The Baltic Region:
Geopolitics, Peace, and Traditions of Toponomy

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The Baltic Region has traditionally and continues to be a crossroads for land based trade, marine commerce, frequent boundary changes, past geographical naming dynamics, and territorial acquisitions. Those activities have influenced geopolitics, peace, and toponyms within the region. The geopolitics of post World War II for the region were polarized in ideology, but they also represented a peaceful period. A major geopolitical transition in post World War II Europe was the change from Soviet domination beginning in 1989 to full independence for the region's eastern Soviet Socialist countries by 1992. Not all was peaceful, and the the balkanization of the former Yugoslavia was accompanied by considerable military and ethnic conflict. Those regional conflicts were followed in 2014 in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine were territorial claims, ethnic separation of the population, and geopolitical influence merged. Geopolitical stabilizing actions by the European Union, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and United Nations helped contain the catastrophic regional conflicts from spreading. In the Baltic Region, the political stability and lengthy, peaceful contemporary period attracted refugees to Baltic countries from the regions of conflict. While the toponomy of the region has undergone changes, many of those geographical name changes occurred in the distant past. With regard to marine names, various sources refer to more than 14 hydronyms used for different surface areas within the contextual Baltic Sea Region. In contrast to the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* geographical naming issue, which remains unresolved, the Baltic has seen resolution of naming issues within its geopolitical context.

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1. Introduction

The Baltic represents a region on Earth that has gone through tumultuous times for over 1000 years. However, the 21st century exemplifies geopolitical stability, peace in both internal and external respects, and considerable agreement on the toponyms used for the Baltic Sea waters. In this paper I will begin with a review of the geopolitical events that led, with some major interruptions such as world wars, to a quite stable political condition in the region. Then I will examine the conditions that were in part responsible for a lengthy period of peace both between countries and within countries. Thirdly, I will examine the geopolitics and the period of peace to their influence on the geographical naming of the Baltic Sea waters.

2. Geopolitics: turning points in the Baltic

The maps of the Baltic Region from the 1600s to more modern cartographic renderings are similar to other regions of Europe. Countries are on the map during one period, but disappear from the map during another period. Territorial acquisition, annexation, and loss due to the spoils of war represent a vivid reality through cartography. Mapping and territorially defined borders in Europe gained increased recognition in 1648 with the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia, thus ending the 30years war. The treaty officially recognized the legal existence of the nation state with specific territorial boundaries. The emerging concept of nation states gradually transferred territorial control from feudal lords to the control of central governments that were ruled by absolute monarchs in nearly all cases. The treaty gave people the legal right to exercise territorially based sovereignty and resulted in the establishment approximately 200 independent political units in Europe. Territorial control became the key requirement for participation in geopolitics after 1648. Territorial units came under the control of official governments that had the exclusive rights to negotiate with regard to military conflicts, treaties, and conventions of commerce, including tariffs and taxes as expressions of self-determination.

The principle of self-determination evolved from the Treaty of Westphalia, and expanded through both military and trade policies enforced by governments. Subsequent to the Treaty, maps of Europe reflected both the role of power and the role

of commerce. The geopolitical maps of countries over the next four centuries were similar to amoeba, appearing, expanding, contracting, disappearing, and reappearing. Geopolitical territories and geographical names were subject to the decisions of cartographic scholars and political aspirants who used the names on maps to represent political power and territorial controls. The consequences are well known in historical accounts that display the changing geopolitical face of Europe well into the 21st century.

The geopolitical attention and geographical naming also focused on the Baltic Region following the 1648 Teatey of Westphalia. Countries emerged on the maps, often as monarchies. Sweden, Norway, Denmark, the Commonwealth of Lithuania and Poland are examples. Several of those countries, Sweden for example, continue to recognize their monarchies as symbols of their geopolitical past.

In the 21st century, the Baltic Sea Region is comprised of countries that recognize the historical and economic importance of the sea they share. The activities in the region that result in research, marine planning, and jurisdiction involve governments and non-governmental organizations. International initiatives are often pursued by organizations, such as the Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment (SCOPE), a member organization of the International Council of Science (ICSU). Those initiatives and the problems they address often cross borders and ocean jurisdictions. The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission, also known as the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) is a non-governmental organization that collaborates with SCOPE. It goal is to provide discussion and action points that will result in a stable geopolitical region and the common reliance of the countries bordering the Baltic Sea. The intended outcomes of the initiatives vary greatly in scale. The largest is the Action Plan by the European Union. It relies on international collaboration and cooperation among EU member countries who border the Baltic Sea (Nordic Centre for Spatial Development (NORDREGIO), 2009). The Action Plan is designed to make the Baltic Region:

- an environmentally sustainable place
- a prosperous place
- an accessible and attractive place, and
- a safe and secure place.

Visions and Strategies (VSAB Committee on Spatial Development, 2010) have proposed a Long-Term Perspective for the Territorial Development of the Baltic Sea Region. It includes:

- Promoting urban networking and urban-rural cooperation;
- Improving internal and external accessibility; and
- Enhancing maritime spatial planning and management.

The geopolitical attention given to the Baltic Sea Region is impressive in two ways. First, the view of the Baltic as a marine sanctuary commonly shared by all countries bounded by the waters of the Baltic has attained a level of acceptance in the region. This does not mean that traditional geopolitical concerns are abated. The news reports from the region regularly express the residuals of Soviet Era Russification on the political futures of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. At the same time, the general acceptance of large numbers of political refugees into several of the Baltic countries represents a humane and open acceptance within the region. The Baltic Region is viewed by refugees as a peaceful and safe place compared to their countries of origin at the time.

Second, Baltic Sea provides a common focus, especially in the scientific, economic, and environmental interests. The number of organizations that are engaged in researching and reporting on the Baltic Sea Region is substantial. Research groups nearly always include members from every Baltic Sea country. The activities represents an investment in the future geopolitical stability of the region through their common marine interests. What is good for the Baltic Sea is good for all countries that border its waters. In geopolitical theory, such an involvement should result in international stability in the region.

Scientific research and economic and environmental protection activities are sponsored by the supra-national European Union, as well as by nationally based agencies and non-governmental organizations. Most of the organizations reflect the need to collaborate on the big issues that are being addressed, and there are examples where the coordinated, collarborative enagement is put to practice. One such project is the international SCOPE Project's attention to the quality of the maritime environment that engages all the stakeholders to participate through the International

Council of Science (ICSU). While multinational initiatives are challenging to organize, non-governmental agencies that address mutual concerns have been effective in the Baltic Region.

Three conditions shared among the countries which represent historical and contemporary foundations for the geopolitical future of the region are:

- Recognition of geopolitical integrity (Westphalian Ideals) since 1991;
- Regional bonding based on the Baltic Sea as the shared, significant geographic feature for all countries; and
- A transition in thinking from strictly geopolitical issues to geoecological issues regarding the sustainability of the Baltic Sea under the auspices of the European Union and the Baltic Sea countries.

3. Peace: a civic expectation

Europe, during the past 70 years has enjoyed the longest period of peace in its modern history. The exception to the revailing peaceful times was Southeast Europe, specifically the former Yugoslavia, in the mid-1990s as balkanization resulted in military conflict, territorial aggression, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, and economic turmoil. The Russia Republic is another exception to the period of peace. The Russian Republic, which borders on the Baltic Sea in the west, was the dominant political and military power in the Soviet Union's Socialist European bloc. Following dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, there was armed conflict between the Russian government and ethnic groups in southern Russia, and military conflict with Georgia. The more recent conflict in Eastern Ukraine and the territorial annexation of Crimea from Ukraine to Russia have raised concerns and caution in the Baltic Region regarding ethnic and cultural territorial markers as a reason for territorial annexation by Russia. Conflict avoidance within the region has been a major objective of the European Union, which has used the negotiating table to avoid aggression between or among countries.

On the one hand, in Europe has enjoyed a substantial period of peace since 1945. On the other hand, the 1945-1991 period was not one of freedom or democracy for the Soviet Socialist Eastern European countries that share the Baltic Sea. Soviet

domination of Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and the German Democratic Republic prevented them from engaging in a post-World War II political and economic recovery that were enjoyed by western European countries. Since 1991, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Baltic Sea countries have reinstated independence with no extraordinary conditions to their sovereignty. They have entered into collaborative, peaceful initiatives among themselves and with other countries in the region.

Why has peace been prevalent in the Baltic Sea Region since the end of World War II? Traditional power theory would cite the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Warsaw Pact, fears of mutual destruction by super powers (the United States and the Soviet Union), the Cold War armaments race, global pacifist movements, and others. An argument could be made for each of those. However, as with the Treaty of Westphalia, it seems there are antecedents to the post 1945 conditions in the Baltic Sea Region and the subsequent 70 year enduring period of peace.

What has transpired in the Baltic Sea Region that led to a period of peacefulness that continues unabated in the 2015? One can return as a starting point to the 1795 essay by Immanuel Kant entitled, *To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (Kant, 2003). The essay by Kant has been a point of discussion by scholars of peace studies, social scientists, theologians, and policy makers since it was penned and published (Kleingeld, 2006). The premise for the essay is that a republican (synonymous with democracy) form of government for each country in a region is the only means to achieve a true peace among countries. Kant proposed only when countries are members of multi-national, voluntary unions are they able to promote and sustain peace. Member countries of such multinational organizations must respect human rights, not only of their own citizens but also of people from other countries. There are other points of view. Economists, for example, have argued that democratic principles are less important that economic stability and opportunity between and among countries. However, if we pursue Kant's ideas, then the respect for human rights of all members of the global society is a strong value among the governments of most countries in the Baltic Region.

If Kant's ideas are applied to the Baltic Sea Region currently, then several interesting parallels between what was proposed in the 1795 essay and what has transpired may be observed. At the end of World War II, the future peace had four

components: 1) disarmament/occupation of Germany and reparations and/or territorial changes in Italy, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Finland; 2) industrial and social recapitalization of Western Europe; 3) Soviet political, economic, and military control of the Eastern European Bloc; and 4) the containment of territorial expansion along the Iron Curtain.

Underlying Kant's theory of peace is the idea that a powerful country intends to prevent other countries from participating in the decision making process, and to obtain the passive agreement by those countries to proposed conditions of territory, borders, resources, and societal livelihood. Those conditions were a dichotomy for eastern and western Europe until 1989. Western Europe at the end of World War II applied the Kantian concept of union to the basic steps leading to the Europen Union. The power of republican governance to promote peace among countries is a hallmark of the European Union (EU). Founded on economic principles beginning with BeNeLux (Belgium Netherlands Luxembourg) in 1944, peace has been a significant product of participation in the European Union. . Membership in the EU requires that a country guarantee democracy to its citizens, govern by rule of law, extend full respect for basic human rights and the protection of minorities gainst discrimination, and establish a market economy.   The European Union member countries in the Baltic Sea Region enjoy the benefits of both peace and representative government. For the longer established countries that practice democratic forms of governance as well as the post 1991 newly democratic countries, the applications of democracy and union expressed by Kant two centuries ago are in practice..

An outbreak of hostilities between democratically governed countries is always possible. In a review of the Baltic Sea Region, Maciejewski (2002) and colleagues cited an interesting difference in settling conflicts between countries with democratic and non-democratic (autocratic) governments. To quote Maciejewski:

The point is that democracies can handle even serious disagreement when dealing with other democracies without resorting to arms. One example might be the territorial dispute between Sweden and Denmark in 1982, concerning the status of a small island (Hesselo) located between the two countries. The

interest in the issue was heightened by the belief that the seabed in the disputed area might contain valuable mineral resources. This conflict was resolved without any references to military power or use of coercive measures.

In contrast, the dispute between democratic Great Britain and the military dictatorship of Argentina over the Falkland/Malvinas Islands in the South Atlantic resulted in war the same year (p. 456).

To provide examples and corollaries is never simple, and the two sides in a disagreement are seldom entirely right or wrong. It is nearly always a matter of degrees on one side or the other of an issue in question. However, the evidence is that functional democracies are more willing and capable of discussing and negotiating their differences in favor of peaceful solutions, than are non-democratic countries.

There are four conditions attached to the maintenance of peace since World War II in the Baltic Sea Region:

- Commitment to democratic governance post 1945 by Baltic Sea countries west of the Iron Curtain;
- Security provided by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to democratic governments in countries not dominated by the Soviet Union;
- The post World War II economic and social recapitalization under the expanding role of the European Union and its predecessor organizations; and
- Civic knowledge that unleashed modern warfare has terrible consequences for humanity and results in the destruction in countries involved in military conflict.

4. Toponyms: reflections on geopolitics and peace

Three aspects of geographical naming in the Baltic Sea Region are significant to consider, which do not delve deeply into toponyms and geographical naming issues. The three that deserve special attention are: 1) a regional-cultural recognition that a toponym means different things to different cultural groups in the region; 2) the Baltic Sea has had the same overarching name with considerable stability and agreement for a lengthy period; and 3) the Baltic Sea has no fewer than 14 hydronyms used for different surface areas. Each of those points complements the prior reflections on

geopolitics and peace. They also suggest a like–mindedness among Baltic peoples regarding the name of the sea that touches many national shores in the region. It also suggests that the lesser sea surface names give credence to national maritime surfaces and hydronyms that provide regional and national recognition regarding nearby maritime countries.

Figure 1. The Baltic marine environment hydronyms with the regions and basins of the Baltic Sea.

Note: 1. Bothnian Bay 2. Bothnian Sea 3. Archipelago Sea 4. Åland Sea 5. Gulf of Finland 6. Gulf of Riga 7. Northern Gotland Basin 8. Western Gotland Basin 9. Eastern Gotland Basin 10. Gdansk Basin 11. Bornholm Basin 12. Arkona Basin 13. The Sound 14. Belt Sea (partly shared by the Baltic Sea partly by the Kattegat) 15. Kattegat (no integral part of the Baltic Sea) 16. Skagerrak (no part of the Baltic Sea)

Source: http://www.baltic.vtt.fi/;
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baltic_Sea#/media/File:Baltic_Marine_subdivisions.gif

The Baltic Sea was known by different names during Medieval times. Evidence of the etymology of the name ranges from Viking mythology to modern Baltic languages. It provides a glimpse into the complexity of a hydronym that is quite placid on the surface, but has strong undercurrents of both cultural and regional characteristics. There is considerable speculation regarding the origin of the name Baltic. The past hydronyms used for the sea included the *East Sea*, West Sea, and Baltic Sea. Each has been used in modern times.

Baltic Sea is the preferred international hydronym and spelling according to most sources for the overall sea surface. However, there are a diversity of hydronyms applied to lesser surface ares of the Baltic Sea. A marine map from 2014 reported 14 regional names that are used to refer to lesser surface areas of the Baltic Sea, or to natural basins that comprise the sea (Figure 1). The map does not represent all the names associated with the Baltic Sea, since maps from several countries continue to prefer the use of *East Sea* (Ostsee), especially for the near shore waters. While the context for the water body remains the Baltic Sea, the littoral countries often use local names for waters. The map (Figure 1), for example, does not include smaller bays and estuaries, such as the Narva Bay adjacent to Estonian and Russian shores in the southern Gulf of Finland.

There are no apparent disagreements regarding the name used to represent the water body among the countries that share the waters of the Baltic Sea. This appears to be the result of:

- Early agreement in the general use of the Baltic name beginning after 1600, with subsequent acceptance as the sea name. The wide acceptance of the name dates to the dominance of Sweden in the region, referring to it as Mare Nostrum Balticum ("Our Baltic Sea"). The use of the possessive "our" is interesting since it implies that Sweden owns the sea. While the English language lends itself to different interpretations derived from translation, it also raises the question of implied ownership of adjacent waters. However, the Baltic name does not imply Sea of Sweden, but the implied possessive "of" could be questioned in other instances of geographical naming.
- Representation and agreement by representative governments of Baltic countries about the sea name.

- Preponderance of republican, representative governments following World War I, and universal democratic participation after 1991.
- Overarching economic, environmental, and political cooperation regarding the sea and its access by all bordering countries.
- Cartographic practice in northern Europe that stabilized the name Baltic Sea on maps, charts, and in other published forms.

5. A brief comparison of contexts and names

The Baltic Sea and its multiple local names and littoral associations, but overall agreement on the single preferred Bering Sea name, is in contrast to the ongoing geographical naming issue in Northeast Asia. Paul Woodman (2009) referred to the sea between the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago as the sea of three endonyms: Dong Hae (Korean for *East Sea*), Nihon-kai (Japanese for *Sea of Japan*) and Yaponskoye More (Russian for Japanese Sea). The Koreans claim the historically validated name *East Sea* as the official name, and the Japanese claim the only internationally accepted name is the *Sea of Japan*, based on the 1928 International Hydrological Bureau Conference and subsequent report. This has resulted in a period of international tensions between South Korea and Japan that threatens the geopolitical stability of the northeast Asian region. What is different about the issue surrounding the Asian sea name from the Baltic Sea name in northern Europe?

- During the colonial period of Japanese occupation, the Koreans were denied participation in the 1928 International Hydrographic Bureau decisions adopting the name, *Sea of Japan*. There have been no similar denials of participation by countries with the Baltic Sea name during a comparable period.
- Cartographic evidence regarding the long-term use of the name *East Sea* is not recognized by Japan in geographical naming issue. Cartographic evidence regarding the Swedish use of the Baltic Sea has prevailed, although there is also reference to the Baltic waters as the *East Sea* (German) and West Sea (Estonian) as concurrent names.
- The Baltic Sea name does not carry the cultural and political effects of colonization and military occupation, as does the *Sea of Japan*.

- The emotive attachment of Koreans to the *East Sea* name is significant for cultural, national, and territorial reasons. A similar emotional attachment does not seem to prevail in the Baltic Sea Region. It is possible that the lesser sea surface hydronyms, such as demonstrated in Figure 1, capture the local littoral significance of the cultural and emotional attachment to the nearby waters.

6. Conclusion

The Baltic Sea geographical name is in contrast to geographical naming issue regarding the water body that is located between the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago. The latter naming issue has both a distant past as well as a more recent relevance to its context. The geographical naming of the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* is just one of many residual effects of the Japanese colonial and military occupation of the Korean Peninsula. The effects of a belligerent military period that ended in 1945 left a record of slave labor, violations of human rights, and the attempted cultural eradication of the language, art, and values of the Korean population. The *Sea of Japan* name is a constant reminder of misdeeds that were committed during the colonial period. Those legacies of the colonial period in Northeast Asia are embedded within the geographical naming issue. There is no comparable political tension with the Baltic Sea geographical name. The aftermath of World War II did not reach its final closure until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, when democratic government was reinstated in the former Soviet Bloc countries in the Baltic Region. Since 1991 the countries of the Baltic Sea Region have devoted attention to the environmental issues that are common concerns throughout the sea basin. Discussions of sustainability, collaborative marine research, and rules of conduct regarding the use of the Baltic Sea, its islands, and near shore environments have been the focus. Democratic countries resolving differences and reaching mutually beneficial solutions have been the desired outcome. The context for the Baltic is different from that faced by the Republic of Korea and Japan. However, there are observations and lessons regarding the behavior of democratically governed countries, presented as a theory in Kant's 1795 essay. The resolution of the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* issue as either concurrent geographical names on geospatial print and electronic media or the mutually agreed designation of a new name will require discussions at the

highest levels of democratic government. Once the geographical name is resolved, the Republic of Korea and Japan will put one of the many residuals of the 20th century colonial period to rest. They can then focus attention on resolving other important issues that will result in peace and harmony in Northeast Asia (Stoltman, 2014).

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