

REGION BUILDING AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION

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Abstract

This paper examines the concept of “new region building” in the Baltic Sea region with emphasis on the construction of a collective “Baltic” identity. Possible implications of these processes on Russia as a non-EU member state are discussed. Region building around the Baltic Sea is conceptualised within the framework of social constructivism, and a connection between region building and identity formation is established. Furthermore, an attempt is made to shed light on the way in which a “Baltic identity” is promoted in the region. By means of a short discourse analysis, certain characteristics of the Baltic Sea region are discovered that are promoted as the basis for a regional identity by various regional actors. The impact of these characteristics on relations between Russia, the EU and the other Baltic Sea states are examined and conclusions are drawn in relation to the region building processes in the Baltic Sea area.

INTRODUCTION

Cooperation in the Baltic Sea region (BSR) has prospered since the independence of the Baltic States in the beginning of the 1990s. Several programmes and initiatives have been established, such as the Northern Dimension initiative (ND), the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) or the Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation (BSSSC). The EU actively supports cooperation in this region. In 1997, at the Luxembourg European Council, Finland’s Northern Dimension initiative (ND) was recognized as part of the external EU policies, and in the year 2000, the EU initiated the INTERREG III B programme Baltic Sea Region, thereby continuing the INTERREG II B programme (1997-2001):

The European Commission has decided to take an active part in the development of the Baltic Sea Region by part-financing the INTERREG III B transnational co-operation programme in favour of the following countries: Denmark, North-East Germany, Sweden and Finland in the European Union and Norway, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Belarus (INTERREG III B).

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Some political and economic stakeholders would like to see the BSR developing into a “world leading region for innovation” (Serger and Hansson 2004: III), which is characterised by economic prosperity and good living standards. Others emphasise the region’s potential for providing security and stability in this part of Europe by referring to the concept of a “security community” based on the example of the Nordic countries (Browning 2001:7; Browning and Joenniemi 2004:240).

In the following, after a brief clarification of the term “Baltic Sea region”, a selection of the literature dealing with “the new region building”¹ and identity formation in the BSR will be presented and discussed with emphasis on claims made concerning the existence and nature of a Baltic identity. This literature review will certainly not be exhaustive but it will provide an impression of the opposing interpretations and ideas that exist concerning these issues. Subsequently, a number of empirical texts serve as the basis for a brief analysis of normative linguistic terms in the current political discourse. The analysis will be conducted along the lines of Jessen and Pohl, who have analysed six speeches of European leaders concerning the issue of Kaliningrad. They thereby examined the construction of a self-other divide with regard to Russia (Jessen and Pohl 2003:15).

DEFINING THE BALTIC SEA REGION

Although many “Baltic Sea institutions” include other than the littoral states, in this paper, the expression “Baltic Sea region” refers to an area composed of the states or parts of the states that have a Baltic Sea coastline. This definition is inevitably somewhat imprecise and arbitrary, because it is often impossible to determine whether a state should be regarded as belonging to this region as a whole or only partly. It is generally problematic to draw an external border of the Baltic Sea region along the borders of a state or a county or province, because those entities basically exist for administrative purposes and often separate collectives of humans that share the same historical or cultural backgrounds. Moreover, as will be discussed below, it is a contradiction to the concept of a region to define sharp and static borders that distinguish it from other areas. Consequently, a clear geographical definition of the Baltic Sea region does not and cannot exist. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this paper, a rough outline of the geographical space referred to by the term “Baltic Sea region” must be given, but it should be understood that the borders between this region and the adjacent areas are blurred and in a constant process of social construction.

¹ The “new region building” refers to the notion that regions are socially constructed by “region-builders”, mainly academics and influential politicians from the states that are part of the region.

The states lining the Baltic Sea coast are Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Germany. As this paper deals with the formation of a collective identity of the inhabitants of the Baltic Sea region, this region is defined in very narrow terms. It is expected that people identify as inhabitants of the Baltic Sea region only if the Baltic Sea plays a role in their daily lives. As a consequence, Germany and Russia can obviously not be counted as belonging to the Baltic Sea region as a whole. In the case of Germany, the “Bundesländer,” Hamburg, Schleswig-Holstein and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, are counted as parts of the region; and within the Russian Federation, the North-Western Federal District, specifically the area around the cities St. Petersburg, Pskov and the Kaliningrad exclave, is regarded as belonging to the Baltic Sea region.²

The distinction between parts that can be defined as belonging to the BSR and those that cannot is more difficult in connection with the other, rather smaller states. To be precise, with regard to Denmark, only the counties South Jutland, Funen, Copenhagen, West Zealand, Roskilde and Storstrøm as well as the island Bornholm can be counted as parts of the Baltic Sea region. Concerning Sweden, the counties Skåne, Blekinge, Östergötland, Södermanland, Gotland, Stockholm, Uppsala, Gävleborg, Västernorrland, Västerbotten and Norrbotten have a Baltic Sea coast line. In Finland, this applies to the province Lapland and the sub-state regions Northern-Ostrobothnia, Central Ostrobothnia, Ostrobothnia, Satakunta, Finland Proper, Uusimaa, Eastern Uusimaa and Kymenlaakso, and in Poland, the voivodships West Pomerania, Pomerania and Warmia-Masuria adjoin the Sea. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are also referred to as the “Baltic States” and account for the so-called “Baltic Region” (in contrast to the Baltic Sea region). Therefore, those states are not further split into coastal and non-coastal regions but also considered to be part of the BSR (more or less) as a whole.

THE CONCEPT OF IDENTITY

Whereas in IR theory the concept of identity is highly disputed and it is hard to find a clear definition (Wæver 2002:20f.), A Dictionary of Geography defines identity as the:

² As mentioned above, such a definition according to administrative areas is probably very imprecise and the “real” border is possibly somewhere in between. However, the politicians in charge of these administrative entities are the ones to decide whether to pursue a policy that engages actively in Baltic Sea cooperation or focuses on other aspects. Therefore, to some extent, the populations of such an area are all affected by these policy choices and so is the BSR.

...characteristics determining the individuality of a being or entity; in the constitution of national identities these characteristics may be fostered by myths. Human geographers commonly view identity as emerging from social action, or the production and reproduction of space (Mayhew in A Dictionary of Geography 2004).

This definition is useful for the examination of collective identity, as it refers to a “being or entity” and includes the notion of national identity. Its emphasis on a constitution of identity that emerges from social action is in line with the propositions of social constructivism. Constructivists hold that reality is socially constructed in a process by which ideas, beliefs and perceptions are shared (Jackson and Sørensen 2003:254). This happens during interaction, mainly discourse practises, e.g. “conversations, narratives, arguments, speeches” (Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy 1996) by external as well as internal actors of a group (Wennersten 1999:276, 278). This distinction between actors inside and outside a certain group implies another important prerequisite for the construction of identity: the existence of a notion of a “self” and an “other”. William Connolly argues that to create an identity there always has to be an “other” to demarcate from (Connolly in Jessen and Pohl 2003:11). In other words, the self develops its identity by distancing itself from the other.

The development of a collective identity that stretches across the borders of several countries is, according to Wennersten, a rather recent trend that is due to “changing dynamics in world affairs [that] ‘are sufficiently powerful to encourage imagining supranational, transnational, or subnational communities’” (Rosenau in Wennersten 1999:276). Wennersten also points out that several collective identities can overlap, e.g. a group of people can have different political identities at once (Wennersten 1999:276). In other words, it can be assumed that people in the Baltic Sea region identify with their national states as well as develop a regional identity and maybe also identify with the EU at the same time.

Taking into account the definition cited above, it is possible to speak of a Baltic identity if a certain amount of characteristics can be discovered that a majority of the people living in this area collectively regard as unique. Consequently, to describe the Baltic identity, one has to discover a certain amount of characteristics that apply to this region³ and are regarded as important by most of its people.

³ Unfortunately, there are no ways of determining how many characteristics are necessary to prove the existence of this particular identity and it is also difficult to draw the line between the existence of one or various identities.

REGION BUILDING IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION

A region can be defined as “an area of a country or the world having definable characteristics but not always fixed boundaries” (Concise Oxford English Dictionary). This definition of a region is similar to the definition of (collective) identity. As regions are discursively constructed, as is everything else in the social and political world (Jackson and Sørensen 2003), this is perhaps not surprising. The notion of “new region building” goes one step further by claiming that region-builders deliberately choose the characteristics they want the region to possess and make them known to the public, thereby constructing reality by their discourse practices⁴ (Engelen 2004:7ff.). Ole Wæver points out that region building in the BSR has become “self-enforcing”: the BSR is perceived to be of importance and, consequently, it becomes important (Wæver in Tassinari and Williams 2003:35). In other words, the perceptions of inside and outside actors contribute to the creation of a regional identity.⁵ In the following, some characteristics will be exposed that define the Baltic Sea region and thereby provide a basis for a regional identity.

The concept of a region can be understood in modern as well as in post-modern terms. Concerning regions in Europe, two opposite metaphors have been created: the “concentric circles Europe” and the “Olympic rings Europe” (Makarychev 2004:302). The metaphor of concentric circles refers to a modern understanding of regions as part of a hierarchy with Brussels at the top, in which the difference between the centre and the periphery is considerable. In the metaphor “Olympic rings Europe”, all European regions are included, there does not exist a clear centre or a periphery, and all regions are equally important. The metaphor “Olympic rings Europe” is part of a post-modern understanding of regions (Makarychev 2004:302). In the literature, it is often pointed out that the ND – and thereby also the BSR – is a good example for a Europe of Olympic rings and a post-modern interpretation of the concept of regions (Makarychev 2004; Browning and Joenniemi 2003). Therefore,

⁴ In this context, Browning points out that there is a danger that policy-makers, who promote region building, are unconsciously influenced by a Western perspective. Accordingly, “the underlying narratives of the new region building (even the ‘post-modern’ ones) also have the propensity to reproduce the very exclusions many hope it possible to overcome” (Browning 2001:48). For identity formation, this suggests that the Baltic Sea identity reflects the views of those who shaped the region—which are unconsciously based on a conviction of Western superiority. Nevertheless, Browning also points out that if people are aware of the “continuing exclusionary nature of the discourses underlying the new region building initiatives” (Browning 2001:51), it becomes possible to reconceptualise them.

⁵ However, it should be kept in mind that the construction of a region around the Baltic Sea was inspired by a post-modern theoretical approach. Neumann points out that this region building was conducted by “a tightly knit epistemic community of ‘Nordic’ foreign political intellectuals” (Neumann in Browning 2001: 3). In contrast, a “region” can also be seen from a more modernist point of view, as it is the case in Russia. The regions in Russia have been introduced for administrative purposes and probably have no unifying characteristics that would enhance the development of regional identities (Browning and Joenniemi 2003a: 84).

one of the characteristics of the BSR is its conceptualisation as a “post-modern region” with a focus on dialogue instead of negotiation, inclusiveness and a potential to overcome frontiers rather than to create new ones (Browning and Joenniemi 2003b:467), and a multitude of networks. These characteristics evolved from the policy of the ND. The construction of the EU’s Northern Dimension thereby contributed to the current understanding of the BSR.

Apart from that, some other factors are claimed to be of importance in the BSR. Of those, the factor “security” is assumed to have been one of the most important driving forces for region building. In the literature, there are diverging positions concerning the impact that this factor has had on the BSR. For instance, Browning and Joenniemi claim that regional cooperation in the BSR can only function if motivated by security (Browning and Joenniemi 2004:245). Adopting a slightly different point of view, Morozov argues that desecuritisation in particular is a prerequisite for post-modern region building. Desecuritisation is defined here as “the process whereby interaction becomes centred on issues other than security, while security as such is actually enhanced by avoiding the language of security” (Morozov 2004:318).

Moreover, Tassinari and Williams differentiate between the concepts “hard” and “soft security”⁶ and their implications on region building. They state that “hard”, military, security issues are dealt with “from above” by actors such as the EU or NATO, whereas soft security matters are addressed by regional actors “from below” (Tassinari and Williams 2003:38). For the origin of the BSR, this means that hard security concerns have been a motivation for engaging in cross-border cooperation for the former Soviet States in order to escape the Russian sphere of influence (Browning and Joenniemi 2004:237). However, at the same time, region building in the BSR is estimated to have been started “from below with numerous actors in the beginning striving for completely different goals” (Tassinari and Williams 2003:35). Tassinari and Williams thus claim that there are two dimensions of region building, one from below and one from above that are complementary and can operate simultaneously.

Those three different approaches towards the origins of a post-modern BSR have different implications for its future. Browning and Joenniemi (2004) claim that cooperation after EU and NATO enlargement will come to an end unless other motivations for cooperation than just security are found. Morozov’s approach to desecuritisation, in contrast, suggests that cooperation is becoming motivated by other issues than security and will thus continue.

⁶ According to Pynnöniemi and Raik, “soft security” refers to non-military issues and common threats that call for cooperative responses (Pynnöniemi and Raik 2003).

Tassinari and Williams' focus on a complementary process of region building from above and below implies that soft security issues will lead to continued cooperation even after the hard security issues, addressed previously from above, lose their immediacy. This explanation of the construction of the BSR as an interplay of forces from above and below is also compatible with the claim that the BSR was constituted on the basis of the vision represented by the ND. Although the policy-makers who created the ND were not concerned with hard security, they engaged in the existing processes of cooperation that had developed from below, and imprinted an overall concept and a vision from above.

With respect to the definition provided above, the purpose of this overview was to describe the BSR as an area of the world with some special characteristics. Those include that it is a post-modern region, symbolising the metaphor of "Olympic rings Europe," that it has no centre, is inclusive and consists of overlapping networks. Concerning the origin of the BSR, many academics regard security threats that had to be overcome collectively as the starting point for regional cooperation. Further characteristics of the BSR can be found, such as geography, since the Baltic Sea region is of course to a great extent defined by the Baltic Sea or its location in Northern Europe. A thorough exploration of all characteristics of the BSR is, however, beyond the scope of this paper.

To sum it up, the presentation of the concepts "identity" and "region" has demonstrated that in the BSR, the processes of identity formation and region building appear to be closely interwoven and to happen in parallel. Policy-makers, who try to construct a region, inevitably also construct specific characteristics that define this region. If the majority of the inhabitants of this region then agree that these characteristics define the Baltic Sea region and, if they consider themselves part of this region, they develop a regional identity – which in turn has influence on their social reality, and thereby the existence and nature of the region. In Catellani's words: "There seems in fact to be a close link between the political objective to establish cooperative ties across the Baltic and the need of creating a sense or a form of common belonging to a single community" (Catellani 2003:18).

DIVERGING APPROACHES TOWARDS A BALTIC IDENTITY IN THE LITERATURE

Some academics claim that for several reasons a common BSR identity has failed to emerge. Firstly, they state that cooperation has only been established to address security risks and to help the Baltic countries and Poland to become democratic market economies and therefore, the cooperation will cease to exist after these problems are solved (Browning and Joenniemi 2004:243, 245). Secondly, it is claimed that tensions between the EU and Russia prevent a common identity from

being established (Browning 2001:52). Thirdly, it has been stated that any identity that is imposed on the region cannot function – only an identity that has developed slowly over the centuries from below such as the Scandinavian “asecurity community” (Browning and Joenniemi 2004) can be sustainable.

Other academics have noted that the countries around the Baltic Sea prefer to highlight – and thereby to identify with – diverging characteristics of the region. It is claimed that academics and politicians particularly from Germany, the Scandinavian countries and the EU tend to emphasise a common Baltic history and actively support the notion of a Baltic identity (Catellani 2003:18; Browning 2001:5f., 51; Tassinari 2003:10; Jessen and Pohl 2003:11, 13f.). In contrast, in the Baltic States and Poland, people are more likely to stress the “Europeanness” of the Baltic Sea region that is used in this context as a synonym for being closer to the EU and the West (Browning and Joenniemi 2003b:471). Concerning opinions from Russian politicians and academics, there can hardly be found any emphasis on common traits applying to all littoral states in the literature. The perception of Russia as a modern, Westphalian state, which prevails in the current political elite, makes it difficult for policy-makers to appreciate the merits of cross-border cooperation, networking and political activity on regional levels.

As to the common images from a shared history that are especially promoted by people from Germany, the Scandinavian countries and the EU, it is argued that the most well known images are the “new Hanse,”⁷ Pomor,⁸ the Viking Age and the North. Of those, according to Catellani (2003), the images of the “Hanse” or Pomor are stronger than a “Northern” identity – represented by the ND – or an “EU identity”. For the Hanse, this claim seems to be confirmed by the fact that this trading network is still well known to many inhabitants of the coastal areas along the Baltic Sea, because the Hanse once consisted of or ruled over towns like Lübeck, Hamburg, Rostock and Stralsund in Germany; Szczecin, Gdansk and Elblag in Poland; Kaliningrad (then the German Königsberg), Novgorod and Pskov, which today belong to Russia; Tallinn in Estonia; Riga in Latvia; Stockholm, Kalmar and Visby in Sweden; and Turku in Finland.

⁷ The words “Hanse” or “Hansa” refer to the Hanseatic League which was “an alliance of trading cities that for a time in the later Middle Ages and the Early Modern period maintained a trade monopoly over most of Northern Europe and the Baltic” (Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia “Hanse” <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanse>> [accessed 23.02. 2005]).

⁸ “Pomors” (поморы) are settlers of the White Sea coasts. Explorers from Novgorod entered the White Sea through Northern Dvina estuary and founded the Russian settlements along its coast. They reached as far as trans-Ural areas of Northern Siberia and founded the city of Mangazeya. They maintained a Northern trade route between Arkhangelsk and Siberia” (Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia “Pomors” <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pomor>> [accessed 22.02. 2005].)

However, in spite of this high profile in the region, the image of the “new Hanse” has been discovered to evoke rather negative connotations among a number of inhabitants of the region, as it is associated with German imperialism. Thus, the Hanse does not present the good example of peaceful cross-border cooperation that it was intended to be, among others by Björn Engholm in the beginning of the 1990s (Engelen 2004:14). Nevertheless, as Jörg Hackman puts it:

...one might argue that the Hanseatic League is the most appropriate conception to use in constructing such as Baltic identity. [...] It could be argued that the temporary success of the New Hansa as concept was due to its vagueness and presumably also to the fact that it does not really interfere with contested historical topics amongst the societies on the Baltic rim. In other words, the Hansa can easily be associated with positive developments such as trade, exchange, wealth and inter-cultural contacts. If there was occasionally a slight reluctance towards Engholm's image of the Hansa, this was based not so much on different political conceptions as on a national perspective which held that it was blurring the colonial role of the Hansa in the past (Hackman 2003:79).

In other words, the image of the new Hansa does seem to have its advantages, as Catalani stated, but it also evokes negative connotations and must therefore be treated carefully.

The metaphors of the Hanse and Pomor fit to the post-modern nature of the region: they refer to former loose, open and inclusive trade networks. Those characteristics are reflected in institutions such as the CBSS or the UBC. In addition, there are institutions in the region that deliberately try to discover and maintain the common culture and past and thereby actively contribute to the development of a common identity. Such an institution is the Baltic Sea Heritage Co-operation.⁹ The existence of the Baltic Sea Heritage Co-operation shows that some policy-makers have already taken active measures in promoting a common identity based on a common history and a common cultural heritage; thus, the attempt to create an identity definitely exists within the region.

To sum it up, this review has illustrated the debate about the existence, duration and nature of a BSR identity. While there are many arguments supporting each approach, what can be stated here is that at least the endeavour to construct a common Baltic identity definitely does exist. Institutions such as the Baltic Sea Heritage Co-operation promote an identity in the region that is based on a common

⁹ The institution held a Cultural Heritage Forum on “Baltic Sea Identity” in Gdansk in April 2003 (Baltic Sea Heritage Co-operation, Homepage <<http://balticheritage.raa.se/>> [accessed 23.02.2005]).

history and a common culture. In the next part of this paper, the previous statements regarding a Baltic identity will be complemented by an empirical study. This is expected to show to what extent a common Baltic history is of importance for the construction of a Baltic identity, which aspects from history are promoted if any, and whether there are other characteristics that serve to define “Balticness”.

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF CERTAIN EMPIRICAL EXAMPLES

In this part, five empirical texts will be examined with a focus on possible characteristics of the BSR that are promulgated in spoken language. The examples comprise, firstly, a speech by the former Commissioner for External Affairs of the EU at the eleventh ministerial meeting of the CBSS in Svetlogorsk on the sixth of October 2002; secondly, a speech by the Vice Governor of St. Petersburg and Chairman of the Committee for External Relations held at the 11th Anniversary Conference on Subregional Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region on the 24th of October 2003; thirdly, a speech by the President of Lithuania, held at the seventh October 2004 at a business lunch hosted by the American Chamber of Commerce in Vilnius; fourthly, a speech by the Swedish Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC), held on the 23rd of November 2004 in Brussels and finally, an interview of the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs to the German Newspaper *Handelsblatt* in Moscow from the 28th of December 2004.¹⁰ These five examples represent five different institutions: the EU Commission, the local government of St. Petersburg, Lithuania’s government, the BSPC and Russia’s government.¹¹

The empirical examples were chosen according to the following criteria: they should reflect spoken language, they should be rather new, they should all concern the BSR, and they should express the views of inhabitants from different BSR countries or members of BSR institutions. Russia is assigned a special role because the purpose of this paper is to examine whether an emerging Baltic identity can serve to bridge the gap between the Russian BSR inhabitants, as the only non-EU citizens, and the people from the other states of the region.

¹⁰ As Jessen and Pohl put it, speeches today are written not by the speakers themselves but by speechwriters (Jessen and Pohl in Hansson 2003: 15). Consequently, they do not reflect the speakers’ opinion but the views of the institution that the speaker represents. The same is probably also true for the interviews with politicians. For instance, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs mentions himself that it is the President of the Russian Federation who decides on the country’s foreign policy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2005: 9).

¹¹ It would be interesting to examine not only the position of the Lithuania and Russian governments but also the other seven countries of the region. Likewise, it would be of interest to examine more institutions than the BSPC, the BSSSC and the Commission as well as the positions of other BSR inhabitants. However, a much larger amount of empirical research would be necessary to draw a more coherent picture of the current situation in the BSR.

It should further be noted that it is not a requirement that the examples of spoken language should be made exclusively by people from the region, because the perception of outsiders is also of importance for the construction of a collective identity. In fact, as a detailed description of each speaker's background is not a part of this paper, it cannot be known for sure whether any of them regards themselves as inhabitants of the Baltic Sea region as defined above. It is only possible to distinguish whether the institutions represented by the speakers belong to the region. Therefore, the speech by the Governor of St. Petersburg is analysed as the view of a Russian politician from within the region while the interview with the Russian foreign minister can be seen as the perception of an "outsider" who, due to his political position, conveys the perception of the Russian government. The speech by the Commissioner for External Affairs of the EU is regarded here as an outsider's viewpoint because the Commission is not a Baltic Sea regional institution even though it participates actively in Baltic Sea cooperation. The speech by the President of Lithuania can be regarded as an insider's view if one defines the whole of Lithuania as belonging to the BSR – this problem could in principle only be solved by asking the Lithuanians whether they feel like inhabitants of the BSR. Finally, the speech by the Swedish Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) is considered an insider's view as the BSPC is definitely a Baltic Sea regional institution. As to the positions conveyed in the speeches, none of the speeches are understood to reflect the perception of Russia, Lithuania, Sweden or the EU as a whole, but as the speeches were held by leading politicians, they probably reflect the official positions of the governments or institutions they represent.

It is furthermore considered important that those examples present spoken language, because such a form of discourse has to take the setting into account, e.g. the words of the speaker have a direct impact on an audience. Additionally, spoken language tends to be less factual but more focussed on the mediation of a message or vision. Thus, the analysis of speeches or interviews can be expected to shed light on the question of how identity is constructed in the BSR.

The speeches have been evaluated with regard to the use of personal and possessive pronouns because through them a divide between the self and the other is constructed. Additionally, focus has been on the way in which the terms Europe, EU, West, Russia and the BSR are used. Furthermore, attention has been paid to the construction of a possible vision for the region, and conclusions concerning an identity of the BSR have been drawn.

ANALYSIS OF THE SPEECH BY COMMISSIONER CHRIS PATTEN (TEXT 1)

In his speech at the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Commissioner Chris Patten uses mostly the pronouns “we” and “our” when referring to the Commission, e.g. “We need to explore common ground between Russia’s wish to ensure easy transit between Kaliningrad and the rest of Russia, and our own need to ensure our security” (Patten 2002:2). By “ensure our security” the EU-members are included into the self, whereas Russia and especially Kaliningrad are linguistically excluded.

The “other” as opposite of the “self” is constructed in the phrases “our policy on Kaliningrad” (Ibid.:1), “Kaliningrad has lagged behind the rest of the Baltic and many other regions of Russia” (Ibid.) and “discussion with Russia and the candidate countries bordering on Kaliningrad” (Ibid.:1f.). Concerning the use of “Europe,” it is interesting that the Commissioner mentions “Europe’s Northern Dimension” (Ibid.:1) suggesting that the ND, which is normally referred to as the “EU’s Northern Dimension,” goes beyond the EU. Consequently, in this case he distinguishes between the notion of “Europe” and the “EU” and includes Russia into Europe.

With regard to the use of the term “EU,” which represents the “self” in this speech, the following sentence expresses the role that is attributed to the EU for cooperation in the BSR: “The importance of the Northern Dimension can only grow as the context of the region changes, and as four more Baltic countries become members of the EU” (Ibid.). The ND is also referred to as “a broad concept that touches many aspects of EU policy in this region” (Ibid.).

Russia is mentioned in Patten’s speech in connection with “the spread of organised crime, illegal immigration, environmental pollution and diseases like AIDS [which] challenge the security of Kaliningrad and Russia as well as that of present and future EU Member States”. This image reveals that, from the Commission’s viewpoint, Russia is associated with soft security threats. Similarly, tensions between the EU and Russia underlie the phrases “discussion with Russia” instead of dialogue (Ibid.:2) and “Let us move on from sterile argument about things like the format of meetings and start real co-operation on substance” (Ibid., italics added) indicating that cooperation between the EU and Russia does not yet function as anticipated. However, at the same time, the relations are depicted in positive terms as well, evident in the phrases “our Russian friends” (Ibid.) or “our friends in Moscow” (Ibid.).

The BSR is generally mentioned positively in the speech as illustrated with the following: “For me there are three key-words for Baltic regional cooperation in the coming decade: focus, leadership, and opportunity” (Ibid.). Chris Patten formulates

a vision not for the BSR but for the ND: “Europe's Northern Dimension stands on the threshold of tremendous new opportunities for continuing democratic development, for enhanced regional cooperation, and for shared prosperity” (Ibid.).

Summarising, the speech shows that although the Commission is an official member of the CBSS, the BSR is viewed from outside. This speech does not serve the establishment of a Baltic identity but the reinforcement of the EU identity. When speaking of the region, the Commissioner underlines the importance of the Northern Dimension, which is an EU policy. Russia is treated as an outsider due to underlying tensions between the EU and Russia concerning Kaliningrad. The message of this speech is that cooperation in an EU frame should be the uniting element in the BSR.

ANALYSIS OF THE SPEECH BY THE VICE GOVERNOR OF ST. PETERSBURG (TEXT 2)

The “self” that is constructed in the speech by the Vice Governor A.V. Prokhorenko of St. Petersburg at a BSSSC Meeting, is the city or the local government of St. Petersburg. Occasionally, the Baltic countries are included into the self, which is evident in the phrases, “our common history” (Prokhorenko 2003:3), “our common past and present, our cultures and our children” (Ibid.:4), and “our organization” (Ibid.:5) referring to the BSSSC.

The “other” is only constructed indirectly: the sentence “we would love to see considerable progress in removing visa barriers” (Ibid.) can also be understood as criticism towards the EU, which has not yet removed those barriers. So indirectly, the EU presents the “other”.

St. Petersburg is, in this speech, regarded as part of “Europe.” The Southwestern Waste Water Treatment Complex in St. Petersburg is described as “the largest facility of its kind in Europe” (Ibid.:4). The EU’s role in the BSR is indirectly mentioned, as the Northern Dimension programme is said to be progressing. Symbols of St. Petersburg’s ties to the West are clearly the presents that are given to the city by the other BSR countries. Many of them refer to a common Western culture including literature, architecture, music, film, art and history (Ibid.:3f.). Those symbols are not discursively constructed in the speech, but described as facts. They also reveal that the Baltic Sea countries regard St. Petersburg as one of them, not as part of an “other”.

The BSR plays an important role in this speech, which is shown in the sentence, “[s]ustainable peaceful development in our region is conditional on our joint effort on addressing our common challenges, building on our common success and shared

advantages both geographic and geopolitical” (Ibid.:5). The BSR is represented as inclusive, e.g. “all Baltic Sea nations without exception” (Ibid.:3), and a notion of commonness is constructed by referring to history: “our millennium-old common history” (Ibid.). The vision of the speech is a continued, sustainable, peaceful development based on a common past and present that will lead to a shared future (Ibid.:4).

This speech strongly reflects the effort to construct a common Baltic identity on the basis of a common history. The basis for the commonness of all the Baltic countries that is taken from history is not, as suggested in the literature, the Hanse or Pomor but the Viking Age. The Vice Governor refers to the time of Rurik (Ibid.:3), a “semi-legendary leader of the Varangians (Vikings)”¹² that came from Sweden to Russia.

ANALYSIS OF THE SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF LITHUANIA (TEXT 3)

The “self” in the speech by the President of Lithuania, Mr. Adamkus, speaking to the American Chamber of Commerce, includes Lithuania, the Baltic States (Adamkus 2004:2) and sometimes the whole BSR (Ibid.:2,3). Russia, not being a member of the EU, is regarded as the “other.” It is claimed that Russia should be involved “more actively into European affairs” (Ibid.:2). Here “European” does not include Russia but means “the EU” or “Western”. At the same time, “the European policy” of Baltic governments is regarded as important for the success of the region (Ibid.). Consequently, this implies that Russia, as the “other,” needs to adapt to “European” values to be included into the Baltic “self” and make the BSR a success: “with Russia participating, we can make the Baltic sea region one of the most prosperous areas in Europe” (Ibid.).

The BSR is mentioned positively in the speech: “The current situation in the region, which includes affluent Nordic countries, small and dynamic Baltic States, Poland, parts of Germany and Northwestern Russia, is well balanced” (Ibid.:1). Most of the time, the economic developments are highlighted: “The symbiosis of affluent and technologically advanced Nordic states and Germany on the one hand and the dynamism of the Baltic States on the other make the Baltic region one of the fastest growing regions in the European Union” (Ibid.).

The vision presented in this speech also refers to economic success, illustrated in the sentences, “Therefore, our actions in the long run should aim at reinforcing the positive trend that brings welfare to the region via taxes, knowledge and expertise”

¹² World Encyclopedia. Philip's (2004) “rurik”, < <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t142.e10078>> [accessed 20.02. 2005].

(Ibid); and “Innovation and competitiveness are the two main priorities for the Baltic region. These two pillars are crucial in making our region an outstanding place to do business” (Ibid.:3).

Summarising, in this speech the BSR is associated with welfare and economic progress. This is probably partly due to the fact that the speech was held at a business lunch that was hosted by the American Chamber of Commerce. Consequently, in order to impress the American partners, the economic success of the region had to be emphasised. As the audience does not comprise members of the BSR, the speech has not so much the purpose to construct a feeling of commonness but to present the BSR in the most positive way. Evidence of a BSR identity can nevertheless be discovered in the frequent reference to this success and to an Europeanness that should also include Russia.

ANALYSIS OF THE SPEECH BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BSPPC STANDING COMMITTEE (TEXT 4)

In the speech by Mr Olsson, the Swedish Chairman of the Standing Committee of the BSPPC, the “self” includes the BSPPC as well as the people of the region, which becomes clear in the sentences, “we can look at the development of the Baltic Sea Region as a success story. The region is rich, we have high standards of living, people have good education and there is functioning infrastructure in the region” (Olsson:1f.).

The “other” is not strongly presented in this speech, but in the sentence, “we see the importance of developing as close relations as possible between the EU and Russia as paramount” (Ibid.:3), the EU and Russia are constructed as the “other” in contrast to the BSPPC. This sentence also shows that the EU is presented as important for the region. It is even indicated that the BSPPC hoped that the BSR would increase in importance after the enlargement which, however, has not yet happened (Ibid.).

Similarly to the Lithuanian President, the Swedish Chairman also constructs an image of the BSR as a prosperous, economically successful region (Ibid.:1). It refers briefly to a uniting history, e.g. “rich common cultural heritage and history” (Ibid.:2). Additionally, the importance of the BSR in national parliaments is underlined: “One of the most significant outcomes of the cooperation, as I see it, is the Baltic Sea perspective and Baltic Sea cooperation has become a natural part of the everyday work in our national parliaments” (Ibid.:4). The vision evident in this speech is that the BSPPC should promote the “democratic, economic, social and cultural development in the region” (Ibid.).

To sum it up, evidence of the promotion of a common Baltic Sea identity can be found in the reference to a common culture and history in this speech. Being a BSR institution, the BSPR apparently takes part in the construction of such an identity because a more coherent and integrated region will improve its functioning and importance. For similar reasons, people of the Baltic Sea that are united by a common history are advised to regard themselves as inhabitants of a prosperous, successful region that is on the way to gaining more importance within the framework of the EU. It is expected that the Russian parts of the region can easily adapt to these aims.

ANALYSIS OF THE SPEECH BY THE RUSSIAN MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS (TEXT 5)

In the interview with the German newspaper “Handelsblatt,” the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs refers to the Russian government (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation:1) or the Russian Federation (Ibid.:2) when he uses the pronoun “we.” The “self” is also constructed in the way that Russia is described as “one of the leading military and economic powers” (Ibid.:4) and when it is claimed that the Russians live in a “real world of real politics” (Ibid.). The “other” in the interview are clearly the Baltic states Latvia and Estonia, who do not observe minority rights and allow Russian minorities to be discriminated against, (Ibid.:3). In addition, Europe is part of the “other,” evident in the phrase “we asked the Europeans” (Ibid.:4), as is the EU, which in the context of minority rights’ issues “ignored these problems” (Ibid.:3).

The notion of Europe that is constructed by Mr. Lavrov’s words is ambiguous. On the one hand, Europe is regarded as not including Russia. For example, the Foreign Minister speaks of exports “to Europe from Russia” (Ibid.:4). On the other hand, he explicitly states, “And then Russia too, in all the parameters, is of course a European country” (Ibid.:5). This reflects clearly that the discussion of Russia’s European identity still is not solved internally. The EU is often associated with Europe and the West (Ibid.:2). It is represented by the EU Commission, which violates obligations to Russia (Ibid.:4). Nevertheless, the necessity of a functioning partnership is highlighted: “Geography, economy, history, culture – all this conditions the necessity of our partnership with the European Union” (Ibid.:5). The Foreign Minister states that EU membership of Russia is not even considered theoretically (Ibid.:6) due to the complicated accession of the 10 new members (Ibid.).

The notion of the West is represented by Europe and NATO (Ibid.:2). Lavrov admits, “we are partners with NATO, but we see no point in the NATO enlargement” (Ibid.:7) and also mentions concerns on the Russian side: “For

practically on the day of the declaration of the enlargement AWACS aircraft immediately began to fly along the Russian borders, and combat aircraft were deployed in Lithuania” (Ibid.). Consequently, Russia’s relations to the West appear rather complicated and fragile but are nonetheless viewed as important by both partners.

The BSR is not mentioned at all when the Foreign Minister enumerates the countries, regions and states that are of interest for Russian foreign policy (Ibid.:4f.). However, the region is referred to in connection with hard security: “this region from the point of view of security presents no threats at present” (Ibid.:7).

A vision for the future can be found in the following sentence: “we want to safeguard our interests not through confrontation, but through a dialogue partner-like, constructive and pragmatic” (Ibid.:4). This reveals that although the Foreign Minister stresses the words “dialogue” and “partner,” he nevertheless also refers to the Russian self-interest, which is characteristic for a realist worldview.

Concluding, it can be said that for the Russian government the BSR only plays a role in the context of hard security issues. These findings confirm the view presented in the literature that the BSR is marginalized in Russian politics and that (military) security is still very important in the discourse of the current political elite. Nevertheless, this interview also includes the statement that the EU and Russia are united by their common history, as they are both “European”.

ASSESSMENT OF THE LITERATURE AND THE LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

The results from the empirical analysis confirm some of the statements presented in the literature review. For example, in the literature it has been suggested that in the Baltic States the aspects “being European” and “independent from Russia” play a strong role. The President of Lithuania¹³ indirectly supports this notion in his speech by presenting a “European policy” as the key to success for the governments of the BSR. He also emphasises that Russia should become a part of Europe, which illustrates that the Lithuanian government would appreciate it if Russia was included into Europe and operated under the umbrella of the EU.

In addition, the interview with the Russian Foreign Minister seems to confirm the statement that security is still important for the Russian government’s perception of the BSR. Conversely, in the speech by the Vice Governor of St. Petersburg, security

¹³ Representing the position of the government, not all Lithuanians!

has not played a role at all.¹⁴ This shows once more that, first of all, there can be several approaches towards the nature of the BSR if one examines several examples of discourse within one country. Obviously, there does not exist only one discourse in Russia, nor does there exist only one identity of the people in the BSR. For generalisation purposes, it can be stated that there seems to be differences between the position of the local government of St. Petersburg and the Russian government towards the BSR. Secondly, these differences can also be seen as representing the internal split between “pro-European” and “pro-Eurasian” Russians, which is an important aspect of the construction of identity in Russia and thus should be taken into account with regard to a collective identity in the BSR.

Furthermore, the EU Commission’s perception of the BSR presented in the literature has also been verified in the study. The speech by Chris Patten suggests that although the Commission approves of the region’s success, it attributes this success exclusively to the ND, which is an EU policy. The Commissioner’s attitude towards Russia expresses indirectly a notion of Western superiority. Consequently, in line with the arguments found in the literature, the Commission seems to support a “Northern Dimension identity” in the BSR that is close to an “EU identity” and that is based on a demarcation from “Russian problems” such as organised crime.

Finally, as also mentioned in the literature review, the image of the Viking Age is used in the BSR as a basis for a common identity. The Vice Governor of St. Petersburg underlines this in his speech. To a lesser extent, he also highlights “the North” as a basis for an identity, though not associating this with the BSR but with an Arctic region. The fact that he does not mention the Hanseatic League as a basis for a common identity can easily be explained. Unlike Novgorod, Pskov or Tver, St. Petersburg has not had any connections to this trade alliance.¹⁵ However, in order to determine whether the Viking Age plays an important role as a basis for a Baltic identity in general, more research is necessary.

Some additional findings have been made in the examination. Firstly, economic success and prosperity is emphasised in the texts 2, 3 and 4 and can therefore be assumed to play an important role for the way in which the policy-makers of the BSR view the region. Secondly, Europeanness is mentioned in the texts 1, 2, 3 and 5. This notion is therefore not only important for the government of Lithuania but

¹⁴ Of course, this may be due to the circumstances under which the speech was held. In order to find out whether security only plays a role in connection with the BSR from Russian outsiders’ points of view, it is necessary to analyse a much larger amount of empirical data, which was beyond the scope of this paper.

¹⁵ “Hanseatic league” in Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia (Online database). Available from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanseatic_League#Members_of_the_Hanseatic_League> [accessed 22.02. 2005].

also for the policy-makers in St. Petersburg and in the Commission. Thirdly, a common Baltic history is mentioned in texts 2 and 4.

As a result, the examples suggest that an emphasis on Europeanness is likely to be found in the discourse¹⁶ concerning the BSR – it is mentioned by outsiders, such as the Commissioner, as well as insiders of the region, such as the Vice Governor of St. Petersburg and the President of Lithuania. However, the fact that Europeanness also plays a role in the interview with the Russian Foreign Minister is of little importance here, as this is not explicitly associated with the BSR and therefore it provides insights in the process of constructing a collective Russian identity rather than a Baltic identity. Moreover, a common history seems to play a role as a basis for identification, which is shown among other things in the gifts to the 300th anniversary of St. Petersburg. A factor that seems to unite only the inhabitants of EU member states in the BSR seems to be the economic success of the region. Only the representative of the Russian government mentions security in connection with the BSR and only the Commissioner emphasises the ND as important for the BSR; therefore, they are not considered further as bases for a BSR identity.

Consequently, the literature review and the empirical study of the discourse examples of certain politicians have shown that a common history and a common culture, expressed in metaphors such as the Viking Age, could be an important characteristic of the BSR. A common past and culture is also emphasised by some of the institutions of the BSR. In addition, Europeanness is used as a basis for a Baltic identity and supported not only by people from the Baltic States and Poland¹⁷ but also by representatives from St. Petersburg in Russia and the EU. Another aspect has been noticeable in the empirical study is the region's economic success. A vision of prosperity and high living standards throughout the region – similar to the vision presented in the introduction – therefore seems to provide a third important characteristic of the BSR and a basis for a Baltic identity.

The findings of the preceding chapters lead to the central question of this paper: What influence can a BSR identity have on the self-other divide between “Western Europe” and “outsiders” such as Russia? In the literature as well as the empirical study, tensions between the EU and Russia have been apparent. The self-other

¹⁶ “The discourse” does not indicate that there is only *one discourse* in one region, state etc. but refers to the sum of spoken and written language in a certain area. In this context, analysing *the discourse* of the Baltic Sea region refers to a thorough examination of some examples of spoken or written language, as it is impossible to examine *the whole discourse*. By referring to *the discourse of the Baltic Sea region*, the results of the analysis of certain examples are meant, and it is clear that a more broad or differently conducted analysis would possibly come to other results about *the regional discourse* – which does not mean that either of the results are wrong but that *the discourse* can include many aspects and also change over time.

¹⁷ Cf. the section on “Diverging Approaches towards a Baltic Identity in the Literature” above.

divide between the EU and Russia, Europe and Russia, or the West and Russia has been perceptible in all five empirical texts. The different characteristics of the region have diverse implications for this divide.

Firstly, an identity based on a common past and culture seems to include and unite all BSR countries. However, one has to be aware that the policy-makers constructing the region and its identity are today mostly EU-citizens. Their visions of the BSR are chosen on the basis of Western values. This applies to the Hanse, which started as an alliance of German traders that began to explore and dominate the Baltic Sea region. Therefore, although it has been said that the image of the Hanse corresponds to the post-modern nature of the BSR, it might not be as inclusive as it seems. Moreover, the Viking Age, which was presented as an example of a uniting history by the Vice Governor of St. Petersburg, must be treated carefully too. Precisely the legend of Rurik, the founder of the first “Rus” empire, has led to disputes among historians. The interpretation of the legend that is mostly supported by Western scholars suggests that the ancestors of today’s Russia came from Scandinavia. Another way of interpreting the legend, which is put forward mostly by historians from Eastern Europe, holds that the ancestors of Russians were Slavs. Although the Vice Governor even underlines the Swedish origin of Rurik and does not seem to regard Scandinavian ancestors as problematic, it cannot be expected that all Russians are of the same opinion. Consequently, by referring to a common Baltic history as a basis for identity and taking as an example the Vikings, one could implicitly reinforce claims of Western superiority and Eastern or Slav inferiority by taking sides with the Western interpretation of the legend of Russia’s origin.¹⁸

Secondly, Europeanness has been highlighted as a basis for a BSR identity. For Russian BSR inhabitants, like the Vice Governor of St. Petersburg, this notion does not seem to pose problems because he makes it clear that he considers St. Petersburg a part of Europe – but the Russian government might see things in a different light. Europeanness has several connotations. For the politicians from the Baltic States and Poland and to some extent Northwest Russia, an identity based on Europeanness seems to underline Western values and strengthen their ties to the EU. For some Russians, Europeanness is interpreted in geographical terms but not so much in cultural terms, but other Russians associate Europeanness with Western notions of superiority. From the interview with the Russian Foreign Minister, it was

¹⁸ Cf. “Rurik: disputed origin” in Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia (Online database), <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rurik#Disputed_origin> [accessed 24.08. 2005]; “Rus’ (People)” in The Free Dictionary By Farlex (Online database), <<http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Rus%27+%28people%29>> [accessed 24.08 2005].

evident that the Russian government sometimes depicts being European as something positive and sometimes as negative.

Thirdly, economic success and welfare appear to be a rather strong basis for a BSR identity. Yet, an identity based on this vision can hardly be sustainable if the BSR fails to develop into one of Europe's most prosperous regions and this vision is proven wrong. What is more, this basis for an identity mostly applies to the EU member states of the BSR and leaves out Russia. The economic prospects for the near future are less promising for the Russian regions than for the other BSR countries. Consequently, an identity based on this aspect is also likely to widen the gap between Russia and "the West".

It can be argued that none of these aspects alone can provide the people of the region with a basis for developing a Baltic identity. But many people living in the BSR could possibly agree to have several aspects in common. A certain amount of historical connections, the notion of belonging to Europe, and the awareness of being an inhabitant of a region with a large economic potential – in addition to living close to the Baltic Sea with its unique characteristics – may be characteristics that in the long-term perspective could become aspects of a common Baltic identity.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper has been to discuss the connection of "new region building" in the Baltic Sea region to the construction of a collective identity with respect to the implications on Russia as a non-EU member state

The starting point of the essay was a presentation of the connection between processes of region building and the construction of identity in the BSR. Based on a literature review, it was concluded that processes of region building and identity formation in the BSR are closely interwoven. The identity of the region and the region itself are continually constructed in discourses through a demarcation of the self against the other. Therefore, the policy-makers who construct the identity of the BSR by means of their discursive practices also construct the region as a whole.

Secondly, a possibly existing identity of the BSR has been examined closer with regard to literature and an empirical study. The identity of the BSR has been defined as the sum of characteristics that determine its individuality. In the literature, it is claimed that the most outstanding characteristics of the BSR are its post-modern qualities, symbolised by the metaphor of Olympic rings Europe, its inclusiveness and its overlapping networks. Other characteristics – or bases for identification –

have been found in the empirical study: the Viking Age as a common history, Europeanness and economic success.

By means of the empirical study, it has not been possible to determine which of the characteristics, if any, have been the most important for constituting a Baltic identity. Nevertheless, it has been stated that each of the characteristics emphasised in the empirical study could have negative implications on the relations between Russia and the other BSR countries if a Baltic identity was promoted carelessly. Firstly, the aspect “Viking Age” as a common history for the whole BSR could touch upon a highly disputed issue about Slavic and thereby Eastern versus Scandinavian and thus Western influences in the history of Russia. Secondly, the characteristic “Europeanness” should be handled with care. The policy-makers should avoid associating the word “European” with “Western”. Finally, welfare and economic success as components of a Baltic identity are most likely to widen the gap between Russia and its EU neighbours. It is questionable whether the Russian regions can feel part of Europe’s most successful region as long as the new EU border prevents them from benefiting from the economic success in the same way as their Baltic neighbours do. Only if the Russian regions reached the same level of prosperity as the other parts of the BSR, could this divide be closed. As to whether cooperation in the BSR will solve the tensions between the EU and Russia or whether the BSR will continue to be of political importance at all is beyond the scope of this paper.

It is the people of the Baltic Sea region who have to adopt those characteristics in order for a Baltic identity to come into being. Whether this is already the case, only large-scale empirical research can show. Thus it remains to be examined whether inhabitants of, for example, Zealand in Denmark, Pomerania in Poland and the St. Petersburg district of Northwest Russia feel a notion of commonness because they share the same history, because they all are Europeans and because they all believe in the economic success of “their” region, or because of completely different characteristics they attribute to the BSR – if a notion of that region exists in their minds at all.

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