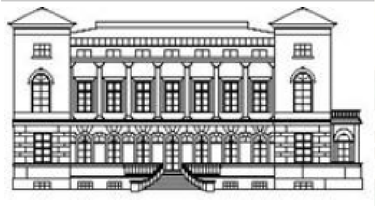

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Riga, Tallinn, Vilnius –
The Return Of The Baltic Capitals To Europe.

An Approach To The Baltic Region
From The Perspective Of 'Histourism'

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Riga, Tallinn, Vilnius – The Return Of The Baltic Capitals To Europe. An Approach To The Baltic Region From The Perspective Of 'Histourism'

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Abstract

Our essay summarises Baltic history such as it seems to be reflected in the buildings usually noticed by tourists when they are visiting Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius; for in their capitals, Latvia's, Estonia's and Lithuania's attempts to underline their 'Europeanness' can be felt more than anywhere else, and many travellers touring in the Baltic region do not visit but these three cities. What can travellers of this kind – sometimes called 'HisTourists' in scientific literature – learn about the Baltic countries and their history under such circumstances – and how?

One possible way is to accentuate dissimilarities which are instantly obvious when comparing the three cityscapes – because nearly all of these dissimilarities can be explained by the course of history.

Chapter 1 – The centre of Europe?

When travelling, it can be astonishing to read in the self-portrayals and tourist advertisements of the three Baltic countries, now once again independent, that they consider themselves to be situated 'at the centre of Europe'. Indeed, there is more to this than a mere, if striking, geographical attribution.

Firstly, if Europe extends as far as the Ural Mountains – and indeed this in itself is a matter of debate – then the Baltic countries are certainly situated 'at the centre of Europe' [1]. The Germans, however, believe that they themselves constitute the centre of Europe, and have thus invented the term 'Eastern Central Europe' for their easterly neighbours Poland and the Czech Republic. This concept of Central Europe tends to be based on historical and political rather than geographical prerequisites. But on which motives is the clearly highly different use of the term in the three Baltic States based?

Paragraph 1 – Gaining and losing independence

These small countries surprisingly achieved independence after centuries of foreign rule during a weak phase of the two large neighbours Germany and Russia following defeat in World War I; indeed, it was only with assistance from the victorious western powers that they were able to maintain it through the early founding phase. On the other hand, the reinvigoration of Germany and Russia under the totalitarian regimes of Hitler and Stalin fundamentally altered the situation of power-politics in Eastern Central Europe, which culminated in the fact that both dictators reached an understanding regarding their 'spheres of interest' in this part of the continent in August 1939, on the eve of World War II, so to speak. The Baltic countries were assimilated into the Soviet Union in the summer of the following year, and there they remained, even after the German defeat of 1945, with the approval of the western powers. In the Baltic countries, especially in Lithuania, many fought as partisans against the Red Army until the mid-1950s in the desperate hope that the western powers would not desert their countries in the light of the intensifying situation of the Cold War (and further provoked by the numerous emigrants). But even when it had come to spectacular uprisings in the satellite states which indeed were still theoretically independent (beginning in the GDR in 1953), the danger of atomic war prevented the West from intervening. In the light of these events, the small Baltic countries had little chance of attracting attention on an international level; they had been, so to speak, 'written off' [2].

Paragraph 2 – New opportunities since 1991

Miraculously, it was the collapse of the Soviet Union that bestowed upon them a new opportunity. In the meantime, they have even become members of NATO and the EU, a guaranteed security that they would never have been granted – at least not to such an extent – during the interwar period. The small Baltic States know as a result of their traumatic experiences in the 20th century that they will only survive in the long term if they are perceived to be full members of Europe. Hence the phrase ‘at the centre of Europe’ and their invitations to western tourists to see for themselves how justified this phrase indeed appears to be.

How do the three countries and their capital cities present themselves to historically interested tourists today? And what will the latter learn during the journey or visit about their ‘return to Europe’?

The historic districts of the Baltic metropolises were spared large-scale destruction during both World Wars (despite notable losses, particularly in the year 1944). They were subject to threat during the first decades of the Soviet era, however, due to neglect of building structures and plans for oversized public buildings and new streets, without regard for the constructions already in place. Since regaining independence in 1991, the countries are increasingly restoring their historic districts and historical museums are being restructured. European aspects long since forgotten in the greater western public sphere are thus regaining visibility, especially for German visitors.

References

[1] Geographically, the centre of Europe (if Europe really extends as far as the Ural Mountains) is situated nearby Vilnius. A ‘Park of Europe’ with a pillar and several quaint sculptures has been established there.

[2] Significantly, the Baltic region is nearly completely omitted in such widely known books as, for example, Hugh Seton-Watson, *The East European revolution* (London: Methuen, 1950).

Chapter 2 – From Christianisation to the tsarist era. Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius as mirrored by their castles, churches, townsmen’s buildings and universities

At the height of the Middle Ages, from the 12th century onwards, the foundations were laid for the Europeanness of today’s Baltic States: a complex procedure that lasted centuries. It began with the frequently violent Christianisation of the country population, implemented by the Order of the Sword and – following the latter’s defeat by the Lithuanians – the Teutonic Knights, resulting in the assimilation of the eastern Baltic coast into the central European economic area of the Hanseatic League, which was also dominated by Germans. The Germans founded Riga in 1201, the Danish and the Germans founded Reval – today’s Tallinn – in 1219. Vilnius (German: Wilna, Polish: Wilno), on the other hand, had already been founded without help from the Germans; when exactly was unknown. In order that Vilnius might grow into a veritable city, Gediminas, grand duke of Lithuania, nevertheless called for immigrants from other European countries during the 1320s. All these procedures had little to do with nation-building processes of the sort to be seen in the 19th and 20th centuries; rather, it was a matter of Christianisation, trade, infrastructural development and cultivation of the land.

Unlike Latvia and Estonia, who did not become independent European states before 1918, Lithuania can look back on a glorious past as one of the great powers of the late Middle Ages. It was able to hold its ground against attacks by the Teutonic Knights and, when its grand dukes eventually converted to Christianity (although they did not do so with finality and permanence until 1387 – later than all other European rulers), they thus de-legitimated any further ‘crusades’ on the part of the Order. Meanwhile, Lithuania was rapidly losing its political weight on account of its union with Poland and its still only loosely defined cultural identity. Poland, which had already been Christianised for some four hundred years and was closely integrated into Europe, penetrated Lithuania both intellectually and socially: Lithuanian aristocrats were soon to speak nothing but Polish. As the Germans had done in Latvia and Estonia before, the Poles became the dominant political and cultural power in Lithuania. Developments of the 18th century – initially the Nordic War; then the Partitioning of Poland – rendered the area of today’s Baltic countries as well as large parts of Poland under Russian rule. It has been since this period that a shared historical destiny has gradually developed, one which to some extent justifies our use of the phrase 'the three Baltic States' today, despite their many historical and linguistic differences.

How are these developments visible in the cityscapes of the Baltic metropolises today? The major objects of study will be compared with each other in chronological order of their historical emergence.

Paragraph 1 – Not a capital, and yet a centre of power: Riga during the Middle Ages and Early Modern Era

Castles, as the central crystallisations of a rise to power and the maintenance of this position, mark the beginning of all three city foundations. In Riga **the castle of the Order of the Sword was initially situated in the town centre** (where the so-called **'Convent Courtyard'** has taken shape later). After the Knights of the Sword had been assimilated into the Teutonic Order, and after it had come to a bitter feud between the latter and aspiring citizens in 1297, it was transferred to the Daugava River, where the palace can still be seen today. The feud of the time was not of a national nature, but was between knights of the Order and merchants of German descent. Conflicts of this kind, in which city rulers were on one side and citizens were on the other, can be said to generally determine the history of European cities in the late Middle Ages. In Riga they were even more complicated due to the fact that the rule of the city had been shared between the bishop (later archbishop) and the Order. When the economical power of the city began to abate – manifested in the decline of the Hanseatic League, of which Riga and Reval/Tallinn had been members since the 13th century – and, at the same time, the Order state saw its own decline brought about by costly battles against Poland-Lithuania (including the Battle of Tannenberg of 1410), the Reformation (which in Hanseatic towns such as Riga and Reval used to become popular very quickly) further weakened existing structures. The Livonian War (1558-1582/83) provoked by the muscovites brought about the final collapse, rendering a new protective power necessary. Riga's attempts of the time to survive as a free and sovereign city failed. The strongest power centres in the Baltic region of the 16th and 17th centuries were Poland, Sweden and later Russia. Riga initially submitted to Polish-Lithuanian rule in 1582; the attempts of the new rulers to convert the city back to the old faith resulted in widespread unrest, however. In 1621, in a war between Poland and Sweden, Riga was conquered by Sweden's King Gustav II Adolf, whose kingdom was rising to become the great Protestant power in the Baltic region. Riga's Swedish era is considered today – despite high tax burdens due to more recent wars against Poland and Russia – a golden age in the city's history. In this context, emphasis is often given to the fact that Riga was unmatched by any other city in Sweden (including the capital, Stockholm) as far as size was concerned. An engraving in the Church of St. Peter reminds us that it was for this reason that the Swedish royal couple also visited Riga in its eight-hundredth jubilee year 2001. In 1721, Sweden's position as a great power was ended by the Peace Treaty of Nystad. The new great power, Russia, ruled at the time by Peter I, acquired Riga and Reval, in practice as early as in 1710; formally, however, not until the signing of the peace agreement. Now a Russian governor was to move into the former **palace of the Order on the banks of the Daugava**.

Paragraph 2 – Riga Castle

The palace of the Order, with its foundation stone laid in 1330, was originally a three-storey fortress construction with a courtyard and four towers. In the 15th century, it was badly damaged during further battles between citizens of Riga and the Order. Its appearance today still bears the signature of the restoration completed in 1515, when Wolter von Plettenberg was the leader of the Livonian part of the Teutonic Order. The Swedes built an ante-palais leading towards the Daugava with a polygon bay on the north-west side, in 1642, followed by the roof and embossment in the tradition of the European Baroque and Mannerism. During the tsarist era 'above stairs' were furnished in this ante-palais for the Governor General of the Baltic provinces; today, as during the interwar period, these serve as reception rooms for the Latvian government. Nowadays, however, the palace is primarily home to the headquarters of the state president, as well as several museums. The complexity of Latvian history and identity is visible from the building construction itself: the impression as a whole is one of a functional building from a past marked by war, made to adjust to the needs of today's independent Republic of Latvia.

Paragraph 3 – Tallinn Castle

The palace of the Order in Tallinn shares many aspects of the fate of its counterpart in Riga. Remains of walls which date back to the foundation period; as they have not been left unchanged, however, today architectural decisions taken under Russian rule shape the entire appearance of the palace. But there are at least two factors strikingly differentiating the palace complex in Tallinn from that in Riga: its elevated position and a Russian Orthodox cathedral situated within its outer ring. The palace of the Order in Riga is located immediately next to the historic harbour on the Daugava, a river flowing deep into the hinterland and meeting the Baltic Sea only slightly to the north-west: a strategically excellent position for transport and military purposes. The palace is situated on the slightly raised east bank of the river; its origins, however, correspond to those of a castle surrounded by water.

With Tallinn Castle, however, it is quite a different matter altogether; it is elevated on a hill (which is nearly 50 metres high and one of the highest in the north of Estonia), with only a short distance to the harbour and coast, yet without connection to the hinterland via a navigable river. Even before the Danes had conquered the later Tallinn in 1219 – to which the Estonian name of the city refers (‘taani linn’ gradually contracted to ‘Tallinn’ = ‘Danish city’, while Danes and Germans spoke of ‘Reval’) – the indigenous Estonians had built defence structures on the hill known today as ‘Toompea’, ‘Cathedral Hill’ or ‘Domberg’; these were burnt down by the invaders. Remains of the defence facilities built by the Danes are still visible. The structural shell that can be seen today with its striking towers (‘Tall Hermann’ is particularly well-preserved and also the highest) dates back to the time of the Teutonic Order, which procured today’s Northern Estonia from the Danes in 1346, although this is no longer obvious at first glance due to the front sides to the east and south, which were heavily restructured during tsarist rule.

The Russian Orthodox Alexander Nevsky Cathedral – built between 1894 and 1900 in order to lend architectural expression to the Russification of the Baltic governorates within the tsarist empire – dominates the area of the former ante-castle almost more strongly than the Lutheran cathedral of today, situated more remotely. There are equally symbolic Russian Orthodox churches from the same period in Riga, where, however, the locations chosen for them are somewhat less striking.

Paragraph 4 – The castles at Vilnius

The castle complex at Vilnius differs considerably from those in Riga and Tallinn. It is located deep inland atop a – for Baltic standards by all means imposing – hill near the spot where the River Vilnia flows into the Neris. Vilnius has an Upper and a Lower Castle, which represent two different periods of the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the late Middle Ages and Early Modern Era. The Lower Castle also included the cathedral of today with its surrounding square; the bell tower was one of the towers in its defensive wall. As a whole, the complex is more extensive than those in Riga und Tallinn. The Lower Castle was extended into a magnificent Italian-style Renaissance construction in the 16th century, during a time in which the better days of Riga and Reval/Tallinn as Hanseatic cities were a thing of the past. Lithuania’s past, which as that of an Eastern Central European great power differed dramatically from the history of the northern Baltic region, is formidably visible in Vilnius’s castle complex hill, even if its significance had diminished following the Union of Lublin in 1569. The existing ruins, the exhibits from the Lithuanian National Museum presented here, and – since only recently – the reconstruction of the Lower Castle (demolished by the Russian administration at the end of the 18th century) will all inspire the imagination of visitors.

Paragraph 5 – The churches of bishops in Riga and Tallinn

A comparison of the cathedrals built in the course of Christianisation and the securing of secular rulers can also prove to be highly instructive. Visitors of today are immediately struck by the contrast between the cathedrals of the three Baltic capitals. The cathedral of Riga is a gothic brick construction from the period of the knightly orders and the Hanseatic League, where we still find traces of Romanesque style, later mixed with those of the Baroque period (steeple and east gable) and even Art Nouveau (vestibule). It is interesting to compare all this with Wilhelm Neumann’s **drawing of how the cathedral may have looked until 1547**. The external façade stands in certain contrast to the Baroque interior as a result of the iconoclasm of the Reformation, fires and other destructive events that destroyed the original decoration. We find a similar situation with most of the other churches in the city. Riga’s cathedral has seen deep ruptures in continuity, not only on account of the Reformation reaching the city in 1520, but equally as a result of the dispossession felt by the German cathedral congregation when at the insistence of the state government, two Latvian congregations were also entitled to use the building around 1930. Declared a concert hall during the Soviet era, today it is reminiscent of a museum (indeed, it literally accommodates one in its cloister), and gives the impression of a stronghold of glorified, yet long-forgotten times, a place in which to flee the here and now. The epitaphs of German aristocrats and citizens appear in contemporary Riga and Latvia like the traces of another world in a foreign language.

The same goes for the cathedral church on the castle complex hill in Tallinn with its over 100 epitaphs with coats of arms and family trees carved of oak, only that here, the stones of the outside walls have vanished under a white layer of plaster. It has been considered the main church of the city ever since its consecration in 1240. The original hall church was later converted into a basilica, and in the course of its more-or-less rebuilding following a devastating fire in the castle complex in 1684, it changed its shape once again. In 1779 it acquired its Baroque spire. The formerly Catholic, later Lutheran principal church of the German-Baltic knights in Estonia is today subject to a Lutheran Estonian bishop and, services regularly take place in its walls, as they do once again in the cathedral in Riga.

Paragraph 6 – The cathedral of Vilnius

The cathedral of Vilnius, however, gives an entirely different impression. The gleaming white classicist construction is reminiscent of an ancient temple. The bell tower is quite some distance away, and looks like the tower of a castle; and indeed its lower section constitutes remains from the defence constructions of the Lower Castle. On the whole, it is no longer instantly visible that the cathedral's origins date back to the 12th and 13th centuries: to a time in which the cathedral churches of Riga and Reval/Tallinn also were built. The church building was damaged so badly by a storm in 1769 that Bishop Ignacy Massalski found himself with an opportunity to completely reconstruct it in the style of French classicism. **A new building, following fully the style ideals of the late 18th century**, emerged on the foundation walls of the gothic, renaissance and baroque buildings that had been there previously. The cathedral buildings in Riga and Tallinn were spared such fundamental changes; their origins in the time of the Livonian Confederation and the Hanseatic League are clearly recognisable even today.

If we compare Vilnius with Riga and Tallinn, on the other hand, the generosity and pomp of many of Vilnius's sacred buildings is deeply impressive; the city was, after all, the second royal residence of Poland-Lithuania up until 1795 and – unlike Riga and Reval/Tallinn – not a mere provincial centre within larger dominions. Coronation celebrations for the grand dukes of Lithuania took place here, and in the 17th century, the still well-preserved Baroque sepulchral chapel of St. Casimir, the nation-saint of Lithuania, was added to the cathedral – a shrine certainly reminiscent of crypt chapels such as that of St. Veit in Prague or that of the last Duke of Burgundy, Charles the Bold, and his daughter Maria in the Church of Our Lady at Bruges. The Casimir Chapel and the cathedral at Vilnius are today symbols of the regained Lithuanian independence and identity; they are reminders of a great religious and national past, a memory, however, that also refers to those deported during the Soviet era, and at the same time, they are sites of living religious practice.

Paragraph 7 – Town halls in Riga and Tallinn

The sovereignty of the city's citizens – who were a mere minority amongst the population as a whole – towards the religious and/or secular leaders, is strikingly visible in the town halls of medieval cities. The town hall of Tallinn, completed in 1404 not far south of the paths between the harbour and the castle, has retained its original gothic architecture. The compact **town hall square** is medieval in appearance, although most of the houses surrounding it originate from much later periods (only the old pharmacy called "Raeapteek" is nearly as old as the town hall). It gives a distinctly more 'authentic' impression than the town hall square in Riga that was rebuilt in the years before and after 2001, and even more so than that in Vilnius.

In comparison, the town halls of Riga and Vilnius have completely lost their original forms. Following city fires in the second half of the 18th century in both cases, classicist constructions that barely fitted in with the style of the rest of the city were built on the foundations of older, previous constructions. Nevertheless, the market square in Riga – where the town hall façade (no longer in its original state but reconstructed in time for the city's jubilee in 2001) is the vis-à-vis of the reconstruction of the even more splendid and essentially gothic Blackheads' House as well as the imitation of a medieval **Roland** – still shows a touch of the Middle Ages. There are no such elements at the town hall of Vilnius, with good reason:

Citizenship of Riga and Reval/Tallinn differed strongly from that of Vilnius. It was uniformly shaped by German merchants who obtained the Gotland town charter early in the 13th century (in Riga later the Hamburg version before Riga developed its own law; in Reval, on the other hand, Lübeck law was in place). From the middle of the century on, merchants' and craftsmen's guilds emerged, and subsequently the cities' membership in the Hanseatic League (for Riga in 1282). The citizenship of Riga and Reval thus created highly similar legal conditions to those in the North German Hanseatic towns, with whom they were closely connected economically and culturally. Town halls and churches, townsmen's houses and guildhalls bear witness to a confident and wealthy citizenry that usually knew how to reduce the influence of the city rulers to a bearable level.

Paragraph 8 – The town hall at Vilnius

In Vilnius the situation was entirely different. In the residence city of Lithuania – initially still a heathen Grand Duchy – the power of the city ruler remained intact. The grand dukes themselves resettled merchants and craftsmen of various origins – including Germans – in front of their castle in order to benefit from their trade and business; they shared their power, however – if at all – only with the ubiquitous aristocracy around their residence. The population consisted primarily of Lithuanians and Poles as well as some Russians, Tatars and, increasingly, Jews, and was thus more heterogenous than that of Riga and Reval/Tallinn. Grand Duke Jagiello only granted the Magdeburg town law in 1387 (at the same time, Christianity was established once and for all and the union with Poland was taking place), which, while certainly a step towards modernisation, did not yet bring about such a consistent civil town charter as that of Riga, Reval, or the German Hanseatic and imperial cities. The city administration with its reeve and its council, consisting of twelve mayors and 24 aldermen in accordance with Magdeburg municipal law, was significantly not responsible for the city as a whole; sections were still subject to the castle administrator and the bishop. Later on, the monasteries created further judicial districts with the assistance of the grand dukes. This was not conducive to the establishment of a strong townsmanship, or buildings that might reflect such strength. It is therefore the constructions of the grand dukes, the various Orders, and of aristocrats that shape the cityscape of Vilnius – and not the buildings of townsmen.

Wilna/Vilnius did not acquire a gothic town hall until 1600, centuries after Riga and Reval/Tallinn had done so. Following a fire in the mid-18th century, the town hall was firstly reconstructed; then, however, once its octagonal tower had also collapsed, it was **redesigned in the strictly classicist style** of Laurynas Stuoka-Gucevičius, rendering it reminiscent of the nearby cathedral. In the 19th century, the building was converted into a theatre – an absolutely symbolic echo of the permenant weakness of the Vilnius townsmen and a direct manifestation of the decline in municipal power under Russian rule.

Paragraph 9 – The Church of St. Peter in Riga

The most significant and, at the same time, impressive parish church in Riga is St. Peter, first mentioned in 1209. St. Peter's Church in particular with its high gothic vaults is immediately reminiscent of North German brick cathedrals. Indeed, this church was built according to the model of St. Mary's Church at Rostock by Johann and Kersten Rumeschottel from Rostock (on top of another older church building that had already been in the same spot). The church is an expression of the self-confidence enjoyed by the wealthy German citizens of the time, also apparent in a number of magnificent epitaphs for mayors and other notabilities. A side chapel commemorates the victims of the Soviet occupation. **Heavily damaged in 1941**, the church was re-established in the postwar decades and has since been used in a cultural vein for concerts, exhibitions, etc. Since 1991, however, church services have also been resumed within its walls.

Paragraph 10 – The Protestant townsmen's churches of Tallinn

The most impressive parish churches in Tallinn are those of St. Nicholas and St. Olav. St. Nicholas' Church, today a museum, is an attractive example of the typical kind of 'merchant's church' that was widespread around the Baltic Sea, with roof space used to store goods and advanced defence facilities such as the small, high windows, walled-up embrasures and the huge tower. Before completion of the city walls, defence churches were of central importance when defeating potential attackers. St. Nicholas' Church was built as a hall church in the 13th century by German merchants from Gotland, and extended to a basilica – due to the increased wealth of the citizenry and a growing need for space – in the 15th century. St. Nicholas was the patron saint of seamen and merchants.

The original interior of St. Nicholas' Church fell victim to the Reformation, and most of the later interior was destroyed by Soviet bombings of 1944. Two particularly noteworthy works of art have been preserved: the main altar displaying scenes from the life of St. Nicholas and the martyr Victor of Marseille, created by Hermen Rode from Lübeck between 1479 and 1481 under commission by the Great Guild and the Brotherhood of Blackheads; and the first part of a painting of the Dance of Death by Bernt Notke, who had also worked in Lübeck during the second half of the 15th century. Both works of art are representative of the religious culture of the North German Hanseatic cities and Reval's close relationship with them.

St. Olav's Church, named after the Norwegian King Olaf II Haraldsson, who established Christianity in Scandinavia on a broader scale around the year 1000, was first mentioned in the year 1267 (as a chapel it also appears prior to the 13th century). Its proximity to the sea must have been one of the reasons for its enormously high tower, which could have served as a guide for ships. At the time 159 metres high, it was the highest building in the world for some decades until 1620. The high spire, however, tended to attract lightening, and **the church burned down** ore than one occasion. The interior of the church, converted to a three-naved basilica in the 15th century, was destroyed during the iconoclasm of 1524. Tsar Nicholas I had the church rebuilt in neogothic style after it had last burned down in 1820; today it is used by the Baptist congregation. Despite all the adversities of history, the Chapel of Our Lady, built by the merchant and presbyter Hans Pawels in 1513 and containing his gravestone, a significant stone sculpture, remained preserved. Still today, this section of St. Olav's Church gives visitors the feeling of being in an 'authentically' historical place.

Paragraph 11 – The Church of the Holy Spirit in Tallinn

Alongside the two large parish churches of Tallinn there are smaller churches built close to charitable institutions. The most significant is the Church of the Holy Spirit, which was located near the market place and immediately next to the poor-law infirmary of the Holy Spirit. The church, which appears in documents for the first time in 1319, acquired its final double-nave shape still during the 14th century, which renders it the oldest church of the city to keep its original form. Soon after the Reformation, it was transferred to an Estonian parish, whose pastor, Johann Koell, translated a catechism from Low German into Estonian. This is the oldest still existing book in the Estonian language, printed in Wittenberg in 1535. The externally modest church with its gothic staircase gable and late Renaissance spire (possibly based on models from Visby, Gotland, if not even from Rhineland) holds a valuable winged altar from 1483 with which the municipal council had commissioned Bernt Notke from Lübeck. The municipal authority used the Church of the Holy Spirit for solemn services and public gatherings. The centre section of the altar portrays the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit onto Mary and the Apostles, in accordance with the church's dedication, and otherwise depicts scenes from the life of St. Elisabeth as an example of merciful charity. There are also traces of contemporary history, such as the flag of the British Marines and commemorative plaques for the British officers, seamen and pilots killed in the War of Estonian Independence 1918/19. Today's Protestant congregation comprises some 600 members.

In most of the churches in Riga and Tallinn named here, the same impression of museum reality dominates as it does in the cathedral churches. Concerts (by no means only those playing church music), exhibitions and other cultural usages are bringing about less a sacred mood than a cultural atmosphere, should services still even be taking place at all.

Paragraph 12 – St. Jacob's Church in Riga

St. Jacob's Church, Riga, is an exception to this rule, first documented in 1225. Still situated outside the town walls at the time, it was initially intended for strangers to Riga rather than for merchants based there. Around the turn of the 14th century, it was extended into a three-naved basilica. For the citizens of Riga it was able to constitute the starting point for a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. The eighty metres-high tower has retained its gothic character better than all other church towers in Riga's historical district, even if here too the contemporary shape of the spire only dates as far back as 1756. St. Jacob's Church was (after St. Peter's) the second church in Riga to preach the Reformation, and the first to do so in Latvian. Under Polish rule (1582-1621) it was subject to the Jesuits; under Swedish rule it was converted back to Lutherism, and as a parish church it was primarily used by Swedish civil servants and the garrison. The independent Republic

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of Latvia as proclaimed in 1918 was obliged to show consideration towards the Catholic population in Latgale, which is the eastern area of its territory, and, accordingly, it handed St. Jacob's Church back to the Catholics and allowed it to become the cathedral of the re-established Archbishopric of Riga in 1923. It has retained this function until the present day, and its interior thus evokes a more sacred atmosphere than that of the other churches in the historical district.

Paragraph 13 – Former monastery churches in Riga and Tallinn

Medieval Riga, like Reval, was home to several monastery churches. In Riga St. John's Church is worth visiting; following destruction and reconstruction, today it features the late gothic style of around 1500. The church had evolved from an originally Episcopal chapel that was bequeathed to the Dominicans in 1234, and was transferred to a Protestant Latvian congregation in 1582. In Tallinn, St. Catherine's Church is used for cultural purposes today, formerly the church of the Dominicans who had been settling in Reval since 1229 and were ousted during the Reformation. Several kilometres away from the historic district we find the ruin of St. Birgit's Convent, largely destroyed when the city was besieged by Ivan the Terrible in 1577.
The complex of the former Dominican Monastery became the starting point for the formation of a small Catholic community in Reval/Tallinn during the 19th century, who were able to build a new, simple church – the Church of St. Peter and Paul (1844) – alongside the secularised St. Catherine's Church with help from the tsarist authority. The Russian government eased the revival of Catholic communities in Reval/Tallinn and Riga in order to meet the religious needs of immigrating Catholics as well as in order to relativise the dominant Protestant German aristocracy.

Paragraph 14 – Religious Orders in Vilnius

The modest remains of Catholic convent life that are still visible today in Tallinn and Riga form a contrast with Vilnius's multitude of convent churches that are not only preserved but also impressively restored. Their misuse during the Soviet occupation has now been reversed to a large extent. Many of these churches now hold services again; nuns and the clergy constitute part of the cityscape, quite unlike in Riga and Tallinn. Some of the communities of religious Orders had already come to Vilnius until the mid-14th century – during the reign of Gediminas, the still heathen progenitor of the Gediminide grand dukes; and they constitute the wide spectrum of Benedictine and Augustine monks to the Grey Friars and Dominicans through to calced and discalced Carmelite monks and nuns. These communities clearly proved to be welcome supporters of the dukes ruling over the city and country; their churches stand in absolute contrast to the gothic brick churches of the townsmen further to the north of the Baltic. The Protestant movement in Vilnius, unlike in Riga and Reval/Tallinn, would have no lasting chance with their striving for urban independence. Following an initial phase of confessional tolerance during the 16th century they were oppressed by the Counter-Reformation – a situation similar to that in Poland. The grand dukes, who were simultaneously kings of Poland, brought the Jesuits to Vilnius and entrusted them with the foundation of the later university (1579). Thus the Reformation period in Vilnius did not mean a weakening of the Orders such as was the case in Riga and Reval/Tallinn; rather, it brought a reinforcement, with striking consequences for the cityscape of today. Most of the churches of the Orders were refurbished in Renaissance, Baroque or classicist style during the 17th and 18th centuries following fires and storm damage, resulting in the southern flair of Vilnius in contrast to Riga and Tallinn. They also contribute with heavy symbolism to the Catholic national identity of Lithuanians up to the present day.

Paragraph 15 – Catholic monastery churches in Vilnius

Any list of the so numerous churches of the Orders would begin with the Franciscan Church of the Ascension and the Dominican Church of the Holy Spirit – both Orders came to Vilnius under Grand Duke Gediminas, who died in 1341. The Franciscan church has maintained its gothic character – despite a few Baroque additions – up to the present day, while the Dominican church was given a completely new design during the high Baroque, today serving the Polish minority in Vilnius as their community church. Furthermore, the Franciscan church of the Order of St. Bernard (gothic with Renaissance and Baroque additions) has to be mentioned – as well as St. Michael's Church of the Order of St. Bernard (a Renaissance construction with numerous sarkophags of the Lithuanian aristocratic Sapieha family), the early Baroque church of the Jesuits (St. Casimir), and the churches of calced and discalced Carmelites (All Saints or St. Theresa). It is also worth visiting the churches of the Lateran Canons, now restored (**St. Peter and Paul in the suburb of Antakalnis**, the most noteworthy Baroque monument in Vilnius, donated by the aristocratic Pac family after the liberation of the city from several years of Russian besiegement and occupation 1655-1661), the Pauline Missionaries (Church of Christ's Ascension) and the Trinitarian Church of Jesus the King.

How can we explain this magnificence of Baroque churches in Vilnius from precisely those centuries of gradual political decline of the old Lithuanian residence, much to the benefit of the Polish competitors Krakow, Warsaw and Lemberg? What proved to be decisive was the patronage of the re-Catholicised aristocrats, the Radziwills, the Pacs, the Sapiehas, the Chodkiewiczs and others who ruled and administrated Lithuania as a Polish 'Nebenland'. It is this patronage that has given the city its appearance of today: Vilnius was much worse affected by war, storms and fires than Riga and Tallinn, for during the 17th and 18th centuries, with the result that a significant portion of the city had to be built from scratch. Russian rule from 1795 on ended the golden age of Catholic church-building. As far as their impact on the city's appearance was concerned, Baroque churches were no longer suppressed by newer sacred or other architecture but rather survived both the Russian and Soviet eras, some of them by being converted into Russian Orthodox churches. Churches and convents that were converted to secular establishments during the Soviet period have for the most part been restored to religious life, and maintenance and restorative work long overdue have produced positive results. To the present day, Vilnius thus presents a Baroque cityscape of countless Catholic churches, a scene that contrasts vividly with Riga and Tallinn and can only be explained by the course of history.

Paragraph 16 – Other monastery churches in Vilnius

The Vilnius Baroque is a complex phenomenon with specific chronological and thematic peculiarities. The city's Baroque churches are by no means exclusively Catholic. Some examples include the Holy Trinity Church and convent of the Uniate Basilian Monks or the Russian Orthodox convent church of the Holy Spirit in the southern part of the historic district. The juxtaposition of both Baroque complexes is indicative of the multi-confessionality of the old Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which continues well into the present day. The Grand Duchy comprised large Orthodox areas of today's Belarus and the Ukraine that to a certain extent represented the antithesis of the Roman Catholicism to be found in the core areas of Lithuania, although the grand dukes would often marry Orthodox princesses. In the course of the Counter-Reformation there were efforts – for political reasons – to revoke the schism of 1054 in the entire dominion of the Lithuanian grand dukes. The Orthodox community were granted some concessions; in return, they announced recognition for the primacy of the Pope (Union of Brest, 1596). But only some of the Orthodox community agreed (the so-called Uniates); others protested vehemently.

Like the neighbouring Russian Orthodox Convent of the Holy Spirit, whose church can be seen as Lithuania's only Russian Orthodox Baroque style church, the Basilian Convent was renovated in Baroque style by the German-Lutheran architect Johann Christoph Glaubitz, following severe damage in the city fires of 1748 and 1760. The remaining Russian Orthodox churches followed the Byzantine construction principles usually applied for Orthodox churches. There were twelve Orthodox parishes in Vilnius around 1600. They continued to grow in number since the uncontested position of Catholicism in Lithuania and Poland had been contested by Russian annexation in 1795. – It is interesting in this context to see how the sacred buildings of Vilnius are enumerated in an **article from an encyclopaedia published in the late 19th century**.

Paragraph 17 – Striking churches in Vilnius apart from monastery churches

Glaubitz also converted the Lutheran Church of Vilnius to Baroque style. This building primarily served German immigrant merchants from the Hanseatic cities on the Baltic Coast who – like their compatriots back home – had converted to Protestantism. Protestant churches were actually townsmen's churches, whose appearance in the Vilnius cityscape seems significantly more modest alongside the numerous magnificent convent churches as compared to their counterparts in Riga and Tallinn. Nevertheless, in Vilnius too there are two impressive gothic brick churches: St. Nicholas' Church from the 14th century and St. Anne's Church from the late 15th century. The former is a simple construction; the other, however, is a *Meisterwerk* of late gothic flamboyance with its façade of 33 different brick shapes. Both churches more or less escaped destruction over the centuries and serve as a reminder that Vilnius had been an absolutely gothic city before the Baroque had become the dominant style following the catastrophes of the 17th century in particular. **St. Anne's Church** was mentioned for the first time in 1501 and, following a series of fires, was eventually refurbished in 1581 in the style that can be seen there today (only the bell tower is significantly more recent). The restricted size of the church, while rendering huge walls unnecessary, allowed on the other hand for a unique construction of gables and façades: its composition as a whole is rather reminiscent of a holy shrine.

Paragraph 18 – Secular townsmen's buildings in Riga and Tallinn

We come to similar conclusions when contemplating secular buildings – here too, the contrast is striking between the 'townsmen's' cities of Riga and Tallinn and the residence, church and aristocratic city of Vilnius. The list of guildhalls and old town houses in Riga and Tallinn is long; there, these continue to define – sometimes elaborately restored – entire streets, which they lend a certain Hanseatic appearance. This is most obvious in Tallinn, where the economic boom of the late 19th century did not bring about quite as many changes as it did in Riga, where medieval buildings were dealt with somewhat less carefully. In any case, contrasts with the historic district of Vilnius are impossible to ignore, and accordingly, there is a sense of the differences in power distribution within the city itself – one might speak of a social structure set in stone.

Paragraph 19 – The Blackheads' House in Riga

In Riga, a tourist interested in history will not omit from the visiting tour the reconstructed **Blackheads' House** on the Town Hall Square, the buildings of the Great and Small Guilds neighbouring each other, and some buildings in the southern half of the historic district. The Riga 'Blackheads Compagnie' evolved from the Brotherhood of St. George that was founded towards the end of the 13th century. It unified young and unmarried merchants from other areas who were living in Riga for a certain period of time without citizen rights. Their patron saint was the Roman-African soldier martyr, Mauritius, whose symbol, a moor's head, was incorporated into the Blackheads' coat of arms that can still be seen today in the façade. The House of Blackheads, first mentioned in 1334, originally a townsmen assembly room that was rented out to the Blackheads by the city council, was **severely damaged during World War II** and demolished by order of the Soviet administration in 1948. It was completely reconstructed, however, in the last years of the 20th century: a remarkable expression of Riga's attempt to return to Europe.

Paragraph 20 – The Great and the Small Guild in Riga

Guilds as townsmen societies with economic and social objectives had been founded in Riga since the 13th century. The merchants convened to form their own 'Great Guild' in 1354, which acquired considerable political importance in the light of the high profits earned from trade. The location that represented their growing self-confidence was their meeting place – the guildhall. This building's medieval banqueting room, the so-called 'Münsterstube', is preserved within today's building – now used as philharmonic hall – which encases it with its neogothic **façade from the years 1854-1859**. The neighbouring **'Small Guild'** was the meeting place of craftsmen; the building evolved in its current form (also neogothic, primarily following English models) in 1864 in the same place of the original construction. Its coats of arms and other elements are reminiscent of the historical relationships with the German Hanseatic cities.

Paragraph 21 – Other townsmen's buildings in Riga and Tallinn

The 'Three Brethren' complex near St. Jacob's Church illustrates the development of the town house in Riga from the 15th to the 17th century; in other words, from the gothic to the Baroque periods. The comparatively narrow buildings tend to crowd one another with the gables facing the street. Most streets of the historic district looked similar, which is why it appears to have been well thought-out and sensible to accommodate the Museum of Architecture here (even if the latter tends to focus on the more modern periods).
In Tallinn, the number of preserved buildings from the Hanseatic period and the Early Modern Era is much larger than in Riga; they dominate entire parts of the historic district, especially on the two main roads of the lower part of it: Pikk and Lai. The House of Blackheads, the guildhalls of the Great Guild, St. Knut's Guild (Estonian: Kanuti) and St. Olav's Guild, as well as the 'Three Sisters' group of buildings close to the northern point of the historic district can all be found there. The palace of the noble corporation, the 'Ritterschaft', and those of the most significant of the nobility it represented focus on Cathedral Hill (Toompea). Their mostly classicist appearance lends them a representative impression, and yet they are still somewhat simpler in style than the noble palaces at Vilnius.

Paragraph 22 – Buildings of townsmen and of the nobility in Vilnius

The town houses of Vilnius barely feature in the cityscape alongside the churches, convents and noble palaces. Most of the older buildings of this sort fell victim to the destruction brought about by wars and other catastrophic events; the more recent constructions rather follow the ruling style of the noble palace and thus demonstrate – compared to Riga and Tallinn – on little independence. Baroque and classicist forms are to be seen on the noble palaces themselves, following the French, South-German/Austrian, or the Polish examples. All large aristocratic families of Lithuania have thus left their architectural traces in modern-day Vilnius – stately buildings that today serve political, administrative, scientific and cultural purposes.

Paragraph 23 – City walls

City defences are a special form of townsmen's constructions: walls, towers and other defence facilities. We have already mentioned the defence character that also marks other buildings of Riga and Tallinn. The ability to defend oneself against attacks from outside was of fundamental importance in order to maintain municipal liberties.
The medieval city walls have been best preserved in Tallinn; three quarters of the original position of the wall, as well as **most of the defence towers**, are still standing – one of the consequences not only of the suppressed dynamics of the city's economy, but also of clever tactics during the siege. In Riga the somewhat earlier and more powerful economic boom at the beginning of the industrial age led to the nearly complete demolition not only of the medieval city wall but also of the defence facilites built by the Poles, Swedes and Russian beforehand, which in turn were replaced by a promenade ring between 1857 and 1863 – at the time as popular as it is today: **a page taken from Bernhard Hollander's book about 19th century's Riga** may give a general impression of the euphoria caused by these changes (all the more because they began shortly after the Crimean War). Vilnius did not acquire a ring wall until the beginning of the 16th century (at that time, citizens were afraid of Tatar attacks); once it had been completed in 1522 it measured three kilometres in total. Today, only Medininkai Gate – also called the 'Gate of Dawn' – and individual sections of the wall have been preserved; apart from these few remains, it was demolished by order of the Russian government around 1800.

Paragraph 24 – Vilnius University

Vilnius University, founded as a Jesuit college in 1579 and thus the first university of the Baltic region to some extent, soon became Lithuania's intellectual centre, a status it has maintained up to the present day. It was of significance for the entire (at the time highly multilingual) Grand Duchy and, as a scientific basis in the east, for the whole of Catholic Europe. Only a few decades passed between the dissolution of the Jesuit Order and the education reforms of Tsar Alexander I, which brought about a re-founding of the university as a state institution of the Russian Empire. It did not exist for long in this capacity, however; after the Polish Uprisings of 1830, those who taught and studied within its walls were placed under general political suspicion, with the logical consequence that it was closed down. In 1919, university life was resumed; yet, as Vilnius was under Polish rule from 1919/20 until 1939, its university did not become Lithuanian-only until 1945. Nowadays, Lithuania possesses a university of considerable size both in its former provisional capital city of Kaunas and in Vilnius itself, as a consequence of the political situation during the interwar period.

Paragraph 25 – The universities at Riga and Tallinn in comparison with Vilnius University

The universities of Riga and Tallinn could not compete with the glory of Vilnius University. Tartu (Dorpat) University is the significantly more important of the two in the Estonia of today – founded by the Swedes in 1632. Merchants like those in Riga and Reval were afraid of the financial risks that went hand in hand with the foundation of a university; a similar disinterest was to be found in most Hanseatic cities in Germany. University foundings in the late Middle Ages and Early Modern Era were primarily a matter for royalty who needed academically trained jurists, theologians and doctors in their territories that needed more stability, whereas the trading townsmen became more interested in the universities when the technical sciences were attributed greater value due to industrialisation. Riga's so-called Polytechnicum, established in exactly this spirit in 1862, became the core of the State University of Latvia after World War I, when the recently

independent Latvia needed its own university. Today's university at Tallinn, on the other hand, did not emerge until the post-Soviet era through conversion of the former Pedagogical Institute.
It is only in Vilnius that the university is surrounded by historic buildings, and it is also from this perspective that today's universities at Riga and Tallinn are incomparable with Vilnius University – another aspect of the contrast between cities of trading townsmen and cities dominated by residences. The university buildings at Vilnius enclose twelve picturesque courtyards. The largest of these gives the stately **Church of St. John** an unmistakeable charm; its tower is an obvious feature of the city's skyline. The originally gothic church was converted to a late Baroque style by Johann Christoph Glaubitz in the mid-18th century.

Chapter 3 – The Russian era (1710/95-1918)

Introduction

Estonia and Livonia were subjected to circumstances under Russian rule which were very different from those later experienced by Lithuania and Courland – while Courland, in turn, was subject to conditions which differed from those in Lithuania. In 1710/21, Estonia and Livonia with Reval/Tallinn and Riga fell to the tsarist empire, after having been under Swedish rule for one and a half centuries (as far as the Estonia of that time is meant, which corresponds to the northern part of present-day Estonia) or else three-quarters of a century – a change of regime which resulted from a dispute between two foreign major powers. Wilna/Vilnius came under Russian rule as late as 1795 following the third partition of Poland-Lithuania, which had previously been a sovereign state with its own history as a major power. The considerable, historically rooted, differences between the northern and southern Baltic regions became gradually less pronounced after they were incorporated into the tsarist empire, albeit only slowly at first. This process nonetheless proved to be decisive for the fate of the region, because Russian rule forced the Baltic peoples to develop a sort of common identity which is still to be seen today.

Paragraph 1 – Privileges and their decline in the northern Baltic region, repression in Lithuania

Now referred to as the 'Baltic governorates', Livonia, Estonia and (from 1795) Courland acquired a special status within the tsarist empire. On the one hand, they were small in terms of territory and population and situated on the western periphery of the empire; on the other hand, their position on the Baltic Sea meant that they were in a key position for trade between Europe and Russia. Above all, they had reached a level of economic and cultural development that surpassed that of Russia. At first, the tsars and tsarinas attempted to take advantage of the situation in the interest of the empire as a whole, and therefore intervened very little in the conditions prevailing in the newly acquired provinces. The German Balts therefore enjoyed considerable privileges in Riga and Reval/Tallinn, or else quickly regained such privileges in cases where – as under Catherine the Great – they had been limited for some years. However, western and central Europe had been rapidly developing politically since the French Revolution and economically since the industrial revolution, which meant that the more Russia fell behind western and central Europe as they became more and more modernised in the course of the 19th century, and the more the peoples of the Baltic region experienced a national awakening (combined with the eager discovery of their languages, for example), the more the Russian government felt obliged to implement a strict policy of Russification. Repressive measures were undertaken in Lithuania and Wilna/Vilnius: the fact that people there had taken part in the major Polish uprisings of the 19th century resulted in the closure of the university in 1830 and, in 1863, in the prohibition of any printed materials written in Lithuanian with the Roman alphabet, a ruling that remained in place for four decades. It is still possible to visit the prison where intellectuals were incarcerated at that time, in the Basilian monastery. In this context, it is hardly surprising that Poles and Latvians (and, to a lesser extent, Lithuanians and Estonians) took part in the revolution of 1905, or that the Baltic peoples strove for independence when German troops forced the Russians to retreat during World War I. The Germans began negotiations with the aim of enabling the Poles and Lithuanians to found their own states, although the Lithuanians were initially expected to work in close cooperation with Germany and to crown an ethnic German as their monarch. Almost two centuries of Russian rule in the Baltic region had come to an end.

Paragraph 2 – Church buildings from the time of the tsars

Architectural remains from this era are still to be seen in all three cities, and most clearly in the form of Russian Orthodox churches which were built at that time. In Riga, the main example of this is the Byzantine Nativity of Christ Cathedral, which stands on the main boulevard, with its five domes and bell tower above the main entrance (built between 1876 and 1884 according to plans by Robert Pflug). In Tallinn, the main reminder of this era is the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, which has occupied a prominent place near to the medieval castle since 1900. In Vilnius, large Orthodox churches were built well before Russian rule, in particular because the wives of Lithuanian grand dukes often came from Orthodox principalities. An example of this is the Church and Monastery of the Holy Spirit; the church has already been mentioned on account of the baroque alterations carried out by Johann Christoph Glaubitz (cfr. Chapter 2, Paragraph 16). From 1795 onwards, during the period of Russian rule, a considerable number of Orthodox churches were built. Sacred Orthodox buildings were not only built to serve practising Orthodox Christians, whose number increased under Russian rule, but also became symbols of the tsars' power. The majority of the population in Reval/Tallinn and in Riga consisted of Protestants (Germans, Estonians, Latvians) and, in Wilna/Vilnius, of Catholics (Poles, Lithuanians) or else members of the Uniate church (mainly Belarussians and Ukrainians) after all. The tsar, for his part, was the official head of the Russian Orthodox church; and as a consequence of this, the latter's sacred buildings in the Baltic region were never simply pieces of architecture, but rather consistently embodied a political counterbalance.

During the Soviet era, Russian Orthodox church buildings were neglected just as much as other kinds of churches; yet after the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, they were among the first to be thoroughly restored.

Paragraph 3 – Secular buildings from the tsarist era

Apart from churches, the era of Russian rule also left behind secular buildings. The most remarkable examples of these include the buildings in the palace complex in Tallinn from the time of Catherine the Great, Kadriorg Palace in front of the former city gates, the Russian theatre and German theatre (which was later turned into the Latvian national opera) in Riga, and the palace of justice in Vilnius.

A unique example of architectural heritage, which also dates from the tsarist era, are the Art Nouveau buildings of the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Riga. These buildings are scattered all over the city, though in some cases they also fill entire streets, as in the area situated to the north east of the old city (in Strelnieku, Alberta and Elizabetes streets, for example). Some of the buildings combine classicism, historicism and Art Nouveau in highly original ways. And all of them testify to the wealth of German and Russian as well as Latvian merchants, bankers and industrialists; for the first industrial era in Russia brought about an economic boom that was more pronounced in seaports such as Riga than anywhere else. The well-heeled middle classes erected such representative buildings in celebration of themselves. Michael Eisenstein, the son of a German Jew who had emigrated to St. Petersburg (who was also the father of the famous Soviet director Sergej Eisenstein), was one of the leading Art Nouveau architects in Riga. Although many of these buildings have since been restored, an equal number have been neglected. The fact that they were built shortly before World War I and the Russian Revolution is food for thought for anyone who is interested in history, insofar as they seem to have heralded the imminent doom of the middle classes at that time. However, historistical architecture and Art Nouveau also embody the Belle Epoque on the eve of World War I, an era which has become the object of fashionable nostalgia throughout Europe for what are supposed to have been 'the good old days'. Since the return of capitalism it has become easier to restore especially *this* architectural heritage; besides, after the deliberate neglect it suffered during the Soviet era such restoration seems to be a matter of course – and can be more generally understood as a further way of emphasising the common cultural heritage shared with western and central Europe.

Chapter 4 – The interwar years 1918-1940: Two decades of independence

Introduction

When the Baltic countries acquired independence in 1918-1920, this was not only something completely new in the history of Estonia and Latvia, but actually surpassed the goal towards which the Baltic national movements had been working for several decades. Moreover, it would have been unthinkable if the two major powers, Russia and Germany, had not collapsed around the same time. Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian independence was founded on the principle of self-determination and on the laws of the recently founded League of Nations, which were set up by politicians of the victorious western powers, above all President Wilson from USA. At the same time, economic and foreign policy interests of the western powers (such as the creation of a *cordon sanitaire* between Germany and the Soviet Union) worked in favour of the new states, which initially had to face up to the danger of Bolshevisation. From the standpoint of the Baltic countries, the threat that Lenin would attempt to expand revolutionary communist activities westwards was perceived to be a direct continuation of the expansionist policy pursued during the rule of the tsars; as a consequence, the alienation between the peoples of the Baltic region and their large neighbour to the east became once again deeper than it had been all the time before.

The new Republic of Lithuania had very little in common with the old Grand Duchy which had existed for the centuries during which it was united with Poland. Although the population was made up mainly of Lithuanians, the old capital city of Vilnius contained only a small minority of Lithuanians. Since the majority of the population of Vilnius were Poles, Poland, also having regained independence, occupied Vilnius, which led to an irresolvable conflict between the two formerly united states over Vilnius. On the Lithuanian side, it was said, among other things, that many of the people in the city were not really Poles, but Polonised Lithuanians: after all, the old Lithuanian nobility was accustomed to using the Polish language – a nobility which was, so to speak, of no use to the new republic of peasants and lower middle classes. The German upper class in Latvia and Estonia was even more stringently deprived of its economic basis, for the land reform ensured that all former manor properties in these countries were dissolved.

Paragraph 1 – Efforts to expand Riga and Tallinn as capital cities

The young republics acquired considerable vitality during the critical interwar years in spite of major political and economic problems. Traces of this period are only visible in Riga and Tallinn [1], because the Lithuanian government had to transfer its seat of power from Vilnius to Kaunas. Ambitious architectural projects were more common in Riga. In 1928-1930, an important construction site in Riga was the **ground of the new Central Market** with its **four halls** which can be said to be one of the most striking structures in the whole of the city. In 1938, for example, the so-called Three Star Tower was built on the palace; at the same time as the new building of the finance ministry in the heart of the old city was being built; and as early as 1931-1935, the Freedom Monument celebrating national liberation was erected on ‘Freedom Boulevard’, consisting of **an obelisk with a large sculpture on top** [2]. No site proved to be more appropriate for the demonstrations which took place with ever greater frequency from 1988 than this monument, which had remained intact throughout the Soviet period. A military guard of honour now watches over this site, in recognition of its special importance.

Paragraph 2 – Museum concepts

Since all that was achieved during the two decades of the first period of independence cannot be immediately deduced from the townscapes of these cities, municipal history museums make a special effort to draw visitors’ attention to their legacy. The Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation – founded in 1733 by a private collector and in a way the oldest museum in the Baltic region – is housed in the restored old cathedral cloister, one of the workplaces of Johann Gottfried Herder, who spent five years in Riga from 1764. Five hundred exhibits (from a total of four hundred thousand objects) illustrate the history of the city until 1940 in four main sections: the beginnings of the city; Riga from the 13th to the 16th centuries; Riga in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries (Polish, Swedish and Russian era); Riga in the first half of the 20th century (until 1940, for the subsequent period is dealt with in the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia). The exhibits are presented in a rather conventional, but clear and systematic manner, while everyday life is given thorough treatment. The smaller Tallinn City Museum is located in a town house once possessed by a merchant of

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German descent. The presentation is divided into topical sections and demonstrations, and is therefore more modern than the one in Riga. In Vilnius, the history of the city is covered alongside other topics in the National History Museum.

References

[1] Apart from those things which are visible, there were many projects which have not been carried out, although they were emphatically propagated in the newspapers. As an example of this, see Karl Burman's **idea to rebuild the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral at Tallinn into a pantheon of Estonian independence**. Others would have preferred to demolish the cathedral – as to these wishes (and their rejection among the German minority), see **an article printed by the newspaper "Revaler Bote" in 1928**.

[2] In the internet, **a short film showing the unveiling of the monument in 1935** can be watched.

Chapter 5 – From the loss of to the regaining of independence (1940-1991): David and Goliath

Introduction

After only two decades, the Baltic countries lost the independence they had acquired at the end of World War I. The reason for this lay in conditions brought about during World War II, for which they were by no means responsible. The disadvantageous geographical location of these countries, which were situated in-between the recently defeated, but now rising powers of Germany and Russia, and far away from the more well-disposed western countries, turned them into defenceless victims of the expansionist totalitarian major powers at their doorsteps.

Within a few years of Soviet and German rule, violent changes were made to the fate of the Baltic region on a scale which matched that of the watershed that took place during the 13th and 14th centuries, at a time when written documents were first recorded, which effectively marks the beginning of the 'history' of the region. This does not only include the destruction of war, but also changes within the demographic structure. Initially, these changes affected mainly local German and Jewish minorities, which almost entirely disappeared as a result. At the same time, a major shift in the relative numbers of Russians and Baltic nationals began, which was to have a long-term influence on the development of the region.

Paragraph 1 – The role of German Balts in Baltic history

Prior to their resettlement from Latvia and Estonia, the German Balts, descendants of the members of knightly orders, Hanseatic merchants, and urban middle classes from the time of the rule of the Teutonic Order, constituted only about 3.7 or 1.7 percent of the population respectively – which means: no more than some tens of thousands. Nonetheless, the ancestors of these people (and partly these people even personally) had formed the ruling elite up until 1918. Contrary to the eastern Germans' colonisation of the region between the rivers Elbe and Memel, no German peasant population had settled in today's Latvia and Estonia (in Latvia's territory there were only some local exceptions dating back to the 18th and beginning of the 20th centuries respectively). Little had changed for the privileged Baltic German upper class under Russian rule; rather, when Peter the Great (who was aware that the Germans could contribute significantly towards the modernisation of Russia) annexed the Baltic region he assured the German 'Ritterschaft' and German city elders that German law, the German language, and the Protestant religion would be maintained.

Paragraph 2 – The last decades of German Baltic history in the Baltic region

Towards the end of the 19th century, the centralist unification policy had ensured that the rights of the German upper class in the Baltic provinces gradually dwindled. However, proper change came about only when Estonia and Latvia gained independence. From then on, the majorities of Estonians and Latvians had nation-states with democratic constitutions. Hundreds of nobles were expropriated, left with neither estate nor compensation, while the land was divided and shared among small farmers. Fundamentally new election laws meant that the German middle classes lost all power, such that the once privileged upper class German population was transformed into a protected minority with its own cultural autonomy and independent administration of schools and welfare. All this was brought about in accordance with the minority laws passed by the new Baltic republics, which were internationally considered to be exemplary, and helped to stabilise the region. During the 1930s, Riga had approximately 44,000 German inhabitants (approx. 13 percent of a total population of 380,000), while Tallinn had 8,500 Germans (approx. 8 percent of a total population of 128,000). By contrast, very few Germans lived in Vilnius, which had belonged to Poland during the interwar years and whose population was mostly Polish.

Whereas the creation of independent states came as a severe blow to the German Balts, the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939 destroyed their community altogether, for this pact contained a series of major population shifts (following a policy to separate different 'spheres of interest'), according to which it was agreed to resettle German Balts 'back home in the Reich'. This brought to an end seven hundred years of history whose architectural traces can still be seen all over Estonia and Latvia.

Paragraph 3 – The destruction of the Jews

The destruction of the Jews meant that the short period of German occupation from 1941 to 1944 had brought about a particularly tragic and irreversible loss of population and culture. Only about 0.5 percent of the total population of Estonia was Jewish (7,000 in total), in contrast to approximately 5 percent of the Latvian population (about 100,000 in total), and 7.6 percent in Lithuania (a total of 155,000 people), which at that time did not include Vilnius. The Jews mostly lived in cities. 11 percent of the population of Riga were Jewish (more than 40,000 in all), which meant that they were as numerous as the Germans and certainly more numerous than the Russians. In Vilnius, the Jews even made up a third of the population with a total of 55,500 people, alongside the largest group, the Poles. Most of the Jews were rounded up in ghettos and murdered in specially erected murdering centres near to the larger cities. These events are commemorated in memorial sites in Riga and Vilnius. Jewish heritage has now largely disappeared from Vilnius, and in Riga even fewer traces of Jewish life can be found, even though in Riga the congregation is now growing again in one synagogue which is still standing – the only one (of originally six [1]) in the city which survived destruction.

Paragraph 4 – Mass immigrations of Russians

The proportion of Russians living in the Baltic republics and especially in the main cities increased rapidly after 1945. The Soviet leadership actively supported this development in order to reduce Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians to a minority in each of the republics. Moreover, by establishing industry and military bases in the region, the Soviets had ample funds with which to ruthlessly achieve their aims, especially since they had deported countless Baltic intellectuals in 1941 and 1949. During the interwar years, the Russian population living in Estonia constituted 8.2 percent of the total population. In Latvia it constituted 10.6 percent, and in Lithuania 2.5 percent, living alongside 88 percent Estonians, 73.4 percent Latvians and 84 percent Lithuanians. Today, Estonians make up 68.6 percent of the population in their country, alongside 25 percent Russians and 3.2 percent Belarussians and Ukrainians, while Latvians make up merely 59.2 percent alongside 28 percent Russians and about 6 percent Belarussians and Ukrainians, and while Lithuanians make up 85 percent of the total population alongside 5 Russians and 2 percent Belarussians and Ukrainians (as well as 6 percent Poles). Lithuania was therefore least subjected to the pressure of Russification, though of all places, this is where the collapse of the Soviet Union characteristically began.

In the cities, the Russian population increased even more dramatically. In Tallinn, for example, which is home to a total of 404,000 people, only half of the population is Estonian, while the rest of the people are mostly Russians, Belarussians and Ukrainians. In Riga, only 42 percent of the total of 720,000 inhabitants are Latvians, living alongside 41 percent Russians and about 8 percent Belarussians and Ukrainians [2]. In Vilnius, whose population stood at 200,000 in 1931, and today stands at 554,000, the war brought about an almost complete change of population. The Polish majority in Vilnius, comprising over 100,000 people, was resettled in Poland in 1945/46 following Soviet orders; most of these people ended up in Danzig. 'At the same time, many Lithuanians moved there from Kaunas and other Lithuanian towns and villages, as well as Belarussians from nearby areas of Belarus, and Russian civil servants, military people, security officers and industrial workers, most of whom had been summoned from Moscow or other parts of Russia. The Lithuanians initially made up only a small proportion of the population, but later formed the majority in the city.' [3] Today, only 20 percent of the population of Vilnius is Polish and Russian respectively.

Paragraph 5 – Soviet policy in the Baltic region: Its failure and consequences

The aim of the Soviet leadership from 1940 was to politically and intellectually decapitate the previously independent Baltic republics, and to destroy their national identity by encouraging mass Slav immigration. It legitimated all this, which took place in the mid-20th century, exclusively on the basis of ideologically founded claims to modernisation and power politics. This left a deep mark on the consciousness of the small peoples of the Baltic region – for, in spite of the violence suffered under earlier periods of foreign rule, they had never experienced such a radical attack on their national existence. Rather, the history of the peoples until the independence they acquired in the interwar period could just as well be interpreted as a success story: in the wake of the simple conditions in place before the rise of the state, foreign powers which conquered these lands since the Middle Ages had brought violence and repression, but also state structures, and had integrated the region into the Hanseatic League while strengthening links with Christian civilisation in Europe.

This is the context in which the Baltic peoples acquired national consciousness from the 18th century onwards, with the support of German Protestant parish priests and linguists who strove to develop Estonian and Latvian as literary languages and wrote down songs – **which also Herder did**. The independence of the Baltic states was effectively a consequence of all these factors at a time when the global political situation was favourable. After 1940, by contrast, it seemed as though many of the benefits achieved in the course of several hundred years of national emancipation were being deliberately undermined. The effects of the resulting traumatic experiences can still be felt today. At the same time, it has become clear that the marginalisation of the small Baltic nations, pursued relentlessly over a period of half a century by a totalitarian world power, has not succeeded. In the last phase of the history of the Soviet Union, it is precisely the independence movement in the Baltic region which accelerated the collapse of the empire.

Paragraph 6 – Architectural traces: What remains of the Germans?

What signs of these developments can be seen today by visitors to Baltic capitals? Seven hundred years of German history in the northern Baltic region have left traces which can be seen throughout the old parts of Riga and Tallinn, which more or less survived the war; many of the older buildings were restored after 1991, including the palace buildings, cathedrals and churches, as well as the town halls, city walls, guildhouses and town houses. Besides, the old part of Tallinn is full of Low German names such as ‘Olde Hansa’, ‘Pepersack’ und ‘Kiek in de Kök’.

Paragraph 7 – Architectural remnants: What remains of the Jews?

The German ‘heritage’ in the Baltic region is not confined, however, to things left behind by the Teutonic Order and the Hanseatic League, but also includes traces of the period of occupation during World War II, which led to the destruction of the Jewish population. Only experts are able to recognise the original traces of this population group. The German occupation forces set up ghettos in Riga and Vilnius which they destroyed in 1944 when forced to retreat, so that nothing would reveal the crime. After all, a few synagogues have been preserved in those areas where, if fires had been started, they could have spread to epidemic proportions. Apart from that, Jewish history and its violent end in this region are most evident in the museums depicting the period of occupation and in the Jewish museums of Vilnius and Riga, as well as in memorial sites marking places of crimes such as Paneriai near Vilnius or Salaspils near Riga (most of which were set up already during the Soviet period). However this is all that remains of the ‘Jerusalem of the East’, as Vilnius was once called, a city which used to be one of the most important centres of European Jewry.

Paragraph 8 – Architectural traces: What remains of the Era of the Tsars and of the Soviet period?

The traces of Russian and Soviet rule, which need to be strictly distinguished, are very visible all over the region. The Russian Orthodox church buildings from the time of the tsars, the most significant of which (after years of misuse during the Soviet period) have been restored and turned into religious centres for the still large Russian population, have already been dealt with above. The architectural heritage of the Soviet period is even more incompatible with the old urban centres. This comprises not only the monotonous satellite towns surrounding them but also several high-rise hotels which were built very close to the historical centres, some of which have nonetheless since been overshadowed (especially in Tallinn) by the recent and even more flashy buildings built by the banks.

References

[1] The largest of them was the **Synagogue on today’s Gogola street**.

[2] Since 1990, when the population of Riga stood at 916,000, many people have moved into neighbouring small towns; additionally, a decline of the birth-rate and the decision of some thousand Russians to go back to Russia have to be taken into account.

[3] Tomas Venclova, *Vilnius. Stadtführer* (Vilnius: R. Paknio leidykla, 2002), 65. (The translation given above has been made by putting the German translation into English.)

Chapter 6 – The new sovereignty since 1991: From traumatic experiences of the past to perspectives of a European future

Introduction

The changes which took place in the Soviet Union while Michael Gorbachev was in power, which were motivated in reaction to a severe economic crisis and growing discontent among the numerous national minorities, lent the independence movements in the Baltic region an opportunity which they had not had for almost half a century. Lithuania set the pace; as in Poland, the Catholic Church proved to be an effective opponent of the government on account of its efficient organisation; national historical consciousness in Lithuania had remained largely unbroken, and Russification there was far less effective than in Estonia and Latvia on account of the strict policies of the Lithuanian communists. Then the ‘singing revolution’ broke out in 1988/1989, whose numerous non-violent demonstrations, such as the six-hundred-kilometre-long human chain from Tallinn to Vilnius, aroused good will all over the world. In January 1991, at a time when unrest was fermenting throughout the peripheries of the Soviet Union and the eastern bloc began to break down, people were killed in Vilnius and Riga. Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians still disbelieve to a certain extent that responsibility for this state brutality cannot be directly ascribed to Gorbachev. The putsch of August 1991, which heralded the imminent collapse of the Soviet Union, opened the way towards renewed independence in the Baltic states. The Russian troops finally left Baltic territory in 1994, marking a moving turnaround and reversal of the events of 1940 and 1944/45. Difficulties arose in relation to the Russians who had immigrated to the region during Soviet rule and who enjoyed higher living standards by the Baltic Sea than they would have if they returned to Russia, and whose return was not in the interests of Russia. The treatment of these Russian ‘minorities’, who had to face the prospect of changing their habits and living on an equal footing alongside the small Baltic nations, proved to be the acid test for governments in the region; for this was to test the credibility of their expressed desire to fully accept European values and, as a consequence, ensure whether they could rely on the unmitigated solidarity of Europe. However, for tourists visiting the Baltic region, these tensions between Russians and local nationals are hardly noticeable.

How do these conditions and developments affect the urban landscapes in the region, and to what extent do they manifest themselves visually? Two aspects are of particular interest: the restoration of historical buildings following independence and, by stark contrast, the creation of so-called ‘occupation museums’.

Paragraph 1 – Restoration projects and the image of history they stand for

The restoration of historical buildings was carried out in a comparable manner in the historical centres of Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius. All three cities suffered war and decay, but have all now been classified as UNESCO world heritage sites. The reasons for this are obvious. Above all, they want to improve local economies by attracting tourists to capital cities which for decades were only partially accessible, had become rather unattractive as a result of decay, and now appeared to be all the more attractive on account of their being new and accessible. The aim was to restore historical buildings from Danish, German, Swedish, Polish and tsarist times to their former glory in order to emphasise old links to Europe, and to draw attention away from the dullness of the Soviet times with their unimaginative colossal buildings and modern suburbs. The local and city history museums of these three capital cities have similar aims. The pre-Soviet times are almost systematically glorified due to the ways of presenting them. Of course, those familiar with the history of the Baltic region know that violence and repression were commonplace under all the earlier foreign regimes; yet these regimes also permitted culture and civilisation to flourish, and did not hinder, but rather favoured the national awakening of the three state-nations of today. By comparison, the consequences of Soviet rule are presented as an unparalleled political and economic failure which undermined the national and European culture of the peoples of the Baltic region, and which even jeopardised their ethnic make-up.

The fact that hardly any of the buildings in the historical city centres, which Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians are so eager to restore, were built by their own ancestors, but rather by representatives of the upper classes at that time, seems to be of no consequence. The overriding factor is the European perspective. Even the architectural heritage of the tsarist times such as classicist palaces and Orthodox church buildings appears to be compatible with this European perspective – whereas it is the traces of Soviet imperialism that constitute an exception. De facto, however, especially Tallinn, with its relatively high number of buildings dating from the time of the Teutonic Order and the Hanseatic League (cathedral, churches, town hall and city fortification), reminds visitors particularly of the German heritage of the area.

Paragraph 2 – The occupation museums and the history they convey

The presentation of the Soviet era from 1940 to 1991 stands in direct contrast to this positive presentation of the histories of the cities and states. This contrast is particularly perceptible in Riga, where the splendidly reconstructed Blackheads' House is situated close to the concrete block from the Soviet era in which the Museum of the Occupation is housed (with the effect that the topic dealt with in the museum seems to be authentically reflected in the appearance of the building). Museums recording the history of occupation have also been opened in Tallinn and Vilnius, all of which adhere to a similar form of historical representation. The three-year German occupation (which lasted four years in parts of Courland) is also depicted in negative terms with reference to theories of totalitarianism, though it is clearly less condemned than the horrors of the Soviet period.
Annex – Die Museen zur Erinnerung an die Okkupationszeit (1940-1991) in Riga, Tallinn und Vilnius. Ein Vergleich ihrer Konzeptionen

Architectural restoration, and the attention devoted to historical education in the occupation museums, together enable curious and attentive visitors to the Baltic capitals at the beginning of the twenty-first century – and even more so in combination with **a travel planning typical of 'HisTourism'** – to gain profound insight into the region. We will therefore conclude our brief survey of these three cities and their history by briefly summarising the main factors which may enhance our understanding of this region.

Paragraph 3 – The revival of the role of mediator

The glories and horrors of the past stand together in close proximity in the Baltic capitals, while the populations of these countries have been the cause of neither of them.
Since they were Christianised and Europeanised in the high and late Middle Ages, the Baltic countries play the role of mediator between western Europe and the huge Eurasian continent. However, this role was perverted by Soviet annexation. By acting as a bulwark against the West, the Baltic republics lay on the periphery of the empire, cut off from their roots in Europe. At the same time, in the West they were perceived simply as Soviet republics rather than as former nation-states with their own particular identities. In the West, people were more interested in the second German state, the German Democratic Republic, and the satellite states Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, not least as a result of the uprisings which took place there in the period from 1953 to 1980.

Today, in the Baltic states, people are more keen on raising awareness about their historical role as mediators between western, central and eastern Europe. Their limited geographical area, small population and geopolitical situation means that these states are vulnerable, which is why they strive to obtain recognition from abroad, and encourage tourism to this end. Cheap flights now make it possible for people who earn average wages to fly from western Europe to one of the Baltic airports within two hours. And these flights appear to be high in demand.

Paragraph 4 – The burden of the past

In order to face up to the tasks facing the Baltic region, the trauma resulting from fifty years of occupation needs to be approached and interpreted on a consensual 'European' basis. In all three countries, the legacy of this era creates a division between Baltic nationals and members of the Russian-speaking minority. This is why many people place hope in the young generation of both populations which grew up in the period following the return of independence, and for whom the historical burden weighs less heavily, since their sights are set more firmly on Europe.
The religious outlook and worldview of people in Estonia and Latvia are very different from those of people in Lithuania. As in Poland, Catholicism has established itself in Lithuania in spite of the political changes, whereas most parts of Latvia and Estonia have traditionally been dominated by Lutheran Protestantism, as in Scandinavia and northern Germany. However, considerable portions of the Latvian and Estonian populations do not belong any longer to one of the Christian churches, which is a legacy of the Soviet era that may be felt strongly (especially in comparison with Lithuania).

Paragraph 5 – Looking back and looking forward: ‘Intersections’ between the histories of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

The present-day territory of Estonia and most parts of Latvia were under the influence of Germans for hundreds of years, whereas the history of Lithuania is closely connected with that of Poland. It was not until the 18th century that all three countries were subjected to a similar fate under the yoke of the Russian Empire (though Lithuanians were subject to different administrative conditions than Latvians and Estonians) – a fate to which they were obliged to respond in unison in spite of all their political, economic, linguistic and religious differences. Lithuania’s conflict with Poland over the status of Vilnius following World War I brought to an end the former bonds between these two countries and encouraged the new republic to build stronger ties with its neighbours to the north. The fate of the three Baltic countries became even more closely connected under the pressure of Soviet occupation from 1940 and from 1944/45. The return of independence in the context of the new Europe has created an opportunity for each of these countries to place emphasis on its specific traditions (without being forced to renounce a degree of ongoing partnership with other Baltic states). It is in this context that the restored city centres place emphasis on their specific historical heritage with reference to knightly orders, bishops, grand dukes, townsmen and the Hanseatic League. Not only does this strengthen the specific identity of these small countries and counteract the damages of the Soviet period and its drive towards egalitarianism, but it also reinforces the appeal they have for tourists and ensures economic benefits as a result.

Paragraph 6 – Outlook: European values and perspectives

The new independence of the Baltic states will endure over time on condition of the existence of a European Union which is committed to peace and cooperation: a condition which had been missing during the interwar period. A further condition is that European values become firmly rooted in the Baltic states, especially with regard to the treatment of Slav minorities. Undoubtedly, it is easier to uphold the model of multiculturalism in relation to the German, Scandinavian, Polish and Jewish heritages than in relation to the Russian or even the Soviet heritages, whose representatives continue to reside locally.

At the same time, the *stability* of these countries depends very much on the quality of relations with the Russian minority. Without doubt, the enforced mass migration during the 20th century clearly contradicts the values upheld by the European Union. The same applies to the withholding of democratic rights for minorities. However, since such rights must not be unreasonably withheld, it has become possible that Russians in Riga demonstrate in favour of re-establishing the Soviet Union (including Latvia). For the Latvians, whose historical experience is opposed to that of the Russians, this provocation is hard to bear.

Russians living in the Baltic countries enjoy a standard of living which many of them, if they were to live in Russia, would have to consider utopian [1]. This is why there is no sign of a trend towards a return among Russians, even though many Westerners, who are not entirely familiar with the Baltic region, assume that this should be the case: although Russians have lost all of what often made their lives more comfortable than those of many Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians during the Soviet era, and although the previously despised local languages must now be accepted as the official languages of state and society (so that many Russians have to learn them), an overwhelming majority of these Russians has remained in the Baltic region. As a result, there is considerable tension mounting, which may only be fully overcome in the course of time as the younger generation supplants the older generation. One possible effect could be that young ‘Eurorussians’ (as they are sometimes called) in these countries, who look to Europe for cultural and political models, may one day stand up for further democratisation in Russia. If so, the Baltic countries would have once again played a useful role as mediators.

References

[1] In the plebiscites held in Estonia and Latvia in the beginning of 1991, even a majority of Russians living there had voted for independence. – Today’s Russia, as the legal successor of the Soviet Union,

continues to negate that the annexation of the Baltic republics in 1940 has been inconsistent with international law.