

Olaf Mertelsmann / Kaarel Piirimäe (eds.)

# The Baltic Sea Region and the Cold War

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EXTRACT

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## Preface

This volume is the final result of a workshop held on 27–28 November 2010 in Tartu, Estonia, entitled “The Baltic Sea Region and the Cold War”, and supported by the Nordic and North/Central European Network of Cold War Researchers (NORCENCOWAR), the project “Baltic Regionalism: Constructing Political Space(s) in Northern Europe, 1800–2000” and the target financed project “Estonia in the Era of the Cold War” (SF0189950s09). These projects also provided funding for this publication.

The discussions at the workshop were fruitful and the mix of participants – senior scholars, PhD-students and Cold War eye-witnesses – fostered the debate. For decades, historiography of the Cold War has concentrated on the superpowers and their main allies, and has mostly focused on the higher level of politics, diplomacy, security and military affairs. During this workshop we could bring the Baltic Sea region, often perceived as a backwater of international politics, and smaller states, non-governmental organisations and in some cases individual actors, into the centre of attention.

The past two decades have witnessed a blossoming of Cold War studies in the Nordic countries. NATO-members Denmark, Norway and Iceland, and neutral countries, Sweden and Finland, have even set up commissions of historians to investigate the Cold War history within their own country. In Germany, studies in the field have mostly evolved around the question of German unity. Poland, the Baltic states, and Russia are lagging behind in Cold War research, as other topics have obviously been considered more important for historians. Unfortunately, a lot of research has been conducted in the framework of national historiography, partly ignoring the transnational aspects of the Cold War in the region.

Recent research conducted in several countries has sought to revise a number of long-established assumptions about the Cold-War conflict, as they do not seem to fit into the context of the Baltic world. The bipolar perspective on the Cold War is more and more being replaced by the idea of multiple players being active on different levels. Thus it is now recognised that the so called Iron Curtain was not insurmountable and a variety of contacts in such fields as economics, culture, media or tourism could take place. In addition, neutral countries also participated in Cold War interaction. Thus, not only high politics, security or military issues were at stake.

One might argue that the Cold War, in the region, did not start over the issue of the Sovietisation of the Central and Eastern European states by Stalin, after World War II, or over the issue of the Marshall Plan, but could be dated as far

back as the Soviet occupation and annexation of the Baltic states in 1940. Many of the issues that began to wreck the anti-Nazi coalition after the war were already visible in the international controversy surrounding the Baltic issue in the early stages of the war. This is the reason why the volume starts with several papers exploring this topic.

Kari Alenius looks at the attitude of the US towards the ‘Baltic question’ in the crucial years from 1939 to 1941 and sees this as a kind of a prelude to the Cold War. Alenius suggests that the manner, in which Washington and Moscow viewed each other in the 1940–41 disputes, was almost fundamentally identical to disagreements after 1945: coloured by distrust and negative mutual perceptions. In contrast to the Cold War period, the rhetoric about the Baltic dispute was fairly muted, however, for both powers needed each other as strategic partners against a common enemy.

Eero Medijainen explores US policies in regards to the Baltic states between 1940–45, and comes to the conclusion that a *de iure* recognition, of incorporation into the USSR, could have nearly happened. Interestingly, it was Stalin’s unwillingness to make even modest concessions to the Americans and the British, for example, to stage elections in the region after the war, which had ruined his chance of acquiring legal recognition. Stalin’s inflexible stance at Allied Conferences had the result that the ‘Baltic question’ became a matter of principle and a hotly debated issue during the Cold War.

Kaarel Piirimäe takes a close look at the status of the ‘Baltic question’ at the end of the war and comes to the conclusion that that this was a nearly dead issue in international relations. As the Big Three powers had no interest in raising the matter, the question of the international status of the Baltic states remained unsettled. The solution of the ‘Baltic question’ depended on the settlement of larger European problems inherited from war, the most significant of which was the future of Germany. The gradual drift into the Cold War, Piirimäe contends, served to freeze the non-recognition policies of the British and the US governments, as was demonstrated by their handling of the Baltic displaced persons, ships, diplomats and embassies.

Pauli Heikkilä explores the activities of exiled Baltic diplomats in international organisations in the early period of the Cold War, particularly in the European Movement between 1948–50. Quite interestingly, the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian activists were accepted in the movement for European integration and allowed to form their separate Baltic Council, which was the only regional body in the organisation. Despite the deep divides symbolised by the Iron Curtain, Heikkilä contends that the Cold War was also the period when actual integration of the continent began.

Lars Fredrik Stöcker studies the activities of Baltic émigré politicians in neutral Sweden during the Cold War. His focus, on non-state actors and non-state interaction, instead of high politics, enables him to demonstrate that the Iron Curtain was indeed more porous than was mostly assumed. This was particularly true for the Baltic region where, due to the soothing effect of Sweden's and Finland's neutrality, East-West tensions were never as explosive as in Central Europe. This was an historical precedent, he argues, that exile communities of such proportions – there were 22,000 Estonians in Sweden – were formed on their home countries' opposite coasts, creating completely new regional entanglements, which are still hardly investigated.

Vahur Made discusses Finland's perspective on the incorporated Baltic states, focusing on the discussions in the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). Finland's special position in the Cold War context meant that it had to adjust its policy towards the Baltic issue accordingly. Despite the predominant role of the Presidents' personal relationships with Moscow, it was still the MFA which determined the direction of Finland's Baltic policies.

Olaf Mertelsmann draws on the example of one Soviet republic, the Estonian SSR, to explore the social costs of the Cold War. Stalin continued the pre-war policy of high defence spending in the post-war period. This was one main reason for his policy of extreme austerity and caused, together with war damage, a human catastrophe, resulting in high levels of excess mortality due to malnutrition in Estonia and outright famine in some regions of the USSR. In general, Cold War spending constrained consumption heavily as demonstrated by Mertelsmann. In addition, the Cold War was one of the main factors to make anti-Soviet resistance and state repressions more brutal.

Vahur Made discusses the interesting case of the attitudes of the Estonian diplomats in exile towards the People's Republic of China. Since the deterioration of its relations with the Soviet Union, the country posed a difficult dilemma for the Baltic exiles – should they continue to follow an anti-Communist line and reject both powers or adopt a 'realistic' position and try to use China against the Soviet Union. As Made demonstrates, Chinese interest regarding the Baltic states turned a tactical alliance against a common enemy into a real possibility.

In his paper, Kim Frederichsen explores Soviet cultural diplomacy in Denmark using the example of the Society for Cooperation between Denmark and the Soviet Union. He views the Soviet propaganda activities in Denmark in the context of the Soviet apparatus for foreign propaganda as a whole and comes to the conclusion that, despite enormous resources spent and meticulous planning, effects on Danish public opinion were, in the long run, of little account. Apart from few individual successes, for example, Erik Vagn Jensen's book on the

Baltic Soviet republics, negative events in the Soviet bloc, such as the crushing of the Hungarian Uprising, shattered the Soviet effort.

Virpi Kaisto explores the fascinating case of a Finnish construction company, operating on the Soviet side of the border, conducting a large building project. Contrary to what one may expect, politics constituted a minor, unnoticed part in the management of the construction project. Despite occasional high-level visits and the media attention, high-level political actors were mostly excluded from the day-to-day running of the business, which offered a unique opportunity for people to encounter each other across the border. As Kaisto's paper well demonstrates, there is an acute need to include individual actors and companies in the study of Cold War relations, in order to fully comprehend the specific operational environment of the time.

The paper by Sigurd Hess deals with the intelligence clash in the Baltic Sea, which was the scene, as he contends, of one of the greatest maritime rivalries in history. According to Hess, there is a tendency in research to ignore the naval dimensions of the Cold War conflict, particularly the Baltic Sea, and to neglect the findings of intelligence organisations other than those of the American and British. He therefore analyses the role played by German organisations, most notably the Organisation Gehlen, in early Cold War encounters. Did intelligence matter? According to Hess, it clearly did, helping Western navies to know what was beyond the horizon. As far as strength estimates were concerned, the West consistently overestimated their opponent's capabilities. As port visits after 1989 revealed, NATO forces had managed, unknowingly, to gain the upper hand by the 1980s.

Pierre-Frédéric Weber looks at a contested location during the Cold War, the Szczecin Lagoon. The paper suggests that the importance of the bay during the Cold War has been underrated, as there was no other place in the southern Baltic area where so many economic, political and strategic interests would have crossed. History of the city in the Cold War context, Weber shows, is meaningful only if it adopts a multi-level approach, analysing the place's local, political, economic, international and strategic meanings. For the Szczecin Lagoon, the East-West conflict resulted in a disruption in its position within the Baltic Sea region; a challenge it still has failed to put aside entirely.

Martins Kaprans analyses post-Soviet Latvian autobiographies as a shared representation of the Soviet period. These life-memories, Kaprans suggests, constitute a discursive repertoire undertaken by auto-biographers to 'normalise' their Soviet experience. In line with recent scholarship on the issue in the Baltics he detects a shift in autobiographies away from the themes of repression and resistance, dominant in the 1990s, towards more positive aspects of daily life un-

der the Soviet system. He attributes the development to the need of the autobiographers to reinforce a positive post-Soviet identity.

In the final paper, James G. Connell Jr. explores the question of American reconnaissance flights being lost over the USSR during the Cold War and how they are dealt with today. The objective of the joint US-Russian effort, launched in 1992, was to recover the remains of the crew members of those flights which had not been accounted for by the time. Connell himself has been actively involved in the work of the commission, which makes the paper very rich reading about the nature of the Cold War confrontation as well as its costs that still need to be addressed.

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Olaf Mertelsmann and Kaarel Piirimäe  
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