

The Joint Baltic Course of Intellectual Activity: A Relevant Subject for Discussion

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Abstract: *The main concept of this presentation could be formulated in a simple phrase: in the global stage local events are neither noticed nor significant. But the results of common local initiatives have a chance to put them in a conspicuous position. There is some reason to maintain that the three Baltic states have a tie with their common two hundred years of experience of forced inclusion in the Russian Empire, and with the independence experience between the two world wars. In the present circumstances, the Baltic joint aspirations would clarify the local regional cultural uniqueness and the Baltic geopolitical significance within the European historical context. The author of presentation deals with the Baltic history of science in the 20th century and onwards by incorporating there the context of political and historical events. After discussing the factual material he suggests two conclusions intended for the first time to the national institutions of the history of science.*

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The historical experience of the three Baltic countries was shaped by the geography and by the changing geopolitical interests of their neighbors. From the declarations of independence in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia (1917–1918) up to the beginning of the Second World War their development exhibited many common traits. That period saw a successful development of the Baltic states' academic and scientific communities which through international ties with the West fostered modernization (Krikštopaitis, 1996). Taking one with another there is a reason to proclaim at the meetings of the Baltic historians of science that in the global stage local events are neither noticed nor significant. This is important for the three Baltic states because their joint aspirations would clarify

the local regional Baltic cultural uniqueness as well as the Baltic geopolitical significance within the European historical context.

Now it is time to contemplate this subject and think ahead on the program of joint intellectual activity. By the way, the choice of a joint course of action with Finland's and other Nordic countries' participation would save Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania from enclosing themselves in their individual cultural and historical circle. Today, such individual activity of locality seems as though a manifestation of pseudo-states with a pretense of real independence.

We know that the three small Baltic states have already lost their full autonomy and have become completely dependent on powerful financial, energy, and political forces that manipulate their independence and political existence. In case somebody wonders why it would be worthwhile to bring in Finland, I would say that the Baltic societies have a tie with the shared two hundred years of experience of forced inclusion in the Russian Empire, and with the independence experience between the two world wars. This total unifying experience becomes clear whenever Baltic scientists interact with Finnish intellectuals. But with the other Scandinavians any such discussion becomes a source of misunderstandings because they did not have the same hurtful experiences in the relations with Russia during the 19th and 20th centuries. In many cases, I privately satisfy myself with this fact by discussing about the historical and political experiences of the Baltic countries with Scandinavian colleagues.

In the Baltic local arena, nearly suffocated by the global information network, lurk unexpected cultural or social breakthroughs stimulated by acts of individual creativity and willful decisions. The results of many investigations confirmed that strong local culture and unique historical experience is the source of unexpected ideas and inventions (Gellner, 1993; Kavolis, 1984; Krikštopaitis & Makariūnas, 2001, pp. 58–60; Lévy-Strauss, 1952). Creative breakthrough in a small state has little chance of becoming an event in a wider world. But in a joint group of small nations, such as the eastern Baltic seaboard, an intellectual breakthrough has greater potential of becoming global or at least on the European scale a significant and meaningful event.

In evaluating the social, economic and political situation in the Baltic countries which has developed in the last decade, the authors (Krikštopaitis & Makariūnas, 2001; Kavolis, 1984) have to recognize that Baltic societies are experiencing dramatic changes. Industry and agriculture, being unable to adjust to free markets are brought to their knees. Obsolete technology and crumbling hopes of investments deepen the economic and financial degradation. The matters related

to science and studies, engulfed by endless reforms, are also quite poor. The public having suffered the loss of past values found itself at a new crossroads of choices. After having generalized the local situation in the Baltic countries, let us look at it in a broader context (Bauman, 1988; Friedman, 1995).

The Baltic society, imbedded in its own troubles, was befallen by two expanding world-wide tendencies: *globalization* on the one side and *localization* (autonomous state) on the other. These tendencies present a challenge particularly relevant to small states that have had economic difficulties. Here, a decisive role will be played out through the selection of a suitable strategy and through its careful evaluation. In concatenation of the named situation it is imperative to note: whichever exaltation of the selected direction is dangerous as any other extreme measure is capable of unbalancing the society.

Globalization tendency emerging from the rapid development of information and other high technologies embraces all aspects of activity. In this path of growing civilization the states that have not created a strong foundation for production, economic and political activities will succumb to the onslaught of aggressive bidders and influence (Hobsbawn, 1997, pp. 77–80). Small states will become peripheral pools that perform service and utility functions. Globalization which proceeds along with a cosmopolitan mentality is not conducive to nationally, historically and ethnically oriented consciousness. Here one has to keep in mind that the sphere of Western mentality (particularly in the Anglo-Saxon culture) nationalist concepts are bonded with chauvinism and separatism. In the Baltic countries – because of their specific historical experience – named concepts are distinctly separate: nationalism is connected here with ethnic culture which is understood as a source of stability and strength nourishing the defense mechanisms of the nation (Krikštopaitis, 1996). Fifty years of Soviet rule only strengthened this consciousness.

The second tendency – *localization* – emerges as a search by nation states to independently manage and authentically identify them in the diversified culture of Europe. Localized tendencies emerge as expressions of independent life, as a seeking for autonomy. When considering this alternative tendency to globalization, one has to keep in mind that new ideas, theories, and projects are born as creative acts by talented individuals, i.e. the new creation appears as an autonomous act, locally and personally defined. Later the results of the local phenomenon, having suffered the trials and having spread out further, become a universal value.

Anyway, localization as well as globalization have another side of the phenomenon: there appears a danger to close oneself in peripheral needs and “eternal” convictions,

in circles of mythological icons which eventually pushes the society toward the periphery of civilization, thus forming a non-self-reliant – totally dependent on external forces – pseudo state, analogous to an ethnic group that preserves dependence on pleasure industries and human charities. The tendency toward this extreme is one of the courses of the present failures of the Baltics. By saying so I have in mind the past decades: after recreating independence, the three Baltic States took distance from each other. Therefore each of their post-Soviet history developed locally. Seeking an ambitious autonomic expression the three states established their own structures of statehood. Ignoring the common experience of the past century – its rich historical value – they did not create a common economic policy or communication and defense systems. They showed no desire to conduct joint science and research projects, saw no reason to coordinate their activities and to prepare a common strategy for joint actions and activity. (There is one exception: the founding of the Baltic Association of the History and Philosophy of Science during the collapse of the totalitarian system is a splendid example of the Baltic alliance of scientists). The local super-isolationism, thrown in with uncritical opening up to the West, prevented the narrow locales to convert into useful regional co-operation, i.e. a unique alliance of the three Baltic states which would have been useful and interesting for geopolitics to the West, North and the East directions.

While speaking about this it ought to be remembered that before the Second World War an attempt was made to organize Baltic conferences on intellectual cooperation (Kaunas, in 1935). This initiative was again revived a decade ago (Rīga, in 1999). In addition, after the collapse of the Soviet system various initiatives appeared, urging structural unification of the Baltic countries (Stradiņš & Cēbere, 1998). Some are worthy of mention. These are cooperative events, such as meetings of prominent scientists, researchers of the Baltic Sea, joint conferences of chemists and a whole line of other worthy overtures. It must be recognized that cooperative initiatives by scientists began in the wake of universal euphoria resulting from the liberation of the Baltic societies. This is probably why part of these creditable enterprises became just formal events, polite visits and matters of publicity. However, out of this proactive mélange several perspective areas became clear, testifying that the Baltic countries irreversibly became integrated into the European Union. These were the strengthening of independent integration into EU research programs, expansion of active exchange of programs for young researchers along with other steps taken by Baltic science that are being noticed in Europe.

Having stated these propositions and remarks, one can begin to ask for a middle way between the global and the local with a promise for a better outcome.

Today it is still complicated to form a useful concrete scenario for action and for living. However, one can offer a few strategically promising priorities toward which the society of small states could orient itself desiring to preserve its own character and still become an equally worthy partner in the activities with global associations. The author of the article suggested three short titles of priorities: 1) intellectual potential, 2) information and high technologies, 3) institutions of science, research and education.

It follows that the named reasoning would be worthy of organized discussion of the learned communities consolidated by the Baltic Association of the History of Science. I guess the first step on the way of joint activity could be the creation of the common Baltic history of science. Writing and publishing such a history in English could be an important contribution to the European history of science as well as a momentous point for international cooperation of historians.

By stating so I base my statement not only on the affinity of the experience of our three states but also on common actions by our historians of science in the last fifty years. This statement is supported by some obvious facts: in the year 2010 we marked the 20th year from the establishment of the Baltic Association of History and Philosophy of Science which was accepted to The International Union of History and Philosophy of Science in 1993. This event did not appear in a vacuum. It emerged from the accumulation of mutual Baltic experience. Here I will mention only two significant results from this common Baltic experience:

1. In 1950, a research team for investigation in the history of science and technology was organized in Lithuania (Matulaitytė, 2001, p. 127). In the meantime the Latvian and Estonian historians of science began the fast expansion of their activities;
2. In 1958, the three Baltic States began conferences of the history of science, which rotated throughout their scientific centers every three years (Stradiņš, 2010). After 52 years this forum of the Baltic historians of science, the 24th International Baltic Conference on the History of Science was organized in 2010 in Tallinn.

These two outcomes of the Baltic scientific experience have not only initiated research into natural sciences, technology and medical history, but also opened up the possibilities to regularly organize international Baltic conferences as well as enabled us to participate in European and world-wide congresses. Every one of the representatives from three Baltic countries has an accumulated intellectual capital (articles, studies, books and dissertations). The named experience is the resource that can be the vehicle for a joint history of science that would reflect

intellectual achievement developed in the unique, social and cultural Baltic environment. Broader discussion on the problem of scientific experience and its application demand a special study on the subject. In place of it the author suggests for publication a short review of Lithuanian experience only.

During the last fifty years more than 3,000 scientific articles and essays on the history of science and technology have been announced, and approximately 400 books, dedicated entirely to history and philosophy of science or very closely related to this thematics, have been published. Multivolume universal encyclopedias and encyclopedias for various fields, manuals and dictionaries containing historical texts have also been published. (Certainly, Estonian and Latvian scientists can claim similar or likely even better results). Now it is worth suggesting a few more thoughts explaining the methods used for raising the qualification of historians of science which has stimulated the growth of such publications.

The Lithuanian Association of the History and Philosophy of Science conducted seminars each month, during which concrete subjects and results of ongoing research were discussed, evaluations of prepared articles and publications made, and also preliminary reflections of dissertations conducted. However, after the collapse of the Soviet system twenty years ago and the re-establishment of Lithuania's state-related functions, the society submerged into a stream of new worries. It became apparent that current times required new methods for the historian's activities. The association has abandoned regular seminars. In their place, two-day conferences *Scientia et historia* were organized for historians and philosophers of science. The best of the texts prepared for the yearly forum are recommended for scientific publication.

Somewhat more difficult is to achieve success in resolving the issues of participating in international conferences and world congresses. Here the fundamental factors standing in the way are limited means of support (financing) and insufficient knowledge of foreign languages. One should hope that the new generation will overcome these prevailing impediments. Unfortunately, there is a decrease in people interested in delving deeper into history of science. The young people are tempted into more profitable things. The Lithuanian community of scientists and educators intend that there will be some positive changes in value orientation.

The outcomes of suggested deliberations:

- First, the historians of science of the three Baltic countries are prepared for a joint intellectual activity. That could consist of not only a publication of the common Baltic history of science but also the results of united efforts of other forms.

- Second, the historical heritage of the past becomes a set of values when each epoch and each generation evaluate, analyze and rethink anew its accumulated experiences. Rethought and expressed in current terms, meaningful values become valuable guidelines useful for problem solving today and at the same time serve as a good projection of possible future courses of common activity.

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