

Mare Nostrum Nordicum: The 1992 Tampere Conference

For an American whose training was in French and Italian history, the center of European history is "*mare nostrum*," the Mediterranean Sea. The International Society for History Didactics' conference in September, 1992, in Tampere, Finland, put European history in an entirely new perspective. Suddenly, the maps on the walls of the conference room and the papers themselves gave view to a northern "*mare nostrum*," the Baltic Sea, which connects such great entrepôts as Copenhagen, Stockholm, Helsinki, St. Petersburg, Tallinn, Riga, Gdansk (Danzig), and Lübeck. Of course, I remembered the late-medieval and early modern trading forum, the Hansa, which intersected with the Mediterranean trading world at such places as Southampton and Amsterdam. Still, here was the *mare nostrum nordicum* in its present and not-always-happy form.

The papers and discussions at the conference were all well delivered and received by colleagues eager to share individual and national perspectives. It would be amiss to summarize each paper. The purpose of this article is to give one American perspective on these papers and discussions. The points made here are, as suggested above, very individual and formed by the realization that there is another, northern, trading and intellectual world which should capture the attention of all Americans on the eve of the twenty-first century. This attention ought to be reflected in the teaching of modern western civilization and world history courses offered both at the high-school and college levels in the United States. This is the case because important world-historical changes are occurring in this region, the outcomes of which are not yet at all certain. I will try to discuss these changes in a point-by-point way.

1. Although the intellectual discussions that occurred at the 1992 Tampere conference included colleagues from all the Scandinavian states (Denmark, Finland,

Norway, and Sweden) and although these colleagues construed themselves as part of some kind of a larger Baltic "confederation," it became clear during the discussions that a real economic and historical division separated them from their eastern European and former Soviet-dominated colleagues. Again, this division does not exist on the level of discussion or friendship. It exists on a historical and teaching level. The Scandinavian states belong to two alliances at once: the larger Baltic region and the Nordic League. The first includes formerly Soviet dominated states, the latter, consistently free states.

This division creates a difference in the teaching of history. The former Soviet and Warsaw-Pact states allowed the public teaching and writing of history according to only one format, i.e., Marxist-Leninist history. The collapse of the Soviet Union and its communist satellites has freed the teaching of history and the perspective on the present and past. But, for several reasons, this has not spelled historiographical equality with the Scandinavian and other Western states. (My comments here do not mean that the West has no ideology. It does, but it does allow a greater latitude and variety in the viewing of the present and the past.)

2. Baltic historians themselves recognize that the teaching and study of history has been liberated from Soviet domination. One historian has characterized this change as "Clio without chains." However, our discussions showed that the results of this liberation have not been immediately happy. As several colleagues pointed out, history teachers are not yet been trained to teach a non-Marxist, freed history. Unhappily, some previously orthodox and employed history teachers now find themselves unorthodox and unemployed. (This situation was already discussed last year at our meeting in Berlin.) They know the old "truths" and are not yet trained in new methodologies or historiographies. It's a mixed situation. Our colleagues from the former East Germany and the former Soviet Union were particularly poignant on this issue.

3. Related to this point is the report that Russians living in now free states cannot learn their "own" history. While "melting-pot" theory might argue that in a generation or so ethnic instabilities in the newly liberated states ought to "take care" of this problem, this American attendant was not left with a sense that these ethnic differences would be quickly or easily healed. They are fraught with political and not just educational differences and memories.

4. Another political problem seems to be internally though not ethnically generated. The results of political liberation in eastern Europe have left a situation in which "who really rules" is still unclear. History teachers and researchers do not want to abandon the old verities too quickly, as they admitted that it is not at all clear who really rules and what history will be permitted to be written. If the wrong individuals or side come to power, then a too hasty change of historical perspective could prove very dangerous. This observer found this situation very troublesome and its discussion by our colleague from Poland extremely moving.

5. If teachers were well trained, if ethnic problems did not persist, and if the ultimate "captains" of the states were now clearly known, there still remains the problem of textbooks. Clearly, none of the eastern European states has the textual wherewithal to teach their students the new history. This problem will eventually be solved but not in the short run.

Therefore, the Baltic region, what I have called *Mare Nostrum Nordicum*, has two main kinds of problems. The first results from the lack of unity with the western region caused by the Scandinavians' lack of historical oneness with the eastern section. The other is caused by the eastern Baltic's difficulty in simply "catching up" in the teaching of non-Marxist-Leninist history. One is reminded of the divisions between the western and eastern Mediterranean. The latter's divisions were never healed historically except epherally through conquest. This approach will not occur now in the Baltic region. Therefore, we are left with the passage of

time which may heal all things. Thus, there is hope for history teaching in the Baltic region.

Edward A. Gosselin
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APPENDIX

I have collected, with the aid of my friend, Professor Toivo U. Raun at Indiana University, a selected bibliography of works in English on Baltic history. I present it here in simple alphabetical order in the hope that it will be of use to my colleagues in the International Society for History Didactic as they re-create the study and teaching of Baltic history in their own lands. This list could be augmented by bibliographies of books in the various other European languages.

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