

Non-reciprocal Region-building

Baltoscandia as a National Coordinate for the Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians

Marko Lehti

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Zusammenfassung

In den neunziger Jahren ist der Ostseeraum zu einem wachsenden Schauplatz politischen, kulturellen, sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Lebens geworden. Nach dem Zusammenbruch der Sowjetunion war die Ostsee keine Trennungslinie mehr durch Europa, und es entstanden Konzepte für den Ostseeraum als einheitlicher Region. Deren Grenzen sind jedoch nicht genau definiert: Manchmal werden alle Gebiete innerhalb der Wasserscheiderregion einbezogen, manchmal ist das Gebiet der Anrainerstaaten gemeint oder ein aus den an die Ostsee angrenzenden Regionen bestehendes Gebiet. Der eingeschränkteste Ansatz rechnet, nur die baltischen Staaten, Finnland und Skandinavien der Ostseeregion zu. „Baltoskandien“ ist eine aus den zwanziger Jahren stammende Bezeichnung dafür und trägt einige wesentliche Züge nationalen Denkens, die immer noch erkennbar sind, wenn die Balten ihre Ostseeregion und ihren Platz im neuen Europa definieren.

Marko Lehti ist wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter am Institut für Geschichtswissenschaft der Universität Turku.

The Baltic Sea Rim has never had so much publicity as it has had in the 1990ies. Politicians, economists, historians, artists and many other people have started to use the term Baltic Sea Region in this decade and the Baltic Sea Rim has thereby become a new rising scene of political, cultural, social and economic life. The collapse of the Soviet Union made this change possible because it ended the old East-West division of Europe and thereafter the Baltic Sea has ceased to be a dividing line in Europe.

This has made it possible to conceptualise of the Baltic Sea Rim as one region. The European integration process has, at the same time, laid emphasis on the meaning of different regions, inter-state regions or regions beyond the sovereign states. Regionalism has formed a core element in political discourse in the late twentieth century. The meaning and mode of regions, however, has differed and even the same region has been seen in different ways. The Baltic Sea Area is a good example of this variety of interpretations. Its borders are not defined precisely: sometimes all the areas within the watershed region are included, sometimes the area of the coastal states of the Baltic Sea is meant and sometimes an area made up of the regions around the Baltic Sea. The most restricted approach is to include only the Baltic States, Finland and Scandinavia in the Baltic Sea Area. This kind of regional imagery was characteristic of Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians during the interwar years and has again come to the fore in the 1990ies.

The Invention of Baltoscandia

Baltoscandia is no longer much used as a concept, but in the interwar period, when it was invented, it reflected some essential characteristics of national thinking. Baltoscandia is also only one label for an area which includes the Baltic States, Finland and Scandinavia. Quite often this area has been termed simply a Nordic or a Baltic Sea Area and then given a broadened or limited definition according to these concepts. The origin of this term Baltoscandia can be found in the discussions of the Baltic geographers. The roots of Baltoscandia are in another term, Fennoscandia, which was introduced in 1898 by a Finnish geologist, Wilhelm Ramsay. For him, *Fennoscandia* covered Scandinavia and Finland including Eastern Karelia and the Kola Peninsula. The origin of the term lay in geology and the similarity of its bedrock was the fundamental argument behind the unity of Fennoscandia.² Fennoscandia has, however, had

² Pakštas, Kazys: *The Baltoscandian Confederation*. Kaunas 1994 (1942), 5. See Kurs, Ott: "Eesti vabariigi asendi ja piiride uurimisest". In: *Akadeemia*. (1990), 1257. See also Voionmaa, Väinö: *Suomen uusi asema. Maantieteellisiä ja historiallisia peruspiirteä*. Porvoo 1919, 32–43.

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a wider meaning beyond geology and it has been used as one proof of a natural connection between Finland and Scandinavia. It was no accident that this kind of term, which separates Finland from Russia and connects it with Scandinavia, was invented during the period of Russian oppression in Finland, when the whole society joined together in the battle against Russian unification policy. This battle had an impact on architecture, fine arts and music, and of course also on geography.

Baltoscandia could be seen as an advanced version of Fennoscandia in a new political and cultural context during the interwar period. The term was introduced by the Swedish geographer, Sten De Geer, in 1928.³ Fennoscandia still formed a basic unit in De Geer's theory. He distinguished nine unifying elements, of which all nine were present only in the case of Fennoscandia and the only geological tie between Fennoscandia and the Baltic countries was that they both belonged to a region that emerged in the glacial period. However, there were also certain cultural elements which connected the Baltic countries in the same area. Protestant Christianity, the idea of a Northern race and the concept of Northern state gave rise, in De Geer's mind, to a larger Baltoscandia, but to him Fennoscandia was still the core unit. Altogether seven elements out of the nine could be found in Estonia, too, and somewhat fewer in Latvia. Both Estonia and Latvia were included in the geographical Baltoscandia. Lithuania was, however, excluded from Baltoscandia in De Geer's theory.⁴

Wider meanings were attached to Baltoscandia when it was adopted by Estonians and Lithuanians. The Professor of Geography at Tartu University, Edgar Kant, published a study in 1934 called *Estlands Zugehörigkeit zu Baltoskandia*, in which he developed De Geer's ideas and introduced new unifying elements for Baltoscandia strengthening the idea of Baltoscandia as a natural geographical unit. Kant stressed the role of agriculture and climate and he argued that Baltoscandia formed a single unit in these fields, too. He also laid more stress on the Baltic Sea itself and to him it was not a divisive but a culturally and politically unifying element. While De Geer had argued that only Finland and Scandinavia were peninsulas, Kant reminded his audience that Estonia and Latvia constituted, in fact, peninsulas of their own. Lithuania belonged in his opinion more to continental Europe. The relatively small size of the Baltoscandia nations was

³ The title of De Geer's book was: *Das geologische Fennoskandia und das geographische Baltoskandia*. Stockholm 1928.

⁴ Kant, Edgar: *Estlands Zugehörigkeit zu Baltoskandia*. Tartu 1934, 5–7 (= Tartu ülikooli majandusgeograafia seminari toimetised nr. 9). See Pakštas, Kazys: *The Baltoscandian Confederation*. Kaunas 1994 (1942), 5–10. See also Kurs, Ott: "Eesti vabariigi asendi ja piiride uurimisest". In: *Akadeemia*. (1990), 1257.

also one of Kant's new arguments. He also stressed cultural elements more than De Geer.⁵

Even if Kant's work is to be conceived as strictly scientific with correct argumentation, the modern reader will have difficulty in avoiding the feeling that the argumentation is a little bit artificial. There is first the idea of a unity between the Baltic States and Scandinavia. I am not saying that he consciously constructed a new region when he wrote his book, but it is true that the unity of the Baltic States and Scandinavia played such an important role in the interwar period that it seemed necessary to devise and prove this unity in one way or another. In the second place, such a geographical discourse contained symbolic borders which formed a fundamental basis for a whole national identity. In his other works, Kant stressed the existence of a dividing line against the East. In his opinion, Europe ended on the eastern border of Finland, Estonia and Latvia and then the great Siberia began.⁶ This division was given a geographical character, however, a symbolic border of that kind seemed more to be there as a starting-point for speculation about a place for Estonia in the whole of Europe.

Speculation and argumentation about a European eastern border is an old question. The discourse on European borders had always been linked with a larger cultural and political context because Europe is more a cultural entity than a geographical one. Different dividing lines have been drawn over the last few centuries and with these boundaries contemporaries have rather defined their own identity than sought to find the real geographical borders of Europe.⁷ Edgar Kant's dividing-line, which exclusively divides Europe into two parts, cannot possibly be explained simply through the history of geography, it owes more to the history of Estonian national discourse. Estonia, for its conceptualisation, has needed a dividing-line to be drawn as much as the idea of Baltoscandia has.

Similar nationalist elements could be found in the texts of the Lithuanian geographer, Kazys Pakštas. He was another advocate of Baltoscandia in the 1930ies. Pakštas used the term Baltoscandia in the lectures he gave at several universities around the Baltic Sea Rim during the years 1933–34, however, he only published his first larger study on Baltoscandia only during the war.

⁵ Kant, Edgar 1934 as note 4, 13–32. See also Kurs, Ott: "Eesti vabariigi asendi ja piiride uurimisest *Akadeemia*. (1990), 1257–1258.

⁶ Kant, Edgar: "Eesti geopoliitiliset ja geoökonomiliset asendist, eriti Venemaa suhtes". In: *Akadeemia*. 1990 (1931), 1232. This is, of course, not a unique way of dividing Europe. See, e.g., Voionmaa, Vaino: *Suomen uusi asema. Maantieteellisiä ja historiallisia peruspiirteitä*. Porvoo 1919, 32–43.

⁷ Davies, Norman: *Europe. A History* Oxford 1996, 10–14.

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His booklet *The Baltoscandian Confederation* (1942) was a combination of a geographical expose and a political pamphlet. He followed De Geer and Kant's footsteps in his argumentation about the unity of Baltoscandia, but expanded his arguments more into the political and cultural sphere. When De Geer needed nine variables, Pakštas was satisfied with only six, but all these six also covered the Baltic countries including Lithuania. His classification was as follows:

- 1) **Baltoscandia – A Region of Characteristic Moraines**; comprising a largely homogeneous natural environment for farming and cattle-raising;
- 2) **The Zone of Nations of a Predominantly Northern Character**;
- 3) **Baltoscandia – A Region of Seven Smaller Languages**;
- 4) **Baltoscandia – A Zone of Western Christianity**;
- 5) **Baltoscandia – A Complete Unit of Northern States**, harmoniously surrounding the Baltic Sea and giving it a real Mediterranean character;
- 6) **Baltoscandia – A Zone of Smaller Nations, of Common Cultural Interests and Mutual Sympathies**, where the variety of languages and cultures does not prevent mutual respect, collaboration and peace. From the latter point of view it is very rare and the most original zone on our planet.⁸

Pakštas' argumentation did not concentrate on geographical unity, instead his theory rather stressed cultural dimensions. Through these six points, Pakštas tried to prove that Baltoscandia was a natural and self-evident unit. His argumentation also had a practical application, since he insisted that because Baltoscandia was a natural geographical unit, this should also be reflected in politics. The main motive of Pakštas' pamphlet was to show how natural it was to also create one political unit around the Baltic Sea Rim. His vision was of a large Baltoscandian Confederation and he even introduced different political institutions for that new federation.⁹

It seems that the geographical discourse on Baltoscandia was not solely confined to scientific issues, but that the meaning and importance of the unit could be found beyond the geographical discourse in an extended nationalist discourse. No science, natural or humanistic, is entirely independent of its own time, with its beliefs and identities. Hence the emergence of Baltoscandia as a geographical concept cannot be explained by evaluating the history or geography but by analysing the national discourse of the interwar period.

⁸ Pakštas, Kazys 1994 (1942) as note 4, 10–14.

⁹ Ibid., 20–23. See also Lehti, Marko: "Unelma Itämeren liitosta. Baltian itsenäisyyden rakentaminen Skandinavian yhteyden kautta". In: Roiko-Jokela, Heikki (ed.): *Virallista politiikkaa ja epävirallista kanssakäymistä. Suomen ja Viron suhteiden käännekohtia 1860–1991*. Jyväskylä 1997, 266–267.

The Territorial Imagination

In the title of this article Baltoscandia was defined as a national coordinate. In a similar manner, in the preceding chapter, I pointed out that the geographical discourse contains nationalistic elements. What do I mean when I emphasize that something is a national construction? We could approach the question by defining a nation. The old and usual way of defining a nation is to search for some objective criteria such as language or common history. This method assumes that nations are in some way natural and ancient units. Nationalism and nation are, however, very modern phenomena. I hasten to add that I do not support a subjective definition either, in which only the individuals' own will is important. National identity is not only part of individual choice, it is also very much a social construction. We could define a nation only through the evolution of national discourse. This means analysing how peoples have understood a nation, which kinds of border and distinction they have made, which kinds of tradition and myth have been constructed. These ideas were produced in the texts of a given society.

A nation is an imagined community is Benedict Anderson's famous metaphor which helps in the understanding of the kind of construction a nation really is. Its point is that a nation is such a large society that it could not be based on natural relations between individuals but that its unity has always been created through different symbols, myths and traditions. These are not ancient, but constructed by nationalists in the modern age.¹⁰ All these different elements come together in the nationalist discourse, and the combination of these different meanings gives a meaning and definition to the nation. At the same time the elements of all nations are similar. They have been imagined as being sovereign and exclusive societies. A nation is a modern way of bringing order into the diversity of the world through the formulation of a particular, homogenous entity.

A spatial dimension is also present in nationality, which can be seen as boundary-setting discourse since it distinguishes the We from the Other. It is the nation-state and its frontiers which are usually used for sorting out this boundary between us and them. Boundary-setting is not, however, a process which takes place primarily in the border area itself but, as Paasi has stressed, a more important dimension is the constitution of a we/they dichotomy by exploiting

¹⁰ Anderson, Benedict: *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* London 1983, 14–16. See also Smith, Anthony D.: *The Ethnic Origin of Nations*. Oxford 1986, 138–144, 169–173, 177–208.

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stereotype definitions of both us and them, and of them in particular.¹¹ In the case of the nation-state, the elements which are usually exploited for this purpose are the construction of national units (e.g. Finns, Russians) or supranational units (Europeans, Scandinavians) or larger-scale geopolitical distinctions (e.g. East/West). The proper context of the study of boundaries and territories is therefore the continual process of nation-building. Hence, boundary-setting is a socio-political process and it is a question of social spatialization or spatial socialization. We can also see this process as a piece of territorial imagination by applying Anderson's term of the imagined community.

To analyse Baltoscandia as a product of the territorial imagination we have to go deeper into territoriality and clarify links of territoriality with the nation-state and sovereignty. Territory, sovereignty and state have a close relationship but they are not inseparable phenomena. It is possible to imagine sovereign entities which are not territorial and, on the other hand, territories which are not sovereign. Spatial dimensions have had an uncontested significance when peoples have formed their social and individual identities. The relationship between man and territory includes, however, rather variable modes and Tuomas Forsberg has distinguished six different forms of man's territoriality.¹² The first he calls *existential* territoriality, which simply means that man has to live somewhere. The second form is *operational* territoriality, a term which comprises the idea that geography sets conditions and offers opportunities for human behaviour. Operational understanding of territoriality is characteristic of classic geopolitics but also of the giant thinker of the history of territoriality, Fernand Braudel, who has emphasized the influences of an unchanging or very slowly changing nature on Mediterranean cultures. The third mode of territoriality, *ecological* territoriality, which refers to resources that are bound up with territory, is also typical of these two traditions.

The fourth mode of territorialization is *biological* territoriality which regards man as a territorial animal. The significance of this kind of territoriality for the human sciences is minor. In some way more important is *psychological* territoriality which has emphasized the emotional ties with the territory where one lives and has lived. Psychological territoriality is an important raw material for the raising of patriotic and nationalist feelings.

The sixth and last form of territoriality is *political* territoriality, area territory which has organized power. In the politics of the modern world, the purest form of political territory is a nation-state, however, a state is not the only form of

¹¹ Paasi, Anssi: *Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness. The Changing Geographies of the Finnish-Russian Border* Chichester 1996, 13, 28.

¹² Forsberg, Tuomas: "Beyond Sovereignty, Within Territoriality. Mapping the Space of Late-Modern (Geo)Politics". In: *Cooperation and Conflict*. 31 (1996), 359–361.

political unit.¹³ There seems to be a basic division between the sixth form of territoriality, political territoriality, and the five others because while all the others are based on reflections of geographical reality in human life, the sixth form is produced by man himself. A political territory is a social construct and in a similar way as other social constructions it is also historically contingent. "Geography" is thus not merely a passive spatial setting in which social life occurs, but something that is actively produced, reproduced, maybe maintained or transformed, in the struggles of individuals, in their local, day-to-day practices of life and in the collective forms of practice on larger spatial scales."¹⁴ The same thing could also be expressed in the Andersonian manner according to which political territory is an imagined entity in a similar way as a nation is.

The construction of regions is an interesting phenomenon which has been brought into the focus of international studies in recent years. These new regional studies have clearly used the new research on nationalism as their ideal in stressing similarities between nation-building and region-building. Neumann has analysed the region-building process as a political project for producing new kinds of territorial identities. He has visualised the logic of region-building as a process identical with nation-building:

The existence of regions is preceded by the existence of region-builders, a political actor who, as part of some political project, imagines a certain spatial and chronological identity for a region, and disseminates this imagined identity to others.¹⁵

Region-building is a political process whereby images and truisms are created politically, or, in other words, these new ways of spatial identity are produced in the first phase in language, in texts, discussions and speeches. Bourdieu in turn talks about regionalist discourse to express the same process:

Regionalist discourse is a performative discourse which aims to impose as legitimate a new definition of the frontiers and to get people to know and recognize the region that is thus delimited in opposition to the dominant definition, which is misrecognized as such and legitimate, and which does not acknowledge that new region.¹⁶

Successful region-building, the emergence of new territorial identity, requires region-builders to assure people about the naturalness of the territory, which

¹³ Ibid., 361–363.

¹⁴ Paasi, Anssi 1996 as note 11, 67.

¹⁵ Neumann, Iver B.: "A region-building approach to Northern Europe." In: *Review of International Studies*. 20 (1994), 58.

¹⁶ Bourdieu, Pierre: "Identity and Representation. Elements of a Critical Reflection on the Idea of Region." In: Thompson, John B. (ed.): *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge 1991, 223.

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could be done by arguing on the historical, geographical, cultural or economic unity of the given region. It is a process of naturalization. In the end, as in the case of a nation, if the new interpretation is accepted, which does not, of course, inevitably happen, different practices emerge within that new territory which strengthen the self-evident nature of that region and make it a natural way of dividing the world.¹⁷

The region-building process or naturalization of a region can be argued to have been the most successful in the case of a nation-state. The nation-state has a dominant role in modern political discourse as a form of imagining the political territory; as well as the state, it is possible to imagine other kinds of political regions which are, however, subordinated to the state. Wæver has found four other kinds of regions which he has classified according to their relations with the state:

- 1) *micro-regions* within states (Lombardy, Carinthia, Catalonia),
- 2) interstate *regional cooperation*, made up of states (the Visegrad group or the CIS),
- 3) *trans-regions* that cross borders but are made up of non-states as well as state actors and possibly have borders that do not coincide with state boundaries (e.g. the Baltic Sea Region which includes only parts of Russia, Germany and Poland) and basically take a network form, and finally
- 4) *quasi-continental regions* (Europe, the Middle East, South East Asia).¹⁸

Wæver's grouping, of course, has corresponded more to the Europe of the late twentieth century than the interwar period but, on the other hand, his classification offers a good framework for analysing previous decades, too.

The existence of these political territories could hardly be denied but their nature is in some way different from that of a sovereign state. While sovereignty is a main feature of a state, it excludes the possibility that other forms of sovereign territories exist. That is why the relationship between sovereignty and different regions, alternative forms of political territoriality, is a key question. Wæver defines the relationship between sovereignty and regions in the following way: Because the region was traditionally thought of very *like* states (only that it currently isn't one), it was based on the logic of sovereignty... Therefore, a region could *either* challenge the existing sovereign and try to become the new one, *or*

¹⁷ Neumann, Iver B. 1996 as note 15, 35–36, 52. See also Paasi, Anssi 1996 as note 11, 35–36, 52.

¹⁸ Wæver, Ole: "The Baltic Sea: A Region after Post-Modernity?" In: Joenniemi, Pertti (ed.): *Neo-Nationalism or Regionality? The Restructuring of Political Space around the Baltic Rim* Stockholm 1997, 228.

it must formally recognize the powers that be and accept a derived function: a region within the state, a region of states, a region in a world of states.¹⁹ The latter model could be called, as Forsberg has called it, a *territoriality without sovereignty*.²⁰ The sovereign state has still preserved its hegemonic position as an exclusive form of organizing sovereign territorial power, but the challenging, alternative ways of organizing political space are not without interest. Of course, the political regions are usually subordinate to the idea of the exclusive, sovereign state but even these inter-state regions have a special and unique meaning in the world of states. They have constituted a special form of territorial identity which has complemented state-centric national identities. It could even be argued that particularly in the case of small nations and nation-states there is a natural need to conceive larger territories than one's own state and in that way finding and defining one's own location in the wider world. Like a person, a nation, too, needs friends and a larger group within which it can identify itself.

A good example of the region-building process is the constructing of Scandinavian unity during the nineteenth century and especially during the twentieth century. In the present discourse it is self-evident that Scandinavia is seen as a united region because of the related languages of the area, similar historical phases and a common political tradition. But it is more a question of the kind of meaning that is given to these elements. These elements were insignificant for the Swedes and Danes in the seventeenth century when they were each others' worst enemies. It is precisely the period of nationalism that has witnessed unifying elements in their connections and Scandinavia has come to be regarded as a society of nations. Scandinavia or "Norden" did not just appear as a region instead it was invented in the discussions of intellectuals, students and politicians. Scandinavian or Nordic unity was produced discursively; unity was produced first in texts in which a Nordic region or community was invented as a concept with a special meaning of unity. Precisely this led to the creation of organizations like the Nordic Interparliamentary Union (1907) and the Norden Associations (1919). These organizations further strengthened the meaning of the Nordic as an important unit and they stressed the collaborative character of that unity.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid., 300.

²⁰ Forsberg, Tuomas 1996 as note 12, 364.

²¹ Andersson, Jan A.: *Nordisk samarbete: Aktörer, idéer och organisering 1919–1953*. Lund 1994, 38–58. See also Østergård, Uffe: "The Nordic Countries in the Baltic Region." In: Joenniemi, Pertti (ed.): *Neo-Nationalism or Regionality? The Restructuring of Political Space around the Baltic Rim* Stockholm 1997, 28–47.

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Baltoscandia has a lot of similarities with Scandinavia but also some differences. It was also produced discursively, being devised as a region in political, cultural and scientific discussions. However, the idea of Baltoscandia has never been accepted so widely as the idea of Scandinavia but still I would argue that it has had its significance when Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians have divided the European nations into separate groups and have tried to locate themselves in one of these groups. The discussion on the Estonian and Latvian place in Europe has been lively especially since the collapse of the Russian resp. the Soviet Empire, when the fall of old state borders also meant great changes for national identification and territorial imagination.

A Baltic Federation or a Russian Federation?

In spite of their development of the concept Baltoscandia, the idea of unity between the eastern and western shores of the Baltic sea was not invented by geographers like Kant or Pakštas in the 1930ies. The idea emerged in discussions as early as during the last phases of the First World War, in the years 1917–1918. The first public presentation of the idea was given by a leading Estonian politician, Jaan Tõnisson, in his speech to the Estonian provincial diet on 25th August 1917.

The future of Estonia and of the Estonians was under discussion at a critical moment when the advance of German troops was felt to be inevitable. The First World War was still continuing during the year 1917. The Russian situation worsened from week to week. Revolutionary ideas, mainly Bolshevism, spread around the former empire and real power passed into the hands of the local Soviets. Nationalists saw this change only as a transformation from order into chaos and anarchy. Then the situation at the front changed, when German troops started to advance again. By the beginning of September, the Germans had conquered the Estonian islands and half of Latvia, including Riga. These changes in the political situation forced Estonians and Latvians to rethink their future and especially the question of independence. They felt that their nations were pressed between Germany and Russia; Russia could no longer defend Estonian and Latvian national self-determination against an imperialist Germany. So the main problem was to find a solution as to how Estonia and Latvia could survive between these two great powers.

At that moment, the Estonian political elite gathered together to discuss the future of Estonia and the Estonians. Jaan Tõnisson opened the day with a new radical idea. His vision was the unification of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, and Scandinavia into one federation. This would consist of 30 million people according to Tõnisson (in practice only 20 million). Tõnisson's Baltic-Scandinavian Federation was intended to be a concept to make Estonian independence possible. Using this concept Tõnisson constructed a new society of

nations to which Estonia could belong. When he rejected the Russian connection, this meant a change in national identification. Balto-Scandinavia was a new “us”, into which Estonia could integrate and construct its own national sovereignty. However, other delegates still did not agree with Tõnisson. They thought that a Baltic Federation was a mere utopia and that the only realistic solution was a federal Russia.²²

To understand the radical change which Tõnisson’s initiative embraced, we must know something about how Estonians and Latvians placed themselves before the war. Before the war, the Russian Empire set practical limits to the Estonian and Latvian national imagination. During the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century they mostly saw themselves as guardians of the East. Tõnisson could write as late as 1905 that Estonia and Latvia were the living borders of Russia against the West; the latter was understood mainly as Germany. Jakob Hurt, the leading Estonian nationalist in the nineteenth century, located Estonia in the Russian Empire so that, since Russia itself was a continental power, the Estonians had a crucial role as its coastal people. The national identity was constructed through the basic division of Europe into an East and a West and Estonians and Latvians located themselves on the edge of the East.²³

How could we explain this kind of outlook? We must remind ourselves how Estonian and Latvian national identities were constructed during the second half of the nineteenth century. In the beginning of the nineteenth century the Baltic provinces formed one single society in which the upper classes naturally used the German language and were part of the German culture while the common folk, the local peasants, were Estonians and Latvians. Their language was understood as a peasant language and their culture as a peasant culture. The rising Estonian and Latvian nationalism challenged this order by inventing the terms “Estonians” and “Latvians”. Their discourse divided the former single estate society into three sovereign nations –Estonians, Latvians and Germans. In that way, the whole nation-building was based on a exclusive division between Estonians/Latvians and Baltic Germans and the first national border was a symbolic border against the Germans who formed the otherness of the national discourse.

The new national discourse was able to justify itself through a re-interpretation of history. A new myth was created about the period of the crusades and it was now seen as a German invasion and a period of Estonian and Latvian freedom wars against the Germans. In that discourse, the Baltic Germans were no longer seen

22 The minutes of the Estonian diet 25.8.1917, Maanõukogu Protokollid, 109–114.

23 Karjahärm, Toomas: “Eesti rahvusluse ideed”. In: *Akadeemia*. (1995), 2067, 2069. See also Plakans, Andrejs: “Peasants, Intellectuals and Nationalism in the Russian Baltic Provinces, 1820–1890”. In: *Journal of Modern History*. 46 (1974), 473.

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as overlords but as colonizers, and Latvians and Estonians as the true owners of the land. Thus national identities were defined against Baltic-German history and tradition. Germanism represented otherness and so the Estonians and Latvians came to imagine their nation as being on the edge of the East and to prefer a Russian connection rather than a German one.²⁴

The second explanation is the existence of a limited definition of a nation's sovereignty. Breuilly has argued that the core-idea of nationalism is to seek as wide a sovereignty as possible and that only one's own nation-state is a satisfactory solution for that need. I agree with Breuilly's first axiom, but I reject the second point because there is also another way of satisfying the need for national sovereignty. The key question is how national sovereignty is understood and the state-centric view is not the only possibility.

The Estonians and Latvians lacked their own political institutions and therefore the terms 'Estonia' and 'Latvia' were used in speaking of culture, not of administrative units. Still, at the beginning of the twentieth century, many Estonians and Latvians constructed their nation in cultural terms. A nation, in the Estonian nationalist discourse, was defined as a cultural entity, a form of culture, or a cultural individual. As late as 1904 Latvian Social Democrats proclaimed national self-determination saying that: "Each nationality should have the right to maintain its own culture and to develop its spiritual strengths".²⁵ The situation was quite characteristic of Eastern European peasant-nations in general. In addition to the Estonians and Latvians, the Slovenes and Slovaks constituted other examples. These were nations which did not have a glorious past and their own state institutions nor even a memory of some medieval kingdom. There was no fundament for a national discourse by trying to construct national identities on the grounds of political institutions and borders.

The new period, however, added some new attributes to the concepts of national sovereignty and national borders. During the revolutionary years of 1905 and 1917, nationalist discourse was politicized in Estonia and Latvia, so Estonia and Latvia were now seen more and more as territorial units, too, but still within the Russian Empire. The idea of national units did not as yet mean separatism and national independence was seen to be possible within the Russian Empire

24 Lehti, Marko: "Sovereignty, Borders, and the Construction of National Identities in Estonia and Latvia". In: Landgren, Lars-Folke, Maunu Häyrynen (ed.): *The Dividing Line. Borders and National Peripheries* Helsinki 1997, 45–48 (= Renvall Institute Publications). See also Karjahärm, Toomas: "Eestlaste regioonalse identsuse ajaloost". In: *Looming*. (1995), 691.

25 Karjahärm, Toomas 1995 as note 23, 2056. See also Plakans, Andrejs: "The Latvians". In: Thaden, Edward C. (ed.): *Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland, 1855–1914*. Princeton 1981, 260.

through requiring fundamental changes in the Empire. The famous slogan of Latvian political discourse during the revolutionary spring of 1917 was *A Free Latvia in a Free Russia* and this contained in a crystallized form the core definition of national sovereignty. The federalization and democratization of Russia were seen to be the essentials for the realization of a national self-determination, but a partition of Russia into independent national units was not demanded.²⁶ The great empires still seemed like eternal entities and most of the nationalists could not even conceive of the possibility of a separation from Russia.

If we examine Tõnisson's statement in August 1917 against the background of this discourse, we may begin to realize the revolutionary nature of the idea of the Baltic-Scandinavian confederation. The Russian connection was rejected for the first time and independence was constructed within a new context. However, the basic interpretation of sovereignty was not yet challenged and independence was still seen to be possible within a larger political entity. This entity was now, however, the Baltic Sea Area and not the Russian Empire.

A Baltic League

Tõnisson's statement was a sign that the old national discourse was changing during 1917 because of the Bolshevik revolution and the advance of German troops. During the next year, 1918, the only certain thing was that the old order had ceased to exist in the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea. Thus, the Estonians and Latvians were forced to re-evaluate their independence and position in the new Europe. In 1918, the Baltic countries were occupied by the Germans and then the discussion on the national future of the Estonians and Latvians continued abroad. One totally new solution was a Baltic Sea connection, the unity of the eastern and western shores of the Baltic Sea. The whole discussion on the independence of the Baltic states focused on the Baltic Sea. *Esthonian freedom is a freedom of the Baltic Sea* was Ants Piip's (a member of the Estonian foreign delegation) principal argument for Estonian national independence²⁷. The change of rhetoric is evident compared with the Latvian slogan from the year before, *A Free Latvia in a Free Russia*. The question was not only a rhetorical change, but it could be

²⁶ Forel, A., Austra Osolin: *Für ein freies Lettland im freien Russland!* Basel 1917, 3–5. See also Germanis, Uldis: "The Idea of Independent Latvia and its Development in 1917". In: Sprudz, A., A. Rūsis (ed.): *Res Baltica. A collection of essays in honor of the memory of Dr. Alfred Bilmanis* Leyden 1968, 41–44.

²⁷ Piip, Antonius: "The Esthonian Question". In: *The New Europe*, 8.8.1918.

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said that the whole concept of national independence was defined in a new way. The coordinates of independence were changed from Russia to the Baltic Sea. The concept of a Baltic League gave a special meaning to this new Baltic-Sea-centric discourse. Its basic idea was the unity of the eastern and the western shores of the Baltic Sea. The Baltic States, Finland and Scandinavia were to form one union or federation according to the plans devised. The future Latvian foreign minister, Zigfrids Meierovics, wrote in a memorandum in 1918: The Lettish National Council ventures to hope that after the conclusion of the General Peace, a Confederation will arise composed of small nationalities on both sides of the Baltic Sea, and that this Confederation will join the League of free and civilised Nations.²⁸

The Estonian discussion on the Baltic League reached its peak in the late autumn of 1918 when two members of the Estonian foreign delegation, Ants Piip and Kaarel Pusta, wrote a long and detailed memorandum in which they presented a vision of Estonia as a part of a wide Baltic League. They gave this plan for a Baltic League to the British Foreign Office and published it in some newspapers and reviews. In this way it allowed the discussion to be opened at different levels. Their well-prepared vision was based on the view that the nations around the Baltic Sea area could be divided into three groups: the Eastern Baltic nations (Finns, Estonians and Latvians) the Scandinavian nations, and the southern Baltic nations (Poles, Lithuanians, and Germans). The last group was not seen as one of true Baltic nations and thus the eastern Baltic nations and the Scandinavian nations had to form the League.²⁹

The Latvians also made their own distinctions which differed somewhat from those of the Estonians, but both still embraced the same basic vision on the unity of Baltic nations and Scandinavia. One alternative was to define three groups: a Scandinavian, a Balt and a Finnish-Estonian group. The eastern shore of the Baltic Sea was thus divided into sub-regions along the lines of the nationalist discourse. A Balt Group would be composed of Latvians and Lithuanians but also the areas of Belarus and East Prussia were included with them; these areas had a significance for Latvians but not for Estonians. The basic idea was, however, the same – a Baltic Union of all these small nations. Finns and

²⁸ Meierovics' Memorandum 16.10.1918, PRO 371/3316/304–306.

²⁹ For Memorandum of Ants Piip and Kaarel Pusta 1.11.1918, ERA (Eesti Riigiarhiiv) f.1624, n.l. 87, 1.6–9; Piip's letter to Pusta 20.10.1918, ERA f.1622, n.l. 49, 1.86–97; Pusta 1918; Piip's letter to Pusta 1.9.1918 see Medijainen, Eero: "Anst Piip Eesti kohast rahvusvahelises liitudes 1918." In: *Kleio*. (1994), 37–39.

Estonians or Latvians and Lithuanians were unified by national bonds, but also this larger Baltic Sea area was seen as a natural region.³⁰

Not only was the manner in which the Baltic World was divided into sub-groups quite striking, but the form of the planned League was surprising. The Baltic League was not outlined only as a military alliance but more as a commonwealth of independent states, a kind of integrated region of nation-states. The Baltic League was seen as an inter-state organization and also as a supra-national organization with its own sovereignty. Common organizations or the unification of foreign policy and legislation were seen to be natural parts of such a league. What factors lay behind this discussion on the Baltic League? Europe was in chaos during the last phases of the war and old regions and old ties had ceased to exist. It was time to create new ones. The Baltic-League-theme was part of a larger European discussion about the construction of the new Europe. The development of a League of Nations was an overarching factor in that discussion. Regional leagues were to be devised to solve the problem of national self-determination. Small nations were still seen as being incapable of surviving alone. The contradiction between the need to realize national self-determination and the weakness of small nations was to be resolved through regional league plans. Small nations could attain their independence within free leagues of free nations. Together, small nations could constitute a larger unit. In that discourse, the integration of small nations was a necessary condition for their independence.³¹

The Baltic League was constructed as a league of small nations and for Estonians and Latvians the League was meant to be a way of breaking the chain of smallness and of making Estonian and Latvian independence possible. The Baltic Sea Area was viewed as a region of small nations between the huge imperialistic powers of Germany and Russia. The symbolic national borders against Russia and Germany demarcated the Baltic Sea Area as a zone between the East and the West. Baltoscandia was thus envisaged through the distinctions that were part of Estonian and Latvian self-definition. Estonians and Latvians still saw their nation's location as being between Germany and Russia, and the Baltic Sea area was produced as a natural region between these two enemies. It formed a region of sameness which was encircled by otherness. The national mythology also stressed the Scandinavian connection because in Estonia and Latvia a powerful myth existed about the Swedish period as a golden age. The Swedish connection represented a counterforce to Germany and was seen as a symbol of freedom and democracy.

³⁰ Baltijas walstu saweeniba, LK 27.4.1920.

³¹ Lehti, Marko: „The Baltic League and the Idea of the Limited Sovereignty”. In: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*. 45 (1997), 460–463.

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Estonian and Latvian national discourses interpreted the Baltic Sea as a unifying element and it could even be said that the Baltic Sea Area was invented in a discussion on national independence. The Baltic Sea Area was not, of course, a new invention, but for many centuries the unity of the Baltic Sea had been an idea cherished by the Western powers in their expansion towards the east. The Hanseatic League expanded from the western to the eastern shores of the Baltic, as the Danes had conquered the lands on the eastern shores, and as Sweden aimed to possess the same lands there. Now, the small nations of the eastern shore turned their faces for the first time towards the West and gave a new meaning to the Baltic Sea Area; for them it was the region of small nations.

Lithuanian national history was different from Estonian and Latvian and distinctions were made in the Lithuanian national discourse that were not made by the northerly peoples. Poles and Polishness was for the Lithuanians the main threat, not the Germans. Still, even some Lithuanians had similar visions of the Baltic Sea connection. There was, however, some disparity, too, and the Lithuanian model of the Baltic League was composed rather like a chain. In 1918, Jonas Šliupas published a book called *The Lithuanian and Latvian Republic and the Union of Northern Nations* in Stockholm.³² The core idea of the Lithuanian discussion is already seen in the title; the idea of a Lithuanian-Latvian dual state won a lot of supporters in Lithuania. This reunification of these linguistically-related peoples linked up with the notion of a wider union of nations around the Baltic Sea. Oscar Vladislav de Lubisz-Milosz – a Lithuanian philosopher living in Paris – gave a more precise form to this wider connection. He wrote that a Lithuanian-Latvian dual state would quite naturally be allied with Estonia; Finland, on the other hand, had good relations with Estonia and in the end this new confederation could approach a Scandinavian union.³³ The Lithuanians needed the Baltic Sea Area to get rid of the old Polish tradition and to find new friends for the confrontation with Poland.

Baltic Cooperation

After the war, Estonia and Latvia gained their independence as sovereign nation-states, but the construction of independence was such a difficult process that they were ready to form any kind of league or union with other nations for a considerable time. Independence in integration remained part of the discourse

³² Published in Lithuanian language.

³³ Milosz, O.V. de *Deux Messianismes Politiques*. Paris 1990, 112–134. See also Kaslas, Bronis J.: *The Baltic Nations – The Quest for Regional Integration and Political Liberty: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Poland*. Pittson 1976, 118–121.

on national independence. Such a union began to appear more desirable among those imagined as belonging to the same society of nations and in the case of the Estonians and Latvians the group was that contained in a Baltoscandia. A real attempt to construct a new region was also made by the Estonians and Latvians and the first regional conferences were arranged between the Baltic states and Finland during the autumn of 1919.³⁴

The Baltic Sea and Scandinavia, however, did not lose their position as a part of national identification. Latvia invited the Scandinavian states to a joint conference with the Baltic States, Finland and Poland at Bulduri, but in May 1920 the Scandinavian foreign ministers refused the invitation and clearly regarded the proposal as ridiculous. But still on the eve of the Bulduri conference, in August 1920, the Latvians still hoped that the Scandinavians would take part in the conference. This was in vain.³⁵

The identification process within the Baltic Sea Area was one-sided and hence unsatisfactory. Constructing a group of nations is a process similar to that of constructing a nation. Even if they are imagined communities, the construction needs some concrete, common symbols, conventions and traditions. As the idea of the unity of the Baltic Sea region did not receive support from the Scandinavian side, cooperation and practices which stressed this regionality arose only between the states in the eastern Baltic Sea Area. A regional system of cooperation between the new nation-states of the eastern Baltic area, the so-called Baltic cooperation, was created. During a seven-year period from 1919–1926, more than forty regional conferences were held between Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Poland. A network of political practices and actions bound this area loosely together. It was seen as an area of small, new nation-states on the western border of Soviet Russia. National sovereignty was linked with the existence of

³⁴ Lehti, Marko: „Baltic Cooperation after the first World War: Independence through Integration.” In: Jundzis, T. *The Baltic States at Historical Crossroads. Political, economic and legal problems in the context of international cooperation on the doorstep of the 21st century* Riga 1998, 393–394.

³⁵ See *Bulletin publié par la ministère des affaires étrangères* Riga 3.8.1920. See also Kangeris, Karlis: “Die schwedische Baltikumpolitik 1918–1925. Ein Überblick.” In: Loit, A. (ed.): *The Baltic in International Relations between the Two World Wars*. Uppsala 1988, 199 (= *Studia Baltica Stockholmiensia* 3).

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this region and its integration was regarded as crucial for ones' own national independence.³⁶

The Baltic Sea did not lose its importance as a source of national identification and the conferences between the border states were known as "conferences of the Baltic Sea countries" in Estonia and Latvia. The Baltic Sea remained an important coordinate of national identity. The Scandinavian connection was still appreciated but in practice it was no longer believed that a real union or league would emerge between the Baltic countries and Scandinavia.³⁷

The Restoration of Baltoscandinavia

In the early 1930ies, the Baltic Sea connection was restored. This could be seen, for example, in an association called *Baltijas Unija* (L'Union Baltique) founded in Latvia 1933. The slogan of the society was *The Baltic Sea unites us and there is nothing that separates us*. In the association's publications, the slogan was given in Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian, Finnish, Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, English and French. These languages defined their Baltic world, the world which existed in their mind. Poland, Germany and Russia did not belong to their Baltic Sea area. The aim of the society was to "encourage the cooperation of the people living on the Baltic Sea on the foundation of justice and honour and to advance their consolidation for the protection of common interest". The integration of the eastern and western shores of the Baltic Sea was the association's goal. The former Estonian Foreign minister, Ants Piip, wrote an article in which he stressed that the small nations around the Baltic Sea had to form a union if they wanted to remain independent in the world of great powers. Small could be big only through unification with other small nations. The big imperialist powers which represented otherness were still Russia / the Soviet Union and Germany.³⁸ A similar discourse on the Baltic Sea could also be seen in many books and articles written in the thirties by Latvians and Estonians with titles such as "The Baltic Sea and the Baltic states".³⁹ The Baltic Sea was seen as a symbolic coordinate of independence.

³⁶ Lehti, Marko: „Realized Forms of Border-State Cooperation”. In: *Tundmatu Eesti Vabariik. Tartu Ülikooli Lähiajaloo kateeder* Tallinn 1993, 142–157. See also Lehti, Marko 1998 as note 34, 393–399.

³⁷ See, e.g., Kaarel Pusta's memorandum, ERA f.957, n.12, 752, l.120–125.

³⁸ The *Baltijas Unijas*, Riga, nr 1-2/1933–1934.

³⁹ Vitols, Hugo: *La mer Baltique et les Etats Baltes*. Paris 1935. See also Pusta, K.R.R.: „Le Statut de la Baltique.” In: *Les Problèmes de la Baltique*. Publication de la Conciliation Internationale, nos 8–9/1934, 643–673.

The Baltijas Unija association was not the only example of the revitalisation of the Baltic sea connection. An attempt to extend the use of the Baltoscandia term also occurred and was not, in aspiration, restricted to scientific discussions. In Estonia, this term was again taken up by certain cultural personalities. In 1937, M. Kuldkepp wrote an article entitled *Baltoskandia kultuuriline koostöö* (Baltoscandian cultural cooperation) in the Estonian review ERK, where he demanded Baltoscandian cooperation in different fields of society. Kuldkepp was a great admirer of Swedish culture and Nordic cooperation. In his opinion, the Baltic States should join in Nordic cooperation at the political and economic level, but especially develop cooperation between the citizens. Cultural and scientific ties were most valuable to his mind, and he especially stressed the role of personal visits. Kuldkepp was even ready to introduce the Swedish language into Estonian schools so that Estonians could participate more easily in a cooperation fostered through one single Nordic language.⁴⁰ In this argumentation, Baltoscandia took on a new, wider meaning because the target of the discussion in the 1920ies, the Baltic League, had been a region of states. Now Kuldkepp also constructed a region of nations.

Baltoscandia was still quite a similar national construction to that of the Baltic League or at least it was defined through a similar set of distinctions. Hugo Viires, who also wrote in the ERK on behalf of Baltoscandia cooperation, stressed how Baltoscandia would serve as a counter-force to German and Russian cultures. He still saw the Baltic states as being under the pressure of these two imperialist cultures and Baltoscandia would resolve this dilemma by creating a new powerful culture between Russia and Germany. Viires also appealed to the geographers' text on Baltoscandia.⁴¹ In his opinion, the geographers had proved that Baltoscandia was a homogenous unity and so it must also be cultural unity. Geographical investigations served in that discourse as a means of testifying to the naturalness of Baltoscandia.

The changes in the international situation were behind the return of the Baltic Sea connection. In the idealistic spirit of the 1920ies Eastern Europe was seen as a political group of the future, but by the 1930ies Eastern Europe had degenerated into being a region of exclusive sovereign nation-states without cooperation and integration. Baltic cooperation had also turned out to be a failure. On the other hand, the German-Russian axis was still defining the Baltic States' own location and the characterization of a zone in-between was needed to visualize

⁴⁰ Kuldkepp, M.: „Baltoskandia kultuuriline koostöö.“ In: *ERK*. (1937), 60–64.

⁴¹ Viires, Hugo:
„Meie kultuurpoliitiline välisorientatsioon ja baltoskandia idee.“ In: *ERK*. (1938), 60–64.

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and strengthen independence. The only solution left was to see the Baltic States in a larger Baltic Sea connection of a Baltoscandia.

The fate of the reborn Baltoscandia was, however, quite similar to that of the Baltic League. Very few real ties were constructed around the whole Baltic Sea Rim. A characteristic episode was the fate of Estonian and Latvian applications for membership in the Norden association in 1928. The Norwegians in particular opposed the idea of extension of the Nordic family to Estonia and Latvia, and thus the Baltic states did not manage to enter into Nordic cooperation similar way to Finland.⁴² There were, however, some exceptions like the first conference of the historians of the Baltic Sea Area held in Riga in the summer of 1937.⁴³ The latter cooperation was not based on Baltoscandia but on a larger view of the Baltic Sea area since the Poles also took part in this conference. Such events strengthened the idea of Baltic unity, but there were few of them. Baltoscandia was part of a national discourse in the interwar period, but, on the other hand, it remained only in the form of a vision of a few Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian intellectuals. It did not serve as a basis for a live *civitas*, in spite of the hope that Kuldkepp, for example, cherished of involving the citizenry. It was discursively a way of organizing the world, but very few real ties or institutions were founded to embody it. It lingered as an unfinished project for the construction of a new region of nations.

The Baltic States as Nordic countries

The period between the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the collapse of the Soviet Empire meant, of course, a natural restoration of the old Russian-centric world view. During the Cold War, the Baltic Sea formed a dividing line between East and West and Estonia and Latvia were regarded as being a part of the huge Soviet Union instead of the Baltic Sea Area. No longer was there any Europe in-between, a zone of small nations, but only Eastern and Western Europe. I would not argue that this was everyone's discourse. But it was, of course, the way the official circles of the Soviet Union wanted to see the situation and it was also the practical context in which the Estonians and Latvians had to live. The situation might be understood also as it was portrayed by Lennart Meri,

⁴² Latvian consulate in Norway to the Foreign Minister 26.9.1928, LVVA f. 1632, appr. 2,1. 1069, lp. 55; Latvian consulate in Norway to the Foreign Minister 6.10.1928, LVVA f. 1632, appr. 2,1. 1069, lp. 33–34.

⁴³ *Pirma Baltijas vesturnieku konference*

who argued that Estonia had no coordinates at all during the Soviet period.⁴⁴ The Soviet connection gave the only possible alternative and for those to whom it was not suitable no other coordinates could possibly be imagined.

This situation has changed with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The fall of Communism meant not only the fall of one political system, but it also meant, that the European symbolic and actual dividing-line was obliterated. This situation provided the peoples in the former Soviet zone with the chance of imagining regions of a new kind and the chance of placing their nations in them. The old pre-Cold-War ties and even older connections, as in the case of the Habsburg lands, have been reawakened and re-used as a basis for national identities. The Baltic States, too, found themselves alone in the new postwar Europe and the Baltics have had to seek a new group with which they could identify. The old connection which has arisen from the ashes of Communism is the Baltic Sea Area. A new Baltoscandia has been created in part through quite a similar argumentation to that employed in the interwar period, but at the same time there are also crucial differences. I will not try to analyse the whole discourse (that will be the target of a larger research project in the future) but only the speeches of one man, the Estonian president, Lennart Meri. However, I believe that the such an analysis will give us also a wider knowledge of the present construction of Estonian and Latvian national identities.

The return to Europe has been the main theme of several of Meri's speeches. He believes there is a general European identity. Opening a speech with the words *We Europeans*, is one way of stressing the interpretation that Estonia is a part of Europe.⁴⁵ Even in 1990 Meri, then foreign minister, wrote in *Helsingin Sanomat*: "Europe is to the Estonians more than only a geographical concept. Europe is our programme. Not because we regard ourselves as better Europeans than the Finns, but because we know what the price is of being absent from Europe."⁴⁶ So when Estonia was part of the Soviet Union, it could not be part of Europe, even if spiritually the Estonians belonged to Europe. Now, when old ties and borders have collapsed, it is time to return to Europe. Europe is our home, Europe is the group to which we want to belong. This has been a common idea in post-Communist Eastern Europe and the whole of this type of rhetoric was originally

⁴⁴ "Coordinates of two countries", Speech at the University of Turku. In Meri, Lennart: *Tulen maasta, jonka nimi on Viro*. Helsinki 1995, 119.

⁴⁵ "Where Europe ends", Speech at the International Academy of Diplomacy, Paris 27.1.1993. Ibid., 147.

⁴⁶ Meri, Lennart: "Eurooppa on Viron ohjelma!" In: *Helsingin Sanomat*, 2.12.1990. See also: "Back to Europe", Speech at the European Council 13.5.1993. In: Meri, Lennart: *Tulen maasta, jonka nimi on Viro*. Helsinki 1995, 133.

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devised by the Czech president, Vaclav Havel. The need to root out old divisions and to build a new one is present to a great extent in that discourse.

But what is Meri's Europe? Stalin and Hitler cut the Baltic States out from Europe. So these imperialist and authoritarian great powers did not themselves belong to Europe. Europe is a concept of democracy and freedom. Especially the Soviet Union and Russia represented otherness and a threat to Estonia. "If Russia wants to identify itself as a European state, it has to understand that the period of the colonialist powers is over and that international law is based on relations even between small and big states", Meri argues in defining Russia's place in Europe.⁴⁷ Russia is not a European country. So geographical Europe is divided into a real Europe and Russia in quite the same way as the Estonian geographer Edgar Kant thought in the 1930ies. In that way the old East-West division is not ended but the eastern border of Europe is just pushed further eastwards.

Estonian independence is bound up with a united Europe. As during the interwar period, independence is seen to be possible within larger unions or leagues. "Our state has no future outside a league of states", Meri declared three years ago in his speech at the University of Turku.⁴⁸ The value of the European community lay in its variety and that is why integration into Europe does not mean dissolving into Europe. Meri's discourse is similar in its interpretation to that given after the First World War about an independence that seemed to be possible only through unification. But is unification understood in quite the same way as seventy years earlier and what exactly is the society or societies into which the Estonians should integrate?

Europe is the core word of the present discourse, but how is European unity to be understood? I again follow Meri's speeches. To him Europe is not one entity. Meri denies the European division into Western and Central Europe but he divides Europe in another way; he divides the united Europe along north-south lines. The Baltic Sea has emerged again as a main coordinate of independence. Meri wrote for example, that "the Baltic sea is one indivisible entity. Priorities of Estonian foreign policy are always priorities of the Baltic sea".⁴⁹ He has also adopted the words of the former Danish foreign minister, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, "a State, which opened on the sea, could not be small".⁵⁰ The Baltic Sea is the Estonian's road to a wider world, to Europe, and the Baltic Sea makes Estonia big, at least spiritually. The famous statement of 1918, *The Estonians' freedom*

47 "Where Europe ends". Ibid., 154.

48 "Coordinates of two countries". Ibid., 123.

49 Meri, Lennart: "Yhteinen meri, yhteinen horisontti. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 15.3.1992.

50 "Heirs of the Baltic Sea Meri, Lennart: *Tulen maasta, jonka nimi on Viro*. Helsinki 1995, 221–222.

is the freedom of the Baltic Sea, is again part of a new Estonian discourse. The Baltic Sea Area is understood, as before, as an indivisible entity. Thus, Europe is divided into sub-regions which are not exclusive and sovereign vis-a-vis Europe but which still keep some important elements of national discourse. The Baltic Sea in that discourse forms a coordinate of identification close at hand.

During the interwar period the Estonians' and Latvians' Baltic Sea Area was a Baltoscandia and the southern shore of the sea and Russia were excluded from the Baltic Sea Area in that discourse. How are the borders of the Baltic Sea Area defined by Meri? The Baltic Sea area is seen as a European sub-region and so Russia is, of course, excluded. It is possible that this interpretation has already begun to be modified, but it is still too early to argue anything about this without a larger investigation. Attitudes towards Germany have on the other hand changed totally since the interwar period. Germany is no longer seen as a threat or a national otherness, but Estonians and Latvians have started to appreciate the German tradition in their history, too. In spite of the changing role of Germany, it is not usually included within the borders of the Baltic Sea Area. It could be said that Germany is excluded from the Baltic Sea being seen more as a European power than as a Baltic power.⁵¹

The Baltic Sea Area takes a familiar role on in Meri's speeches. In 1990 he said: "Estonia maintains its Nordic characteristics as its inheritance. The existence of these Nordic characteristics has been recognized by the Nordic countries during the peaceful period, when it was without risks. During totalitarian decades, when Estonia was isolated behind the Iron gate after Stalin's and Hitler's division of Europe, the Estonian connection was forgotten in the Nordic consciousness. However, Estonia identified then with Central Europe and the Nordic countries."⁵² At the same time as Meri, Toivo Kuldsepp, the Deputy foreign minister of Estonia, expressed an identical idea in his statement: "We Estonians have always felt that we belong to the Nordic world."⁵³ He also tried to find different arguments – historical, cultural and geographical – to support this Nordic line. So in that discourse, the western shore of the Baltic Sea became the most important part of the region for the Estonians. The defining of Estonia as a Nordic country accorded special attributes to Estonian identity. In that rhetoric,

⁵¹ Ozolina, Zaneta: „Baltic-Nordic interaction, cooperation and integration.” In: Lejinš, A., Z. Ozolina *Small States in a Turbulent Environment: The Baltic Perspective*. Riga 1997, 113–114.

⁵² Meri, Lennart: “Eurooppa on Viron ohjelma! *Heisingin Sanomat*, 2.12.1990.

⁵³ Kuldsepp, Toivo: “Viro ja Pohjola. Takaisin Eurooppaan. *Kanava*. (1991), 47. See also idem: “Tie Eurooppaan kulkee Pohjolan kautta.” In: *Uusi Suomi*, 6.6.1991.

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the Nordic world and the Baltic Sea Area were fused and the Baltic Sea area gained its significance from the Nordic connection. Estonia was simultaneously seen as a Baltic Sea country and as a Nordic country and these concepts were understood mainly as synonyms. Thus, Estonian independence and national identity was again defined through the Scandinavian connection.

The Region-Building Process in Baltoscandia

Finally, we must try to summarize the region-building process in the Baltic Sea Area during this century. First it is necessary to pose the question: Who are the region-builders of Baltoscandia? The main attention while analysing the region-building has to be directed to the rhetoric of naturalization. Neumann describes it in the following way:

Where every region-builder's goal is to make the region-building programme as natural as possible, this approach aims to expose its historically contingent character.⁵⁴

The meaning of the region is created in the speeches and texts; in the first place, a new concept was introduced, then the region was depicted as being a natural one and in the end the region was no longer seen as a newly constructed region; it had become a self-evident way of dividing the world. Thus, the following question should be asked while analysing the region-building process of Baltoscandia: how has Baltoscandia been imagined and how successful has the assurance rhetoric been?

The argumentation for Baltoscandia has changed during this century and a natural region has been produced in a different way. In the beginning, the Baltoscandia concept emerged as a Baltic League, which was only a construction of a small political elite; it was a concept of a unity which was produced through state-centric argumentation. It was not seen as a normal alliance, but yet security played an important role in it and national independence was argued as being possible only through such a league. In the 1930ies, Baltoscandia surfaced again as a Baltic Union, but also a geographical concept "Baltoscandia" was introduced to make the region more ancient and self-evident in nature. The Baltoscandia of the 1930ies was more a production of intellectuals and scientists than politicians but the state played a crucial role in the rhetoric surrounding it. Baltoscandian citizenship, the idea of a cultural community, was not totally absent in that discourse but still unity was produced mainly by means of the argument that a small nation could retain independence only in unification.

In the early phase, the Baltic League was perhaps even imagined as a new sovereign unit, but quite soon the Baltoscandia discourse came to be based

⁵⁴ Neumann, Iver B. 1994 as note 15, 59.

on the idea of a region of states. The Baltoscandia of the interwar period was quite clearly the region of interstate regional cooperation. The whole discourse arose due to the size of the nation-states and the borders of the states also provided the region with borders. The exclusion of the Soviet Union and Germany played a main role in the definition of Baltoscandia. Thus, the rhetoric of the interwar period emerged on the basis of Estonian and Latvian national needs; Baltoscandia was part of their national discourses. It served the role of coordinating their independence and it was constructed through their national distinctions. These distinctions were, however, strange to Scandinavians, and Estonian and Latvian argumentation did not correspond with these nations' needs to interpret the world. Thus, Baltoscandia was a non-reciprocal region-building process and no strong regional identity was created on the basis of Baltoscandia in the interwar period.

What can we say about the region-building process in the post-Cold War period? On the basis of Meri's texts it is clear that a border excluding Russia and new security arrangements have been the main elements when Estonians and Latvians have sought their place in the new Europe. Still, several alternative regions and entities have existed together and each of the geographical coordinates have their own function for Estonia and the Estonians. Europe is put to serve as a larger entity, which would guarantee national independence. Europeanism takes its form through organizations like the European Union or NATO which have been seen as an answer to traditional security demands. Nevertheless, smaller regions like the Nordic and the Baltic Sea Area have been needed to give the image of a sub-region of a larger Europe and the Baltic Sea has been adopted into the political language as a new organizing concept for the location of one's own nation-state. A wider Nordic community or Baltoscandia has to a great extent taken on the dimension of a cultural unity, which has, in this way, served the need to construct a new regional identity. It is, of course, a question of securing of national independence but not in traditional security political means. Security is then interpreted more as social security.

In the post-Cold War period, the Baltic Sea Region has begun to make an appearance in the speeches of Nordic politicians, scientists and artists, too. A new way of appealing to history, to natural geographical bonds and to economic necessities has touched the people living around the Baltic Sea more widely than in the interwar period. During the 1990ies, constructing regions has also been accepted as a valid approach to the European future. The existence of the Baltic Sea Area has thus corresponded with the needs of Balts and Scandinavians alike and has formed an accepted project for the European future on both sides of the Baltic Sea. The principle of reciprocity, a fundamental precondition for successful region-building, therefore seems to have been fulfilled, but is the Baltic-Scandinavian connection imagined in the same way both on the eastern and the western shores of the Baltic Sea?

Non-reciprocal Region-building

A lot of new ties and institutions have helped to bridge the Baltic Sea during the 1990ies and these different mutual conferences or associations have strengthened the idea of the Baltic Sea Region and given it a concrete outline. Political cooperation has been lively in the Baltic Sea Region and new institutions are founded like the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Baltic Sea States' Subregional Cooperation (BSSS), the Vision and Strategies for the Baltic Sea Region 2010 (VASAB) or the Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC). The whole area is formed by emerging ties and these ties are characterized by a variety of networks.

Different bonds and ties which are based on different discourses are unified in these networks and so, as an entity, a new Baltic Sea Region is portrayed as being a truly post-modern region.⁵⁵ An interstate region and a transregion are present at the same time in the same region. Nations, states, provinces, towns and even smaller institutions like universities construct their own Baltic Sea networks and the whole region is based on this variety and disparity of actors. Further, the discourse on the Baltic Sea Region is not constructed on the exclusion of otherness, but its main function is merely seen to be the annihilation of the former division of Europe and to exceed an old inside/outside dichotomy. Due to this rapidly growing network during recent years the Baltic Sea Region has become a natural and self-evident context for constructing international relations for more and more people. All these ties have transformed the region-building in the Baltic Sea Area to a second level and we could agree with Wæver⁵⁶ when he argues that a Baltic Sea identity already exists because it is no longer a vision but a cause of action. The region-building work is not, of course, over yet and the Baltic Sea Region is still a self-evident region only to a few.

One problem is, however, that the new discourse on the Baltic Sea Region is two-sided. One side sees the Baltic Sea Region as a transregion which includes Northern Germany, Poland and the western areas of Russia as well, but at the same time there is in the Baltic States another kind of discourse on a wider Nordic area that tries to express Estonian (or Latvian) Nordic character as a natural one. These two interpretations are not necessarily exclusive, they have coexisted and often their characters have been fused. Nevertheless, these discourses also contain some contradictory elements. As stated in the texts of Meri, at least, in the early years of the new independence the boundary against Russia defined also the Baltic Sea Region for the Estonians and that is why the Baltic Sea Area was limited to consist, in practice, only of the Baltic States and the Scandinavian countries, or, in other words, Baltoscandia. It seems clear that the function of

⁵⁵ Joenniemi, Pertti: "Norden as a Post-Nationalist Construction." In: idem (ed.): *Neo-nationalism or Regionality? The Restructuring of political Space Around the Baltic Rim*. Stockholm 1997, 222.

⁵⁶ Wæver, Ole 1997 as note 18, 306.

Baltoscandia for the Estonians and Latvians differs from more functions which have been set to the Baltic Sea Region around the whole Baltic Sea Rim and in particular on the western shores of the Sea. While the western vision on the Baltic Sea Area based on the unification of the former eastern and western blocs and on the construction of a new kind of region of Europe, the rhetoric of the Baits can be seen as an effort to enter into the Nordic family. The creation of a new sovereign interstate unity or perhaps more an enlargement of an old one has been the main aim of the discussion on Baltoscandia. The discourse on Baltoscandia is based on states, nations and their borders and the inside/outside logic is still the constructive element of that kind of territorial imagination.

The Nordic dimension has been quite a unique national construction among other regional identities. It was created more by civil movements than by states. A grassroots dimension and a strong element of civil society are present in the Nordic identity. Nordic identity might thus be seen as a form of nationalism but as existing beyond the normal state-centric nationalism. This type of identity goes beyond the normal inside/outside state-centric argumentation. As a region, the Nordic area is relatively open, elastic and pluralistic. It is not seen as a sovereign unit with exclusive borders and a power-centre.⁵⁷

Thus, the discourses on the Nordic and on Baltoscandia differ in their nature and these differences form an obstacle for the region-building of Baltoscandia or, in other words, for the fusing of the Nordic and Baltoscandia together. Baltoscandia remains to be something else than the Baltic Sea Region but also something else than the Nordic. The creation of the so-called five-plus-three-model of cooperation between the Nordic countries and the Baltic States characterizes well the special nature of Baltoscandia. Originally the Baits wanted to join into the existing Nordic organizations but this request was refused by the Nordic countries. Instead of an enlargement of the old institutions, they chose to create new ones. The meetings of the Baltic and Nordic prime ministers and foreign ministers have formed already a regular practice which by linking the Baltic States and the Nordic countries together has created a true Baltoscandia. A reunion of the Nordic Council and the Baltic Council has served a same function.⁵⁸

The situation is, however, partly different on the level of civil societies. Scientific and cultural ties have been very close between the Baltic States and the Nordic countries.⁵⁹ On that level, the Baits have managed to take part as full members in Nordic cooperation and thereby Nordic cooperation has, in practice, quite often been more a Baltoscandian cooperation because

57 Joenniemi, Pertti 1997 as note 55, 188–193, 207–208.

58 Lehti, Marko 1997 as note 9, 284–285.

59 Ibid.

Non-reciprocal Region-building

the Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians have also been included. Thus, the unofficial dimension of Baltoscandia is perhaps strengthening and in that way the concept of Baltoscandia is approaching the Nordic discourse. The nation, however, seems to remain a more fundamental part of the discourse on Baltoscandia than on the Baltic Sea Region or the Nordic, but the state is no longer needed as a mediator between nation and region, and region can define nation without the concept of a nation-state. The abandonment of state-centricity and security elements in the present discourse on Baltoscandia could lead to a unification of two discourses, that of Baltoscandia and that of the Nordic area and when this happens a true Baltoscandia could really emerge as part of broadened Nordic world.

Still, the main problem of the region-building in the Baltic Sea Area stems from the difference in historical time. Wæver argues that in the West a region is constructed more as an answer to the needs of post-modern society and the role of the state is diminishing, while a nation-state building process determines region-building on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea.⁶⁰ The division is, however, perhaps not so simple and stereotype but the difference in time can be seen merely in different region-building processes. The discourse on the Baltic Sea Region follows the logic of post-modernity while the discourse on Baltoscandia includes more characteristics of modernity. The elements of both region-building processes and also of both times can, however, be found on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea, too. Nevertheless, Baltoscandia, as an ideal, has dominated the discussion in the Baltic States while the Baltic Sea Region has been the primary concept in the western discussion. This difference of periods does not, however, necessarily hinder the construction of a close network across the Baltic Sea and it seems evident that this difference will disappear little by little and a new kind of Baltic Sea Region will emerge – a region composed of different elements and which exists beyond the state-centric world.

⁶⁰ Wæver, Ole 1997 as note 18, 315–318, 325–330.