

The Eastern Baltic Subregion: Conflict and Cooperation

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With the passage of eight years since the states of the Eastern Baltic subregion (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) re-established their independence, it is now possible to make certain generalizations and conclusions about the character of their relations. Although from 1990, political leaders and press frequently declared their allegiance to cooperation among the three neighboring states, nevertheless after several years it became apparent that their relations were, and continue to be, based on the concept of prospective utility. Each state has been pursuing separate goals and utilizing different means in implementing them.

Cooperation among states is usually attended by greater or lesser disagreements. Hence, in discussing Lithuania's relations with its northern neighbors, it is impossible to ignore what political science parlance refers to as conflict. Most works dealing with the Baltic States examine only one aspect of their relations, namely cooperation. At the same time, the question of conflict within this subregion has not been subjected to comprehensive analysis (although its political-geographic aspect has received somewhat more attention).

By its nature cooperation is a political phenomenon which demands greater or lesser accommodation on the part of states vis a vis their partners' needs and interests.¹ The extent to which a state succeeds in satisfying this requirement determines the probability of conflict among partners.

Conflict arises when states encounter opposition to the realization of their goals. There is always a chance that a certain level of conflict will arise even among countries developing very friendly ties with each other. Thus signs of conflict among the Baltic states should not be seen as a danger to the region's stability or the prospect of pro-European development. Conflict is an entirely natural element in the political development of a state. Ignoring the existence of conflict can thus produce undesirable consequences for the planning and implementation of a country's foreign policy.

Interwar Relations Among the States of the Eastern Baltic Subregion

Historians believe that it is possible to speak of a united Baltic states region from 1914 on, for up to that period Lithuania was viewed in the context of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania, even after it was incorporated into the Russian empire. Latvia and Estonia were seen as parts of the former Livonia. Consequently, their political traditions differed. The Central European tradition dominated in Lithuania whereas its northern neighbors were under German influence. In addition, there were religious differences: Catholicism and the Lutheran faith.

Relations among the Baltic states grew stronger after they declared independence and began seeking international recognition. The border delimitation process played an important role in their mutual relation. The Estonian-Latvian border was the first to be delimited in 1917, when the provisional Russian government decreed the establishment of the provinces of Estland and Livland, which comprised

¹ J.E.Dougherty, R.L.Pfaltzgraff, *Contending theories of international relations* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1990), p.170.

ethnic Estonian and Latvian territories.² Disagreements arose in the course of delimiting the border regarding the town of Valga and a few islands. These differences were resolved in 1920 with the assistance of Great Britain. The date of the final resolution of this conflict should be fixed in 1923, which saw the signing of a military-political and economic cooperation treaty. Both countries signed a total of 20 agreements related to their common border.³ The delimitation of the Latvian-Lithuanian border was also a drawn-out affair. Attempts to solve this issue through bilateral negotiations ended unsuccessfully. Thus, both sides agreed to submit this question to third party arbitration. In September of 1920 both sides signed an agreement entrusting the border delimitation question to an arbitration commission headed by George Simpson. The 1920 agreement also recognized the ruling of the arbitration commission as binding.⁴ The March 1921 ruling was essentially concerned with the land border, for delimitation of maritime economic borders was not relevant at the time. The Baltic states' borders with Soviet Russia were established in 1920 with the signing of bilateral peace accords.

Another aspect of the relations between the Baltic states was the formation of the Baltic Entente. The first step towards establishment of a political-military union was the attempt to conduct jointly-organized peace negotiations with Soviet Russia. This effort failed on account of two reasons: the uneven effect of East-West tension on the Baltic states and their inability to find a common principle for their disengagement from the East.⁵

A variety of ideas and projects regarding formation of common institutions surfaced in the interwar period. One of them envisaged the Scandinavian countries, Finland and the Baltic states establishing a federation which would be joined by Poland. Another concept involved the unification of all states bordering Russia in the West. The possibility of putting these concepts into effect collapsed after Poland seized the Vilnius region, although the search for alternative unions continued. There were proposals to create a Finish-Estonian and a Latvian-Lithuanian federation as well as a Lithuanian union with Poland. A union of the three Baltic states was also put forward.⁶ The main cause of the failure of the latter idea was Lithuania's demand that the other two prospective partners support it in its struggle with Poland over the Vilnius region. In November of 1923, Estonia and Latvia signed economic-customs and military treaties. Lithuania was prepared to sign these agreements only on condition of Polish non-accession. The establishment of a three-way union was also hindered by the Lithuanian-Soviet Russian non-aggression pact of 1926, which obliged the parties to refrain from joining coalitions directed against either one of them.⁷ The rising German threat at the beginning of the fourth decade occasioned changes in Lithuania's foreign policy. In April of 1934, the Lithuanian government presented to its Baltic neighbors a memorandum on strengthening mutual relations.

² P.Joenniemi, J.Prikulis *The foreign policies of the Baltic countries: basic issues* (Riga: Centre of Baltic-Nordic history and political studies, 1994), p.120.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Zenonas Butkus, *Lietuvos ir Latvijos santykiai 1919 - 1929 metais* (Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidykla, 1993), p.49.

⁵ Česlovas Laurinavičius, "Baltijos valstybės tarp Rytø ir Vakarø 1918-1940 m.," *Politika ir diplomatija* (Kaunas: Naujasis lankas, 1997), p.227-237.

⁶ E.Anderson, "Pabaltijos sąjunga - realybė ar fantomas?", *Trimitas*, 11-12 (1993), 5.

⁷ Butkus, *Lietuvos ir Latvijos santykiai*, p.103.

The first part of this document declared that “the independence of all three states is in the vital interests of the other parties.”⁸

The official Latvian and Estonian reaction to this memorandum was favorable and at the same time cautious (because of Lithuania’s territorial problems). Disagreements arose when the states began discussing the concrete form of cooperation. The Latvians spoke out for a firm union while the Estonians did not support this idea. Nonetheless on September 12, 1934, the foreign ministers signed a treaty of concord and cooperation in which they promised “to consult regarding mutually-important foreign policy questions and render mutual political and diplomatic assistance in their international relations.”⁹ This formula was not applied with regard to any specific Lithuanian problems. The role of the Baltic states’ union was that of a coordinating and consultative body, which was to be put into effect during their foreign ministers’ conferences. In the defense sphere the Baltic states also declined to assume any obligations. Latvia demonstrated the strongest level of interest in the viability of the union and attempted to play a leading role in this process. Lithuania was not as active in this field mainly on account of its neighbors’ position concerning the Vilnius issue. Greater attention was devoted to relations with the Soviets. The Baltic Entente played an even lesser role in the foreign policy of Estonia. Its priorities were relations with Poland and Germany. The declaration of neutrality which the Baltic states passed in 1939 put an end to any kind of cooperation in the political, military and security spheres.

Relations Among the States of the Eastern Baltic Subregion Following the Restoration of Independence

The process of re-establishing the Baltic states’ independence and gaining international recognition showed that they are capable of cooperating successfully in fields which demand joint efforts (for example, in the security area). On the other hand, each state has specific interests which need to be dealt with as disagreements or even conflicts.

The Baltic states encountered problems associated with border delimitation immediately after the re-establishment of independence. In this process they tried to adhere to the 1940 boundaries as a basis, thereby stressing the principle of continuity. The treaty re-establishing the Estonian-Latvian border was signed in March of 1992. The process of restoring the land border did not provoke notable friction, although there remained one problematic question concerning the Valka-Valga situation. During the Soviet occupation this town functioned as an integral unit. Following the re-establishment of the Baltic states’ independence, however, the Latvian-Estonian state border divided the town into two parts. Some of the Latvian and Estonian residents ended up in foreign territory. Restoring the maritime boundary did occasion a conflict. In the spring of 1993, Estonia passed the Maritime Territory Act, which unilaterally fixed the boundary zone vis a vis Latvia. The latter never recognized this border, but it began protesting it only when the Estonians drove away Latvian vessels from its territory. The coastal zone of one of the islands in the Gulf of Riga became the cause of an international dispute. Latvia in the third decade granted the Estonians

⁸ Vytautas Paľys, *Baltijos Antantės susidarymas: Lietuvos TSR Mokslø Akademijos darbai* (Vilnius, 1988, A series, vol. 2), p.79.

⁹ *Svarbiausios Lietuvos Respublikos tarptautinės sutartys. 1918 - 1995*, (Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 1997), p.122.

possession of the island as an expression of gratitude for their assistance in the independence struggle and as a good will gesture to facilitate the establishment of the Baltic Entente. However, none of the documents which might have confirmed the changed juridical status of the island have survived. In 1995 Estonia rejected Latvia's proposal to consider the disputed zone as a common fishery zone pending the signing of a treaty. Estonia also rejected a proposal to adopt the pre-war sea boundary as an alternative.¹⁰ Nevertheless a maritime boundary agreement was signed in July of 1996 with the help of Swedish mediation.

In re-establishing the land border between Latvia and Lithuania, both sides adhered to the pre-1940 boundary as a basis. The delimitation of the sea border was held up by an international dispute. On October 31, 1995, the government of Latvia and two foreign oil companies signed a contract on exploration and exploitation of crude oil deposits in the Baltic Sea. This contract encompasses a disputed zone in which the two states have not yet agreed on a maritime boundary. A memorandum which the heads of state signed in May of 1995 in the town of Maišiagala set forth the following principles governing the demarcation of the maritime boundary: 1) regarding the 1958 Convention on the principle of equidistance and 2) regarding agreement to refrain from negotiating with third parties on exploitation of the continental shelf prior to delimitation of the maritime border.¹¹ On November 1 of the same year, the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs recalled for consultations the Lithuanian Ambassador in Latvia, Rimantas Karazija. The Latvian MFA received a diplomatic note which informed Riga that Lithuania had repudiated the agreements reached in negotiations up to that period.¹² Latvia set forth the following arguments before ratification of the agreement in its parliament: that the accord would create better conditions guaranteeing stability and security; it would strengthen Latvia's ability to resist Russian political influence and allow Riga to claim an appropriately large part of the profits ensuing from implementation of the agreement.¹³

The Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania adopted an appeal to the Latvian parliament in which it pointed out that Latvia had "violated its international obligations and Lithuania's sovereign rights"¹⁴ by signing the agreement. In another declaration the Lithuanian parliament noted that Latvia had violated the principles of the 1982 UN Law of the Sea and the Baltic states' Treaty of Concord and Cooperation of 1934. It was emphasized that the agreement signed by Latvia was null and void from the moment it was signed, without regard to the conditions of its entry into force. Latvia was also urged to delimitate the seabed boundary between the two states as a first step.¹⁵ Seeking a solution to this disagreement, Latvia offered to request mediation by Norway, Denmark or some other third country, but Lithuania was opposed.

Lithuanian-Latvian disagreements surfaced not only in connection with demarcation of the maritime border, but also with regard to control of air space.

¹⁰ Lietuvos Respublikos užsienio reikalų ministerija [henceforth - LR URM] (Vilnius) Doc. no. 66 (Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania in Riga. Week Events' Review, 2 April, 1996).

¹¹ Artūras Račas, "Maišiagalos memorandumas: apsigavę Lietuvos vadovai ieško išeities," *Lietuvos rytas*, 27 May, 1995, 2.

¹² LR URM (Vilnius) Doc. no. 42 (Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania in Riga. Account of activities for 1995, 12 January, 1996).

¹³ *Lietuva ir jos kaimynai: Metinės konferencijos tekstai* (Vilnius: Pradai, 1997), p.154.

¹⁴ *Lietuvos Respublikos Seimo dokumentų rinkinys 9 (15)* (Vilnius: Seimo leidykla "Valstybės žinios", 1997), p.579.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 587.

During the Soviet occupation an air navigation station was built in the Riga military district, which included all three Baltic states. The old air space boundaries remained following the restoration of independence, although Latvia assumed control of the air space above the Baltic Sea. Negotiations on the former USSR air navigation region have now been continuing for several years. Wishing to avoid paying Latvia for navigational guidance for its aircraft flights over the Baltic Sea, Lithuania aims to obtain at least one air space corridor should agreement evade the two countries. In that case, the dispute could be submitted to the ICAO, which would divide the air space above the sea alongside the coastline of the two countries.

The sea oil terminal is another issue in Lithuanian-Latvian relations. After Lithuania announced that it would build the Būtingė oil terminal, Latvia began taking active political steps aimed at thwarting these plans. Latvia is offering to establish a common transit corridor along the line Mažeikiai-Ventspils or Biržai-Ventspils while the Lithuanians are building the Biržai-Mažeikiai-Būtingė project. On August 10, 1996, Latvian State Minister Indulis Ems joined his country's greens in staging a demonstration near the Latvian-Lithuanian border to protest the construction of the Būtingė terminal. The Latvian press began publishing numerous articles about this subject. Some of the publications even linked the sea terminal issue with the negotiations concerning the maritime border. I. Ems asserted that the construction of the terminal was based solely on political considerations and that Lithuania had violated the 1974 Helsinki Convention regarding protection of the Baltic Sea by failing to obtain Latvia's consent before commencing construction.¹⁶

On May 12, 1990, the three countries established the Baltic States Council, which embodied political cooperation between the Baltic states. The aim of most of the documents this body adopted was to consolidate the Baltic states' political and diplomatic efforts in defending their sovereign rights and expressing a common position vis a vis the USSR.

This trilateral institution encompassed both an inter-parliamentary and an inter-governmental level. The Baltic States Council ceased functioning in mid-1993, although there was no official act to this effect.

Parliamentary relations between the Baltic states were institutionalized with the establishment of the Baltic Assembly. This took place on November 8, 1991, and its first session was held in January of 1992. The Baltic Assembly serves as a consultative and coordinating body in relation to common issues and undertakings.¹⁷ One of the most important ideas proposed during the first session was the coordination of the Baltic states' legislation, although it was decided in 1997 that each state should adopt legislation individually in conformity with EU requirements with the exception of those laws which are directly related to relations between the Baltic states.¹⁸ Speaking at the 11th session of the Baltic Assembly, Mečys Laurinkus proposed that the individual delegations to the Assembly should obtain a higher status in the respective national parliaments as a way of raising the stature of the Assembly itself. He emphasized two aspects regarding the Assembly's status and functions: 1) the Baltic Assembly should have decision-making powers with regard to the national parliaments, and 2) the delegations' positions should be coordinated with the national

¹⁶ "Vilnius prašo, kad Ryga pasiaiškintų," *Lietuvos rytas*, 19 August, 1996, 2.

¹⁷ *Svarbiausios*, p.253.

¹⁸ The speech of the Chairman of the Baltic Assembly Prezidium Mr. M. Laurinkus in the 11th session of the Baltic Assembly. – Document text received from the archive of Lithuanian Republic parliamentary delegation secretariat in the Baltic Assembly.

parliaments.¹⁹ Of note is Lithuanian President Algirdas Brazauskas' view expressed in 1994, that "the Assembly's adopted resolutions should be considered as its own and not as official views of the states, particularly concerning foreign policy questions."²⁰ The number of documents passed by Baltic Assembly sessions usually totaled ten or more. Quite sharp disagreements would arise in the process of adopting them. One could cite as an example the 5-th session, during which Estonian objections blocked passage of a resolution on the Baltic states desire to become NATO members.²¹ Moreover, a major dispute concerning a resolution on events in Russia flared up during the 8th session when Latvia held to a more cautious position than the Estonians and Lithuanians.²² The chief subjects of the documents formulated by the Baltic Assembly dealt with the following: relations with Russia; the Baltic states' defense and security; common action in international organizations; NATO and EU integration and practical relations with multilateral institutions (the Baltic Assembly's main partners are the Nordic Council, the Consultative Inter-parliamentary Council of the Benelux countries and the WEU Parliamentary Assembly).

Of note are the following two resolutions endorsed in 1995: "Concerning the Principles of Unity of the Baltic States" and "Concerning the Resolution of Disputes among the Baltic States." The first resolution provides for three principles of unity:

1. the failure or problem of one of the three states is a common concern of all three;
2. a threat aimed at one of the three states is a threat to all three;
3. the success of one of the three states is an achievement for all three."²³

In the second resolution the Assembly urges the governments of the Baltic states and the Baltic Council of Ministers to show good will and more of the spirit of neighborly harmony in addressing the problem of demarcating common borders and maritime economic zones.²⁴

One could point to April 12, 1990, as the beginning of relations between the governments of the Baltic states, when Kazimiera Prunskienė, Prime Minister of the Republic of Lithuania, V.E. Bres, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR and Edgar Saavisar, head of the government of the Estonian SSR, met in Vilnius. The heads of government signed an accord establishing a trilateral inter-governmental economic cooperation body - the Baltic Cooperation Council. Government-to-government meetings during 1993-1994 devoted considerable attention to institutionalizing cooperation. Work on developing the concept of a Council of Ministers of the Baltic States, modelled on the Scandinavian example, was initiated in the Foreign Ministry of the Lithuanian Republic. The chief function of this institution was to be coordination and control over activities of ministries and agencies. Certain differences in the positions of the states emerged during the preparatory work on the principles of the Baltic Council of Ministers. The Latvians sought to grant the BCM a maximum of executive powers by setting up a permanent secretariat and establishing

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "Laiko penklai," *Lietuvos rytas*, 17 November, 1994, 4.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Kęstutis K. Girnius, "Baltijos dalių bendradarbiavimas," *Atgimimas*, 17 April, 1996, 5.

²³ *Baltic Assembly session documents 1995 - 1996* (Riga, 1996), p.25.

²⁴ Ibid, p.23.

a common budget. By contrast Estonia was firmly opposed to such ideas.²⁵ The articles of the BCM were passed on June 13, 1994. They set forth three levels of cooperation: heads of government, ministers of Baltic cooperation and ministers of specific spheres. The most important functions of the BCM are the following: 1) the adoption of decisions taking into account recommendations of the Baltic Assembly; 2) the implementation of agreements between the Baltic states over which it had responsibility; 3) the preparation of proposals and the implementation of measures which encourage cooperation between the Baltic states. Three themes dominated the political activity of the BCM during the past few years: the harmonization of policies regarding EU and NATO integration, the development of relations with the CIS and the coordination of activity in international organizations.

Cooperation at the presidential level commenced in the second half of 1993, by which time all three of the Baltic states had elected their heads of state. Their powers in the fields of domestic and foreign policy were set by the constitutions of the respective countries and differed markedly. Thus it is not surprising that the 1994 agreement governing the organization of summits of the Baltic states pointed out that summits of the Baltic presidents are to be held for consultations and coordination among the presidents of the republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in order to develop closer cooperation between the Baltic states and coordinate strategies concerning security and foreign policy questions.²⁶

Each year there have been at least two presidential summits since the start of trilateral meetings in 1993. The summits endorse joint statements, declarations and communiqués. The August 27, 1993 summit stressed that a precondition for the integration of the Baltic states in the European Community is their prior integration amongst themselves in economic, foreign and security policy and other fields.²⁷ On March 25, 1994, the presidents adopted a declaration regarding the encouragement of mutual and regional cooperation. The declaration asserted that the heads of state committed themselves to promote cooperation among the diplomatic missions of the Baltic states. The document also stressed the usefulness of cooperation between the Baltic states and the Visegrad countries in the course of integration into European structures.²⁸

In addition, the Presidents discussed coordination of actions in expanding ties with the EU and NATO. In September of 1995, Algirdas Brazauskas, Guntis Ulmans, and Lennart Meri adopted a joint communiqué which confirmed the aspirations of the Baltic states to become NATO members and agreed to coordinate their actions regarding the security of their Eastern borders.²⁹ The May 29, 1996 declaration "Concerning Partnership for Integration" reiterated the presidents' intention to pursue EU and NATO membership in concert and not in competition amongst each other.³⁰ The presidential communiqué of November 10, 1997 welcomed the recommendation of the European Commission to begin negotiations with Estonia regarding

²⁵ A. Semaðkienē, J. A. Semaðka, *Baltijos ðaliø regionalizacijos procesø analizė: Tarptautiniø santykiø specialybës diplominis darbas* (Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto Tarptautiniø santykiø ir politikos mokslø institutas, 1995).

²⁶ *Svarbiausios*, p.252.

²⁷ *Lietuvos Respublikos Seimo dokumentø rinkinys 3 (9)* (Vilnius: Lietuvos Respublikos Seimo leidykla, 1994), p.534.

²⁸ *Svarbiausios*, p.250.

²⁹ "Baltijos valstybiø vadovai tvirtai apsisprendæ stoti á NATO," *Lietuvos aidas*, 8 September, 1995, 1.

³⁰ *Lietuvos Respublikos Seimo dokumentø rinkinys 8 (14)* (Vilnius: Lietuvos Respublikos Seimo leidykla, 1994), p.1034.

membership in the EU and conclusion of preparations for the Charter of Partnership among the U.S. and the Baltic states.³¹

An important element in the relations between the Baltic states is cooperation among defense institutions and coordination of security policy. The states initiated military cooperation right after the re-establishment of independence. The main documents governing relations in this area are the following: 1) the June 2, 1992 protocol of agreement among the ministries of defense of the Baltic states on ensuring security cooperation, which provided for joint military exercises and unified control of air, sea and land borders;³² 2) the September 13, 1993 trilateral declaration regarding cooperation in the security and defense fields; 3) the February 27, 1995 agreement between the ministries of defense of the Baltic states concerning cooperation in the area of defense and military relations. In addition, there is an entire collection of joint declarations on the subject of security and defense by the Baltic states' presidents, prime ministers, foreign ministers and the Baltic Assembly. The main subjects of these documents include the following: 1) withdrawal of the Russian army. The Baltic states undertook active efforts to solve this question as quickly as possible in all three countries. After Russia withdrew its military units from Lithuania, it was repeatedly emphasized that this represented only the first step in ensuring security in the region and that this must be followed by withdrawal of the army from the other two Baltic countries; 2) relations with NATO, the UN and the WEU; 3) participation in peace-keeping forces; 4) the drafting of coordinated security and defense concepts and others.

Baltic defense and security cooperation is continuing on the basis of consultations, exchanges of information and joint military exercises. The creation of a defense union was discussed as early as 1990, and the idea was especially intensively considered in 1994-95. The 5th session of the Baltic Assembly recommended preparation of a draft defense accord of the Baltic states and called for the signing of it as quickly as possible.³³ However, Lithuania's position in regard to this question is not positive. The government of Lithuania stresses the necessity of close cooperation, but does not seek the establishment of a defensive union. According to former Lithuanian Defense Minister Linas Linkevičius, a military alliance would gravely hamper the Baltic states' efforts to join NATO.³⁴ Estonian Minister of Defense Andrus Öövel believes that an alliance would be practical and meaningful only if the Baltic states' armies were capable of carrying out their functions in each other's territory.³⁵ Military cooperation at the subregional level is supplemented by participation in the Partnership for Peace program and in the Nordic-Baltic countries' military relations. Moreover, Lithuania and Poland agreed in May of 1995 to establish a joint peace keeping battalion.

Trilateral meetings at a variety of levels devote considerable attention to integration with the EU. One of the problems which Latvia and Lithuania faced in their efforts to be invited to negotiate EU membership was Estonia's attempts at demonstrating that it was best-prepared for membership among the Baltic states. This was especially apparent during the period of the "Isamaa" party's rule. In advertising

³¹ LR URM (Vilnius), Doc. no. 45. (Meeting of the presidents of the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Latvia and the Republic of Lithuania, 11 November, 1997).

³² A. Lejinš, P. Ozolina, *Small states in a turbulent environment: the Baltic perspective* (Riga: Latvian institute of International Affairs, 1997), p.170.

³³ *Baltic Assembly session documents 1991 - 1994* (Riga, 1996), p.64.

³⁴ A. Lejinš, P. Ozolina, *Small states*, p.171.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Estonia's reformist changes, this party stressed as a contrast the Lithuanian government's indecisiveness, particularly during the rule of the LDDP. Former Prime Minister Mart Laar some times asserted that the Estonian economy surpasses Lithuania's in absolutely all respects. In the early part of March of 1998, Estonian diplomats disseminated an anonymous complaint concerning the privatization of the Lithuanian Telecom. The complaint included a critique of the general economic and political situation in Lithuania to lend weight to the document.

In June of 1995, the Baltic states signed association agreements with the EU, which in their contents are essentially similar. The chief difference is that transition periods are specified in the Lithuanian and Latvian agreements while these provisions are absent in the Estonian agreement.

In 1997, the Estonian Institute of International and Social Studies conducted a survey of Baltic government officials, parliamentary deputies, intellectuals and representatives of other fields in an effort to classify Baltic strategies regarding European integration. Among the questions the survey subjects were asked was the following: which should come first - EU or NATO membership - or should accession to both institutions be simultaneous? In the opinion of Estonians and Latvians, membership in NATO alone would not provide adequate security guarantees. Moreover, approximately one-third of them indicated that membership in the EU would remove the necessity of belonging to NATO. Only 13 percent of the surveyed Lithuanians supported this view.³⁶ Another question asked whether the Baltic states should join the EU together or individually. Only 6 percent of the Estonian respondents favored joint accession. 24 percent of the Latvians and 30 percent of the Lithuanians questioned supported this idea. The Estonians' individualistic view is further underscored by their skepticism regarding the EU's support for joint accession (only 22 percent think the EU is inclined in this direction). 43 percent of the Lithuanians and 48 percent of the Latvians queried did feel the EU was in favor of this proposition.³⁷ Aside from this, approximately 78 percent of those surveyed in Latvia and Lithuania desired cooperation in integrating into the EU, while 75 percent of those questioned in Estonia believed that this process should be carried out individually.³⁸ 61 percent of the Estonians in the survey backed cooperation exclusively on a formal basis. Only 6 percent of the Estonians considered cooperation as the foundation for the future. 10 percent of those queried in Latvia and 17 percent in Lithuania supported this idea.

The Development of Relations Among the States of the Eastern Baltic Sub-region: Analyzing Cooperation and Conflict

As is apparent from the factual material presented above, conflict among the Baltic states has both traditional components such as border delimitation and post-Soviet "imprints" such as the disagreements over the control of air space. However, there are also elements - such as the Būtingė terminal issue - which should be considered as new phenomena in the relations between these states.

The establishment of boundaries is a traditional source of international conflicts, and the Baltic states have been unable to evade this problem in their mutual relations.

³⁶ "Europe and the Baltic states: which way should be chosen for reunification," *Baltic Review*, 8 (1997), 11.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 12.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 12-13.

In discussing the Lithuanian-Latvian and Latvian-Estonian areas of conflicts, one may note that they belong to the category of economic disputes. Disagreement stems from division of resources. Thus, one may assume that the inter-state relations in the first instance would have developed in another directions, had there not existed the possibility of finding crude oil or (in the Estonian-Latvian case) had there not been significant supplies of fish.

Judging by their external qualities, both disputes should be considered as belonging to the “joint survival”, incidental and controllable category of conflicts. These three characteristics explain their non-coercive nature. One may also assume that, once borders are established, conflicts on these grounds should not arise in the future.

Individualistic and cooperative motives were also intertwined in the conflicts subject to discussion. The first motive might be symbolized in terms of the accentuation of national interests and charges directed against another party regarding the violation of sovereign rights. The second might be understood in terms of the parties’ desire to resolve disputes through negotiations and assistance of mediators.

One could assign the Lithuanian-Latvian dispute over airspace control to a specific category of international conflicts by referring to the scope of the problem. In this instance there was a collision between Latvia’s interest in maintaining control over as much of the airspace above the Baltic Sea as possible (thus ensuring considerable revenues) and Lithuania’s desire to have at least one air transport corridor (thereby avoiding payments to Latvia). The dispute was aggravated by Latvia’s passivity in seeking a mutually acceptable resolution (it rejected the Lithuanians’ proposals without submitting any of its own).

Using Karl W. Deutsch’s classification of international conflicts in accordance with their external qualities, the previously-discussed dispute may be characterized as a “joint survival,” incidental and controllable conflict. Realizing the inevitability of cooperation in the future, Lithuania as well as Latvia naturally chose the path of negotiations. This dispute may be termed incidental because its appearance was determined by external circumstances (the survival of the old system of airspace control following the collapse of the USSR). The fact that none of the countries concerned presented this as a “life or death” matter influenced its non-coercive nature.

An important element of the Būtingė terminal issue is the factor of mutual fear. One of the motivating factors in Lithuania’s position is its unwillingness and fear of depending on Russian oil supplies. The wishes of both states coincide in a political sense. From an economic perspective, however, Latvia’s proposed cooperation strategy is not in Lithuania’s interests because the greater part of the financial benefits would accrue to Latvia.³⁹ Cooperation regarding the construction of the oil terminal is prevented by the unwillingness of both states to accommodate each other’s interests. This situation creates favorable conditions for the development of conflict situations. Among the other factors promoting conflict is the core nature of the problem (countries which lack strategic resources consider oil supplies to be one of the most vital concerns from an economic as well as a security point of view) and Latvia’s one-sidedness (its constant charges that Lithuania was violating international conventions and creating ecological threats and even proposals to link this issue to the question of delimiting the maritime boundary). Conversely, this situation’s favorable aspects form

³⁹ But its important to note that Lithuanians did not pay any special attention and did not carefully analyze the plan proposed by their neighboring state.

Russia's point of view should encourage cooperation between Latvia and Lithuania. Russia has the opportunity to exploit the question of oil supplies as a means of pressure by threatening diversion of oil exports to another country in pursuit of political ends (for example, its interests regarding national minorities).

An analysis of institutional cooperation should begin with the Baltic States' Council. The orientation of the documents that this trilateral institution has adopted points to its obviously symbolic nature. The bylaws of the Baltic Assembly, which was established in 1991, grant this organization the status of a forum for the exchange of views and not that of decision-making body, although in a formal sense the Assembly has not been entirely eliminated from the decision-making process (its recommendations may serve as the basis for decisions by the Council of Baltic Ministers). In real life, however, this institution practically had no influence on decisions of national parliaments. An even wider gap existed between the Baltic Assembly and national governments as well as presidential institutions. For all of these reasons the Baltic Assembly became a trilateral institution of a purely declarative character.

Institutional cooperation rests on a rather flawed principle which favors the state that is lagging behind or in opposition to a decision (for example, the 5th session of the Assembly failed to pass a resolution concerning the Baltic states aspirations for NATO membership). The very first declaration "Regarding the Principles of the Unity of the Baltic States" gives a dissenting state favorable conditions to hinder individual action. All of this differs fundamentally from the structure of relations among the Visegrad countries, which allows all of the parties to act individually. The Visegrad countries act in unison only when a common stance is useful.

Trilateral cooperation which is based entirely on idealistic declarations by the Baltic Assembly would have been completely ineffectual. That is why the creation of the trilateral Council of Ministers represented a logical step in the development of institutional relations and one which strengthened the process itself. The Council of Ministers began to dominate institutional cooperation from the very start. Lithuania could be considered the initiator of the Council, for it was its Foreign Ministry which drafted the first version of this institution's bylaws.

Effective cooperation at the presidential level is hampered by differences in the kinds of constitutional powers that each of the three heads of state exercises. For this reason, and also because the presidents' influence on national institutions varies in each country, cooperation at the heads of state level is limited to symbolic gestures and declarative statements. Their regular summits serve only to underline the continuity of cooperation.

Taking into account that interstate institutions play the main role in promoting integration among states, one can maintain that purely cooperative forms dominate in the institutional relations of the Baltic states, however, there is no trace of any deeper integration processes. Although the Baltic states consider cooperation as a suitable means of achieving common goals, they also make efforts to utilize other approaches which are more promising.

One field in which the Baltic states are actively cooperating is defense and security. Military cooperation is of particular importance.

Trilateral cooperation is useful in several respects. Military cooperation between the Baltic states and their efforts to coordinate the activity of their defense systems demonstrate that they would be capable of carrying out organized defense

should the need arise. Moreover, three-way cooperation bolsters the efforts of each individual state in pursuing their strategic goal of membership in NATO.

Defense and security cooperation encompasses the operative strategy (consultations, joint military exercises and the implementation of other active measures) and general strategy (e.g., joint diplomatic, political and military actions during the withdrawal of the Russian Army from the Baltic states and their integration in NATO).

With regard to the withdrawal of Russian forces, their more rapid departure from Lithuania also accelerated analogous processes in Latvia and Estonia.

The Baltic states' present cooperation in security affairs is to a significant extent influenced by current Russian policies regarding these three states. Effective cooperation with the involvement of third parties is continuing (for example, the signing of the U.S.-Baltic States' Charter).

Geographical dimension is very important in the relations between three Baltic states. The influence of geopolitical code and geopolitical gravitation is evident in this case.

The geopolitical interests of all three countries have practically coincided since 1990. During the period immediately following the re-establishment of independence, the governments of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia regarded as their fundamental interest the preservation of their status as independent states and the guaranteeing of their territorial integrity. After the Baltic states became full-fledged subjects of the system of international relations, they began considering as their paramount interests the strengthening of their defense and security as well as the raising of the level of their economic well-being. The threats to securing these interests were and remain generally similar. For all practical purposes, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia had no alternative to cooperation and integration into the EU and NATO in the face of the threat from Moscow.

In examining the development of relations among states, their nature and level of intensity, a researcher may pursue as one line of inquiry the role of historical precedents in foreign policy and their connections with current events.

The question establishing state borders became one of the subjects of dispute both after the declaration of independence in 1918, and following its restoration in 1990. If land borders were the cause of disagreements in the first case, then maritime boundaries were the subject of disputes in the second instance. The inter-war conflicts were resolved with the help of an arbitration commission, however, its rulings satisfied none of the contending parties (especially with respect to the Lithuanian-Latvian case). This choice of means of resolution clearly demonstrated that relations had reached the stage of significant deterioration since the parties were no longer capable of solving problems through bilateral methods. It is for this reason that after 1990, the Baltic states chose the course of bilateral negotiations rather than appealing to international institutions for their assistance (although there were suggestions to this effect). At the same time, the states sought to demonstrate their own ability to settle one of the essential issues of statehood, for one of the most important principles in current international conventions is "with the agreement of the parties."

Institutional cooperation among the Baltic states was quite lethargic after 1918. The signing of the 1934 Treaty on Concord and Cooperation was followed by meetings of foreign ministers, which became the most important link in maintaining relations. At the presidential level active relations were hindered by personal friction (especially between the Latvian and Estonian presidents). These processes lost even

more momentum after authoritarian regimes were established in all of the Baltic states, since the roles of individual leaders usually are much more accentuated in these circumstances. Cooperation at the level of parliaments was completely non-existent. The absence of common institutions in the inter-war period (with the exception of the foreign ministers' conferences after 1934) was one of the factors inhibiting coordination of foreign policy and the search for the most appropriate approaches. Moreover, the Baltic Entente treaty was never implemented de facto. One may assert that radically changed circumstances at present have created far more favorable conditions for cooperation between the presidents and at other institutional levels. In investigating the influence of historical precedents on current events, Robert Jervis, concluded that the events which provide the most potent lessons are those which have radical effects on peoples and states. The perception of Russia as the chief external threat stimulates considerably more active and effective Baltic cooperation in the field of security and defense. This Baltic image of Russia is understandable, since countries which have experienced aggression in the past tend to view the foreign policy of the former aggressors as domineering or expansionist. If one were to compare the present with the inter-war period in terms of opportunities for developing relations, one may assert that the possibilities of cooperation are more favorable today. By learning from shared historical experience, the Baltic states today have an opportunity to pursue more realistic policies of cooperation than during the inter-war period.

Conclusions

The Baltic states should examine the history of their relations with greater care so as to avoid repeating past mistakes (e.g., elevating national ambitions above common interests). Objective similarities and differences determine the present state of relations.

The geopolitical position of the Baltic countries permits them to develop their relations across both land borders as well as in the strategic expanses of the sea. This creates possibilities for cooperation, although it simultaneously promotes the appearance of certain conflicts. The existing divergence in their geopolitical codes and in their geopolitical gravitation also conditions the present state of international relations. On the other hand, historical experience (in the defense and security fields, for example) affects in a largely positive manner the development of relations among the Baltic states.

Cooperation is the dominant form of relations among the states of the Eastern Baltic subregion, although its effectiveness is seriously hampered by the absence of clearly defined goals. Cooperation is further undermined by the choice of differing means and strategies as well as concerns that the specific problems of each Baltic state will receive inadequate attention. The intensity of cooperation is determined by the following factors: the strengthening of trans-Atlantic ties, enlargement of the EU and other European integration processes, the situation in Russia and the latter country's policies towards the Baltic states and transformation processes in the subregion itself. The level of conflict and cooperation in the Eastern Baltic subregion also depends greatly on whether the states succeed in balancing their national interests with trilateral interests.

The external and internal characteristics of the conflicts of the Eastern Baltic subregion lead one to assume that their occurrence in the future will decrease. The

stability of the countries as well as the prospect of their membership in the EU also should lessen the probability of conflicts.

Future trilateral relations should develop in parallel with integration into Western structures, and both processes should influence each other. In addition, Baltic cooperation needs not only a common purpose, but also a certain specific foundation. At present this process is frequently considered in terms of trilateral relations, however, the bilateral dimension should be no less important.

Translated by Algis Avižienis