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**INNOVATIVE EDUCATION
IN THE BALTIC REGION:
THE EXPERIENCE
OF THE FINNISH-RUSSIAN
CROSS-BORDER UNIVERSITY**



The article defines the innovative features of teaching international relations in the Baltic Sea Region at the graduate level, taking as an example the double degree program in international relations of the Finnish-Russian Cross-Border University, set up by the St. Petersburg State University and the University of Tampere the article also evaluates specific features of other similar programs taught in universities around the Baltic Sea.

Key words: higher education, graduate studies, innovative teaching, international relations, Baltic Sea Region, Finnish-Russian Cross-Border University, St. Petersburg State University, University of Tampere.

The Baltic Sea region is a relatively new area of research on international relations. During the "cold war" it was usually mentioned in the context of the earth's plate movements and atmospheric fronts. Neither in the international politics, nor in research, or in the classrooms of higher education institutions, was the Baltic Sea region spoken of as an element of international politics. Politicians started speaking about the Baltic Sea region only in the early 1990s. And in 1992, the Council of Baltic Sea States, the first international organization for the Baltic region, was established. It was actively supported by Russian politicians at the federal level and those from St. Petersburg — the deputies of the Leningrad-Petersburg City Council [5, c. 74]. Some of them are now teaching a course on international relations in the Baltic region at St. Petersburg University. At the same time the first research papers on international relations in the Baltic region appeared, one of the first works was a collective monograph, edited by P. Joenniemi [7].

Lecture courses on international relations in the Baltic region were introduced to university curricula. The first educational program on the subject was launched at Uppsala University (Sweden) in 1994 in the form of a distance learning course "Peoples of the Baltic Sea". This course is aimed at undergraduate level students who study law, economics, social sciences and the humanities in the countries with economies in transition. In the future it was planned to create complete educational programs at both undergraduate and graduate at the University of Uppsala, but these plans were never implemented. Distance learning course "Baltic peoples" included seven major sections: general features of the history of the Baltic and Nordic countries, military security in the Baltic Sea region, the economy of the Baltic and Nordic countries, the demographic situation in the Baltic and Nordic countries, languages and culture of the peoples of the Baltic and Nordic countries, the policy of the Baltic and Nordic countries, and prospects for the Baltic region.

Today, video lectures included in this distance learning course can be found in the library at Uppsala University [16], as well as in the libraries of

other universities; students, including students of St. Petersburg University, can have a distant access to them. During this course the students learn that in the early 1990 the Baltic Sea region was a group of countries and regions, which differed from each other a lot in their religion, languages and culture. It was assumed that these differences would remain in the region. It is these differences that would build high competitiveness of the Baltic region in the future world politics. In addition, the countries and regions around the Baltic Sea differed from each other in their political systems, economic level, their basic vision of the threats to the region's security and ways to overcome them.

In the early 1990s, it was assumed that, in contrast to the religious, cultural and language differences, political and economic dissimilarities, as well as the different vision of the region's security would smooth out soon. And due to this fact the Baltic Sea region would become a single political and economic space, enjoying collective security, rather than remaining an arbitrarily selected group of countries and regions. The main way of smoothing economic differences was seen in deepening economic cooperation, the foundation of which was to be a common interest expressed in the region to cargo transit from west to east (mainly manufactured goods) and from east to west (mostly raw materials). Thus, it was assumed that these transit routes were to become the engine of economic harmonization in the Baltic region. In the 1990s, the importance of developing the cargo transit was mentioned in research papers, lectures and teaching materials of St. Petersburg University lecturers [3, c. 84].

In the political sphere in general and the security issue in particular, the solution was seen in the democratization of all countries in the Baltic region. It was assumed that in Poland, which embarked on the path of democratization after the "Round Table" in 1989, and the newly independent states like Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Russia that emerged after the demise of the Soviet Union, the democratization process would be quick and painless. The process of democratization was closely connected to the region's security, i. e. to the idea of liberal peace, according to which democracies do not attack each other. Thus, if the solution to the economic problems of the region was seen in the cargo transit, then the transit of democracy was the solution to political problems.

However, this did not happen. The global financial crisis which began in 2008, once again revealed the differences in the economic systems and levels of economic development between the states of the Baltic region and even between regions within them. Some Baltic countries are still in doubts about the outcome of democratization in Russia, others have a dubious opinion about the results of democratization in Estonia and Latvia, where large segments of the resident population do not have the right to vote. Finally, some Baltic states are still considering other countries of the region as the primary threat to their national security [13].

In 2003, professors of the Faculty of International Relations of St. Petersburg University launched a new Master's program — "Baltic and Nordic studies". It was quite obvious that the model offered in 1994 by Swedish researchers, was obsolete. Accordingly, there was a need to formulate a new model of the development for the Baltic Sea region. The analysis of similar

master's degree programs, run at universities of the Baltic cities, suggested that at the beginning of the decade there were at least two models.

According to the first model, the Baltic region should pay attention to three important aspects [2, c. 223]. Firstly, the disparity between western and eastern parts of the region is preserved, but it gives a special dynamism to the region's development. It is not characteristic of many other regions of the world. In other words, the Baltic region is a region where the energy of the East (energy — both literally and figuratively speaking) meets western experience. Secondly, the Baltic region is one of the few regions in the world which emerged at the time of globalization of the 1990s. And this "new" region, to a much greater extent than the "old" ones, would benefit from the liberalization of international trade and economic relations, which is the foundation of globalization. Thirdly, the Baltic region is ahead of many other regions of the world in terms of information technologies.

Information technologies are actively being developed not only in the private sector, but also in public services, and the state plays an active role in this development. This trend is reflected in the curriculum of the Master's program — it includes a course "Information Society in the Baltic and Nordic countries." Following the internationalization principle of the program, study materials for this course were published in the English language [14].

The second development model for the Baltic Sea region, which appeared at the beginning of this decade, is related to the then emerging "Northern Dimension concept", which at that time was one of the policies of the European Union. Russia actively debated the issue of the basic principles of this policy as well as the question to which extent they met Russia's interests. The "Northern Dimension" represented the Baltic Sea region as possessing three basic characteristics, but they, unlike in the previous model, were not seen as its advantages or disadvantages, but rather as specific challenges that the region could respond only by joint effort [2, c. 170]. Firstly, the climate of the Baltic Sea region limited opportunities for the economic development of its countries and regions. Secondly, the Baltic region is quite an extended area, and there are vast territories which are not densely populated (compared to many other regions of the world). Thirdly, the environment of the Baltic region is more vulnerable compared to other areas of the world.

These challenges predetermined priorities for cooperation in the Baltic region, including the basic policies of the "Northern Dimension" — the energy policy, population policy, transport infrastructure development and the environmental policy. Each of these areas required a specific approach. There have been attempts to link achievements in the energy sector with advances in transport infrastructure development that took place in the European Union in the past. But they have demonstrated their ineffectiveness. Similarly, did attempts to impose on Russia the EU vision of energy and environmental problems fail, when the EU wanted to get some concessions in the field of environmental protection in exchange for concessions in the energy sector.

This understanding of the challenges that the Baltic region faced resulted in the Master's program curriculum "Baltic and Nordic studies". The program

attracted the interest of both students and international partners of the St. Petersburg University. This fact entailed a new joint master's program one year later (in 2004), with a dual degree from the University of Tampere (Finland). The joint program was elaborated on the initiative of the Ministries of Education of Russia and Finland to establish a cross-border Russian-Finnish university. Currently there are double degree programs, and the first of its alumni — former students of the University of St. Petersburg — received both Russian and Finnish MA degrees. The innovative curriculum of the joint program is unique. Its preparation was done jointly by Russian and Finnish researchers and university lecturers, so that the Russian party familiarized themselves with some ideas which were popular with the academic community in Finland, and Finnish scientists learned more about the Russian approach.

During the elaboration of the joint curriculum the above-mentioned theory of liberal peace was criticized. At the University of Tampere, the structure of which includes both educational and research units, special attention is given to the International Peace Research Institute, created in the "cold war" years under the auspices of the United Nations. Its work goes in line with the so-called Northern School of Peace Studies, which was founded by the Norwegian scientist J. Galtung. He was the author of the theory postulating the fact that the main tool for achieving a lasting peace is not democracy as such, but satisfying the basic needs of all people in a conflict zone, including the provision of drinking water, food, medical care, shelter and basic education. Through collaboration with the Institute of Peace in 2003, St. Petersburg State University hosted the 16th conference on North Peace Research [9].

Another contribution of our Finnish colleagues to the common methodological basis of the curriculum was the theory of pragmatism in the modern science of international relations [11]. International relations were seen as a branch of science already in the 1920s. Based on the theoretical assumptions made by U. S. President Woodrow Wilson, the leader of the Russian Revolution, Vladimir Lenin and other advocates of the approach, this field of science was later called the international relations theory. At that time the theory of international relations was undoubtedly the science of how to avoid war. Some researchers, including J. Galtung, still adhere to this concept. However, more and more international researchers ask themselves what practical use the theory could have. Practical application of the theory of international relations and research into it is called pragmatism in international relations.

Finally, the Finnish colleagues were the first to realize a change in the gender composition of graduate students of international relations. On the one hand, this change was due to the "privatization" in international relations — the fact that more and more graduates of master's programs in international relations fail to find jobs in government agencies, and managed to find employment in private companies, where the employment policy is less conservative. On the other hand, in Finland in 2003 for several months, all three top positions — the president, the prime minister and the speaker of the parliament — were held by women. In Russia too, for example, the Governor of St. Petersburg Valentina Matvienko served as Russia's ambassador to Malta and Greece and in general,

female representation in government agencies has become better, including top managerial positions. Accordingly, the curriculum of the joint master's program reflected elements of a gender perspective in international relations, being the contribution of the University of Tampere [8].

Speaking about the main features of the St. Petersburg school of international relations that underlie the curriculum joint master's program, it's worth mentioning its approach to the analysis of foreign policy, which was called "reducing" by K. Waltz [16]. Finnish researchers who analyze the foreign policy of fairly small states like Finland, believe that the success of any foreign policy largely depends on the state system of international relations. They believe that foreign policy decisions depend on the political situation in the country to a much lesser degree. For Russian scientist the study of the foreign policy of major powers like Russia, by contrast, is characterized by increased attention to their political situation. This approach was described by St. Petersburg University research on Russia's policy towards Europe in general and the Baltic region, or "Northern Dimension" region, in particular [10].

Another feature of the St. Petersburg approach to international relations, reflected in the curriculum of the joint master's program, is inextricably linked to the dichotomy of "small countries — big countries." Since the time when the Faculty of International Relations was opened in St. Petersburg University in 1994, its professors have focused on politics of small countries in Europe [1]. After all, most of the Baltic region countries, with the exception of Germany and Russia, are small countries. And for their policies, history and the disagreement in its assessment are becoming a negative factor in international relations. According to the approach, proposed in the early 1990s by Swedish scientists, the history of the Baltic Sea region has lasted for almost a thousand years, including German and Swedish crusades in the Baltic States, Finland and into Russia. However, only contemporary history of the Baltic region is included in to the curriculum of the joint master's program. But it was the XX century that witnessed the most acute problems today. The analysis of these problems is provided in numerous research papers, including the works of the professors of St. Petersburg University [4].

Finally, St. Petersburg University traditionally made an emphasis on the study of foreign languages, particularly in the field of international Relations. For Finland, where most high school students originally demonstrate a high level of at least the Finnish, Swedish and English languages, paying so much attention to the teaching of foreign languages is not typical. However, the joint master's program curriculum on international relations [6] also included the foreign languages. Foreign Languages are not merely a means of communication, but also an opportunity to familiarize oneself with international research papers, archive materials and publications in the media. A foreign language is a key to a better understanding of the history and culture of a state; it is a research tool for studying the current state of its political structure, social structure, a system of relations between people.

Summing up, it can be noted that the innovative master's program which was designed by St. Petersburg University and the University of Tampere, is the first and the only double degree master's program in international rela-

tions, created by the institutions of higher education of Russia and Finland. Its methodological background is truly innovative compared to other master's programs in international relations in the Baltic region, which are run by universities, located on the shores of the Baltic Sea. It is based on a synthesis of the traditional (transit of goods) and innovation approaches to international economic relations, on the concept of peace among nations as a supreme value in international relations, pragmatism and a gender perspective, recognition of the importance of domestic policies, the importance of historical and linguistic factors in international relations. At present, the Russian and Finnish academia who are working in the program, see a new challenge in synthesizing these approaches and formulating a new theory of international relations and creating a cross-border school of science of international relations. It goes without saying that the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea region and the need to scientifically reflect on the current situation in the region remain high on the joint agenda [12].

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