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THE BALTIC REGION DEVELOPMENT FROM A HISTORICAL, ECONOMIC, AND ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVE, AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

Dr. Anders Fröjmark
University of Kalmar, Sweden

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When I grew up, the Eastern coast of the Baltic Sea was still a great mystery. I also know that on the other coast of the Baltic, when people occasionally had a possibility to go down to the beach, they could say something like "On the other side is Sweden". They might just as well have said, "On the other side is the moon".

In 1988, as a Ph.D. student, I was invited to a seminar in Poznań, Poland. That was my first visit to what was then still called "Eastern Europe" (a name reflecting a political division of Europe, and not the location of the country, which is rather in Central Europe). Anyhow, when I got onboard the ferry in the port of Ystad and the big iron door closed behind me I really had the feeling of going to another world. Were there telephones there? Would it be possible to call back home? Will my money—non-declared US Dollars included—be sufficient? If not, I will be completely lost, because I do not think they accept credit cards! And what if I lose my passport? Will I ever be able to get back home again? As a precious treasure, I kept a small piece of paper with the telephone number to the Swedish embassy of Warsaw.

What I met was something very different from what I had thought it would be. Apart from some rather surrealistic dealings with the Polish police, I only met warm and generous people and I really discovered a beautiful country with a great and partly tragic historyt I soon found out that most people were not used to meet Swedes, and at some occasions, I realized that the memory of the ravages of the Swedish army in the 1650s was still very vivid at places. It was no use to say, "My ancestors lived on the island of Gotland, and they had just recently become subjects of the Swedish Crown at that time, and anyhow they have always been very poor soldiers ..."

No, I learnt the meaning of the Polish word *Potop*, the Deluge, the name given to the Swedish invasion by Nobel Prize winning author Henryk Sienkiewicz.

Already the next year saw great changes taking place in Poland and in the rest of the countries of Soviet dominated Eastern and Central Europe. In the then Soviet republics of

Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, a human chain from Vilnius via Riga to Tallinn on August 23 commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and in November came the opening of the Berlin Wall. The Baltic Sea Region once again was becoming a whole.

Already from this short introduction, it is—I hope—made clear that boundaries, nationalities, and the frequency of exchanges have varied greatly through history, and will most certainly continue to do so—just have a look at a series of maps showing the boundaries of Poland in different historical times, and you will know what I mean. Right now, the Baltic Sea offers better possibilities of exchange of people, knowledge, ideas, and capital than it has done for a long time, and this is an opportunity that we must make use of. Of course, this is why you all are here, so this is something that you all know very well already.

Instead, since I myself am a historian, I will try to give you some historical perspectives on the Baltic Sea region, and at the same time situate Kalmar and the sea route of Kalmar Sound in this larger context.

We shall begin by remembering a process that has contributed more than perhaps any other to form the political and cultural landscape of the Baltic Sea region, Christianization that was at way around A.D. 1000, but took some centuries to achieve, especially in Lithuania were paganism resisted valiantly. Christianization resulted in a relative religious homogeneity with one religion embracing the whole of the region, albeit in two major varieties, Eastern Orthodox in Russia and Western Catholic in the rest of the region.

Belonging to the Christian world meant for the once Barbaric North access to the heritage of the Roman civilization—literary culture, cities, well-organized states, and the rule of law. One of the most important developments of Catholic Western and Central Europe in the Middle Ages was self-governing institutions of higher learning, the universities. They found their way also to our part of the world: Kraków in 1364, Uppsala in 1477, Copenhagen in 1479, Königsberg (present-day Kaliningrad) in 1544, Vilnius in 1579, and—after the Lutheran reformation—Dorpat (now Tartu) in 1632—just to mention a few. Today, there is a multitude of universities and colleges in all countries around the Baltic Sea—Kalmar being one of them. Without this fabulous invention of Medieval Europe, a meeting such as this would never have happened.

We are here quite close to the navigation passage between the Swedish mainland and the island of Öland. Kalmar Sound was one of the veritable highways in medieval times, and was used for example by the ships of the Danish king on their way to his Estonian provinces in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Naturally, as states were formed, the control of this waterway was an important asset. The Swedish Crown succeeded in erecting two great fortresses from which it could control the narrowest part of the sound, Borgholm in the North and Kalmar Castle—where you will dine tomorrow—in the South. In fact, for many years, Kalmar was the southernmost great fortress of Sweden—until 1658, the Danish border was only fifty kilometers south of Kalmar—and a much disputed key to the Swedish kingdom.

Many fierce battles have been fought over this stronghold, but the name of Kalmar is not only related to war and battles, but also to a grandiose political project brought about to a substantial degree by peaceful negotiations and agreements in the year 1397, the Union of Kalmar. Under the leadership of a most competent First Lady, Margaret, queen dowager of Norway and Sweden, and Regent of Denmark, a territory at land and sea, stretching from Viborg (Vyborg) in Karelia to Greenland in the Atlantic was united to form a great empire.

Only twelve years earlier, another union was constituted on the other littoral of the Baltic Sea, the Polish-Lithuanian union, which would last for four hundred years and at its zenith be a multinational, multicultural, multireligious, and relatively tolerant empire, stretching from the coast of the Baltic Sea to the coast of the Black Sea.

The old fortress of Kalmar received a Renaissance style face-lift in the late sixteenth century. At that time, John III was king of Sweden. His wife Catherine was a daughter of King Sigismund the Old of Poland and his wife Bona Sforza, a princess from Milan in Italy. With Bona Sforza, the Italian Renaissance had reached Poland, and now her daughter brought it with her to Sweden.

With his Polish queen, John III had a son named Sigismund, who was elected king of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1587, and who inherited the Swedish throne at the death of his father five years later. Once more, Kalmar became the hub in a great union, this time uniting the Kingdom of Sweden and the Polish-Lithuanian *Rzeczpospolita.* Unfortunately, this brave experience of trans-Baltic cooperation was not possible to uphold in an era of severe religious conflicts, and it gave way to a series of long and devastating wars between Sweden and Poland, of which I was reminded at my first visit to Poland, as I have already told you.

With changing borders, and with Sweden's loss of its short-lived position as a Great Power, Kalmar lost its strategic and exposed position. It became a peaceful and somewhat sleepy provincial town. Still, at the end of the Second World War, Kalmar was reminded of the horrors going on in the Nazi-controlled lands of the other side of the Baltic when a number of famished ex-prisoners of German concentration camps arrived here. Many of them did not survive their first year in freedom. A small memorial in the Jewish Cemetery of Kalmar tells us not to forget their destiny.

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Political constellations come and go, but the Baltic Sea remains our common heritage. We must protect it as a sea open to all nations, where people, goods, and ideas can move as freely as possible. This conference, gathering researchers and specialists from countries and continents far away from the Baltic Sea, as well as from the littoral states, is a model in this respect.

History shows us that we cannot take peace and liberty for granted, but we can try to make them last by encouraging economic growth and the development and maintaining of stable and legitimate institutions in the countries around the Baltic littoral. Of course, economic growth must take place in an environment friendly way, which is why you all have come together here. This is one of the key issues for our shallow and sensitive, but beloved and precious Mediterranean of the North.