Project on Ethnic Relations

The Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) was founded in 1991 in anticipation of the serious interethnic conflicts that were to erupt following the collapse of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. PER conducts programs of high-level intervention and dialogue and serves as a neutral mediator in several major disputes in the region. PER also conducts programs of training, education, and research at international, national, and community levels.

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Report

MAY 15-16, 1998

NOVGOROD, RUSSIA

BALTIC-RUSSIAN RELATIONS IN THE NEW GEOPOLITICAL FRAMEWORK

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PREFACE

Nowhere is the uncertain and shifting relationship between post-Communist Russia and the West more sharply manifested than in the Baltic region. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, until only a few years ago parts of the USSR, now lie on the other side of Russia's border with northern Europe.

Among the republics of the former Soviet Union that have become independent, the Baltic countries are on the fastest track toward inclusion in Western institutions and alliances. The support and sympathy that they receive from Scandinavia, Western Europe, and the United States, as well as the relative success of their political and economic reforms, increasingly make them part of an outside world with which Russia, struggling for a place in the new Europe, must compare itself. It is no wonder that Russia and the Baltic countries see the world very differently, or that they are prone to argue so bitterly about the long trail of grievances and countergrievances accumulated during the Soviet era.

All of this is immeasurably complicated by the presence—especially in Estonia and Latvia—of large numbers of ethnic Russians (in some locations a majority of the population), many of whom settled in the Baltics during Soviet days. The Balts, understandably, have wished to restore or reassert the use of their own languages after many decades of "Russianization." But the insistence on using fluency in the national language as a criterion for citizenship, and other barriers to citizenship for ethnic Russians, have led to charges by Moscow and leaders of the Russian communities that Russians are being subjected to discrimination and even human-rights violations. The result has been internal tension between Russians and the national populations and external tension between the Baltic countries and Russia.

Although the prodding of the international community has recently led to modifications in some of the more exclusionary citizenship provisions, the tension persists over such questions as separate education in the Russian language. Moreover, Moscow continues to view with alarm (some would say primarily for domestic political reasons) the status of ethnic Russians living in these former Soviet republics. On the other side, politicians and officials of the Baltic countries accuse Moscow of exaggerating the problems and of constantly reiterating Russian demands in order to reassert a kind of colonial control.

Formal negotiations over these issues between Russia and her Baltic

neighbors have been only sporadic and have so far failed to lead to comprehensive resolutions of the disputes. Against this background, the Project on Ethnic Relations agreed to launch a series of face-to-face discussions between politicians and officials of the Baltic countries and those of the northwestern provinces of Russia. We reasoned that those with strong regional interests in their neighbors across the border would be more amenable than the central authorities to finding practical, working-level compromises and solutions.

The meeting that is reported here was the first in the series. It took place in Novgorod—one of the major centers of Russia's northwestern region—in May 1998, and it brought together Russian and Baltic political leaders and officials (including leaders of the Baltic Russian communities) and officials from the several Russian northwestern provinces. Also joining the discussion were representatives of the Scandinavian countries, the United States, and European organizations. As the reader will see, emotions at the meeting ran high, but there was a common recognition that this kind of dialogue is a prerequisite not only for improving atmospherics but also for finding practical ways in which Russia's northwestern region can cooperate with its Baltic neighbors.

So far as we know, this meeting was the first occasion on which high-level Russians and Balts met for face-to-face discussions of their differences outside the constraints of formal diplomatic settings. While the list of disputes was not new, the openness and frankness of the exchanges were. All the participants agreed that this was an important contribution to enlarging each side's understanding of the motivations and sentiments that lie behind the issues.

The Project on Ethnic Relations has already moved to fulfill one of the recommendations that emerged from the talks in Novgorod. In October 1998, Russian and Baltic journalists gathered in Tallinn, Estonia, to consider how to enlarge the scope of their mutual coverage and to avoid ethnically biased reporting. Another early result of the meeting was the appointment of two of the participants from Russia to serve on a presidential committee in one of the Baltic countries to review the historical legacy of the Soviet rule. Meanwhile, plans have been made to continue the political dialogue that began in Novgorod with follow-up discussions in the Baltic countries.

The Project on Ethnic Relations is grateful to Milan Panic and ICN Pharmaceuticals for their generosity in hosting a reception for the participants and to the governor of Novgorod and the Novgorod Regional Administration for providing logistical support for the meeting.

We are also especially pleased to acknowledge the partnership role of the Russian Public Policy Center in conceiving and organizing the meeting. (The head of the center, Dr. Alexei M. Salmin, is a member of PER's Council for Ethnic Accord.) Boris I. Makarenko, deputy director general of the Center for Political Technologies and PER's Consultant in Moscow, was very helpful is planning Russian participation in the meeting. Alex N. Grigor'ev, PER program officer, was responsible for organization on the American side.

Robert Nurick of the RAND Corporation not only prepared this report, but also was extremely helpful in planning the meeting. Robert A. Feldmesser, PER's senior editor, together with Alex Grigor'ev, edited the report. PER is solely responsible for its contents, which have not been reviewed by the participants.

Allen H. Kassof, *President*
Livia B. Plaks, *Executive Director*
Princeton, New Jersey
November 1998

From left to right: Alvydas Medalinskas, Robert Nurick, Per Carlsen, Vygaudas Usackas, Pyotr Lillenurm.

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

In order to encourage frank and open discussion, none of the participants spoke for attribution. However, in order to make sense of the viewpoints expressed in the discussions, some form of identification of the speakers is necessary. For this purpose, participants from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are identified as "Baltic." Representatives of the Russian-speaking communities in the Baltic countries are identified as such. Participants from Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and the European Union are identified as "West European." The other participants are identified as "Russian" or "U.S."

This terminology does not, however, imply that Russia or the Baltic states are not located in Europe or that Denmark, Finland, Russia, or Sweden are not part of the Baltic region.

From left to right: Valery Tishkov, Mara Ustinova, Jack Scanlan, Thomas Lynch (blocked from view), Boris Makarenko, Sergei Khenkin, Boris Tsilevich, Yuri Mishin.

SUMMARY

The meeting reported here took place in Novgorod, Russia, May 15-16, 1998. It was the first in a series organized by the Project on Ethnic Relations. The goal of the series is to provide a neutral forum for policy-makers and officials from Russia and their Baltic and Scandinavian neighbors to discuss issues of regional security and interethnic and bilateral relations. Such dialogue has an important place in the larger framework of Euro-Atlantic relations.

The most confrontational issues at the meeting concerned the status of the Russian-speaking communities in Estonia and Latvia and the related problem of the legacy of Soviet rule in the Baltics. Russian participants and participants representing the Russian-speaking communities in the Baltic countries contended that Baltic ethnic nationalism and its goal of building "monoethnic" states had led to a condition of "statelessness" for the majority of ethnic Russians in Estonia and Latvia. They pointed out that the Russophone communities are becoming increasingly frustrated at what they see as their diminishing economic and political rights. Russian participants urged Estonia and Latvia to grant official status to the Russian language. In addition, they stressed that the policies toward Russian-speakers in those countries have seriously eroded support for the governments of Estonia and Latvia among Russian democrats.

Baltic participants tended to emphasize the detrimental effects of fifty years of Soviet rule. They said Russians were remnants of that rule, and they maintained that integration of the Russian-speaking populations into their societies must include not merely citizenship but a command of the state language and full participation in the respective nation's political and social life. West European and U.S. participants made positive assessments of the steps taken by the Baltic governments toward integration of their Russian-speaking countrymen, but they also urged the Baltic states to implement more fully the recommendations made by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

While the Russian participants see the core regional problem as lying in the domestic situation of the Baltic countries, the Balts consider the major difficulty in bilateral relations between Russia and the Baltic states. All the Baltic participants spoke of their strong desire to rejoin the West as soon as possible, but the Russian participants found it difficult to accept that orientation. They agreed with the view in Moscow that NATO was an anti-Russian military and political bloc and that

inclusion of the Baltic states in NATO was aimed against Russia.

The Balts declared that NATO membership was necessary for their security. They realize that membership will take time and resources, as well as simultaneous efforts to improve relations with Russia. The task for the Baltic countries, therefore, is to demonstrate that their accession to NATO need not run counter to Russian interests. Several participants underscored the importance of Russia's developing ties with NATO and expressed the hope that Russia would take full advantage of the opportunities to participate in the Partnership for Peace activities and the Permanent Joint Council. Most Russian participants agreed, and they did not object to the desire of the Baltic countries to join the European Union.

Russians and Balts agreed that the border treaties between their countries should be finalized and signed as soon as possible. This would significantly improve regional security and the level of trust between them.

Participants also discussed the place of economic ties in Russian-Baltic relations. They recognized that there is considerable economic interdependence between the Russian northwestern regions and their neighbors in this part of Europe. Economic relations in the region need further improvement, and the EU's "northern dimension" and the work of the Council of Baltic Sea States may make a major contribution toward the end.

There was considerable interest among conference participants in the prospects for confidence-building measures. Several Russian participants proposed enhanced cooperation in the military sphere. Other participants spoke of easing the visa procedures for Russians traveling to the Baltics and other ways of increasing cross-border activities. Participants also expressed support for initiatives that might be undertaken at the local or regional level, such as rural development, environmental problems, media exchanges and training, cultural exchanges, education, fighting crime and terrorism, and "sister-city" relationships. Both Russians and Balts welcomed the growing importance of the Council of Baltic Sea States as a forum for discussing and organizing cross-border cooperation in general.

The meeting did not produce an agreed-upon set of recommendations. However, the participants did agree that it would be useful to continue this kind of dialogue. Therefore, PER will organize a second meeting in one of the Baltic capitals early in 1999.

RUSSIAN-BALTIC POLITICAL RELATIONS

An American participant set the context for the discussion by noting that the United States has a twofold stake in constructive Russian-Baltic relations: first, because of its interest in stability and economic development in northeastern Europe as a whole; and second, because Russian-Baltic relations inevitably affect the tone and content of Russian-American bilateral relations. He observed that, while the political tone of Russian-Baltic relations is determined in the national capitals, the future will be increasingly affected by what happens outside the capitals, and not only in the Baltic countries and northwestern Russia, but in Scandinavia as well. With these considerations in mind, he posed these questions to the conference: What precisely is the problem? What are the sources of the difficulties? The Baltic and Russian participants in the conference tended to present markedly different answers to the questions.

The status of the Russophone communities

Probably the most contentious issues concerned the status of and prospects for the Russian-speaking communities in the Baltic countries and the related problem of coping with the legacy of the Soviet occupation.

Several Russian participants stressed what they viewed as the pernicious effects of ethnic nationalism in the Baltic states. As one put it, the issue of nationalism was a key factor in the collapse of the Soviet Union; and even now, the main challenge for the post-Soviet states is how to insure stability in view of their multiethnic character. The Estonian and Latvian experiences show the perversity of ethnic nationalism: Both countries received considerable political support from their Russian-speaking populations, but those large Russophone communities are now excluded from political life. Such exclusion would not be tolerated in other circumstances. The challenge for the Baltics, this participant argued, is to abandon the utopian—and ultimately dangerous idea of constructing a "monoethnic" state and begin the transition to a true civil society.

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This task is especially important, this speaker continued, because Russia

itself is in the midst of a profound crisis of identity, one that has an important impact on attitudes toward the Baltic states. The official government position, he noted, fully accepts the independence and sovereignty of those states. However, some Russian politicians do not; they crave revenge, and they exploit every shortsighted policy error in Riga and Tallinn (to say nothing of the double standards of the West). Nor is Baltic treatment of their Russian-speakers an issue only with Russian nationalists; sympathy for the Baltic states has also seriously eroded among democrats, who once were supportive.

Another participant stressed the interaction of the political and the cultural grievances of the Russian-speaking communities in Estonia and Latvia. Not only are they deprived of their political rights, but the Russian language itself has no status. Finland, he maintained, had given official recognition to minority languages; Estonia and Latvia should do the same, by making Russian an official language for interethnic communication. Others, however, took exception to this view. One European participant called the comparison misplaced; for example, he said, there is no "Swedish minority" in Finland, but rather a Swedish-speaking population that has been there for a thousand years. And even there, it took many hundreds of years for them to become integrated into Finnish society.

A Baltic representative raised a different objection. If Russian were made a second state language, then the incentive for the Russian-speakers to learn Estonian or Latvian would be greatly diminished, and true integration of these communities would not occur. In this speaker's view, the proposal simply demonstrates the underlying ambivalence that many Russian-speakers still unfortunately seem to have about integration as such.

A related exchange concerned the causes and implications of the events in Riga on March 3, 1998[1]. Several Baltic speakers said that the demonstration that day was not an ethnically based human-rights protest, as alleged by the president's spokesman, Yastrzhembsky, and others in Moscow, but rather a march by pensioners —ethnic Latvians as well as Russians— demanding higher pensions and better social benefits. (And, added one participant, ethnic Latvian retirees actually receive *lower* pensions than do retired Russian military personnel.) The incident was undoubtedly unfortunate, but Russian officials and politicians wildly exaggerated the severity of the police response and chose to stoke tensions rather than try to dampen them. This was disturbing, a Baltic speaker commented, because it suggested that Russian policy was being driven by the mounting economic and political difficulties at home, on the one hand, and, on the other, by unhappiness with the progress the Baltic states had shown both economically and in integration with the West (e.g., the Baltic Charter[2] with the U.S. and the new activeness of the Council of Baltic Sea States).

A representative of one of the Russian-speaking communities acknowledged that some Moscow politicians had exploited the affair for their own purposes, but, he said, this did not change the fact that there was a clear ethnic dimension to the incident and that the police had used excessive force in dealing with it. The underlying problems, and their potential to cause serious trouble, cannot be explained away. Another participant from one of the Russian-speaking communities issued a more general warning: The Russophone communities are becoming increasingly frustrated at the restrictions on their economic and political rights; they are becoming more self-confident, and they are going to press vigorously to insure that their rights are restored. Participants from Russia seconded this point. The political reality, they argued, is that large segments of the populations in Estonia and Latvia lack civil and political rights, and history tells us that groups isolated from mainstream political life will seek other avenues of expression. Moreover, for Russians, the treatment of these communities also has an important humanitarian component, which Russian diplomacy cannot and should not ignore.

The burdens of history

In discussing the causes of Russian-Baltic tensions, Baltic participants tended to emphasize the legacy of history—fifty years of Soviet rule—and the Baltic desire to rejoin the West as soon as possible. One speaker noted that Estonia, for example, must come to terms with a past

[1] On March 3, 1998, more than 1,000 people blocked a street near the Riga City Council building to protest low living standards. When the demonstrators failed to comply with a request to clear the street, police used force to disperse the demonstrators, most of whom happened to be elderly Russian-speakers. On the following day, the Russian Foreign Ministry said that Latvian police had committed a "glaring violation of elementary human rights" and that the use of force against the demonstrators was "disgusting". The Latvian Foreign Ministry responded by issuing a statement saying that it was "astonished" over the way Russian officials were trying to "interpret an administrative breach to give it a political and ethnic nature."

[2] The U.S.-Baltic Charter of Partnership was signed by the presidents of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and the United States in Washington on January 16, 1998. The document pledges U.S. support for the integration of the three Baltic states into Western institutions, including NATO.

marked by forced migration, oppression, and occupation. Inevitably, this past makes it difficult to create an integrated society. There has been progress, he argued—not yet integration, but at least a benign coexistence between the Estonian and the Russian-speaking communities. With independence achieved, Estonians no longer view Russians as occupiers, and most Russians recognize that Estonia is no longer part of Russia.

This speaker also disputed the view that ethnic nationalism was central to the collapse of the Soviet Union; for the Baltics, at least, the essential motivation was a desire to reestablish their lost statehood. This emphasis on the legal continuity of the state has been critical to the Baltic approach to citizenship issues. Estonian laws, for example, are not ethnically based, as the same rules apply to Estonians that apply to Russians, Finns and Germans. However, these rules do reflect the assumption that the Soviet rule was illegal.

The future of Estonia depends on its ability to integrate the Russian-speaking community.

He agreed with those who contend that the future of Estonia depends on its ability to integrate the Russian-speaking community. But he maintained that true integration is not merely the naturalization of aliens, for if the entire Russian-speaking community were naturalized now, the result would be not stability but rather a split society. Integration is the goal, but true integration takes time. According to him, Europe is the best judge of whether Estonia is violating European standards in this regard; and Europe says that Estonia is not.

One West European speaker concurred with the general thrust of this argument, but cautioned that while integration does take time, it must be worked at to succeed. It is critical, therefore, that the Baltic states fully and energetically implement the recommendations made on this subject by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The Baltic participants did not dispute this. One observed, however, that the fact that Estonia meets European norms does not mean that there are no problems there; for example, it needs to do a better job of teaching the Estonian language to those who wish to learn it. But he stressed that to require citizens to know some Estonian is not unfair, and indeed, it is necessary for integration over the long run. Moreover, the problem applies not only to Russians but also to other minorities, such as Ukrainian and Jewish, and in both Estonia and Latvia.

Another Baltic participant argued passionately that the experience of Soviet invasion and occupation will, and should, have a powerful impact. It is impossible to forget that some fifty thousand Latvians were deported in one night in 1940, and that for decades thereafter people were detained and tortured in the gulag. Latvia lost a large portion of its population and received seven hundred thousand Russian arrivals in return. Nor are the Russians deprived of citizenship; those who truly want it can get it. However, it is not self-evident, he argued, that integration ought to be the goal. He noted that while some Russians declare their readiness to learn Latvian, many others protest this requirement, and only about 30 percent say that they would defend Latvia in a conflict with Russia. It would be folly, he said, to give citizenship to those sent by Moscow to Russify Latvia or to those who are not loyal to the new and independent state. To do so would mean returning Latvia to the Russian orbit.

What many Russian-speakers fear is not integration as such, but integration that entails assimilation and a surrender of their ethnic identity.

A representative of one of the Russian communities in the Baltic states replied that the concept of "restored citizenship" is seen by the Russian-speakers as a device to preserve the political domination of Estonians and Latvians in their respective nations. This is not only unjust but also unnecessary, he maintained, because "Baltic Russians" are quite different from "Russian Russians," indeed, polling data suggest that the former are much more supportive of membership in the European Union than are ethnic Latvians and Estonians, largely because the Russophones believe that they will be better off when they can compete freely in Europeanized countries. The Russian-speaking communities desire integration, meaning full participation in the nation's political and social life. It is true, he acknowledged that not all Russians are ready to accept their status as an ethnic minority in Latvia. However, it is also true that many Latvians are not ready to accept Russian-speakers as full citizens. Hence, what many Russian-speakers fear is not integration as such, but integration that entails assimilation and a surrender of their ethnic identity. Meanwhile, higher education is open only to Latvian-speakers, Russian teachers are being pushed out of the schools, and for seven years, the Russophones have been hearing such reproaches as "You deported us," and "You brought Communism to Latvia." Under these circum-

stances, is it really surprising that only 30 percent say that they are willing to defend Latvia?

A Russian participant took note of a report that the Russian government is presently drafting a "concept paper" to define its policy on the issue of the ethnic Russians in the Baltic states. He explained that the draft is intended to neutralize the highly politicized statements and legislative proposals coming from the Duma. The government hopes that this will help improve the Russian-Baltic political atmosphere. But the document will also clearly reflect the government's desire to preserve close ties to the Russophone communities. The policy goal is to promote their integration into the lives of the countries where they now live. There is no hidden agenda here, he stressed, and the document is a constructive one, at least in its present form. He expressed concern, however, that the recent deterioration in Russian-Latvian relations and the resulting public pressures for sanctions and other measures may have a negative effect on the policy statement.

The external aspirations of the Baltic states

A Baltic participant observed that, while from a Russian perspective the basic problem involves the domestic situation within the Baltic states, from a Baltic perspective the core difficulties lie in the relations between Russia and the Baltic states. The fundamental Baltic choice for comprehensive integration with the West is hardly welcomed in Moscow, he suggested; it is clearly difficult for Russia to formulate an approach to the Baltic states that accepts their predominantly Western orientation.

For Moscow NATO means security against Russia, not with it.

This view was seconded by others, who pointed to Lithuanian-Russian relations as a case in point. The status of Russian-speakers is not an issue in Lithuania, one participant noted, yet there are problems in its relationships with Russia. These have primarily to do with Lithuania's external aspirations—its desire for rapid integration with the West. The Russian-speaking population in general seems quite unconcerned about Lithuania's aspirations for EU and NATO membership; the difficulty lies, rather, with the Russian political elites, and that is another legacy of the Soviet occupation. In the same vein, another participant commented that Russian officials have great difficulty in explaining why they object to Lithuanian membership in NATO. Why is Lithuania different from Poland? The only difference is that Lithuania used to be part of the U.S.S.R., but this fact—the illegal occupation—cannot be a basis for denying Lithuania, or for that matter the other Baltic states, the right to make their own security choices. He and others emphasized that, for Lithuania as for the other Baltic states, the wish to become part of NATO is not directed against Russia. Rather, it reflects the desire to rejoin the West and to gain a voice in Western institutions—not only NATO but also the EU, the Council of Europe, and others.

One Russian-speaker expressed sympathy for the goal of the Baltic states to "return to Europe". Nevertheless, he argued, their interest in NATO also reflects a fear of Russia and a desire for security. This, too, is understandable, but it reinforces the view in Moscow that NATO means security against Russia, not with it. Others expressed more categorical objections. What are the guarantees, one asked, against the deployment of NATO troops on Baltic territory? Estonia and the other Baltic states should abandon their desire for NATO membership, he said; here, too, Finland is a better model for them. Representatives from the Baltic states rejected this position and the assumptions behind it. Why, they reiterated, should Baltic membership in NATO be seen as a threat to a democratic Russia? It is true that Russians had been told for years that NATO was the enemy, but Estonians, Poles, and other East Europeans were subjected to the same message, and they had simply disregarded it when, upon gaining independence, they opted for integration with the West. This choice, including close ties to NATO, is open to Russia as well.

One participant from Western Europe commented that, in his view, the Baltic states have placed far too much emphasis on NATO membership, for NATO has not yet found a persuasive substitute for its cold-war, anti-Russian rationale. They would be well advised to give greater attention to other elements of security policy. Another went further, saying that NATO membership is a red herring for the Baltics; the real change in their situation will come with membership in the EU, because that will truly mean entry into Europe.

However, EU membership is not a foregone conclusion, he and others warned. Accession is a very complicated and technical affair. Moreover, the EU is itself undergoing a process of internal reform, in anticipation of the enlargement of its membership. There is no such thing as a "fast track" to the EU; rather, there is a "pipeline". First, the criteria for mem-

bership are clearly spelled out; they encompass human rights, a competitive market economy, and a readiness to meet the obligations of EU membership. The EU then assesses how far the aspirant countries have moved along this route. There is no preset timetable for completion of the process; indeed there is no guarantee that an aspirant will be judged to have completed it at all.

Baltic representatives said they understood this, and they were not asking for any guarantees of EU membership. But, they added, it was critical that the Baltic states—all of the Baltic states—be explicitly brought into the process and have the opportunity to make their case. One participant insisted that, politically if not procedurally, the Luxembourg summit did in fact define a "fast track;" the problem is that Lithuania and Latvia are not on it. Do EU members have the political will to add new states to the list of those qualified for accession negotiations (provided, of course, that they meet the EU criteria)? That is the Lithuanian and Latvian concern.

Several West European speakers pointed out that, in addition to the formal EU membership criteria and processes, Baltic prospects will also inevitably be affected by the disposition of the domestic political issues discussed at this conference. One speaker made the point sharply: No country can expect to join the EU if hundreds of thousands of its residents are not citizens. He and others stressed that the OSCE recommendations on citizenship laws in Latvia and Estonia should be fully implemented—no more, no less. If this is done, then the EU will defend Estonia and Latvia against any pressure to do more, and Western governments will expect Moscow to respect those recommendations as well.

Language and culture

A Russian participant remarked that, in their haste to "rejoin the West," the Baltic states had in effect dismantled a transnational cultural system based on the Russian language. This had several unfortunate consequences. First, it reinforced the feeling among many Russian-speakers that their communities and their culture were becoming increasingly isolated from the rest of Europe. Second, it had the immediate practical effect that, as the ties of common language and experience weakened, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was finding fewer and fewer people who actually know the Baltic countries. This does not bode well for the future. A member of the Russophone community in the Baltic states added that, faced with the pressures to assimilate, the next generation in Estonia and Latvia was not likely to speak much Russian. This was a loss for those countries, and they should act more energetically to preserve minority cultures and languages, as had been done in the U.S.S.R.

One Baltic participant replied that this linguistic trend was inevitable. Over time, fewer people in the Baltics will indeed speak Russian, because they now have the freedom to learn other languages instead. Another agreed that this trend was also related to the Baltic states' wider European aspirations. In seeking to join the "new Europe," increasingly marked by common domestic legislation, open markets, and common foreign and security policies, the Baltics were importing values from the West. This is another reason why English, German, and Swedish are displacing the Russian language. A third participant agreed, but offered a more optimistic perspective. He noted, for example, that in the immediate aftermath of World War II, nobody in Denmark wanted to speak German, but this attitude softened because of the necessity of interacting with Germany. The same will occur with the Russian language in the Baltic states, he predicted. "Just give it time."

Economic factors

Another issue concerned the place of economic ties in Russian-Baltic relations. One participant noted that Estonia receives considerable profits from the transit of Russian oil across its territory. Should these profits be used to finance accession to NATO? he asked. If Russia diverts its oil to other ports, Estonia will lose this income. Estonia thus has a strong economic stake in stable relations with its eastern neighbor, he concluded, and should be more attentive to Moscow's interests. A Russian participant added that Russia was economically important to the Baltics not only as a source of energy supplies and transit fees, but also as a market for Baltic agricultural output.

A representative from the Baltic states disputed these points. First of all, he said, Estonia is not dependent on Russian energy supplies; Russian gas constitutes only about 10 percent of Estonia's total consumption. Moreover, Gazprom is anxious to continue selling there. Secondly, though income from transit fees is rising, overall economic growth means that their importance to Estonian GDP is going down. Estonia was much more dependent on transit fees back in the 1970s, when Russia did divert oil transport away from Estonian territory and the Estonian econ-

omy suffered considerably as a consequence. Estonia learned a lesson from this experience, and will not allow itself to be dependent in this way again. The first speaker replied by asking, If Russia doesn't matter much economically to Estonia, then why do Estonians react so strongly to the threat of sanctions, and stress the harm such steps will do to the Russophone community there?

A Russian regional representative pointed out that the various trade corridors between the Baltic states and the Russian regions are in competition with one another. For example, authorities in the city and region of St. Petersburg plan to construct new ports and expand oil-processing facilities, with the aim of making the region a major player in import and export operations. As these plans come to fruition, they will have a considerable economic impact on the Pskov region. St. Petersburg, not Pskov, already processes most of the transit through Latvia. Pskov's economic potential began to decline, he said, once its borders with the Baltic states became state boundaries, but the Pskov political establishment does not yet fully appreciate the region's stake in developing its economic ties with the Baltics. (However, he did note as an aside, the Pskov administration has not supported the imposition of economic sanctions against Latvia.)

One participant said that two broad lessons could be derived from these observations. First, a critical factor is how—and how well—economic interests are reflected in policy; and second, there is still considerable economic interdependence between the Russian regions and their neighbors in this part of Europe. But, as other speakers pointed out as well, the infrastructure of roads, rail links, and communications in northwestern Russia is inadequate to support expanded cross-border trade. Improving that infrastructure should be a priority. The EU has recognized this problem, and the EU's "northern dimension" may have a major impact on the nature of Baltic and other European economic ties with Russia.

Several West European participants picked up on this point, predicting that important economic prospects for the future would stem from the processes of European integration. There is great economic dynamism in the region now: Estonia is already an economic success, Latvia is following the same path and is becoming a major trade partner for Finland, and Lithuania is beginning to take off as well. One said he expected that virtually all the Baltic rim countries will be members of the EU within ten years. Russia will probably not, however, which makes it all the more important that new forms of Russian-Baltic economic interaction be developed.

Policy choices

The final topic at the conference's opening session revolved around the policy choices facing the governments of the region. As one speaker remarked, nearly a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia and the Baltic states have not yet figured out how to treat each other. For Russia, he said, the question was: Should we treat the Baltic states as partners or as potential enemies? Similarly, the Baltic states must be very unsure what kind of Russia they will be dealing with ten years from now. There are thus important uncertainties on both sides, and such uncertainties inevitably cause trouble.

Russia needs to be able to express its doubts and concerns directly to the Baltic governments, and to hear theirs in return.

A Russian participant framed the question in a somewhat different way. The problem for the Russian government, he said, is that it is not clear how it can constructively react to, or affect, whatever unhelpful policies may be adopted by the Baltic governments, especially those bearing on issues of citizenship and political rights. In his view, the recent steps by the Latvian government are headed in the right direction, but they still must be enacted in legislation, and in any case are not yet enough. Western efforts at mediation are appreciated, but Russia wants and needs a direct dialogue among the parties whose interests are at stake: Russia needs to be able to express its doubts and concerns directly to the Baltic governments, and to hear theirs in return.

A Russian-speaker from the Baltics saw the recent record of Russian policy in the Baltic region as a complicated matter. On the one hand, he commented, Russian pressure has produced a backlash in the Baltic states, increasing the force of nationalist appeals there and reinforcing desires to integrate rapidly with the West. On the other hand, this pressure has also clearly energized the West to act—to push the Baltic states to address the issues at the core of Russian complaints.

Other Baltic representatives offered different perspectives. One identified three prerequisites for improved Russian-Baltic political relations: (a) reciprocal respect and tolerance, which among other things presupposes a jettisoning of cold-war rhetoric; (b) a recognition of interdepen-

dency, particularly in the border regions on both sides; and (c) concrete initiatives to enhance cooperation and rebuild ties, especially at the grass roots. Another emphasized that security itself is based on a commitment to friendly relations, so both sides must want them. Why, then, does Russia not sign the border treaty with Latvia? The issues in the treaty as such are settled, yet Russia continues to use the language of ultimatums and link its signature to other matters in the bilateral relationship.

For the Baltics the question is not whether they will be able to integrate quickly into the West—they can. Rather, the question is, what kind of neighbor will they leave behind?

One of the Russian participants reminded that for several years the border treaty between Latvia and Russia could not be signed because of Latvian territorial claims to Russia, so, according to him, it would be wrong to blame Russia for that delay. Besides, he continued, after the recent conflicts involving Russian-speaking population it would be unrealistic to expect gestures of goodwill from the Russian government. He predicted that no progress would be reached in bilateral relations until after parliamentarian elections in Latvia in October 1998.

Reviewing this exchange, an American participant suggested that both Russia and the Baltic states need to rethink their approach to these issues. For the Baltics, he said, the question is not whether they will be able to integrate quickly into the West—they can. Rather, the question is, what kind of neighbor will they leave behind? The answer, of course, depends very much on Russia, but what the Baltic states do will affect it as well. The Baltic states can win arguments, but this will not change the facts on the ground. The challenge is a political one; and the fact that their policies may be consistent with European norms is not a substitute for encouraging the emergence of a congenial neighbor and an amicable neighborhood.

However, Russia too has questions to confront, he continued. First, Russia must recognize that the Baltics are gone for good from their sphere of control—just as the Russian-speakers in the Baltics must accept the fact that the Soviet Union is no more. Secondly, Russian foreign policy must shed its "contrarian" stance toward the Baltics and their aspirations. This stance has carried large diplomatic costs. It has produced real uncertainty—not only among the Baltic states but elsewhere in Europe as well—about the long-term aims of Russian policies in the region. Does Russia truly desire to settle its differences with the Baltics, or does it intend to use those differences as barriers to Baltic integration into European institutions? If the former, then it should abandon its pressure tactics and seek above all to alter the widespread perceptions of a Russian threat to Baltic security. Russia needs to clarify the objectives of its policies not only toward the Baltic states but also toward Europe in general.

ISSUES IN REGIONAL SECURITY

The conference then turned to matters of regional security, examining several interrelated sets of issues: the roles of the EU and NATO in the evolving European security architecture; security-related problems in Russian-Baltic relations; and the prospects for regional confidence-building measures (CBMs).

The EU and NATO

A West European participant opened the discussion by providing a perspective from Strasbourg. He reported that there is a consensus in the European parliament on the main elements of EU security policy. First, security encompasses more than defense. The multifaceted nature of security has several manifestations in EU policy: partnership agreements, special arrangements with Russia, a commitment to EU enlargement, and support for regional security cooperation, in the Baltic area and elsewhere. Secondly, members are determined to develop the "European Security and Defense Identity." The Berlin declaration, which allows for the possibility that the Western European Union (WEU) may act, if necessary, without the United States, and the so-called "Petersburg tasks," with their emphasis on crisis prevention, are at the core of this objective. NATO membership is the final element of the consensus within the EU, but it is not regarded as the only form of institutional collaboration that matters. The potential in the WEU and the Partnership for Peace (PfP) needs to be fully exploited as well.

It would be a mistake to view the process of NATO enlargement as if Baltic membership were inevitable.

An American speaker seconded this last point. It would be a mistake, he said, to view the process of NATO enlargement as if Baltic membership were inevitable. The first three candidates were relatively unproblematic—they brought no serious instabilities with them—but the next round of enlargement is likely to be much more controversial. Sharp and dramatic changes in Russian-American relations could have a major impact on American attitudes toward the question of Baltic membership. The Baltics thus need to consider some alternative scenarios. What new problems—or, for that matter, new opportunities—would be opened up if the second round of NATO enlargement were delayed, or didn't take place at all?

A Baltic representative replied that the Baltic states are not willing to base policy on any such "alternative scenarios." He pointed out that not only are the Baltic governments firmly committed to membership in NATO, but President Clinton and other key Western leaders have made it clear that they support this aspiration. The Baltics understand that NATO membership will take time, effort, and resources, as well as efforts to improve relations with Russia. The task for the Baltics, therefore, is not to search for alternatives, but rather to demonstrate that their accession to NATO need not run counter to Russian interests, especially in light of deepening Russia-NATO ties.

Several other participants underscored the importance of developing Russia's ties with NATO, and therefore expressed the hope that Russia would take full advantage of the opportunities to participate in PfP activities and the Permanent Joint Council (PJC). Most Russian participants agreed as well. One of them added that the negative images that Russians and Balts have developed of each other will be changed only by constructive personal contact and interaction, in defense and other fields. But, while expressing support for Russian participation in NATO activities, one speaker also said that institutions like the PJC should not be used as a smoke screen for a second wave of NATO enlargement; if this should occur, he warned, Russia will leave the council and reassess its relations with NATO in general.

An American speaker confirmed that there is considerable momentum behind the Baltic push for NATO membership and that the U.S. is actively assisting the Baltic states in their efforts to qualify. Alternative security arrangements do of course exist, and they should not be denigrated; after all, not all of the NATO "partner" countries aspire to membership, and not all aspirants will succeed. But the Baltic states have their own particular requirements, and their prospects for NATO membership should not be linked to the state of Russian-Western relations. Several Baltic speakers agreed that the WEU and the OSCE have a role to play, but for the Baltics they are not alternatives to NATO.

Western European perspectives on these matters varied considerably. One participant stressed that the guarantee in NATO's Article V is a serious commitment. Could NATO hope to defend the Baltic states to implement that commitment? Would NATO members be willing to accept the resulting obligations? He was doubtful. A Baltic representative replied with the observation that when NATO was formed, nobody

thought Denmark was defensible. The keys to change were political will and the deterrent effects of defense commitments. The same applies to the question of Baltic "defensibility" today.

A second West European speaker reiterated the view that defense and military integration is in any case less important for the Baltic states than is economic integration. It is economic reform and EU membership, more than NATO membership, that will transform the Baltics' security situation. This is not to suggest that NATO is irrelevant to the Baltics. Though his own country has not chosen to join, it is active in the PfP, is working hard to improve joint operability with NATO forces, and maintains that all countries have the right to make their own choices. It also supports "all the attributes of statehood" for the Baltics, including defense—not only competent armed forces but also effective border controls. But, he said once again, the real issue is economics; Baltic preoccupation with NATO membership is a diversion.

It is economic reform and EU membership, more than NATO membership, that will transform the Baltics' security situation.

A third West European speaker took a somewhat different position. He acknowledged that, as a practical matter, the Baltics may need to think about delays in or alternatives to NATO enlargement. But he was surprised to hear this line of argument, especially from representatives of NATO member states whose own security is already assured. Everyone should be clear about one fundamental point: There are no alternative security structures to NATO. No other institutions have the capabilities—both military and political—that NATO has today, and none are likely to develop them in the foreseeable future. Under those circumstances, is it really so difficult to understand why the newly independent states of Europe so badly wish to join? .

Security perceptions and fears

Several Russian participants reminded the conference that their concerns about NATO and EU enlargement go beyond purely defense-related matters. First, they pointed to fears of the consequences of exclusion. Those countries brought within the orbits of Western institutions will move ahead fast, while Russia will be left outside and thus will inevitably be less dynamic and competitive than its neighbors. This is one basis for the growing sense of insecurity felt in Moscow. Secondly, they noted that what they called the "Russophobic card" was used by politicians in the three nations chosen for candidacy as part of their drive for NATO membership, and that is an even greater danger in the Baltics. In other words, the politics of enlargement have taken on an anti-Russian cast and have reinforced images of Russia as the enemy, despite protestations to the contrary. This, too, can only exacerbate Russia's fears of exclusion and insecurity. Russia is searching for new approaches in the Baltics and is showing a readiness for cooperation, they concluded, but the Baltic states' focus on NATO membership is likely to produce an impasse.

It is important to understand that fear of Russia is one major reason for the Baltic states' determination to join the Western alliance.

One Baltic speaker replied that it is important to understand that fear of Russia is one major reason for the Baltic states' determination to join the Western alliance. No one likes to make a point of this, but it is a fact, and unfortunately Russian tactics—threats of countermeasures if the Baltics join, insistence on political concessions for economic ties, and the like—often serve to reinforce it. Another added that the Baltic states' history of dealings with Russia inevitably colored their reactions to more recent Russian initiatives, including President Yeltsin's offer of a security treaty as an alternative to NATO. The Baltics have signed (or have been forced to sign) security treaties with Russia before, and they have learned not to rely on Russian guarantees.

A third Baltic speaker explained, however, that what Lithuanians fear is not Russia per se but insecurity in Russia—crime and corruption, political instability, risks from nuclear power stations, and the possibility that nondemocratic regimes may come to power there and in Belarus. This perspective reinforces both Lithuania's desire for integration with the West and its efforts to find areas of collaboration with democratic forces in Russia, both in Moscow and in the regions. He therefore concurred with the view, advanced by several Western European participants, that support for Russian reform must be an important element in Baltic security policy.

Support for Russian reform must be an important element in Baltic security policy.

Regional confidence-building measures

There was considerable interest among conference participants in the potential for CBMs in the Baltic region. However, they did not find it easy to translate support for such measures in principle into agreement on practical measures.

One speaker from Moscow argued that contacts and cooperation in the military sphere are often easier to achieve than in the civilian sphere. He noted that Russia has already taken some initiatives to build confidence—e.g., Yeltsin's decision to reduce troop levels in northwestern Russia. These should be built on, he suggested, to turn the region into what he called a "zone of special defense policy." Key elements could include special border regimes, joint maneuvers and training, special arrangements for military observers, and even joint Russian-Baltic units, to deal with such matters as disaster relief, terrorism, and peacekeeping.

NATO's PfP program provides an existing framework for Russian/Baltic/NATO cooperative activities in defense.

Other Russian participants expressed support for proposals of this sort and also said that joint Russian-Baltic military units and activities could be expanded to include NATO as well. One argued strongly that military cooperation in the region should be enhanced; the problem was how to arrange it institutionally. He noted, for example, that the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) had studiously avoided military issues—though this was probably just as well, since it allowed for the smooth disposition of other, less difficult matters. Nevertheless, this left a gap. A forum is needed to deal with Yeltsin's and other regional security proposals and with regional CBMs. A West European speaker noted that some Scandinavian states want to avoid any "regionalization" of security and therefore will oppose the creation of new permanent regionally based bodies to address security issues in northeastern Europe. The Russian speaker said he understood these objections, which reinforce his view that the OSCE is the appropriate institution for this purpose.

Baltic reactions were guarded. One speaker noted that previous Russian initiatives of this sort had not been matched by cooperation in other, less complicated areas, such as border negotiations. Indeed, there is a whole series of agreements lying on the table, ready for signature; signing them, he maintained, would be the best way for Russia to build trust and confidence among its Baltic neighbors. In the meantime, he said, ambitious defense cooperation is premature. Another Baltic participant added that, although there are certainly interesting elements in the Russian proposals, the notion of a "special zone" is incompatible with the principle of indivisible security and thus is unacceptable from a Baltic point-of-view. In addition, NATO's PfP program provides an existing framework for Russian/Baltic/NATO cooperative activities in defense, and he expressed the wish that Russia would become a more active participant in the program. The Baltic states certainly welcomed Russia's unilateral force reductions (indeed, they would like to see more), and they believe that "transparency" measures along the lines of the Swedish-Finnish proposals are a particularly promising avenue to pursue. But it is not clear if the Russians are interested in this approach; he noted, for example, that the Russian general staff has received an open invitation to observe "Baltic Challenge" exercises, and so far has not responded.

A West European speaker agreed with these remarks, adding that CBMs must stand or fall on their own merits and not be linked to other matters. To be precise: Russia must refrain from conditioning its CBM proposals on the Baltic states' remaining outside of NATO. Doing otherwise will make progress on CBMs very difficult to achieve.

COOPERATION ACROSS BORDERS

The general sense of the conference was that, although Russian and Baltic concerns, suspicions, and antagonisms are real and cannot be wished away, neither should they be allowed to define the totality of Russian-Baltic relations. Though matters of high policy may well be susceptible to resolution only in national capitals, much can nevertheless be done—in some cases, is already being done—on the ground. The final session of the conference focused on issues and prospects for collaboration across national borders at the local and regional levels.

Conference participants saw considerable potential for initiatives in this area that would be constructive both for their own sake and because of the larger political messages that cross-border cooperation could convey. Most also acknowledged, however, that the devil was often in the details—that there were obstacles as well as opportunities, and that both varied considerably from region to region.

Political purposes and concerns

Several participants pointed out that the potential utility of cross-border cooperative activity was increasingly coming to the attention of decision-makers at the center. As a case in point, some called attention to Lithuanian President Adamkus's policy statement of March 16, 1998, with its emphasis on encouraging practical cooperation with the Russian city of Kaliningrad. This is starting to happen, they said, and despite political difficulties, economic, cultural, and social cooperation is proceeding well. Commercial relations have grown considerably, to the point that Lithuania's trade with Kaliningrad is now at the same level as with Latvia. The participation by Lithuanian business entities in projects in Kaliningrad has grown as well. Indeed, a program of cooperation has begun among business people from Lithuania, Kaliningrad, Germany, and Poland, and joint projects may begin soon. Finally, Lithuania is seeking to include Kaliningrad in regional forums (such as the CBSS) and other forms of subregional cooperation.

One speaker viewed this trend as marking a third, mature phase in Russian-Lithuanian relations. The first stage was that of the restoration of Lithuanian independence. This was a highly emotional period, he said, in which relations with a newly democratic Russia reflected a sense of shared goals and grievances. In the second stage, each country began to define its own independent interests, and disagreements on some issues, such as NATO enlargement, became more prominent. Now, relations were moving into this third phase, in which both sides were seeking to identify and engage in new and concrete forms of cooperation. From Lithuania's perspective, such cooperation can serve important political as well as practical purposes. Constructive and active ties with contiguous areas of Russia—Pskov and Novgorod, as well as Kaliningrad—can demonstrate that Lithuania's aspirations to join the EU and NATO are not inconsistent with a desire for close and productive relations with Russia.

Another speaker argued that these cross-border ties can be of great political significance to Russia as well: Kaliningrad's growing role in cross-border economic activities and institutions can, over time, help bring Russia closer to Europe in general. Novgorod, St. Petersburg, and other parts of northwestern Russia can play similar roles. In other words, he concluded, these cities and regions can be Russia's windows on Europe.

A representative from Kaliningrad expressed general support for this view, adding that in light of its geographic position the region had no choice but to develop stable ties with its Baltic neighbors. Problems remained, of course, but in his opinion these were most usefully addressed and resolved at the regional level, not at the center. Other Russian regional representatives were similarly optimistic about finding areas of cooperation at the local level. Nor did they think that political avenues should necessarily be excluded; one pointed to interaction among local parliaments as a potentially fruitful area.

Not all of the news was rosy, however. First, Baltic representatives expressed some concern that enhanced cross-border contacts, while eminently desirable on many grounds, might also mean that neo-Nazism in Russia could more easily be exported into their societies. A Russian participant interjected that the importance and influence of neo-Nazi political currents in Russia was being blown out of proportion. Another speaker reported, however, that at least in Pskov neo-Nazism is a sensitive matter—not widely propagated, to be sure, but politically visible and active. Neo-nazi groups and newspapers are small but aggressive, and they are working to place their representatives on local councils. He stressed that the Pskov authorities are combating these groups, and with some success—the Mayor recently won an important libel suit against a neo-Nazi newspaper, for example. So while the phenomenon should not be exaggerated, he concluded, it does exist, and it is the responsibility of local authorities to deal with it.

A second and more common concern focused not on the risks of too much cross-border contact but rather on the effects of too little. Pskov again was cited, as an example of a region where previous patterns of personal interactions across the Russian-Baltic borders had been greatly weakened. One speaker reported that local authorities in Pskov are concerned about this trend and are working with counterparts in Estonia and Latvia to address it. One initiative has been to create new transborder institutions, such as a "Council of Border Cooperation." These bodies have already proved useful, he said, but they function only sporadically and are hobbled by a lack of specific authority. Cross-border contacts have also been negatively affected by a rise in the cost of an Estonian visa. Another Russian participant warned that Estonia and Latvia are increasingly becoming terra incognita, and that if constructive initiatives are not taken, the next generation of Russians will know them more as abstractions than as real countries. This is another reason, he said, why it is important that the core issues in Russian-Baltic relations not be left to the next generation to resolve.

"Bridges of contact": travel and education

A Baltic representative said that, in light of the foregoing problems, a key task was to rebuild what he called "bridges of contact" between the Russian and Baltic populations. He suggested two areas for special attention: education, especially as concerns history, and travel. The former was important, he said, because most Balts do not have a very good grasp of real Russian history (which is very different from what was taught in Soviet textbooks), while very few Russians know much about Baltic history, especially as the Baltic peoples themselves understand it. Tourism and other forms of cross-border travel also need to be encouraged, so that webs of personal contact can be developed and sustained. These two suggestions served as the focus for considerable discussion.

There was widespread agreement that priority attention should be given to increasing tourism between Russia and the Baltic states, and several participants expressed the hope that the conference could produce concrete recommendations for local authorities and media. Representatives of the Russophone communities, while endorsing this objective, stressed that, for progress to be made, the Baltic states would have to streamline their currently very cumbersome visa procedures and reduce their cost.

Present arrangements strongly discourage Russian tourism. Another speaker identified a different factor: Russian travel to the Baltics is held down, he said, by Russians' belief that they will not be made welcome when they arrive. What they expect instead are lectures and reproaches. Some way must be found to prevent political problems from poisoning relations at the personal level.

Several West European speakers reminded the group that if the Baltic states desire EU membership, they will have to adjust their visa regimes to EU requirements. This may not be a simple matter, they cautioned, because visa control is already a big issue in the EU enlargement debate, and may become more contentious as accession negotiations widen and concerns about border controls grow. Border controls are themselves an important aspect of security; they reflect, as well as influence, the overall state of bilateral relations.

The second area suggested for "bridges of contact"—education and history—proved considerably more controversial, in that it was linked by both Russian and Baltic speakers to memories of the Soviet occupation and its aftermath. A debate was sparked by the observation made by a Baltic speaker that one source of misunderstanding is the fact that Russia has not yet made its reconciliation with its own history, as Germany did after World War II. He stressed that Baltic peoples do not blame today's Russians for what happened in 1940, but they do find it worrisome that Russia has not come to terms with its past.

It is unproductive, and unfair, to project onto today's Russia all the sins of the U.S.S.R.

Russian participants took strong exception to this view. First, one argued, there has in fact been great criticism of the Soviet past; indeed, the criticism has been so harsh that it has provoked a counterreaction in some quarters. Russia has gone from one extreme to another—from Soviet falsifications of history, in which all was harmony and progress, to its opposite, that all was oppression and horror. It is true, another acknowledged, that there has been no official statement of regret or apology for the occupation and its consequences, but on a personal and social level the criticism has been widespread. Second, they rejected the parallel between Russia in 1991 and Germany and Japan after World War II. The latter were defeated militarily by the Allies, but the U.S.S.R. was

defeated by its own people, including many Russians. One speaker asked: What should Russian democrats, in particular, apologize for? They, more than any others, were responsible for bringing down the old system. It is unproductive, and unfair, to project onto today's Russia all the sins of the U.S.S.R.

A member of the Russian community in the Baltics raised another sort of objection. He was concerned that, if Russia formally admits to the wrongs of the occupation, the attitude of Latvians and Estonians toward the Russian-speaking inhabitants of their countries will be like that of the Algerians toward the French. The result will be not reconciliation, but further estrangement. The Russian community, he said, would never agree to such a reading of history in any case, for—as distinct from the Nazi occupation—many welcomed the Soviet arrival there. A colleague took a somewhat different view. It would be an important symbolic act, he said, for Russia to acknowledge and apologize for the fact of occupation. But if the matter were not carefully handled, it would simply lead to new issues. He pointed out, for example, that many of his own relatives had been killed by Latvians during World War II. Should he demand an apology? Obviously, that would be foolish. The point, he explained, was that "our mutual injustices" are so interwoven that acting on the Baltic suggestions may merely serve to keep old wounds open and to create new ones.

In reply, Baltic representatives emphasized their appreciation for the fact that many individual Russians do regret what occurred during the occupation and have strongly criticized those responsible for it. The problem, however, is that no authoritative Russian political figure has been willing to do what Chancellor Kohl of Germany did in Riga—to issue a clear and public apology. They reiterated that the purpose of their proposals was not to cast blame but to begin a necessary process of reconciliation, because the occupation is a political fact that needs to be addressed. The Germans have understood this. German apologies have been central to its reconciliation with its neighbors, and Germany—democratic Germany—is still apologizing for Nazism fifty years later. Germany has apologized for the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact; Russia has not. In any official sense, Russia does not even acknowledge the fact of occupation. This is a serious political problem; Russia needs to understand the feelings and perceptions of the occupied nations.

Several West European speakers drew on their own national situations to support this line of argument. One noted, for example, that a good deal of reconciliation has been taking place in Russian-Finnish relations, spurred in no small measure by Yeltsin's expression of regret in Helsinki. This and similar statements from other officials have had a powerful impact on Finnish perceptions of contemporary Russia, he reported; such gestures make a big difference. Unfortunately, another speaker observed, the current Russian political situation will not allow for such initiatives toward the Baltic states, and it would probably be counterproductive to push the matter hard right now. But he thought it important to prepare for the time when such gestures do become politically possible.

This led to a suggestion from the floor that joint historical work be undertaken, to lay the groundwork for possible political initiatives later, when the time is right. It was noted that the Baltic presidents have already agreed on one initiative in this regard: to organize an international commission (with Russian, American, and European members) to address the period from the 1930s to the present. Conference participants expressed considerable support for initiatives of this sort. But one issued a word of caution about applying "truth commissions" to these complex historical memories.

Other possibilities

Conference participants suggested a number of other areas in which they felt useful initiatives might be undertaken at the local or regional level. Among these were:

- rural development (including cross-border cooperation in marketing, agricultural infrastructure, and the like);
- environmental issues;
- media exchanges and training (to help break down stereotypes and provide more accurate information);
- cultural exchanges (with a particular emphasis on youth);
- higher education ("It is a pity," one participant remarked, "that Russian universities now receive more students from England and France than from the Baltic states");
- crime and terrorism (building, for example, on the groups of experts established by the European Conference, an EU body);

- (again, some EU bodies might be a useful model); and
- "sister city" relationships (as a way of encouraging cross-border business and professional contacts, fostering joint projects, and assisting democratic institutions at the local level).

Two sets of issues received particular attention in this part of the discussion. There was consensus that environmental issues and problems should be a high priority. Baltic representatives said that they will need technical and financial assistance in this area, especially to deal with the environmental problems associated with former Soviet military bases, the pollution generated by coal-fired power stations, and the risks of nuclear power. Environmental concerns, and the need for better cross-border cooperation, were much on the minds of Russian representatives as well. One noted that environmental problems were already high on the CBSS agenda. Activities include an effort to identify so-called "hot spots," or areas of unusually high pollution (there are more than one hundred in the region as a whole, of which some seventeen to twenty are on Russian territory); and chemical weapons that have been dumped in the Baltic Sea (a "time bomb," where cooperation is especially necessary).

These remarks led to the second theme: the growing importance of the CBSS as a forum for discussing and organizing cross-border cooperation in general. As one West European participant reported, the CBSS is already entertaining a wide range of projects and proposals. One is the so-called "energy ring" around the Baltic region. Another is the "via Baltica" transport corridor—an idea that has evoked great interest in the Russian regions but has been slowed by constraints emanating from Moscow and by insufficient resources from the EU. Baltic representatives also attached great importance to cooperative projects in energy and transport and to projects involving small and medium enterprises. They also stressed the necessity of including some entities from outside the region in CBSS deliberations, most notably the EU and the U.S.

A view from Moscow

The discussion of trends in and prospects for cross-border cooperation at the regional level concluded with a set of observations about the perspective from Moscow. As one Russian participant noted, several government-supported programs of this kind already exist, some of relatively long standing, though most have not received much publicity. He stressed that the government views such cooperation as a very promising area and that it recognizes the importance of initiative from below. But, he added, a key principle in the government's approach is that programmatic initiatives should not be totally independent of the views of the center. Programs are—or at least should be—coordinated through intergovernmental agreements, as the principal vehicle by which regional entities cooperate across state borders. Russia has concluded such an agreement with Finland, and this participant expressed the hope that agreements will be possible with the Baltic states as well.

The same speaker went on to say that Russia hopes that the CBSS will provide the framework within which cooperation among the Baltic littoral states (including, for example, Poland) can be expanded. He noted that the U.S. has also become interested in these activities and is now represented at CBSS meetings. And the CBSS agenda is growing. For example, a special experts group on organized crime has been formed, under the Swedish foreign ministry, to exchange information and look at possible areas for expanding operational cooperation. Finland has taken a similar initiative to improve the training and procedures of border guards. Russia participates actively in both these efforts. It also works closely with the CBSS commissioner responsible for human rights—the creation of which was a Russian initiative to address human-rights issues and strengthen democratic institutions in the region.

Therefore, he concluded, cooperation does go on, despite the obstacles and difficulties in bilateral relations. He expressed the hope that when Lithuania takes over the chairmanship of the CBSS, some of these obstacles can be resolved and the council's work accelerated.

From left to right: Alex Grigor'ev, Livia Plaks, Allen Kassof, Alexei Salmin, Oleg Vishnevski.

CONCLUSIONS

The final session of the conference was given over to a pair of summary presentations by the organizers—one Russian, one American.

Problems and pseudoproblems

The Russian presenter began with the observation that Russian-Baltic relations are beset not only by real problems but also by "pseudo-problems," or myths, that are often more difficult to deal with than the real ones. He identified five such myths.

The first myth is that of "the Baltics." The Russian tendency, he noted, is to view the three Baltic countries as a single entity—a habit that can produce serious misconceptions. They are different states, with different problems and different attitudes toward Russia. Russia needs to distinguish among them, see them clearly in all their particularity, and fashion its policies accordingly.

Second is the myth of Russia as a dangerous neighbor. What, precisely, is the nature of the danger that Russia poses? Economic? Military? In the speaker's view, at the root of this myth in the Baltic states is a sense of Russia as a cultural danger—a view that reinforces their sense of difference, despite the fact that Russians and the Baltic peoples are in fact a good deal alike.

A third myth concerns the Russian language. There is no doubt that Russian is being pushed out of everyday life in the Baltic states. In some respects, this is an inevitable if not "normal" occurrence. But the Russian language will not disappear; it will remain the lingua franca of a very large neighbor, so some people in the Baltic states will continue to speak it because it will remain useful for them to do so.

Fourth, there is the myth of "the West." In one version, this myth takes the form of a conspiracy against Russia; in another, it is the "rear guard" of the Baltic states, ready to underwrite their every aspiration and support them in every dispute with Russia. But the West is not monolithic, either; there is no consensus there on the issues that this conference has addressed.

Finally, there are the myths surrounding NATO. For many Russians, NATO is simply a threat—though precisely why is not often clear. Baltic aspirations for NATO membership are understandable: NATO does provide important forms of support to its members, including (but not limited to) the security guarantees it conveys. The real problem is that the prospect of enlargement has opened a Pandora's box; it has raised new questions and erected new difficulties. Most Russian participants, he noted, welcomed a strong and predictable NATO. But enlargement has made the alliance's purposes less clear, its actions less predictable.

In contrast to these myths, this speaker continued, the conference discussion made clear that some problems are quite real. One of these, of course, is the status of the Russian-speaking communities. The pace of integration of these communities needs to be addressed. Successful resolution of the problems surrounding these communities will require good will from the Baltic side, which in any case should harbor no illusions: The pressure from Russia, from the Russians themselves, and even from the West will not cease on these matters. But Russia, for its part, must recognize that mere pressure is counterproductive, in relations not only with the Baltic states but with the West as well. There are no simple solutions here. But mechanisms must be found for constructive interactions; intercommunal activities and other cross-border initiatives are certainly worthy of further attention.

Economic relations and environmental degradation are also real problems. Long-term strategies—of the Baltic states, as well as of Russia—are needed in both areas. Finding new ways to institutionalize economic and environmental cooperation across national borders—through joint commissions, expert groups, trade councils, and similar mechanisms—would also be useful.

Finally, there seems to be little doubt that history is a real problem, too. Some in Russia have argued that the blanket delegitimization of the Soviet past should cease—that it is a part of a collective memory, and that simply wiping it away will leave a void. Another viewpoint is that Russia was too hasty in declaring itself the legal successor to the U.S.S.R. It is clear that history cannot be undone; 1940 cannot be forgotten. Russians did inflict suffering on the Baltic peoples. This is highly regrettable, and Russians should understand why the occupation has left bitter memories in the region. But there are bitter memories on all sides; it is the task of governments now not to create new ones.

Recommendations

The American presenter concluded the conference with a summary of the principal recommendations that seemed to have emerged from the two days of deliberations. She grouped them into the following categories:

- *security:* better border control, the signing of existing agreements, intelligence-sharing, CBMs;
- *economics:* joint ventures, encouragement to small and medium enterprises, travel and tourism, strengthening of regional infrastructure (transport, communications, energy);
- *politics:* visa procedures, accelerated integration of the Russian minorities, support for the Russian language;
- *Russia:* less negative rhetoric about the Baltics' aspirations for EU and NATO membership;
- *culture:* citizen exchanges, higher education, tourism, rewriting history textbooks;
- *environment:* power generation, chemical weapons, environmental "hot spots;"
- *international organizations:* monitor and assist with integration of Russian-speakers, enhance security cooperation in NATO and with PfP, build on and expand EU initiatives and expertise;
- *information and media:* exchange of editors, improvement in depth and accuracy of coverage of Russian-Baltic issues and trends.

From left to right: Geoffrey Harris and Mecys Laurinkus.

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