Russia in the Baltic Sea Region

Desecuritization or Deregionalization?

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———————————— ABSTRACT ————————————

Relations between Russia and the Baltic States — the weakest link in the Baltic Rim — have significantly improved since 2000. One of the explanations for this improvement is the fact that in contemporary Russian political discourse national identity is desecuritized. The role of the Baltic states has radically changed: they are no longer considered as an embodiment of the 'false', anti-Russian Europe. However, despite the desecuritization of national identity, security as the model of structuring and governing the 'external' world still dominates political discourse. The preponderance of the war against terrorism as discursive articulation, as well as the modernist nature of President Putin's political project, leads to the marginalization of the Baltic Sea area on the political agenda. Some new departures in Russia's policy as regards the Baltic Sea area are possible, however, once Russia has gone through its election campaign, and the enlargements of NATO and the EU are complete.

Keywords: desecuritization; discourse analysis; Estonia; identity; Latvia; Lithuania; Russia; security; terrorism

It would not be an exaggeration to say that relations between Russia and the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) are crucial for the very existence of the Baltic Sea region (BSR) as such. The raison d'être of the region-building project at its inception was the need to deal with the Soviet legacy; now, when the Baltic states and Poland are in the European Union (EU), the only major gap to be bridged is the one between the EU and Russia. The Baltic Rim will be broken without Russia, and it would require a substantial redefinition of the entire concept of the BSR to make it applicable to whichever regional cooperation may take place instead. Russian engagement, in turn, will hardly be effective if the weakest link of the Rim fails and meaningful communication between Moscow and the three Baltic capitals, still excessively dependent on political contingencies, becomes impossible.

In an attempt to evaluate the prospects for Russia's participation in the Baltic Sea region-building process, I concentrate on the role played by the Baltic states in Russian political discourse. Clearly, the BSR provides a unique opportunity to develop relations in the spirit of new Europe,[1] where

state sovereignty and state borders have ceased to be the only principal markers of identity. In the Baltic Sea area, it is possible to open new political spaces and work out new identities based on historical narratives, geographical images and shared cultural values, which would not substitute national identity, but would enable us to build new links and overcome the old conflicts. In my view, it makes a difference whether we address such issues as environment, cross-border crime, migration, etc., on the basis of the well-established national identities *or* as inhabitants of the BSR. In the latter case, this new transnational identity turns any problem into 'ours', and moves us from the discourse of external threats to a pragmatic, problem-oriented approach.

This new post-territorial attitude to politics requires a significant transformation of political discourse. One of the most important prerequisites for that is desecuritization — a term introduced by the so-called Copenhagen School (see Buzan et al., 1998), and referring to the process whereby interaction becomes centred on issues other than security, while security as such is actually enhanced by avoiding the language of security. I have argued elsewhere (Morozov, 2002) that contemporary Russian political discourse tends to securitize the identity of Russian society: identity becomes a referential object of a security discourse, which inevitably leads to a defensive position vis-a-vis the 'outside' world and to a never-ending process of constructing a boundary between 'us' and 'them', good and evil, and an acute fear that if this boundary is damaged the identity of the community will be destroyed — 'we' will no longer be 'us'. Needless to say, such a discursive setting is hardly conducive to openness and debordering, and views any identities other than the identity of the nation, which is understood as a given and sometimes even sacred community, with utmost suspicion.

In this article I argue that in contemporary (post-9/11) Russian political discourse national identity is desecuritized, which inter alia leads to an improvement of relations with the Baltic states. NATO enlargement is no longer described as a threat, and in general the role of the Baltic states has radically changed: they are no longer considered as an embodiment of the 'false', anti-Russian Europe — a discursive construction described by Iver Neumann (1996). In order to demonstrate this important change, in the next section I briefly return to the period of uneasy bilateral relations in 1998–2001 to describe the impact of the identity crisis. In section three I deal with the symptoms of identity desecuritization in Russia's approach to its relations with the Baltic states, and show that the old confrontational discursive patterns are no longer valid. In the fourth section I put the problem of Russian–Baltic relations in a more general context, arguing that despite the desecuritization of the national identity, security as the fundamental model of structuring and governing the 'external' world is still there. The overwhelming form of security discourse today is the war against terrorism, which leads to marginalization of the Baltic Sea area in relation to other items on the political agenda and makes the new discourses of openness and post-territoriality even more peripheral than they used to be. There are additional obstacles in the way of the region-building project, the most

important of which seems to be the extremely modernist nature of President Putin's political project, mainly structured according to the logic of national interest. The conclusion, however, suggests that certain new departures in Russia's policy as regards the Baltic Sea region-building project can be possible once Russia has gone through its election campaign, and the enlargements of NATO and the EU are complete.

The Baltic States as 'False' Europe

The breakdown of the USSR caused an acute identity crisis in Russia, because, unlike the rest of the former Soviet republics, the Russian Federation as a state and a nation had no anchoring in the past which could be read separately from the history of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Facing, in addition, a total economic collapse and extreme political instability, Yeltsin's leadership chose the easiest way to answer the question 'What is Russia?' They opted to define Russia as the successor-state of the Soviet Union, and also implicitly of the Russian Empire (Matz, 2001). A complete break with the Soviet past was ruled out, which gave the Russian Federation a historical foundation for its new nation-building project. However, the repercussions of this decision were wide-ranging and often disturbing.

One immediate consequence was that the Russian nation tended to be redefined in neo-imperial terms, while attempts to create a civic political community were for a while unsuccessful (Tolz, 1998). This neo-imperial community included the 'compatriots abroad', i.e. the Russian speakers in the former Soviet republics, which made their rights a hot issue in Russia's relations with Latvia, Estonia and, to a lesser extent, Lithuania. Russia's concern for the 'compatriots' was obviously unacceptable from the point of view of the Baltic nationalisms, since it was perceived as undermining the independence of the three Baltic republics. In addition, Russia started to claim for itself the role of the guarantor of security and stability in the entire post-Soviet space, which led to Moscow's staunch opposition to NATO enlargement. The possible accession of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to NATO was perceived as an almost existential threat, since it would signify an intrusion of the ancient adversary into the lands that had been part of imperial Russia for centuries.

The total negation of the Soviet past, which was an important part of nation-building in all three Baltic republics, manifested itself, inter alia, in legal proceedings against the veterans of the Soviet army and security services, and sometimes even in demands on Russia for compensation for the damage inflicted by the Soviet occupation. For the same reason of identity politics, these symbolic moves caused outrage in Russia (see Moshes, 1999: 31; Morozov, 2003: 230–1, 235–6). Hostility towards the Baltic states was also encouraged by the fear — not totally unfounded — of possible isolation from Europe, which has always been one of the major driving forces behind Russian foreign policy. Paradoxically, criticism against Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius was in part a discursive practice aimed at securing Russia's own

European identity. It can be conceptualized using Iver Neumann's terminological opposition of 'true' Europe versus 'false' Europe, which he traces several centuries back (see Neumann, 1996). Russian discourse always constructs a 'true', friendly Europe, which represents, in a sense, a projection of Russian values and priorities, and dismisses the 'hostile' Europe as having lost the genuine European values, violating the rules established by and for itself — this construction is described by Neumann as 'false' Europe. The list of historical examples of the two opposing Europes includes Moscow as the 'third Rome' versus the 'infidel' catholic West, the legitimate Europe of the Holy alliance versus the 'barbarian' Europe of the revolutionaries, the 'peoples'' Europe of the Soviet ideologues versus a Europe of the capitalist monopolies, controlled by the US. This complex structure of the world as it looks from Russia always makes it possible to dismiss certain political positions as being 'falsely European' and to insist on the role of the Russian state as the defender of 'true' European values. By singling out the Baltic states as the black sheep of the European family, Russa could establish itself as a 'normal' European nation, which might have *some* internal problems (Chechnya being the foremost example), but they were forgivable if compared to the even greater, it was argued, sins of others (Morozov, 2003). This strategy was hardly successful internationally, but worked almost perfectly on the domestic political stage.

The role of 'false' Europe was assigned to the Baltic states as early as the beginning of the 1990s, but most actively this pattern was exploited in 1998–2000, when bilateral relations were extremely strained. After the crisis in Russian–Latvian relations, which was provoked by the dispersal of a demonstration of Russian-speaking pensioners in Riga in March 1998 and aggravated by the annual march of the Waffen-SS veterans, Russian diplomats, politicians and journalists systematically accused the authorities of the Baltic states of harbouring pro-Nazi sympathies, in language which was later described by two Russian journalists as belonging to the time of the Second World War (Kalashnikova and Kalashnikov, 2001). The support for the Chechen cause, so unreservedly expressed by some political forces in the Baltic states, has been interpreted by the Russian press both as proof of the prevailing anti-Russian mood in the Baltics and as an extra indication of the wickedness of the Chechens. The two arguments were thus mutually reinforcing. More or less the same can be said as regards the prospects of NATO membership for the three Baltic countries. The desire of the Baltic states to become members was interpreted as an extra proof of their anti-Russian inclinations, and vice versa, any statement on behalf of the NATO members confirming their willingness to admit the Baltic republics was taken as an indication of 'NATO expansionism' (Sokolov, 2000). Moreover, 'the sympathy for Ichkeria' (i.e. Chechnya), demonstrated by Lithuanian politicians, and the desire 'to hurry with hustling the country into NATO' were presented as complementary policies (Paip, 1999), while cooperation with Russia, according to the Russian authors, inevitably was to be phased out as the Baltic states developed friendly relations with the US. And vice versa, 'a possible rejection or at least a delay in accepting these countries into NATO' could, in the opinion of St. Petersburg-based analysts,

'contribute to an improvement of Russia's relations with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania' (Beltiukov and Pikhtov, 2001: 1).

As late as in early 2002, browsing the Russian press, one could still come across numerous articles structured fully in accordance with the logic of the opposition between 'true' and 'false' Europe and asserting, for instance: 'as long as the Russian population is oppressed in the Baltic countries, Russia will not cease to remind European organisations and blocs who is going to be accepted in their ranks' (Vinogradov, 2002). No less typical for this discourse was the comparison between the status of the Russian language in Estonia ('false' Europe) and that of the Swedish language in Finland — one of the most indisputable embodiments of the 'true' Europe (see Shesternina, 2002, cf. Narochnitskaya, 2003: 58). The zero-sum game logic prevailed even in some academic writings: thus, Arkady Moshes of the Institute of Europe described NATO enlargement as a net loss for Russia, which it should have tried to prevent if it could (Moshes, 2002). Security was still the central paradigm, while security threats were customarily associated with NATO. Being part of the 'false' Europe, the Baltic states were a security threat for Russia in military terms (because of their intention to join NATO), but most importantly their existence was a challenge to Russian national identity as it had been formed by the end of the 1990s. It was evidence of Russia's weakness as compared to its imperial predecessors, and in addition the Balts were trying to deny Russia's belonging to Europe by criticizing it over Chechnya and on a number of other issues. The fact that they were far ahead of Russia in integrating into European structures, despite the alleged violations of the rights of the Russian-speakers, raised the fear that Russia was being deliberately isolated and ostracized, and thus its European identity, often challenged from within, received insufficient affirmation from the outside world.

From the 'False' Europe to the 'New' Europe

However, already in 2001 there were signs that the position of the Baltic states in Russian political discourse was changing. An article by Viacheslav Yelagin in the April issue of *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn'*, despite being an inventory of Russian charges against Estonia as 'false' Europe, asserted in the conclusion that putting today's Russia, 'which gave freedom to the Baltic peoples', on an equal footing with the Soviet Union was 'inappropriate', since 'the Russian people suffered from Stalinism no less [than the Estonians]', and suggested that 'Russia would like to build its uneasy relations with the Baltic republics not on the basis of the psychological complexes of the Soviet period' (2001: 58). A significant attempt to reflect upon the fundamental assumptions of the Russian discussion about Estonia was undertaken by Marina and Viktor Kalashnikov in their June 2001 article in *Nezavisimaya gazeta* (Kalashnikova and Kalashnikov, 2001). Since then, Estonia seems to have been acquiring a very special standing in the Russian discourse, moving towards becoming part of 'true' Europe. This is happening against the general background of desecuritization of relations between

Russia and the group of states usually described as 'the West', and, accordingly, between Russia and the Baltic states. The outcome of the NATO summit in Prague in November 2002, which decided to accept seven new members including Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, did not provoke any significant negative reaction even on the part of the traditionally nationalist papers like *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. A balanced, business-like approach is characteristic of the publications about the preparations for accession, and such potentially hot issues as the construction of radars in Latvia and Estonia in the framework of the Baltnet system (Shegedin and Vodo, 2003). What is more, the same publications raise the issue of the state and prospects of Baltic–Russian military cooperation (Yuryev, 2002) — an obvious departure from the zero-sum security logic characteristic of the period 1998–2001.[2]

The Chechen theme also figures in the current debate, but the boundary between 'us' and 'them' in the description of the conflict has completely shifted. When the website of the Chechen separatists *Kavkaz-centre* was removed by the Estonian and Lithuanian authorities from servers, and the separatist representatives called this the action of 'gangsters', the accounts of the events in the Russian press left no doubt that the Russian journalists regarded Estonia and Lithuania as part of the civilized world, while the 'gangsters' were to be found on the other side of this conflict (Volkhonskii and Vodo, 2003). Even more interesting is the trend to interpret the experience of post-Soviet Estonia as a model for Russian society. Only such a restructuring of the discourse can explain the fact that a brand of paint can be advertised in the St. Petersburg metro with, *inter alia*, references to the 'Estonian technology' which is allegedly used in its manufacture.[3] The most popular topic seems to be the reform of the housing sector — a painful issue for present-day Russia. An article in *Izvestia* on the Estonian housing reform featured a characteristic title: 'It is already far from Moscow to Tallinn' (Sagdiev, 2002; see also Ivanov, 2003a).

All these examples show that, today, Estonia, and perhaps on its heels also Lithuania and Latvia, is increasingly perceived in Russia as part of the 'true' Europe, from which Russia can learn without any damage to its own prestige. Old disagreements are still there, but it is clear that Russia no longer needs them to promote its European identity. On the contrary, the image of the Baltic republics as the closest part of Europe to Russia, which existed even during the Soviet era, now seems to be undergoing a revival. Russians today are ready to accept that Estonia is ahead of their own country in many important respects ('it is far from Moscow to Tallinn'), and the above reference to the 'Estonian technology' is reminiscent of the much-quoted word *evroremont* ('Euro-repairs'), which means not simply a first-class refurbishing of an apartment, but maintenance of a higher quality than is usually done in Russia. On the other hand, the fact that *evroremont*, as it were, turned out to be feasible not only in the remote 'West', but in some of the former Soviet republics, in a part of 'our' Europe, is encouraging: it shows that Russia, after going through economic hardships of the same nature as Estonia, but perhaps on a larger scale because of a less advanta-

geous starting position, is liable to undergo a similar economic and social revival.

Another important shift is visible in Russia's official position in relation to 'compatriots' abroad. The 1999 law 'On the state policy of the Russian Federation in relation to the compatriots abroad' (Rossiiskaya Federatsiya, 1999) in effect defines 'compatriots abroad' as all former citizens of the Soviet Union who live outside Russia but identify politically with the Russian state, regardless of their present citizenship. The 'compatriots' who were Russian citizens were expected to take part in the Russian national elections, and all of them were supposed to unite on the basis of their Russian political identity — at least their unwillingness to act as a unified force at the local elections in Estonia in 1999 was interpreted as a failure (Morozov, 2003: 233). During Yeltsin's era, the emphasis was on protecting the rights of the 'compatriots' in the countries where they lived, and this emphasis is clearly reflected in the law. The conceptual background for this, explicitly stated in the preamble to the law and emphasized in the public discussion (e.g. Shushanikov, 2001), was the principle of continuity: the Russian Federation declared itself not only the legal successor of the USSR, but a 'continuer-state' (*prodolzhatel'*) of the Russian Empire, the 1917 Russian Republic, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and the USSR. Thus, the Russian nation was imagined in neo-imperial and potentially irredentist terms, which undermined the legitimacy within Russian political discourse of the independence of the 14 states created from the ruins of the Soviet Union and thus created additional tension in relations with them and in particular with the Baltic states.

In Putin's Russia, the neo-imperial identity has become in some respects even stronger: the old Soviet anthem has been reintroduced with new words as the state anthem of the Russian Federation, while Soviet retro dominates some important segments of popular culture, in particular television. However, this new version of the neo-imperial identity seems to be broadly compatible with Baltic independence: it is telling that in describing his vision of a 'liberal empire', which Russia is destined to create on the ruins of the Soviet Union, Anatoly Chubais (2003) clearly limits his design to the Commonwealth of Independent States, leaving the Baltic states to the EU. In the state policy in relation to the 'compatriots', the emphasis has shifted from making their rights an issue on the foreign policy agenda into encouraging the Russian-speakers to migrate to Russia as a means of offsetting the demographic crisis. This move, the first major evidence of which was President Putin's speech at the Congress of Compatriots in October 2001 (Putin, 2001), even if it was motivated by purely pragmatic reasons, has signified a fundamental change in the official nationalism from an imperial to a civic model: the members of the Russian nation are invited to reside on the territory of the present-day nation-state, while the state's promise to protect their interests outside the national territory is played down. The new stricter citizenship law, adopted in 2001 (Rossiiskaya Federatsiya, 2001), is also framed according to the principles of civic nationalism — one of the major reasons for the adoption of the new law, according to its author Oleg Kutafin, was to stop 'mechanically regarding as citizens of Russia all

the former citizens of the USSR' (Airapetova, 2001, see Tolz, 2004 for a detailed discussion on Putin's approach to Russian national identity-building). This has led to a more benevolent attitude to the integration of ethnic Russians in Estonia and Latvia — i.e. to their leaving the ranks of the 'compatriots' and turning into loyal citizens of their respective states. This new attitude, already discernible in the earlier quoted article by Viacheslav Yelagin (2001: 56), was manifest in the fact that the defeat of the ethnic Russian parties at the parliamentary elections in Estonia in September 2002 did not cause any negative reaction in Russia (see, e.g., Ivanov, 2003b; Suslov, 2003) — while two or three years earlier this would certainly have been interpreted as a disaster.

   Even the split of Europe into the 'old' and the 'new' over the attitude to the Iraqi war in 2003 did not thwart this discursive transformation. One might have expected this new division would be superimposed upon the old one, between the 'true' and 'false' Europe, and would strengthen the existing discursive constellation, especially in view of the fact that the core countries of the 'false' Europe, including the Baltic states, supported President Bush's Iraqi adventure. If this was the case, it was limited to the most extreme applications of geopolitics by such authors as Natalia Narochnitskaya (2003: 57–63). Surprisingly enough, in the mainstream discourse the two matrices apparently did not coincide in certain crucial respects, and therefore the emergence of the 'new' Europe helped to destroy the image of the dangerous 'false' Europe even further. The desire of the political elites of the NATO and EU candidate countries to support the US at all costs was interpreted in Russia as a manifestation of the 'new' Europe's immaturity, but not of its hostility. A *Kommersant* article on the results of the referendum on EU membership in Poland plays with subtle differences between the Russian and Polish languages: the title 'the Poles have made their way to become Europeans' uses the Polish word *Europejczyk*, which, in the Russian transcription, acquires a funny diminutive meaning (Vodo, 2003). This patronizing attitude is perfectly reflected in an illustration to an article in *Expert Severo-Zapad* on the development of stock markets in the Baltic countries. The drawing features three boys launching a toy ship with the symbol of the euro on its sail in a puddle in the centre of an old European town (Krasil'nikova, 2003). Despite the fact that the piece itself had no connection with the conflict over Iraq and had been published before the very term 'new Europe' came into existence, this illustration anticipated the interpretation of the 'new' Europe in Russian political discourse as a Europe which is young, immature, still coming into being — and whose mistakes therefore can be understood and even excused.

The Limits of Desecuritization

The modification of Russian political discourse in relation to the Baltic states is an indication of a more general socio-political transformation which took place during President Putin's first term in office. It can be

described as desecuritization of Russia's national identity, at least in as much as it was constructed in opposition to the West. As previously argued, there has been a visible degree of restorationism in Putin's handling of political symbols, the result being that Russian identity today is deeper rooted in the past, while the two empires — the Russian and the Soviet — are less and less differentiated in historical mythology. Paradoxically or otherwise, this has not led to a revival of the old Soviet-era fears that previously produced the 'besieged fortress' mindset. On the contrary, this re-anchoring of today's Russian Federation in the 1000-year long history of the Russian state has alleviated the anxiety about Russia's belonging to Europe and to the 'civilized world'. Russia today is much less of an unknown quantity than it was 10 years ago; it is more a 'normal' European state that has been around for as long as almost any of the other European nations.

Desecuritization of national identity has not, however, resulted in the abandoning of security as a discursive mode. It may, indeed, be argued that this desecuritization was only possible because the place of the now redundant enemy — the West and/or NATO — has been taken over by a new one, usually referred to as terrorism. It is important to emphasize that this enemy was already there in 1999 — indeed, it was the promise to fight it tooth and nail that brought Vladimir Putin a great share of his enormous popularity in the run-up to the presidential elections of 2000. At that time, however, the existence of the terrorist threat could only exacerbate the already severe identity crisis in which Russia found itself towards the end of the Yeltsin era. Criticism of the second Chechen campaign on the part of most of Russia's neighbours in Europe, the US and international organizations like the Council of Europe and the EU produced a feeling of total isolation, of Russia's having to fight a lone hand against both the terrorists and their 'Western advocates'. After September 11, on the contrary, this enemy is shared with 'the West', and this has finally created conditions suitable for refocusing security discourse on referential objects other than national identity — now, it is the 'civilized world' which is threatened by the terrorists, and this broader 'we' includes the old Other, 'the West'.

Today Russia is a crucial member of the antiterrorist coalition: it closely cooperates with the EU and NATO and thus feels itself part of the 'civilized world' (see Morozov, 2002). Russia no longer needs to lash out at the Baltic states, or to construct any other kind of 'false' Europe, in order to feel a better European. A much more self-assured patronizing position in relation to the 'new' Europe was made possible only due to the fact that Russia could safely side with the 'old' Europe, including such traditional partners (members of the 'true' Europe) as France and Germany. Thus, national identity has apparently been desecuritized, but security as a discursive form through which the 'extremely unstructured universe' of the post-Cold War world is being structured and governed (Wæver, 1995: 75) is still there.

It would be beyond the scope of this article to consider the impact this new situation is likely to have on individual rights and freedoms — in Chechnya, in Russia, or at the global level. In the BSR, though, the new setting provides a unique opening for building transnational networks that

would consolidate this desecuritized environment. However, there are still several important obstacles in the way, many of which directly result from a very special kind of identity transformation that has occurred in the area during the past several years.

First of all, it has to be kept in mind that security as a discourse, which has become even more powerful after September 11 and the ensuing wars, tends to structure political space in a certain way. Instead of making borders less exclusive and turning them into interfaces for interaction, 'we' are increasingly concerned with building barriers to protect 'us' from 'them'. Such an environment could hardly be described as conducive to new post-territorial political developments which could transcend national borders and create new identities, such as a feeling of belonging to the Baltic Sea area. Besides, the BSR can offer very little in the fight against terrorism, and therefore is marginalized in the discourse on global issues.

Secondly, one should consider the nature of borders that are to be tran-scended in each case. National identity in all three Baltic states is con-structed around the idea of independence, central to which is a strong historical narrative of dependence and oppression by a named powerful neighbour — Russia. Russia, in turn, cannot accept any outside criticism of its imperial history, since it serves, now more than ever, as the basis of national identity. Despite the fact that in the official statements the Baltic states tend to be described as part of the outside world, the tension between this position and the imperial narratives is still discernible. Although the recent experience shows that the legacy of the past can be overcome, the historical myths can again be invoked if a conflict breaks out, or when the political situation necessitates a reassertion of national identity. The 2003 election campaign produced exactly such a need, and the old discursive model was reactivated by the political actors competing for the role of the best defender of national interest. The tension steadily intensified and cul-minated in the statements like the one made by the chairman of the State Duma Foreign Affairs Committee Dmitry Rogozin that Latvia had become a land of 'hooligans' run by Nazis (RFE/RL, 2003), and in the Duma reso-lution condemning Latvia for the violations of the rights of the Russian-speakers, adopted on 14 October (e.g. Rodin, 2003).

Thirdly, it is becoming increasingly clear that Putin's project is best described as modernist and nationalist. Putin's main message, unambigu-ously declared in his May 2003 state of the nation address, is the consolida-tion of the entire society around an ambitious patriotic goal — to make sure that 'in a not too far off future, Russia will take its recognized place among the ranks of the truly strong, economically advanced and influential nations' (Putin, 2003). His framework concept is the national interest, and even the most 'globalist' project of today's Russia — WTO membership — is conceived of in those terms. Against this background the possibility of developing contemporary Russian political discourse into something more postmodern is extremely problematic.

The fourth obstacle is to a large extent a result of the third. It consists in the fact that in the Russian image of the BSR, imagination as such is lack-ing. The economic potential of the region is appreciated by many, but one

would have a difficult time trying to figure out how the political and economic elite of the country is going to turn this potential into a working model of cooperation. Many Russian scholars are prepared to argue at length in favour of transnational regional cooperation (e.g. Fedorov, 2002: 32–8), but the positive effect of such calls is usually limited to the promotion of a desecuritized image of regional cooperation as not threatening the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation. This discursive practice has been largely successful — a positive attitude to transborder cooperation prevails among policy-makers. However, this discourse is also structured around the fundamental concept of the national interest: according to the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Federation Council Mikhail Margelov (2003), Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, as well as the governors — members of the State Council (State Council, 2003: 9, 13–17), the task of transborder cooperation is to help realize the foreign policy strategy of the centre. Despite the fact that the international activity of the regions is no longer a security concern, security as a basic cognitive frame is still there: at the meeting of the State Council in January 2003, entirely devoted to international issues, the international situation is described in terms of the growing threats stemming from 'military and political uncertainty' and international terrorism (State Council, 2003: 7, 14). This is probably why the BSR was hardly mentioned at the meeting.

One reason for cautious optimism is the gradual linking in of the cities in the Russian northwest to the regionalizing environment. In particular, the strong international dimension of the St. Petersburg tercentenary celebrations is encouraging (Joenniemi and Morozov, 2003). Such 'meeting points', where 'languages, cultures, confessions intersect' (Margelov, 2003), could indeed acquire a role of their own, but so far they figure more as interfaces between established identities than as sites for the development of new ones. The unique situation of the Kaliningrad exclave is discussed in Russia almost exclusively as a problem, while the idea of taking advantage of its special position and turning it into the 'pilot region' for Russia–EU cooperation, put forward in the 1999 'Strategy for the Development of Relations with the EU' (Strategiya, 1999: 26), remains to be filled with content. Attention remains focused on the 'big' issues, such as energy dialogue and security (including anti-terrorist measures), which tend to concentrate resources on bilateral relations between Moscow and Brussels, while the existence of transnational cooperation at the local level is largely neglected in the public debate. The passionate discussion about the prospects for visa-free travel between Russia and the EU can be interpreted as a sign of Russia's willingness to accept more transparent borders, but one should not forget that it stays within the limits of bilateralism and reciprocity. No one dares to propose any unilateral concessions on the part of Russia, despite the fact that visas remain one of the major obstacles in the way of increasing inward tourism, especially in the Russian northwest. On the contrary, the 2002 decision to introduce visas for cruise passengers, which had a visible adverse effect on the number of tourists, still holds firm (Ovchinnikov and Strela, 2003).

Security no longer informs Russia's image of the region, but there is nothing to replace security as the basis for region-building. Environment is

too narrow a field, while transport networks are discussed exclusively in modernist terms: thus, completion of the first stage of the Baltic Oil Pipeline System led to an immediate, and justified in terms of national interest, redirection of Russian oil transit from the Latvian port of Ventspils to Primorsk (Orlov, 2003). As a result, the Russian image of the BSR tends to break apart into several groups of states, the most significant being the Baltic states and the Nordic countries, with the latter usually still enjoying a much more positive image than the former. Besides, the great foreign policy achievements of Putin's era — the rapprochement with the US, the Rome agreements with NATO, and the intensifying dialogue with the EU — all tend to shift attention to the grand projects where the 'federal centre' in Moscow plays the central role, and thus to peripheralize the Baltic area in foreign policy thinking.

Conclusions

The analysis of Russian political discourse in relation to the Baltic states seems to suggest that a desecuritization of Russia's national identity paves the way towards better relations with its neighbours in the Baltic Sea area. An exceptionally favourable constellation of all major factors, such as economic recovery and an outstanding external situation, combined with a sophisticated handling of identity issues, alleviated the identity crisis in which Russia had found itself ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union. One of the key manifestations of the crisis-ridden world-view, the fear of isolation from Europe and doubts about Russia's belonging to the European 'civilization', has significantly receded, and this has made redundant the image of the Baltic states as an embodiment of the 'false', anti-Russian Europe. Russian society is no longer afraid of NATO enlargement, is ready for a constructive dialogue on the issue of the Russian-speakers, and is getting closer to the enlarging EU. For all these reasons, security is no longer the framework concept for Russian understanding of regional affairs.

   However, security has not been substituted by any other major concept which could serve as a foundation for future Russian policy in the Baltic Sea area. As a result, there are no signs that someone, either in Moscow or elsewhere (for instance, in St. Petersburg as the capital of the North-Western Federal District), in the government or in the private sector, is trying to define the future Russian approach to the problems and opportunities of the Baltic Rim. The policies of President Putin's administration are framed by the modernist concept of national interest, in which the inherently transnational and post-territorial idea of the BSR does not fit well. On a larger scale, security — in the context of the war against terrorism — is still the overwhelming mode of thinking, and this can hardly promote debordering and openness to the world 'out there'. The region is mostly perceived as several groups of states, and although it is unlikely to disappear from the Russians' mental map of Europe, one cannot expect Russia to offer any innovative ideas about the future of the Baltic area.

It is certainly not a disaster that the Russian political elite is so far unable to conceive of regional cooperation in a less than zero-sum-game way. The preconditions for creative thinking are there, first of all in the sense that Russia today fears neither its neighbours in the BSR nor the consequences of regionalization. However, it is regrettable that these preconditions are not availed of, and we are thus missing an opportunity to start building a new Russia in the spirit of new Europe, and not after the models of the nineteenth century. An optimistic reading of the situation would be to put all one's hopes onto the years 2004–05. In 2004, Russia has gone through its election campaign, while the EU and NATO have completed their most significant rounds of enlargement. The 2003 election campaign, unlike the one in 1999, has not significantly increased tensions in Russia's relations with the Baltic states and NATO, but it has certainly been a distraction for the decision-makers. The effect of the enlargements has been more or less the same throughout the area, and their completion might leave a void to be filled by a new grand project. There are some grounds for hope that the history of the Baltic Rim is only beginning.

Notes

1. I deliberately use the term *new Europe* (without quotation marks) together with *'new' Europe* later on to emphasize that, in my opinion, a truly new post-Cold War arrangement on the European continent should be something much wider and more substantial than the division over President Bush's unilateralism.

2. For a detailed discussion of the changing Russian attitude to the Baltic's NATO membership, see Kramer (2002).

3. The advertisement of paint under the trademark *Korall* in the St. Petersburg underground was observed by the author in May–June 2003.

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