13 Networking in the Baltic: The ‘Kieler Modell’¹

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GERMANY AND THE BALTIC REGION

Before the Second World War the German province of East Prussia extended beyond present day Kaliningrad to the borders of Russia. After the First World War some land in the east had been lost to the newly created state of Lithuania and the province was cut off from the rest of Prussia and Germany by a strip of Polish territory known as the Danzig corridor. The Baltic States had been conquered and converted by the German monastic military orders of the Knights of the Sword and the Teutonic Knights from the thirteenth century to the fifteenth century. The Old Prussians from whom the German state derived its name were in fact eradicated during this process of forcible conversion. The result was first a German domination of Baltic trade in the mediaeval period through the Hanseatic cities and later the emergence of the militarily and economically advanced Prussian state along the shores of the Baltic. Before the Second World War, Königsberg, the capital of Prussia, was a flourishing university city with a population of over a quarter of a million. During the war over 90 per cent of the city was destroyed by bombing and shelling, and in 1945 its population was driven out and replaced by Russians. Königsberg’s fate is typical of that of the whole of East Prussia which disappeared from the post-war map. The territory was divided between Poland and Russia.

After the First World War the Baltic states Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia were granted independence. On the eve of the Second World War Hitler abandoned them and their German-speaking citizens to the Soviet Union, and most of the Germans were forced in 1940 to leave their homes and to resettle in the newly conquered Polish territories further west. Some came back to their homelands in the ranks of the invading German army one year later, but had to leave again in 1945 as the Soviet Army once again took over the Baltic states. At the end of the war those who had settled in the former Polish territories were once again forced to move further west and many then emigrated to America or Canada. The five-hundred-year German presence in these countries has now ended, but memories of the Germans remain and so, of course, do their buildings and cities, but now occupied by a different population.
The Situation After the Second World War

For fifty years after the war the territories to the east of the former German Federal Republic, the German Democratic Republic, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, remained firmly under the control of the Soviet Union. They were run by loyal communist party officials whose gaze was focused on Moscow, with the result that their countries had little contact with each other. Lines of communication and trade were for the most part with Russia, and their economies were distorted to meet the needs of Russia with the emphasis on heavy industry rather than commerce. The infrastructure and in particular the road and rail links with the West were neglected. Agriculture degenerated badly under collectivization and a great deal of damage was done to the environment. Both the German and Jewish minorities in these countries had disappeared and there was little scope for the cultivation of national culture and identity. In any case, there had been massive shifts of population so that many of the people now living in a particular area had no roots there whatsoever. Of all the Baltic states only Estonia, thanks to its close proximity to Finland, had any access to Western culture.

The Situation After 1989

After the unification of Germany and within a year or so of the collapse of the Soviet empire it now became possible to think again of the Baltic as an area that had once been united by a common maritime culture, where Germans had once played a dominant role. It was even possible to dream of rebuilding that unified culture, but there still remained a strong danger of fragmentation arising from the petty national rivalries between the newly liberated former communist states. Certainly the German government was aware quickly both of the dangers and the opportunities presented by the new situation in the Baltic. The trading potential is huge. Approximately 50 million people inhabit the area and the majority live in cities with a population of at least 50000. There are 49 cities with populations of over 100000, and 76 significant sea ports. On the other hand the Baltic area contains sharp divisions between haves and have-nots. There are huge differences in GDP between the former soviet states and the Western countries. Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Germany are all in the 20000 USD per capita bracket, in contrast to Poland, Russia, and the three Baltic republics which have GDP per capita of 5000 to 6000 USD. Lithuanian workers have monthly wages of around 30 USD, whereas Estonian and Latvians receive 60–65 USD and Russian levels are around 100 USD. Polish workers earn 170 USD, but in Sweden, Denmark and Germany wages are often over 3000 USD a month. Environmental problems such as the pollution of the major rivers and the disposal of radioactive waste remain a major issue, as does