

A Sea of Changes

COOPERATION BETWEEN THE BALTIC STATES AND SWEDEN



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“A Sea of Changes – Cooperation between the Baltic States and Sweden” has been published by Sida as part of the phasing out of the cooperation programme with the Baltic States. One of the aims of the book is to show the breadth of the cooperation. Another is to utilise the knowledge gained in other parts of Swedish development cooperation. The opinions stated in this book are the views of each individual author and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of Sida.

The book does not claim to be a complete description of events but a selection from certain parts of the cooperation. For a more complete picture we refer you to the report “Swedish support to the transformation of the Baltic States 1990–2003”, which can be ordered from Sida.

A great thank you to all those who contributed to “A Sea of Changes – Cooperation between the Baltic States and Sweden”!

Sida [www.sida.se · info@sida.se]

A Sea of Changes

– *Cooperation Between the Baltic States and Sweden*

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Editor: David Isaksson, Global Reporting

Translation: Dennis Brice

Graphic design, insert: Global Reporting

Cover photo: Victor Brott, Global Reporting

Printed in Sweden by Edita Sverige AB, Stockholm 2004

Art.nr: SIDA3688en

ISBN 91-5868-400-X

CONTENTS

<i>Staffan Herrström</i> : Preface	8
<i>Agneta Larsson</i> : A new Approach to Involve the Fathers	11
<i>Mats Andersson</i> : The New Kalmar Union	23
<i>Petter Bolme</i> : Crime and Punishment	35
<i>Lars Truedson</i> : The Political Parties and Democracy	51
<i>David Isaksson</i> : Cleaning up the Baltic Sea	61
<i>Anna Thor</i> : Dreams of distant shores and a fast car	77
<i>Juris Kronbergs</i> : The Return of the Fools	85
<i>Willand Ringborg</i> : This is not the Time to Withdraw	97
<i>Tiina Meri</i> : Integration is Seldom Simple	111
<i>Mats Sundgren</i> : Sugar Beet and Solidarity	127
<i>Sara Sandberg</i> : Feeling Needed	139
<i>Mikael Holmström</i> : Can the Baltic States be Defended?	149
<i>Mats Sundgren</i> : A New Social Approach	167
<i>Marcus Svedberg</i> : Shock Therapy with a Happy Ending	177
<i>David Isaksson</i> : Women Set the Pace	193
<i>Mats Sundgren</i> : Beloved Ignalina	201
<i>David Isaksson</i> : The driving Forces of Progress	211

PREFACE

I remember it so well. It was late 1988 and I was listening to a lecture by Andres Küng on developments in the Baltic States. What I saw and heard was almost unbelievable at the time: the first images of the Singing Revolution.

I think we all have such memory fragments. I can recall the overwhelming feeling of unreality as the military and psychological curtain was lifted. Breaking new ground step by step through the realms of the impossible.

Swedish support to the Baltic Countries became – and remains – a popular movement in the real sense of the word. From the Monday meetings and humanitarian aid to what followed: development cooperation and networking.

The whole of Swedish society has been mobilised on a broad front with money coming from all possible sources: Sida, The Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Trade Union Movement, EU, local authorities, fundraising. But cooperation has had its lifeblood in the personal commitment of all those who took part. Cooperation has been carried forward on the shoulders of these enthusiasts, here in Sweden as well as in our partner countries Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. And it has been a mutual cooperation mainly focussing on the needs of our cooperation partners but often, perhaps most often, of great value to Sweden as well.

Development cooperation has a beginning and an end. It does not last forever. In the best of worlds it will have contributed to creating a basis from which our partners can further develop. In Europe it has

contributed to forming networks between neighbours who can continue cooperating on a more equal basis through an enlarged European Union. This is where we stand right now.

May 1, 2004 is the day when borders are shifted in the literal sense of the word. The Baltic States become members of the EU after just 13 years of independence, mainly due to their own hard work.

Developments have gone at a breakneck speed by any reasonable standard. There are of course difficulties with shortages and social problems, and a long agenda to work through, but 13 years of impressive progress has opened the door to EU membership.

It is difficult to assess the significance of the collective Swedish contribution, but this is not the purpose of this book or the report on development cooperation, “Swedish support to the transformation of the Baltic States 1990–2003”, also published by Sida. We have together taken part in a historic process, in a historically successful process. This is the first attempt to reflect over our mutual journey.

We close the book on development cooperation. Neighbourly cooperation is here to stay.

Staffan Herrström

HEAD OF SIDA’S EUROPEAN DEPARTMENT



A NEW APPROACH TO INVOLVE THE FATHERS

“His name’s Robin,” says Urmas Mardi proudly as he holds up his newborn son.

ROBIN, WHO WEIGHS 4.1 KILOS, is only five hours old and has his father’s dimples. When Robin starts to scream Urmas rocks him, pats him awkwardly on the back and quickly hands him back to his mother Katre. She is reclining on the bed in her dressing gown but looks much more alert than her husband who was present throughout the delivery.

The couple have just moved into their family room at the maternity ward of East-Tallinn Central Hospital, a room with fresh yellow walls and bright colourful patterns on the sheets and changing table. The room costs 250 Estonian Kroon night (approx. 170 Swedish kronor), says Katre as her mobile phone rings for the second time. If all goes according to plan Katre will be able to return home after just two days. A nurse is on her way to help her with breastfeeding and the hospital paediatrician will visit her at home later.

Things have progressed at breakneck speed in Estonia with regard maternity care. Before independence, fathers were not even allowed near the maternity ward. Mothers had to stand in the window and hold up their newborn babies to show the fathers down on the street. Due to the risk of infection the mothers were isolated in the ward and used ingenious systems of string and hooks to haul up presents and other necessities. The babies were swaddled, slept in their own wards and fetched by nurses with masks every third hour on the dot for feeding.

Opposite page:

Things have progressed at breakneck speed in Estonia with regard maternity care. Fathers were not previously allowed in the maternity ward but they are now showing a greater interest in taking part.

Photo: Susanne Kronholm

This system of maternity care, which took 25–30 years for us in Sweden to change, took 6–7 years to collapse in Estonia.

Katre, who is 28 years old, has heard all the stories from her mother about the stern and resolute staff who worked at the maternity ward when she was born. She herself has been well treated and is thankful for the opportunity to relax with her whole family in her own room. Katre has studied law and works for the police authorities and her husband is a lawyer. She admits to being afraid of the changes to her life brought about by having a baby.

“I like my job and I’m not much of a housewife,” she smiles. “My work is very important to me, but now...”. She stops speaking and strokes little Robin gently on the head.

According to Katre, well-educated Estonian women are waiting longer before having children. She has to stay home with Robin for the first year. Urmas, somewhat embarrassed, says he could have taken paternity leave but it would not have been that popular at his workplace.

THE MATERNITY WARD AT East-Tallinn Central Hospital performed around 3,000 deliveries in 2003. Some parts of the hospital are newly renovated but the 1970s is still visible in places. One bright spot from the Soviet era is the elderly woman lift attendant sitting on her bench crocheting Christmas angels as we take the lift up to meet obstetrician Ferenc Szirko. He confirms that during the past six years fathers have shown more interest in taking part and staying the night at the hospital. But ideas for change within maternity care began back in the late 1980s, mainly influenced by Finland.

“Unfortunately we couldn’t change the strict rules so much back then,” explains Ferenc Szirko, now head of the antenatal ward.

“There was extreme pressure from Moscow and we were visited at least twice a year by Russian inspectors. Russian healthcare had the same infrastructure as the army with a leader at the top who gave orders.”

After independence changes were implemented step by step. A vital link was the partnership between Sweden and The East European

Committee of the Swedish Health Care Community (SEEC) formed in 1992. The SEEC has received support from Sida for the past ten years.

Several of the doctors and nurses on the committee had strong ties with the Baltic region and wanted to help their colleagues change the healthcare system into a Western European model. The Swedish staff who visited their Eastern European colleagues were met by a health-care system in deep decline. The lack of hygiene, modern equipment and expertise was clearly evident, but everybody was enthusiastic about independence, extremely curious and determined to implement changes.

Ragnar Tunell, retired paediatrician, has been involved in the project since it began. He had previously worked with development aid in Africa and was quick to point out the differences:

“It was extremely stimulating working with the Baltic States. Great progress has been made in a very short time. There is an infrastructure and educated people. When I was in Tanzania I often asked myself what I was doing. We never saw any results and it sometimes felt as though things were progressing backwards.”

The project has mainly focussed on the transfer of knowledge. The SEEC has funded projects and arranged conferences on the subject of pre and postnatal care and were also involved in establishing The Perinatal Society for paediatricians, gynaecologists, nurses and midwives. The project has also enabled doctors to both visit and work in hospitals in Sweden and other countries.

“It was very important to be able to see all the new things with our own eyes, to be able to ask questions and not just get information from books,” says Ferenc Szirko, who has visited Sweden several times.

The East-Tallinn Central Hospital has adopted the Swedish model and gives nurses and midwives greater responsibility to carry out, for example, ultrasound examinations, previously the task of doctors:

“It was quite simple for us to implement the changes because you in the west had already made the fundamental mistakes,” continues Ferenc Szirko. “All we had to do was open the door to all the knowledge that already existed. The exchange of knowledge with Sweden also taught us to evaluate our work better.”

Next page:

Kati Köpper is visited by her husband Urmas and their daughter Miia 2 years, seen here admiring her newborn brother.

Obstetrician Ferenc Szirko examines a mother-to-be using the latest ultrasound technique.

Photo: Susanne Kronholm





Everything from methods of treatment and equipment to medicine and hygiene has been improved during the past ten years and the infant mortality rate has fallen from three to one per cent. But Ferenc Szirko says the greatest change concerns the mentality of doctors and patients:

“Doctors treated patients like children before, they seldom explained anything, just gave orders. And the patients didn’t dare question anything. Today we provide much more information and involve the patient as a partner in their treatment. Young people of today could not even imagine what it was like before independence. They take a lot for granted and make increasingly more demands. They also seek information on the Internet and when they come to a doctor they already know all about the medicines that exist.”

Despite the general improvement in standards, doctors’ salaries are still as low as before. Doctors in Sweden earn nearly ten times more, which leads to more and more doctors going to Sweden and Finland to work. Ferenc Szirko fears this could lead to a brain drain within health-care for all the Baltic States.

BY CAR WE MAKE our way to the district of Mustamäe, twenty minutes drive from the centre of Tallinn. Nightfall is well on its way. A few snowflakes float through the air and rapidly turn to slush on the pavement. The Tallinna Lastehaigla Children’s Hospital is wedged between shabby high-rise buildings, their balconies eaten away by rust. A child gives a welcome smile from a large poster above the emergency ward entrance.

The hospital was built in 1978 but 80 per cent of the buildings have been renovated during the past ten years. Together with hospital superintendent Merike Martinson we tour the laboratory and radiotherapy department. The standard is as high as any university hospital in Sweden but when we enter the orthopaedic department the contrast is clear to see. The floor is covered with cracked grey linoleum from the 1970s. The rooms, which lack ventilation, are equipped with beds, tables and wheelchairs donated by Sweden and Finland.

Tallinna Lastehaigla has 263 beds. Premature babies and sick children are sent here from all over the country. When we get back to

Merike Martinson's office she talks about the changes that have taken place since independence. She remembers the time when lorries would suddenly stop outside loaded with bread, chocolate, soap and toys. Relief supplies from the Red Cross or private donations.

"We were very poor during the first years of independence and we are extremely grateful to you for all your efforts," she says.

Merike also mentions the SEEC and Ragnar Tunell, who was in charge of the maternity project:

"Tunell did a fantastic job getting us all pulling in the same direction to create our network."

She says the result is amazing. After the intensive care ward was renovated in 1997 infant mortality for premature children dropped threefold. The technical level is just as high as in Sweden and the staff are well educated. Merike worked as an anaesthetist in Helsinki in 1990 and 1991:

"I had never seen such equipment before and just stared at everything I saw," she smiles.

Several seminars and courses have been arranged and the transfer of knowledge continues. Most contact is with the Children's Hospital in Gävle. Merike reaches out for a black folder with her visiting cards from foreign contacts to help her to pronounce the Swedish words correctly. She leafs through it and says in passing: "I never thought I'd be ready with all the Christmas cards last year, I had 150 to write."

THROUGH THE SWEDISH CONSULTANCY Stockholm Care, a large hospital reform programme is underway in Estonia to be completed by 2015. Previously the country had several smaller hospitals often with only one specialist. The idea is to amalgamate several hospitals to rationalise the system and have different specialists working under the same roof. But the scheme has met with criticism. The reform has entailed staff having to move from hospitals or lose their jobs and patients having longer travelling distances. Many people think that Estonian politicians deliberately assigned the reform programme to a Swedish consultancy to avoid criticism.

Merike Martinson takes up the questionnaire that Tallinna Laste-

haigla recently circulated among its patients. At the last survey around 80 per cent of the patients were satisfied with the level of care at the hospital, the latest figures show only 55 per cent.

“Most think that waiting times are too long,” she says.

Even the new Swedish style family doctor system has been greatly criticised. Merike Martinson feels that it has brought about a deterioration in child healthcare. The paediatricians who previously worked in the outpatients department providing preventative healthcare to children up to 18 years of age no longer exist and have been replaced by family doctors. The debate is still very lively:

“Family doctors are not child specialists and many do not have the time to examine all the children. This means that many parents take their children to the emergency ward, even for minor ailments,” explains Merike Martinson. “We see a steady increase in this and have employed a few paediatricians on a consultancy basis. Step by step we hope the family doctor system will function better.”

THE WARD FOR PREMATURE children is calm and quiet, embedded in soft light. At present there are three children in incubators, the mothers breastfeed and help to nurse them under the supervision of nurses. The mothers can live in comfortable rooms on the ward for an unlimited period and have contact with their children 24 hours a day. Both parents are welcome but not so many fathers live at the hospital.

In one of the overnight rooms is Tõivi Tammiku-Timberg, in the hospital for a follow up examination with her son Paul Marcus. He only weighed one kilo at birth, but six months later he is now rosy with lots of baby flesh and is now six kilos. Tõivi's first daughter was also premature, but that was in a hospital in England where she and her husband lived at the time.

“It was a big difference,” she says. “You couldn't live on the same ward as the children and could only visit during certain hours. All the staff were friendly, but we still felt in the way. It was never like that here.”

According to Adik Levin, head of the neonatal department, the idea of letting mothers live on the same ward as their premature babies

came by mere chance. When the hospital was built in 1979 there was a shortage of staff so Adik tried to solve the problem by letting the mothers stay in the ward. After a tough fight and several letters to the Deputy Minister of Health and other authorities, he finally received special permission from Moscow.

Adik Levin gradually noticed the advantages of having the mothers present. Treatment was less aggressive and the children could get breast milk, which made them calmer and helped them develop quicker. The mothers also became more mentally prepared to care for their babies at home.

Adik, who has taken part in the exchange of knowledge with Sweden via the SEEC, now works together with Ragnar Tunell in Russia. Letting the Baltic doctors lecture in Russia has its advantages, partly because they know the old Soviet system and partly because they have already implemented such changes themselves. At maternity hospitals throughout Russia babies are still swaddled like small cocoons and Adik Levin and Ragnar Tunell usually unwrap the babies to let the mothers see what they look like. When babies are swaddled they get less stimulation and it also restrains breastfeeding.

Adik Levin has presented his idea of mothers living with their children in a paper called The Human Neonatal Care Initiative. He has also published an article about the method in the esteemed paediatric journal *Acta Paediatrica* and has lectured on the subject at international conferences.

LAST YEAR DANDERYD HOSPITAL in Stockholm opened a new ward for premature babies and their mothers inspired by Adik Levin's ideas.

"This also shows that cooperation between Sweden and Estonia works both ways," points out Adik Levin. "We have influenced you in Western Europe and have received a great deal of help and ideas from you, which we are very grateful for, but not everything here in Eastern Europe was wrong. We must now analyse the good bits and try to hold on to them."

AGNETA LARSSON

Agneta Larsson is a journalist at Global Reporting and editor of Plan Sweden's magazine *Barnens framtid*.

FACTS · HEALTH SECTOR

The rapid economic development in Estonia and the other Baltic States during the early 1990s led to great social divides. Exclusion and other social problems increased and the general health situation deteriorated. Shorter average life expectancy and an increase in postnatal deaths are two examples. Other problems included widespread alcoholism and the spread of HIV and TB.

Unlike other sectors there were no strong forces to put social work into focus during the first years of independence so Sweden was a vital driving force in giving social work a clearer profile within development cooperation projects.

The Soviet model provided curative healthcare in the shape of large hospitals and institutions such as children's homes and homes for physically disabled children but not much preventative work. Most of the Swedish support to the social sector has therefore been aimed at stimulating preventative healthcare.

In 1992, The East European Committee of the Swedish Health Care Community (SEEC) began its transfer of knowledge programme in Eastern Europe. The SEEC is an NGO with 30 members made up of government bodies, health and staff organisations and private individuals involved in Swedish healthcare. SEEC's activities are financed by Sida who also provide guidelines for cooperation.

Cooperation within the SEEC initially concentrated on three areas: maternity care, children with physical disabilities and psychiatry. Swedish county councils played host to study visits and in turn sent healthcare staff to the Baltic on full pay. Around four hundred Eastern European doctors and nurses visited Sweden during the first two years. Cooperation was on a local basis and often functioned as twinning. Later the SEEC contributed to building up model institutions with the help of Swedish staff and equipment and by translating educational material.

SEEC's contributions for the 1992–2002 period in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania amounted to SEK 171, 161 and 128 million respectively, a total of SEK 460 million. Added to this is the larger part of SEK 184 million that SEEC contributed to regional projects and other activities. SEEC's total support for healthcare in the Baltic States exceeds half a billion.

During the ten years the SEEC has been involved with the Baltic States the health situation has improved but there are still large social divides among the population. Alcohol consumption and the death rate for alcohol-related illnesses is high and HIV/AIDS is rapidly spreading among young intravenous drug abusers.

*Opposite page:
Urmaz Mardi, proud father of new-
born Robin, here five months old.
Photo: Susanne Kronholm*





THE NEW KALMAR UNION

“The liberation of the Baltic States concerns us all. We Swedes, if anybody, should lead the way in rebuilding our neighbouring countries in Eastern Europe.”

HARDY PETERSSON WAS MUNICIPAL commissioner of Mörbylånga municipality on the Swedish island of Öland when the liberation process began. Surprised and amazed, we journalists soon realised that his sudden press conference in March 1992 was not about the budget deficit or the shaky finances of the Öland tourist board but solidarity and sympathy – and a good deal of guilt:

“I know I cannot make you write, but I will implore you. The people of Lithuania have suffered greatly this winter with no food or heating. We must now support them, if for no other reason than to show them that the terrible extradition to the Soviet Union of Balts who had fled to Sweden at the end of World War II was something we Swedes are not proud of.”

He was not alone. During the early 1990s a new type of foreign aid was initiated in Sweden. The three independent states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were suddenly the concern of every man, woman and child. We journalists paid countless visits to collecting depots where young and old helped to pack lorries full of necessities. The piles grew in clubhouses, parish halls and community centres and the lorries were often driven by volunteers.

“It felt good to be able to help by sending equipment we no longer needed,” says Anna-Britt Wejdsten, one of the initiators of the first relief

*Opposite page:
Vilma Kucyte with a model of
Kalmar Castle. The twin town on
the other side of the Baltic Sea
opened the world for Panevezys.
The Kalmar Union was a political
alliance formed in 1397 to allow
Denmark, Sweden and Norway to
present a united front against for-
eign-primarily German-encroach-
ments.*

Photo: Anders Gunnartz

consignments from Kalmar. Anna-Britt Wejdsten's commitment began when she took part in setting up the first Monday meetings in Kalmar through which she got into contact with people in Lithuania and with Lithuanians living in Sweden. The first consignments were made up of kitchen equipment to children's homes, schools and homes for the socially deprived.

"I simply went to schools and other municipal institutions under renovation and begged for the kitchen equipment. It worked really well, but without the commitment of people and companies the project would never have succeeded," she continues and remembers the day of the first consignment:

"Everything was chaos. A Lithuanian lorry that was meant to transport the consignment had fastened in a police control. Some volunteer mechanics helped get it repaired for us. In the meantime the four people who were meant to drive down what we had collected – and it wasn't a small amount by any means – lived in my cellar. All the kitchen equipment and 39 banana cartons full of clothes were lying around the house. But it all worked out fine in the end and it was a fantastic feeling to hear over a bad telephone line that the consignment had arrived."

AS DEMOCRACY GREW STRONGER in Lithuania the interest for the country spread in Sweden. An exciting holiday to an extremely cheap country was naturally very enticing. But progress was not without its setbacks. The Estonia ferry catastrophe in 1994 put a stop to plans for a ferry service. Criminal problems also began to rise to the surface. Relief workers were robbed when they visited the Baltic States and prostitution and drug trafficking were low on the list of priorities for the authorities in Lithuania.

A visit I made to Klaipeda in the late 1990s proved to be a wonderful experience during daytime but a torment at night. The large, newly renovated hotel had hordes of scantily clad women persistently trying to sell their bodies. Telephone calls in the early hours of the morning were the rule rather than the exception: "Do mister want some massage..."

But relief work gradually changed shape and was no longer top pri-

ority. Municipality after municipality in southern Sweden initiated twinning programmes. Kalmar municipality led the way and quickly understood the benefits of cooperating on several levels: politically, within associations and between schools. Växjö, Karlskrona, and later Kristianstad, began democracy initiatives with their respective twin towns in Lithuania. Local politicians in Lithuania received support from their colleagues in Sweden in the difficult task of turning a state apparatus built around a one-party dictatorship into a fully functioning democracy.

“The project was not particularly complicated. Politicians and other interested parties came on regular visits to their respective twin towns. Most of the project meetings were held in Sweden to enable the visitors to study democracy issues,” says Bengt Enge, who represented Kalmar for four years.

During the meetings in Sweden the Lithuanians met representatives of the parties sitting on the municipal council. They studied the municipal system and followed the progress of an issue from a proposal to a decision to implementation.

“We tried to provide a complete picture of how Swedish democracy is structured at local level and how our welfare society is managed,” continues Bengt Enge.

The democracy initiative was evaluated and all the parties involved agreed that it had been a success, but Bengt Enge would still like to know whether the project had any real significance:

“Of course I know that the work meant a great deal for democratic progress in Lithuania but it would still be nice to know what the Lithuanians really thought about it. They could hardly be anything but positive when we Swedes asked them how they had experienced the project at the time.”

THE DEMOCRACY INITIATIVE WAS the beginning of almost tens years of cooperation between Panavezys and Kalmar. The work was sometimes on a broader front as when arts groups from Kalmar, Malmö and Panavezys performed the musical Jesus Christ Superstar in Kalmar.

Anders Engström, today head of the International Department at

Kalmar Municipality looks back on ten years of cooperation with Lithuania:

“It was never a question of if we should commit ourselves but how we should commit ourselves. Being willing to help just happened naturally. I was always inspired by Olof Palme and I have a great interest for international work.”

When Estonia and Lithuania became independent Anders Engström was social democratic municipal commissioner in Kalmar. Little did he know that the initiative in Lithuania would become his new mission in life and lead him to leave party politics and his mandate as municipal commissioner in 1999 to devote his time to international activities. For the first ten years he was President of The Union of the Baltic Cities and he is still involved as Vice President of The National Swedish-Lithuanian Society. The Baltic region is his work and his leisure:

“I am now married to a Lithuanian woman I met in 1995, so the initiative has changed my life in more ways than one.”

ANDERS EKSTRÖM SAYS THAT when Kalmar municipality began its cooperation programme with Lithuania it was more like a modern form of development assistance. Since then the initiative has gradually progressed and the need for basic relief supplies that were shipped over during the first years rapidly reduced as things progressed in Lithuania. He also mentions a large democracy initiative where Kalmar, Karlskrona and Växjö cooperated with their three Lithuanian twin towns:

“They talked a great deal about the importance of free elections and a functioning democracy but had very little knowledge of elections and electoral systems. Their frames of reference were still in the old communist system.”

There were of course unforeseen problems that took longer than expected to handle. One example was the expressed dislike of women among the new politicians. It was difficult to convince them that women were an integral part of the party organisations.

“Another thing that caused problems on a regular basis was the fact that many politicians quit after a short period. Take Panavezys for example where the present mayor is the eighth since we signed the twinning

agreement. This means we have to start all over again every time.”

The initial contact between Kalmar and Lithuania involved the arts. Theatre groups from Kalmar visited twin town Panavezys, and the Drama Theatre from Panavecys visited Kalmar.

“The arts were high on the agenda, people in Lithuania are very proud of their cultural heritage. One of the strongest memories I have is from watching the Drama Theatre perform Kafka’s *The Process*. Otherwise the most exciting experience was watching schoolchildren from both countries meet each other. Despite great language difficulties it didn’t take long for the children to begin mixing as friends. Children have no history to colour their opinions.”

The democracy initiative has also influenced politicians and officials within Kalmar municipality:

“There is definitely a greater understanding for the cultural differences between the various ethnic groups here in Kalmar since we began cooperating with Lithuania. This now characterises our work in integrating today’s immigrants into our community,” explains Anders Engström.

THE INITIATIVE QUICKLY SPREAD to Fojo, an journalism institute at Kalmar University. A course in journalism and democracy was already arranged by 1993:

“Journalists from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Russia attended,” recalls Lars Holm, head of Fojo’s activities in Eastern Europe. “After contacting Sida we followed up with courses in Lithuania.”

Between 1995 and 1997, 215 Lithuanian journalists covering local and regional issues at small newspapers attended courses on Western journalism. At first the Lithuanian journalists were uncertain of their occupational role because they were used to printing the information given to them by the Soviet machinery of power, but they were soon investigating the machinery of power instead of running its errands.

Lars Holm is convinced that the courses have had a great affect on the progress of journalism in Lithuania:

“The country’s democratic progress has definitely influenced journalism in a positive way. Journalists and their new methods of working

Next page:

Dressed in protective coats and hair-nets, students from the Baltic Business School visit the newly renovated chocolate factory in Kaunas, Lithuania.

Thousands of chocolate creams are made every day at the Kraft Foods plant in Kaunas.

Sara Lindh and Lena Gunnemyr on a study trip to Lithuania. They are studying at The Baltic Business School – a special Baltic business management programme at Kalmar University.

Photo: Sonja Palm





have been accepted by society, which means a great deal for developments. Compared to their colleagues in Russia, and even more in Belarus, the Lithuanian journalists do not need to be afraid for their lives when carrying out their work.”

THE REGIONAL FEDERATION IS a federation of the twelve municipalities that make up Kalmar County Council and even here the Baltic Sea region is one the most important issues:

“Developments in the Baltic Sea region will have an enormous significance for us in the Kalmar County region. We are in the middle of a region that will become one of the most exciting in Europe and the Baltic Sea initiative will affect everything we do,” says Håkan Brynielsson, Director of the Regional Federation in Kalmar County. He produces a brochure of a project called Seagull. The EU invested SEK 13 million in the project to develop cooperation within education, tourism, the environment and rural development. The work integrating Kalmar County into the Baltic Sea region had come a long way, as was evident from the material on the desk and shelves in Håkan Brynielsson’s office.

“Our task is to initiate and support project concepts. I’ve worked with the Baltic Sea region for 13 years so I know how important it is for southeast Sweden to take part in developments there,” he continues.

The late 1990s saw the emergence of a formal type of cooperation between companies from Sweden and Lithuania. A short walk in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius bears witness to this. Building sites are full of activity. The names of the new Lithuanian corporations light up the streets and are easily recognisable: Telia-Sonera, Husqvarna, SE-Banken, Föreningssparbanken, Nordea and Tele2, all of whom have invested a great deal to acquire a share of the Lithuanian market.

But opportunities also exist for small companies. Daniel Ahlqvist works at the Swedish Trade Council in Vilnius. It is his job to guide Swedish companies looking to invest in Lithuania, which is not a simple task. Many Swedes have experienced how Lithuanian companies lack long-term business strategies. Their aim is to make as much money as quickly as possible.

“Where we usually talk about a win-win-situation, here we jokingly talk about a hit-the-guy-twice-situation,” says Daniel Ahlqvist.

Despite the risks the interest in Lithuania is growing among Kalmar companies. In order to facilitate the development of free enterprise in Lithuania, Kalmar University began The Baltic Business School in 2000 offering six specialist degree programmes in business administration.

“It was soon quite obvious that the liberation process in the Baltic States would provide new business opportunities. The need for education was rapidly growing and companies lacked expertise and the experience of doing business with companies in the Baltic States,” explains Lennart Larsson, project coordinator of the Baltic Programme at the BBS.

The Business Administration Programme at BBS specialises in the Baltic Sea region. Students study 30 points Baltic Business Administration and History because it is vital to understand the background to the current situation. Companies interested in working with countries on the other side of the Baltic Sea can hereby recruit business administrators with specialist know-how.

“Now that the programme is established we notice a definite increase in interest. Many companies take direct contact with the school. We have also established contact with universities in other countries around the Baltic Sea. This creates opportunities for our students to study over there and for us to take in foreign students,” says Raminta Laukeviciūtė, coordinator at BBS.

The students on the Baltic Sea Business Administration course believe in a future with Lithuania as a base or business partner:

“The Baltic region will undergo intensive and interesting developments. I want to be there when it happens,” says Tommy Carlsson, who is studying to become a Baltic business administrator. Robin Alsparr agrees with him:

“I’ve planned to study business administration for some time. I believe there’s a future for the market around the Baltic Sea so this course suits me fine. Many Swedish companies planning to establish themselves in places like Lithuania lack the expertise to carry this through. Lithuania needs people like us,” he declares.

The view of our neighbouring countries is changing and this is noticeable by the discussions in Kalmar. It is interesting to see how people who less than ten years ago saw their commitment to Lithuania in terms of humanitarian aid, now see the new economies in Eastern Europe as the salvation for small Swedish companies. New EU initiatives are planned aimed at bringing together companies in the various countries to create business opportunities. And the objectives are mutual. Lithuanian companies see the Swedish market as the perfect launching pad into Europe:

“We mainly invest in export, the majority of which goes to the Scandinavian countries. Only about 30 per cent of our production is intended for the Lithuanian market,” explains Lina Barniskienė, export manager at the renowned furniture company Kauno Baldai in Kaunas. Kauno Baldai has been one of Lithuania’s leading furniture manufacturers since 1880. The company has survived Soviet rule and two world wars and is now in the middle of an extensive restructuring programme to enable it to compete on the Western European market.

“We have managed quite well so far. Just over 60 per cent of our production goes to Ikea and we hope to increase this volume,” continues Lina Barniskienė.

One businessman who saw the potential on the other side of the Baltic Sea at a very early stage was Hans Svensson at Möremaskiner in Kalmar. He has been doing business with the three Baltic States and Poland since 1971.

“I have devoted my entire adult life to the Baltic market and must have visited Eastern Europe at least 500 times,” he says.

Håkan Brynielsson at the Regional Federation is quick to emphasise that nothing changes by itself:

“It is not a foregone conclusion for Lithuanian companies to come to us. Small companies in Denmark and Germany are showing a great interest. We must provide an interesting option and improve our infrastructure. In addition, small companies that invest must have a long-term strategy. Profits will probably be non-existent during the initial period but the market has a great long-term potential. It could also

serve as an access route to several larger markets in the former Soviet Union,” predicts Håkan Brynielsson.

Lithuanian companies will probably compete with Swedish companies on their domestic market:

“There are two sides to every coin, including this one. Companies here in the region will be exposed to very tough competition. Our companies have a completely different wage structure and we will not be able to compete on the wage front. We must simply utilise what we are good at. Our aim is for Kalmar County to lead the way,” says Regional Director Håkan Brynielsson optimistically.

Southeast Sweden is well on its way to becoming a sparsely populated area, which is why politicians and companies hope that years of commitment in Lithuania will give the region a boost. Hans Svensson at Möremaskiner sums up the hopes and beliefs of many people:

“The process of change that is now taking place in the Baltic Sea region is nothing new. Before World War II the Baltic Sea region was a flourishing commercial hub and I am convinced it will happen again.”

MATS ANDERSSON

Mats Andersson is a reporter for the Barometer newspaper in Kalmar. He has followed developments in Lithuania since independence.

FACTS · MUNICIPAL COOPERATION

Swedish municipalities have a long tradition of twinning, but with Baltic State independence, it took on a completely different meaning. The initial period after independence was mainly characterised by spontaneous relief consignments. The exchange of experience gradually became of greater importance with people from the Baltic States visiting Swedish municipalities to get work experience.

The Swedish Association of Local Authorities was quick to grasp this opportunity and saw the chance to support individual municipalities and contribute to the building up of independent local authority associations in the countries. But it was not clear how they would be formed. They therefore contacted The Swedish Agency for International Technical and Economic Cooperation (BITS) who were responsible for development cooperation with the Baltic States. A fund was set up managed by The Swedish Association of Local Authorities for projects in the Baltic region, Russia and other countries in Central and Eastern Europe. SEK one million was initially allocated but interest rapidly grew. Between 1998 and 1999 there were around 270 twin town exchanges of which 180 were with the Baltic States. SEK 215 million was allocated to twinning between 1991 and 2003. Estonia received the largest amount (SEK 58 million) followed by Latvia (48 million) and Lithuania (42 million).

Many municipalities had clear objectives for how they intended to develop contacts with neighbouring countries. They wanted to recreate the Baltic region as a commercial hub. In 1993 the need for support to develop local democracy and decentralisation was high on the agenda. Communist society was authoritarian and centrally controlled. The first discussion was about how to reduce central power and bring about a process of decentralisation. The demand for action gradually increased and the proposals became increasingly more elaborate.

Much of the initial work carried out by Swedish municipalities was against the law, which stated that Swedish municipalities were not permitted to work outside their municipal boundaries (the law was changed in 1997).

Sida's shift of activities further east brought about a change of support for the development of local democracy. In 1998 The Swedish Association of Local Authorities was given a similar fund to spread cooperation to other parts of the world. With Sida's support to the Baltic States being phased out, municipalities are looking for new ways of cooperating with the Baltic States including financing from the EU. Another way is through the three-party cooperation between municipalities in Sweden, the Baltic States and Russia.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

“Hi, my name’s Peter and I joined CRIS on August 1, 1998 when I was released. I joined because I wanted to change my life and finish with drugs and crime. I’m much happier today when helping other people than when I committed crimes and used drugs,” says Peter Söderberg.

Several of the prisoners get up and leave. One spits on the floor on the way out of the hall to show what he thinks of CRIS (Criminals Return into Society). There are no young chickens in the Alytus prison in Lithuania. Many have committed serious crimes like murder, sex and drug trafficking, blackmail and theft and some have contacts with organised crime. But the Swedes are used to this; CRIS got the same reaction in Swedish prisons in the beginning.

Most of the prisoners, about a hundred, remain and listen to Peter and Christer Karlsson, Chairman and founder of CRIS. Together with two prison chaplains and the prison supervisor they sit at an oblong table beneath the podium, just ten metres from the prisoners in the first row. The inmates of Alytus prison could reach them in just ten short steps, but the distance in opportunities, time and freedom is much greater.

Christer Karlsson started CRIS in 1997 together with ten other prisoners. They had a simple concept: that criminals and drug addicts who want to change their lives help each other. By providing a “new, honest and drug-free social network” CRIS helps people released from prison to stay clear of criminality and drugs. From a simple concept and a great deal of voluntary work the organisation has grown and is now represented in 26 towns and has 4,700 members in Sweden.

CRIS has provided support to prisoners in Lithuania for several years. Their objective is to spread the organisation to other countries and Lithuania was the first target outside the Nordic region

“CRIS can provide the power and resources to get you back into society. I’ve been where you are now. I’ve spent 27 of 33 years in prison. I know what you need,” says Christer.

Prison is the tail end of a legal chain that includes the police, prosecutors, courts, preventative measures and correctional treatment. The legal chain has played a vital role in the cooperation partnership between Sweden and the Baltic States and a holistic view of the legal chain has been stressed in all planning, projects and agreements.

CRIS only stands for a microscopic part of the total support but they cover the important area of crime prevention. A lot of hope is placed on organisations like CRIS, not least by the criminals themselves.

PETER AND CHRISTER’S BODY language is restrained to the point of non-chalance as though they do not want to give too much hope. They have brought brochures about CRIS in Lithuanian, and those who wish can come forward and fetch the information. Suddenly hundreds of prisoners rush forward and empty the table of brochures. They ask questions and want to know more. On the two other occasions they visited the prison nobody came forward. There is now a ray of hope for returning to a normal life after serving the sentence.

But 21-year-old Jevgenij Vorobjov sits tight. He is not in any hurry because he will not be released until 2010. But if he behaves there is a chance he will be released three years earlier. In 1998, at the age of 16 he was sentenced for murder. In a letter he wrote: “I lost my freedom when I was 16 and I am already 21. I have a mother and a brother who have not turned their backs on me. They write letters and sometimes help me with a little money but not that often because they have it really tough.”

Jevgenij is waiting for Father Elias, a Dutch monk who has worked with Lithuanian prisoners for many years and provides CRIS with contacts. Father Elias says that Jevgenij is a genius. Without education and within the course of six weeks Jevgenij managed to verify hundreds of

footnotes and cross-references in a special Lithuanian bible. A bishop, who heard about Jevgenij's work, said it was impossible, nobody could manage that in such a short time, especially not an uneducated convict in Alytus.

"Write to me, and promise to write back if I write to you," asks Jevgenij. He has a long scar above his left eye. His friend, Ruslan Sas, also wants a picture so they pose together. Many others follow suit. They ask to have their picture taken alone or with a friend. The prisoners laugh and joke, ask for cigarettes and more pictures all the way to the prison gate, a gate that the 21-year-old Jevgenij will not be passing through for another six and a half years unless he receives a pardon.

ESTONIA, LATVIA AND LITHUANIA have problems with law and order. Corruption is widespread and the number of murders is ten times higher than the EU average. Swedish prisons have an increasing number of Balts serving time for serious crimes and a lot of the drugs sold on Swedish streets come from the Baltic States.

A quick glance in the Swedish newspapers reveals a dark picture of the Baltic States. You would think Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were run by the Russian mafia and that murder, corruption, drugs, prostitution and trafficking is so widespread that you should avoid going there. But the question is whether that image is correct when compared with how other EU countries are covered in the press. Is the legal system in the Baltic States much weaker than say Greece or Portugal and is it more dangerous to travel to Tallinn, Riga or Vilnius than to Paris, London, Athens or Amsterdam?

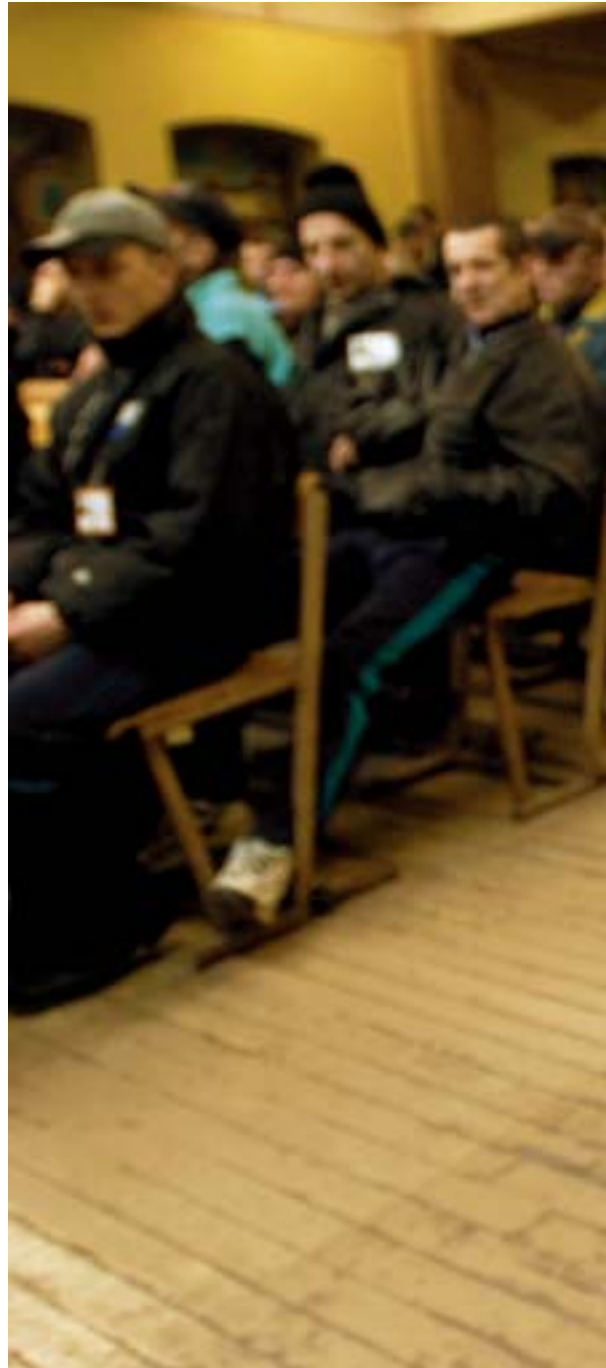
According to Interpol statistics 502 murders were committed in Lithuania in 1995. With a population of only 3.7 million, Lithuania had five times more murders than Sweden, where the figure has stayed at around 100 murders a year for the past 25 years. But based on the number of murders per inhabitant, the situation was worse in Estonia. In 1995, twenty times more murders were committed per capita in Estonia than in Sweden. Since 1995 there has been a positive trend and the number of murders has fallen in all three Baltic States. In Lithuania the figure fell from 502 in 1995 to 378 in 2001. In Latvia 286 people were

Next page:

"If I behave I could be released in 2007," says Jevgenij Voroghov, 21. Together with a hundred or so other prisoners at Alytus prison in Lithuania he is listening to Peter and Christer From Swedish Criminals Return into Society (CRIS). Jevgenij has been in prison since he was 16 and will have served his time by 2010.

"Take a picture of me," begs Virginijus Baranciukas in the prison yard. Like many other prisoners he is putting great hope in CRIS in Lithuania. There is no support today but an association of former prisoners can support prisoners being released.

Photos: Petter Bolme





murdered in 1995 compared to 180 reported in 2002. In Estonia the corresponding figure was almost halved from 307 to 158.

Another positive trend is the fall in the number of prisoners in the Baltic States. Statistics from the International Centre for Prison Studies at Kings College in London shows a 32.7 per cent increase in the Lithuanian prison population from 9,175 to 13,628 between 1992 and 1998 but in 2003 this figure was down to 8,900. Latvia has the highest number of prisoners among the Baltic States. Compared with the USA, who top the prison statistics, Latvia has half as many of its population locked up in prison, but the proportion of prisoners in the Baltic States is way above Sweden and other EU countries.

The high proportion of prisoners depends on the longer sentences. A prisoner in the Baltic States spends on average a longer time in prison than a prisoner in Sweden. This positive trend, with both a reduction in murder cases and fewer prisoners, indicates a fall in criminality but it is too early to verify.

IN VILNIUS THE PAINT has hardly dried. The newly plastered facades in the City Centre and the Old Town outshine each other. Chic boutiques line Gedimino Prospektas and taxis have stickers of naked girls advertising a chain of striptease clubs. But the many luxury stores, restaurants, bars, hotels, striptease joints and casinos have a price - and some have paid more for the economic transformation than others.

When the Baltic States became independent they inherited a legal apparatus that was designed with the sole aim of maintaining power for the communist party. Laws were passed in Moscow and independent courts and legal bodies were unheard of. The most serious crimes were political and therefore regarded as crimes against the state and carried the highest penalties. Political crime was not managed by the police authorities but by other organisations such as the KGB. The normal police force was a professional unit that took care of everyday crime.

The countries inherited hierarchal police organisations where the officers waited for an order from above before acting, otherwise the organisations were pretty much as they are today with a national police force, district and county authorities, uniformed police, police detec-

tives, intelligence departments and departments for crimes of violence.

The prison service came under the Ministry of the Interior and was guarded by military troops. Prisons were seen as part of the state's production apparatus and were divided into prison camps and prisons. The prisons took care of the most dangerous criminals and were so overpopulated that the prisoners slept in shifts.

The transition from Soviet rule did not go smoothly. Many took advantage of the extra space provided by their newly found freedom. The Baltic States also inherited the corruption that existed in the old repressive structures. It was impossible to just rip down the old legal system and change all the police authorities, prosecutors, courts and prison authorities overnight.

Rising prices for basic commodities was followed by greater unemployment. Alcohol abuse, which was already widespread during the Soviet era, further increased and new drugs came in through the open borders.

A new market economy emerged in a grey zone between the formal and informal, between the legal and illegal. Crime paid. The only businessmen who worked according to the laws of the market economy during the communist era were the black marketeers. They were criminals in the Soviet Union and survived by paying the police to turn a blind eye on their trading.

After independence the same businessmen quickly put on their business suits to become legal. Contacts with "ordinary" criminals, police and politicians and a start-up capital gave them a head start ahead of the law and the privatisation of state companies provided a golden opportunity to launder money. An increase in crime appears to be the price for taking the step from a repressive police state to a parliamentary democracy. Several countries, including the former dictatorships in Latin America and South Africa, have also experienced an increase in crime in connection with democratic progress.

IN 1998, THE SWEDISH Ministry of Justice began a cooperation partnership with the governments of the Baltic States within the legal field. A report was issued the previous year based on an inquiry into develop-

ment cooperation within the legal field, which states that the legal field is a “key area that is prioritised in development cooperation” with Central and Eastern Europe.

One of the principles established by the inquiry and later emphasised by the agreement was that cooperation was to be based on a system of coordination. Courts, prosecutors, the police, prison service and crime prevention authorities would coordinate and work together in order to achieve the best results. But it has not been easy for these authorities to cooperate and many feel there should be a distance between the courts and the police and prosecuting authorities. If the courts cooperate too closely with prosecutors it could jeopardise their autonomy.

THE REASON FOR IMPROVING the cooperation in the legal field between Sweden and the Baltic States was not simply because the Baltic States were joining the EU, something that Sweden has pushed for, but because Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are our close neighbours and criminality seldom considers state borders, in particular if it involves making money from moving merchandise over the borders.

A blueprint identified the issues for the authorities to work on. According to Ulf Bejrums at the international development cooperation of The National Swedish Police Board (NSPB) the blueprint is basically an “order form” of what the Baltic States require and not everybody was informed of the cooperation:

“Only two people turned up to some meetings, a general and his chauffeur,” says Ulf Bejrums.

The Baltic police had not been informed that the cooperation would touch on issues such as organised crime and drugs and they also expected Swedes to treat them like small children. But the cooperation continued and the Swedish police benefited from the regular contact with the liaison officers. The liaison officers were already in place and had built up a relationship with the police in the Baltic States. Ulf Bejrums says that once they had developed a relationship with the right people the project went ahead nicely.

One concept they are working on is good policing. Good policing

minimises the risk of corruption, strengthens human rights and helps to build confidence in the police force among the general public. Good policing includes handling evidence, safeguarding clues and documenting everything from the scene of the crime. Swedes do not teach human rights, this is integrated into the course. One example taken up by Ulf Bejrums was the course in interrogation technique where the treatment of suspects was discussed:

“If you treat suspects decently they cooperate better but if you mistreat them just to get a confession they deny everything in court and you have no case.”

All three countries have recruited a new generation of younger, more professional police officers. Many officers have quit voluntarily while others have received their notice. The administration side of things such as fingerprinting, registering, communication centres, cars and computer skills has also been improved.

But Ulf Bejrums points out several times that the cooperation has benefited both parties. Swedish police officers have learned a great deal from their colleagues in the Baltic States, in particular with regard murder investigations and explosions. In Lithuania bombs were quite often used to kill people so Lithuanian technicians are very skilled at examining cars and handling bombs.

Murder is more common in the Baltic States than in Sweden and the countries’ detectives have more experience of murder investigations. Ulf Bejrums calls the detectives he has met on the other side of the Baltic Sea skilled craftsmen. They are quick to see the rational thinking behind a murder and create good criminal profiles.

The cooperation will continue even without Sida funding. Ulf gets phone calls every day asking him for various forms of assistance: “We have never considered it to be only a four-year project but are building for the future. We will always be neighbouring countries. Transboundary crime like trafficking and drugs also requires future cooperation.”

It is a totally different police force today than eight years ago when the project began. Ulf becomes almost indignant on the issue of whether the police forces in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are up to EU standard:

“I wonder why we always have to measure what they require in order

Next page:

“I feel stronger now than when I first came here,” says Reda (left). Together with her friend she has trained to become a hairdresser at the Panevėžys women’s prison in Lithuania. Activities and training during prison terms are a result of the cooperation initiative between the prison services. Photo: Anders Gunnartz

“Welcome Your Majesty,” greets Bruzas Remigijus. Queen Silvia visited him at Lukiskiu prison in Lithuania where he is serving a life sentence without the chance of a pardon. Thanks to support from Swedish prisoners in CRIS he now has a computer and his cell has been redecorated. Photo: Sara Ringström, Aftonbladet Bild





to become EU members? They are very good police officers. Some EU countries have much worse police forces so we should not put them into a little brother pigeonhole. We all play in the same league and all organisations have their deficiencies. We can all learn from each other.”

The first time Bo Johansson at the international wing of The Swedish National Prisons and Probation Administration visited a prison in the Baltic States was in 1992. The situation for prisoners at Riga Central Prison was horrendous. The rooms were shabby and run-down and the bedrooms incredibly overcrowded. The prisoners had to sleep in shifts but there were still not enough beds and the sanitary conditions were beyond belief. A large part of the cooperation with Sweden went on modifying staff attitudes with regard the humane and dignified treatment of prisoners and improving the relationship between prisoners and staff:

“It is a much different situation for prisoners today. They have better food, better accommodation and more hygienic conditions. The prison service also has a more open policy towards the rest of society. Not only families but the media and others can now visit prisoners,” says Bo Johansson.

According to Bo Johansson, the demilitarisation of the prison service played a large part in the rapid change of attitude. The prison service was put under the Ministry of Justice together with other legal bodies such as courts, prosecutors and the police force.

BETWEEN JANUARY 1998 AND 2002 Sida donated SEK 14.5 million to the prison project in the Baltic States. “To have achieved those results in three different countries over a period of four years with that amount of money is very worthwhile,” writes Andrew Barclay and Claes Sandgren in the evaluation of the project they carried out on behalf of Sida.

The cooperation between the prison authorities was based on the Nord-Balt Prison Project initiated by The European Council. The aim of the project was to raise the standard of correctional treatment in the Baltic States to comply with European Council directives. Denmark, Finland and Sweden were allocated a country each. Sweden’s country was Lithuania.

One problem taken up by the evaluation is that the knowledge has not been transferred to other prisons in the country. In addition, the evaluators question whether the changes are sustainable when Sida withdraws its support.

The central prisons still keep dangerous criminals and prisoners awaiting sentence. Overcrowding and long turnaround times are problems the Baltic States must remedy in order to comply with EU requirements. As Bo Johansson points out there are greater similarities than differences between prisons in Sweden and the Baltic States.

The project is very flexible and has been able to adapt to new problems as they arise. Initially the Baltic authorities did not regard drugs as a problem at the prisons. They said there were no drugs or HIV at their prisons but it is now an enormous problem. The first HIV-infected prisoner was at a women's prison in Riga: "They were in a panic and rang to ask what they should do. Two days later a Swede was in place."

Drugs were smuggled into the Alytus prison and the prisoners shared syringes. A HIV epidemic soon broke out. At least three hundred prisoners were infected before the prison management reacted. The prison supervisor was changed and the prison is now trying to control the epidemic – which answers for 25 per cent of Lithuania's HIV/AIDS cases.

When asked for assistance the Swedes held seminars on narcotics, how to search for drugs, how to see if a person is intoxicated and treatment for drug addicts.

The next great challenge for the prisons in the Baltic States is to create meaningful occupations for the prisoners. There is a lack of paid work and education as well as treatment for drug addiction.

One good example is the Ilgusina women's prison in Latvia that received laundry equipment from Hinseberg. Hygiene has improved at the same time as the prisoners were provided with employment and the possibility of earning a wage. But it is difficult to find suitable employment for prisoners.

The prison systems in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania do not have a parole system. In Sweden parole is a part of the preparation for being released. Bo Johansson wonders how prisoners can prepare themselves

if they do not take part in the planning and visit social services and prospective employers.

The Lithuanian women's prison in Panevezys has a cooperation partnership with Sagsjön in Gothenburg and has now introduced a preparation programme for prisoners being released. After a few study visits in Gothenburg the prison contacted the social institutions in the town and prisoners were soon given leave to visit the social services.

When CRIS visited the Alytus prison and the women's prison in Panevezys around 600 prisoners had been released from Alytus and nearly half from Panevezys. These prisoners had not completed their prison terms but were given amnesty. Amnesty has been used to reduce overcrowding in prisons.

"Because the prisons are so full the authorities simply decided to release a certain number of prisoners. It is a way of emptying the prisons but it is not particularly effective. Prisoners released in this way often return again," says Bo Johansson.

He thinks it would be better to create alternative forms of punishment. Lithuania has begun to show an interest in other forms of punishment. The problem is not a lack of political will or insight to improve the efforts for those released but all the other groups in society who require social services and money. It is just not politically possible to improve the situation of released prisoners before giving more to pensioners, street children, the disabled and other vulnerable groups - not yet anyway. But this is another type of problem that cannot be solved by the prison service, the police, prosecutors or courts.

When Stasys Rackaukas, 33, rushes forward to get information about CRIS he does so because he is not sure what is going to happen when he has served his time. On August 15, 2004 he will walk through Alytus prison gate with 30 litas in his pocket. The money is hardly enough for a bus ride home. He will probably buy a cup of coffee, a glass of beer or something to eat, but what does he do then without money, accommodation or work?

PETTER BOLME

Peter Bolme is a journalist at
Global Reporting. He mainly writes
about international issues concerning
development cooperation.

FACTS · LEGAL COOPERATION

Cooperation between the Swedish judicial system and its counterparts in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania began in 1991. Up until 1998 development assistance amounted to SEK 66 million. The police and prison services answered for a large part of the cooperation and the efforts mainly concerned the transfer of equipment. For example, 70 per cent of support to the police before 1995 consisted of used vehicles, computers, forensic equipment and radio communication systems. In the mid 1990s cooperation changed direction and after 1997 most support concerned training and the transfer of knowledge.

In 1996 The Ministry of Justice was given the task of monitoring development cooperation within the judicial field. An inquiry was set up that laid the foundation for continued support. The inquiry found a need for an increase in the number of projects and for the projects to have a holistic approach – a legal chain perspective. From 1998 cooperation has been based on agreements between The Ministry of Justice in Sweden and its counterparts in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Cooperation has mainly involved The Ministry of Justice, The National Swedish Police Board (NSPB), The Office of the Prosecutor-General, The Swedish National Courts Administration, The Swedish National Prisons and Probation Administration, and The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention. Contributions between 1998 and 2003 amounted to around SEK 90 million. Several EU reports refer to Swedish cooperation as playing a vital role in the preparation for EU membership.

Prison and probation service contributions amounted to SEK 21 million between 1998 and 2001. The aim of the the cooperation has been to improve human rights and the situation for internees in the prisons. Contributions within the police service amounted to SEK 20 million between 1999 and 2003. The aim of the cooperation has been to work on issues concerning organised crime and EU adaptation.

Together with Sida, The Ministry of Justice has had overall responsibility for development cooperation within the judicial field. The Ministry has supported the reform process and EU adaptation in the respective Baltic State ministries. The National Swedish Courts Administration has cooperated with the ministries of justice and the national court administrations. The cooperation has concerned human rights issues, the rationalisation of court procedures, legal ethics, relationships with the mass media, court administrations and court premises.

Since 1999 a project has been underway between The Supreme Courts and The Supreme Administrative Courts in Sweden, Finland and the Baltic States. The aim has been to broaden knowledge in criminal and common law and EC law in national adjudication.



THE POLITICAL PARTIES AND DEMOCRACY

Sweden's political parties have been assisting their counterparts in the Baltic States with help and expertise (and a little cash) since the late 1980s. In 1995, Swedish parliamentary parties were allocated a special government grant for supporting their sister parties in other countries. According to many of those involved, the most positive effect has been the large number of personal contacts that have been made, which has helped strengthen parties in both Sweden and the Baltic States.

RIIGIKOGU, THE ESTONIAN PARLIAMENT, is situated on Toompea Hill overlooking Tallinn Old Town. In the party district office, Tunne Kelam, leader of the conservative Fatherland League, explains how important the contacts with parties in other countries have been since 1988, when he helped form the first new political party in the Soviet Union since the revolution.

"When the ban on foreign travel was lifted I went to Sweden without a visa. I pretended to be a Finnish tourist. The first person I met was Carl Bildt. It paved the way for many future contacts." Kelam says the most important thing the sister parties had to offer was human contact:

"At the first stage, before independence, it was all about human contact. We received support for our objectives and to counteract Russian attacks."

Suddenly a bell rings and Tunne Kelam hastens away to vote against the government's budget proposal. His wife, Mari-Ann Kelam, the party's international secretary, adds that Sweden has provided a great deal of information about EU membership:

Opposite page:

The Monday Movement for supporting the Baltic States' right to independence demonstrated every Monday between March 1990 and September 1991. Swedish politicians from all the parties took part, often side by side with those who formed the Baltic parties. The text on the badge says: Each Monday at 12 AM. we support the Baltic people.

Photo: Scanpix

“Sweden has also taught us a lot about internal democracy. Grass-roots level people are much more involved in decision-making these days. Previously they felt they could only accept decisions and pass them on to others.” With a smile she adds that Brits and Swedes always hold good lectures on how to win elections but are not that proficient at it themselves...

Swedish politicians were quick to support the budding independence movements. The Monday meetings at Norrmalmstorg in Stockholm, initiated by four Moderates (right wing party) and Liberals in 1990, rapidly expanded and became a vital manifestation of support for the Baltic States’ independence. Swedish-Estonian Peeter Luksep, one of the founders of the Monday Movement, says that supporting the Baltic States has meant a lot for the Swedes involved:

“The greatest impression is that of having experienced the totalitarian reality of daily life up to the fall of communism. We probably value freedom and democracy more when we know how easily and brutally it was suppressed so close to Sweden and during our own lifetime,” he says. For the Swedish Moderate Party, the Monday meetings also opened the door to a broader political perspective:

“We were previously a very Swedish party but the experience from the Baltic States has given us an international perspective,” he concludes.

Cooperation between the parties rose to another level in 1995 when the Swedish parliament introduced a special party support grant to enable parties to support their sister parties in Eastern and Central Europe and developing countries. The Baltic States, and in particular Estonia, rapidly became the largest recipients.

When some of those involved on the Swedish side look back on 15 years of activities they agree with Tunne Kelam on what has been most important. Former parliamentary Speaker Birgitta Dahl, who was involved in many of the social democratic activities in the Baltic States during the 1990s together with her Estonian born husband and veteran social democrat Enn Kokk, says that personal contacts were invaluable for new politicians emerging from total isolation:

“They didn’t know who they could trust so it was imperative they had somebody they could talk to,” she says.

Peeter Luksep agrees. He has been a member of both the Estonian Congress, an unofficial pre-independence Estonian parliament, and the Swedish parliament where he represented the Moderate Party:

“The knowledge we have been able to share has been of great benefit and the equipment we donated has worked fine, but the most positive thing is the worldwide network we have given the Baltic peoples. Development assistance was the catalyst that made this happen.”

BY NOT BEING BOUND by overall strategies and accounting procedures from Sida and the Foreign Office, the party support grant holds a unique position in Swedish development assistance. It is allocated to an organisation chosen by the party and corresponds to the number of mandates each party has in parliament. The aim is to strengthen democratic development, in particular the participation of women, and assist in the development of functioning party systems.

The support grant must go to a developing country or a country in Eastern or Central Europe but each affiliate organisation is free to decide within these limits which country and which party or organisation is to receive the grant. Sida is responsible for the administration of the grant and for ensuring that it is accounted for in the correct fashion and is used in compliance with the broad directives, which in particular specify that material gifts or gifts of money must be avoided and support must not be given prior to an election or to finance election-related activities. In practice this means that the money must not be used to purchase advertising space or to print campaign material, but education is permitted at all times. Peeter Luksep feels that the emphasis on the transfer of knowledge is misleading:

“The idea is based on an incorrect analysis. People in the Baltic States were often better educated than us but had no fax machine. In that situation it is strange that we have chosen to arrange courses instead of donating technical equipment.”

Tove Lindén, doctoral candidate at Södertörn University with extensive experience of the Baltic States, points out that in those countries people and organisations still live from day to day:

“Swedes mean well, but many times things go pear-shaped. They

Next page:

Demonstrating on the streets was a new thing for many of those who took part in the Monday Movement, which was given a very positive response. The text on the placard says: The future of the Baltics should be decided in Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius. Not in Moscow.

Photo: Scanpix





S BALTIKUMS
FRAMTID
BA E BESTÄMMES I
TALLINN, RIGA
OCH VILNIUS
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don't really understand the difficult reality of the Baltic States, so a conflict arises between, on the one side, the Baltic citizens who are mainly interested in economic aid and practical advice, and on the other side, Swedes who are mainly concerned with the transfer of knowledge and who lecture on democracy from a Swedish perspective. But sometimes things work out, particularly if the partnership continues for some time."

Party support is very unregulated, but it only works out at SEK 35 million a year if the parties distribute the entire amount. A drop in the ocean considering that Sida allocates more than SEK 800 million a year on development assistance through non-governmental organisations. Some of the affiliated organisations, in particular The Olof Palme International Center, is also involved in this type of support. Several parties have also been involved in a three-party partnership with parties from the Baltic States.

A LOT HAS HAPPENED in the Baltic States in a very short time but there are still many problems to overcome. Trust in politicians, and even more in political parties, was already low from the Soviet era. It is doubtful whether the political reality of the three independent countries has contributed much to improving public opinion of the political system. Kaja Kaur, who has stood for parliament in Estonia with the support of a woman's project run by the Swedish Centre Party, agrees. The aim of the project she took part in was to get at least one woman to stand for parliament by arranging seminars and courses. Four stood for parliament and a number of candidates stood in local assemblies.

"But none were elected of course, we just amassed votes for the men at the top of the list. We were supported by the Swedish Centre Party and Centre Party women but not by our own parties," she says somewhat resigned. Today she is involved in rural development for a non-governmental organisation and does not want anything more to do with party politics:

"I've left politics behind me and let the men continue with their sordid games. Our politicians need to learn what democracy really means," she says. She is not alone in her views. Many think there is a lack of openness. A small elite run everything and money plays a great

part. Generally speaking, all three countries are more rightwing than the Nordic countries. All three operate a one level flat tax rate of 25 per cent for both income and corporate tax. Even when leftwing parties have been in government the emphasis has been on growth and reform rather than social welfare. Estonia is the most rightwing of the three countries.

Parties and countries differ, but the party system is in constant disarray in all three countries. There have been countless coalitions and splits, and it is not over yet. New parties emerge for elections and quite often get as much as 25 per cent of the vote. One reason is that the system needs time to settle. Another is that the parties are not built on ideological platforms but formed by political entrepreneurs.

Party splits and the lack of clear ideological variations has created problems when forming governments. The prime minister post, for example, has shifted many times in all three countries. It has also made cooperation tricky for the Swedish parties. Because the party formers often take any name that is not already in use, it is not always easy to see what the parties stand for. The Estonian People's Party the Moderates (Rahvaerakond Mõõdukad) is a member of the Socialist International and has close links with the Swedish Social Democratic Party, the Centre Party in the same country is a leftwing party demanding greater equality and higher taxation.

Many of the parties have also split during the project. Göran Holmström, long-standing chairman of the Swedish Christian Democrat's council for democracy and development, says that in the end the party had so many cooperation partners in Latvia that they decided to only support a conservative trust:

"It's impossible to cooperate with three competing parties at the same time," he says.

The parties have not won their votes for their ideology or manifestos but by having strong personalities at the top. The parties are small. Even the leading parties have only a few thousand members and the membership has a limited influence.

"I've spent an enormous amount of time preaching what is obvious for us: you need more from a leader than just media skills and an effi-

cient campaign. To succeed in the long-term you need an organisation that involves a lot of people and a strategy by which to represent them. This was not clear at the beginning,” says Enn Kokk, who spent most of his working life at the Swedish social democratic party headquarters with ten years as Baltic and Nordic secretary responsible for party cooperation in the area.

POLITICIANS IN THE BALTIC States do not run election campaigns by talking to the electorate at work and distributing leaflets. They use the media, both at editorial level and by purchasing advertising space, which costs money. The countries do provide a small party support grant but not enough to cover election campaigns. The lack of money is solved by using both traditional and shady means. Candidates sometimes use private money. Fundraising and us type corporate sponsorship are also good sources of income. These sponsorships are also used by the leftwing parties and quite often several parties are sponsored by the same company. They do not buy specific benefits, but by all appearances rather a type of insurance premium.

A number of parties have also suffered corruption scandals. Candidates have financed their campaigns in an unsuitable manner and individual politicians have not been able to differentiate between personal and official funds. The best example is probably Lithuanian president Rolandas Paksas who awaits impeachment accused of having had close dealings with the Russian mafia.

The People’s Party the Moderates (Mõõdukad) in Estonia have been accused by newspapers of being too influenced by the Swedish Social Democrats after large support projects. But Andres Mandre from Mõõdukad says that the Palme Center withdrew the support all too quickly as soon as the party could stand on its own two feet. Göran Holmström of the Christian Democrats has seen signs of dependency on development assistance among the parties:

“We should perhaps have been more prudent when we planned the project and introduced part financing or something along those lines instead,” he says.

According to Pär Lönegård, formerly at the Palme Center and Peeter

Luksep, the greatest difficulty during the aid projects has been in tailoring what Sweden has to offer to the needs of the Baltic States. A correct analysis requires a good deal of awareness of each other's situation. It then has to get through rigid administrative procedures with applications submitted for a full year at a time in spite of a rapidly changing situation.

Mari-Ann Kelam from the Estonian Fatherland League says that the Swedish Moderate Party has sometimes called at the end of the year to plan something quickly because they have money over from the grant.

"This causes problems because it means that people on this side have to find the time from somewhere," she says.

All those involved are positive about the results of the project. The Baltic parties have been strengthened and the close cooperation between those that have run the projects has been very positive. But the question is whether or not the party support grant has actually fulfilled the aim of strengthening the party system in the recipient countries. It is fairly obvious that all three countries still have a weak party system with repeated splits and very little stability.

An evaluation of the party support grant carried out by political scientists in Uppsala points to the difference between on the one hand money being used to support sister parties and on the other hand support to the democratisation process and strengthening the party system. The evaluation concludes "...that instead of going towards the democratisation process, a significant amount of the support is contributing to electoral success for individual parties in countries that already are established democracies."

Despite their problems, the Baltic States have been counted among the established democracies for some time. The parties retort that the money has always been intended as support for the sister parties and, as the evaluations show, this has often succeeded. Strengthening parts of the system helps strengthen the whole system in the long term. No, not always, some say. Strengthening small parties that would not normally survive only causes a more fragmented political landscape.

This is where the debate stands at this moment in time.

LARS TRUEDSON

Lars Truedson is a freelance journalist.



CLEANING UP THE BALTIC SEA

Environmental threats was an issue that united people in the Baltic States during their struggle for liberation and independence. Many who were active in the environmental movement at the time later took a leading role in their countries. After liberation the environment became one of the most important areas of cooperation between Sweden and the independent Baltic States.

TWO ELDERLY MEN ARE down at the canal fishing. The rain clouds break for a moment and the sun appears. A father is pushing a colourful pram over the bridge that crosses the canal and a rainbow is taking shape beyond the shabby blocks of flats.

In the Latvian town of Liepaya the Baltic Sea is always present. Liepaya, with barely 100,000 inhabitants, is beautifully located close to a long sandy beach. The southern part of the town is like a peninsula, separated from land on the inside by a shallow lagoon. On the north side stretches an enormous area that was once a Soviet military base. Nobody was allowed on the beach during Soviet rule because it was a military zone. Today the people of Liepaya are free to trickle sand between their toes.

The planned economy gave no incentive to economise with resources. Water and energy cost next to nothing, but on the other hand it was almost impossible to find a fridge. The best way to cool your beer during the summer was to place it under a running cold tap. There was great wastage and water consumption was nearly twice as

Opposite page:

From the Soviet large-scale model when nobody cared about the environmental consequences to today's model when consumers pay for what they pollute.

Environment is one of the areas that has progressed most in the Baltic States.

Photo: Mats Widén

high as in Sweden. At the time most wastewater ran straight out into the Baltic Sea untreated. It was the same in many of the other large towns in the Baltic States. Today the situation is different. In Liepaya, as in Klaipeda, Kaunas, Haapsalu, Daugavpils, Riga and other towns, the wastewater is now treated. A lot has indeed happened in the six years since I was last here.

THE BALTIC SEA PLAYS a central role in the lives of many people, but not many realise it is a unique marine environment. One reason is the low level of salt. There are very few species, those that do exist have adapted from a freshwater or a saltwater environment in order to survive in the brackish water. The Baltic Sea is shallow. The average depth is 60 metres while the depth at the two outlets, The Great Belt and The Sound, is never deeper than 22 metres, which almost completely shuts it in. While the water in The Cattegat changes every few months, it takes between 25 and 50 years for the water in the Baltic Sea to be completely replaced.. This means that toxic substances remain for a very long time. Around 80 million people live around the Baltic Sea, shipping is very intensive and for many decades the sea was exposed to untreated waste from towns, industries and agriculture.

As early as in the mid 1950s attention was being focussed on what was happening to the environment. Studies showed a fall in the salt level and how animal and plant life on the seabed was being destroyed due to the drop in the oxygen content. Something radical needed to be done to stop the Baltic becoming a dead sea.

But there were also positive forces, such as the cooperation between the Baltic countries that grew despite the Cold War. In 1974 the Baltic States adopted the Helsinki Convention, which was drawn up by the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) to protect the Baltic marine environment. A number of recommendations were approved for protecting the environment and laid the foundation for plans to clean up the Baltic Sea.

In 1990, just prior to independence, a summit conference was held in the Swedish town Ronneby with the aim of finding a solution to the environmental problems. The conference led to a programme of measures called The Baltic Sea Joint Comprehensive Environmental Action

Programme. The programme was approved in 1992 and included long-term measures to be implemented over a twenty-year period. In connection with this, 132 pollution “Hot Spots” were identified. Sweden had invested a great deal in wastewater treatment during the 1970s and 80s so it was only natural for the country to commit itself to the work of treating the wastewater from Poland and the Baltic States. The responsibility was placed on The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency where Lars Eklund worked:

“There was a high level of environmental awareness in the Baltic States in the early 1990s and HELCOM had provided a functioning cooperation we could build upon. Global environmental work was also one of the first areas in which the now independent Baltic States took part under their own names, which is why environmental issues were given strong political backing from the outset,” says Lars Eklund.

In the mid 1990s the Swedish government, on a proposal from The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, made the decision to contribute to the building of three treatment plants, one in each country: Haapsalu (Estonia), Liepaya (Latvia) and Klaipeda (Lithuania). The project was carried out in close partnership with The World Bank.

“The support model was unproven. Some people had experience of working in developing countries but nobody knew how to implement this type of project in a country undergoing transition from a planned to a market economy,” continues Lars Eklund, who was later recruited by the development assistance agency at the time, BITS, which had been given the government go-ahead to handle agreements and follow up the project.

When the first water and wastewater project was at the discussion stage many people in Sweden and the Baltic States regarded it as being nothing more than a construction job, but it was soon clear that the local water and wastewater companies would have to be restructured and customer-focused for the project to be sustainable in the long-term. This required a businesslike approach, improved service and a model where customers paid tariffs according to what they consumed. Up until then the water and wastewater companies had been a part of the municipal administration with insufficient funding and inadequate

Next page:

In Liepaya the Baltic Sea is always nearby. From the part of the plant closest to the sea it is only 28 metres to the water.

Photo: Mats Widén





organisation. The aim was to establish independent municipal companies in charge of their own finances.

“Full tariffs and the installation of water metres were the most dramatic changes. It also had an immediate affect on consumption, which fell from 300–400 litres per person a day to in some cases as little as 70 litres,” continues Lars Eklund.

Consumption was predicted to fall to Swedish levels of around 150–200 litres, but it was significantly lower. This created hygiene problems in the water mains as water stood still for long periods. The operating budgets of the new water and wastewater companies were based on calculated sales revenues, now significantly lower than expected. In later projects however it was easier to predict the dramatic effect of the reform and be able to budget accordingly.

“But it is still difficult to get our local cooperation partners to understand that developments must follow the same pattern in all towns. If you lived in the Soviet system with no incentive to save and where increased productivity was rewarded it is difficult to change your way of thinking. Extensive persuasion was required to bring them round to another way of thinking, which took time,” continues Lars Eklund.

The negotiations were tough and the cultural clashes many but today most people are willing to accept the new way of doing things, enabling the water and wastewater companies in the Baltic States to be able to stand on their own when financial support is phased out.

THE COLOUR OF THE treatment plant basins merges with the “grey” sea and horizon. Only the bright Colgate blue pipes and the pistachio green fence forms a contrast. A bit further away is a place where the Nazis executed a large number of people during World War II. History is never far away in the Baltic countries.

At the time of liberation there was a half-finished treatment plant in Liepaya that could be partly reconstructed. A total of SEK 149 million was invested in the project for improvements to the water and wastewater mains and the organisational restructuring of the water and wastewater company. The SEK 49 million contributed by Sweden through Sida in grants was used for the treatment plant and for the

investments required to restructure the water and wastewater companies.

“When the plant was opened by Anna Lindh in 1998 it was just as cold as today,” recalls Maris Zviedris, manager of the plant, as he shows us around.

JEKATERINA LUNINA IS SITTING in front of a computer monitor in the control room. The drawing of the plant takes up nearly a whole wall and is as stylistically pure as a graphic print. Jekaterina prefers to speak Russian. She is 59 and has worked at the company for thirty years. She is a friendly, rather shy person who radiates warmth and genuine commitment in all she does.

“A lot has happened since I began here when valves and taps had to be turned on and off manually. Today we have to learn computer skills to be able to work here, but it is not always easy for older people to adapt,” she says.

Jekaterina has made a long journey; from the Soviet Union’s empiric plans to little independent Latvia on its way to becoming a member of the EU. Environmental thinking has made the same journey. Jekaterina seems quite satisfied and says she has had a good life. Even if her salary of SEK 1,500 a month after tax is nothing to write home about she likes her job and she likes the current developments. She does not miss the Soviet era:

“Today we are much more a part of Europe and I welcome that!”

Jekaterina will soon be retiring. I ask her if she has any special memories from her many years of work. She ponders for a moment but cannot think of anything. It goes quiet as she ponders a bit more, but when we start talking she suddenly remembers:

“I once visited the treatment plant in the Swedish city Norrköping and was impressed by how things functioned. We were treated very well and did a few things together in the evenings.”

Bringing together Swedish and Baltic treatment plants through twinning programmes was an important part of the cooperation and was based on the transfer of knowledge and experience. Liepaya was twinned with Norrköping. But it was not an easy process. In Liepaya

they could not understand why Norrköping wanted to support them, seemingly without using underhand methods to get something in return. They were convinced of ulterior motives and this influenced the relationship for some time:

“It took a long time before we actually understood they were not here for financial reasons,” explains Maris Zviedris.

Initially Sida and The World Bank, who were the driving forces behind the idea of twinning, thought the Swedish water and wastewater companies would manage the entire reform package by themselves, but this did not work out as well as expected and extra support was needed from financiers and experts. The Swedish water and wastewater companies were undergoing a transformation process at the time that meant a reduction in resources and had limited experience of managing this type of reform programme. The twinning programme was for that reason supplemented with consultants to work on organisational restructuring and financial systems.

The twinning programme between Liepaya and Norrköping was implemented between 1995 and 1999. It is now Liepaya’s turn to pass on knowledge and experience. A few days before my visit, the treatment plant had played host to a study visit from Romania. For Maris Zviedris things had come full circle:

“A lot of things were familiar during their visit. They asked more or less the same questions as we did regarding higher tariffs etc. So yes, we could well function as their twinning partner!”

IN 1997 LIEPAJA UDENS and the town library invited children and young people to take part in a knowledge quiz and a drawing competition. A typical question was: “How does a water tap work?” Another was: “How many oceans are there and what are they called?” The first winner was Evija Belicka, 13:

“I’ve always been interested in how people live in other countries. In school we were once given a task to write about the Baltic Sea, which encouraged me to read other books to learn more,” says Evija when I met her the same year.

Like so many other children in Liepaya she had been repeatedly told

not to swim in the sea because the water was so polluted: “A lot comes from other places but we who live here are also responsible. Our wastewater runs out into the sea and our heating systems pollute the air.”

The competition is now in its seventh year and there is still a great interest. Ilga Erba has run the project since it began and she now divides her time between the water company and her job as promoter at Liepaya’s marvellous theatre. In 1997 she said:

“One of the important things with the competition is being able to influence the parents. We create awareness of the need to save water and many people now understand how our way of life affects the Baltic Sea.”

Six years later she thinks they have managed to achieve these aims quite well. There is a greater awareness and the sea outside the town is cleaner so the children of Liepaya no longer have to worry about whether or not it is safe to swim.

“The level of knowledge among the children is higher today than when we started, which is reflected in the answers to our quizzes.” Ilga produces a pile of drawings and shows me. The pictures are rich in colour. There are science fiction themes, beautiful fish and descriptions of what happens to the sea if the waste is not treated. The drawing competition is definitely here to stay.

IN THE WATER COMPANY’S project office Sandra Dejus works on the plans for new investments. Behind her are heavy folders full of EU directives, procurement documents and project reports. Liepaja Udens has just completed its first project financed through the EU Phare Programme and has now applied for funding for projects to be implemented in 2005–2008.

“We have put a great deal of time and effort into studying EU directives. They are no more bureaucratic than other directives but entail a considerable amount of paperwork. EU membership is a good way of improving the situation here,” says Sandra Dejus, who does not appear too concerned; if you have lived under the Soviet system then EU mass documentation is an easy match.

The first years after liberation were difficult for Liepaya, a lot of heavy

Next page:

A cubic metre or a litre? The price is the same. Sandra Deus is now involved in new projects.

Photo: Mats Widén

“My best memory? Perhaps when we went bowling with our colleagues in Norrköping,” says Jekaterina Luninas.

Photo: Mats Widén

Strong images from committed children. One of many drawings from the competition arranged in Liepaya.

*Photo: Victor Brott/
Global Reporting*



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industry disappeared and unemployment shot sky high. But, paradoxically, this improved the environment because many of the large plants closed down. Sandra now hopes the worse is over. New investments have been made in the metal industry and a small-scale textile industry has emerged that produces frivolous lingerie among other things. But the new companies must carry the environmental costs themselves, polluting the environment is no longer a cheap option.

Water is not free anymore either. In the autumn of 2003 a cubic metre (1000 litres) of water cost 46 centimes (six Swedish kronor). This means that a household today pays around 2.5 per cent of its income on water and wastewater disposal, which is below The World Bank's recommendation of four per cent as a reasonable maximum cost per household.

"It's not a great amount but together with the rent, hot water and heating it soon mounts up," continues Sandra Dejus.

To help her in her work Sandra and the others at Liepaja Udens have a Plexiglas cube containing 1000 litres of water. Next to it she places a 1-litre bottle of mineral water. The price is the same, around six Swedish kronor.

"We have to keep repeating things and tell people what happens to the water and the environment and why it costs what it does. There's always somebody new who isn't aware of what we do," she says.

THE GREEN MOVEMENT in the Baltic States played a vital role for liberation. At the time environmental issues were regarded as politically "harmless". The environment was one of the areas that people were allowed to openly discuss so they naturally took advantage of this to form environmental organisations. They were also supported by Gorbachov, who saw the Soviet Union's environmental problems as a time bomb.

During the final years of Soviet rule Indulis Emsis stood at the barricades and fought for a better environment. He was one of the founders of the Latvian Green Party that was formed in 1988 as the first free party in the country. He later became Latvian environment minister and despite the country changing government about ten times he managed to keep his seat for ten years. Some time after this interview was done

he returned to government as prime minister of a new coalition government.

“When we looked at all the crazy environmental directives during the final years of Soviet rule we could see they nearly always came from Moscow, local politicians were not responsible. The logical conclusion was that we would have a better environmental policy if Latvia was given self-rule again,” says Indulis Emsis.

The thing that mostly upset people in Latvia was the plan to build more power stations along the River Daugava. Another issue that led to public protest was the plan to build an enormous terminal for the import and export of chemical products in the port town of Ventspils. In Estonia the plans to quarry oil shale in a sensitive environmental area led to protests.

“People here probably understood the need to protect nature but were not environmentally aware, that was a completely new concept. Swedish knowledge and experience was therefore of great importance to us.”

According to Emsis, the most important aspect was the cooperation that was established between environmental agencies, treatment plants and others in both countries. During the first period after independence however, Latvia received many enquires from companies willing to pay to dump toxic waste in the country.

“Money was then scarce and many were tempted to accept these offers. Several of my government colleagues saw it as good idea at the time and I had to get tough with them on more than one occasion, but thankfully I received a lot of help from my Swedish colleagues. We have since been able to advise other countries with similar problems such as Georgia.”

Today the struggle for a better environment is not as high on the list of priorities as during liberation. Other issues are now more important, but despite this Emsis says it has been relatively easy to get his government colleagues to listen because parliament is often in agreement about environmental issues:

“In 1993 we pushed through a law on environmental tax in the face of tough opposition and received a great deal of support from non-governmental organisations. When the MP’s came out after a stormy debate

they were met by people with flowers, probably the first time they were given flowers instead of harsh criticism.”

It will take a long time for Latvia to solve all its environmental problems. According to the transition provisions laid down by the EU, the country has until 2015 to comply with EU directives for water and wastewater. But Indulis Emsis believes that EU membership is positive because environmental issues will come more into focus through the joint legislation of the EU:

“Latvia is one of the new member states proficient in environmental issues and we can pass our knowledge on within the EU.”

HAS THE BALTIC SEA become cleaner during the fifteen years that have passed since environmental work began? Up until 2003, the discharge from 50 or so Hot Spots had been dealt with, largely due to Sida’s contribution, and the Baltic countries had reduced their discharge of oxygen-consuming substances by 60 per cent. All the countries had halved their discharge of phosphorous, with the exception of Poland who came just under the limit, but none of the Baltic States managed to halve the discharge of nitrogen by 2002 as planned. More needs to be done, particularly within the agricultural sector, which is considerably more difficult than building treatment plants because it is not as easy to remedy the source of pollution. Improving the ecology of the Baltic Sea requires long-term sustained efforts and two of the largest sources of discharge have still not been dealt with, namely Kaliningrad and in particular St Petersburg. When the Southwest treatment plant in St Petersburg is completed it will have a significant effect on the Gulf of Finland environment .

DAVID ISAKSSON

David Isaksson is a journalist at Global Reporting. He has covered Swedish contributions to improving the Baltic Sea environment since 1997.

When reviewing achievements it is important to remember what could have happened if the Soviet system had survived, Lars Eklund at Sida:

“What would have happened if the oil shale quarrying had continued in Estonia? If towns like Kaunas and Kaliningrad continued to discharge untreated wastewater into the Baltic Sea, or if the large polluting industries had continued their activities? The result would have been too catastrophic to even imagine!”

FACTS · ENVIRONMENT

The environment has been a major issue for Swedish cooperation with the Baltic States. Between 1989 and 2003 contributions from Sida and its predecessor BITS amounted to around SEK 840 million. A little more than half of this has gone on investment and reform programmes for water and wastewater projects in large urban areas. The projects supported by Sida have led to environmental improvements that directly affect around two million people.

Another important area has been the rationalisation of energy consumption, in particular with regard district heating. Along with the investment programme, intersectoral cooperation has made up a large part of the Swedish contribution. Environment is one of the areas within the EU covered by extensive joint policies so strengthening the Baltic States' environmental initiatives plays a vital role in their preparations for EU membership.

Intersectoral cooperation during the years leading up to EU membership has played a large part in Sida East's contributions within environment and energy. The Swedish Environment Protection Agency is responsible for a large part of this, partly through its internal projects and partly as an umbrella organisation for contributions from other authorities.

The contribution of The Swedish Environment Protection Agency in the Baltic States has mainly focussed on helping candidate countries comply with EU directives and a programme for transboundary rivers and lakes that also includes Russia and Belarus.

The Swedish Radiation Protection Authority (SSI) and The Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) are also important cooperation partners. Chemicals is another area in which Sweden has a long-term commitment. The Swedish National Chemicals Inspectorate enjoys extensive cooperation with its Baltic counterparts. There are also other types of initiatives. One example is the work being carried out to determine the species and biotopes that exist in the countries' bird and wetlands in order to draw up a protection programme.

Several non-governmental organisations have also been actively involved in environmental work. These include The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC) and The World Wildlife Fund (WWF).



DREAMS OF DISTANT SHORES AND A FAST CAR

The corridors echo with the tramping of feet and the sound of shouting and laughter. There are girls who dream of becoming waitresses, boys who long to own a car, half-grown orphanage children, teachers who are forced to be psychologists, children who ponder, small girls who yearn, teenagers who have just begun to dream – and those who have already stopped.

THE BELL RINGS AND all the young people stream into the corridor again and form their usual gangs. Outdoors, midst the throng of shaven heads, cigarettes are passed around and words exchanged. Smug looks and raised chins go in all directions as the smoke is inhaled and quickly blown out again. But when they see nobody is looking they relax and become themselves again. When the last puff has been smoked the boys hurry back into the classroom.

The depressing economic reality creates even more social problems in a life already full to the brim with hardships. When these young people are confronted with problems at home it often affects their school-work negatively and they fall behind. They have the chance to spend their final year at compulsory school in a special school where the teachers use slower methods of teaching.

This particular school is in Kedainiai, a small town in central Lithuania, which takes a hundred pupils. Figures show that a third of these young people have been sentenced for one crime or another. Many come from families with economic problems and many have only one

Opposite page:

Uncertainty and expectation. After the lesson one of the pupils of Kedainiai's school for youth devotes his time to thinking about the future.

Photo: Anna Thor

parent. Some try to make the best of the situation while others can hardly be bothered with the necessities.

Of the ninety-nine pupils at the school, only ten are girls. Two of the older girls, Renata and Neringa, say the boys don't bother them. They have been going to school for three and four years respectively and have discovered it is much easier to study here because the teaching is at a slower pace. There is not as much homework and you get much more attention from the teachers.

Renata says she would like to continue studying a bit longer when she leaves school. Her gaze is fixed on the desk where her hands rest and she says quietly:

"I would like to be a waitress in a bar. It's probably more fun than in a restaurant." Neringa nods in agreement.

Renata shares a two-roomed flat with her parents and her eleven-year-old sister. She talks about how tiresome it is not having her own room and never being able to just close the door when she needs to be left alone. With her head leaning in her hand and her gaze fixed on the old lecturer's desk she talks about the poor nightlife in a small town like Kedainiai. She smiles and sighs as she agrees that the nightlife in the town is almost non-existent. She yearns for nightclubs, cinemas, concerts and neon lights.

The other girl, Neringa, has recently left the home to live with her boyfriend. Her last lodgings were much too small and she seems relieved to have moved from her parents and her sisters and their families. They were twelve people sharing a two-roomed flat. She sits at her desk reflecting, arms and legs crossed.

"I'm going to Spain when I leave school," she says solemnly without looking up. "My boyfriend is going first and I'm joining him when I leave school."

Neringa says she will work as a waitress or bartender, but her face shows no sign of excitement when she speaks of her plans. Perhaps she just sees it all as a pipedream.

A YEAR AGO, WHEN Vladimiras was 15, his mother moved to Germany to work as a waitress when she realised she couldn't get a job in her own

country. Vladimiras lived in his mother's house by himself for ten months, but a month ago it was sold and he moved into a flat with his friend Samiras.

Their two-roomed flat looks as though it has just been tidied. There is a nice sized living room and the furniture is made up of the usual necessities: TV, settee, table and a Nintendo. The small kitchen has no fridge, sink or stove, but there are two hotplates. The running water in the kitchen comes from a leaky tap in the far corner of the room, and if it weren't for the small light bulb over the basin the room would be pitch black. The boys share a bedroom and have a small bed each with blue sheets. The alarm clock on a small table between the beds is a daily reminder of when the first lesson begins. The bedroom door is decorated with half ripped stickers of pop and film idols. A former tenant has left the pink remains of Spice Girls, a striking contrast to the brown wood of the door. The wallpaper in all three rooms has begun to peel with bits hanging down tattered and torn.

Vladimiras and Samiras sometimes invite their friends to a party. The neighbours and landlord have complained on a few occasions and both boys giggle when they talk about the noise they've made.

"I don't like this area," says Vladimiras defiantly. "There are too many old people here!"

Vladimiras has no father but he has two brothers, one of whom lives in Russia. The other lives with a nurse in Kedainiai, where his mother left him when she moved to Germany the year before. His name is Vova and he is two. Vladimiras meets his little brother regularly and his mother every third month when her visa expires and she has to return to Lithuania. By sending money she earns as a waitress his mother can support her son despite the distance.

"It was very lonely at first" he says. "But then I got used to it..."

It is not until I see Auras away from the school desk that I realise how short he is and how young he looks with his boyish smile, neatly cropped hair and narrow shoulders. Faint freckles cover his nose and cheeks and when he smiles, the skin around his mouth forms small dimples. We go past houses and small shops and eventually arrive at the block of flats where he lives with his mother and sister.

Next page:

After school in late afternoon, some boys play ball in their housing estate.

Last page:

Giggles and deadly earnest. A group of boys sit waiting for the lesson to begin in a small classroom in the Kedainiai school for young people.

Photo: Anna Thor

There is a gang of small boys outside the building and some of the older ones begin to taunt him, but he continues to walk without turning as if he were used to their bullying.

The stairwell is dark and it is difficult to find the stairs that lead us up to the flat. His sister Neringa is 16 years old, two years older than Arunas. She meets us outside the door and with a faint smile greets us and leads us into the flat with a gesture.

Two red settees stand on either side of the room and the family's possessions are spread around the room on shelves and in cupboards.

"This is my bed," says Arunas and sits down next to a couple of teddy bears on one of the settees. "Mum and Neringa sleep in the other bed."

His sister is standing next to her bed, erect with hands joined together behind her. Her voice sounds guarded as she answers my questions about the special school. Because there are only ten girls at the school there aren't that many to mix with she says.

"I don't have enough friends," she says sadly.

The lack of future ambition seems common for many of the young people at the school and these two are no exception. When I ask the boy what he wants to be he looks at me somewhat surprised as though the thought had never crossed his mind. A shrug of his shoulders says he doesn't have a clue.

But his sister gives me a direct answer: she wants to be a shop assistant when she leaves school. She also has a secret dream that she reveals with an embarrassed smile followed by her brother's giggles.

"I want to sing in a band..."

She dreams on and raises her gaze.

"I want to go abroad as well."

I ask where.

"It doesn't matter," she says. "I just want to go abroad."

ANNA THOR

Anna Thor is a 22 year old
freelance photographer.
The report from Kedainiai
was part of an exam taken
during the first year of
her photography course at
Vieback Folk High School.

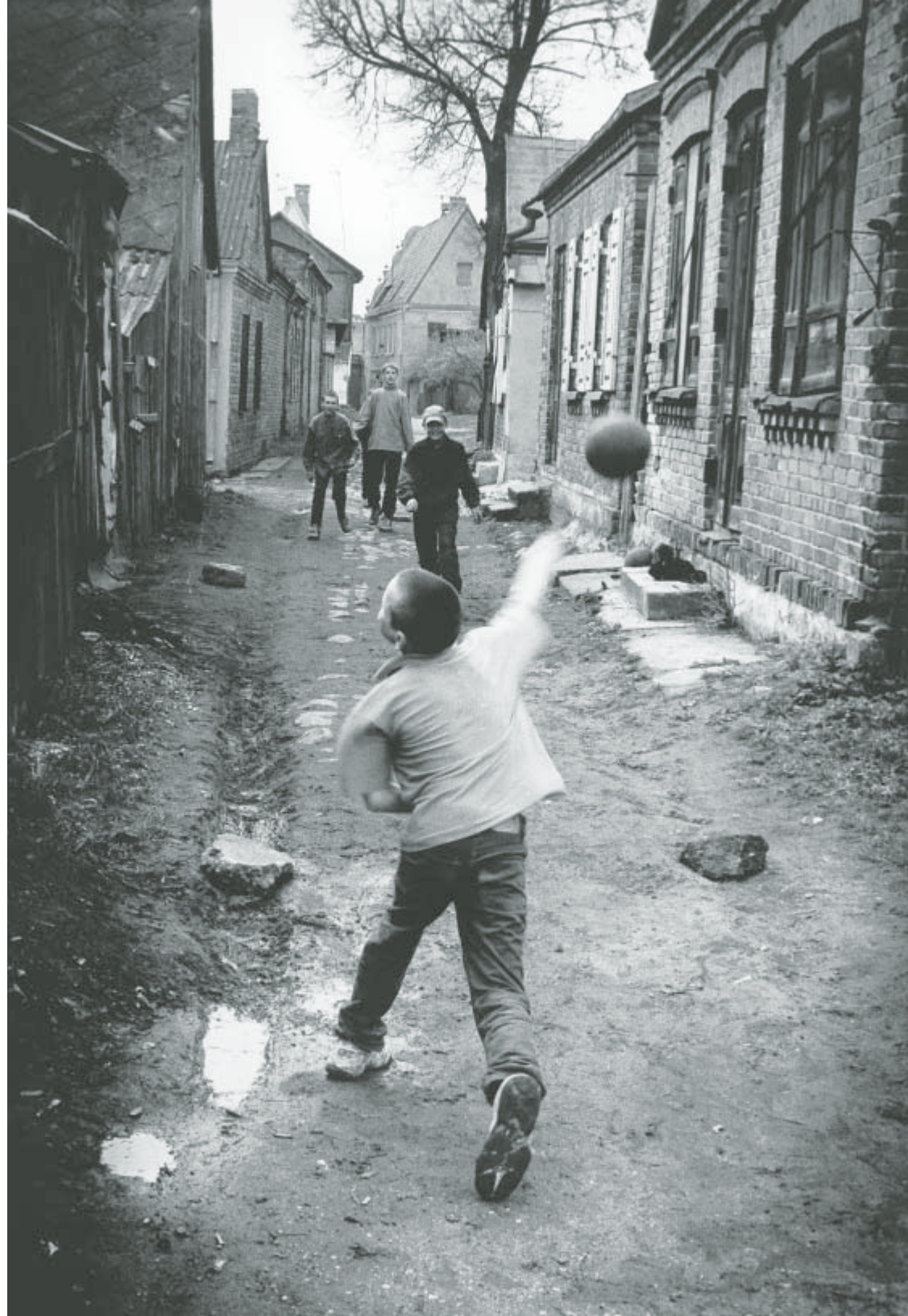








illustration: Johan Resele

THE RETURN OF THE FOOLS

During the final months of World War II there were not many ways of getting to the Swedish island of Gotland from the Courland coast. Most of the boats had been seized by German occupying forces, the Red Army had taken over large areas of the country and coastguard patrols opened fire on refugee boats. A lifeline set up by Great Britain and Sweden enabled a considerable number of Latvian authors to make their way to Sweden. A few Estonian authors also fled to Sweden by sea. They were all prepared to return to their “soon to be liberated” homeland at any time to take part in the rebuilding work, but it would be another forty-five years before that many Baltic authors would cross the Baltic Sea again, now on a ship loaded with authors and translators from the Baltic Sea region. The book that was published after this cruise was entitled *The Ship of Fools*.

UP UNTIL WORLD WAR II, and even during Soviet occupation, contact between Latvian and Swedish authors was very sporadic and one-sided. The first and only Latvian book to be published in Sweden before World War II was Rudolfs Blaumani's collection of short stories “In the Shadow of Death” (Ernst Wessman publishers 1925) translated from the German. In Latvia, on the other hand, Swedish and Nordic literature was very popular. Up until 1988, the work of 125 Swedish authors had been translated into Latvian.

To my knowledge only one Latvian author visited Sweden between the Viking period and World War II. This was Latvian national poet

Janis Rainis who visited Sweden and Norway in 1928. In Stockholm he was well received by Prince Eugen, Mayor Karl Lindhagen and Almqvist, the Minister of Education. He also attracted a great deal of attention through interviews and poetry reviews in the two large Swedish newspapers Dagens Nyheter and Svenska Dagbladet. Whether any Swedish authors visited Latvia between the Viking period and World War II is not known.

The Iron Curtain descended between Sweden and the Baltic States after the war and to my knowledge two Swedish authors visited Riga during this period. The first was in 1962 when Artur Lundkvist paid a short visit on his way to Moscow to receive the Order of Lenin. He later said: "I was in Riga and met Russians." The second and more legendary visit was by Tomas Tranströmer in 1970 at the request of the head of The Swedish Institute John Waldén. Tranströmer was better prepared and did his homework before departing. From former fellow student, exiled Latvian author and arts journalist A.G. Irbe he found out all he needed to know about the most prominent poets in Latvia. After successfully shaking off his "shadows" he knocked on the door of poet Vizma Belševica, who promptly invited a few colleagues including poet Knuts Skujenieks (recently returned from a seven-year sojourn in the Gulag).

Latvian authors did however make a few sporadic visits to Sweden. The most memorable was poet Imants Ziedonis' poetry recital in January 1981 at the Modern Museum in Stockholm together with Swedish colleagues Johannes Edfeldt, Östen Sjöstrand and Bertil Petterson. This visit has always been clouded by the issue of why the KGB allowed this particular author to travel abroad on that particular occasion. While walking to Axelsberg tube station in suburban Stockholm I asked Ziedonis what he thought the purpose of his visit was. He answered: "I don't know. But I'll find out when I get home." It was not a question of a thorough interrogation on returning home, more of a "cultural" discussion over a cup of coffee and a glass of Armenian cognac.

More regular contacts were not established until the Gorbachov Perestroika and Glasnost era. In 1987, eminent publishers Fripress (that is to say author Lennart Frick) arranged a recital evening for its poets in

The Stockholm Arts Centre (Kulturhuset). Among those present was Lithuanian poet Marcelius Martinaitis. Vizma Belševica also attended. Despite many people in the Soviet Union being convinced that Sweden was the one place on earth that had actually introduced true socialism it was her first visit to the formerly so repulsive capitalist West.

TOGETHER WITH THE SWEDISH Union of Authors' vice chairman Benkt-Erik Hedin, Katarina Frostensson, Kay Glans, Björn Håkansson and Brigitta Trotzig, I took part in organising the first significant visit by Swedish authors to Latvia. We took the usual long route via Stockholm, Helsinki, Tallinn and Riga, a journey through four countries that made you feel like you were travelling to the moon. At the time the Soviet military dictatorship decided everything, including geographical distances! In actual fact Riga is only 440 kilometres from Stockholm, making it 110 kilometres closer than Gothenburg.

The Swedish group of authors arrived in Riga in 1988 when The Singing Revolution was well underway. A month or so prior to the visit, the Latvian flag had been seen flying on the streets of Riga for the first time since World War II and the national anthem had been heard. This was just a few weeks before The Latvian People's Front was formed. In a park on the outskirts of Riga the National Independent Movement was holding a meeting. Its chairman was Eduards Berklavs, a national communist who had been purged during the Khrushchev "liberal period" and spent twenty years as a cinema attendant in Smolensk before returning to Riga to work as an electrician for the state-run electrical machinery factory VEF. When he caught sight of me he called me up on stage to deliver an impromptu greeting as a Latvian exile to the Independence Movement.

"It feels secure here in Riga. It's like the forties in Stockholm, the only thing that requires urgent remedying are the house facades," declared Birgitta Trotzig about Riga's inner city, which had been in a Thorn Rose slumber since the war. Nothing had been demolished and nothing had been renovated. Soviet concrete monolithic buildings only replaced buildings that had been bombed.

In a poem about my father's hometown of Liepaya, which I wrote in

defiance at not being allowed as a foreigner to visit this closed town with its large naval base, I wrote the following: "...and today I'm not even considered suitable as a guest in this Latvian equivalent to Gothenburg". This moved several of my Latvian colleagues to enquire of the Ministry of the Interior as to possibility of my visiting the town. First came the standard no, but then somebody must have remembered Glasnost and Perestroika, turning on the charm for the "rich exiles" and I was given permission to visit the town. I was the first exiled author to "return" and The Singing Revolution had just begun so the theatre where the recital took place was packed with people and the evening concluded with the Latvian national anthem, probably the first time it was sung officially in Liepaya since World War II.

A BREAKTHROUGH FOR LITERARY relations came in 1992 with Baltic Waves, a Baltic cruise for authors organised by Peter Curman, then chairman of The Swedish Union of Authors. The cruise brought together 300 authors from the Baltic countries. At the meeting prior to the trip, the Latvian representatives suggested that Norway and Iceland also be included in the Baltic Sea community for this special occasion. This proposal was received with warm applause.

The cruise, the first and hitherto largest ever meeting of Baltic authors, was conducted in an intoxicating spirit; not only that of vodka but also the intoxication of freedom, of new acquaintances and new opportunities. Many of the new friendships that were made became permanent. There were also plenty of absurdities. For example: the proposal from the Petersburg authors that all contacts with Sweden from that side should be centralised via St. Petersburg. Or when Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish authors sat in a corner of the bar and sang *Bandiera rossa* and other renowned European revolutionary songs. Or the fact that the delegation of authors from St. Petersburg was nearly ten times larger than from any of the other countries. A popular subject for debate was of course how many of this delegation were actually authors, 5-10% was the general consensus. Whatever the true figure, extensive "bizniss" activities took place at every port of call.

From this chaotic throng emerged a fantastic, albeit impractical, con-

cept of a centre on Gotland where Baltic authors and translators could spend a few weeks together in creative bliss. Fantastic for those authors who found themselves wallowing in a post-communist state of unrest, impractical because with very few exceptions the only means of transport to Gotland depart from the Stockholm region. But the idea of authors being able to meet on an island in the middle of the Baltic Sea was so romantic that it was won over by sheer enthusiasm shared by the Gotlanders themselves and the centre became a reality in 1993.

In Gunilla Forsén the Centre had a qualified and committed chief with well-developed social skills and a natural maternal disposition towards that peculiar section of humanity occupied by the humble servants of literature. The Centre has provided an oasis for many authors. Hundreds of texts have been written and translated there and it is no exaggeration to say that the Centre has had a significant influence on the contemporary literature of many countries.

It is impossible to measure the value of all the discussions that have taken place at the Centre's kitchen table because they are invaluable, and so are the poetry festivals. It all leads to new acquaintances and translation projects, but above all, The Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators is living proof that we who live around the Baltic Sea do not need to be captives of the past but have a future as free people on equal terms.

A SECOND AUTHORS' CRUISE soon followed in the wake of the first with Peter Curman once again at the rudder. It was now the turn of the writers around the Black Sea to become friends, with a history just as dramatic and complicated as that of the Baltic States. The cruise took place in the autumn of 1992 and if definite proof is required of its success there is now a writer and translator centre on Rhodes that enjoys a flourishing relationship with its sister centre in Visby. A great achievement indeed. When will we see a similar centre for the Middle East?

Just as positive and inspiring was the Swedish-Baltic project Presence Balte in Paris and London arranged by the Swedish Institute represented by Hans Lepp and Helen Siegeland. The British Library held poetry recitals and a special Baltic Poets folder was released. The Nord-

KNUTS SKUJENIEKS (LETTLAND)

after all the bustle
 of wakefulness and dreaming
all of us wish for a gotland
where the grace of god and the sun
shine through the rib bones of churches

where in deserts of limestone
junipers bow down like martians
where woolly ewes graze
in bogs
 on flags
 in skies

where heroes push on in boats of stone
to promised feasts
where the traveller lies giddy until morning
in green grass and lilly of the valley

only then – as if he'd won the lottery
to return home again

and if we can't get to gotland
we can well imagine us a gotland

Translated by Mara Rozitis

JAAN KAPLINSKI (ESTLAND)

Dockhem –dollhouse made of morning fog
condensing into rain gray clouds gray stones
into shadows of medieval dolls
walking with small steps beside you
touching you with their transparent hands
saying with transparent lips
Don't go stay here with us
Stay here become one of us
so difficult to say no so difficult
keep in mind you must go home
you must fly this evening
you must fly over the island over the sea
with this fog this west wind
back to your home your name
your namelessness your own fog
your own loneliness
on another island
on another shore

ANTANAS JONYNAS (LITAUEN)

Postcard

While time stands still and life hurries on
towards an abyss where I don't exist
I am alone like a sculpture in the park
someone who not even the dogs remember

my fingers melt and drops in the flaws
chop them off like dried up trees
am I meditating or praying
it's good that you no longer write to me

I have walked down all the streets and paths
to places that don't even arouse a dog's curiosity
my love, you have not yet understood
are you really waiting for destiny's angry cry –

a white dragon whirls – loneliness
is all there is
on my post-card from Gotland

Translated by Mara Rozitis

West cultural days in Moscow in 1997 was a similar event for authors. This was a joint effort by the Baltic States, Sweden and Finland. Swedish instigator was Cultural Attaché Johan Öberg. This was an important event, in particular because the Baltic culture and its representatives came to Moscow as “any other foreigners” together with their Nordic neighbours. This was another in a long line of Baltic (and Russian) “liberation and transformation processes” that took place throughout the 1990s and which to some extent are still taking place. From “Soviet republics” to “close to the West” to neighbouring countries the road to heaven is fraught with pitfalls while the road to the bottle (i.e. nostalgia for the lost superpower) is straight and even.

With regard author visits between Sweden, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, there were so many for the period in question that it is impossible to count them all. There cannot be that many Swedish writers today who do not know several Baltic authors – and visa versa. This is of course a gratifying sign of a good relationship between neighbouring countries. The only cloud in the sky is, as always, the lack of balance in the translations.

BETWEEN 1991 AND 2003, 103 works of Swedish literature were translated into Latvian but only 14 works of Latvian literature were translated into Swedish (5 by Vizma Belševica). The corresponding figure for Lithuania is 106 and 11 respectively and for Estonia 107 and 18. Several of these translations inspired other Nordic countries to translate the works into their languages with the help of Baltic language experts and the Swedish translations. In this way Vizma Belševica's work, for example, has been translated into Danish, Norwegian and Icelandic.

Sweden and the Baltic States are geographical neighbours but it is only during the past twelve to fifteen years that they have enjoyed anything like a normal neighbourly relationship. The Iron Curtain has fallen and for the first time in its history the Baltic Sea is surrounded by democratic states. But the economic unbalance still remains. The cultural exchange between Sweden and the Baltic States has basically been financed by Swedish funding. This has led to Sweden, often against its will, compiling the agenda and setting the priorities in areas

such as democratic progress, environment, gender equality, promoting Swedish language and culture, promoting a positive image of Sweden in the Baltic region, etc. The Baltic culture in Sweden has also been financed by the Swedish side, which has often led to passivity from the Baltic side. A neighbourly relationship will never exist between our countries until economic equality is achieved.

We have never before experienced such an extensive cultural exchange as the one we have enjoyed since 1991. There have been previous connections of course. Northern Latvia and Estonia were once “Swedish” and in the 1930s people travelled with The Aelos to sunbathe on Riga beach (Jurmala) and buy cheap spirits. But interest was lukewarm, information about Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania was limited as was the belief in the ability of these “border states”, which was reflected in our cultural exchanges. Just look in the rear-view mirror and sympathise with the limitations of the Baltic States, inflicted or self-inflicted, and the low level of self-confidence floundering on history and the language barrier.

THE LANGUAGES OF THE Baltic States managed to survive the seven hundred year German yoke and nearly fifty years of Soviet occupation but unfortunately the Baltic States’ lingua franca was not English but Russian. There is an interesting comparison with Ireland. The Irish lost their language but were “tuned in” to global English. All new Irish novels get international reviews, which is why Irish history and Irish culture are internationally renowned. In other words the threshold to all things Irish is very low. For the Baltic States and their culture the situation is the opposite. Most Baltic cultural manifestations based on history and tradition must be explained. This is a considerable drawback because we know all too well that an explanatory footnote cannot replace a direct emotional experience.

The success of Swedish and Nordic literature such as Smilla’s snowy Greenland, Sofie’s Norwegian world and Henning Mankell’s Detective Inspector Kurt Wallander books proves that even small language groups can reach out. International success is not only based on literary quality or taste, it is also very much a question of marketing and

JURIS KRONBERGS

Juris Kronbergs is a poet and translator. He lives in Stockholm. His work includes the translation of Vizma Belševica’s books into Swedish.

finance. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania now have their own equivalents of The Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs and The Swedish Institute, bodies with enough financial power to provide grants to assist their authors in the translation of their work. These contributions will hopefully become more substantial in the near future. Then, and only then, will the literature of the Baltic States be able to seriously compete on the international market and Baltic authors will be able to compete with their Swedish colleagues. But the comradeship and solidarity (this fine, but oh so tired and misused word) that was established during the first dramatic period of independence will live on; of this I am firmly convinced.

THE PAST SLOWLY DIMINISHES like a ship passing over the horizon to be gradually transformed into a collection of narratives from which something close to the truth has to be fished out and saved from the mists of oblivion...

For many Baltic authors the changes mean they are no longer forced to be Puppets of the State or The Voice of the People or Prophets, they can once again play The Fool. And now, twelve years on, we discover that this right is not a matter of course everywhere. But together we become stronger. Fools everywhere unite!

THIS IS NOT THE TIME TO WITHDRAW

The Soviet Baltic Republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had the most modern merchant navy fleets and several of the most important shipping ports in the Union. It was here that a large part of the Soviet shipping industry was concentrated. As with all other sectors, the shipping industry was managed and organised by the state to the finest detail. Under the Ministry of Shipping in Moscow, a shipping company was set up in each of the three republics. The shipping companies in each Soviet republic were integrated with the ports and were also responsible for the safety supervision of ships etc. Shipping fairways and nautical charts were the responsibility of the military. There were no private boats, with the exception of sailing boats owned by university clubs.

Before Soviet occupation there were 40 ports in the Baltic States, all enjoying a lively commerce with their Baltic Sea neighbours. During the Soviet era all trade was concentrated to four ports while others like Liepaya and Paldiski became military bases. The coastal area was a military zone and a forbidden area for local people.

Most things were centrally controlled. The Soviet Federal Constitution did however allow the Republics their own departmental ministries in a few administrative areas. Estonia appointed Tiit Vähi to the post of Minister of Transport in 1989 before regaining of independence (he later became Prime minister) and he in his turn appointed a director general to the Estonian National Maritime Board, Nathan Tönnisson, who took office in February 1990. Tönnisson's executive power

was of course limited, all maritime affairs were administered by the port manager in Tallinn, appointed by Moscow, and the Soviet navy managed the fairways and aids to navigation. Tõnnisson therefore took the only course open to him; he travelled to all the Nordic maritime administrations and asked for cooperation. The long isolation was now broken. Tõnnisson's tour of the Nordic countries resulted in a wait-and-see policy, even with regard to our response. In September of the same year Tõnnisson returned to Sweden, this time to the undersecretary of the Ministry of Transport and Communications. Rhetoric was now put aside. He described the situation in Estonia as extremely serious; a technical-institutional cooperation was immediately called for, and on Estonian terms.

WE COULD WAIT NO longer. On October 27 we took the ferry over. Four experienced experts from The Swedish Maritime Administration met the Minister of Transport Tiit Vähi, Deputy Minister of Transport Enn Sarap and Tõnnisson. The message was clear: "Send over an expert for a month and as quickly as possible, we need to draw up a strategy."

We spent the afternoon guided around Tallinn docks by Harbour Master Eduard Hunt who took his orders directly from Russian Port Director Lukoshkin. The central port was full of endless rows of ploughs from Ukraine for export to countries in Africa with whom the Soviet Union had trade agreements at the time. Muuga harbour was a gigantic grain terminal for the import of American wheat to compensate for the constant failure of the Soviet agricultural policy.

In January 1991, Per Eriksson, newly retired Director of Marine Safety, arrived in Tallinn. A month later he presented a 100-page report containing no less than 13 high priority issues. It was too much for the Estonian National Maritime Board, with its three employees, to digest. We chose three projects also involving Latvia and Lithuania, which could all be implemented in Sweden: courses and practice in maritime safety, maritime search and rescue and marine environmental management. We took the whole package to the Swedish Agency for International Technical and Economic Cooperation. Gunilla Olofsson, Director General of the agency, was aware of the importance of proj-

ects on a good technical level but could only afford to finance two of ours. The third, search and rescue, we had to finance ourselves.

A vital part of the work during the spring of 1991 was to go through the criteria for national ships registers. The three republics had the most modern merchant navy fleets in the Soviet Union. The maritime industry was also the largest sector in all three countries. There were not only modern, if few, ports, but also a shipbuilding industry and harbours for ocean-going fishing fleets and a large fish processing industry, not to mention support functions such as nautical training colleges etc. The shipping companies were the crown jewels.

The struggle for independence culminated in 1991. Declarations of independence in the Baltic States, Soviet troops, the bloodbath in Riga and the coup against Gorbachov in Moscow. This was not the time to sit down. All the telephone lines still went via a telephonist in Moscow and there were queues of up to 36 hours compared with the usual 2–6. We telexed a couple of messages that we were on our way to Tallinn and that we were keeping to our partnership agreement. The remaining projects had an even higher priority now.

A few more days and Jeltsin declared the Soviet Union dissolved and all Soviet property within Russian borders the property of the Russian Federation. On August 20, the Baltic States one by one declared their regained independence and also declared all former Soviet property within their borders nationalised.

I managed to get a visa from the resurrected Estonian legation in Stockholm, visa number 2, and got to the ferry, which this time only had a few passengers. There were only 5–6 of us in the cafeteria so it was not difficult to see that among the others was the future Swedish ambassador, so I went across to Lars Grundberg to tell him of my business and to congratulate him. He told me not to be so forward, he was travelling as chargé d'affaire and awaited his agrément in Tallinn. Lars Grundberg became ambassador and also doyen (the diplomatic corps' chief representative).

Tallinn, like Riga and Vilnius, still looked in a state of siege. Stones and concrete blocks in the squares and in front of the parliament and government buildings to prevent armoured cars from passing. Tönnis-

Next page:

Edward Hunt looks out over the Port of Tallinn where large cruisers now dock. Strengthening the central institutions within shipping and aviation was a crucial part of early cooperation.

Photo: Susanne Kronholm





son apologised and explained that all the archives had been taken away for safekeeping and we had to recap most of our work. He had received our telexes and said that it was vital that we had stood by our agreement to implement the programme. The countries had drawn up their shipping registers and transferred the Estonian, Latvia and Lithuanian shipping companies into national ownership. The same applied to the aircrafts that were registered in each republic and the railway carriages that were within the countries' borders.

WE HAD SHUTTLED AROUND the Baltic States for almost a year when we decided it was time to quickly draw up a strategic platform for cooperation. What we had seen represented a huge challenge: to pilot our resurrected neighbours towards forming their own stable structures, recreating their institutions, creating a self image based on sovereignty and standing on their own two feet as quickly as possible. Shipping represented their most important source of earning foreign currency but they were still rouble economies. Accordingly, we invited the ministers of transport to Sweden.

Normally, ministers are invited by ministers but there had just been an election in Sweden and an interim government takes no political initiatives. Even if it had not been out of the question for the Minister of Transport and Communications to send the invitation, the situation was naturally such that the guests would not have accepted an invitation but would have chosen to visit the incoming government instead. But there was no time to wait and both The Ministry for Foreign Affairs and The Ministry of Transport and Communications wanted to see an initiative.

The visit took place in October 1991 and was combined with a visit to the Swedish Civil Aviation Administration, also located in Norrköping. The delegation consisted of four ministers (Latvia had both a minister of transport and a minister of maritime affairs) and six director generals as well as interpreters. In the afternoon we presented a draft of possible areas of cooperation that was far from complete because in the traditional Swedish manner we expected a discussion to take place. Tönissson took the floor and suggested we keep minutes of what we had just presented. Everybody agreed. Adjournments, tumult and consulta-

tions became the order of the day and when Norrköping City later invited us to dinner in the Town Hall I found myself sitting with three envelopes of agreements on my lap – Memoranda of Understanding. Negotiations lasted all night and everything was ready for signing the next day on the bus to Stockholm. We were to meet Mats Odell who had just been appointed Minister of Transport and Communications and who had hardly had time to warm his seat before we turned up. Our cooperation documents were ready, four programmes for each country.

We could not manage the workload ourselves because of our limited resources and were in need of financial support. The Swedish Agency for International Technical and Economic Cooperation gave us the green light to go ahead with the programmes. An upgrading of maritime search and rescue services was also accepted and we were given the tough task of implementing the changes within a year. We also brought in the Swedish resource base of consultants, Swedish ports and a large number of our own experts.

IN THE WINTER OF 1991-92 it is freezing cold in the Baltic States. We travel the length and breadth of the countries in trains with unheated sleeping cars and water bottles filled from samovars by babushkas. We have electric fans with us for the hotel rooms. There are long bread queues on the streets of Tallinn, as necessities are rationed this winter. We have with us powdered yeast for our Estonian colleagues. Vegetables are non-existent so we have with us the largest jars of multivitamins we could find at the Swedish pharmacy and issue strict instructions that they were only to be distributed to employees with young children. We quickly learn not to remove our overcoats when we arrive at the offices and to keep our gloves on when typing, this is what everyone did this winter.

We only bumped into a few other Western experts at the hotels, usually other Swedes. What drove us to the almost impossible task of being the sole providers for the rebuilding of the Baltic States' maritime institutions? Where were all the others? The Finns were nowhere in sight, their economy had suffered a blow from the collapse of their foreign

trade with the Soviet Union and it was probably difficult to get around Koivisto's notorious statement after the Moscow coup. The Danes were around but sporadic. In fact we also had other important work to occupy us in Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines and Africa – not to mention all the uncompleted work at home! What had we let ourselves in for?

OUR CONTRIBUTION COVERED A wide area, from general maritime affairs and the training of port staff to protecting the marine environment. The aim was to break down old barnacled structures and to separate the commercial sector from the public in areas such as maritime safety. This involved training in maritime safety inspections of the countries' ships, now under their own flag, sea rescue and a broad-based study of the survival of the shipping sector in the three countries. We worked in close contact with the transport ministries and their institutions. But we were now encountering a segment of society we had not expected to meet but which we had to cope with to get the public sector functioning, namely the transformation of militarised structures into civilian.

The Soviet Union regarded the coastal area of the Baltic States as a strategic military zone and civilians were not permitted to set foot there. People could not bathe at the beach. The fishing industry was not local but managed by gigantic kolkhozes on fishing quotas agreed upon with partner countries around the world. The whole coastal area was a military zone. Soviet troops did not leave the Baltic States until October 1993 in accordance with agreements that were intricately connected to boundary disputes etc.

The three Baltic States were attractive for the Soviet Union after World War II and they rapidly established high technological electronics and telecommunications industries there. The Baltic States played host to a large proportion of the Soviet military industrial complex for advanced development projects, which greatly contributed to the comparatively high standard of living in the three Baltic States. But after independence it all stood still.

Part of this industrial complex was the manufacture of nuclear energy batteries. Small 100–300 kilo batteries driven by the isotope

strontium 90 that last for as long as 20–30 years, suitable for use in small plants in remote areas such as lighthouse beacons.

In 1993, before the coastal areas were returned to each country and the Russian troops were evacuated, we carried out an inventory of lighthouse beacons and aids to navigation in order to draw up a restoration programme. Around half of them were out of operation due to lack of maintenance, which in its turn was due to a lack of financing throughout the 1980s. Maritime safety was in jeopardy.

Our engineers had to climb through barbed wire and endless procedures to attain passage permits. The lighthouse keepers were often retired non-commissioned officers from the Soviet navy who could support a whole family with the paraffin oil, potatoes and firewood they received from the navy. But the beacons did not work. It became apparent that the automisation programme introduced by the Soviet navy included 30 strontium-driven beacons in Estonia and thankfully only five in Latvia. Many of the beacons were in a bad condition, rusty and exposed to waves. Non-corroding flanges were required for cooling the mini reactor, but there were not that many. The doors to the beacons were broken. Probably, someone had hoped to find something valuable there despite the three-spoke radiation symbol having been put up properly.

Without delay, we turned to the Swedish Radiation Protection Agency in Stockholm, who had already begun a survey of the nuclear material in the area and were aware of the beacons' existence.

It was not just a question of getting basic maritime safety functions working again and for the Baltic countries to take control of their infrastructures, it was also a matter of shifting focus and energy sources, another substantial task – and on the other side of a barbed wire fence where Soviet troops had hegemony. It was Denmark who finally solved the dismantling problem using pragmatic methods that we did not have the mandate for. The nuclear operated beacons have now been replaced by solar panels.

ONE DIFFICULT ISSUE FOR Estonia and Russia was Paldiski. This old port, situated in the most weather-protected bay in The Gulf of Finland, has

Next page:

A mooring buoy in Tallinn harbour. Baltic Sea shipping has doubled and ferry services are rapidly expanding. Today the shipping industry cooperates across the borders and all the countries have adopted the most important conventions and take an active part in international cooperation.

Photo: Susanne Kronholm

Around the Orthodox Church in Liepaya lived thousands of Russian military staff. The beach, a bit further away, was a forbidden zone for everybody else.

*Photo: Victor Brott/
Global Reporting*





historically served as a retreat for the German, Swedish and Russian navies. On old German maps the port is called Baltischport (mit einer Schwedische molo (jetty)).

Paldiski was one of the Soviet nuclear submarine bases, a closed military zone with a population of some 10,000. It had two gigantic buildings for training reactor engineers and a submarine and robot boat base. North of the gulf are the two islands of Pakri, then used as target practice for strategic bombers. The islands were completely contaminated by detonated and undetonated shells.

The marine base was a scrap yard. The old detention barracks were still there complete with sheds, watchtowers and barbed wire. Sunk ships were still at the bottom, anything of any value had been removed and the rest destroyed. The Institute of Technology sent deminers to the Pakri Islands and in 1994 the Swedish navy hired a vessel to examine the seabed which reported some dramatic finds. The next summer we were there surveying for shipping channels while the navy detonated mines and lost torpedoes. Paldiski was getting into shape again.

Paldiski was something of a challenge and a test case for the extent and commitment of Swedish development cooperation. Our task in that context was to ensure that the port could be used for civil shipping. This involved surveying for nautical charts, marking shipping channels, putting the antiquated military mechanical industry into civil use and opening the port. The first ships to lay anchor were with relief supplies. The Swedish navy had done a good job of clearing old mines both here and later also in other waters.

Now, ten years later Paldiski has a daily ferry to Sweden and an annual turnover of two million tonnes of goods. It boasts modern goods and passenger terminals and serves as an economic hub for the entire region. The old military base has undergone a metamorphosis.

DURING THE FIRST YEARS we planned the projects to be implemented jointly or parallel in all three countries. The countries had similar problems and more or less the same requirements: to uphold the sovereignty of the coastal states over their waters, establish authorities and introduce shipping dues. We thought we knew what had to be done and

we provided that, but it was soon evident that the countries had different priorities and emphasised their own identity and policies. Each country also made its own timetables where maritime legislation was concerned. Our contributions were to be determined by the different national requirements. Our role was quite often that of the catalyst, to contribute to the changes and to assist each country in their priorities. One important area was to help each country comply with the requirements of international shipping conventions. This included the important Helsinki Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment.

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have now all separated state responsibility from the private sector. The governments and their bodies are responsible for maritime safety issues and for maintaining the shipping infrastructure. The ports function as independent commercial enterprises and the shipping companies have been privatised. In this respect the Baltic States are not different from other EU countries.

The Baltic Sea is small but has as many as nine coastal states so there is obviously a lot to gain from cooperation. This also concerns areas such as oil pollution protection with the coastguard and search and rescue services. Cooperation has also been extended to Poland and Russia – St Petersburg and Kaliningrad – where a number of broader, sub-regional projects are underway.

All the countries now have well-developed cooperation programmes with their neighbours in the area of shipping. All comply with important conventions and are members of international technical cooperation organisations. Should this chapter therefore be closed? Yes and no. We have, as one result, drawn up, or are in the process of drawing up, search and rescue agreements with all the countries and have also introduced standardised international methods. At the same time, maritime trade has doubled, ferry traffic is steadily increasing and the threat to this sub arctic environment cannot be ignored. Our partner countries require a professional dialogue, joint development projects and cooperation initiatives. As we have been engaged in this process for more than a decade this is not the time to withdraw.

WILLAND RINGBORG

Willand Ringborg is Head of the
International project Office of
The Swedish Maritime Administration.



INTEGRATION IS SELDOM SIMPLE

Somebody told me to look out for a short police officer in high heels. While waiting for somebody fitting that description I saunter along the wintry streets of Tallinn's old town among handicraft stalls, breathless first-time tourists and the chiming of shop doorbells.

Anna Fomchenkova for her part is on her way into town from Lasnamägi, one of the run-down concrete block suburbs, and getting nowhere fast on the bus she informs me from her mobile phone. There is a large Russian community in Lasnamägi where Anna lives with several of her friends. A few minutes late she turns up in person in a long beautiful coat with a broad smile on her face.

Anna Fomchenkova tells me she has just got back from her childhood metropolis St Petersburg, a "cultural trip" to the city of opera and her family. But she says it is nice to be home again in peaceful Estonia because this is where she belongs.

"I was born in Russia in 1980," she says and begins a life story filled with political and social upheaval. She has just been persuaded to try a fantastic pastry at a café where the Russian-speaking youth of Tallinn seldom go. Maybe because the cakes and pastries they serve here are too expensive or because Russians and Estonians have lived fairly separate lives, both culturally and professionally, since the Soviet era.

But judging by Anna's life it is still possible to mingle between both worlds. Anna is a police inspector in the old wooden building district of Kopli, another low status area where a great number of Russians live.

Opposite page:

Anna Fomtjenkova became a police officer after completing a business management course for Russian-speaking students supported by The Swedish Institute.

Photo: Susanne Kronholm

She speaks Estonian and Russian at work, and her friends include both Estonians and Russians.

After decades of Soviet oppression and colonisation, Estonia is now aiming to become a multicultural society. But the road to a totally integrated society is littered with the remains of a painful history, a history of many losers.

WHEN ANNA WAS FOUR, her parents packed all their belongings and moved from Leningrad over the almost non-existent border to Kohtla-Järve in the northeast region of the Soviet Republic of Estonia. The Soviet occupation of the Baltic States resulted in a massive influx of foreign labour and the Russianisation of Estonia and Latvia. Along with Anna's family came hordes of military engineers and workers, people who normally earned their living within the energy sector and military industrial complexes.

During the 1970s and 1980s the Estonian and Latvian languages were well on their way to being driven out by Russian. Many Russian-speaking people settled in the capital cities. Northeast Estonia and southeast Latvia were more or less transformed into Russian-speaking enclaves but little did the new inhabitants know that one day their presence would be frowned upon and they would be called colonialists.

Anna Fomchenkova was eleven in 1991 when the Soviet Union collapsed. At that time she was too young to be interested in politics, but both her and her parents probably understood that something drastic was about to happen. Many Russian-speaking people were against the Baltic demands for independence, but Anna's parents took the upheaval in their stride. They also chose to remain in Estonia after August 1991.

"Many moved, but they didn't," says Anna, as if to underline her parents' loyalty to independent Estonia despite belonging to the 90,000 or so people in Estonia who chose to remain Russian citizens.

In northeast Estonia where Anna's parents live many of the heavy industries closed down after the collapse of the Soviet Union. What was once an ecological disaster area soon became a social crisis area with high unemployment. But Anna's parents have nevertheless been lucky.

Her mother is still a history teacher in Kohtla-Järve and her father is one of those fortunate enough to have kept his job within the mining industry. But young people who want to achieve something move away.

One of them is Anna. She moved to the capital city and studied business management at Tallinn's pedagogical institute. On completing her education she was offered the opportunity of becoming a police officer, which was not far removed from her childhood dream of becoming a teacher.

"I like to tell people what they've done wrong and how they can put it right, so this is also a form of teaching," she says and laughs.

CURRENT FIGURES SHOW THAT around 12 per cent of Estonia's population lack citizenship in any country while the figure is 21 per cent in Latvia. In Estonia and Latvia, as opposed to the linguistically and ethnically more homogeneous Lithuania where the influx of foreign labour was significantly lower during the Soviet era, only people in the independent republics from the interwar period have received automatic citizenship. Other residents have received permanent residence permits and the entitlement to apply for citizenship.

Those who for various reasons remain non-citizens enjoy the same privileges and entitlements as ordinary citizens with regard state pension and healthcare etc. regardless of whether they are stateless or Russian citizens. But in Latvia they are not free to vote even in local elections and there are certain occupations that are not open to people without Estonian or Latvian citizenship, which includes the presidency.

From a democratic perspective it is obviously crucial for all inhabitants to participate in public debate and influence political developments at national level if they so wish. But despite widespread media campaigns, reducing the number of stateless people in Estonia and Latvia is a slow process. One explanation is that many of the Russian-speaking population do not fulfil the language requirements for citizenship, but a popular theory is that many people have lacked motivation for too long. People busy supporting their families and managing their everyday lives do not necessarily have the time or the energy to apply for citizenship. Many Russian-speaking people also feel confused

about the great social changes that have taken place. Some of the older people were indoctrinated during the Soviet era to believe they were “liberators” of the Baltic States. For these people it is unthinkable or simply humiliating to apply for citizenship.

Now that the countries have introduced legislation that entitles children born in the country after independence the right to a simplified form of citizenship, the stateless group will reduce significantly in the long term. Since gaining entry into the EU, more stateless people seem to be prepared to apply for Latvian or Estonian citizenship and increasingly more Russian-speaking youth speak fluent Estonian. But Anna Fomchenkova still thinks the Estonian language laws are too rigid. She says it is not easy for older people to learn sufficiently good Estonian:

“It can actually be quite difficult living in Estonia as a Russian. You are often told you speak with a foreign accent and your Estonian is bad. A friend of mine who applied for a job was told by the manager at the interview that although her English was a merit, not everybody would be happy about him employing a Russian before an Estonian.”

It is no longer controversial to talk about integration of non-citizens. The Estonian and Latvian governments have been operating a special integration programme for several years. The Estonian parliament recently decided that all course fees for language education that leads to citizenship would be repaid to the individual in question afterwards.

According to Mati Luik, head of the government-run Integration Foundation in Estonia, becoming an Estonian citizen is not an end in itself:

“Integration is a voluntary process and we live in a democratic society. The stateless people in Estonia have had ten years to make a choice. The government can only help those who want to become citizens,” he says.

He also points out that the existence of a government integration programme could have a great bearing on how people choose because it shows that the government welcomes people who want to create a future for themselves in Estonia.

RUSSIA HAS ADOPTED A policy of special responsibility for some time, not

only towards its own citizens but also for the entire Russian-speaking population of Estonia and Latvia. The Russian government has repeatedly threatened sanctions and accused Latvia of human rights violations. The Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the EU Commission and various UN committees have all had their opinions about the citizenship laws in Estonia and Latvia but as a rule have not supported Russian criticism. The OSCE claims that it has received sufficient support for its demands and the EU countries stress that Estonia and Latvia fulfil the Copenhagen criteria for democracy and human rights.

Sweden and several other Western states began taking an active role in the Baltic region in the early 1990s by supporting language teaching in Latvian and Estonian along with other integration-promoting measures. The aim was for language skills to help reduce ethnic tension and provide the Russian-speaking population with a greater possibility of asserting themselves in the new society. It was in this context that Anna Fomchenkova and thirty other overachieving Russian-speaking students received an education in business management with the help of Swedish contributions. A good wide-ranging course but far too difficult to enrol according to Anna:

“I was lucky, but I’d also worked hard in high school to pass the entrance exam,” she says.

Although Anna is very target-oriented she does not see the police job as being the first step in a planned career. At the Anglais Café she talks about her dream of travelling. She also talks about working within the police force and raising a family. The person she builds her life together with must be Russian:

“Russian men have a different mentality. Even if we don’t have much to say to each other I know what he feels and I understand him better. I know what sort of person he is.”

A FEW DAYS BEFORE Anna Fomchenkova sat dreaming of a future with a man she understands, two career women were driving towards the Russian border. They were heading for Narva, a town in Estonia where only four per cent of the population are ethnic Estonians, a direct result

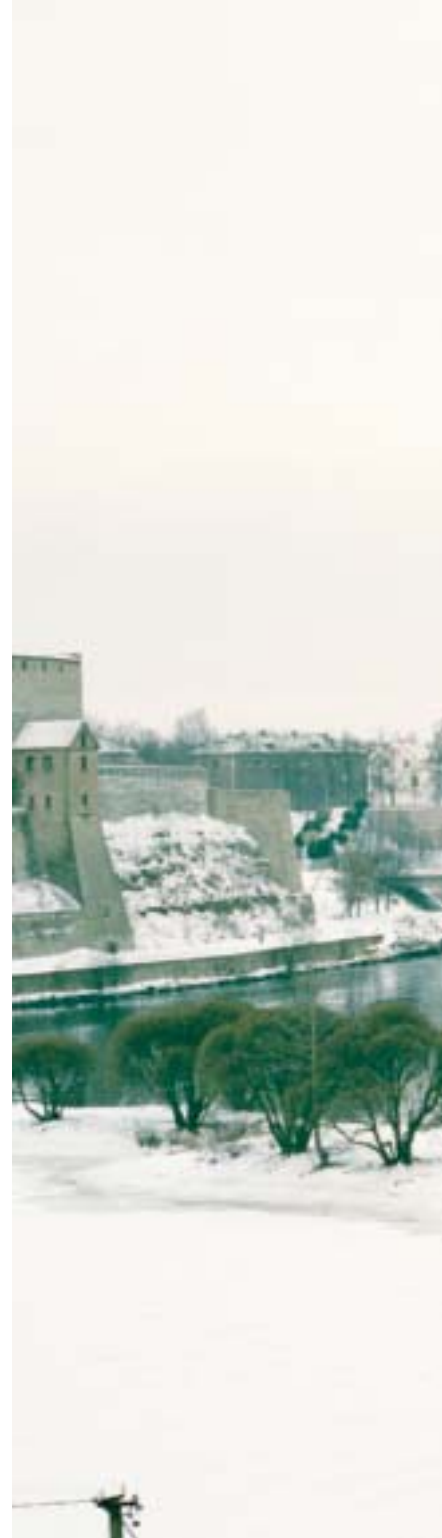
Next page:

“It would have been difficult to give Estonian education a boost without foreign contributions,” say Eda Silberg and Katrin Tàmme at the government Integration Programme.

“It is all about helping to solve the problems,” says Natalia Umarova about life in her hometown of Narva where only a few per cent have Estonian as their first language.

Northeast Estonia became a social catastrophe area after the financial restructuring programme when many jobs within heavy industry were lost. Narva is hard hit by drug abuse and HIV.

Photo: Susanne Kronholm





of the Soviet relocation policy. Katrin Tamme and Eda Silberg, who both work at the government-run Integration Foundation in Tallinn, are planning summer activities for Estonian schoolchildren: language and tolerance, saunas at the lakeside and nightly whispering in the dormitories.

Katrin is in charge of youth activities at the Integration Foundation and for the unique – from an international point of view – language camps and family exchange programme that every year helps 2,500 Russian-speaking children to speak better Estonian. Eda works on the Nordic integration programme, which, with Swedish support, organises the language camps and arranges lodgings for Russian children in Estonian families.

The children come from socially vulnerable families in towns like Narva, Sillamäe and Kohtla-Järve. Despite educational improvements in recent years, these children do not get enough Estonian in the state school. It is not grammar that is lacking but the courage to speak, which is why the teachers at the camp use “invisible” teaching methods in the shape of games and competition.

Katrin says a camp must be situated in a place of natural beauty in a less Russian-dominated part of Estonia and last at least twelve days. It must have Estonian support pupils and teachers capable of not only teaching but also of introducing Russian-speaking children to Estonian culture. The camps are built around mutual learning that helps modify the children’s prejudices about each other.

But is all this possible during a few summer weeks? Not entirely, but there is no doubt about the success of the camps, at least according to Katrin and Eda:

“A survey shows that 73 per cent of the children achieve better grades in Estonian after attending a language camp,” says Katrin.

Russian and Estonian children also become good friends:

“Children cry when they say goodbye and quite often write to each other afterwards. Families continue to socialise by visiting each other in different parts of Estonia. But it could all fall apart if the camps get too big or if the organisers do not prepare carefully enough,” emphasises Katrin. “You can’t just shove Russians and Estonians together and hope

they begin to socialise. You have to work on tolerance among the adults, and that includes the people who work at the camps such as cleaners and cooks. If adults have the right attitude then it will succeed,” she continues.

Katrin and Eda agree that promoting integration in Estonia would be much more difficult without foreign assistance. They would never have been able to afford the educational material they now have at their disposal for instance. The money is generally put to good use, says Eda and Katrin as the car rolls through historic Narva. Newly opened shops line the street and through the window we get a glimpse of the old, part Swedish owned, textile mill Kreenholm with its massive redbrick buildings.

Just a stone cast away on the other side of the river is Ivangorod and Russia. Many of the people in Narva and northeast Estonia have their sights firmly fixed in that direction. Most of them would rather watch Russian TV channels than Estonian TV, which does not help the inhabitants of the region to take a more active part in Estonian society. It also complicates attempts to achieve integration.

One exception in the region is Raadio 100 Narva, a Russian language radio station that began broadcasting in 1995 with support from the Swedish Institute. From what looks like just another five storey building, the station broadcasts what its owners call “objective” and “Estonian-oriented” programmes and news. The music is also rumoured to be good among the employees of the Integration Foundation who say it is possible to hear much longed-for French classics.

“And nostalgic music in Russian,” says Ivan Breganov, who has worked at the station since it began. He has quite an unsentimental - and probably healthy - relationship to the social significance of Raadio 100 Narva:

“We’re not in the business of integration, we play music,” he says emphatically.

According to Raadio 100 Narva’s business concept, Russian-speaking people prefer to listen to golden hits. It is an odd sort of Russian radio station broadcasting local and “non-political” news from Estonia along with Russian golden hits, but it could have an effect on integration after all.

Next page:

Natalia Umarova's organisation "An own home for the child" works with children from various at-risk groups. They also arrange language camps for Russian-speaking children to give them the courage to use the Estonian they learn at school.

Photo: Susanne Kronholm





NOT FAR AWAY IN a neat yellow stone house along an avenue littered with damp piles of rust-coloured autumn leaves lives one of Narva's most dedicated people. Natalia Umarova does not speak Estonian and she is not an Estonian citizen but she is still chairperson of the Municipal committee on social issues and works fulltime with at risk children as head of an organisation called "An own home for the child". This involves working with the Integration Foundation every year to organise language camps for children in northeast Estonia.

With a swift movement Natalia takes an album from the bookcase. She shows photographs of a lean-to standing in a field of rubbish. One of the photos shows three people in warm woollen hats who lived on the rubbish tip.

"One of them was a diver who had left the military academy, the others had studied athletics at the university in Leningrad," says Natalia.

She helped 59 people living on the municipal rubbish tip to get their IDs sorted out so they could leave the tip and get a job or social welfare. Estonia has thousands of Russian-speaking residents, most of whom have serious social problems and are totally excluded from society. With support from the Estonian government, Natalia's organisation has set up a booth where people can come every Friday and get help to sort out their ID problems.

"It's simply a case of helping to solve the problems," says Natalia about life in her hometown where unemployment, drug addiction and HIV have spread at an appalling rate.

ANNA FOMCHENKOVA, WHO STILL drinks her coffee in the capital Tallinn, belongs to an elite group of people who received their higher education in Estonian. But she is determined to keep her Russian citizenship:

"I'm a Russian living in Estonia," she says, meaning she attended Russian school, listens to Russian music and reads Russian books, but she likes the country, the nature and the people here. Which nation Anna's future children will belong to remains to be seen:

"They can decide themselves, but they must speak both languages."

Her children will probably be Estonian citizens. Anna Fomchenkova has namely passed a test in Estonian and now has a passport with a blue

cover, which she can change for a EU passport. As an Estonian citizen she can enjoy the benefits of EU membership such as free movement within the EU, something the stateless and the Russian majority do not have the opportunity of doing. In the long term she will not only have voting rights, but be able to live and work where she wants in Europe.

“It’s a good thing for us young people. We get greater opportunities to study and work abroad and in doing so broaden our perspectives.”

You could say Anna is privileged in having a place in the new republic and being able to decide over her own life. Her story also appears to have a happy ending. Before we part she says:

“At the moment I’m very happy.”

Then she goes home to Lasnamägi where thousands of people are switching on their lights in the white, high-rise concrete blocks as dusk sets in. Anna Fomchenkova has her future ahead of her. Tallinn is her capital city.

TIINA MERI

Tiina Meri is a freelance journalist. In 1998 she worked as attaché at the Swedish embassy in Tallinn and has also been editorial writer at the Swedish daily newspaper Dagens Nyheter.

FACTS · INTEGRATION

Government-run integration foundations and national programmes for achieving integration between the various ethnic groups have existed in Estonia and Latvia for a two years. Since 1993, Sweden has supported the integration process in Estonia and Latvia with a total of around SEK 35 million. Most of this support has gone to educating teachers and to language education for the working population and school children. Estonia has received around SEK 10 million and Latvia SEK 25 million.

Estonia

A third of the country's population is made up of Russian-speaking people, the majority of whom are ethnic Russians.

1993–1998: The Swedish Institute allocated around SEK 5 million to language education for adults, educational material and further training of teachers. The Swedish Institute also supported media activities and language camps for children and young people.

Latvia

A third of the country's population is made up of Russian-speaking people, the majority of whom are ethnic Russians. Opinion polls show that Latvian is gradually becoming the common language within the public sector. There is not much friction between the various ethnic groups but there are great differences of opinion with regard the educational reform that is due to be completed by the autumn of 2004. Sixty per cent of all teaching in Russian-speaking schools will then be in Latvian and the schools will receive government grants.

Despite the majority of teachers in Russian-speaking schools having been trained within the national language programme run by the Ministry of Education, many Russian-speaking teachers fear a drop in educational standards and are concerned about losing their jobs. There is still a lack of teachers qualified to teach in Latvian, particularly in the south-east part of the country.

Latvia has operated a national language programme for teaching Latvian to the Russian majority population since 1996. Teachers were identified as being a crucial target group for educational training at a very early stage. A variety of educational material has

also been produced within the framework of the Latvian language programme and a number of language camps have been implemented.

Sweden has been one of the main contributors to the Latvian language programme. The Latvian government has financed a third of the programme since 2000.

As well as national language programmes, there are several projects underway within the UNDP framework that aim at increasing the number of Latvian citizens.

Lithuania.

Immigration to Lithuania was on a much smaller scale during the Soviet era. Only about eight per cent of the population belong to a Russian-speaking minority. After independence, all residents were in principle given Lithuanian citizenship. Sweden has not supported the integration process in Lithuania to any great extent, with the exception of a project in Visaginas near Ignalina on the border with Belarus.



SUGAR BEET AND SOLIDARITY

“When is the sugar beet harvested in Sweden?”

“Now I think, in November some time,” I reply somewhat vaguely, not realising the query required a more exact date. We have just been invited to lunch by Genute and Juozas Staliunas at their farm a few miles north of Kaunas in central Lithuania. Breaded pork chop with fried potatoes and Russian salad; a well-cooked stable diet. To the food we are offered a few glasses of sloe vodka, a Lithuanian speciality. This is when Juozas enquires about the Swedish beet harvest.

IT IS NOVEMBER 1995 and Juozas has just harvested his last load of beet for the year. Sugar beet is the most profitable thing a Lithuanian farmer can grow. Last year he received 130 litas (around 300 Swedish kronor) a tonne, this year it is 160 litas.

Juozas has been in Sweden and learned how to grow sugar beet using modern methods. He uses the Swedish Freja beet and the results will be shown to other farmers in the area during the winter. But now that he has harvested his own beet his thoughts go to the Swedish beet harvest.

I ask why.

“I heard that Arne is sick and won’t be able to harvest his sugar beet. So I thought I’d go over and give him a hand.”

Arne Persson is a farmer from the Kalmar region who became Juozas’ “twin farmer” in Sweden. Juozas has been over a few times for work experience on Arne’s farm and Arne has been in Lithuania. It has now developed to the point where Juozas goes over and helps Arne

Opposite page:

Sugar beet pays well, which is why the Baltic States want to continue growing them even when they become members of the EU. But the EU wants to reduce the amount of sugar beet cultivated so this will be the first dispute the Baltic States’ farmers federations will have to resolve in Brussels.

Photo: Anders Gunnartz

when he is sick. A small service in return for Juozas picking up even more knowledge of running a modern farm. He could also take a look at machinery that would be handy on the farm back home. With Arne's help he has already bought a second-hand Swedish plough, a sowing machine and a manure spreader. But he now needs more modern equipment.

When I ask about the difference between himself and a Swedish farmer he says there is no comparison:

"In Sweden I have met farmers who have owned their land for generations with buildings and knowledge being handed down. I have to build everything up from scratch."

It was farmers like Juozas and Genute with higher education who were the first to benefit from the privatisation of Lithuanian agriculture. They had the knowledge and with help from contacts within the kolkhoz management they could acquire land and machines. They also received help from outside the country, in particular from Sweden. These are the future farmers of Lithuania, I remember thinking as we thanked them for the lunch and headed back to Kaunas.

ALMOST EIGHT YEARS TO the day I drive along the muddy road to Juozas och Genute's farm. The fog is lying even thicker over the dark brown fields. I think of what I wrote about the future farmers of Lithuania after my last visit. The future is here and now. How have things gone?

We greet Juozas and Genute and instantly recognise them but they do not recognise us. In the kitchen we see the first changes. It is new, with a dishwasher, modern oven and a microwave. We do not recognise anything until they explain. The house was previously a pig barn. It has now been rebuilt into a kitchen, living room, office and a large conservatory. The obvious question is what has happened since our last visit.

"I don't remember," says Juozas and laughs, then quickly explains it is just a joke. Forgetting things is popular in Lithuania at the moment. He is referring of course to President Paksas and his contacts with the Russian mafia, a scandal that has rocked Lithuania during recent months.

Juozas quickly becomes serious and explains that he has quadrupled his acreage by leasing land on top of the 150 hectares he already owns.

He now farms on 800 hectares compared with 200 eight years ago, which puts him among the thousand largest farmers in the country. At Christmas every year he goes around to the 60 landowners who lease the land to him and pay them at the same time as he tells them what he has grown on their land. Many of them live in Kaunas, but they keep an eye on their land. All the details of the lease agreements and what he grows are stored on the computer he bought four years ago. He now manages all his payments and accounts through the computer.

Suddenly he switches on the tv and zaps with the remote control. It takes a while before I realise that he is zapping through pictures of the farm. On the screen are a couple of the farmhands who work for him fulltime.

"I have six cameras and can sit here all day monitoring everything that happens," he says proudly.

We rise to go out and take a look at the reality behind the tv images. The first thing to emerge from the fog in the farmyard is a new glossy black Nissan jeep bought less than a week before. This is just a starter for what is waiting in the large barn. Before our eyes could adjust to the dark, Juozas has climbed up onto a giant green combine harvester.

"The latest model from Belgium," he shouts and starts the machine to show us all the features.

We continue to the next machine, a special multipurpose tractor from France, then on to a giant sprayer all shiny and new.

"I bought my first tractor from the West seven years ago," he says. "I saw it in Sweden and immediately phoned and ordered one. A Valmet with which I won first prize in a ploughing competition."

When Juozas climbs down from the machines I ask him how he could afford all these investments. He points to his hair and laughs.

"Can't you see I've gone grey? Now you understand why!"

He borrowed one and a half million litas, around four million Swedish kronor. He has also received help through the EU Sapard programme, a development assistance programme to help candidate countries modernise their farming methods.

I remind Juozas that the last time I was here he said he had been over to Kalmar and received help from his friend Arne to find second-hand

Next page:

Genute Staliuniene on her way home from her office on Kaunas. As president of the Lithuanian farmers' federation LUS, she has an important role in Lithuania leading up to EU membership. She has to take up the struggle in the EU for Lithuanian farmers to be able to carry on farming sugar beet.

Nobody's afraid of the EU here! Juozas Staliunas proudly displays his latest bargain, a French multipurpose tractor. Machines have been his passion since he was a small boy. Today he has a machine hall that would make even a Swedish farmer green with envy, paid for by EU grants and loans. He is a true entrepreneur who has dared to invest in the new Lithuania. He received a good deal of help from his Swedish farmer colleagues who taught him how to operate a modern farm.

Photo: Anders Gunnartz





machines, where were these Swedish machines today? Juozas points across the field through the fog to a machine graveyard for worn out ploughs and harrows.

The time when Juozas needed help from Swedish farmers is over. In eight years he has taken a giant stride that has lifted him sky-high above the average Lithuanian farmer to the same level as modern Swedish large-scale farms.

If the changes for Juozas have been immense during the past eight years then they have not been any less intensive for his wife Genute. When we show the picture from our previous visit eight years before, she points at herself and laughs:

“I was then a farmer’s wife, I looked after the children and the household and Juozas worked on the farm.”

Things are different today. She is now in a position that gives her an important voice in Lithuanian politics, and in particular prior to EU membership. As their children grew up, Genute and her husband became more active in LUS, the Lithuanian counterpart to The Federation of Swedish Farmers (LRF). They belong to Kaunas district branch, the largest and most active.

Genute first became president in the Kaunas district branch and in 2002 she was elected president for the entire LUS organisation. The Kaunas district promoted her as a candidate. The choice was between her and a man and she won.

“It was a very unstable situation within LUS at the time,” she explains. “We had changed presidents all too often and those elected were politicians just making a career for themselves. I think the members wanted a genuine farmer as leader.”

The choice of Genute means that Lithuania is one of two European countries with a woman as leader of the farmers’ federation. The other is Sweden. But what does her husband think of Genute being elected to such an important post? Juozas looks serious when he replies:

“I was against it at first, it meant I had to run the farm by myself. The person I could trust was no longer at my side.”

But he was not surprised:

“It is important for a person in this position to understand farming

and be able to help the farmers. Those who ran the organisation before were only looking out for themselves.”

He just cannot resist teasing his wife a little:

“She’ll soon be in the government,” he says pointing his finger at her.

Do they have the same views about agricultural issues?

“No,” replies Juozas instantly and Genute agrees. Juozas has his views that he shares with Genute, but he says she must listen to everybody on the LUS committee and also act as a representative for small farmers who have other interests. The difference is that the small farmers have a greater need to work in cooperatives than the large farmers. Cooperative is a sensitive word in post-soviet Lithuania, so you have to find forms that do not remind farmers of the kolkhoz. Juozas emphasises that he has absolutely nothing against cooperatives. He has seen how it works in Sweden and thinks the Lithuanian farmers should follow suit. Just yesterday, he says, he was at a local meeting to form a cooperative and was elected as one of the leaders.

LITHUANIA WAS AN IMPORTANT agricultural country in the Soviet Union. The soil is fertile and there is widespread knowledge of modern farming methods, the Soviet model true, but nonetheless... During recent years Lithuania has been very adept at using the EU Sapard agricultural grant for future member states. The programme has only been going a short time and has not reached out to all the farmers yet. Many did not bother applying for support because of the tough demands and complicated rules.

Genute shows no sign of the concern that exists in other candidate countries for farmers being crushed by the EU agricultural policy. Quite the opposite:

“Our farmers expect healthy competition where we can learn from each other,” she says. “We get access to a bigger market and better prices. We have high quality produce that we couldn’t sell before due to the high duties. But on the other hand we don’t think the terms for competition with farmers from the old member states are fair. We simply don’t compete on the same terms as the French farmers with their enormous subsidies.”

LUS organises 15,000 farmers – the largest and most active. Genute thinks they are well prepared for the EU:

“They have the interest and the ability to learn and develop themselves,” she says.

This is evident in the great interest for environmental farming methods. One burning issue for Genute is the growing of sugar beet, which is very profitable but is threatened by the EU favouring the import of sugar cane.

“We will fight to keep our sugar beet,” says Genute. “And unite with the other Baltic States to get our voice heard!”

She has just returned from a meeting in Riga where a cooperation organisation was formed for the Baltic farming federation. LUS and the two sister organisations have decided to have a representative in Brussels to watch over their interests. The first task will be to negotiate sugar beet with the commission.

“The cooperation with Sweden has been vital for LUS,” continues Genute. “LRF helped us make LUS the organisation it is today. They provided us with education and taught us to watch over the interests of the farmers. We hope for, and count on, continued cooperation.”

She says the countries around the Baltic must keep together in the EU:

“We are small but if we pool our votes we become stronger,” she says.

HOW DID THINGS GO for Juozas on the trip to his “twinning farmer” in Kalmar? When I visited eight years ago he was considering travelling over to help Arne Persson with his beet harvest because he was sick. Juozas went over with his son. Winter had come when they arrived and there was ice at the airport when they landed, but Juozas and his son came in time to help Arne with the last day of harvest. Since then they have met quite often, in fact just a month before when Arne visited with a delegation from Sweden. For Juozas it has been extremely beneficial to study how a Swedish farm works and take the knowledge with him to his own farm. Genute has also visited the Kalmar region.

“I was particularly impressed by the beautiful red colour of the farms and houses,” she says. “It makes Sweden look so neat, not like here in Lithuania. Who knows, we might just follow suit one day.”

WHEN I PHONE ARNE Persson in Hagby, twenty-five kilometres south of the Swedish city Kalmar, he speaks warmly of his friends Juozas och Genute:

“Juozas was here a few months back and helped my son concrete a manure guttering in the barn,” he says.

A year ago Arne handed over the responsibility of the farm to his son. He is now committing all his time to Lithuania. During the winter he will be leading a study circle in farm English for Lithuanian farmers. There are a lot of new English terms to learn when you join the EU, he explains. He could not speak a word of English when he first went to Lithuania. His commitment for the country on the other side of the Baltic Sea began in 1992 when he received a Lithuanian “reference farmer” through LRF’s newly formed development cooperation organisation. The year before he had begun to collect second-hand machines for Lithuania.

“We drove around Kalmar in a lorry and picked up machines. When the first load came to Klaipeda the mafia were waiting but the farmers guarding the boat managed to prevent the machines from being stolen. Our efforts meant a lot for the Lithuanian farmers. Old grey haired farmers still come up to me when I’m in Lithuania and ask if I know who donated this or that machine. They want to send thank you letters.”

Arne Persson has led countless seminars and courses for Lithuanian farmers. He has been in Lithuania 47 times and says he will continue his commitment as long as he is able. He is an honorary member of LUS (with a right to vote) and never misses the annual congress. He is proud that he contributed to electing Genute Staliunene as president.

“I spoke up for her because I think she represents the new progressive Lithuania. I know her extremely well and know what she stands for.”

FACTS · AGRICULTURE

Farming in the Baltic States has undergone dramatic changes since 1990. The countries previously supplied St Petersburg and Moscow with agricultural produce. Following independence the old Soviet market disappeared and production fell by half but is now starting to pick up again.

LRF's cooperation with the Baltic States and Poland began when a number of "reference farmers" were chosen from each country. By working with the Swedish farmers the Lithuanian farmers learn practical things such as when to harvest the hay to get the most nutrition out of it. The collection of second-hand machines went to farmers who were active in the farmers' federation. The Swedish reference farmers helped to install and maintain the machines. They also helped Baltic farmers with their organisational skills. The perspective shifted from Farmer to Farmer to Movement to Movement. LRF had coordinators for each country and they tied different counties in Sweden to each Baltic State. They carried out leadership training (30 per cent of the course participants had to be women), which had a great significance, particularly in Estonia where those trained became leaders within the farmers' organisations. The outcome was worse in Lithuania.

The farmers' organisations in the three Baltic States generally have a strong position, but membership is limited. Lithuanian LUS, for example, has 15 000 members on paper but only a few thousand paying members. Influencing the EU agricultural policy will be the most important area for the Baltic farmers' organisations in the future.

A prerequisite for agricultural development was the land reform that returned land that was confiscated during the Soviet era back to the original owners. Through The Swedish National Land Survey consultancy Swedsurvey, Sweden has contributed since 1991 to building up a modern land registry in the three countries.

The Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) has also played a vital role in a large number of projects. The SLU has contributed to transferring vital knowledge about sustainable and environmental farming. An important underlying factor for the Swedish support to environmental farming in the Baltic States is the reduction in the amount of nitrogen discharged into the Baltic Sea. Prior to EU membership great demands have been put on the storage of farmyard manure. The SLU has worked on a broad front with farmers, authorities and universities in the Baltic States.





FEELING NEEDED

Uus Street in Estonia's second largest town Tartu is a mixture of high-rise blocks and old Russian villas from the turn of the last century with ornate decorations around the windows, flowery overgrown gardens and old women in colourful scarves cutting immortelles. The houses are on their last legs and as the beautiful autumn evening retreats into nightfall the chill penetrates right through the thin walls. In the middle of the estate is a basketball pitch and a shabby grey two-storey building. No. 56. The door leads down a graffiti-sprayed stairwell into the warmth. A pastel-coloured dream protecting from the world above. The first thing you encounter is Respect in large red painted letters. Respect has become the mantra of the Owl Project.

"Whatever happens out there you leave it behind when you come down here to us," says Daniel, who comes from Switzerland and works as a volunteer at the Owl Project.

At the project you show each other respect by listening to each other and showing consideration. But despite all the visions it has not always been this way. Not long ago the Russian and Estonian children had to be separated into different activities on different days. There was too much heated debate and slanderous arguing between the groups. It needs more than ten years of independence to wash away a long history of victimisation. Fear, powerlessness, mistrust and nationalism are all transferred to the next generation of Balts and Russians.

But the Owl Project managed to reverse the trend. When a new group of young children began they started from scratch. Everybody

*Opposite page:
Getting children to feel they are part
of things is a way of safeguarding
democracy.*

Photo: Tørkel Edenborg

must now respect each to have any hope of changing a society made up of mixed groups of Estonians and Russians, all of whom have to attend language courses in order to manage even fundamental things like talking to each other.

About 150 children and young people use the Owl Project. Many come for the warmth and the food, others to engage in activities and work as volunteers. The afternoon coffee break provides a breathing space to chat to others about daily routines, which are sometimes very difficult to manage on one's own, or just to talk about what to do during the rest of the week.

The Owl Project is not just a clean and cosy environment, it empowers children, they become somebody. Aleksandra is 18 and a youth volunteer at the project. She has Russian blood but was born in Tartu, Estonia. The dyed blond hair and nose ring gives the appearance of a tough attitude, but she is very kind towards the children and smiles shyly at the camera.

"All my friends are here at the project," she says. "This is the only place young people can go if they don't want to roam the streets. I work every week as a volunteer. I clean, cook and help the younger children who come here. The most important thing is that I do something meaningful for the project. I feel needed."

THE RAIN HAS JUST stopped and the Laima sign is reflected in the puddles and the young girls' black patent leather boots. It is Friday night in Latvia's capital Riga and around the sign young people and tourists mingle with down-and-outs and street children.

"We need 20 lats," she says looking up at us.

Not swollen but definitely hazy pupils bear witness to the bag that was probably held over her nose. Her little brother seeks refuge in his sister and puts his head on her shoulder. Then they begin. The story is the same from one child to the next: mother is sick, father has left. The sister needs an operation and for just 20 lats we can save her and her family. In the smiling glow of Ronald McDonald.

The Latgale district is regarded as the most criminal in Riga. Four

hundred kilometres from the Swedish border and three tram stops from the Statue of Liberty in central Riga.

For many young people drug abuse and criminality is a part of their daily lives. There are few alternatives, but there are possibilities for those who dare to break their pattern of life. The surface of the newly painted facades is brittle and cracks easily, but Olga's is as hard as stone. She goes under the nickname of fighting girl and arms herself with a black leather jacket and drugs (we later heard that Olga managed to break the vicious circle and is now studying).

On Jekabpils Street in Latgale is The White Sparrow, the only place that opens its doors for children and young people. They come in to keep warm, have a hot drink, play games and meet friends. A refuge from the street. A sanctuary where 60 children can get help and support. These are children who live at home or on the street in a vulnerable environment of drugs, alcohol, criminality and prostitution.

Around 50 per cent of all registered drug abusers under 19 years of age are from the poorest families and cannot afford treatment. Most people in the area are either Russian or Roma and at The White Sparrow there are only Russian youth. Few speak Latvian. Under the surface it is all about resentment. Among Latvians for the Russian occupation, among Russians for the lost power and identity.

"The problem is that the parents of these young people transfer their values onto their children and blame their own, often economic, failure on the Latvians. They keep themselves and their children isolated from the Latvian majority community and their reluctance to learn Latvian and pave a way for themselves in society is inherited," says Vilnis, a project leader at The White Sparrow.

THE SIGN SAYS: NAUTILUS. Open from 12am until the party is over. There is room for everybody in the new Latvia. Riga's newly renovated city centre is full of restaurants, bars and discos and along the cobblestone streets art nouveau facades blend in with fashionable nightclubs and stylish department stores full to the brim with merchandise. There is room for everybody in the new Latvia - as long as they have money.

Next page:

Riga 2001. They choose clubs for the image – and the drug image. The dealers on the street outside hand out flyers of clubs tailored to your needs! Dizzi, Casablanca and Nautilus are three such exclusive clubs. The entrance fee is a day's wage for a Latvian worker. On the second floor of Nautilus, Swedish Absolut Vodka has its own bar with neon tables. Absolut Riga.

Wednesday evening. Still quiet. The Dizzi and Nautilus nightclub owners and Alexander wait for the punters to arrive.

Photo: Torkel Edenborg





“I go out five times a week,” says Gundega. “Mondays and Tuesdays are rest days.”

Gundega works as a tv presenter and lives a life that most young people in Riga can only dream about. It is Wednesday evening and we are on our way to some of Riga’s fashionable clubs and have with us the perfect guides: Gundega 24, her boyfriend Girts 27, who owns a restaurant in Riga, and Alexander 30, who is just setting up a new nightclub.

“The image is extremely important when you create a new in-place,” says Alexander. “You have to know exactly the type of people you want to attract. Everything must blend in. The interior design, music and the drinks and drugs on offer all give the club a certain image. You then get the type of customer you are looking for. If you want ecstasy users to come to your club you ask the drug dealers on the street outside to distribute flyers about the club to their customers.”

“Drugs are available at most nightclubs but they are more expensive there, just like alcohol,” says Girts. “Most people are high when they arrive or buy a bottle in the kiosk next door.”

Dizzi, Casablanca and Nautilus are exclusive clubs where more expensive drugs are used. Admission is a day’s wages for a Latvian worker. On the second floor Swedish Absolut Vodka has its own bar with neon tables. Down below the dance floor thumps to the music.

The law states you must be 18 to purchase alcohol with the exception of beer which has no age limit. In the nightclubs however your make-up is more important than your age. Here they practice face control. The bouncers outside turn you away if you are too young.

“But we always got in without any hassle when we were 16,” says Gundega.

Most young people never get in. Many of them spend their time on the street outside prepared to do anything for a bit of the high life.

“Prostituting yourself to be able to buy clothes at one of the department stores instead of at a market stall near the railway station is totally acceptable,” says Gundega.

I ask who usually goes to a prostitute.

“All those who can afford it,” says Alexander.

“All those who have a problem with women,” modifies Gundega.

Opposite our hotel is a photo studio. Gundega reveals that it is one of the places that recruits sweet young girls and boys to high-class prostitution in Riga and other large European cities. It is a life that appeals to many. Cars, clothes and money in Paris, Milan or Stockholm swapped for a life of exclusion in their own country. In Riga they sit in the lobbies of five-star hotels and foreign customers pay 500 lats, around SEK 8,500, for a night. A few blocks down from the hotels is Cāka Street with sex clubs and call girls from 15 lats. Those who are worth five work the cold streets outside.

Prostitution is not only a class issue but an ethnic issue as well. Most young people entrapped in sex trafficking are Russian. They grew up after independence and were slotted into the category of second-class citizens by both the Latvian surroundings and themselves. Many Russian youth do not even have Latvian citizenship. Citizenship requires fluent Latvian, knowledge of the country's history and money. Without citizenship it is difficult to get a job or education. Drug dealing, criminality and prostitution may be the solution to certain problems but it is also the road to further abuse.

Gundega, Girts and Alexander are aware of the segregation but do not notice it that much in their daily lives. Nautilus is one of the places where the town's few well-off Russian youth dance cheek to cheek with Latvians.

The rain is quietly falling over Riga's beautiful streets as we head homeward from Nautilus. Gundega comes up beside me and says:

"I know so little about what goes on in my own town, like what we talked about tonight, child prostitution at the central station and the young people in Latgale. I feel like I'm living in a glass cage. I work, meet my friends and go out. That's my life. I just can't look at all the terrible things around me. It's the same for things that happen outside of Latvia. When the news comes on the tv, I just turn it off.

SARA SANDBERG

Sara Sandberg is a information coordinator and development assistance administrator at the international institute of the Swedish section of The International Order of Good Templars (IOGT-NTO).

FACTS · DRUG ABUSE

The Baltic States lack an overall policy for alcohol and drug abuse issues. On the one hand there is a national scheme to prevent drug abuse through projects directed at young people and parents, but on the other hand beer is legally classified as a food item and can be bought by children. Even other types of alcohol are easily accessible in food stores, local kiosks and all-night pubs where the age limit control is almost non-existent. The financial gains are tempting but the human misery and physical damage caused by the increase in alcohol consumption through traffic accidents, domestic violence, physical abuse, neglected children and ill-health is much more costly in the long term.

Most of the heroin used in Latvia comes from Afghanistan. The country has a high consumption rate. Heroin makes up 89 per cent of all drug use. The difference is enormous compared to Sweden. While we in Sweden have a long run-in to heavier drugs, in Latvia, heroin is often the first drug young people test, sometimes even before they test alcohol.

Unlike Sweden, Latvia's heroin addicts are young; most who are admitted for treatment in Riga are between 16 and 25 years of age. But a dose is expensive and to be able to afford a hit, several people often share the same syringe. The dose is less but still sufficient to create addiction. This has caused a dramatic rise in the spread of HIV among young people and controversial methods such as providing clean syringes are being tried in an attempt to reduce the number of new HIV-infected.

The IOGT-NTO Movement has had cooperation partnerships in the Baltic States since 1992. The emphasis is on alcohol and drugs issues, the development of popular movements and education in democracy and leadership. The IOGT-NTO Movement also supports the Owl Project centre for street children in Tartu, Estonia and The White Sparrow in Riga, Latvia. It also supports the Baltic Temperance Movement's drug prevention activities through school education, youth leader training and alcohol-related political work.

The street children centre is chiefly aimed at children and young people who have a home to return to. Accommodation is not provided. The busiest time is during the afternoons, evenings and weekends so as not to clash with school hours. To further help those who wish to change their situation meetings are also arranged with parents to offer them assistance. In Estonia the project has expanded to a further four districts along the Russian border. During recent years the street children projects in both countries have held joint seminars and arranged visits to each other to exchange knowledge and experience.





CAN THE BALTIC STATES BE DEFENDED, AND IN THAT CASE BY WHOM?

Non-aligned Sweden supported the national security policies of the Baltic States and helped them modernise their armed forces to pave the way for EU and NATO membership on May 1, 2004. But the Swedish contribution was politically sensitive and has up to now been kept under wraps. Of course the Swedes could help the Baltic States, but how far did they dare to go?

IT IS A SUNNY, crispy winter day with a temperature of -10° centigrade in Lielvarde, Latvia. The steaming breath of 20 or so Latvian officers and guardsmen hangs in the freezing air. They are working quietly and efficiently. We are in the Baltic States at a former Soviet base for more than 100 military aircraft.

The soldiers fit a Swedish Bofors anti-aircraft gun with its radar and align it. The result is checked by laser. In a training hall is a Swedish all-terrain vehicle with a reconnaissance radar from Ericsson.

"The anti-aircraft gun is excellent for ground defence. NATO countries like Norway still use this system and it works very well together with Ericsson's modern radar," says Captain Olejs Odzerkalis persuasively.

In their modern camouflage uniforms the Latvians work expertly and efficiently. We could be in any NATO country, in fact we are. From April 2004 Latvia will be a full member of the alliance.

In which case what are weapons from non-aligned Sweden doing here? The answer is that the guns from Bofors and the radar from Eric-

On Guard: Latvian Captain Olejs Odzerkalis has been involved in building up the Latvian air defences with Swedish Bofors anti-aircraft guns, the next step is to go over to more modern Swedish air defence missiles.

Photo: Dan Hansson

sson are a small but important part of a much larger context: the Swedish security policy support to the Baltic States.

Security policy support has existed for thirteen years and has progressed from just money to advice, political, diplomatic, and military administrative expertise and donations of advanced equipment for rescuing, monitoring and the armed defence of our three Eastern European neighbours.

There are currently 75 full-time Swedish officers in the Baltic States on support that is to be phased out during 2005. The expenditure for 2004 is around SEK 100 million with SEK 15 million coming from the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 25 from the Swedish Ministry of Defence, 50 from the Swedish Armed Forces (salaries) plus 15 extra for the transfer of material.

A Swedish conscript from the 1990s would feel at home in Lielvarde: Latvian equipment and military abbreviations are the same as in Sweden (radar PS-70, fire-control system Cig-790, anti-aircraft gun L-70). These days Swedish army material is not only used for the Latvian air defences but for the entire Latvian, Estonian and Lithuanian armed forces.

The most feared Soviet fighter-bomber, the Su 24 Fencer, flew from Lielvarde and has now been replaced by Swedish anti-aircraft guns. There is a connection. When the Soviet Union was dissolved in 1991 the Soviet Union was no longer a threat to Sweden. Defence resolutions from 1996 onward meant that the Swedish Territorial Army could be wound down, but instead of pointlessly destroying large amounts of material, it was sent over to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. But the material that was sent had to be handled in a correct and safe manner:

“People here are very enthusiastic and there appears to be better job satisfaction compared with Sweden. They show immense professionalism. The Balts shoot just as good as Swedish soldiers, despite the Swedes having had ten times more shooting practice. They have a strong belief in their alliance with NATO and to their own contribution to NATO,” explains Lieutenant Colonel Joel Parde, who together with his team is helping Latvia and Lithuania handle the Swedish anti-aircraft gun.

Enormous amounts of equipment have been shipped to the Baltic States. The largest operation is called the Army Project, which began in 2000 and is due to be completed in 2005. The project involves the transfer of equipment for nine complete infantry battalions, 9,000 soldiers. This means that a Swedish automatic carbine (AK 4) is now the standard weapon for all Baltic State soldiers.

But sending Swedish rifles, and in particular anti-aircraft guns, over the Baltic Sea was far from being just a matter of course. A change of scenery in Latvia in the spring of 1993 was not only a step back into another century but also to a completely different world of ideas, not only for the Balts but also for Swedes and Swedish security policies.

THE THUDDING FROM THE worn runway reaches us like the sound of an old-fashioned scrubbing board as the elegant, streamlined Swedish Air Force jet plane lands in Riga. As security policy correspondent for the daily newspaper Svenska Dagbladet newspaper I am here to cover the first visit to the Baltic States by a Nordic minister of defence.

The journey begins here in Latvia and the Swedish delegation is already nervous. The plane from non-aligned Sweden has landed in a security grey zone. Only the airspace around the airport is controlled by Latvian radar, the rest of the country's airspace is still controlled by the Russians.

Minister of Defence Anders Björck (Moderate Party) had spoken loudly in the Swedish press about "crushing the stone tablets of Swedish neutrality", but during this trip he is being slightly more diplomatic. He wants to avoid any impression that non-aligned Sweden will in any way guarantee the defence of the Baltic States. So no promises of weapon supplies are to be made and the status of the trip from the Swedish side has been downgraded to a working visit.

But the Latvians pay no attention to this. This is much too important for them and they have drummed up all the official pomp and ceremony they could muster. In front of the shabby station building with its flaking plaster awaits a well-trimmed guard of honour with a band. The troops wear uniforms from the 1930s period of Latvian independence. The leader's shining ancient sabre suddenly flashes. The pride of the soldiers

Next page:

Change of scenery: during the Soviet era the airbase in Lielvarde was home to the Soviet SU 24 Fencer fighter-bomber, which with its 750km radius could reach large areas of southern and central Sweden during war. Today, the former base is a Swedish air defence radar designed to meet such attacks.

The air defences belongs to the air force with the motto "Everything for Latvia" from 1924 – a motto the soldiers live up to 80 years later. The soldiers in the picture are checking that the radar is exact to the milimetre in order to hit the target.

Photo: Dan Hansson





is clear to see as they hold back their tears during the national anthems.

The Swedish national anthem *Thou Ancient Thou Free* is in stark contrast to the young Latvian state and its newly won freedom. Only 21 months have passed since independence in August 1991, but freedom is far from guaranteed. On the way in from the airport we pass lorries with some of the 24,000 Russian soldiers who still remain.

Playing music and marching is just about what the regular troops of the three countries are capable of. Latvian soldiers are only permitted to shoot 20 rifle rounds a year. They live in miserable conditions in destroyed Soviet barracks where even the wc pans have been removed. They have no vehicles and, even worse, no weapons to defend themselves.

“Our first priority is to feed and clothe our soldiers and provide them with radios, telephones and means of transport so they can patrol our borders. Weapons are not absolute top priority at the moment,” says Latvian Minister of Defence Taulas Jundzis.

His last utterance about weapons is a diplomatic concession to the Swedish guest Anders Björck. The visit was preceded by a fair amount of disagreement. Estonian Minister of Defence Hein Rebas is also a Swedish citizen. He demanded that Sweden donate their unwieldy Mauser rifles, model 1896, instead of scrapping them.

Björck’s message throughout the visit was that Sweden wanted military stability. But Swedish weapons would not be supplied until the Russians had left the country.

We are reminded of the lack of resources when the delegation view the Russian naval base in Riga from a simple pleasure craft. Worn-out Soviet submarines line the quayside. The aide to the Swedish Minister of Defence is a naval officer and cannot resist the opportunity. He jumps up on the foredeck, hauls up a camera with a telephoto lens and starts photographing the submarines. The photos end up with the Swedish intelligence services – the enemy still comes from the East.

Months before Björck’s visit, Sweden had donated an unarmed Swedish coastal patrol ship to both Estonia and Latvia. Latvia is now promised four Swedish coastal patrol ships. Another gift from Minister Björck’s portfolio is a radar monitoring system. With the help of older Swedish military radar stations, a radar chain is to be constructed along

the coast of the three countries. Military and civil systems will be joined together to enable the Balts to control their airspace.

When we land in Estonia the next day the no-weapons statement is received with great disappointment but the Estonian journalists soon rejoice when the Swedish minister promises armoured vehicles. Armoured vehicles!

As a Swede I feel somewhat embarrassed and glance down at the table. The Estonians do not yet know what they have been promised. It is nowhere near the same class as the Soviet army uses to drive around the country but it is possible to drive the Swedish gift, the KP 42 from 1942.

The KP 42 was the first piece of war equipment to be sent to the Baltic States, but only after the ring for the vehicle's only weapon, a machine gun, had been dismantled. The KP 42 belongs to the category of Swedish support that is still met by an embarrassed silence on both sides of the Baltic Sea. The vehicles are still there, stored away and never used.

"The KP 42 caused the most resentment. A Lithuanian officer maintained that they had more use for the bicycles that were sent along with the vehicles," recalls a Swedish civil servant.

One success story however is the coastal patrol ships. The promises from Björck's visit were fulfilled and followed by more. Up to 2001, Sweden donated a total of thirteen ships (five to Estonia, five to Latvia and three to Lithuania).

The gift package also included thousands of military uniforms and it was not until much later that I discovered how sensitive this military support was initially.

IT WAS NO COINCIDENCE that the first minister of defence to visit the Baltic States in 1993 was a Swede, but it was no foregone conclusion either. Everything surrounding security policy support was initially tentative, controversial and even secret.

The Baltic States' yearning for freedom gained in impetus with the Eastern European liberation from Communism in 1989. Sweden had a global foreign policy but in the deep-frozen Europe of the Cold War,



neutrality required very little action. As the largest Baltic coastal state, Sweden now had a ringside seat but it was a performance that created mixed feelings. The Baltic Sea had been the borderline of the Cold War: threatening but stable.

The Swedish Consulate-General in Leningrad opened departmental offices in the Baltic States. The first Swedish contribution in 1990 was to break the isolation of the Baltic States by facilitating their communication with the rest of the world.

But tensions increased and in the shadow of the Kuwait War in January 1991, the Soviet Union hit back at the peaceful struggle for independence. When Soviet armoured vehicles rolled into Vilnius and Riga some leading Baltic politicians were in Stockholm, but they had a mandate to form exile governments should the worst scenario take place.

After the outbreak of hostilities in January 1991, the next Swedish step was to finance foreign visits and contacts for the Baltic State governments. Then came the unsuccessful military coup against Soviet leader Michail Gorbachov in August 1991 and the Baltic States' declarations of independence.

The parliamentary elections in Sweden in September of the same year led to Ingvar Carlsson's social democratic government being succeeded by a centre-right four-party coalition government under the leadership of Carl Bildt (Moderate Party). Swedish security policy was modified.

Prime Minister Bildt formed a group that would devote practically all its time to issues concerning the Baltic Sea and the Baltic States. Ambassador Krister Wahlbäck provided the historical facts; Undersecretary Lars Fredén, who had witnessed the struggle for independence in Riga, travelled as emissary between the capital cities, and Commander Emil Svensson kept the prime minister up to date with military developments.

In late 1991 the prime minister and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs considered what could be done to strengthen their three "new" neighbours. Sweden, whose coalition government had approved Stalin's annexation of the Baltic States and turned over of their gold reserves to the Soviet Union, had a moral and historical debt to pay.

"There is tremendous enthusiasm and work satisfaction here compared with Sweden," says Lieutenant Colonel Joel Parde (right). The lack of resources is a challenge. While Swedish military expenditure is SEK 42 billion, in Captain Olejs Odzerkali's (left) Latvian defence it is 1.5 billion.

Photo: Dan Hansson

The first cabinet decision was made on December 19, 1991. The three Baltic States received SEK 10 million each to open embassies in Stockholm. The Soviet Union was dissolved a few days later.

The new Russia had shrunk to 16th century Russian borders. Baltic State independence was declared – but far from guaranteed. The other side of the Baltic Sea was a security grey zone.

“There was a great unwillingness to enter into this area - with the exception of Carl Bildt. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had great doubts, as did The Ministry of Defence, who had had it drummed into them for decades not to meddle in politics. We had a classic security grey zone situation and the Swedish machinery of government was badly equipped to handle it,” recalls a Swedish government official.

The original plan was to provide “national security support” but that label was far too sensitive so it was renamed sovereignty support, which sounded more secure.

“During the first year the prime minister took personal care of all issues deemed as being controversial in one way or the other,” recalls a key figure.

Another key figure says that the first consignment of Swedish uniforms dispatched across the Baltic Sea in 1992 was such an issue:

“We sent tunics and uniforms but nothing in the way of war equipment. It was regarded as being extremely sensitive. The cabinet made a decision to allocate SEK 120,000 to cut off the buttons on the tunics because they were embossed with the Swedish three crowns symbol. Such tunics could be purchased at any military surplus store. But the buttons were cut off in Sweden before the uniforms were dispatched; the reason being that there were still Russian soldiers there and the government were concerned that Swedish tunics might be used during a conflict and be discovered later.”

In February 1992, the Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs issued a directive for continued restrictions on all weapon exports to the Baltic States in consensus with the other Nordic countries.

Sweden had a vested interest in stability and continued peace and freedom in the Baltic States. The Baltic States were also one of the arenas where Sweden could show the EU countries, Russia and the USA that

it contributed something positive to the building of the European community. The Swedish commitment paved the way for Swedish entry into EU membership negotiations (the other arena was the war in Yugoslavia to which Sweden rapidly sent UN troops).

Sweden led by Carl Bildt also took a Western European leading role in integrating the Baltic States with Western Europe. This took place in a highly informal task-sharing with German Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl taking responsibility for the integration of Poland and the countries further south.

This led to a group of diplomats secretly meeting in Stockholm in July 1992. Swedish diplomats called it the ad-hoc group; other countries called it the Stockholm group. The group consisted of Nordic neighbours Finland, Denmark and Norway along with Germany, France, Great Britain and the USA, who could talk to Russia as an equal. Japan later joined the group, which was led by various diplomats from the political department of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

“Sweden played a leading role in the ad-hoc group. The Americans basically supported everything we wanted them to support,” says a Swedish diplomat.

The group members exchanged information of what their countries had done to support the Baltic States, which led to a natural cooperation. The group also worked on two other vital issues: to remove Russian troops from the Baltic States and to strengthen the rights and status of the Russian-speaking population. The most intensive years were 1992-96, but the group carried on meeting until the autumn of 1999.

Sweden was the only Nordic country with the resources to help all three Baltic States. In time, and with a good deal of Swedish resistance, a natural division of tasks took place. Finland took special responsibility for its southern neighbour Estonia, Sweden for Latvia and Denmark for Lithuania in the south.

The Baltic States requested weapons for their defence at an early stage. The current Latvian Minister of Defence Girts Valdis Kristovskis, who took part in defending the parliament in Riga in 1991, recalls the atmosphere during the years that followed:

“When we began in the early 1990s there were very strong misgiv-

ings that Russia would try to rebuild its empire on our territory. Nobody knew then how NATO would be enlarged and the EU integrated,” explains Kristovskis.

Many experts and politicians outside the Baltic Sea region regarded the Baltic States as being a part of the Russian sphere of interest. Providing the Baltic States with more than a symbolic defence might provoke Russia. At a seminar in Stockholm in February 1993, former Russian expert at the US State Department Paul Goble said:

“The Baltic States are the captives of geography. A Russian platoon is all that is required to take Estonia, for Latvia a company and for Lithuania a battalion. There is not one country in the West that would be prepared to prevent a Russian advance on the coast.”

Goble met with opposition:

“If the Finns had reasoned that way they would not have been free for the past 50 years. This is complete nonsense,” replied Danish historian and Lieutenant Colonel Michael Clemmesen who later became head of the Baltic Defence College in Tartu, Estonia, which was built up by several countries under the leadership of Sweden. Since 1999 this college has taught the Swedish and Finnish models of national existence defence. Countries can be defended was our message, which was also spread in international circles by the Swedish Defence Research Agency. As Finland proved during the Winter War (1939–40) and the Continuation War (1944), an attack from a super power can be stopped.

But what would Sweden do if the Baltic States were attacked? The answer came in 1993 in a top secret war exercise that involved the entire Swedish government assembled in an underground cavern. During the exercise the three Baltic States were attacked in three different ways: by Russian regular units, by a breakaway faction of Russian generals and by Russian independent units. The Estonian government sought asylum in Sweden, fleeing ships were pursued, deserting Russian units were attacked by Russian aircraft and Russia blocked the southern Baltic Sea. The exercise showed that Sweden was politically committed to the Baltic States at such a high level that it was not possible to throw this commitment overboard during a crisis. There are great similarities with the Finnish Winter War when Sweden sent large

amounts of war material, an air squadron and 8,000 volunteers. Even in the exercise Sweden was forced to provide assistance. In the final stages a Russian military attack against Sweden was imminent.

The conclusion was that Sweden cannot claim neutrality during a conflict in the Baltic States, quite the opposite to the official doctrine from 1992 according to which Sweden “should be able to uphold its neutrality in the event of war in its close vicinity”. This menacing picture partly explains Anders Björck’s caution when he visited the three Baltic States in 1993 (the exercise first came to light when I revealed it in the Swedish daily Svenska Dagbladet in 1995).

How do you provide the Balts with military support without provoking the red-brown forces in Russia? The solution was to form a Baltic peacekeeping battalion, BALTBAT. It was placed in Adazi in Latvia and between 1994–2003 became a multinational project. By training the Balts in peace operations they could show they had something to offer. Baltic soldiers and officers also came out into the world through international exercises within the framework of NATO’s Partnership for Peace initiative (which Sweden joined in 1994). They later served in Nordic peace forces in the Balkans. From 1994, Baltic officers also received training in Sweden.

BALTBAT was basically a way of building up the Balts’ own defence systems. By 1994 Russian troops had left the Baltic States and Sweden could send ammunition, engineering equipment and kitchen and hospital equipment. But BALTBAT would not receive modern weapons until 2002–2003 (the Swedish anti-tank missile Bill, and then only on loan).

Initially the Baltic policy was a controversial issue in Sweden. In November 1993 Carl Bildt held a speech where he insisted that Swedish neutrality was not possible if the Baltic States were threatened. Former prime minister and opposition leader Ingvar Carlsson (Soc. Dem.) called the speech “adventurous”.

Ingvar Carlsson won the election in 1994 and disbanded Bildt’s analysis group that had worked on Baltic Sea issues. The new government put its own signature on the sovereignty support and renamed it “promotion of security support” from June 1, 1995 (and increased it to cover Poland).

“But the political scribbling in no way affected the support to the Baltic States. We have always received the money we’ve applied for to support the Baltic States and we’ve had a free hand. The support has chiefly been determined by what the Baltic States have asked for. The Balts inquired and we looked into whether or not we could provide them with what they required,” says Swedish defence attaché in Estonia, Lieutenant Colonel Lars Ramström, who worked in the Baltic department headquarters 1994–2003.

In the meantime other developments were taking place. Under pressure from the Eastern Europeans and the Balts, NATO began discussing an enlargement into Eastern Europe. An enlargement into Poland was historically unavoidable, but several NATO countries drew the line at expanding NATO into the Baltic States in the northeast, into former Soviet territory. Many within the alliance saw the countries as impossible to defend. In March 1996, former British Foreign Minister Douglas Hurd therefore proposed a defence alliance between Sweden, Finland and the Baltic States. Similar ideas also circulated in the USA, France, Germany and Norway. Sweden and Finland opposed this. They wanted to avoid regionalising European security at any price. In a conflict Sweden risked standing alone with the Baltic States against Russia.

In March 1996 Göran Persson succeeded Ingvar Carlsson. He had hit the right tone at the party congress that elected him: “It is high time to say that our neighbours’ cause is our cause.” Persson was mainly thinking in economic terms. He was also the driving force behind ensuring the Baltic States being included in the first expansion eastward by the EU.

The next surprise came when Prime Minister Persson visited Riga in June 1996. He said that Sweden not only respected the Latvian decision to become a member of NATO and: “We will do all in our power to support Latvia in this process.”

Meanwhile NATO was holding a meeting in Berlin in which Minister for Foreign Affairs Lena Hjelm-Wallén was taking part. Her Ministry for Foreign Affairs were taken so unawares that from Berlin they disclaimed what Persson had said, despite his speech being recorded on tape.

The new theme was: “secure neighbours are good neighbours”. In order to feel secure the Baltic States needed a functioning defence, but

it had to come under democratic control. That we now exported Swedish democratic popular defence came to legitimise the increasingly extensive military support.

But for Swedish military support to be effective it had to be part of a defence doctrine and in order to determine the type of help the countries required, the operative concept and military planning of the Baltic States had to be developed.

“But we were not allowed to openly discuss the latter,” says one of those involved.

This work was extremely sensitive, but took place with the knowledge and silent approval of the Swedish government. The doctrine was to have sufficiently strong forces to stop a large power (Russia) from just marching over the border and reaching the Baltic Sea coast. The Russians would be forced to escalate, which would expose them and give the Balts sufficient warning. In addition, a total defence based on the Swedish-Finnish democratic popular defence model would improve resistance against military pressure. An attack could be fended off until such time as help arrived from NATO and the Nordic countries.

The Baltic Countries wanted to join NATO. In Sweden the Minister of Defence Thage G Peterson and Supreme Commander Ove Wiktorin were both opposed to an enlargement. The Baltic States, who were regarded as having no chance prior to the summit meeting, sat in the first row for the next enlargement. The reply was a diplomatic offensive from the Russians offering the Balts security guarantees, which the Balts, with their historical experience, blankly refused. In Sweden, Björn von Sydow became the new minister of defence and declared that with the Baltic States in NATO the Baltic Sea region would become “a more secure region”.

In March 1999 Poland joined NATO. In September 2000 the Swedish government decided to implement the Army Project in the Baltic States but deleted two areas from the list. One of them was giving naval mines to the Baltic States. The Swedish naval mine clearance project in Baltic ports and shipping channels had kept a high profile and had received good publicity since the early 1990s so giving mines to the Baltic States was seen as sending out the wrong signals.

The other deletion was long-range artillery (the Swedish army's 155mm Haubits F). When Finland was fighting for its existence in 1944 it was the strong artillery that stopped the Soviet offensive. Sweden was still obviously sensitive to Russian reactions.

Did Russia never react to Sweden arming her eastern neighbours?

"Oddly enough, no. We expected reactions at any time but they never came. From the outset we maintained that security policy support should be given openly," recalls a key Swedish figure. A Swedish ambassador substantiates this:

"The signals we received were that the Russians thought it better that we Swedes provided military support than the NATO countries."

In the autumn of 2002 the Baltic States achieved their objective: a NATO summit meeting in Prague invited them to become members of NATO and an EU summit meeting in Copenhagen opened the door to the EU.

AS MUCH AS THE Baltic States desired to become members of the EU and NATO they had just as many doubts about it ever becoming a reality. Now that it is a reality, Swedish security policy support will be phased out in 2005. What do the recipient countries themselves say? Was Sweden too cautious in its security policy support?

"No. The Swedish approach was naturally very cautious and I can understand why," replies the Latvian Minister of Defence Girts Valdis Kristovskis.

A well-informed person from Latvia's security policy elite and former Nordic diplomat says:

"Sweden won first prize in supporting us along with the USA. The Swedes dared to do more than many other NATO alliance countries. Our defence was built from Swedish and American material. This means that when future military orders are on the agenda Sweden and the USA will be first in line.

What has been the most important Swedish contribution to Latvia's defence?

"Sweden helped us understand that even as a small nation we can defend ourselves and stand up to threats," replies Minister of Defence Kristovskis and adds:

“Swedish support enabled us to develop our leadership, the military force we have today and to prepare our future within NATO.”

He points out that Sweden also directly benefits from this:

“With the enlargement of NATO the Baltic States have developed defence systems whereby Sweden’s security zone is moved 500-600 kilometres further east.”

Would NATO membership have been possible without Swedish support?

“That is difficult to say. Without Swedish support we may possibly have found another strong partner to invest equipment. But with the Swedish support we did not need to split our resources and put a strain on technical solutions for the armed forces,” replies Kristovskis and points out that the Swedish support in democracy has been just as important.

LATVIA’S VERY POPULAR PRESIDENT since 1999, Vaira Vike-Freiberga, welcomes us into her magnificent office – a room in Riga’s Palace. She calls Swedish support very constructive and helpful:

“We started with nothing. With all the other pressing needs in society, modernisation of the defence system was impossible to implement. Even the donation of used equipment has been very beneficial. We have also enjoyed excellent cooperation regarding organisational and other aspects. In Sweden as a non-aligned country we have had a partner that has supported us in our attempts to improve our defensive power.

Will Sweden become less relevant for you when you become a member of NATO?

“Our priority will naturally be to make an impact on the NATO alliance and to adapt to its overall structures and defence strategies. But I think there are still parts of the preparation process where our cooperation with Sweden can continue. NATO and Sweden overlap and strengthen each other,” she concludes.

MIKAEL HOLMSTRÖM

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A NEW SOCIAL APPROACH

I first meet Alfredas Zabieta on a wintry day in Smargonj, Belarus not far from the Lithuanian border. A Sida delegation is visiting a social centre that is a pilot project in an extensive cooperation initiative between Belarus and Sweden, financed by Sida with The Stockholm School of Social Work as Swedish party. The aim is to create new forms of social services in Belarus and train social workers in modern methods. Alfredas contributes as a consultant with his knowledge of transforming the Lithuanian social services, a process in which he played a key role as coordinator at the social ministry in Vilnius.

LITHUANIA HAS COME A long way in ten years, but Belarus is still far behind and Soviet ideas still live on. Social outcasts of all descriptions are kept in large institutions, often isolated from their family, relatives and society. There is absolutely no visible sign of misery at these institutions. The social centre in Smargonj is well equipped, with regard both staff and technical aids. The atmosphere is friendly if somewhat authoritarian.

Hundreds, perhaps millions, of people were admitted into such institutions in the Soviet Union. Children with various types of physical disability, children who for some reason were taken from their parents, orphans, street children, criminal children, abused children. Many people lived their whole lives at institutions. When they were released they were not prepared for the harsh reality outside. They had no social network, nobody who helped them, no money. It is not difficult to imagine the consequences: a vicious circle of abuse, criminality and social

Opposite page:

Olga is fleeing from her husband.

Together with her children she is staying at a refuge for abused women in Vilnius. There are four such centres in Lithuania, a result of the programme of social reforms implemented with Swedish support.

Photo: Anders Gunnartz

poverty and sooner or later admission to a new institution.

Today Lithuania, with the help of Sweden, has taken a giant step away from the Soviet legacy. Each municipality has day centres based on the Swedish model where mentally handicapped and physically disabled people can go to get help and stimulation. Ten years ago there were no social workers in the Western sense and no social work training. Today there are more than 3,000 trained social workers.

In the early 1990s, when Lithuania declared independence from the Soviet Union, Alfredas Zabieta was in Utena, one of Lithuania's larger towns. He had had various positions, including cultural director at the local authority and a job at the town's medical college. This is where he became seriously interested in social work. Lithuania was independent and the world around suddenly opened up. Alfredas had the opportunity to partake in courses and study visits to other countries. In 1994 he came to Sweden for the first time and met Ronald Penton, in charge of international cooperation at The Stockholm School of Social Work.

"The Lithuanians who had any idea about modern social work could be counted on one hand," says Alfredas. "And I was one of them. I was young and insecure. We had hardly anything to build on. All I knew I had learnt abroad. We fumbled in the dark but were driven by the knowledge that this was the future and it was necessary."

THE FALL OF THE Soviet Union had created many new problems in society. The economy deteriorated and unemployment rose. The social welfare that existed was weakened and broken down. Alcohol and drug abuse increased, many became homeless, street children or prostitutes. Added to these were all the physically disabled who were invisible at institutions or hidden in their homes; blind, deaf, mentally ill...

"There was an enormous need for social welfare," says Alfredas. In addition, new ideas were coming about integrating mentally handicapped and physically disabled people into the community. It became increasingly clear that we needed trained social workers."

The first example of a new approach was the introduction of a system whereby mentally handicapped children could live at home and spend their days at a day centre to allow their parents to work.

“Of the 30 youth, some had been to an institution but most of them had lived at home,” he continues. “We tested a model where we mixed mentally handicapped children with children from difficult home conditions. They formed good relationships with each other and it became a success.”

Many of the new experiences came from a project initiated by the social ministry together with The World Bank and Sweden. The aim of the project was to create more open forms of support for different groups with social problems. All local authorities could apply to take part and fourteen centres opened in six municipalities. It aroused great interest and the ministry helped other local authorities who wished to take part and there are now day centres in nearly every municipality.

“This system is more humanitarian and ten times cheaper for society than putting people in institutions,” says Alfredas.

The first argument did not weigh so heavily with the local politicians but the second one did. There were some strong reactions when mentally handicapped people suddenly appeared on the streets:

“People were not actually against it, they were just not used to it,” explains Alfredas. “But it has become a good school in democracy where people have to learn to show tolerance and accept we are not all the same.”

It has taken time to change attitudes and ingrained patterns. Society was not prepared for the open system, teachers, for instance, were not prepared for children with physical disabilities in the class.

A FEW MONTHS AFTER independence in the Baltic States, the first contact was made with the then social minister in Estonia, Arvo Kuddo and the Stockholm School of Social Work. Arvo Kuddo wanted Swedish help to change the Estonian social system. The Stockholm School of Social Work took contact with The Swedish Agency for International Technical and Economic Cooperation (BITS). BITS quickly arranged a project that gave ten Estonians the opportunity to come to Sweden to study the social services. The following year, Latvia and Lithuania sent similar requests.

For various reasons, cooperation with Estonia did not materialise. The Stockholm School of Social Work instead concentrated on Lithuania.

Next page:

Alfredas Zabieta from the social ministry has been at the centre of the social reform in Lithuania. He now wants to spread his knowledge to other former Soviet countries.

At the Parama support centre in Vilnius a group of young people meet to talk about alcohol and drug abuse. Young people in the Baltic States are exposed to enormous advertising campaigns for various forms of alcohol.

Photo: Anders Gunnartz





nia and Latvia. The first step was training for social chiefs, high up officials and politicians.

“We provided them with a broad picture of Swedish social services and social work theories and models,” recalls Ronald Penton, who taught social work at the school and became involved in the cooperation over the Baltic Sea.

In 1995 the social ministry in Lithuania asked The World Bank for a loan to the social sector. It was the first large social project that The World Bank had ever undertaken. For a project partner the ministry turned to The Stockholm School of Social Work, who in its turn received financing from Sida. A model was therewith created for reshaping the social sector, since used in several places throughout the former Soviet Union.

NEXT TIME I MEET Alfredas he takes me to a centre for alcohol and drug abusers in Vilnius called Parama (support). A derelict building has been renovated with funds from The World Bank. It is fresh and modern with a welcoming atmosphere. The Principal is Silva Cizauskiene, one of the social workers educated within the initiative with the Stockholm School of Social Work. She has been to Sweden twice on study visits and visited various treatment centres.

Parama opened in 1999 and has around 60 clients, chiefly men. There are programmes for children and families to drug and alcohol abusers and for young people at risk. As well as Silva, there is a psychologist and seven social workers. The main cost (salaries, heating etc.) is paid by the local authority in Vilnius. Renovation and furnishings etc. were paid by The World Bank, and Sida finances training and counselling. Every month the centre is visited by instructors from The Stockholm School of Social Work.

“Traditionally, abusers have always been treated medically,” explains Silva. “Our method is completely new.”

“We have learnt that the system must be client-oriented,” adds Alfredas. “We do not discuss institutional care but the alternatives built around day centres where people can receive support and counselling and still live at home. For us this is a radical change in attitude and opin-

ion. This is a system that is no longer dependent on the whims of government or local politicians but is based on the needs of the community.”

The centre has close contact with various social institutions such as prisons and homes for abused women. These institutions phone Silva and ask her to send clients. Some come here as a condition for not being sent to prison.

In one room is a discussion group for young people from homes where one or both parents are alcoholics or who are themselves at risk. Working with young people on preventive measures is something completely new. The discussion group talks about alcohol and abuse issues in order to make the young people aware of the dangers. But the centre also supports young people with acute problems. In one group a despairing teenager talked about how his parents were going to sell their flat to get money for alcohol. The social workers then took contact with the parents and managed to prevent the sell.

The fourteen social centres that make up the Swedish-supported initiative are also a source of inspiration for other activities, social workers from all over the country come on study visits. The project also includes the further education of social workers and the teaching of instructors. The project was formally completed in 2002 but has continued for a while longer. When the evaluations are complete in mid 2004, Alfredas Zabieta is going to Stockholm University to complete his dissertation about the Swedish influence on social reforms in Lithuanian. It will be a summary of just over 10 years experience of cooperation with Sweden. The question he asks in his dissertation is how to best use foreign aid in a reform process. There is a great interest for this subject in many countries, not just the former Soviet Union.

“In the Baltic States we were open and took the chance to change our approach,” says Alfredas. We realised we had to put an end to the old system and find new ideas. But in Ukraine and Russia they still stick to the old ways. In these countries they regard everything that comes from Moscow as the best in the world.”

According to Alfredas, the mentality in Lithuania differs from that in the former Soviet Union. There is a tradition of civil society here,

destroyed during the Soviet era it is true, but which has risen from the ashes again. The church has played a particularly important role, which signifies that the concept of voluntary work lives on.

“We didn’t previously see social problems as a political issue. I always tell parents that their personal problems with their children are political issues that they must discuss with politicians and force them to do something.”

In Lithuania the mayors are mainly concerned with becoming re-elected. So it is important to have good social services to show off, it helps in the popularity stakes.

“Swedish education has been very good,” concludes Alfredas. “We have learned a great deal about methods, models and attitudes, things that were previously not so important in Lithuania.”

Lithuanian knowledge is now used in other parts of the former Soviet Union. The Stockholm School of Social Work, which runs projects in Russia, Moldavia, Armenia and Belarus, uses Alfredas as a lecturer and some of their projects include study trips to Lithuania.

“When people from these countries come to Sweden or hear a Swede talk they feel it is hopeless,” says Alfredas. “They don’t think they’re capable of doing something similar. But when I tell them about the Lithuanian experience they see that changes are also possible in their countries.”

Ronald Penton at The Stockholm School of Social Work is impressed by developments in Lithuania.

“Attitudes need modifying of course,” he says. “But I consider Lithuania to be on an average European level with regard to social work. I think their social system is even more developed than the ones in Ireland and Greece when they entered the EU.”

FACTS · SOCIAL SERVICE

Sweden has made several contributions to the area of social services in the Baltic States. One example is the creation of a municipal social service in Lithuania. The first and second phases were financed by The World Bank to the tune of USD 3.7 million and Sida with SEK 16.4 million. After a year or so the Lithuanian social ministry looked to expand activities with the education of teachers who would in their turn train social workers. A system for following up municipal open care for socially vulnerable groups would also be created. Sida allocated a further SEK 10 million to expand the work of The Stockholm School of Social Work and to a fund at The World Bank and the social ministry for local expenses.

Another example is when Latvia a few years after independence wanted to reform its social insurance system and the government turned to The World Bank. The bank assessed that the new Swedish pension reform could be of interest to the countries in Central and Eastern Europe. In the autumn of 1995, an extensive pension reform programme was initiated between Latvia, Sweden and The World Bank to which Sida has contributed a total of SEK 46 million.

Over the years, several NGOs have worked with the growing number of vulnerable children, young people and street children and have provided support to local organisations in the countries. The Swedish Organisation of Handicapped International Aid Foundation (SHIA) is one of several organisations active in the Baltic region. The Swedish National Federation of the Blind cooperates with its Lithuanian counterpart to improve the chances of children with defective vision of attending school.



SHOCK THERAPY WITH A HAPPY ENDING

The rapid transition from planned to market economy in the three Baltic States is probably the most dramatic institutional restructuring we have ever witnessed in peacetime. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania quickly recovered from the sharp economic decline of the early 1990s to become one of the most rapidly expanding economies in the world.

Institutional reform has been a vital factor in this rapid growth process and forthcoming EU membership has played a crucial role by providing clear political aims and creating pressure to carry out reforms. Progress has not just happened by itself but has been achieved through an extensive programme of reforms.

PRIOR TO INDEPENDENCE IN the autumn of 1991 the Baltic States were integrated within the Soviet economic structure, with production focussing on heavy industry connected with the Soviet military. At independence only three per cent of export went to countries outside the Soviet Union but after independence the Baltic States lost a large part of their production due to the collapse of the Soviet Union and supply and demand was no longer maintained artificially. Consumers and manufacturers now had to decide what to produce and consume at the same time as prices adjusted to their real value.

A great problem during the transition period was that the money in circulation greatly exceeded the value of products and services that companies and individuals wanted and were able to buy. This led to a dramatic rise in prices and inflation. Meanwhile, there was a sharp

*Opposite page:
Strong currencies. The currencies of
the three Baltic States are strong
today. The Lat is used in Latvia.
Photo: Mats Widén*

decline in the value of local currencies, extensive flight of capital and a great demand for foreign products, which led to greater pressure on exchange rates and a further rise in inflation due to increased import prices. A reform programme was therefore of top priority.

Two overall reform strategies quickly took shape in the former Eastern bloc in the early 1990s. There were those who advocated a short sharp shock where as many reforms as possible would be carried out as quickly as possible in order to make the transition process as painless as possible. The President of the Czech Republic at the time, Vaclav Havel, was an advocate of the short sharp shock maintaining that “it was impossible to cross a chasm in two leaps”. Others advocated a more gradual reform process. Advocates of the gradual reform strategy maintained that it was not possible to carry out the transition process overnight and that a short sharp shock would lead to greater social hardship. The latter strategy was also advocated by China’s Deng Xiaoping, who, using a similar metaphor, said it was important to “feel the stones when crossing the river”.

Estonia and Latvia chose the short sharp shock method and implemented the necessary, but painful, reforms as quickly and as extensively as possible. The reforms led to a lower standard of living in the short term but the logic behind the short sharp shock was to make the pain as short-term as possible while there was still widespread approval for change and achieve rapid growth to bring about an increase in the standard of living. Another important reason for the short sharp shock was to avoid regressing back to the old system and stopping halfway.

Lithuania chose the second strategy and carried out a gradual programme of reforms. The logic behind the gradual strategy was to first carry out the reforms in one relatively simple area and then use the experience to implement reforms in other more complex areas. The choice of an overall reform strategy was of course important but the most interesting factor were the similar results despite the differences in politics and strategy. There were also a row of other factors, such as the political situation and the initial circumstances, that played a crucial role in the choice of reform strategy as well as for progress itself. The countries have also developed at a different pace within different areas

but the reforms in Estonia have generally been quicker and more far-reaching than in Latvia and Lithuania.

SO WHAT REFORMS ARE we talking about? The initial phase of the transition process in the early 1990s was chiefly concerned with stabilisation and privatisation and liberalisation of the market and prices.

Compared with the planned economy, market liberalisation involved a considerable decentralisation of production and consumer decision-making, from central power to individuals and companies. Liberalisation thus corrected two of the largest flaws of the planned economy, namely weak incentives and lack of transparency. Liberalisation of the economy also increased competition and saw the Baltic States opening up for trade with non-Eastern bloc countries. Estonia is the clearest example of this. By the end of 1992 Estonia had in principle eliminated all export barriers and import restrictions and made its currency convertible for foreign transactions. Estonia's very ambitious import and export liberalisation led to the rapid introduction of world market prices and trade being redirected westward, which in its turn led to an increase in quality and export income. Today Estonia is ranked by The Heritage Foundation as the sixth most open economy in the world. A total of 80 per cent of exports and 67 per cent of imports are in dealings with countries outside the former Eastern bloc, of which current EU members answer for 62 and 52 per cent respectively.

The main aim of the macroeconomic stability programmes was to bring down inflation, balance the budgetary deficit (without printing more money) and improve the balance of payments. One of the main issues of the stability programmes was the choice of exchange rate. The Baltic States chose somewhat different ways of approaching this. Estonia introduced a new currency in 1992 along with a currency board and tied the Estonian kroon to the German mark.

The basic principle behind a currency board is that all national currency within the country is matched by the same amount of foreign currency reserves, which led to Siim Kallas, President of the Estonian Central Bank saying: "Even if we have only eight kroons in circulation, we will have a D-mark in our vaults to back them". The advantages with

Next page:

Small-scale enterprise.

Many small enterprises still have problems developing because they often lack the administration required in order to be granted loans.

*Photo: Victor Brott/
Global Reporting*



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currency boards are that they are predictable and governed by strict rules, which helps stabilise the exchange rate. Stability was crucial in the Baltic States in the early 1990s when the countries had just become independent and inflation was running very high. The disadvantage with currency boards is that they prevent the government from regulating inflation or using the exchange rate to counteract external shocks.

Estonia chose to pursue its strategy with a currency board against the recommendation of The International Monetary Fund (IMF). By introducing a currency board Estonia adjusted its currency and based it on the demands of a fixed exchange rate. Several foreign experts and repatriates, such as Swedes Bo Kragh and Rudolf Jalakas, came to play an important role in the economic reforms that laid the foundation for the introduction of the new currency.

Unlike Estonia and Lithuania, Latvia followed the IMF's recommendations to a great extent and kept a flexible exchange rate mechanism. The Bank of Latvia functioned as an independent central bank from 1992 and a year later the lat became the only official currency. Lithuania compromised and first introduced a traditional central bank in 1992 but later established a currency board in 1994 after the success in Estonia and tied the litas to the US dollar. It is interesting to note that despite the different strategies, the objective of financial stabilisation was achieved relatively quickly in all three Baltic States. A comparative study of the three countries shows that Estonia has developed somewhat better than Latvia, followed by Lithuania. As in many other contexts, the study shows that the implementation of the chosen strategy had a great significance for developments.

A THIRD PHASE IN the reform process was the privatisation and restructuring of companies. The privatisation process was both political and economical; politically significant in order to cement the changes and thwart a return to a planned economy, economical in that it rationalised companies in order to support the transition process. Transferring ownership to individuals would, it was thought, create a whole new middle class of dynamic entrepreneurs.

The privatisation process also brought to the surface a series of diffi-

cult issues concerning the redistribution policy. Should right of ownership be transferred to the former owners, to those who worked there, to those who could pay most or to the general population? Privatisation of small enterprises proved to be less complicated and was implemented through various voucher programmes. In Estonia most of the large and medium-sized enterprises were sold directly to those who paid the most (often foreign investors), while in Lithuania the majority of these companies were distributed to the population through a voucher programme. A small number of companies were sold to those managing the companies during privatisation (management buyouts). Swedish companies were very active during the privatisation process, in Estonia in particular where they answered for as much as 40 per cent of all foreign direct investments in the country.

Another difficult issue was the question of when to privatise in order to optimise the financial gain. Should privatisation take place before or after the companies had been restructured, and before or after the economy had stabilised and market institutions established? The balance between continued ineffective state control and the rapid transition to efficient ownership in an institutional vacuum proved to be very delicate. In both cases the companies ran a considerable risk of being stripped of their most valuable assets.

At the beginning of the transition process there was a firm conviction that macroeconomic stability was a necessary, if complicated, process and that privatisation would aid growth and liberalisation would guarantee competition. There was also a belief that institutional reform could be implemented simply by transferring the best knowledge from the West at the same time as the state machinery was drastically cut. In retrospect it is clear to see that macro stabilisation was necessary and went smoother than expected, while privatisation did not have the predicted effect on growth. In the meantime, market liberalisation did not automatically lead to free competition whereas the emergence of completely new enterprises proved to be one of the crucial driving forces of economic growth and continued reform. The establishing of institutions to promote competitiveness on the free market also proved decisive.

The insight into the central role of institutions in the progress

towards a functioning market economy has greatly improved during the transition period. But identifying and setting up the best market institutions that would guarantee and maintain the free market was not that simple. The need to reform state institutions and not just reduce the state machinery was becoming increasingly apparent. Among other things it was all about establishing an extensive institutional framework that would safeguard right of ownership, impose market regulations, ensure macroeconomic balance and stability, and counteract corruption and arbitrary state intervention.

Somewhat surprisingly, the application process for EU membership has become a significant driving force behind institutional reforms in the new member states. Although membership negotiations have generally centred around the Copenhagen criteria (overall political, economic and legal objectives), at a more detailed level the application process is chiefly about the necessary reforms and market-regulating institutions. Indicators that measure the efficiency of the countries' state bureaucracy show clear progress in the Baltic States, which can be greatly attributed to the EU membership process. At the same time, the regulating bodies have been improved in all three countries, in particular in Estonia, which is beginning to approach the OECD average. The EU application process and the emergence of small and medium-sized enterprises has probably played a significance role in the rapid changes within this area.

FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENTS HAVE also had a positive affect on developments in the Baltic States. As well as capital, foreign investors have also provided knowledge and new technologies, which has led to increased productivity and growth. The areas that have attracted most investment in the Baltic States are found within the service sector and primarily within the finance, transport and communication sectors. A small amount has gone to the manufacturing industry, in particular export industries such as wood and wood products, food and drinks and base metals and textiles. Foreign investments in the service sector have been chiefly market-oriented while investments in the food manufacturing industry have been market and resource-oriented. Invest-

ments in the wood and textile industries have been based on increased resources and assets.

Sweden is one of the largest foreign investors in the Baltic States. The main interest is in banking, IT and telecommunications, the textile and furniture industry and soft drinks and brewery products. Among the leading Swedish companies in the Baltic States are: Borås Wäfveri and Vogue Group (textiles), Baltic Beverages (brewery), Austria Tabak Scandinavia Holding (tobacco), Tele2 and Telia/Sonera (telecommunications). IKEA has a factory in Lithuania and an office that purchases material from the Baltic States. Swedish banks have probably been the most active in the Baltic States and have had a great influence on developments.

The banking sector in the Baltic States has undergone a thorough transformation during the past decade, which was necessary to enable the countries to manage the transition to a market economy. The banks were also privatised at an early stage and Sweden played a crucial role in developing the banking institutions in the Baltic States.

In the mid 1990s a bank support project was initiated from Swedish quarters, which interestingly enough was financed by the Swedish stabilisation fund that was first introduced to support the new Baltic currencies. The project was led by Swedfund Financial Markets (SFM), a subsidiary of the state-owned venture capital company Swedfund. The idea was to inject capital in the shape of equity or some other form of ownership capital and to mediate technical assistance to sustainable banks in the region. SFM chose to go in as an investor in the private banks. These investments later made a good profit for Swedish banks and provided Swedfund with the resources for further investments in the Baltic States. The project thus contributed to stabilising the financial markets in the Baltic States and facilitated the entry of Swedish banks onto these markets. In the late 1990s two Swedish banks, SEB and Föreningssparbanken, took a dominating position in the banking sector of the Baltic States. Through acquiring Hansa Bank, Föreningssparbanken (Swedbank) became the largest player in Estonia, the next largest in Lithuania and the third largest in Latvia. SEB took control of the largest bank in Lithuania and the second largest banks in Estonia

Next page:

Swedish companies have a strong presence in the Baltic States. An overwhelming part of the banking sector is today owned by Swedish banks, among them Hansa Bank. Photo: Anders Gunnartz



The image shows a low-angle, upward-looking view of a building's exterior. The building has a light-colored facade with dark horizontal bands. A window with a white frame is visible in the upper left. The primary focus is the 'Hansaaba' logo, which is mounted on the wall. The logo consists of a stylized orange and blue icon followed by the word 'Hansaaba' in large, 3D block letters. The letters 'Hans' are blue, and 'aaba' is orange. The lighting is bright, casting shadows on the wall.

Hansaaba



and Latvia. Nordea also entered the Baltic States but with a different strategy. Instead of acquiring existing banks, Nordea mainly established bank branches. In Latvia, however, MeritaNordbanken acquired the French bank Société Générale, greatly increasing its presence in the country in the process.

Foreign ownership of banks has a positive effect in many areas with better access to capital and modern technology and improved efficiency and services. Competition and regulating bodies are also improved through the presence of foreign players. Foreign ownership of the banking sector amounts to 70–90 per cent in the Baltic States, but despite the overwhelming foreign ownership the financial markets of the Baltic States are still not fully developed. The relatively small difference in the borrowing and lending rates indicates weak institutional development and inherent inefficiencies in the work of the financial institutions. The financial institutions in most of the new EU member states have been mainly oriented towards financing state budget deficits rather than companies. It is still difficult for companies, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to borrow money for operations and investments.

Companies in the region are dependent on investments in order to expand and have so far been forced to rely on their own funds and foreign investment. Several surveys show that the lack of capital and the cost of borrowing is a great problem for SMEs in the region. More than half of the SMEs in Latvia and Lithuania experience problems with getting short-term operating loans on reasonable terms. The situation is even more problematic for long-term investment loans. Between 60–70 per cent of SMEs in Latvia and Lithuania have stated they have difficulties. The situation is significantly better in Estonia. The problem however is not the lack of capital on the market:

“Quite the opposite, we could actually lend more. The problem is that many SMEs lack the structure required to enable them to borrow, such as a functioning accounting system,” says Thomas Neckmar, head of Nordea in Poland and the Baltic States.

BECAUSE OF THE DIFFICULTIES involved for companies in getting long-

term credit from commercial banks for investments in the Baltic States, other solutions have emerged that offer venture capital on commercial terms supplemented with technical assistance. One such example is the East Capital Amber Fund, which offers venture capital within the growth sector of the Baltic States. A mentor programme is attached to the investments and is financed through The Swedish Trade Council's Marketplace Baltic Region programme.

Marketplace Baltic Region provides Swedish companies with advice on business opportunities when establishing on the new markets in the Baltic Sea region. Since the autumn of 1999 around 600 companies have used Marketplace Baltic Region. Around 30 per cent are in business today and just over 20 per cent are entering the market.

But it is not only Swedish enterprise that has been active on the Baltic market. Swedish development cooperation has also played an important role in the institutional development within the countries and in implementing the economic reforms. Sida's Eastern Europe database includes a list of the 62 projects, or SEK 60 million, directly aimed at the process of economic transition in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania since 1996. Below follows a few examples of such projects:

The Swedish National Audit Office has assisted its Lithuanian counterpart in improving its administrative, organisational and technical capacity. The Swedish National Labour Market Board has in a similar way received funding from Sida to help the Lithuanian Labour Exchange to promote labour market issues and increase its capacity. With the help of funding from Sida, The National Land Survey of Sweden has assisted in the implementation of land reforms in the three Baltic States and The National Swedish Board of Occupational Safety and Health has been involved in introducing modern monitoring methods in Latvia. The Swedish Board for Accreditation and Conformity Assessment (Swedac), a central authority under The Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs with the task of acting as national accreditation body, assessing the competence of laboratories, certification and inspection bodies, has helped its Lithuanian counterpart to gain the approval required within the EU. The largest project was in establishing The Riga Graduate School of Law and Stockholm School of Econom-

ics in Riga, which educate the next generation of leaders for the Baltic States.

As well as general development cooperation, Sweden has invested SEK 2 million in the Baltic Billion Programmes to “stimulate economic growth and employment in Sweden and the Baltic Sea region, and to strengthen the position of Swedish companies in the region”. The Baltic Billion Programmes cover more than 100 projects spanning over a wide area. The outcome of these projects remains to be seen.

The three Baltic States have enjoyed exceptional economic and institutional development during the past decade. We have already witnessed many of the positive effects on trade in the Baltic Sea region. In much the same way, the privatisation process in the new member states has already opened the way for strategic investors from current EU countries.

Despite this, there is still a long way to go with regard economic size and institutional development compared with current EU members. The impending EU enlargement is often mentioned in this context and there is a great expectation on the positive effects of membership. The effect of EU enlargement eastward does not end with EU membership in May 2004, but has been, and will continue to be, quite a long process.

With all probability trade, growth and investment will continue to increase after enlargement but not on its own steam. It is necessary for the Baltic States to continue to increase internal investments and productivity, and to promote the emergence of institutions that support the free market. Imminent EU membership has functioned as an effective driving force for reform, a force that will become significantly weaker when the countries have become members.

SWEDEN AND THE OTHER Nordic countries have played an active role in the Baltic States’ efforts to once again become a part of Europe. The 5+3 cooperation (Nordic + Baltic Council) and the North Dimension have been the main initiators on the political level. There is now a good opportunity to greater utilise the industrial structure of the region in order to strengthen both the Baltic and the Nordic countries’ competitiveness in Europe. Through utilising the comparative advantages of

the region and focussing on production that is not solely dependent on physical proximity to the large central European markets, both the Baltic and the Nordic countries will benefit from continued economic integration. Industrial cooperation today is largely based on the great variety in the cost of labour. But with the Baltic States becoming increasingly competitive – and in terms of quality (which has already begun in certain industries) – industrial cooperation will change character.

ESTONIA IS ALREADY ONE of the world's most open economies and the brightest star among the new member states. Even Latvia and Lithuania have developed more rapidly than the EU average during recent years. Just as EU membership has been a crucial driving force for institutional reform, the Nordic countries have played a vital role in the economic development of the Baltic States. The strong economic and industrial ties between Sweden and Finland, and Estonia in particular, have without doubt been significant for the rapid development in Estonia. Interestingly enough, the other leading candidate country, Slovenia, has had similar connections with its neighbouring countries Austria and Italy.

EU membership will give the countries' economies a further boost. Whether or not the Baltic countries will continue to rapidly develop will probably not depend so much on the size of EU's structural funds but more on the ability of the countries to carry out continuous reforms to stimulate growth and improve the investment climate. Experience from previous EU enlargements clearly shows that membership and extensive structural funds do not automatically lead to rapid growth and institutional development. At the end of the day it is all about the decisions that improve incentives to work harder and improve the standard of living. This ought to be the ultimate challenge in the transition from a planned to a market economy.

MARCUS SVEDBERG

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WOMEN SET THE PACE

Since 1995 the initiative to get more women involved in politics in the Baltic States has taken a giant step forward. Networking is the key along with getting men involved in the work. One of the initiators is Iluta Lace, leader of the Marta Centrs organisation in Riga, a resource centre for Latvian women.

THE PREMISES ARE ON the bottom floor, far removed from Riga's renovated city centre. Out in the dimly lit courtyard nothing is heard, but gestures and movements from the back building reveal a heated debate. People are talking and gesticulating, writing intensively on flipcharts and whiteboards. This is where the Latvia Marta Centrs organisation is housed, at this moment an English course for women is taking place. In many ways the course is a good illustration of the work carried out by Marta Centrs.

"Providing knowledge and strengthening women's self-esteem so they become aware of their rights and opportunities is one of the most important things we can contribute with," says Iluta Lace, the driving force behind the centre.

Iluta Lace herself is almost girlishly juvenile. But there is no mistaking her commitment and capacity. Like a couple of years before when she spent a few months in Sweden and Finland and learned almost fluent Swedish!

"I was interested in Sweden when I was young so that's why I learned the language."

Opposite page:

Iluta Lace pushes on. Gender equality has at last come onto the political agenda in Latvia.

Photo: Mats Widén

I ask her what she meant by “young” but she just laughs again.

The Latvian Marta Centrs organisation began in 2000 with support from the Finnish-Swedish Marta Movement (formed in 1898). The Marta Centrs provides extensive activities to support the women who come to the centre. In one corner a lawyer gives advice, in another a social worker answers the helpline phone. During daytime there is an accountant who helps unemployed women organise their finances and perhaps to start their own business.

One of the aims of the AISMA project (Support, Development, Stability, Love, Responsibility) implemented by the Marta Centrs with Swedish support is to get more women active in politics. On paper the situation looks quite good. Prior to EU membership the EU parliament could see that Latvia had more women in its government (30 per cent) than the European average. Latvia also has a woman president. But the number of women MPs is low, only around 20 per cent.

“One of the election candidates recently went around with a slogan that said Choose a Good Team. That team consisted only of men... But it feels secure for many young women to vote for young well-dressed men. They trust campaign slogans like: A Man Keeps his Word,” says Iluta Lace restrained. But there are signs of change. The fact that Latvia has a woman president who commands respect in all quarters is very significant. She is an important symbol.

SINCE 1996 GENDER EQUALITY has permeated Swedish cooperation with the Baltic States and is as highly prioritised as other objectives. But many times it has proven to be difficult to include gender equality as a natural part of the cooperation. Many of those who had contact with the Baltic cooperation partners, in particular in the early 1990s, talk about a complete lack of interest for gender issues. The survey carried out by Statistics Sweden (SCB) between 2000 and 2002 is a good example of how gender equality issues nonetheless became a part of “normal” cooperation. From the gender-division figures it was possible to see the changes that were required within areas such as health and education in order to develop a more gender-equal society. Experience from this project has since been spread to other countries by Baltic State experts.

Sweden raised the issue of trafficking on the political agenda within the EU and in cooperation with the Baltic States. Trafficking is now a high priority issue within Swedish development cooperation. Since 2001, Sweden has contributed around SEK 100 million to various projects in Eastern Europe. The UN International Organisation on Migration has received 35 million for various campaigns against trafficking.

The issue was brought up in the first place because of the UN Convention on Transnational Organised Crime that was drawn up in 2000. A supplementary protocol includes trafficking. According to UN estimates, around four million women and children around the world are subjected to illegal trafficking. From the Baltic States around 2–3000 women are sold as sex slaves to other countries each year.

When the UN convention was signed, Anita Gradin was commissioner of migration issues and during Swedish chairmanship in 2001, trafficking came up on the EU agenda. The ministers Anna Lindh and Margareta Winberg pursued the issue within the government and contributions were gradually increased for campaigns to counteract trafficking.

The gender equality ministers in the Nordic and Baltic countries decided to make an effort to stop trafficking and prostitution through a joint campaign in 2002. This resulted in Sweden and the Baltic States modifying their laws and adapting them to the UN supplementary protocol on trafficking.

THE GENDER EQUALITY “HANGOVER” from the Soviet era makes it difficult to pursue a gender equality policy. On paper everybody were comrades, but as we all know, reality was another thing altogether even with regard the relationship between women and men. International Women’s Day on March 8 is a good example. In the Soviet it was a public holiday when all men gave flowers to their wives and girlfriends. This was the one day in the year when the men managed the household that women had responsibility for the other 364 days of the year so it is not so strange that so many women in the Baltic States are suspicious of March 8.

Carin Lann at Swedish Språngbrädan Development Consultants,

involved in many of the Swedish gender equality initiatives in the Baltic States, talks about a forced gender equality that existed, for example, in the workplace but which did not embrace political power. Under the Soviet system various types of quotas were also normal, something that later put people off the word quota. Quotas are now more often seen as a necessity in order to facilitate the inclusion of more women in politics.

“Today it’s more about mutual respect, women want to be part of the decision-making process. They want to be part of developing their own countries,” says Carin Lann.

A mainstay in gender equality work has always been the forming of networks: between women in each country, between countries and even between women and men in order to break the deadlock that easily arises when gender equality becomes an issue for women only. One example is a project that twins five municipalities in Sweden and Estonia in a gender equality initiative. Together they planned concrete gender equality projects. The work was well received, in particular by the male municipal representatives!

“A vital part of the work has been about making women’s knowledge and experience visible to all. There has been a strong need to form networks and cooperate across the borders,” says Carin Lann at Språngbrädan.

AT THE BEGINNING THERE was quite intensive competition between the women’s organisations. Those who had foreign contacts kept them close to their chest and did not want to allow other organisations onto their “territory”. Step by step these attitudes were replaced by transparency and cooperation as more and more organisations realised they were stronger together.

There was no contact with politicians at the beginning either, something that gradually changed. The same process took place within the parties: male party leaders began to realise that despite everything women were quite important, they were also part of the electorate.

In the Baltic States there are more women in traditional male occupations, e.g. within the construction industry. In Latvia, women gener-

ally have a higher education, than men but still suffer more from unemployment. Among women with a higher education unemployment is higher than among men in corresponding occupations.

“During the Soviet era women worked double, but they were not discriminated against like now. Today women risk not getting a job or losing the jobs they have if they get pregnant,” says Iluta Lace.

In addition, women live around 10 years longer than men. Men die and the women are left on a low pension. Many women are also alone with children and quite often live under the accepted poverty level. Another problem is the lack of children’s day nurseries. Schoolbooks are still full of stereotype pictures of women caring for the home, standing in the kitchen and looking after the children. Schools still have different activities for boys and girls.

“I remember when I was at school. We girls had to work in the school kitchen as boys attended interesting lessons. When I said I didn’t want to stand there they got angry, such were the rules. When it was my turn I took my dad along, he had to do my job!”

Iluta Lace laughs, but there is no doubt that what she did needed a strong will. A lot of people maintain that in many ways men have suffered more than women during the transition to a market economy because they find it more difficult to adapt to the new system. But when men lose grip this also greatly affects the women. They are the ones who are subjected to violence.

“It is difficult to get men to talk about how they are affected by the changes. We have tried to provide activities for men and get them to come and talk about the man’s role but so far there has not been much interest”, says Iluta.

In this area they have had more success in Lithuania where Sweden has contributed to a crisis centre for men. The aim is to reduce domestic violence through education, therapy and social services and reach out to a thousand men.

Carin Lann from Språngbrädan says that we should never take it for granted that Sweden is always best. She has experience of courses where the participants have not always “bought” everything we have to say but question a lot, and that is positive!

“One example is domestic violence. When Estonian politicians visited Swedish municipalities they could not understand why local authorities in wealthy Sweden could not afford to protect vulnerable women and their children in women’s refuges instead of just putting the responsibility on voluntary organisations. And when they saw Swedish elderly care many were really upset! I think it is very beneficial for Swedes to have to answer questions they are not used to answering.”

The mass media is an effective road to change and influence. Together with local organisations, Språngbrädan has arranged seminars for journalists, decision-makers and others to improve awareness of the image of women, in particular in advertisements. This has resulted in a network of journalists emerging in the countries.

ONE WOULD THINK THAT with Lithuania being the most Catholic and therewith perhaps also the most tradition-bound of the three countries, it would be more difficult for women to progress within politics, but on the contrary, the Milda initiative (women’s initiative to improve democracy in Lithuania) has been very successful. Lithuania possesses great knowledge of gender equality and both within and outside of parliament women cooperate over the party borders, often in close contact with voluntary organisations, to promote gender equality issues. Lithuania is also the only Baltic State that has so far passed (March 2004) a special law on gender equality.

Jurate Puidiene works for The Women’s Employment Information Center in Lithuania. She says the reason the work has gone so well in Lithuania is that women MPs have been in agreement over the party borders:

“When we have been in contact with them to discuss various events they have always been prepared to cooperate as a group, irrespective of political affiliation. Another important aspect is that male politicians have also been involved in the project. Without them change is impossible. Things we work with here also become high priority issues for them,” she says.

In Lithuania the number of women elected at the recent municipal elections (December 2002) rose from 17 to 21 per cent. Parliamentary

elections will take place in the autumn of 2004 and before that the European Parliament, where the number of women elected is expected to increase.

“I don’t think the positive trend can be slowed down or stopped. On the contrary, I think that women will become more active in the future. Our contact network will probably expand to give us more involvement in the European women’s network. Sweden is the country in Europe where women have managed best so it is an important example for us.

IN MARTA CENTRS IN Riga the English lesson is about to end. It is soon eight in the evening but activities are far from over for the day. Like so many other women, Iluta has to look after her children alone. Every other week she is in Limabati where she lives with her daughter and her mother, every other week she is at the office in Riga where she sleeps on a sofa when everybody has gone home.

“We get a lot of calls from women in trouble. It is very difficult to find sheltered accommodation”.

Trafficking is the problem that is given most attention outside of the country. Iluta would like to show the film *Lilja 4-ever*, directed by the Swede Lukas Moodysson, to all the young girls in Latvia, not just for them to see but so they really understand what it is all about.

“There is such a naiveté, many don’t want to see it, they want to see the best side of everything. We had a young voluntary girl here with us. She had been offered a trip to Ireland and wanted to go at once. We tried everything in our power to get her to look into the companies behind the offer, could she trust them, did she have a contract? But it was difficult; we talked for a long, long time. Everybody wants to see the best side of everything.”



BELOVED IGNALINA

The colossal concrete structure emerges through the fog, hated by many, feared by more, but also loved for the energy, jobs and prosperity it has provided. The grey monolithic buildings live up to preconceptions of Soviet delusions of grandeur. The power plant clashes with the forest landscape of small hills and lakes in northeast Lithuania where it has stood since 1984, run directly from Moscow under military rules and surrounded by an iron curtain up until 1990.

THE PLANT WAS BUILT during the Breznev era when the Soviets had a great belief in their own ability and technology. The Soviet Union developed its own nuclear power technology and built a number of RBMK reactors to supply cheap energy, a commodity that was squandered in the Soviet planned economy.

There was no debate on the risks of nuclear power like we had in the West, but the meltdown in Ignalina's sister reactor in Chernobyl in 1986 changed all that. A shockwave rippled through Europe when it became clear how unsafe this type of reactor was, how badly prepared plant staff and society were for an accident, and how terrible and long-term the consequences for people and the environment, even at a great distance from the catastrophe. In Sweden, an accident at the US Harrisburg nuclear power plant in the late 1970s led to an agonising debate on a nuclear power referendum. In Lithuania, Chernobyl led to people suddenly becoming aware that the same thing could happen in Ignalina at any time and with far worse consequences.

Opposite page:

Anna and Lidiya love their Visaginas and still want to live here when Ignalina has closed down. They want to start their own business and were inspired by a trip to Sweden arranged by The Swedish Federation of Private Enterprises.

Photo: Anders Gunnartz

This concern led to the emergence of a political movement that used Ignalina as a springboard but rapidly expanded to question the whole Soviet system. National feelings that had been suppressed for decades sprang to life again and the location of Ignalina on Lithuanian soil became a symbol of cynical Moscow imperialism. The community of 35,000 that had sprung up around the power plant with Russian, not Lithuanian, as first language and where over 90 per cent of the population were from other parts of the Soviet Union, was living proof of how Lithuania had been gradually Russified, in the same way as neighbouring Latvia. Moscow planned to build six reactors in Ignalina but the Lithuanians ran out of patience when the third was being built in the late 1980s. The protest against Ignalina sparked the torch in Lithuania's struggle for independence.

WITH INDEPENDENCE IN 1991, Lithuania opened up and Ignalina gradually opened its gates. Swedes looked in their old school atlases and realised Lithuania was a neighbouring country with a new Chernobyl simmering less than 500 kilometres from Stockholm. Not much imagination was needed to picture the consequences of a similar catastrophe at only half the distance from Sweden. Lithuanians were quick to realise they could benefit from this fear to get financial assistance for the power plant. In 1992 Sweden became the first country to provide substantial support for safety improvements.

By 1995 the third reactor was being dismantled; independence and the protests had put a definite stop to the expansion plans. But the debate on Ignalina tailed off because people were too busy surviving the economic decline that followed in the wake of the Soviet Union's dissolution, and it was also due to the Swedish support that had raised the safety levels at the power plant.

The power plant could not afford to carry out safety measures by itself because it sold cheap electricity to Belarus, Latvia and Kaliningrad. Sometimes payments were ignored, a typical post-Soviet phenomenon. Once the workers had been paid there was not much over for safety measures.

A tour of the power station gave a clear impression – even for an

inexperienced onlooker like myself – that the plant was shabby and run down. There were people everywhere with plastic protection on their feet. The facemasks seemed more like a game than dead earnest.

The Swedish International Project on Nuclear Safety (SIP) was formed in 1992 as a special development cooperation agency under The Swedish Nuclear Power Inspectorate (SKI). Per Bystedt, who worked at Ignalina for three years on behalf of SIP, later confirmed my passing observations:

“When we first came to Ignalina we thought it was very run down,” he said. “With our help they’ve done a great deal to improve the environment but it is also a cultural issue. They think our safety aspects are exaggerated when we concern ourselves with the look of the premises. But we know that small things soon become great problems.”

The Swedish contribution was based on the Barselina Programme, which recommended 100 improvements to Ignalina to bring the risk level down to the same as for a reactor in the West. This programme of measures was implemented during the mid and late 1990s. Swedish contributions have totalled SEK 400 million.

The Chernobyl type RBMK reactor has fundamental differences in construction and will never be as safe as a reactor in the West. You can raise the standard but the consequences of an accident are still greater. This is why a large part of the Swedish contribution was for building up a safety culture; i.e. create preparedness that would do everything possible to rapidly reduce the effects of an accident.

A few serious accidents in the early 1990s highlighted the lack of preparedness. In late 1995 reports reached Sweden of a leak at Ignalina and a few weeks later it was disclosed there had been a fire in the turbine hall. That information of these incidents left Ignalina at all was the direct result of the Swedish contribution, which also included a new policy of inspections and transparency. Soviet military safety policies were thrown overboard and replaced by honest reporting on near-accidents. The aim was to put an end to all the rumours about accidents so a special information centre was opened at the plant manned by staff trained in Sweden.

The programme of measures also included raising the safety levels against sabotage and trespass. The year before, Lithuanian’s most pow-

Next page:

The beautiful surroundings form a stark contrast to the nuclear power plant in Ignalina.

*Photo: Victor Brotti/
Global Reporting*





erful mafia leader had threatened to blow up Ignalina because his son had been sentenced to death. Today the soldier guards have been replaced by the last Swedish contribution in Ignalina before cooperation was phased out in 2003: x-ray equipment.

IT IS INTERNATIONALLY AGREED that the contributions from Sweden and other Western countries have made Ignalina the safest of all the Chernobyl type nuclear power plants. The current safety committee is comparable with its Western counterparts. But has these efforts saved us from experiencing another Chernobyl?

“I don’t know to be honest,” answers Lars-Gunnar Larsson who has worked on safety at Ignalina on behalf of SIP for many years.

“I can only point to the fact that there has not been an accident as yet and it feels good to be able to say that Swedish taxpayers have contributed to the increase in safety at Ignalina.”

With the latter he means that the 400 million coughed up by Swedish taxpayers to avoid having more Swedish land exposed to radioactivity – or something even more catastrophic – was money well spent.

WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR Ignalina having gone from one union – the Soviet – to another – the EU – the situation at the power plant has radically improved, but the EU has passed judgement: the first reactor is to close in 2004 and the second in 2009. The Lithuanian parliament made the formal decision but only after strong pressure from the EU, which the Lithuanians saw as an ultimatum for EU membership. There was great bitterness, but most people seem to accept Ignalina as the ultimate sacrifice for achieving their goal of EU membership. This was evident from the EU referendums where Lithuania had the largest number of yes votes among the candidate countries, 92 per cent. Meanwhile it was clear from the figures that Ignalina had not forgiven the EU; the yes vote in that region was as low as 50 per cent in some places.

From Ignalina’s satellite town Visaginas, buses run a 24-hour service to the power plant, a journey of twenty minutes. The language heard on the buses, as everywhere in Visaginas and Ignalina, is Russian. People are happy here; at least if you believe those you meet. There are

good sport and leisure facilities, beautiful countryside and a strong community spirit. Those who moved here have been able to remain in their Russian cocoons: watch Russian tv, read Russian newspapers and travel to Russia to meet relatives and friends. After Lithuanian independence they were offered the chance to become Lithuanian citizens. Most did but it did not change much. Ignalina was the only workplace in the country where Russian was permitted as the working language.

EU demands and the parliamentary decision to close the plant hit the area like a tornado. In 2001 staff manager Feliksas Markevicius warned for a catastrophe, and not just a social catastrophe for those losing their jobs:

“Specialists are already looking for more secure employment elsewhere,” he says. “This means great safety risks.”

He also warned, although somewhat veiled, that the bitterness of the employees could lead to sabotage. Lars-Gunnar Larsson at SIP warned for the same thing and felt it was important that key people be persuaded to stay during the phasing out period and that maintenance was not ignored.

ACCORDING TO A STUDY commissioned by Sida on the social consequences of closing the plant, 3,500 jobs will be lost when the first reactor is shut down and a further 3,500 with the second. This does not include the jobs that will be lost in the service sector at Visaginas.

“People will flee from here, mostly young people and those with higher education,” predicts Vladimir Dasevskij, who runs a website where the youth of Visaginas chat.

“The most common question on the website is what you have to do to work or study in the West,” he continues. “There is an atmosphere of dejection; nobody thinks they can influence the situation.”

After the decision was made to close the plant, worrying figures began circulating about the increase in drug use among the youth of Visaginas. It felt as though the future had been pulled from under their feet and desperation began to spread. What would happen next?

In the study commissioned by Sida, rapid efforts were recommended to replace the bitterness with a constructive debate on the future of the

area. Sida decided that the final Swedish contribution in the Baltic States would be a programme to alleviate the social consequences of closing the plant.

IT IS MAY 2003. Irina Chodova is sitting in a newly renovated classroom in Visaginas learning to think positively. She is attending a course that will help unemployed women to survive when Ignalina closes. Her husband is a mechanic at the power plant and is destined to lose his job. Irina worked as a programmer until a few years ago when the company folded:

In another classroom in Visaginas sit two 18-year-old girls who challenge the gloomy predictions about the future. Lidija loves Visaginas:

“People think we have two heads and four arms,” she says indignantly. “But the air here is much purer than in many other places and the natural surroundings are fantastic. Everybody is happy here and are not afraid of something going wrong at the power plant!”

She and her friends recently entered a competition that was part of a Swedish project to help young people start their own businesses and did so well they were given the opportunity to travel to Sweden and meet young businesspeople there.

“We arranged a Halloween show,” she says. “Visaginas should hold more festivals to help people believe in a future here!”

FACTS · RADIATION

The Swedish-Lithuanian bilateral cooperation in the area of nuclear power was phased out prior to EU membership and has been replaced by normal neighbouring country cooperation, but Sweden will of course follow events in Ignalina extra carefully. The expertise and knowledge that SIP has acquired during the project will be put to use in a cooperation programme with Russia, which still has eleven Chernobyl type reactors in operation, some at the same distance from Stockholm as Ignalina.

Sida has financed several projects to alleviate the social consequences of the power plant being closed down. One is a project to stimulate young businesspeople implemented by The Swedish Federation of Private Enterprises in partnership with the Lithuanian Ministry of Education. Another is cooperation between Swedish NGOs and organisations in the Ignalina area to help them develop.

The Swedish Radiation Protection Institute (SSI) has also been involved in the setting up of radiation protection agencies in the Baltic States. The aim is to provide the countries with a radiation protection system that complies with international recommendations and EU radiation directives. When the countries became independent, several of the functions carried out by Soviet authorities disappeared along with the radiation expertise that was previously controlled from Moscow. New laws and a new radiation authority was therefore a priority, as was the acute problem of handling sources of radiation and radioactive waste to limit the risk of exposing people and the environment to radiation. The administrative control of the sources of radiation and the handling of radioactive waste was, and still is, a cause for concern.

SSI's contribution to the radiation authorities in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania led to the current radiation laws and the drawing up of directives and methods of inspection.

All three countries now have laws and radiation authorities that carry out inspections and inform the public but there is still a long way to go to come up to Western standards. Cooperation within the area of natural radiation and radon has always been a priority issue in the Baltic States and the countries.

Another important area is radiation protection within healthcare, x-rays in particular, which is the second largest source of radiation after radon. Radiation protection can reduce the radiation that people are exposed to. One method has been to bring together Swedish hospital radiology experts with decision-makers and politicians in the Baltic States. Another contribution is the further education of physicists working within healthcare.



THE DRIVING FORCES OF PROGRESS

Cooperation with the Baltic States is probably the most successful transition process to which Sweden has ever contributed. In less than fifteen years the three countries have gone from top-heavy Soviet rule to a model that in many ways is similar to the Nordic. Contacts grew to a popular movement involving thousands of people. Many of them had never been in contact with traditional forms of development cooperation. The Baltic States opened up their world and many now continue their efforts in other countries and continents.

What is the reason for this great progress? What did cooperation look like during the first years, what were the priorities and what determined the route to take? And more importantly perhaps, what can other countries, development cooperation agencies and organisations learn from the process that has followed the Baltic States from independence to EU membership.

IN SIMPLE TERMS COOPERATION with the Baltic States can be divided into three phases, each with a strong and identifiable driving force: An initial period from 1990 to 1992/93 of acute relief supplies at the same time as the foundation was laid for extensive market economy reforms. Driving force: to leave the Soviet system behind.

A second period from 1992/93 to 1995 focussing on creating institutions, increasing environmental work and social issues. Driving force: to become like the Nordic countries.

A third period from 1995/96 to early 2004, involving adaptation and

*Opposite page:
Developments in the Baltic States went quicker than anyone could have hoped in the early 1990s. The countries chose different paths in some areas but together they formed a strong force for change that would guide the countries towards becoming a part of the new Europe.
Photo: Victor Brött/
Global Reporting*

continued reform prior to EU membership. Swedish support during this period was to a great extent directed at facilitating adaptation to EU directives. Driving force: to become a member of the EU (and Nato) and be integrated with the new Europe.

Cooperation with the Baltic States is now a model for other parts of the former Soviet Union and the Balkans. The crucial difference compared with the contributions of today is that there was no experience of implementing the transition from a state-controlled planned to a market economy at the time. In 1990 when Sweden first became aware that great changes were in progress, nobody knew how the Soviet Union would react. The Berlin Wall had indeed fallen the year before, but there was very little knowledge about the Baltic States.

During the period when independence was being restored, a large group of people with Baltic origin lived in Sweden. According to estimates, about 30,000 Estonians, 4,500 Latvians and 500 Lithuanians settled in Sweden after the end of WW II. Many of them and their offspring came to play a significant role in the cooperation. They were often high up municipal officials or economists, journalists and politicians. Among the most well known were Handelsbanken's former chief economist Rudolf Jalakas and publicist and politician Andres Küng.

Many of the Swedes committed to the Balt's cause, particularly among the elderly, felt a profound guilt for what Sweden had previously done, or had neglected to do. That which most stuck in the throat was the extradition to the Soviet Union of 146 military personnel with Baltic origin in 1946. Another issue was the way in which Sweden handed over Estonian gold reserves deposited in Sweden to the Soviet Union.

"There was every reason for these guilt feelings. The emergence of so many enthusiasts and the will to ratify the wrongs of the past were crucial aspects during the initial years of cooperation. Popular support for the Baltic States came in many shapes and sizes. I remember all the people I met on the car deck of the first ferry, Nord Estonia: local fire brigades, choirs, rural schools, people with fully loaded trailers – enthusiasts," says Lars Grundberg, later to become the first Swedish Ambassador in independent Estonia.

Lars Grundberg was also positive to the way Sweden made up for the

past in the repayment of Estonian gold reserves. The amount was paid in exactly the way the opposite party desired. Sweden acknowledged its debt, both symbolically and morally. The money formed the basis of the country's currency reserve. Another symbolic gesture was the state visit to Estonia by the Swedish royal couple in April 1992, followed by a visit to Latvia later the same year and Lithuania in 1993.

BUT LET US RETRACE our steps a few years in time. In 1988 Lars Grundberg took an administrative post at The Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs after being stationed abroad. Waiting on his desk was a giant pile of visa applications from Soviet citizens, the direct result of Gorbachov lifting travel restrictions. Long queues formed outside Swedish embassies and consulates. Sweden had previously criticised the Soviet for their confinement policy of not allowing people to travel. The Swedish consulates were now suddenly the bottleneck.

"We needed to do something promptly to avoid a political scandal. We finally copied a Finnish concept by opening departmental offices of our Leningrad consulate in Tallinn and Riga," continues Lars Grundberg. The Swedish consulate office in Tallinn opened secretly in July 1989. The issue was not formally raised but Moscow was confidentially informed. Cultural issues had a crucial role from the outset. In January 1991, Hans Lepp arrived in Tallinn as Cultural Attaché. He had a nightmare start: two Swedish trade union leaders had been found dead the same day as he arrived in Estonia.

The consulate in Riga opened in early 1990. In Vilnius this arrangement was never locally approved. A departmental office of the Leningrad Swedish consulate was regarded by the Lithuanian popular front as recognition of Soviet supremacy.

"It was typical of Landsbergis to see the issue in this way. The other countries were more pragmatic and saw more benefits than disadvantages with the arrangement," says Lars Grundberg.

In practice, the consulate offices functioned as "stealth" embassies that had to serve two masters: the dying Soviet power and the budding liberation movement.

In the summer of 1990, Torsten Örn resigned as head of the political

Next page:

Through the liberation of the Baltic States the Baltic became an open sea once again. The work improving the Baltic Sea environment was also something that engaged many people. Swedish support helped build cleansing plants in many towns, among them Daugavpils in Latvia (small picture).

*Photo: Victor Brott/
Global Reporting*





department of The Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. While waiting to take up the post of Ambassador in Bonn, Örn was given the task of looking into future Swedish representation in Eastern Europe and Lars Grundberg became his secretary. For several months they travelled around the Baltic Soviet Republics and the rest of Eastern Europe. A direct consequence of these experiences was Grundberg applying for the post of consul in Tallinn. In late August 1991 he was on the verge of travelling to Leningrad to get his Soviet diplomatic passport when news of the coup in Moscow filtered through.

“I saw our whole shrewd plan go up in smoke but two days later it was back on course and a mighty tug-of-war broke out on who would be the first ambassador in Estonia. For our part it concerned rapidly finding suitable ambassadors for Latvia and Lithuania.”

Sweden was first. Iceland had been first in acknowledging the new independent Estonia, but Lars Grundberg was the first ambassador to take up his position. On August 29 he handed his credentials to Arnold Rüütel, chairman of the Supreme Estonian Council (now interim head of government), in the presence of Sten Andersson, Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs.

THE NOW INDEPENDENT BALTIC States lacked the most elementary of resources required to establish themselves in the world. The first crucial contribution was the SEK 450,000 the Swedish government put at the disposal of each country as national security support. In practice this was petty cash for the embassies. The first support to be paid in Estonia was some Swedish cash to enable newly appointed Minister for Foreign Affairs Lennart Meri (later Estonian president) to buy the air ticket he needed to take part in an international conference in Italy. The new countries' finances were so bad there was not even foreign currency available for hotel and travelling expenses! The enlarged national security support was the first crucial area for Swedish contributions. It also paved the way for extensive military cooperation, taken up elsewhere in this book.

In the autumn of 1991 the social democrats lost the Swedish general election and a centre-right coalition took office with Carl Bildt (Mod-

erate Party) as prime minister. There was no sudden change of policy, but the new prime minister did however take a tight grip on the cooperation with the Baltic States and national security issues.

The Swedish development cooperation agency at the time, The Swedish Agency for International Technical and Economic Cooperation (BITS), was formed in 1979. BITS was chiefly responsible for soft loans in developing countries and Contract-financed Technical Cooperation. This model was based on “technical” cooperation between a party in a developing country and a Swedish party. These parties together planned initiatives that BITS then financed. As well as BITS, there were two other agencies: Sarec (research development) and Swedcorp (trade & industry) working side by side with Sida, responsible for traditional, long-term cooperation with developing countries.

The work culture within BITS differed from that of other cooperation agencies. It was mainly only young people working at the agency. BITS was a place where you worked hard for a few years to gain experience to then go on to other assignments.

BITS had no experience of Eastern European cooperation either when they initiated support to Poland in 1989. The fact that the agency worked very close to a broad circle of Swedish institutions and authorities was one of the reasons it was given responsibility for the Eastern Europe initiative. The flexible working methods developed by BITS in developing countries also played a great part in the responsibility being given to the agency.

Peeter Horm, who has been involved since the first efforts at the time of liberation, sums it up in this way: “Nobody knew how the total transformation of society would be carried out. The principle was “Let a Thousand Flowers Bloom”, which meant we had to utilise the initiative and great commitment that already existed.

ANOTHER REASON WHY THE Eastern Europe cooperation did not end up on Sida’s desk was the fear that the contribution to Eastern Europe would restrict support to Africa. There were even those who felt that it would be humiliating for people from Eastern Europe to be “treated like Africans” so it would be good to separate the two! BITS was heav-

ily questioned during the first years, in particular by Swedish enterprise which wanted to take care of the Baltic States itself.

The distinction between Eastern Europe and Africa also had a certain amount of logic attached as the cooperation with the Baltic States and Poland was much different in nature to that of long-term development cooperation. It was aimed at the short-term transformation of the countries and had a clear element of national security attached.

In 1991, a week before the coup in Moscow, Anders Hedlund was employed at BITS with the Baltic States and Russia as his main area of interest. He had a background as an economist and knowledge of Russian, unusual in development cooperation circles in those days.

“There were piles of project proposals when I began. Everybody thought they should have a role to play, every folk high school wanted to receive Balts. But we mostly said no,” recalls Anders Hedlund nearly fifteen years later.

Most of the Swedish parties who contacted BITS with project proposals had no previous experience of development cooperation and it was far from certain whether they would manage to complete their projects. But it was also important not to act in a way that would kill enthusiasm.

Working methods at BITS were radically different from those at both the old and the new Sida. There were no underlying strategies to build on but there was great flexibility. Many of the contacts began with study visits. People came from the Baltic States, met Swedish authorities and institutions, and got a aha reaction to how to proceed. Back at home they created their own authorities and organisations based on the Swedish model and contributed to changing their country’s laws.

A normal method was to implement the projects in phases. Cooperation began with a smaller project, e.g. a weeklong course in market economy. If it was successful the applicants were given the green light to advance to the next phase, and the next, etc. Put together these phases amounted to a comprehensive project, a simple method requiring little administration.

“The ball was passed quickly, no deep analyses and strategies. We didn’t get involved in implementation, that was the parties’ responsibility. Work was based on trust and being able to show clear results.

Sometimes there was never a second phase. All that was weak disappeared and something else emerged,” says Anders Hedlund.

Each country had a “gatekeeper”, often somebody in the country’s ministry of finance, who reviewed the project. A prerequisite for implementing the project was that the proposal be accepted by the recipient country and clear areas of responsibility drawn up. According to Anders Hedlund the model would probably have been difficult to implement in larger or more corrupt countries. The Nordic region was a model the Baltic States clearly wanted to learn from. This created a strong driving force and motivation for change. It was essential for the Baltic States to feel they owned the process. The work was all about finding forms to illustrate this. It was also important to get the Swedish and Baltic parties to take formal responsibility for the process, even if they were often supported by consultants.

“There were no theories on the transition from planned to market economy and no experience to build upon. It was like trying to run a process backwards – we had fish soup but no way of getting it into the aquarium! Flexibility was a necessity, we were aware that developments were characterised by great variability, we couldn’t assess what would happen next,” continues Anders Hedlund.

All projects were based on cost-sharing. The Swedish party provided the knowledge while the cooperation partner over the Baltic Sea answered for the cost of premises.

UNLIKE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IT was clear to see that work in the Baltic States was for a limited period. Already at an early stage those working in the Baltic States realised something that is today obvious for most people in developing countries, namely that system restructuring is more important than financial flows. Sweden was quicker to realise this than most others. It was not until around 1995 that institution building was the motto of all donors.

There was however one area in the Swedish-Baltic cooperation that clearly deviated from the above model, namely the environment. Environmental cooperation was directed at long-term sustainable improvement of the problems involving the Baltic Sea. This was also the only

Next page:

Since 1995/96, EU membership has been the focus point for the Baltic States. Many EU-financed projects have been implemented during recent years. Afris Dumpnieks is director of the EU-financed treatment plant in Liepaya, Latvia, that removes iron from the water (large picture). The Baltic States have now begun creating their own development cooperation agencies.

Andris Sekacis and Zane Ivanova were the first two workers at the agency at the time of this interview.

Photo: Mats Widén





area with large Swedish financial investments.

The environmental movement had been a driving force for liberation so environmental issues were given a prominent place in the cooperation after independence. The Helsinki Commission for a better environment – HELCOM (read more in the chapter on the environment) was the first international forum in which representatives from the countries took part under their own flags. This gave the project a special priority. Environmental issues also gave the countries a foundation to stand on in their international work. The first water and wastewater project was the first organised cooperation between the Baltic States and the West with joint financing. The project was largely based on previous experience from project financing and joint financing between BITS and other players including The World Bank. As a pioneer project they appropriated a relatively large part of the countries' resources. One could go as far as to say that a disproportionate sum of money went to environmental contributions during the first five years. In the meantime there were very few projects at that time that had such a clear reform character about them. The water and wastewater project had a clear vision and the international community was ready to offer its support. It was also clear to see how the project influenced legislation, or rather shunted it along. Or as Lars Grundberg puts it:

“I have nothing but respect for BITS and later Sida East for following their professional conviction in the environmental project, even if it meant not always gaining PR advantages.” When other interested parties with financial means built a sewage treatment plant on the Estonian island Dagö, a great deal was made out of the fact it could be done in six months while Sida required several years. But it is clear today that the Dagö project forgot how the treatment plant could make revenue and continue to operate in the long term. What Sida did was to create integrated projects where everything was included.

MOST PEOPLE ARE IN agreement about the environmental project being a success. One reason is that it was part of a regional cooperation programme with political unity and a high level of commitment between the countries. Environmental work in the Baltic States now serves as a

model for the initiatives around Lake Victoria in East African. Another crucial difference between the cooperation with the Baltic States and that with Asia and Africa is that it was clearly specified that the Swedish resource base would be used for the Baltic contributions. Swedish funds put aside for the Baltic were tied to dealings with Swedish consultants and supplies from Swedish companies. According to Lars Eklund, who has worked on the Swedish water and wastewater project since the early 1990s, this restraint had both advantages and disadvantages.

“For the Swedish approach to make grounds it was vital for the consultants who were hired to share the same approach. The result would probably have been different if we had used international consultants. So it was a clear advantage working with Swedish companies. Assignments also developed step by step in a dialogue with the consultants so continuity was also important. The situation is different with regard equipment. One of the aims was to develop our neighbouring country relationship where trade and industry played an important part,” continues Lars Eklund.

IN 1995 THE “NEW” Sida was formed, which BITS became a part of. The Head of The Eastern Europe Department was Staffan Herrström, formerly liberal party state secretary of the government coordination group. Staffan Herrström was also a Sida board member and possessed what many at the then “old” Sida lacked – experience of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. At the time Sweden once again had a social democratic government with Pierre Schori as development cooperation minister.

“I was raised in an environment where development assistance went without saying – partly I think because my parents were active within the church. This is why I find it difficult to see development cooperation issues through politically tinted glasses. The spirit of the time changes, in the 1970s many believed in planned economic solutions, we now know this leads nowhere. In 1989–90 many were afraid that the money going to Eastern Europe would be at the expense of Africa, nobody could then visualise the acute needs in countries like Moldavia, or what would happen in the Balkans. It was therefore a step forward

when the Eastern European cooperation received its own budget in 1992. Just as natural as it is today, now that the Baltic cooperation is being phased out, to put the two separate parts into the same budget,” explains Staffan Herrström.

Sida East was in many respects built around the experiences of the BITS period. Integration of Eastern Europe into Sida activities was a great opportunity to develop working methods. Many were curious about the work of Sida East, but there were also those who were sceptical. Some sector expert might for instance wonder what East people were doing on “their” territory. Sida East has gradually got closer to other parts of Sida, although Staffan Herrström thinks there has been too little exchange. What has Sida East learnt from other parts of Sida? The importance of field representation is such an issue, says Staffan Herrström. In the Baltic States this was not so important, but in Ukraine, Moldavia and other countries this need is clear to see:

“Sida possesses a broad knowledge of methodology that we could benefit greatly from. They have expert knowledge of nearly all subject areas. There is otherwise a risk that things we do are not properly focussed and based on proper analyses. If there is a negative aspect of the things we have done within Sida East then it is that we tend to be a little disjointed and short-term. It might have been better with larger projects spanning over several years. But it was natural that contributions in the Baltic States were short-term in their nature.”

IT WAS NOT UNTIL the government bill on Eastern Europe in 1995 that the social issues really came into focus in the cooperation with the Baltic States. But to conclude from this that it was wrong to place so much emphasis on market-economic reforms during the first years is incorrect according to Staffan Herrström:

“There wasn’t, and still isn’t, any clash between market and social contributions. Social work requires a functioning market system. The social consequences of the transition could have been even more severe if the transition from a planned to a market economy had not been implemented as resolutely as it was.”

One reason the work began so late was the belief among many that

Soviet society had, despite everything, managed social issues reasonably well.

“The Baltic States had been socialist so that sector should exist and function well, we thought. The needs were not visible. What they needed, we thought, was market economy and democracy. What could we with our heavy taxation system be able to teach them? This way of thinking blocked us and meant we couldn’t see that the large institutions were not resources but actually problems and an obstacle for progress,” explains Anders Hedlund. It was not until 1994/95 that BITS and later Sida took the initiative in the social field. A departure from the principle of cooperation having to be demand-driven.

“We therewith began a process that created a demand on what Sweden had to offer. This work was later very successful,” continues Anders Hedlund.

Something completely new compared with previous development cooperation was the role that Swedish local authorities came to play in the development of the Baltic States. Municipal cooperation, which aimed at transferring knowledge and strengthening local democracy in the countries, is an area where the Swedish-Baltic knowledge has become significant throughout the world.

“I remember the first times I visited a Swedish embassy as representative for The Swedish Association of Local Authorities : “What are you doing here?” Was one of the things I was often asked. Today the entire donor community has turned everything on its head and there is great pressure to bring about decentralisation. During my last years at the Swedish Association of Local Authorities, The World Bank paid us a visit to learn from us, by 1991 they were laughing at us. It was probably only BITS that had sufficient foresight to see the opportunities,” says Steinar Langbakk, former information manager at the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and one of the initiators of the Baltic Sea project in the early 1990s.

Decentralisation and strong self-esteem – also in Sweden – was another result of the cooperation. Local authorities suddenly became important, regional centres began emerging, roads opened for the new regional cooperation.

“One of our arguments for cooperation was that it gave local authority officials the opportunity to develop themselves. People listened to them and admired what they had achieved. They set a good example, which was very beneficial, at the same time as they put off dismissing people as long as possible during the economic depression of the time,” continues Steinar Langbakk.

IN 1995 MARIANNE TEGMAN started working with the Baltic States at the new Sida and in 1999 became departmental head. She had previously worked at the Nordic Development Fund in Helsinki. At the turn of 2003 when this interview took place she was employed at the Swedish Embassy in Laos, something that gives her the opportunity of comparing two in many ways different working methods:

“The close proximity to Sweden was of course very important and provided completely different conditions for cooperation than between Sweden and say countries in Southeast Asia. Other great differences included the high level of education and a clear ambition to carry out reforms in the Baltic States. In Laos one could probably refer to an economic transformation. In the Baltic States, both a political and economic transformation was on the agenda,” she says.

Marianne Tegman entered the Baltic State cooperation during the third phase, preparations for EU integration.

“We should not underestimate the fact that future EU membership provided a strong driving force and clear development objectives. It would be difficult to find similar objectives in other countries or regions.”

Meanwhile she would like to have seen more coordination between the various players in the Baltic States. There should have been more contributions in the shape of programmes and not just small ad hoc -projects. Many contributions would also have benefited from a better analysis of the requirements. Coordination of donors did not function particularly well in the Baltic States. The EU could have had a stronger role and supported the countries. We would then have gained in efficiency.

One reason for the greater success of privatisation in the Baltic States

than in many other places is that the countries knew what they wanted, which enabled them to formulate their needs very clearly.”

One area with less success according to Marianne Tegman was in introducing gender equality as a natural part of the contributions:

“I think this is partly due to us at Sida finding it difficult to formulate our directives for the Swedish parties. Our guidelines have improved throughout the years, but we have failed in our ability to provide clear directives for how they should work.”

Which experiences from the Baltic States do you find most beneficial today?

“Having taken part in the Baltic developments is in itself a very good experience. I have witnessed close at hand the significance of political will. Flexibility and breadth is something that I miss here in Laos. We are progressing towards a more demand-oriented cooperation in other parts of the world but it takes time. Here it is all about large contributions that take years to prepare as opposed to the Baltic States where we began on a very small scale and tested our way forward. Everything didn’t need to be in the shape of a large project, there were also small strategic contributions with simpler aims,” she continues.

The Baltic State initiative has also provided Swedish consulates and authorities with crucial experience. In Laos for instance the dependency on external experts is greater than was the case in the Baltic States.

“It’s about finding the right balance so that the long-term experts don’t take over. That risk didn’t exist in the Baltic States because there were no long-term experts,” explains Marianne Tegman.

As members of the EU the Baltic States will now contribute to the union’s development cooperation. This is a new and unusual role for the three countries having themselves been recipients. At the same time, the model used in the Baltic States has provided a good foundation for a philosophy that places the transfer of knowledge and the creation of institutions in main focus. Many Swedish consultants, organisations and authorities together with their Baltic cooperation partners have already carried out projects in other former Soviet republics. This is something that will be further developed, according to Andris

Sekacis, one of (at time of writing) two employees at Latvia's equivalent to Sida:

"Our greatest advantage is the experience we have from the region and that we have ourselves gone through the process other countries now face. We also know Russian, which is a prerequisite for working in many countries in our close proximity," he says.

At the first phase Latvia will contribute with money to the UN system and will also create a three-party cooperation. The guidelines adopted prior to EU membership specify that Latvia's development cooperation initiatives must focus on former Soviet republics and the Balkans. One example is the three-party cooperation initiated between Latvia, the Canadian development cooperation agency CIDA and Ukraine for reforming public administration. Latvian officials have held lectures in Ukraine and Ukrainians have made study and work experience visits to authorities in Latvia.

COOPERATION IN THE BALTIC States is different in many ways from that in Africa and Asia. At the beginning it lacked coordinated country programmes, it was clearly connected to the Swedish resource base, there were no extensive programmes, decisions were made for each individual contribution. It has, in addition, been very successful.

Is it then possible to conclude that other development cooperation projects should to a large extent be based on the Baltic model? No, says Staffan Herrström. The situation in the Baltic States was unique and cannot be copied:

"Some emphasise the differences between the Baltic States and Africa and Asia, I tone them down. What we had in the Baltic States was geographical proximity. Swedish society mobilised itself, Sida did not need to sit in the driver's seat, which we have to do in Russia and Ukraine. The education level was high, providing a great resource. The positive feeling towards EU integration also created favourable pressure and contributed to a strong will to reform. The close bond with Swedish resources has been greater than in other countries but I don't think this was a decisive factor in itself.

Meanwhile, I would never have believed that it would go so quickly.

It's nice to get it wrong from that perspective for once!" says Staffan Herrström.

The Baltic States had clear objectives for what they wanted to achieve. It is perhaps this vision and strong driving force that is lacking in so many other countries. But not all visions need to be of benefit. Staffan Herrström says the planned economy of the 1970s in many developing countries was based on a model that proved insufficient.

An equivalent to developments in the Baltic States is now seen in the Balkans where future EU integration is a strong driving force for those countries. A Croat can travel to Estonia and feel at home in many ways, but it is more difficult to bring together Estonia and Mozambique. But perhaps better functioning regional cooperation in Africa could provide that positive vision.

The decisive factor, he argues, is not development cooperation in itself but the countries' own efforts. The EU map is changing continuously. It is important that all European countries are regarded as a part of Europe.

"From Täby where I live to the Charles XII monument in Varnitsa, Belarus, the trip takes no longer than seven hours. It is vital that we continuously develop our image of what Europe is and include the rest of Europe in that image. I believe that if the EU hadn't existed when the Berlin Wall fell, we would have had to invent something similar," says Staffan Herrström.

Anders Hedlund also sees the strong national driving forces for integration with the rest of Europe as one of the reasons for success:

"There were relatively few mistakes made during development cooperation with the Baltic States. One reason is that there were no powers struggling to retain the old system. Everybody was looking for something new. If you compare developments in Estonia with Moldavia the significance of neighbouring countries willing to help is clear to see.

Peeter Horm is just as enthusiastic: "I think the Baltic States will take a Spanish or Irish route within the EU, not a Greek. The countries' politicians want to achieve a high standard of living as quickly as possible – and I think they have all the hallmarks for success!

The Baltic States' struggle for liberation in the late 1980s led to a unique commitment in Sweden. From the initial relief work grew a broad cooperation that involved large parts of Swedish society. This important piece of modern history is portrayed in A Sea of Changes – Cooperation Between the Baltic States and Sweden. In articles, flashbacks, portraits and facts we meet many of the people involved.

Halving poverty by 2015 is one of the greatest challenges of our time, requiring cooperation and sustainability. The partner countries are responsible for their own development. Sida provides resources and develops knowledge and expertise, making the world a richer place.



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