

Thomas Lundén

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## **The dream of a Balto-Scandian Federation: Sweden and the independent Baltic States 1918-1940 in geography and politics**

This paper will focus on the attempts by Swedish and Baltic geographers in the inter-war period to discuss a geopolitical regionalism defined by Sweden, Finland and the three Baltic States, and the political use of the so called Balto-Scandian concept<sup>1</sup>.

### **Introduction**

For a long time in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Baltic region, or Baltikum<sup>2</sup>, here defined as the area south of the Gulf of Finland and east of the Baltic Sea, was more or less a white spot on the mental map of Swedish politicians and social scientists alike. The “inventor” of geopolitics, political scientist and conservative politician Rudolf Kjellén, urged for Swedish cultural and economic activism towards the Baltic part of Tsarist Russia (Marklund, 2014, 195-199, see also Kuldkepp, 2014, 126), but the program was never implemented, and the break-up of the Russian Empire and the new geopolitical situation, as well as Kjellén’s death in 1922, with a few exceptions put a new end to Swedish academic interests in the contemporary geopolitical situation of the area.

From Eastern Baltic point of view, any super-state regionalism with Norden<sup>3</sup> was primarily connected with Estonia, in combination with Sweden (Kuldkepp 2010, 49, 2015). Sweden and Estonia thus played a special role in the Baltic discussion about regionalism. The independence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in 1919-1920 gave Sweden a geopolitical buffer to the neighboring great powers Russia/Soviet Union and Germany, which were initially weakened and politically unstable. But as pointed out by Wilhelm Carlgren (1993, also Jaanson 2001, 273 and Kuldkepp, 2010, 53), Swedish foreign policy towards the three Baltic states was passive, even reluctant. Kangeris makes a distinction: In the period 1918/9-25 Sweden was the leading actor in relations to the three newly independent Baltic states, which had no political co-ordination. From 1925 to 1934 the three states searched for contacts with a (reluctant) Sweden and Finland, and from 1933/34 Sweden’s policy towards the three states were directed towards keeping them neutral (Kangeris 1988, 187).

Kangeris (1988, 190f) summarizes the Swedish deliberations in 1919 as follows:

- A rejection of all participation in a Baltic confederation
- Caution with political standpoints and commitments
- Consideration of German standpoints
- Emphasis on Russian standpoints

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<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to docent dr. Eric De Geer, Uppsala for information about his father Sten De Geer, and to Prof. Dr. Saulis Pivovas, Kaunas, for information on Swedish –Lithuanian relations in the inter-war period.

<sup>2</sup> The Swedish word Baltikum or Balticum (also used in German) stands for the spatial area of the Baltic states without clear delimitation, sometimes (but not here) including the Russian exclave ‘oblast’ of Kaliningrad and, earlier, German East Prussia. It will be used untranslated in this paper. See the discussion in *Hur nordiskt är Baltikum? och Svensk kultur sedd utifrån*, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Norden is defined as the five independent states; Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland including their autonomous territories. See the discussion by Isachsen p 13 in *A Geography of Norden*, 1960, and in *Hur nordiskt är Baltikum? och Svensk kultur sedd utifrån*, 2007.

- Finland's exceptional position in relation to Sweden
- Consideration of the interests of national minorities
- Sweden's economic interests in the new states

The Swedish lack of interest in the Baltic States was particularly regretted in Estonia. Per Wieselgren, professor of Swedish at Tartu 1930-1941, in his book referred to this, accounting an anecdote by which prime minister (1917-20) Nils Edén, Liberal, responded to the demands by an Estonian delegation begging for Swedish help with building a legal system with Swedish help and appointing Swedish jurists at the Tartu University Law Faculty, by saying "Dass interessiert uns nicht" [that is of no interest to us] (Wieselgren, 1942, 9). The recent monography on Edén does not mention the Baltic area with one exception: A speech by Edén on March 2<sup>nd</sup> 1919 where he mentions that "an important right-wing journal had, apparently influenced by great power traditions, demanded an active involvement in the Baltic countries" (Oredsson 2017, 261). The wording seems to indicate a repudiation of this demand. That early Baltic demands for help with building a modern legal system was rejected by Sweden is further mentioned in an article in *Svensk Tidskrift* from October 1939 (Håstad, 1939, 538).<sup>4</sup>

Edén's rather self-willed minister for naval defense, social democrat Erik Palmstierna, in his diary from 1918 notes several visits by Estonia's Jaan Tõnisson, representative of the not yet recognized Estonian independence, first to a Nordic interparlamentarian meeting in Copenhagen, noting September 6<sup>th</sup>: "interesting that the Estonians search contact with Norden...Finland, Estonia and Livonia [sic] will be free and a market will open through Estonia towards Asia (Palmstierna 1953, 200). A few days (Sept 22) later Tõnisson asks for Swedish help with communication with his compatriots, and with Swedish troop to secure the upcoming elections. Palmstierna and Edén conclude that this cannot be done because it requires acceptance from both sides in the war, which is impossible because of Germany's resistance (Palmstierna 1953, 208). On October 14 Tõnisson asks for Swedish help, "but we have to be reserved", but if the League of Nations under construction may ask us, Denmark and Norway to "safeguard the sake of civilization in Balticum it would be difficult to reject" (Palmstierna 1953, 221). On November 2<sup>nd</sup> Palmstierna notes that the Estonian question was debated for long yesterday [in Government]. "Edén was against any intervention. His historical sense tells him that we shall not start anew a Baltic policy of bygone days. If it starts with Estonia, the action will easily slide along the coast, southwards." If the League of Nations asks for charges of order, we might obey, but parliament will never accept a military troop, probably consensus about instructors (Palmstierna 1953, 230).

While Finland recognized Estonia on June 7 1920 shortly after the Tartu Peace Treaty of February 2<sup>nd</sup>, Sweden and Norway waited until February 4 next year to recognize Estonia and Latvia. Sweden recognized Lithuania *de jure* on September 28, 1921 (Motuzas 2011, 133, 647)<sup>5</sup>. A Swedish Legation was established in Tallinn but already in 1922 it was moved to Riga in order to include Lithuania in its responsibility.

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<sup>4</sup> The article is signed E.H. Elis Håstad was editor in chief 1936-1949.

<sup>5</sup> "The Swedish government was first contacted for the recognition on 22 October 1918. This was done by a member of the Council of Lithuania M. Yčas, but the application has not been formalised. Sometime later, in the end of November 1918, the Lithuanian representative in Berlin J. Šaulys asked for recognition through the Swedish envoy in Berlin. Historiography does not provide information on when exactly he applied to Norway,

The Swedish envoy to the Baltic States from 1921 (Kaunas from 1922), Torsten Undén, first reported on the Memel issue with a positive interest in a referendum to the benefit of the ethnic Lithuanian population, but the Lithuanian geopolitics in the area eventually caused a Swedish resentment (Pivoras, 2000).

A *chargé d'affaires* was installed in Tallinn in 1930 but subordinated to the legation in Riga. On August 9<sup>th</sup> 1940 the Estonian Foreign Ministry, under Soviet pressure, informed that the Estonian missions abroad had ceased and consequently the Swedish representations had to be closed in all Baltic States, soon to be annexed to the Soviet Union (Carlgren 1993, 50, von Sydow, 1988, 49-52). A similar message was received by the Swedish mission in Kaunas on August 10<sup>th</sup> (Motuzas 2011, 400 f, 652).

### **The “Baltic Entente” in Swedish politics: A one man’s work**

The only politician to urge for closer ties to the Baltic states was the (1903-30) mayor of Stockholm, Carl Lindhagen<sup>6</sup> (Lehmann 1960, Lundqvist 1995<sup>7</sup>) who both around 1920 and 1934 in Parliament advocated a closer cooperation with the area, in 1934 as a counter-force to an increasingly aggressive Germany (Rämmer 2016, 50-51; Kuldkepp, 2010, 50-60; Jaanson 2001, 275, mistakenly referring to him as Lindgren).

Lindhagen devotes six pages in his extensive memoirs to” *Den baltiska ententen. Finland, Estland, Lettland, Litauen, Vilna*” [The Baltic entente. Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Vilna] (Lindhagen 1939, 377-383). Representing Stockholm as its mayor, Lindhagen secretly met representatives of these “rim states” in St. Petersburg in 1903 at the celebration of its 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Evidently these contacts led to a meeting in Stockholm October 12<sup>th</sup>, 1915 with J. Gabrys, M. Yčas and St. Šilingas<sup>8</sup> (Lindhagen 1939, 377-383). In October 1915, together with Estonian Aleksander Kesküla<sup>9</sup>, Gabrys traveled to Stockholm to

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however, the dates of de facto recognition by Sweden and Norway have been recorded. Sweden was the first country that recognized Lithuania de facto. The note of the envoy in Berlin is dated on 12 December 1918, when Lithuania actually did not yet become a state”. (Motuzas, 647, Lietuvos Respublikos Saemas: The state of Lithuania placing itself on the international stage in 1918–1924.)

<sup>6</sup> Carl Lindhagen (1860-1946), was a jurist and politician, member of the Stockholm City Council 1903-1941) member of Parliament second chamber 1897-1917 and first chamber (1919-40) as a Liberal until 1907, turning Social Democrat in 1909, joining the leftist break-out in 1917 but returning in 1923. He was the most active Member of Parliament in terms of motions, active concerning human rights and the right of law.

<sup>7</sup> Lehmann (1896-1980, Danish cultural and industrial historian), in his almost hagiographical booklet on Lindhagen, in passing mentions Lindhagen as being the first in Sweden to urge the country to pay attention to the small Baltic lands (p. 58) and his wish that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to be included among the Nordic countries (p. 76). Lundqvist describes Lindhagen’s ideological orientation and its development but does not cover his internationalist ideas. The booklet has however a valuable list of his enormous amount of parliamentary bills, including almost 10 covering Swedish relations to the Baltic States and Poland (see Appendix).

<sup>8</sup> Juozas Gabrys or Juozas Gabrys-Paršaitis (1880, Russian Empire –1951, Switzerland) was a Lithuanian politician and diplomat, best remembered for his efforts to popularize the idea of Lithuania's independence in the West during World War I. Secretary of the Union of Nationalities in 1918 and author of books and maps on nationalities. Martynas Yčas (1885, Russian Empire -1941, Rio de Janeiro), member of Russian Duma 1912-1917, minister and active in Lithuanian delegation at Paris Peace Conference 1919 and border negotiations with Latvia 1921. Stasys Šilingas (1885 –1962) was a prominent lawyer and statesman in interwar Lithuania, detained in Siberia 1941-1953.

<sup>9</sup> Aleksander Kesküla, (1882 Estonia, Russian Empire – 1963, Madrid) Estonian nationalist, enthusiast for Baltic-Swedish cooperation and possible agent, founder of the Estonian Office in Stockholm 1918 but discarded

meet with Martynas Yčas, member of the Russian State Duma, and Stasys Šilingas, an employee of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs. Keskūla wanted to persuade Yčas to resign from the Duma in support for Germany. Yčas wanted to organize a much broader Lithuanian conference with representatives from Lithuanian activists living in Lithuania, Russia, Western Europe, and United States and was disappointed that only Gabrys could attend. Jonas Aukštuolis and Ignas Šeinius<sup>10</sup> also attended the meeting. The meeting, self-declared the First Lithuanian conference, did not adopt a political statement. Nevertheless, the men established a war refugee relief organization, the Swedish–Lithuanian Aid Committee (Lithuanian: *Švedų-lietuvių šelpimo komitetas*), with Carl Lindhagen, mayor of Stockholm, appointed chairman, Verner Söderberg, editor of *Stockholms Dagblad*, secretary, and Lithuanian Jonas Aukštuolis manager (Misiūnas 2004, 76, Motuzas, 646). Two further meetings were held in Stockholm October 18–22, 1917 and January 3–6, 1918 (Motuzas 2011, 62-74).

A Swedish-Lithuanian committee was founded and further meetings were held in 1916 and 1917. In January of 1918 Lindhagen met Estonian representatives in the custody of the German Finland army in Eckerö, Åland islands. When the Baltic States declared their independence, and sought recognition, Lindhagen in Parliament interpellated the foreign minister, but the Government “did not dare” until “Paris and London” made the decision. When this happened, Lithuania was excluded because of Polish complaints about the Vilna case, and Sweden followed the example. At a celebration in Stockholm Lindhagen suggested a “popular declaration of recognition of Lithuania” but finally the Paris and London government gave recognitions, and Sweden followed (Lindhagen 1939, 378).

At a conference in Helsinki in 1919 the Baltic foreign ministers approached the Scandinavian foreign ministers for cooperation but were met with rejection. Lindhagen made a new interpellation urging for cooperation with no avail. In the following ten years Lindhagen made seven parliamentary bills concerning relations with the East Baltic States. Lindhagen continued with two more bills in 1933-34, one about the Vilna question, one about “cooperation between small states, especially between Scandinavians and the Balts” (Bill 1:200). The Parliament Standing Committee on the Constitution wrote that there are possibilities, but resolved that it is up to the King in Council (Kungl.Majt.) to implement. Minister of Foreign Affairs Rickard Sandler “who had communicated with the Committee was of the opinion that I ought to be satisfied”. Thus no real results, but the bill was given much attention in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

In the summer of 1934 Lindhagen traveled privately through the Baltic States and was received by officials, visiting also Memel (Klaipėda) and Dünaburg (Daugavpils). By special permission he was allowed to cross the Lithuanian-Polish border, visiting Wilno and seeing representatives of the Jewish and Belarusian population (Lindhagen 1939, 381-83).

## **De Geer’s regionalization of Baltoscandia**

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by the official Estonian delegation. See Mart Kuldkepp: Hegemony and liberation in World War I, *Ajalooline Ajakiri*, 2015, 3 (153), p. 257f.

<sup>10</sup> Ignas Jurkunas Šeinius (in Sweden Scheynius) (1889 Russian Empire -1959, Sweden) came to Sweden in 1915 and became the first ambassador of Lithuania in Stockholm, Helsinki and Copenhagen. He returned to Lithuania in 1926 but at the annexation by the Soviet Union in 1940 he returned to Sweden.

A scientific attempt to define a Balto-Scandinavian region based on natural and cultural indicators was made by the Swedish geographer Sten De Geer (1886-1933) in 1928 in the *Journal Geografiska Annaler*<sup>11</sup>. His rather haphazard selection of indicators resulted in a core area including Scandinavia, Finland, Estonia and Latvia (see e.g. Kuldkepp, 2010, 46). Starting from the Finnish geologist W. Ramsay's concept of Fennoscandia (comprising Norway, Sweden, Finland, Soviet Karelia and the Kola peninsula) based on ancient bedrock morphology, he underlined that both other physical as well as socio-cultural aspects show different spatial distributions. There is a well-known difficulty in defining the outer limits of a distribution, some features show a slowly declining intensity, e.g. many biogeographical features that reflect an Atlantic or inner Eurasian influence.

De Geer chose nine indicators of a possible Balto-Scandian regional homogeneity, four of a physical and the remainder of a socio-cultural character. While most of the physical indicators are of little direct cultural influence, they in a historical context define conditions for livelihood and subsistence. His socio-cultural indicators are from a geopolitical point of view more interesting and partly also questionable, particularly nr. 5 "The core area of the Nordic race" p. 127- 129, is partly based on a study by the later infamous race biologist Herman Lundborg and F.J. Linders. The indications are based on body length, eye color and head form. De Geer indicates on a map the distribution of the "Nordic race or the Nordic race mixture" (p.129). The delineation is vague, the "Finns and Estonians are no more Mongolian, but the Lapps [Sámi] are". Even if this indicator is, by modern standards, totally senseless, there is no indication of any derogatory racism. The next indicator is "The two Fennoscandian language areas (p. 129-130) where the difference between the North Germanic and Fenno-Ugric languages are not taken as a regional boundary, as "the cultural border is rather to the east", but the region is still divided into two sub-regions. De Geer also discusses the role of the Baltic languages, Latvian and Lithuanian, but with some hesitation he does not include them within the regional delimitation. As to the distribution of the Protestant religion he maintains that religion was earlier a more important cultural indication than language. The delineation is quite clear, with Latvia divided in the middle towards Catholicism and the easternmost part of Finland marked as Orthodox (map 4). The present (1928) political division into states is also marked on map 4, where Estonia and Latvia belongs to an eastern sub-division with Finland. The final indication is "The maximal extension of the two Nordic states (Denmark and Sweden) during 1000 years" (p 133-135) where the time under the supremacy of one of these states is indicated on map 5. The only area really questioned is Kurland (Kurzeme, southern Latvia) which during 1660-1720 was at times under Swedish dominance. At the end of the article De Geer tries a synthesis, cartographically depicted on map 6 (p.136). The result is, not surprisingly, the area covered by the states of Norden, plus Estonia and Latvia, while Lithuania and the southeastern coast of

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<sup>11</sup> Sten De Geer received his PhD in (physical) geography 1911 and was appointed docent in geography at Uppsala University the same year, and became teacher at Stockholm University College in 1912, the same year his article *Storstäderna vid Östersjön* [The cities at the Baltic Sea], (see Lundén et al. 2012) was published, based on research and visits to the Baltic cities. In 1929 he was appointed professor of "geography with mercantile geography and ethnography" at the Göteborg University College. He had a vast field of contacts with influences from US social ecology and European geography, including Estonia, Latvia and Finland (Eric De Geer, 1997-99)

the Baltic Sea is only covered by physical indicators. In the remaining part of the paper De Geer mentions other types of Nordic influences further south and east.

While De Geer is cautious about geopolitical or other conclusions, his study is more important as a sign of genuine interest in the Baltic relation than as a scientific study. In his vast correspondence (e.g. 122 letters with Germany), Estonia accounted for 4, all with Tartu including one from Edgar Kant, and 3 with Riga plus 11 with a Swedish geographer Jonatan Grufman (1893-1964) making regional studies in Latvia (Eric De Geer, 1997-99, 9). Grufman wrote one article on the regional geography of Estonia in 1923, referring to Sten De Geer as his teacher and the SSAG, Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography as grantee of a scholarship (Grufman 1923, 452) and one on Latvia's nature in an anthology (Grufman 1935. Sten De Geer's main contribution concerning Sweden's southeastern neighbors is perhaps the naming of the concept of Baltoscandia<sup>12</sup>, and, by a link of personal contacts, the intellectual transfer of Kant's social geography back to Sweden after World War II.

### **The spread and extension of the Baltoscandian concept**

De Geer's spatial concept was used by Lindhagen and others in advocating closer relations to Sweden's eastern neighbors. The Lithuanian professor Kazys Pakštas soon took up De Geer's findings but sought to include his own country into the region as a Baltoscandian Confederation, evidently in lectures in 1934 later written in a pamphlet (Pakštas 1942/1994, Misiūnas 2005, 21), (see note 14), actually an idea already put forward by the Estonian president of the Land council, (Maanõukogu), Jaan Tõnisson, in 1917 (Jaanson, 2001, 268; Jansson, 2011, 114-115). In his 1942 paper Pakštas comments on De Geer's exclusion of Lithuania and adds that the county's recent maritime development and northern location will qualify to consider it a "Northern State" (Pakštas 1942, 8-9). Pakštas visited the Sweden in the summer of 1933 and Scandinavian countries in 1934, and gave two lectures in Stockholm. According to Misiūnas he gave the lectures on "Lithuania in the Baltoscandian family of nations" at "Sweden's Higher School of Commerce and a geographer's meeting" (Misiūnas 2005, 20). In the minutes of the SSAG of February 16<sup>th</sup> 1934, he was awarded the Andrée Medal.<sup>13</sup> In a letter in Swedish to SSAG of March 28, 1934, the Dean of the Mathematical-

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<sup>12</sup> Sten De Geer's idea of Baltoskandia was mentioned by Swedish Estonian writer and geographer Andres Küng in 2002 (2002: 240)

<sup>13</sup> In the machine-typed minutes of the board §10, this is stated, with a hand-written continuation, evidently written by the secretary, Hans W:son Ahlmann; stating *med anledning av hans föredrag i Stockholm den 20 febr.* [approx.: brought about by his lecture in Stockholm on February 20<sup>th</sup>]. The medal, initiated in 1905, was given to prominent lecturers at SSAG meetings but there is no mention of a SSAG meeting on that day. In *Ymer*, the Society's journal, p. 154 is written that the Board of SSAG at its meeting on February 16<sup>th</sup>, has awarded Prof. Pakštas the medal. According to prof. Saulis Pivotas, he gave two lectures, on February 16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, organized by the Swedish-Lithuanian Society. In Pakštas pamphlet of 1942 it is said in the Preface that the material was taken "from lectures given before geographical societies and universities in Stockholm, Oslo, Copenhagen, Tallinn and other Baltic and Scandinavian cities in 1934". Pakštas was president of the Lithuanian-Swedish Society 1933-1938 and promoted the establishment of a lectureship in Swedish at Vytautas Magnus University (Pivotas e-mail July 21<sup>st</sup> 2018, Svenska Dagbladet December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1934.) Pakštas was mentioned in Lithuanian history when he in 1938 was summoned by the police for being mentioned as a rival candidate to the

Natural Science Faculty of Vytauto Didžiojo Universitetas in Kaunas, Prof. Z. Žemaitis, mentions the occasion and the awarding of the medal, the increased interest from Swedish scientific institutions and the mutual visits of professors.<sup>14</sup>

The Estonian geographer Edgar Kant referred to De Geer's (cited de Geer) study of the Baltic Cities and other articles in his thesis of 1926 about the urban geography of Tartu, and one copy of the book has the library stamp of the Göteborg Handelshögskola, which indicates a contact (p.47)<sup>15</sup>. Kant supported Pakštas' ideas (Rämmer 2015, 120; Kuldkepp 2010, 65; Buttimer 1994). In his book on the population and living space of Estonia, "an anthropoecological contribution to the knowledge of Baltskandia" (Kant 1935a), Kant devotes a long and partly critical scrutiny of De Geer's indicators, especially his map of the Scandinavian historical legacy of the area, "which particularly in the Southeastern sector of Baltoscandia, through later societal-political designs have in so many relations been subdued" (Kant 1935a, 7).<sup>16</sup> He also criticizes De Geer's map of the political-geographical division of the area (De Geer, 1928, 31). That Kant had a contact with De Geer and his ideas is evident from Kant's booklet *Estland och Baltoskandia*, published in Swedish in 1935 (Kant 1935 b), which is dedicated to the memory of the deceased De Geer. (Kant even visited De Geer's widow and young son Eric in Stockholm<sup>17</sup>). In this book he states that "in spite of these critical parentheses, one has to recognize that the delimitation of Northern Europe made by De Geer is the most acceptable (Kant 1935b, 85).<sup>18</sup> He also refers to Rudolf Kjellén's point that Sweden's capital is situated in the middle of Baltoskandia, "dem Ostseegedanken angepasst" (Kant 1935b, 99, referring to Kjellén's 2nd edition in German 1917). He would later translate this book into Estonian (see e.g. Lundén, forthcoming).

Kant's close relation to Sten De Geer is also confirmed by Professor Olavi Granö, son of Johannes Gabriel Granö, the first professor of geography in independent Estonia who calls Kant "Sten De Geer's confederate" (Granö, 2009, 2). As for direct contacts between Lindhagen and De Geer, there are no references, but taking into consideration Lindhagen's position as mayor of Stockholm the important position of the De Geer family (and particularly Sten De Geer's scientific work on the urban geography of Stockholm) it is evident that they were in personal contact.

## A late geopolitical interest from Sweden

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authoritarian president Smetonas at the latter's "re-election" (Senn, 2007, 208.) His biography is sketched by Misiūnas 2005.

<sup>14</sup> In Pakštas 1942, he is mentioned on the title page as receiver of the SSAG medal and also as Knight of the Order of Vasa by HM the King of Sweden, 1939. This is evidently the *Vasatecknet* bestowed to foreign nationals for their merits to Sweden. In 1935 the same Order was given to *Paulins Žaltauskas, fd kanslichef vid Vytautasmuseet i Kaunas*. [Paulins Žaltauskas, former head of division, Vytautas Museum in Kaunas].

<sup>15</sup> Edg. Kant: *Tartu Linn kui ümbris ja organism*. Tartu 1926. The reference is to De Geer, *Storstäderna vid Östersjön, Ymer* 1912, 41-87. The reference to organism seems to refer to Rudolf Kjellén but there is no indication in this book. However, in his booklet *Estland och Baltoskandia*, mentioned above, he refers to Kjellén's *Der Staat als Lebensform* 1917 citing (p.99) his ideas about a Sweden with or without a Baltic influence. Kant in 1940 wrote an introduction to the Estonian version of Kjellén's *Staten som livsform* (1916).

<sup>16</sup> ...auch besonders im Südostsektor Baltoskandias durch spätere gemeinschaftlich-politische Gestaltungen in so mancher Beziehung verschleierte.

<sup>17</sup> Personal communication by Eric De Geer (born 1927) on May 28, 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Trots dessa kritiska parenteser måste man emellertid erkänna, att den av Sten De Geer företagna avgränsningen och definitionen av Nordeuropa är den hittills antagbaraste.

Rickard Sandler (1884-1964), foreign minister (1932-39), academic geographer, “showed a clearly greater interest in political contacts with Baltikum than his predecessors. He evidently wanted on a long term establish some sort of connection between the Nordic group of states and the Baltic one. This was also a Baltic interest. But great power politics crushed such ideas.” (Carlgren 1993, 38).

Sandler made an official visit to the three states in 1937 and was met with warmth and good publicity (Möller, 1990: 324). Before the journey, Professor Adolf Schück of Stockholm University College and the Baltic Committee informed Sigurd Curman, the King’s Custodian of Antiquities (Riksantikvarie), about important persons to meet (and others not to meet), after which Curman in turn, in a formal but hand-written letter passed on the information to Sandler<sup>19</sup>. In Kaunas he met Lithuania’s dictatorial president Antanas Smetona and among others, Kazys Pakštas (Motuzas, 2011, 344-345). There were rumors in Nazi Germany that Sandler, with the help of Great Britain, would try to form a Baltic-Scandinavian group of neutral countries in competition with Poland, but these were only German speculations (Möller, 1990: 324). His social democratic colleague Sven Backlund, initiator of and teacher at the Nordic school for adult education in Geneva, envisaged a group of regions of small states in Europe, but he separated two northern blocs of states, divided by the Baltic Sea (Leppänen 2011, 642).

### **Social, economic and academic contacts**

In spite of these fruitless theoretical and political attempts to create a Scandinavian – Baltic region there were of course economic, cultural and educational contacts and exchanges. Swedish-Baltic economic exchange peaked around 1929 but then dwindled due to recession and to an increasing economic protectionism and from 1934, authoritarianism. Towards the end of 1930 the amount of Swedish tourism to Estonia (and to a lesser extent, to Latvia), based on the beaches and the bathing resorts, also peaked, but the decline was motivated also by political and cultural arguments (Jansson, 2011). Attempts to formalize a regional cultural cooperation met with limited interest from Sweden. A committee for cultural contacts with the Baltic states was founded in 1931 by a group of professors at the University College of Stockholm, organizing exchange, courses and a Baltic conference for historians in Riga in 1937 with presence of important Stockholm academics and arranged from Riga by the lecturer in Swedish language and history (1928-36) Harry Wallin (Bolin 2012, 283; Loit 1988, 80). Two rather distinguished Swedish officials attended the Tartu conference in 1936, a planned meeting in Stockholm of the cultural conference was cancelled but at the Baltic Conference on Intellectual Cooperation) held in Riga the same year there were some Swedish delegates (Rämmer 2015, 122, 133).

Adolf Schück, historian and secretary at the Baltic Institute of the Stockholm University College, in an interview in 1937 with an Estonian academic journal underlined that a status quo in the Baltic area would be in Swedish interest and determine a future cooperation between the Baltic States and Sweden (Kuldkepp 2010, 61).

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<sup>19</sup> Curman’s archive, copied and transmitted by prof. Saulis Pivotas.

At Tartu University a number of Swedish professors were appointed. Philologist Johan Bergman was professor until 1923 but worked as politician in the Swedish Parliament to create a chair in Swedish language and literature at Tartu (see below). Archaeologist Birger Nerman was professor at Tartu University 1923-25, and made field excavations in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the early 1930's studying early contacts with Gotland and Sweden. Other Tartu professors were Andreas Bjerre in penal law until 1925, Helge Kjellin 1921-24 in art history (at Riga 1929-31), followed by Sten Karling as Tartu professor of art history 1933-1941 with an important study on the building history of the baroque fortress town of Narva in Estonia. In 1928 the Swedish Parliament decided to finance a professors' chair in the Swedish language at Tartu University. Per Wieselgren held the chair from 1929 until the German take-over in 1941 (Karling 1988, 55-59; Sveriges Riksdag 1990, Wieselgren 1942).

The Latvian University recruited some Swedish academics, usually men with rather weak merits (Bolin 2012, 253), but also including the (rather controversial) physical anthropologist and anatomy professor Gaston Backman (1920-26). There were strong contacts in archeology and ethnology with professors Birger Nerman and Sigurd Erixon, (who both contributed to the anthology 1935 at the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Swedish –Latvian Association) and one of the history scholars from 1937, Edgars Dunsdorfs, even studied at Stockholms Högskola (Bolin 2012, 279).

Kaunas University introduced courses in Swedish in 1932, and a lectureship in 1935. The lecturer, Knut Olof Falk in November 1936 wrote a memorandum concerning the Swedish cultural propaganda in Baltikum (Falk, 1936) where he indicated that the lectureships in Riga and Kaunas were implemented on Swedish initiative, mainly from the Baltic Committee, but with increasing interest from the Swedish state, but the question of remuneration had not been effectively solved (Falk 1936, 3).

Courses in the Baltic languages and Estonian were introduced at Stockholm University in 1939 and kept during the World War with its influx of Baltic refugees, but were discontinued in 1950, probably because the Cold War and the containment of the Soviet Union made contacts with the Soviet Baltic republics virtually impossible. Some teaching of Estonian was kept at the Departments of Finno-Ugric languages of the main universities. The publication *Svio-Estonica* issued at Tartu continued from Lund in 1943 and 1948-71 with contributions by exiled Estonians (Karling, 1988, 60; Jansson 2014, 119).

## Conclusions

In the period between the two World Wars, the Swedish interest in the three Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, was generally extremely limited, whereas from the other side, Sweden was seen as a geopolitically inactive power and consequently a possible support and ally against the two greater neighbors, Soviet Union and Germany. Culturally and academically, a few interested persons mainly related to Stockholm and its University College tried to keep contacts with the Baltic States, and especially Tartu University received a limited number of Swedish scholars. Lithuania, squeezed between the Soviet Union, Germany and Poland, tried to cultivate academic contacts with Sweden, while Latvia seems to have had little contacts with Sweden except for a limited number of academics working at the

university. The Swedish academic interest in Latvia was almost entirely confined to Stockholm University College, with particular emphasis in archaeology, ethnology and history related to earlier Swedish influences (Bolin 2012, 283). While often based on glorifying Swedish history, these contributions seem to have had no geopolitical aspirations. De Geer's ideas and their Estonian and Lithuanian interpretations met with little interest in Sweden and Denmark <sup>20</sup>.

The most active Swedes working for direct contacts and a sense of regional communality across the Baltic Sea was Stockholm's mayor Carl Lindhagen, geography professor Sten De Geer and foreign minister Rickard Sandler, himself an academic geographer. Lindhagen and Sandler were obviously in contact as members of Parliament and of the Social Democratic Party. De Geer and Lindhagen were both involved in the development of Stockholm, while De Geer and Sandler were both members of the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography. Sten De Geer's early death put an end to a relationship with Estonian geographer Edgar Kant, later to become vice-chancellor of Tartu University and later as a refugee in Sweden, making impetus for the modernization of social geography. The Swedish academic contacts with Latvia were weaker and mainly confined to a Swedish interest in the history and pre-history in the area. In the case of Lithuania, Lindhagen's interest, Sandler's visit and the efforts by Kazys Pakštas and later Ignas Šeinius/Scheynius created some important contacts in spite of a lack of "natural proximity" but perhaps explicable by the vulnerable geopolitical situation of the country.

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<sup>20</sup> A review by (later professor) Gerd Enequist review of Kant's *Bevölkerung und Lebensraum Estlands* in *Ymer* 1936, repeated in English in *Geografiska Annaler* Vol. 18 (1936), is positive but does not mention the concepts of Baltoskandia or even Lebensraum. The Danish geographer and geopolitical commentator professor Gudmund Hatt had a low evaluation of Nordic or Baltic co-operation and saw the inter-war period of the Baltic Sea region as a triangular imbalance of "English", "Russian" and German influences, at the expense of the smaller states (Hatt, 1941).

1936. The same review in English in *Geografiska Annaler* Vol. 18 (1936), pp. 218-219.
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## Appendix

Carl Lindhagen: *Motioner* (from Lundqvist, 1995) AK: Second chamber, FK: First chamber.

AK 1914B:214. Ang. befordrande av vänskapliga förbindelser mellan Sverige och Ryssland.

FK: 1920: 142. Främjande av skandinaviskt och baltiskt samarbete i lagstiftningsfrågor m. m.

1922:90. En fristående svensk, eventuellt nordisk, baltisk, eller samfällt småstatlig avrustning.

1923: 146. Initiativ för att nationernas självbestämmanderätt antas som internationell lag.

1925: 170. Nationernas självbestämmanderätt som en internationell rättsfråga.

1932:280. Reglering av undertryckta folks självbestämmanderätt genom internationell lag.

1933:200. överenskommelse mellan staterna runt Östersjön om gemensam självförsörjning.

1933:201. Lösning av tvisten mellan Litauen och Polen om Vilnaområdet.

1933:202. Legationssekreterarens i Riga förflyttning i Kovno i Litauen.

1933 :203. Internationella politikens sysslande med ofredens djupliggande orsaker.

1933:204. Hävdande av nationaliteternas i alla världsdelar självbestämmanderätt.

1933:209. Det paneuropeiska problemet.

1934:274. Samverkan mellan mindre stater, särskilt mellan baltar och skandinaver.

1935:228. Inrättande av en permanent representation för Sverige uti Kovno i Litauen.

1936:3. Nordens framträdande med ny utrikespolitik.

1936:4. Betyggande av Freden i Östersjön genom överenskommelser med Tyskland.

1937.189. En Sveriges och Nordens fredsplan för en varaktig fred.

1937:219. Ytterligare motiveringar till motion n:r 189 om Sveriges och Nordens fredsplan.

1938: 2 13. Nordisk samverkan för bildandet av ett Nordens fredsförbund.

1938:214. Granskning av kraven på ett Nordens försvarsförbund.

1939:49. Om vissa europeiska minoriteters rätt.

1939: 192. Alla nationers självbestämmanderätt.

1940: 127. Återställande av ett fritt polsktalande Polen.