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ALBERT, MARTIN, AND PETER TOO: THEIR ROLES IN CREATING THE ESTONIAN AND LATVIAN NATIONS

Rein Taagepera

What has enabled the Finnic and Baltic slivers east of the Baltic Sea to survive in the midst of a Germanic-Slavic Northern Europe for the last 1000 years? Such an outcome was not foreordained – it is the result of a succession of lucky circumstances, on top of the strength of native cultures. Favorable factors include geopolitical location, worldwide main currents such as Protestantism and Romanticism, competition among would-be assimilators, and the unintentional positive impact of personalities extraneous to the Baltic area, such as Bishop Albert, Martin Luther and Peter the First. The latter occupy only a part of this overview, but as partly counter-intuitive examples they highlight the contradictory vagaries of the process of nation-building east of the Baltic Sea. While the focus is on Estonia and Latvia, some observations apply to Lithuania and Finland as well. Sustainability during the last 1000 years has implications for future national survival, but with marked reservations in a demographically imploding Europe. Nations without children have no future.

Keywords: survival of small nations; religious competition; Germanization; Russification; Anglicization

Introduction

Nation states can be based on historical, linguistic, religious and other grounds. The states east of the Baltic Sea are largely based on distinct languages – otherwise there would be no basis for such small states. In retrospect, we know these languages have been sustainable during a thousand years. This outcome was not foreordained, given how much language areas in the world have shifted during that time. In the very same

East Baltic neighborhood, the ancient Prussians have vanished and the last Votes east of Estonia are fading.¹

The reasons for past sustainability of Finnic and Baltic languages and the resulting nations and nation states east of the Baltic Sea may be instructive for the future. Estonians and Latvians, in particular, are numerically the smallest continental populations in the world to have a modern high culture based on a distinct language. (Including the island nations adds only one further case – the Icelanders in their sea refuge.) This means that the languages that became Estonian and Latvian have somehow survived under conditions where many other languages failed. It must have taken tenacity, a suitable location – and appreciable luck. So let us consider when and where the prospective Latvian and Estonian peoples and languages had luck – at times even when it looked like misfortune. Some of these considerations also apply to Lithuania and/or Finland.

Counterfactual history

Why weren't the languages on the east Baltic shores assimilated by the more extensive language areas east and west? The unifying theme here is Windy Land – a zone where conquerors alternated sufficiently often, so that their languages could not take root. While competing with each other, they inadvertently gave the local language breathing space. Two extraneous cultural developments contributed to the rise of local cultures: Reformation and Romanticism.

None of this is new. It is a question of emphasis – and of wondering about some developments that factual history takes for granted. Hardly anyone would dispute the boost Lutheranism gave to the printed word in peasant languages. But was it foregone conclusion that the Bible in German would be followed by the Bible in Latvian? It is also a factual observation that Russification in the late 1800s slowed down the steady Germanization of those peasant sons who acquired education. But could Germanization have become total, if the tsarist conquest had never taken place?

Such counterfactual questions are beyond the realm of solid factual history. Yet, in order to appreciate the implications of what did happen, it helps if we take into account what could easily have happened, but did not. We then begin to sense the frailness of the course of events that actually materialized.

This think piece is not standard social science either, especially when science is reduced to simplistic hypotheses testing the pitfalls of which I have addressed elsewhere (Taagepera 2008). By definition, counterfactual considerations do not yield data to be 'tested'. Moreover, I have no desire to displace the existing views on the broad lines of Baltic history – my aim is just to add a few complementary facets. Some of these have been foreshadowed in Taagepera (1993). At the end of most subsections, I will briefly review to what extent some existing history texts have expressed the features highlighted here. The sample of texts considered includes broad treatments of the entire history of Latvia or Estonia (Plakans 1995; Raun 1987/2001; Uustalu 1952/2005; Zetterberg 2007/2009), solid popularizations (Çērmanis 1959/1995; Vahtre 2005), and works on the early twentieth century which include overviews of previous history (Rauch 1974/1990; Rei 1970).

The teleological trap

On the macro level, this exercise is definitely counter-teleological. It points out that it was *not* a foregone conclusion, 1000 years ago, that the Baltic and Finnic languages were bound to survive on the shores of the Baltic Sea. No stand is taken on whether it was good or bad that they did survive, even though one may argue that variety in itself is desirable regarding languages as well as biological species. European culture is richer when it is not reduced only to Romance, Germanic and Slavic languages.

On the other hand, suppose the East Baltic populations had shifted to Germanic or Slavic languages, while maintaining basically the same genetic base. In such a case the present inhabitants east of the Baltic Sea most likely would be quite happy with such an outcome. The French do not feel sorry for having lost their ancestors' Celtic language. The same goes for Baltic and Finnic populations east of the present Baltic states, where Slavic has taken over.

Most often, we are glad to be who we are, whatever we happen to be. On the personal level, the a priori likelihood was infinitesimal that our precise genetic mix would materialize. Each of us is one among a huge number of potential brothers and sisters (and half-brothers and -sisters) who also could have been borne but did not. Being products of happenstance is no reason for not taking ourselves seriously. The same applies to nations that might also not have existed if history had taken a different course. Once nations do exist, they usually want to continue to exist.

In the following, however, I might often sound teleological because I lack non-teleological vocabulary. When pointing out alternative developments that did *not* occur, my continuous reference point inevitably is the single alternative that actually did materialize. This is so, in particular, when dealing with the tribal level. My terminological shortcuts might seem to imply that, if the Baltic and Finnic language families survived at all east of the Baltic Sea, then precisely the existing four languages would emerge as state languages within the present borders. Actually, the outcomes could have been vastly different.

Under slightly different circumstances, the Finnic Livs might have merged with the future southern Estonians rather than with future Latvians. The present Estonian area itself could have two separate literary languages, as it did until the northern speech achieved supremacy in the 1800s. Under slightly different circumstances, the Latvian language area might have failed to include Latgola (present-day eastern Latvia) but might have included Žemaitija (present-day western Lithuania), given that the Žemaitian speech arguably was closer to what became Latvian than to the Aukštaitian speech around Vilnius. And so on. Keep in mind this cautionary note, if in the following I keep talking of future Latvians and Estonians, as if the only option besides extinction was survival in precisely the actual format.

Past Survival

Northern Europe 1000 years ago

What was Northern Europe like, 1000 years ago? Some 1500 years ago, the Slavic language area had suddenly begun to expand. In the east, this thrust turned north

and rapidly reached Lake Ilmen, but then it got bogged down in the Votic area between Ilmen, Peipsi and Ladoga. What caused the slowdown? Could it have been higher population density? It's hard to say. But it was hardly a mere accident that the proto-Estonian language border stabilized at the Peipsi Lake rather than somewhat further east or west. The Estonian nation is a by-product of this barrier, the Peipsi Lake. But if so, then how did the future Latvians cope without such a border lake? The answer is that they almost didn't. By 1200, the power of Russian princes had already reached to the very core of present-day Latvia, on middle and even lower Daugava. Then a new extraneous factor entered.

Some 500 years after the Slavic expansion began, the German language area, in turn, started to expand to the east. In contrast to the earlier *Völkerwanderung* of semi-nomadic Germanic tribes, this specifically German *Drang nach Osten* (striving toward the east) had peasants as its core, the tillers of the soil. This new expansion engulfed the ancient Prussians, bogged down against Lithuanian resistance (and I still wonder why this resistance was so much stronger), but then pole-vaulted over the Baltic Sea into Livonia. Most Germans, however, lacked such a long pole. The knights and priests managed to make the leap, but the peasants were left behind. This is what made the difference between the fate of Latvians and Estonians as compared to Prussians.

Establishing a *Landsbrücke*, a dry land connection from Prussia to Livonia, remained for centuries a major goal for the German overlords of Livonia. They even achieved it around 1400, as the German Order seized Žemaitija, but this bridge remained too shaky for German peasant wagons to make it across. Thus the Latvians and Estonians are also by-products of the Baltic Sea – and beneficiaries of Lithuanian resistance.

As early as the year 1000, Christianity had almost reached the Arctic Ocean in a two-pronged movement through the Germanic west and the Slavic east – but not in between (see Figure 1). Language differences most likely played a role. The northern Germanic and Slavic populations had linguistic relatives further south. The latter could supply missionaries whose message could be understood in the north. But Christianity missed for a while the ancestors of future Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, and Finns, possibly because no southern missionaries could be found whom those peoples could understand.

These peoples also missed out on more powerful technology and organizational skills, which Christianity carried with it. This is why the entire eastern shore of the Baltic came to be dominated by speakers of Germanic and Slavic. Even the militarily powerful Lithuanians eventually shared this fate.

Why didn't those languages fade like Prussian in the west and Votic in the east? In the words of Estonian poet Gustav Suits (1883–1956), the peoples in between the Prussians and the Votes were truly located in the Land of Winds. Repeatedly changing direction, this wind blew in conquerors, but it also blew them all away before their languages had time to ensconce themselves in the Windy Land. Language survival is best ensured when a language area is politically independent. The next-best is when the foreign-language overlords keep changing. The toughest challenge comes when the same foreign language dominates continuously, as German did for the Prussians and Russian for the Votes.

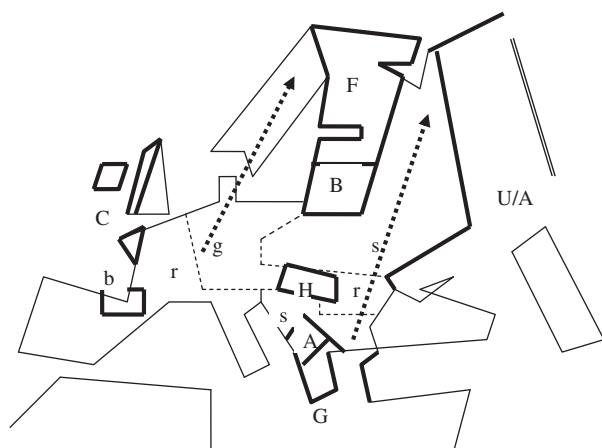


FIGURE 1 Language families in Europe around 1000 to 1500 AD and spread of Christianity. The areas of 'exceptional languages' (those not Romance, Germanic or Slavic) are outlined heavily. A=Albanian, B=Baltic, b=Basque, C=Celtic, F=Finnic, G=Greek, g=Germanic, H=Hungarian, r=Romance, s=Slavic, U/A=Uralic (apart from Finnic) and Altaic. Arrows show the early advance of Christianity into Northern Europe along the Germanic and Slavic axes

To what extent have the 'why' questions posed here been raised earlier, for the period prior to 1200? Rei (1970, p. 15) does ask why the Slavic expansion 'left the area on the Baltic alone' and explains it in terms of Lake Peipsi and marshes. The other sources surveyed seem to take it for granted or explain it by local resistance – which leaves the question of why resistance was stronger than further east. No source seems to ask why Christianity by-passed the East Baltic coast. It not only 'approached' this area from both west and east (Zetterberg 2009, p. 45) but also pushed further north on both sides.

How Bishop Albert's cloud had a silver lining

It was the first unlucky stroke of luck for future Latvians and Estonians to be conquered by Germans before anyone else fully managed to do so. What could have happened otherwise? Russian conquest was the likeliest alternative among many. True, a single local state may have formed in each language area, as it did in Lithuania. The Swedes might have subdued Estonia and Couronia, as they subdued Finland. But the likeliest outcome would have been Russian rule. Indeed, Russian princes had already ruled southeastern Estonia for several decades, from 1030 to 1061.

The impact of German conquest on the future Estonian and Latvian language areas has often been regarded as similar. In fact, the difference between the two impacts was as wide as the Peipsi Lake. In Estonia, Germans displaced local native leaders. Not so in many parts of Latvia. As we peruse the chronicle of Henricus de Lettis (1993),² we find that the foremost early opponents of the invading German Bishop Albert were Orthodox princes with Russian retinues in Jersika and Koknese, in what is now central Latvia. The Talava Latgolans in the northeast paid tribute to Pskov, and even

the Livs at the mouth of Daugava paid tribute to Polotsk.³ In those areas, Germans replaced Russian domination rather than local independence. While Lake Peipsi was a barrier, Daugava supplied an invasion route from the east. Even so, Russian rule was likely soon to penetrate Estonia too.

Whether German or Russian conquest, what difference did it make? The difference was that Russian princes and warriors would soon be followed by Russian peasants. In contrast, the Baltic Sea blocked influx by German peasants. Without German conquest, Latvians and Estonians would have met the fate of the Votes – steady Russian immigration and resulting assimilation. Thus, Bishop Albert's cloud had a silver lining for the local languages – but only for as long as the Germans could not establish a land connection through Žemaitija. They were very close to achieving it.

Among the sources surveyed, Vahtre (2005, p. 33) terms the German conquest a 'tragic turn of history'. Most other sources take it as simple fact, and do not weigh its positive and negative consequences. Potential alternatives to German conquest are rarely discussed, and this applies to the Russian alternative in particular. Only Rei (1970, p. 20) notes that the Russian principalities 'were making strenuous efforts to impose the Byzantine version of Christianity upon the peoples on the Baltic coast', and Rauch (1990, p. 15) observes that the German conquest pushed back the longstanding Russian expansion attempts and influence, dating back to the eleventh century. Ģērmanis (1995, p. 40) declares Russian inroads into ancient Latvia to have been a failure. The fact that Meynard, the first German missionary to the Livs, had to ask for the permission of the duke of Polotsk is explained by Zetterberg (2009, p. 47) as Polotsk just 'monitoring the happenings on the Daugava'.

Despite the spread of Orthodoxy in Jersika, Ģērmanis (1995, p. 55) terms this entity a Latgolan state, even while its ruler might have been of 'Viking stock' and the prestigious 'Jersika gospel' was in Church Slavonic (Ģērmanis 1995, p. 57). For Plakans (1995, p. 16), Koknese and Jersika are Selonian centers, with no hint at any Orthodox influence. Zetterberg (2009, p. 32) sees the Estonian counties as independent of Russians, prior to German invasion, and Uustalu (2005, p. 41) extends this characterization to Latvians, even while recognizing Russian tribute demands and Christianization on the Daugava. Other Estonian-oriented sources do not address the issue. Rei (1970, p. 19) considers Russia a threat from which the Baltic peoples gained respite thanks to the Mongols, but sees it as an external threat.

The vital fact that the German peasants did not follow the knights, as they did in Prussia, is pointed out only by Raun (2001, p. 19) and Zetterberg (2009, p. 47). Most sources seem to take this contrast between Prussia and the east Baltic coast for granted.

Europe's three zones of survival of exceptional languages

Looking at Europe about 500 years ago, one observes a predominance of Romance, Germanic and Slavic languages, plus three broad zones of exceptional languages, stretching from north to south (see Figure 1). The western zone had Celtic and Basque languages on the Atlantic. The central zone had Finnic and Baltic languages on the Baltic Sea, plus Hungarian, Albanian and Greek in very different situations.

The third zone began on the Volga and was a separate north-south zone only when viewed from Europe – it actually was the western fringe of a broader Altaic-Uralic language area in Asia. What has become of these zones during the last half-millennium?

The western zone of exceptional languages has shrunk. The eastern zone has fractured into mostly small language islands surrounded by a single Slavic language. In the central zone, by contrast, the exceptional languages have developed into vehicles of high culture and into state languages: Finnish, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, and on to Hungarian, Albanian and Greek.

What set this zone apart from the others? It was their intermediary location, which first contributed to the subjection of these language areas by their neighbors but then enabled them to emerge again. The central zone alone was a Land of *Alternating Winds*.

The Baltic and Finnic areas east of the Baltic Sea became a bone of contention between Germanic and Slavic powers. Being contested meant destruction and suffering but also alternation of dominance. No conqueror was allowed to stay long enough to assimilate the area linguistically. The western zone had no such alternation. It was perennially between the ocean and the Anglo-Saxons, or the ocean and the French (for the Bretons and northern Basques), or the ocean and the Spanish. The Pyrenees supplied a clear border and thus prevented a Spanish-French contest, which could give the Basque language a breathing spell. In the eastern zone the scores in the Tatar-Russian power struggle were quite even for a long time, but then the fall of Kazan led to unbridled advance by Moscow way beyond the Volga-Ural area.

In the north of the central zone, the same expansion by Moscow interrupted the Swedish-German-Polish political dominance, but it came too late to dislocate the western religious-cultural heritage. Several centuries followed where the tension between the political and cultural powers offered the peasant languages a breathing space. Later, romanticism supplied a further opening for development of peasant languages – but only in those regions where the upper classes were split linguistically. In this sense, Ossian's songs (the lack of authenticity of which is irrelevant in this respect) had more impact in the central zone than in Britain itself.

The rise of modern nationalism gave peasant languages another boost – but only if they had already acquired sufficient cultural mass to profit from the idea of nation distinct from kingdom. By the time the French notion of civic nation had mutated into the German notion of language-based nation, the Baltic and Finnic peasant languages had developed a culture able to support political demands.

The picture is more varied at the southern end of the central zone. Here the Turkic impact weakened the Hungarian language against the subsequent pressure of German, but it possibly prevented the submersion of Albanian and even Greek in the Slavic flood. For a while, this flood extended all the way to the Peloponnesus peninsula, far beyond the present borders of Albania and Greece. How did the Ottoman invasion alter the Greek-Slavic balance? And to what extent did language relationships influence the shift of most Albanians to Islam? Such questions would take us too far from our central concern. Let us return to Latvia and Estonia. Consider the latest 500 years in more detail, starting with Reformation.

How Martin Luther created literary Latvian and Estonian

If Bishop Albert played an important role in preserving the proto-Latvian and -Estonian language areas, this was even more so the case with Martin Luther. Without him, no Latvian- or Estonian-language cultures would exist. This was not what he had in mind when he called for the people to receive the God's word in their own language. Luther was thinking of the German people. But some of the German reformers in Livonia felt they had to apply this norm to the local peasants too, if they did not want to contradict themselves. This is why the printed word in Estonian language materialized a mere 80 years after the Gutenberg Bible. The Finnic peoples further east reached this stage 200 years later.

Languages fade when their prestige is so low that younger people shift to another language. This is what occurred in Ireland 200 years ago, and this is how the Finnic peoples further east have lost out. Latvian and Estonian languages ran the same risk, but the printed word boosted their prestige. It also forced their vocabularies to transcend everyday speech.

Actually, it was not inevitable that the Lutheran language norms would be applied to the east Baltic peasant languages. Humans have a remarkable ability to protest against infringement of their own rights while denying the same rights to those whom they consider inferior. The German overlords in Livonia could easily have convinced themselves that they deserved to have the God's word in their own language but that the local peasant languages were too uncouth for this purpose. The difficulties faced by the earliest publications in the peasant languages, including destruction of entire stocks, hint at divided opinions among the ruling circles. Under these circumstances, thanks are also due to Polish Jesuits, in addition to Luther.

Most of Latvia and even southern Estonia fell for a time under Polish-Lithuanian Catholic rule. To get the local people to return to the fold, the Jesuit preachers sometimes made use of Estonian and Latvian even more extensively than did the Lutheran clergy. In return, such practices put pressure on German clergymen. For the first time, indeed, the souls of the peasants were deemed so valuable that it was worth competing for them. The higher going price of their souls gave a break to their languages.

How much did this rivalry matter? After all, Finland did not witness such a competition, yet the peasant language developed at least at a comparable pace. The starting point was different, however. During the preceding centuries, the attitudes of the German upper class in Livonia toward anything *undeutsch* (un-German) were markedly more disdainful than those of the Swedish upper class in Finland toward Finnish. Given this atmosphere, the German Lutherans might still have neglected the peasant languages in Livonia, regardless of what Luther said, if it were not for the Jesuit competition. In Lithuania, where Protestantism faded after its initial successes, the advance of the peasant language was slower – and some of the important later milestones, such as the poem *The Seasons* by Kristijonas Donelaitis (published in 1818), came in mixed-religion East Prussia.

A literary language requires more extensive vocabulary, especially when the long-term goal is translation of a complex work such as the entire Bible. It also requires bringing some unity to dialects. The multi-faceted popular speech is forced into a

narrower pattern. In order to speak a developing 'mother tongue', one often has to give up on the way one's own mother spoke and adopt the ways of mothers in a neighboring region. In Estonia, two literary languages took shape, possibly more different from each other than Swedish and Danish. The southern language was the first to print a full translation of the New Testament, but the northern was the first to print the full Bible. It thus gained a definitive advantage. The competition was more uneven between Latvian in the Lutheran areas and Latgolan in the Catholic east. In Lithuania and Finland a single literary language seems to have dominated from the beginning, despite the marked differences between Žemaitian and Aukštaitian and between the western Finnish and Savo-Karelian dialects.

Observing the connection between Martin Luther and the rise of printed word in the peasant languages is not at all novel or controversial. It is stated explicitly by Plakans (1995, p. 32) and Zetterberg (2009, p. 122). If anything, this connection has been taken so much for granted that quite a few of the works surveyed do not even bother pointing it out, and Uustalu (2005, p. 72) merely shows impatience at the slow rate of book publishing in Estonian. Yet Reformation did not have to emphasize peasant languages even to the degree it did, and it did not have to occur in time to rescue the geographically East Baltic languages – for ancient Prussian, it was too late. The 'struggle between Catholic and Protestant forces for the hearts and minds of the Estonian people' not only gave rise to the printed word in Estonian (Raun 2001, p. 24), but Ģērmanis (1995, p. 98) says it was a struggle for peasant souls and so does Vahtre (2005, p. 87). Many sources describe Reformation and Counter-Reformation without making note of this interaction.

How Peter the First and his successors saved the East Baltic shore from Germanization

It was the second major luck in disguise of the geographically East Baltic language areas that the Russian state eventually still managed to reach the Baltic littoral – but that it did so only when the Catholic-Lutheran culture had already struck root and could no longer be displaced. What would have happened without this Russian conquest? Gradually, the Lithuanians would have turned into Poles, the Finns into Swedes, and Latvians and Estonians into Germans. Such an outcome was blocked by Peter the First and his successors. Thus, like Bishop Albert, the dark cloud of Peter the First also had a silver lining. With culture from the west and state power from the east, neither could assimilate the peasants. In the Windy Land, the wind was blowing from two directions simultaneously!

This is not to say that Russian conquest always came at the optimal time for boosting the peasant languages. In Estonia and northern Latvia, continuation of Swedish rule would have offered the peasant languages more opportunities, without any risk of imminent Swedization during the next century or so. Russian conquest, formalized in 1721, delayed the printing of the Estonian Bible translation by several decades. It also reinforced the privileges of the German upper class and hence increased peasant misery even when one overlooks the losses during the Great Northern War. But in the long run, Russian conquest set a barrier between the Baltic provinces and the Germanic world.

In Finland, by contrast, the Russian takeover in 1809 arguably came at the very last moment, from the viewpoint of Finnish language survival. At the grass roots, expanding peasant education spread Swedish as a high-prestige second tongue. At the top, the centralizing administration in Stockholm was hemming in any autonomy for Finland. Indeed, this refusal of autonomy enabled Tsar Alexander I to offer Finland's Swedish-speaking elites a better deal. The cultural-territorial identity of these elites differed markedly from that of the German-speaking upper class in the Baltic provinces. The latter maintained a German identity, while Finland's elites had developed a territorial identity separate from Sweden. Once Finland was identified as the prime object of national loyalty, Finnish language was bound to look more patriotic than Swedish, in the long run. While increasing education continued to spread the knowledge of Swedish throughout the 1800s, sometimes leading to full-scale language shift, the tide eventually was reversed.

From Poland to Estonia, subjection to Russia carries a negative stamp. When Finns view such subjection in 1809 neutrally or even positively, this contrast either just does not register south of the Gulf of Finland or it may be misconstrued as another manifestation of 'Finlandization'. It is hard for Baltic 'southerners' to internalize that in 1809 Finland obtained unprecedented autonomy. The resulting Finnish goodwill toward Russia was squandered by later tsars through measures to abolish this autonomy in the late 1800s, but this shift does not alter previous history. The Baltic German elites also gained in autonomy when submitting to Peter the First. The difference was that the Swedish-speaking elites in Finland identified with Finland, while the Baltic Germans remained more German than Baltic. Thus, a somewhat similar subjection is interpreted rather differently by Finnish and by Estonian national histories.

In sum, only a Russian takeover could block a relentless shift to Germanic languages, but from the viewpoint of development of peasant languages, this takeover could have occurred later than it did in Estonia and northern Latvia. I find it harder to visualize the Lithuanian case. Here the upper class wasn't imposed from abroad. Due to Polish cultural appeal, the Lithuanian nobility itself shifted to Polish, while often preserving a Lithuanian identity. Russian conquest in the late 1700s affected Lithuania and Poland simultaneously and thus did not put a clear administrative barrier between the two. The commonality of identity was such that the two major Polish uprisings in the 1800s spilled over to the Lithuanian-speaking areas almost automatically. While undoubtedly weakening the position of Polish at least in the administrative realm, the tsarist regime repressed the Lithuanian language even more harshly than Polish by trying to impose the Cyrillic alphabet.

The more an outsider thinks about it, the more he might be surprised that a separate language-based identity did develop in Lithuania. In contrast to Latvian, Estonian and Finnish peasants, the Lithuanian peasants could not resent the Polish-speaking upper class as being of foreign origin. Little Protestantism remained in Lithuania so as to boost literacy in one's mother tongue. Russian oppressive policies did their best to push Lithuanians and Poles into a joint Catholic front. Yet a language-based identity developed in Lithuania too. Romanticism may have been a major factor, to be discussed in the next section.

Viewing the Russian conquest as an indispensable ingredient for development of the Latvian and Estonian languages is probably the most controversial part of the present evaluation. Among the sources surveyed, only Raun (2001, p. 37) and Uustalu (2005, p. 104) observe that conquest of the east Baltic littoral by Peter the First at least led to the longest peaceful era since the Middle Ages. All sources surveyed properly stress the disastrous conditions under which the Russian conquest was carried out, the slow demographic and cultural recovery thereafter, and the worsening of the peasant condition up to the mid-1700s – and quite a few extend the impression thus formed to the entire tsarist period. Vahtre's (2005, p. 111) chapter title for the entire 200-year spell is 'In the Clutches of the Imperial Eagle', and Rei (1970, p. 24) feels that, throughout the duration of foreign domination, 'the Russian turned out to be the unhappiest'. True, it would have been better for Estonia and northern Latvia if Russian conquest had been delayed up to around 1800, as was the case for Finland, Courland and Latgola – but no further. As Germanization never became massive, factual treatments of histories have no reason to ask what prevented it.

Herder – and repercussions via Russia

Even under the tsarist rule, the local show in the Baltic provinces continued to be run in German. As they acquired education, Latvian and Estonian peasants gravitated toward German. It wasn't a strange anomaly that the grandchildren of Estonian enlighteners such as Johann Woldemar Jannsen and Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald ended up monolingual Germans in the very late 1800s. It was a rather natural course, just as at present Chicano students in California gravitate toward English. The last so-called Juniper Germans (still smelling of the smoke of their ancestral Estonian peasant hearths) may have come to look in the 1930s like anachronistic funny old ladies. But 150 years ago it was not clear at all why an educated Latvian or Estonian peasant son should not shift from his native *Bauernsprache* (peasant language) to the recognized German *Kultursprache*.

What was it that tilted the balance toward the native language? Romanticism did so both directly and indirectly by boosting Russian chauvinism. The same largely applies to Finnish-Swedish and Lithuanian-Polish relationships. In the following, though, I'll focus on the impact in Estonia and Latvia.

Indeed, after Martin Luther, another German rode to the rescue of the peasant languages: Johann Gottfried Herder. His romanticism proclaimed the despised folk poetry of the Latvian and Estonian peasants a part of high culture. So it came to pass that German-speaking intellectuals laid the foundation of a Latvian Literary Society (1824) and Estonian Learned Society (1838). They essentially aimed at studying *past* folk culture before it vanished. By the time they noticed that Vanemuine (a fictional Estonian God of Songs invented by the Romantics) was getting out of hand, and Kalevipoeg (a semi-folkloric hero) even more so, it was too late. The Latvian and Estonian peasants had begun to believe Herder's valuing of their poetry – and unlike the German Estophiles and Lettophiles, they used it as a basis for *future* cultural development. However, at the very same time increased education still boosted Germanization.

Here the Russian tsar again rushed in. Romanticism infected the Russian court too. It gave up on French in favor of its own language. Trouble was the court soon began to push its Russian on other peoples too. What the Latvians and Estonians most remember is that even village school instruction was forcibly shifted from native to Russian language. The blows received by the Baltic Germans, however, inflicted much more damage. The tsars stopped the flow of new clergymen from Germany, and this restriction rang the death knell for German culture in the Baltic. In this language struggle the Russian tsars saw German as their main adversary, and they underestimated the challenge by peasant languages until it was too late.

From utter domination by one high culture, the Latvians and Estonians had reached a zone of competition between two of them, which led to new openings. Indeed, up to that time, the Baltic peasantry had the feeling that the entire high culture of the world was using German. In St. Petersburg as well as at the university in Tartu, now Russified, the children of Latvian and Estonian peasants discovered that high culture could also use Russian – and so they began to wonder why it could not use Latvian or Estonian as well.

The tsars of the late nineteenth century were also religious chauvinists, and once again the going price of peasant souls went up, as it did during Reformation and Counter-Reformation. While challenging Lutheranism, the Russian Orthodox Church made concessions to the Estonian language that the Finnic peoples further east could only dream of. It became easier for an Estonian to become an Orthodox priest than a Lutheran clergyman. Once again, the Lutheran Church was forced to compete, and the position of Estonian was enhanced.

Latvian history may offer some modifications to this primarily Estonian-oriented view. As for Finland and Lithuania, only the following broad outline is common. Romanticism impacted first the attitudes of the local elites toward the respective peasant languages, and later the self-awareness of the peasants themselves (and of the new peasant-based elites). Reverberations through Russian imperial policies followed. Within this broad framework, the details in Finland and Lithuania played themselves out quite differently.

Almost all sources mention Herder, sometimes in only a few words (Rauch 1990, p. 20; Raun 2001, p. 56; Uustalu 2005, p. 130; Vahtre 2005, p. 127), and sometimes more extensively (Ģērmanis 1995, p. 136; Plakans 1995, p. 84; Rei 1970, p. 30; Zetterberg 2009, pp. 319, 321, 328), but his impact on peasant self-respect appears to have been negligible. The main observation is that he made Latvian and Estonian folklore known in the West.

Conversions to Orthodoxy are also widely mentioned both in a few words (Ģērmanis 1995, p. 135; Plakans 1995, pp. 86, 101; Rauch 1990, p. 21) or extensively (Raun 2001, pp. 45, 48, 53–4, 80; Uustalu 2005, p. 147; Zetterberg 2009, pp. 308–9), but they are generally seen as unfavorable to local national development. Only Zetterberg (2009, pp. 308–9) notes that conversion elicited self-examination among the German clergy, and Raun (2001, pp. 53–4) points out that it broke the spiritual monopoly of the Lutheran Church and forced it to be much more active in minding its flock.

The Russification of administration and education is described extensively in all sources examining its impact on Latvian and Estonian languages. The weakening of the

German grip, however, is pointed to much more briefly, if explicitly, by Raun (2001, pp. 60–3) and Zetterberg (2009, p. 352), though less so by Plakans (1995: 101), Uustalu (2005, pp. 146–7) and Vahtre (2005, p. 141), and hardly at all by Gērmanis (1995, p. 158). Rauch (1990, p. 21) sees Russification as radicalizing the Estonian-Latvian demands against the Germans.

The breakthrough by 1900

As a result of all these developments and happenstances, by 1900, four modern nations had come to exist on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. They were aware of their identities and proud of their languages. When it comes to Latvian and Estonian nations, their formation took place thanks to Bishop Albert, Martin Luther, the Jesuits, Peter the First and later tsars, Herder, and the Russian Orthodox Church. All of these had undertaken various helpful steps, fully unaware of their long-term impact in the space between the Peipsi meridian and the Baltic Sea.

The existence of Latvia and Estonia as nations with their own languages is largely due to their location in the Land of Winds, and more specifically of alternating winds. If Bishop Albert and Peter the First had to come, then it was essential that both came, and in the sequence they did. In Finland, the alternation of Swedish and Russian rules offers similarities. In Lithuania the Polish-Russian interplay involves marked differences in view of the early formation of the Lithuanian Grand Duchy.

But what did the Latvian and Estonian populations accomplish by themselves? The last medieval independence effort by Estonians flared on the Night of St. George in 1343. Coordination with Swedish allies from Finland was apparently botched up by over-hasty action, and the uprising failed. In Latvia, Zemgale resisted the Germans up to the late 1200s; no later attempts to throw off the German yoke followed. For many centuries thereafter, these peoples could do very little, apart from produce babies. But this they did. When new opportunities began to open up for national awakenings, they made good use of them. One must have luck. But luck tends to favor those who seize the day.

The twentieth century added little new. In the contest for the eastern shore of the Baltic, Sweden was out of the picture, and Poland was involved quite marginally in the Vilnius area. Russia (under whatever name) continued the challenge, and Germany for a while expanded its reach to Lithuania and even to Finland. But the dominant trend was for the east Baltic nations to extend their period as modern nations from a few decades to a century and more. This was the cultural bedrock on which they asserted their political independence.

Future Sustainability

Let us move from the past to the future, even though this step may annoy some. It is customary to keep history apart from discussion of the future, which is counterfactual by definition. But this connection has to be made. The Baltic and Finnic languages and the nations based thereon have been sustainable for 1000 years on this sliver of land between the sea and a zone of lakes and swamps. Does it mean they can happily expect the same from now on? Excessive confidence may be risky.

How sustainable are these cultural nationhoods and political statehoods in the future? Which lessons can be drawn from the past and – at least equally important – which lessons must not be drawn, mistakenly? To repeat, one does not need to consider the existence of relatively small language-based nation states as an ultimate good. One can still point out which past lessons may help them to survive, and which do not. The factors considered are geographic, cultural and demographic.

Location on the sea shore certainly matters for language survival. No other language area can then completely surround the given language area, the way Russian has surrounded Altaic and Uralic language areas east of the Volga. Apart from Hungarian, all the exceptional languages in the aforementioned western and central zones of Europe are located on the sea. Short of an island location, a quasi-peninsular configuration comes in especially handy. Along with Wales, Brittany, and Greece, Latvia, Finland and Estonia partly share this feature. Interestingly, a Finnish folksong (*Oulun kasarmin laulu*) calls Finland an island: '*Suomensaaren vartijaksi olen minä opetettu*' (I have been trained as a defender of the Finn-island). In the Estonian case, peninsularity is reinforced by the big lake to the east.

The importance of Baltic Sea and Peipsi Lake is reduced in an era of air travel and ICBMs. But let us imagine a major flood of refugees. From the west, the sea would block it appreciably, despite the experience of Baltic refugees in 1944, who managed to cross the sea. In the east, even the Narva River and the Peipsi Lake would offer Estonia a holding line. Borders marked by water have lost in importance, but not completely so.

Culturally, a main cleavage line in Europe came about in 1054, when the split between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches became official. In their hazy contact area east of the Baltic Sea, their border settled down a few centuries later along the Pepsi meridian, and it has held up remarkably well ever since. Swedish and Lithuanian advances eastward proved short-lived, and even the prolonged Russian rule on the Baltic shores could not shift the cultural border. Such attempts now belong to the past, regardless of remaining revanchist dreams and possible actions. Does it mean that the east Baltic shores are no longer the Land of Alternating Winds? By now the main cultural challenge comes from further away, rather than from neighboring regions.

Languages fade when their prestige falls so dramatically that younger people shift to another language. But high-prestige languages can also fade when not enough children are born. For centuries, low prestige was the greater threat to the nations on the east Baltic shore. This concern is now past in the traditional sense. Inferiority complexes toward Swedish, German and Polish languages, respectively, still quite palpable even 50 years ago, have faded. The east Baltic peasant languages have evolved to the point of being able to express anything, and they are among the official languages of the European Union. In this sense, the prestige of these languages is higher than ever before.

On the other hand, the worldwide impact of English is felt more strongly in the Baltic area, year by year. Compared to previous linguistic invasions, this one is not connected to blatant political-military-administrative control. Thus, it does not raise instinctive warning flags. It could be said that the Russifying rulers all too often threw the Baltic frogs into boiling water, and they kept jumping out. In contrast, the

Anglicizing forces are raising the temperature on the Baltic frogs so slowly that they may not react and could be boiled. Some balance between the national languages and English may be reached, but it may leave the national languages hardly more room than Letzeburgish has had in Luxembourg, in the shadow of French.

In sum, the Land of Winds now faces a mild but relentless Anglo-Saxon cultural breeze. Could it become so suffocating for the local languages that some military occupation from the east would be needed, once again, to restore the balance? Well, this is an issue that can wait.

It does not suffice to have a language one can speak – it also takes a sufficient number of speakers. Recall that Estonian is the language with the fewest speakers on any continent to be the basis of a modern high culture. Latvian is a close second. Demographically, the last 15 years have brought something unprecedented during the previous 1000 years: a lack of children. Appreciably fewer children are born than there are deaths. Populations with few children will soon have fewer adults, and hence still fewer parents for the next generation. It's a slow but relentless downward spiral.

As the number of speakers decreases, Estonian and Latvian would be the first distinct-language high cultures to collapse, as a warning to others. Even before that stage is reached, these nations would become minorities in their ancestral territories, because demographic vacuum invites a heavy influx of immigrants who prefer English and get away with it. Such would be the wages of an excessive cult of personal welfare and pleasure, which actually leads to reduced well-being. Little comfort is offered by the observation that such a birth deficit is observed throughout most of Europe. The Latvian and Estonian nations will be the first to go, if they fail to act without delay. Note that I did say 'nations', not 'states.' The difference is huge.

Challenges can be external or domestic. History has taught the nations on the eastern shore of the Baltic to focus on external threats. Now it is time also to pay attention to internal challenges, caused by high social stress during a time of great changes. A market economy has already been developed in those countries, with all its benefits and drawbacks. Now is the time to think of people's health – so that more children are born and so that the adults live longer, healthier and happier. Deeper thinking is called for – and deeper feeling, which is not reducible to euros.

Understandably, the common reaction in Estonia – and I presume also in neighboring countries – is that demographic implosion is unthinkable, because nothing like it has occurred during the previous 1000 years. If languages like ancient Prussian have become extinct, it has been under external pressure. Why should it be any different now? The difference lies in this utterly unprecedented new factor: birth rates wildly below the replenishment level.

The Baltic and Finnic languages and the nations based on them on the Baltic shore have recognizably maintained continuity over 1000 years of deep change and huge challenges. Different times have presented different challenges. The dangers inherited from times past still lurk, and new challenges have arisen. Of these, I have mentioned only the most basic.

The existence of relatively small language-based nation states need not be considered an ultimate good. But if one happens to favor them, then it might be better not to lie to oneself that language survival is ensured – even while one's own actions and inactions work to undermine it. Do not count on a future Martin or Peter from

abroad to save the east Baltic nations from themselves when they do not have enough children.

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Notes

- 1 The Finnic Votes inhabited the area between the Peipsi, Ladoga and Ilmen Lakes, prior to the Slavic advance (Taagepera 1999, pp. 141–2). They formed the *Vodskaja Piatina*, one of the five sections into which the original Novgorod territory was divided. A handful of aging speakers may remain.
- 2 The original date in the 1200s is unknown, and the text has been lost. The earliest copy is from the 1300s, a century later.
- 3 The Livs at the lower Daugava paid tribute to the prince of Polotsk, whose permission Meynard requested for his early missionary work (Henricus I–3). The Livs continued to pay this tribute at least up to 1212, or else Bishop Albert actually paid it on their behalf (Henricus XIV–9, XVI–2). The Talava Letgoleans in the northeast of present Latvia were ‘perpetual’ tributaries of Pskov, Henricus claims (XI–7). He writes of the ‘Russian stronghold of Koknese’ (X–3) on the middle Daugava, whose defenders were fellow-Christian Russians (X–8), even while the general population was Letgolian and Selonian (XI–9, X–1). Henricus clearly distinguishes this Russian stronghold from the near-by stronghold of the Selonians (XI–6). Defeated by the Germans, Prince Vetseke of Koknese sought refuge in Novgorod, whose rulers sent him to help defend Tartu against the Germans; he died doing so, in 1224 (XXVII–5 to XXVIII–6). Prince Vissewalde of Jersika, further up the Daugava, is termed a fellow-Christian, his warriors are described as fellow-Christian Russians, and the city as being full of churches in 1209 (XIII–4). All defenders of Jersika are again called Russians in 1215 (XVIII–3). Henricus consistently calls the Orthodox rulers of Jersika and Koknese ‘princes,’ while the leaders of Livs, Letgoleans and Estonians rate only as ‘elders,’ with a single hesitant exception: Caupo is introduced as someone who was ‘like a prince and elder’ of the Toreida Livs (VII–3). Note that Henricus de Lettis had no motivation to exaggerate the Orthodox Russian penetration, which actually weakened the Christianization claims of the Germans.

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