



THE EMERGENCE AND DECLINE OF ETHNIC MINORITIES IN BALTIC BORDERLANDS

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The purpose of the paper is to discuss the emergence and decline of national and/or ethnic minorities in the borderlands around the Baltic Sea. The socio-political development of ethnic groups is seen as a result of different influencing factors: The territorial history, the change of state borders and population groups plus relations beyond the state territory. Several criteria were found to determine the development, non-development or decay of national allegiance. The change, establishment or eradication of state boundaries, the ethnic cleansing of areas, mostly for the sake of “nation-state” homogeneity, the assimilation of a potential ethnic group into the majority population, and the non-emergence of a national movement.

Keywords: Baltic Sea Region, border, ethnicity, language, minority, population, territory.

Introduction

The borderlands of the Baltic Sea Region¹ show a number of different ethnic minorities ranging from recognized and protected peoples to groups of disputed and vague characteristics. It also encompasses a number of small language groups and even formerly large languages in stages of dissolution, as well as landscapes of language extinction (Lundén 1993, 2006).

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the emergence and decline of national and/or ethnic minorities in the borderlands around the Baltic Sea, and in some cases the assimilation of an ethno-linguistic minority into the majority population.

The definition of minority is problematic. There is a sliding scale from recent immigrant minorities over autochthonous, recognized groups into area of ethnic extinction. The sociopolitical development of ethnic groups (however defined) will be a result of different influencing factors:

- The, territorial history, régime(s) and majority population of the state of domicile;
- The change of state borders and expulsion and resettlement of population;

¹ In this article, the Baltic Sea Region is approximately defined as the catchment area of all rivers and tributaries flowing into the Baltic Sea in its extension from Northern Finland and Sweden to its outlet into the North Sea (including all of Finland, Eastern Sweden, North-Western Russia, Western Belarus, all of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, North-Eastern Germany, Eastern Jutland and the Danish islands).

- Power and market relations within and beyond the state territory, especially with ethnic kin-states.

The nationality policies of the state in which they lived during different régimes had a strong impact on the development of minority consciousness. Changes of territorial borders caused ethnic cleansing, while potential linguistic or religious minorities with a weak social basis never developed into a self-definition of ethnic minority.

There is a plethora of literature on the rise of nationalism as a basis for the definition of territorial states. The relation between “nation-states” and kin-ethnicities in other states has been discussed in several works. Less attention has been paid to the development of ethnic groups into self-ascription as minorities or their disappearance. In the present borderlands of the states around the Baltic Sea, there are groups that in some cases developed as recognized “national minorities”, in other cases either disappeared physically as a result of ethnic cleansing, or were assimilated into the majority ethnicity. After an introductory discussion of concepts, the relation between minority ascription and a number of influencing factors will be analyzed. Some cases of minority status in the Baltic Borderlands will then be discussed, and finally some conclusions will be drawn as to the factors influencing the development of Baltic border minorities.

Some introductory definitions

Border, in British English, refers to an *area*. *Webster's New Encyclopaedic Dictionary* adds, “A border is that part of a surface lying along its boundary line” (*Webster's New Encyclopaedic Dictionary* 1993; Lundén 2004). In American English, the boundary of an independent state is usually referred to as a border, while the area along the demarcation line is called a borderland. Boundary, in this paper, refers to a distinction that may be both spatial and cultural.

Identity is a word with several meanings. In an old standard dictionary of concepts, *Roget's Thesaurus*, identity is under the section “Relation: Absolute Relation”. The following concepts related to identity are mentioned: *sameness, homogeneity, unity, coincidence, coalescence*. Identity clearly reflects some relation. But in our meaning of the word, identity is not sameness, but the fact that people refer themselves to a group of people or to an organization to which they think, or say, they belong. This group of people could be – a people, but also to a religious group, a class (in the Marxist or the school sense of the word) or just a network of individuals with the same interests, e.g. radio amateurs or Esperantists. This type of group identity is strongly facilitated by the existence of a set of speech norms understood by all members of the group, but the formation of an ethnic group can rest on other forms of identification, e.g. religion.

Ethnicity, as discussed by Fredrik Barth, is an ascription into a group of some perceived homogeneity, but most social scientists now see this ascription as a result of information and indoctrination rather than a primordial difference in relation to non-members (Barth 1969, 1994; Migdal 2004). Often ethnic group denotes a weaker

self-image than a “people” (in German *Volk*) or a “nation”, in the cultural definition of this misused word. Nation here means a group of people who regard themselves a nation that forms, or should form, a state (the “Kulturnation” concept) and not the French and US American definition where nation and state seem to converge.

The definition of a *minority* is problematic, and there is no such definition in International Law or in the Law of the United Nations (Ermacora 1988). Felix Ermacora cites the definition given by Francesco Capotorti, special reporter of the United Nations, in 1979:

“Minority means a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members – being nationals of the State – possess ethnic, religious or <...> characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion, or language” (Ermacora 1998: 43).

The Council of European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages defines the concept of “regional or minority languages” as:

1. traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State’ population; and
- 2a. different from the official language(s) of that State;
 - this does not include either dialects of the official language(s) of the State or the languages of migrants;
- 2b. “territory in which the regional or minority language is used” refers to the geographical area in which the said language is the mode of expression of a number of people justifying the adoption of the various protective and promotional measures provided for in this Charter (Council of Europe 1992: 2).

In the Swedish official investigation for recognising minorities and minority languages, (Statens offentliga utredningar 1997), the rule of thumb for the definition of minority is at least 100 years. In the Estonian contribution to Council of Europe publications on demographic characteristics of immigrant populations and national minorities, the authors discuss this distinction, particularly important in Latvia and Estonia because of a number of cases of forced migration and resettlement. In essence the difference used is in the demographic turnover of Estonia from a country of emigration (i.e. around the first independence in 1920 up to 1940) to a receiver of immigration. The ethnic and linguistic groups living in the country before this turnover, and still remaining, would then be regarded as autochthonous national minorities, while late-comers will be classed as immigrants of foreign origin. The scholars report considerable demographic and social differences between these groups (Katus *et al.* 2000, 2002). In the case of Estonia and Latvia, this distinction is crucial, as almost the whole group of native Russian speakers consists of people and descendants of immigrants to the area during the time of the Soviet occupation, with the exception of autochthonous speakers in Letgallia, in the Eastern Latvian borderlands.

Another aspect of minority definition is that of *religion*. While the most frequent ascription of minority status is related to language, some groups use religion as a strong marker of ethnicity. In the case of Poland, the political subordination of Polish-

speakers during the “long 19th century” and during the Communist authoritarianism meant an association of “Polishness” with the Catholic church (Davies 2001: 300), in turn resulting in the “ethnic delimitation” towards Protestant, Jewish and Orthodox speakers of native Polish. In Poland, ethnicity is strongly tied to religion, so that native speakers of Polish with Evangelical Protestant religions were seen and referred to as “Germans” (Kossert 2002; Wedel 2010: 31–32). There is thus a divide in religion, not only in denomination, but also in the social and nation-forming role of the church (Marody, Mandes 2008: 10–12). In other cases, a religious practice deviating from the surroundings may have helped to preserve an ethnic-linguistic distinction, as in the cases of the Catholic Sorbs and the Orthodox Setu, perhaps also the Karaites (see below).

Territory and population

In countries regarded as “nation states”, one majority group defines the language, the nation and the symbols of the state. States may, however, recognise the existence of “national minorities”. The criteria for what is defined as a national minority differ from one state to the other. It can be based on self-ascription (a more sociological definition, sometimes called cultural nationalism) or by rules of descent (as in the former Soviet Union (SU)). Certain states, particularly France and Turkey, vehemently deny the existence of national minorities on the grounds, e.g. that “all citizens are equal”, a purely legalistic definition (Ermacora 1988: 40). This principle of state nationalism thus sees equal treatment, according to majority culture and language as the democratic goal, irrespective of the fact that autochthonous groups of other cultures and languages will have to adapt to that treatment, at least in official relations with their state of domicile.

The state boundary is rarely, perhaps never, an absolute limit between individuals with totally different histories, cultures and opinions. Minorities characteristically inhabit boundary areas. Often they were the residuals when boundaries were drawn according to “ethnic criteria”. In most parts of Europe, different ethnic groups used to live interspersed, often playing different economic and professional roles, and using several different languages in their contacts with the other groups. In areas of this type, a spatially distinct ethnic boundary would be impossible. Very often minorities will remain on both sides.

Power and market

The most visible type of organisation in modern society is the political. By *political* organisation we mean an organisation having authoritative competence, i.e. it has (been given) the power to regulate conditions within a certain subject area or/and territory (Easton 1968). The power is usually *defined*, both in terms of the content of its authority as to its spatial extent (Lundén 2004: 44–45). This definition includes regulation of official and standardised language(s), of national symbols and often educational indoctrination.

There is, however, a marked contrast to another type of organisation, the *market*, defined as the free exchange of goods and services. With this definition, the market is borderless. The “Free Market” is of course a fiction as it presupposes a number of conditions that hardly, or rarely, exist. One such precondition is *homo economicus*, an individual who in each situation chooses what is best for him or her, but at the same time acts totally without power. Some theorists argue that the market, even commercial companies internally, show many of the characteristics of political organisations (Lindblom 1977); while others, for example, representatives of the public-choice school, argue that authoritative decisions are made by individuals on an economic market (Olson 2000). Obviously, some commodities and utilities have a vague or open access and are difficult to confine/contain both in relation to their positive and negative repercussions. One part of this is the classical “tragedy of the commons” (Keohane, Ostrom 1995). This question contains a spatial (geographical) and chronological (historical) problem of scale. Is it the individual that is supposed to act in his self-interest or is it the family, the clan, the ethnic group, the company, the region or perhaps “the nation”? Is it for the future or perhaps “for eternity”? The relation between ethnic group and national allegiance will have an impact on market functions, particularly in borderlands.

Society, with its mixture of markets and regulations, functions through *communication*, the distribution and exchange of information between different individuals and groups. Communication is often organised, directed and structured, according to political and market rules, but also according to present technology. One of the most important means of communication is *language*. Through communication in the form of language and symbols there is a mediation and reproduction of common evaluations of behaviour and attitudes, *culture*. And before this plethora of facts and ideas stands the reflecting, acting, indivisible human being.

Another type of limitation, which is important but intricate, is the relation between knowledge and prejudice. The picture we have of the environment is a landscape of attraction and repulsion and large areas of “white spots and black holes” that may neither have a positive nor a negative meaning. The individual domain of knowledge is a complicated mixture of different impressions, some of which are direct, others being mediated. Communication between the individual and the surrounding society (in a very wide sense) plays an important role. At a state boundary it is reasonable to suppose that the intake of knowledge concerning the “own” and “the other” country is uneven, both in quantitative and qualitative terms (Reynolds, McNulty 1968). However, among minorities the identification with the “own” and “the other” may differ considerably from that of the majority. Minorities may form networks over-arching the political boundaries, sometimes making use of differences in the regulations of the territorial states and its results on the markets.

Individuals and their situation

In the everyday life of most people and under ordinary conditions, acts, contacts and movements are a mixture of individual decisions, biological necessities and involuntary

acts, imposed either by the State and its organizations, or by “social compulsion”, e.g. family matters and cultural norms. Different people have different needs and desires but also different constraints in fulfilling their chores and wishes. We can speak about *the reach*, the individual range of contacts and movements, usually centred on the home (Buttimer 1978). But we can also speak of homogenizing and nearness principles, the first uniting kin or similarity e.g. common ethnicity irrespective of distance, the other obviously based on proximity:

“Every large group of human beings is subjected to a tension between two principles of integration we may conveniently call the *territorial* and the *functional* modes. In the territorial mode of integration *nearness* is the supreme category and therefore thinking, loyalty and action become highly place-bound. Conflicts arise across geographical boundaries between neighbouring groups. In the functional mode of integration <...> *similarity* is the supreme category. Thinking, loyalty and action become of a ‘non-place’ kind and unite what is similar in function over wide geographical areas. Critical boundaries emerge between interest groups, whether these are made up of subsets of the population or of professionals in competing sectors” (Hägerstrand 1986: 8; see also Waack 2000).

Different groups, and especially minorities, may form different networks creating separate “regions”, but within each group there will also be different networks depending on the type of action or communication, e.g. economical, regulation, social or cultural (Schack 2000: 204ff.). But different types of individual and joint projects have to fit into the time and space restrictions of the individual lifelines, and different types of networks therefore influence each other (Hägerstrand 1975; Lundén 2001).

The socio-economic role of minorities

Whatever the definition, ethnic minorities almost always differ from the majority population in socio-economic status, demographic characteristics and spatial distribution.

Spatial distribution: contemporary minorities in the Baltic Sea Region characteristically inhabit borderlands. The boundary areas of Denmark-Germany, part of Sweden’s land and river boundaries with Norway and Finland as well as the borderlands between Belarus, Lithuania and Poland are areas of multi- or unilateral minorities, mostly of the neighbour state (“kin-state”) nationality. Russia’s Western borderlands and their adjacent cross-border neighbourhoods were areas of multiple ethnicities before the Second World War, and partly also today. Poland’s North-Eastern and Western territories as well as the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad were populated by German or pro-German populations before the War, and now these areas of Poland have a population of Polish, partly also of Ukrainian and Belarusian origin (*Atlas Narodov Mira* 1964: 16; Mogocsi 2002). The major cities also have ethnically mixed populations, but these are usually not autochthonous, and will not be considered here. There are also minorities with a specific riparian distribution, particularly the Swedish-speaking population of Finland and (formerly) Estonia but also the few remaining Livian speakers on the Northern tip of Riga Bay in Latvia. The areas of Low German speech have, or had, a distribution along the riparian lowlands of Northern

Germany from the Netherlands via the Danish-German borderlands to the Polish border (formerly into East Prussia) (Oeter, Walker 2006).

Demographic characteristics: In the Baltic Sea area, autochthonous minorities usually represent ageing populations. Assimilation into the majority population often occurs through mixed marriages and there is often a high propensity to emigration among minorities, something characteristic of young adults.

Socio-economic status: Baltic Sea area minorities form very varied socio-economic segments of the population. Historically, especially in the Eastern parts of the area, different minorities performed different socio-economic roles. In the Baltic territories of the Russian empire the Germans formed the landed aristocracy and the academics, Russians the administration and military (but higher officers were often of foreign origin some generations back), while the autochthonous population (including local ethnic Swedes and Livians) were peasants and fishermen. Industrialisation created an ethnic mixture of rural “natives” and migrant Russians. Jews from the former Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth entered the towns as merchants, shop-keepers and, when admitted into the universities, academics and physicians. In doing this, they often changed their Yiddish speech into that of the dominating territorial power.

Finland-Sweden: two different cases of minority status

In Finland, the Swedish speaking population was favoured by the official use of Swedish language during the time Finland was a Grand Duchy under the Russian tsar and until Finnish was introduced on par with Swedish in 1886. The Swedish-speakers had a split socio-economic structure with a majority of peasants and fishermen but an important minority of high rank administrators, landed gentry and intellectuals in the capital. With the increasing emancipation of the Finnish speakers, the latter group has relatively decreased, and much of the working-class “Swedes” of the Helsinki area were either assimilated into Finnish or moved upwards into the middle classes (Al-lardt, Starck 1981: 166–199). While linguistically being distinct (but often bilingual), Finland Swedes usually regard themselves as Finlanders, and keep a loyalty to their homeland. Formally Swedish is one of the state languages of Finland, albeit under attack from populist parties.

The Finnish-speaking minority of North-Eastern Sweden west of the Torne River for a long time represented a poor, mainly peasant population characterized by religious austere Lutheranism or political extremism (so-called crofter communism) and for Sweden extremely high birth rates. Because of a high outward migration, especially of young females, many women came over from the relatively even poorer Finnish side of the boundary river, and there was also an influx of Finns to the relatively nearby mining areas of Kiruna and Malmborget. In the later part of the 20th century the Finland side has developed more quickly than the local Swedish side. The influx of Finns has changed into a return of Northern Finns to their home region after a working life in Sweden, but many settle in Sweden, especially in the border town of Haparanda, where housing is cheaper while they are still within reach of their homesteads.

The Finnish ethnic group is thus highly divided and vague, also because of a lack of ethnic consciousness of the autochthonous Torne valley population of Sweden (Elenius 2001; Lundén 2004).

When the boundary between Sweden and the Grand Duchy of Finland under the Russian tsar was delineated in 1809, it left a large slice of the Finnish-speaking area within Sweden's borders. In this area, Finnish was used in local schools and churches up until the 1880s. Thereafter, during the strengthening of nationalistic demands throughout Europe (which also resulted in, e.g. Russian attempts to russify Finland), the Finnish language was more or less ousted from Sweden's official life, to be replaced by Swedish (Elenius 2001). The result today is that the whole local population of the area speaks Swedish, while a decreasing and ageing number also speaks Finnish, the original native language. The variety of Finnish spoken is, however, a combination of the old local river dialect of Finnish, added with Swedish words which are incorporated into the very different grammar structure of Finnish. This locally-spoken Finnish is an example of what Heinz Kloss (1952) terms a "wild dialect", that is, a version of the language which is unsupported by knowledge of or instruction in the standardized version of the same language. This accounts for a situation in which border residents on the Swedish side show different stages of bilingualism, ranging from standard Finnish to no Finnish at all. Politically, on the Finland side the local river dialect "tornion murre" was developed into a closer relation to standard Finnish while in Sweden the same speech changed into a "wild dialect" unofficially called Meänkieli, "Our tongue". In the late 20th century, and after a long public denial of the value of the dialect, a small but vociferous group called for a formal split between standard Finnish and the local version, "Meänkieli" to be recognized as a minority language in its own right and "Tornedalians" as a minority.

After an extremely strange "remiss" process, that is an official request for opinions about a government proposal (Persson, Messing 1999: 143), the proponents of Meänkieli convinced the Ministry of Culture to propose to the Parliament the "split version" thereby establishing a new "language" developed with state subsidies with a standard grammar, lexicon, etc. (Lundén 2011; for diverging views on the language question see Hansegård 2000; Winsa 1997). The process of making Swedes out of Finns took about 100 years. Even today, in an open society, not everybody there realizes that it is perfectly possible to be Finnish-speaking and loyal to Sweden, just the way Finland Swedes are loyal to their homeland Finland and at the same time, to their Swedish mother tongue (Lundén, Zalamans 2001).

Minorities along the borders of the Russian Empire

For Imperial Russia and the SU, the formation of the Baltic states (including Finland) as recognized by the Tartu Peace in February 1920 meant a considerable loss of territory mostly inhabited by the new state-forming nationalities, but with considerable minorities of Germans, Russians and of Christian and Jewish minority religion(s) plus Poles and Belarusians (in Latvia) and Swedes (in Estonia). Only in the case of some of

the Russian speakers there were areas of ethnic territorial domination, namely in the Eastern parts of Estonia and Latvia. Most of the minority groups were given cultural and linguistic autonomy in Estonia and Latvia, but political activity was curtailed during the increasingly authoritarian regimes of the 1930s.

Finland and Russia have a long history of shifting boundaries and mutual language influence. On both sides, in Karelia, there was a population speaking Karelian, a dialect or even language related to standard Finnish, plus small linguistic islands of *Vepsian*, another Finno-Ugric language, spoken only on the Russian side (Pimenov 1965). This population was mainly Orthodox and partly russified. After the Soviet take-over of Finland's Eastern borderlands in 1940 and 1944, however, the newly annexed areas were re-populated with Russian speakers from various parts of the SU and the Karelian population fled to Finland (Hakamies 2006). One part of the area was attached to the Soviet Karelo-Finnish Republic (later degraded into the Autonomous Republic of Karelia). This particular area was officially bilingual (and in the inter-war period recruited Finns from Finland and North America), but because the resident Finns had been expelled and replaced by immigrating Russian speakers, the only remaining Finnish/Karelian and Vepsian speakers were in the areas east of the previous boundary, which is far from the present borderlands (Engman 1995). Finnish is no longer an official language of the Karelian Republic in Russia and the state boundary is an example of a total split between two mutually unintelligible languages.

The inner and a Southern part of the Gulf of Finland were populated by Finno-Ugric ethnic groups, *Votians* and *Ingrians*, which are more or less extinct as ethnic groups. During the Swedish reign in Ingria (from Narva at the present Estonian-Russian border up to Lake Ladoga, mainly in the 17th century) the area was settled by Finns who until recently formed a Finnish speaking minority, *inkerilaiset*, in the Leningrad Oblast' including the area east of Narva river that the Estonian SSR had to cede to the RSFSR in 1944–1945. Most of the remaining Finns left for Finland in the 1990's (Kurs 1994).

The Eastern areas of Southern Estonia and of Latvia near the Russian boundary have an ethno-linguistic setup deviating from standard speech and ethnicity. The Narva region, as mentioned, had several Finno-Ugric minorities as well as Russians during the first Estonian independence especially on the small slice of territory east of the Narva river that was annexed to the RSFSR in 1945 (Kurs 1994). In Estonia's Võru district a rather different dialect is spoken, sometimes launched as a language (Koreinik 2011; Raag 2010) and the Setu ethnic group living in the Petseri/Petchory area on the Russian border speak a similar dialect heavily influenced by their Orthodox faith and they now claim some recognition as an ethnic group (Assmuth 2011; Berg 1999; Kaiser, Nikiforova 2006). Latvia's Eastern province of Letgallia had long been characterized by an ethnically diverse population, consisting of Latvians speaking a dialect rather different from standard Latvian (Bengtsson 2001), plus minorities of Russians, Belarusians, Poles and Jews (most of whom were exterminated or fled during the Second World War). In all of this area, as well as in the major towns, there is a much larger population of immigrant Russians and other nationalities from other parts of the SU.

Border minorities of Poland Lithuania and East Prussian Germany after 1919

The aftermath of the First World War created a radical shift of territories, the (re) birth of “nationalising states” and plebiscites in ethnically mixed or questionable areas of the loosing states. Even with an “ethnic principle” in the delimitation of the new states, there were substantial ethnic minorities in all of the states of the Baltic Sea area. Unlike the multi-ethnic, multi-language and multi-religious Lithuania-Polish nobility Republic before its partition, Poland was now established as a “nationalising state” formed after the Polish nationality, partly in conflict with its border minorities, Germans and Ukrainians (Brubaker 1996: 85).

The territory was also contested. After a complicated War with the young Soviet State 1919–1921, in the peace of Riga of 1921, Poland was given Eastern areas of mixed Polish, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Lithuanian and Jewish population (see e.g. Skarbek, Żuchowska 2000). In spite of Lithuanian protests, Poland was also able to capture the Wilno/Vilnius area predominantly inhabited by people of Polish and Jewish ethnicity. In the Polish-Lithuanian conflict, ethnic and historical arguments were used against each other (Eriksonas 2006: 54–58). While Poland in the Wilno case referred to the mainly Polish-speaking population, Lithuania referred to Vilnius as the ancient capital of the Lithuanian State. Against the ethnic argument Lithuania also used the argument of autochthonous population with ethnographic maps to show the rural predominance of ethnic Lithuanians (Petronis 2007: 253–260). In the end Polish troops decided the case for the inter-war period, but in 1939 Lithuania received the Vilnius area, recognized by the USSR and by Poland after World War II (see below).

But language is not always the criteria for ethnic identification. In the case of the Masurian population in the area of East Prussia the language was obviously Polish by a linguistic definition, but the population was strongly Protestant. In the referendums of 1919 the local population voted almost unanimously in favour of Germany and, in the early 1930s, the area voted heavily for the National Socialist German Workers Party and given the choice after World War II, with few exceptions, they chose exodus to Western Germany (Kossert 2002).

Soviet geopolitics and its aftermath in the South-Eastern Baltic Sea area

The end of World War II created a new geopolitical landscape. In the South-Eastern part of the Baltic Sea area (i.e. the area South of Finland), the three Baltic States were (re-)integrated into the SU after their occupation and annexation in 1940. While Estonia and Latvia were forced to reduce its territory by giving land to the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), Lithuania gained territory at the expense of Poland, returning its capital to Vilnius. In the Potsdam Agreement of 1945, Poland in turn was compensated for the loss of Eastern territories given to the Belarusian and Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republics of the USSR (SU) by being given the

responsibility for the administration of Germany's former Eastern territories East of the Odra/Oder-Nysa/Neisse Rivers, with the exception of part of East Prussia which was annexed by the SU as an exclave of the RSFSR. The western areas put under Polish administration (and part of medieval Polish territories) were formally recognized as integral part of Poland by the former Allies and the two German states in 1990. All these territorial shifts involved immense expulsions and transfers of population and a significant change in the ethnic spatial distribution. Two ethnic groups were particularly affected by the 1939–1946 events: The Jews who were exterminated during Nazi German occupation and the Germans who were expelled.

In the borderlands of Lithuania, Belarus and Poland, a number of small ethnic minorities keep an emotional relation to languages more or less forgotten, mostly remnants of groups admitted to the area in the time of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: In its former territory the presence of a large Jewish population is visible in partly destroyed cemeteries in Hebrew and commemorating plaques in Yiddish. Tatars and Karaites have their own shrines, and a strong ethnic presence, partly as a tourist attraction, while the Roma form larger but socially weaker groups. While these group form networks of adherents in the neighbouring states, the Kashub (in Polish *Kaszub*) semi-language, a border language of Danzig and Poland in the inter-war period, is now appearing in Poland without ethnic pretensions (Maciejewski 1999; Janusz 2006).

Belarus has a considerable minority of Poles and Ukrainians and some Lithuanians, mostly concentrated on its Western and South-Western borderlands (National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus: Census 2009, for their traditional spatial distribution see e.g. *Atlas Narodov Mira* 1964: 16), since then large groups of minority origin have been urbanized, now mainly living in Minsk. On the other side of the boundary, Belarusian is mainly spoken and used by minorities in Poland (Holm-Hansen 1999). Poland and Lithuania have overlapping language minorities, and in spite of some formal difficulties, mainly because of the rigidity of state language legislation, the reciprocity calls for easier settlement of conflicts. In the Poland-Belarus case, however, the same situation of reciprocity of minorities has rather strengthened official conflicts (Holm-Hansen 1999).

The border minorities of Germany and beyond

At some conjunctions in time-space certain population groups manage – or happen to – formulate an ethnic belonging strong enough to form a nation and eventually a state. In other cases the opportunity is missed and the linguistic criteria disappear when the language is diluted into a dialect of a related standard language. This was the case of Low German (also called Sassisch and Platt), formerly a language in its own right more related to Dutch than to High German. Low German was spoken in the whole area from the Netherlands Gelderland to East Prussia and had a strong position within the Hanseatic League, but the spread of High German through the Lutheran Bible marked the end of the language as a nation-forming possibility (Kloss 1952).

Another case of language border overlap is represented by the case of Denmark-Germany, where there is a certain balance of long standing autochthonous minorities. In this case, the status of “national minority” is more important than the minorities’ actual use of language. Both minorities are locally well integrated into the states in which they reside, but they also follow developments in their kin-nationality states and cultivate their kin-nation state language (Kühl 1998; Kühl, Pedersen 2006; Oeter, Walker 2006). On the Germany side of this area, however, the linguistic status of Low German and North Frisian, while sociologically quite weak, has been legally strengthened by Germany’s decision to adopt the Council of Europe’s definition of autochthonous minorities. The Frisians of Germany, linguistically divided between those of Schleswig, Helgoland and Ostfriesland in Niedersachsen mostly refrained from formal minority status, with the exception of Danish-minded North Frisians who professed a status of minority now accepted also by other German Frisians (Oeter, Walker 2006).

Most German minorities are hampered by the effects of the federal structure of Germany, where cultural matters belong to the competence of the *Länder*. In the case of the linguistic minorities of Low German and Frisian, several Länder are involved, while the Sorbs, divided into two quite different dialects or rather languages, inhabit two Länder, one of which, Sachsen, seems more interested in the support of its High Sorbians, while the Land of Brandenburg is passive in its attitude to the weaker, and more complicated case of the Low Sorbians, who inhabit the watery and lignite-extracting areas of Eastern Brandenburg (Oeter, Walker 2006).

While relics mind of lost language landscapes, recent language indications may give a false impression of language use. But the recognition of minority languages may also give a false impression. In the area around Cottbus/Chośebus south of Berlin, the Low Sorbian language is officially recognized, but the reality is one of language decay and partly language death. It is remarkable that in the Protestant Low Sorbian area the language died faster than in the High Sorbian Catholic area around Bautzen/Budyšin (Walde 2006).

Conclusions

This overview of strong, weak and “failed” border minority ethnicities in the Baltic Sea area shows that several criteria determine the development, non-development or decay of national allegiance:

1. the change, establishment or eradication of the boundary. In especially the Finnish-Russian case the annexation of Finnish territory by the SU caused a “rift” in the earlier dominance of Finnish-speaking population;
2. the ethnic cleansing of areas, mostly for the sake of “nation-state” homogeneity, but also because of sheer racism (extinction of the Jewish population);
3. the assimilation of a potential ethnic group into the majority population. In Sweden, the Torne Valley Finns after strong indoctrination to claim Swedishness tended to deny their relation to Finnish ethnicity, although small groups now claim status either as a separate ethnic group or as members of the Finnish ethnic “na-

tion”. In a similar way, The Masurians refused merging with the “Catholic” Polish nation and choose German ethnicity in spite of their language;

4. the non-emergence of a national movement. In the case of the Frisians, the group was too small and subdivided, while the Low German speakers were even less inclined to form a nation.

During a period of strong state nationalism, Finnish-speakers in Sweden and Danish-speakers in Prussian Germany were oppressed. However, with the territorial gain of Denmark in 1920, the minority situation was partly reversed, while Sweden kept its cultural hegemony versus its Finnish-speakers. Finland was seen as a poor country ridden by wars which helped to support a denial of Finnish-ness.

Changes in territory caused ethnic cleansing in the borderlands of Finland-SU and Poland-Germany as well as with the partition of German East Prussia into Soviet and Polish supremacy. In these cases, earlier border minorities have vanished, to be replaced with people of the majority of the new territorial power.

Groups of “potential minority status” (by linguistic or religious characteristics) have, as a rule either been assimilated into the majority population (as the case of Low German and Low Sorbian speakers) or chosen exodus (the Protestant Polish-speaking Masurians). In some cases, however, groups of deviant ethnicity (Karaims, Tatars, High Sorbian speakers) have persisted thanks to an identity related both to ethnicity and religion. The Kashubs seem to be an intermediate case with a weak ethnic identity.

The socio-political geography of border minorities must take the contextuality of communication and identification into account if we are to understand differences in attitudes and self-identification.

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ETNINIŲ MAŽUMŲ IŠKILIMAS IR IŠNYKIMAS BALTIŠKUOSIUOSE PARIBIUOSE

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Santrauka

Straipsnio tikslas – aptarti tautinių ir (arba) etninių mažumų Baltijos jūros paribiuose iškilimą ir išnykimą. Sociopolitinė etninių grupių raida suprantama kaip skirtingų įtakos turinčių veiksnių rezultatas: teritorinė istorija, valstybės sienų kaita ir populiacijos grupės, taip pat santykiai už valstybės teritorijos. Buvo pasirinkti skirtingi kriterijai tautinės ištikimybės raidai, ne-raidai ar jos žlugimui apibrėžti. Valstybės sienų permaina, įsteigimas ar sunaikinimas, etninių plotų valymas daugiausia dėl „tautos-valstybės“ homogeniškumo, potencialios etninės grupės asimiliavimasis į didžiąją populiaciją ir tautinio judėjimo neiškilimas.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Baltijos jūros regionas, paribys, etniškumas, kalba, mažuma, populiacija, teritorija.

Received 25 January 2012; accepted 22 October 2012