against the Bolshevik threat (Pusta 1933; Hovi 1975).

Thus there was a window of opportunity for the reconceptualization of the "Baltic" as consisting of more than three states, but a larger Baltic union collapsed due to the unsolved Vilnius question between Lithuania and Poland, as well as the unwillingness of Finland to commit to an alliance in the south (see Butkus 2007). Even the creation of a trilateral alliance between Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania proved difficult. In Estonian and Latvian public rhetoric in the 1920s and 1930s, the support for a Baltic cooperation in this narrower format was very strong, and the two countries agreed to a defensive alliance and a customs union in 1923. The Lithuanians, on the other hand, were less enthusiastic about the trilateral cooperation (Jurkynas 2007, 53). The increasing tensions in Europe after the National Socialists came to power in Germany made Lithuania reconsider the partnership proposals. In 1934 a "Baltic Entente" was eventually secured between Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, with the main goal of joint action in foreign policy (see Medijainen 1991, 38–43). The alliance failed in practice, as its member states could not withstand the military pressure from Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939–40 (Jurkynas 2007, 54).

The usage of the word "Baltic states" in the interwar period reflects the vacillation between a larger and smaller union. The concept "Baltic states" was used in a broader and in a narrower meaning, as was pointed out in the Latvian encyclopedia published in 1927–28 ("Baltijas zemes," 1927). In its broadest sense, "Baltic states" coincided with the "Baltic Sea states" that sometimes included even the Scandinavian countries but was more frequently restricted to the five states on the eastern shores of the sea (e.g., Jackson 1940). In the narrower meaning, it included just Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The Swedes, for example, preferred to use the word "Baltic" in this narrow meaning from the early 1920s onwards, which reflected their aversion to being called a Baltic state ("Balticum/Baltikum" 1923; "Östersjöprovinserna" 1922). But neither was this narrow meaning firmly established: sometimes Finland was also named as the fourth Baltic state.[8] In Estonian, a clear difference was made between "Baltic Sea countries" (*Läänemeremaad*) and "Baltic countries" (*Baltimaad*), in order to distinguish between the broader and the narrower meaning. An even narrower meaning was proposed by Mihály Haltenberger, the professor of geography at the University of Tartu, who put forward what he called scientific proof that *Baltikum* included only Estonia and Latvia (and the region was closer to *Nordeuropa*), while Lithuania was a part of *Mitteleuropa* (Haltenberger 1925).

There were skeptical voices in the region that held the Baltic entente as insufficient or even dangerous, and sought to include the countries in a broader transregional framework. One such alternative regionalist conceptualization was "Baltoscandia," which was an attempt to place a broader understanding of "Norden" on presumably scientific foundations. The concept, launched by Swedish geographer Sten de Geer in 1928, was enthusiastically adopted by both Finnish and Estonian scholars (De Geer 1928, see also chapter 2 in this volume). The Estonian geographer Edgar Kant added a number of historical and cultural factors to De Geer's account, agreeing with him that Baltoscandia as a natural geographic unit consisted of the Scandinavian countries Finland, Estonia, and Latvia. Lithuania, in their view, belonged to continental Europe (Kant 1934; 1935; see also Lehti 1998). The Lithuanian geographer Kazys Pakštas objected to this interpretation in the 1930s, and revived the idea during World War II in *The Baltoscandian Confederation* (1942), envisioning the Baltic Sea as the Mediterranean of the north, a zone of peaceful collaboration of small nations (Pakštas 2005; see Lehti 1998). In order to fit Lithuania into this region, he suggested a number of alternative characteristics to complement and replace some of the criteria offered by De Geer and Kant.

A more explicit critique of the concept of "Baltic states" came from the pen of the young Estonian scholar Ilmar Tõnisson at the end of the 1930s

(Tõnisson 1937). He argued that the concept "Baltic states" was a chimera, invented by the Baltic Germans and revived by the Latvians for their own purposes. It was not based on anything substantial because there was no cultural affinity, economic integration, or "common destiny" between the three nations. Tõnisson maintained that for geopolitical reasons, Estonia should become "Nordic," and that it was possible to convince the Scandinavian countries that the benefit was mutual. The Estonians' desire for acknowledgement as a Nordic nation was supported, in his view, by their linguistic kinship with the Finns, and the affinity between their history, culture, and national character and those of the Scandinavian nations.

Another strand of thought that sought a place for Estonia outside the Baltic bloc was Finno-Ugric regionalism.[9] Its most notable representative in Estonia was ethnographer and folklorist Oskar Loorits, who drew upon the intellectual traditions of scientific racism and *Völkerpsychologie*, both popular at the time (see, e.g., Jahoda 2007; Richards 1997). Loorits contrasted what he saw as the aggressively expanding Western or Indo-European monotheist nations with the harmonious, pacific, and polytheistic traditions of the East, where in his view the Estonians also naturally belonged (Loorits 1932 and 1939; see Selart 2013). Loorits was explicitly anti-Latvian, but even more vehemently anti-German and anti-Russian—the latter, in his view, were also "the children of the Western world," having come in touch with the East only recently (Loorits 1951, 35). The view that membership in the ancient and glorious "Finnish race" should be a source of pride was not Loorits's invention, as it had been a popular theme among Estonian intellectuals since the early twentieth century (Selart 2013).

His anti-European sentiment was not, however, particularly widely shared, even though some writers were inspired by Oswald Spengler's criticism of Western civilization (Karjahärm 2003, 82–86). The mainstream political elites in the Baltic republics continued to conceive of Europe as their "natural home," and the ideas of "Western Christendom" and "European civilization" always remained in the background as the widest sphere of supranational identity (Pusta 1931; see Heikkilä 2014). The physical anthropologists interested in racial issues also emphasized that the Baltic nations were racially European, not Asian. The Estonian anthropologists, such as Juhan Aul, vehemently rejected the old nineteenth-century misconception that Estonians (and Finns) were "Mongols" (Kalling and Heapost 2013). Both Estonian and Latvian scientists conducted extensive fieldwork, measuring the skulls of a very large number of people and applying the popular cranial index methods in their analysis. Aul concluded that the Estonians were a mixture of two European racial types—the Nordic (dolichocephalic) and the East Baltic (mesocephalic). Estonia and Finland were, in his view, the core territory of the

East Baltic race, which was another clear sign of their closeness (Aul 1933). Whereas Aul did not construct any psychological or cultural hierarchy on the basis of these types, the Latvian anthropologist Jēkabs Prīmanis argued that the original and "pure" Latvian type was the "Nordic" one, and that Latvians had subsequently been "corrupted" by the influx of Eastern races. Prīmanis could draw upon the theories of his teacher Gaston Backman, a Swedish scholar, who already in 1915 had described the Baltic region as a front line in racial warfare between the "Germanic" and "Slavic" races. In 1920, Backman became a professor at the University of Latvia and initiated a program to systematically measure eleven thousand Latvian army recruits (Felder 2013). The incentive to emphasize the Nordic racial character of the Baltic nations of course increased during the Nazi occupation, when Aul also started stressing the high ratio of "strong" Nordic-type people in Estonia, and pointed out the essential differences between the Estonian East-Baltic type and the similar type in the neighboring areas (Kalling and Heapost 2013, 100).

The Soviet Period

It can be argued that the Baltic region that we know now was established during the Soviet era. During this period, the prewar concept of "the Baltic states" lost its vagueness and was exclusively reserved for the three republics occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940. The Soviet Union applied almost identical policies toward all three states, starting from the ultimatums for military bases in 1939, staged "revolutions" in 1940, the granting of "Soviet republic" status after the incorporation, and ending with mass deportations in the 1940s, as well as collectivization, nationalization, and other Sovietization practices. Finland, on the contrary, was able to resist a similar attempt at conquest after being conceded to the Soviet "sphere of influence" by the Hitler-Stalin pact in 1939, and thus Finland clearly moved away from any Baltic associations. This common historical experience created a sense of unity of fate between the occupied republics. This was expressed in stronger cultural cooperation than had been the case in the interwar period, and also in a coordinated dissident movement (e.g., the "Baltic appeal" of 1979; see Shtromas 1996, 105–6). This unity was also sensed from the perspective of the Soviet Union, where the three republics were called by a single name, "the Soviet Baltic" (*Sovetskaia Pribaltika*), and acquired the image in the Soviet Union as "the Soviet West" (*Sovetski Zapad*). In the actual West, the occupation created the persistent diplomatic problem of recognition, subsumed under the common name of "the Baltic question" (see Hiden, Made, and Smith 2008). The fact that the Baltic issue was not buried during the Cold War, and that the policy of nonrecognition was pursued by most Western states until

the end of the occupation, is partly attributable to the very strong cooperation between the Baltic expatriate communities, who actively advanced their cause in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Sweden. In this period, many Baltic societies and organizations were founded, and the concept of Baltic studies was launched (Rebas 1990).

The feeling of common identity culminated during the "Baltic revolution" of the years 1987–91, which resulted in the regaining of independence. Symbolically, the cooperation climaxed with the "Baltic Way" (or "chain") on 23 August 1989, when approximately two million citizens formed a human chain between the three capitals. Political cooperation was institutionalized in 1991 in the form of a Baltic Assembly—an interparliamentary consultative body. The Assembly coordinated the policy of the Baltic states toward Russia (e.g., the withdrawal of Russian troops) and the EU, with a view toward meeting the criteria for accession. It also established Baltic prizes for literature, arts, and science, which somewhat increased the awareness of cultural and scientific activities across the region. An institution for intergovernmental collaboration, the Baltic Council of Ministers, was founded in 1994.

Post–Cold War Identity Politics

Nevertheless, the common Baltic identity diminished in the 1990s, when the three states started looking for broader regional affiliations. The situation after the end of the Cold War was, to a certain extent, similar to the period after World War I, in the sense that the small (re)established states started to look for a broader regional affiliation that would reduce the security risks arising from their geopolitical location (Hiden 2003). The common denominator "Baltic" was seen as less desirable, as it reminded people of the Soviet legacy and seemed to condemn the Baltic states to the "post-Soviet space," alien to European values and politically dominated by Russia (Brüggemann 2003). The primary aim of all three states was to be accepted as members of Europe, or more broadly to be recognized as part of "the Western civilization," with the concomitant living standards and security guarantees (see Kuus 2012; Rindzeviciute 2003). On the rhetorical level, it was emphasized that the Baltic states were not endeavoring to "become" European but were "returning" to the European "family of nations," since Europe was, historically and culturally, their "natural home" (Pavlovaite 2003). Institutionally, this meant that the ultimate aim was access to the EU and NATO, but in the early 1990s this still seemed a distant dream. Therefore, various other forms of supranational regional cooperation were pursued, both for their own sake and instrumentally, because they were regarded as means to move toward Europe. Again, the Nordic region loomed large in these regionalist dreams, especially for Estonia and

Latvia, which emphasized their historical connections with the North (Lager-spetz 2003). This was accompanied by mnemohistorical activities such as organizing royal visits and opening monuments to commemorate Swedish kings.

As it was clear that it would be rather difficult to be accepted officially as belonging to the Nordic family of nations, the "Baltic region" itself was reconceptualized so that it would involve countries on all sides of the sea. A favorite regionalist concept launched at the time was the "Baltic Sea Area," with schemes for institutionalized cooperation in all spheres of society (Ewert 2012; Grzechnik 2012). The concept "Baltic world" was developed by historians who emphasized the historical unity of the region around the Baltic Sea (Kirby 1995 and 1998). An alternative concept was "North-Eastern Europe," favored especially by German historians, who consciously promoted the unity of *Nordosteuropa* as a "historical region" (Zernack 1993 and 2002; Hackmann and Lehti 2010; Hackmann and Schweitzer 2002a and 2002b; Troebst 1999 and 2003). In the early 1990s, the concept of a "New Hanseatic Region" was also popular, but its significance gradually diminished, probably because of its overwhelmingly German orientation. All of these concepts can be considered instruments for overcoming the Cold War–era legacy of dividing Europe into the East and the West.

Nevertheless, these regionalist constructions did not replace the established concept of "the Baltic states." Also, trilateral Baltic cooperation remained the primary focus of the identity narratives of the political elites in all three states, as M. Jurkynas has shown in his quantitative study. In official speeches, "the Baltic" prevailed among all regional references in the period from 1992 to 2004. At the same time, the Baltic references were often accompanied by broader regional affiliations. Estonia and Latvia tended to refer to themselves as Northern countries, whereas the Lithuanians viewed themselves simultaneously as part of Central and Eastern Europe, or as a bridge or link between the Baltic region and Central Europe (Jurkynas 2007, 58–108). Against this broader picture, the attempt by the Estonian foreign minister Toomas Hendrik Ilves in 1998 to "move" Estonia out of the Baltic region was more an exception than the beginning of a new official narrative. Quite like Ilmar Tõnisson had done in the 1930s, Ilves described Baltic identity as a "poorly fitting, externally imposed category," and launched instead a poetic vision of "Yule-land" which located Estonia, but not Latvia or Lithuania, within the Nordic family of nations (Ilves 1998; see also an official speech in 1999, quoted in Jurkynas 2007, 83). Ilves's vision can be interpreted as a sign that some Estonians had started to treat the Baltic affiliation as a burden, feeling that their slightly more slowly developing southern neighbors were dragging them down in their move toward the EU. The Estonians' sense of a different trajectory was undoubtedly enhanced by their linguistic separation

from the "Balts," as well as their particularly close economic and cultural connections with their so-called fellow Finns.

Such attempts to reconceptualize "the Baltic" have not come to fruition, largely because the international community always treated the three states as a single unit, and did not deviate from this policy, accepting all of them simultaneously, rather than one-by-one, as members of the EU and NATO in 2004. Since then, the regionalist denominations have stabilized. The Nordic countries have not been a target of regional affiliation to the same extent as earlier, partly because the Baltic states are more integrated into the European and Euro–Atlantic structures than most Nordic states at the moment.[10] At the same time, successful integration has diminished the incentive for trilateral cooperation. From 2004 onwards, Latvia has been the strongest proponent of institutionalized cooperation, whereas Estonia has suggested a less institutionalized pattern. An analysis of government and party programs has shown that after integration with Euro–Atlantic structures, the issue of Baltic collaboration has played a somewhat smaller role than previously in political debates of all three countries (Jurkynas 2007, 127–29). Another tendency is to tie the trilateral cooperation into larger formats. A more recent development in Europe is a new cooperative framework between Visegrad-Nordic-Baltic states in the form of regular meetings of foreign ministers, who coordinate their policy with regard to issues threatening the stability and welfare of this broadly conceived supranational region ("Meeting of Foreign Ministers" 2013).

To conclude, the "Baltic" is less and less viewed as a problematic concept, especially in the light of the current tentative reconceptualization of Europe on the North–South axis rather than the West–East one, reflecting, among other things, the different approaches taken to cope with the fiscal crisis and austerity measures. The Baltic nations figure relatively high in the recent comparative analyses of democratic institutions, social welfare, education, countering corruption, etc. Therefore, their current effort is to promote the "Baltic" brand by advertising their achievements, rather than to reconceptualize the region as such. Marko Lehti has spoken of the newly self-assertive voice of the Baltic nations, "who are shedding the image of nations in transition, insisting that in new Europe all are equal" (Lehti 2005). In light of the increasingly tense security situation in Europe, the division of nations along the old geopolitical "spheres of influence" is a scenario that the Baltic nations are definitely keen to avoid.

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Notes

1. For a semantic and etymological analysis of the concept, see Hackmann 2015, 26–28.
2. In the nineteenth century, it was often retrospectively called *Alt-Livland* in order to distinguish it from the later Swedish and Russian province of Livland, which comprised only the southern part of the medieval *Livland*.
3. The historical province of Saaremaa (Ösel) had its own Ritterschaft.
4. From 1863 also *Baltische Wochenschrift für Landwirtschaft*. For liberal Baltic German ideology, see Bahn 2008; Wittram 1931.
5. For Harry Jannsen, see Jansen 2005, II, 32–42; E. Piirimäe 2012, 112. Estonian statesman Jaan Tõnisson argued as late as in 1926 that "Baltic national identity" is a cover to hide the class ideology and power claims of German barons (Tõnisson 2011).
6. The local news in Harry Jannsen's newspaper *Die Heimath* was divided along these ethnic lines (Jansen 2005, II, 39).
7. The situation in Latvia was more complicated; see Rauch 1974, 60–69.
8. An Estonian encyclopedia (1932) says that "sometimes Finland is included in the Baltic states"; "Baltic union" (*Balti liit*) is defined as "cooperation between the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Finland) and Poland." A Latvian encyclopedia defines "the Baltic problem" (*Baltijas jautajums*) as the process of the formation of four Baltic states in 1917–20 ("Baltijas jautajums" 1927, "Balti liit" 1932, "Balti riigid" 1932).
9. Its broader interpretation in the form of the pan-Turanic movement advocated by the Hungarians never found resonance among the Finns and the Estonians. (Karjahärm and Sirk 2001, 362–63)
10. As of 2016, all three Baltic states are members of NATO, while Sweden and Finland are not; all three are members of the EU, while Norway and Iceland are not; all three are members of the Eurozone, while only one Nordic country (Finland) has joined.

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