

## THE BALTIC-PONTIC REGION IN THE EUROPE-EURASIA DUAL SYSTEM

*M. V. Ilyin*

*Ye. Yu. Meleshkina*\*



*This article considers the Baltic-Pontic Sea region not only as a geographical space of Intermarium (Międzymorze, Tarpjūris etc.) but also as Intermundium or the interface of European and Russian (Eurasian) civilization. The study sets out to clarify the logic of changing patterns shaping this geopolitical area. To this end, the concept of the Baltic-Pontic conflict system proposed by Vadim Tsymbursky is applied and further developed. In contrast to his agent-focused vehicle of analysis disclosing the power interactions in Intermarium, the authors advance an alternative structure-focused model of the Baltic-Pontic system (BPS) as a multidimensional evolving space of heterogeneous interactions, which include cooperation. The authors suggest applying the BPS models in interpreting and clarifying historical developments in the area from the late 14<sup>th</sup> century until the present. The article analyses the spatial, geopolitical and geochronopolitical characteristics of the region, as well as the models of intercivilisational interaction between Europe and Eurasia. The author addresses the issue of the political identity of the region and its ability to play an independent role in the world politics.*

**Key words:** Baltic-Pontic region, interface of civilizations, conflict system, dual civilization system

The inner form of the compound word *Baltic-Pontic* in the headline suggests that it is about the connection of the Baltic and Pontic basins. Here generations of different tribes, which had found themselves at the same place due to the large-scale geographic and long historical circumstances, established a common

---

\* MGIMO-University  
76, Prospect Vernadskogo, Moscow,  
119454, Russia

*Received on March 12, 2012.*

doi: 10.5922/2079-8555-2012-2-7

place-development [11]. In this space there are two significant structural axes, North — South (Baltic region — Pontic region) and West — East (Europe — Eurasia). The place-development on the North — South axis is in the form of *Intermarium*, and on the East-West axis is in the form of *Innerworld*<sup>1</sup>.

A dozen and a half years ago, in the course of the discussions between one of the authors of the article M. V. Ilyin and V. L. Tsymbursky, two alternative interpretations of the political set-up of the Baltic-Pontic region in the Tsymbursky's terminology of the system (BPS) were identified. Tsymbursky focused primarily on the BPS military aspects and all that is taken was associated with volitional activities of political actors (agency) in the methodological literature of that time. The co-author of this article contrasted this approach and the structural one stemming from the stable and to some extent 'unchangeable' geographical characteristics of the space.

What is the difference between the agent-based and structural approaches? The structural factors are associated with the separation of the place-developments of different scale, global, regional and local and their mediation structures, or interfaces (for example, the territorial organisation in Western Europe discovered by S. Rokkan). BPS is the interface of the two global place-developments, Western Europe and Northern Eurasia. This interface runs through the spaces at their junction or, to put it more precisely, interpenetration and various territorial and local place-developments of that area, and creates the logic of a spatial interaction.

In the interpretation of V. L. Tsymbursky BPS is represented by a conflict system. These systems are connected to the power pattern and exist only on the surface level of the international organisation<sup>2</sup>. On another deeper level, as acknowledged by V. L. Tsymbursky himself, 'we have the geopolitical support roles specific to the space of the system, and the tension between those' [14, p. 251—252]. This distinction quite logically makes V. L. Tsymbursky put a fundamental question, 'Should we not believe that the deep and superficial levels of the international system are formed by different types of entities and different types of relationships between them assuming that the units and the relationships of one level can always be transformed into those of the other level?' [14, p. 251].

This question should be given an affirmative answer. One should, however, clarify that it is not simply about two levels but different system-related and temporal scales. The differential between the scales creates a chronopolitical perspective. Then the evolutionary potential comes out resulting in some pragmatic capabilities of the day-to-day activities including those related to the power struggle between political protagonists but not limited to their rivalry.

Of course our approach and that of V. L. Tsymbursky to the understanding of the Baltic-Pontic region were largely identical and became significantly closer during the discussions. For example, when discussing the first versions of

---

<sup>1</sup> The duplicate definition of the Baltic-Pontic region as *Intermarium* and *Interworld* was proposed by V. L. Tsymbursky.

<sup>2</sup> 'I interpret the international system on its surface level as a conflict one'. [14, p. 252].

V.L. Tsymbursky's articles it was possible to convince him that the BPS was not completely dead by the period of the Congress of Vienna as he initially thought. Its end was moved back by them to the time of the Versailles. In addition, V.L. Tsymbursky amended the ending of his work and added a postscript to reference areas in the 1940's. For his part, M. V. Ilyin adopted the reference area concept by giving it not a conflicting agentive understanding of the interaction channels of the powerful nations but the structural interpretation as the state-building locations (*loci*) and, more broadly, place developments.

### The Baltic-Pontic Intermarium

With a panoramic view of the wide extent of the Old World in the west we can see a quaint peninsula. That's Europe. Its image as a peninsula was used by Alexander von Humboldt in his classic 'Kosmos' in which he wrote about the 'western peninsula of Asia' [4, p. 309, 351]. Halford Mackinder quite consistently followed the idea of Europe as a giant peninsula of the Old World [5, p. 179, 182, 203]. Thereby he considered the European isthmus between the Baltic and the Black seas [5, p. 179, 197—198, 203] as a kind of link between Europe and the core of the Earth, and he also talked about the space as a gateway from Europe to Asia or from Siberia to Europe [5, p. 69, 74, 180, 203].

Other researchers, who wrote about the eastern reaches of the European peninsula, noted the 'Baltic-Pontic isthmus... where the mainland narrows' as a natural continental frontier of Europe [12, p. 110, 114] or simply referred to the traditions of the ancient geographers who considered after Ptolemy the link between Europe and Asia as a sort of isthmus [7, p. 293]. The prominent Polish geographer Eugeniusz Romer called it the Baltic-Pontic isthmus. His famous compatriot historian Oskar Halecki proposed a special name for the region, Great Eastern Isthmus [3]. He persistently promoted the idea of the European frontier [2] which lay just along the Great East Isthmus.

There are other synonyms too. Thus, the name Intermarium was spread. The Latin version (*Intermarium, Intermarum*) is mainly used in the modern European languages, English, French and German. In the languages of the region portrayed in their own names, in Polish *Międzymorze*, in Lithuanian *Tarpjūris*, in Czech *Mezimoří*, in Slovak *Medzimorie* etc.

For the most part low, often imperceptible watershed emphasizes the geomorphologic originality of the so-called *Baltic-Pontic Isthmus*. One can speak about this space in multiple aspects. For example, we can single out and combine the water catchment areas of both seas. They cover most of the formal geographical Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals, except for its western and eastern, southern and northern boundaries. This is a kind of inner Europe, and if all the Mediterranean catchment area, the bosom of the Roman Empire, could be added to the Black Sea, it would be called the root Europe.

But it is quite clear that it would be unnecessary to include both water catchment areas in the *Baltic-Pontic Intermarium*. Obviously the land of Scandinavia and Anatolia, Jutland and the Caucasus have the *overseas* rather than *maritime* and thus *intermarium* identifications from the point of view of the space in question. It is located *between* the Baltic and Black Seas and not *around* them.

Therefore, it is advisable to single out the wide geographic combination of the Baltic and Black Sea flows which have a common watershed that stretches from the Jeseniky and Beskydy mountains in the west to the Okovsky forest<sup>3</sup> and Valdai in the east. In the west its boundaries are marked by the Danube watershed, then from the Bohemian Forest along the Moravian Highlands to the Jeseniky mountains and the Sudetenland, and then are traced along the watershed aspiring to the North Sea of the Labe (Elbe) and the Odra (Oder) flowing into the Baltic Sea.

In his previous articles M. V. Ilyin preferred to draw a conditional boundary from the Carpathian Mountains to the north along the watersheds of the tributaries of the Vistula and the Dnieper, and then along the western watershed of the Neman. This boundary, however, is too 'politically correct' and is close to the existing state borders. However, if the actual geographical and structural parameters are taken into consideration to the full extent, then it should be necessary to accept an inclusion in the great Baltic-Pontic region of the Vistula and Odra basins.

In the eastern part with its smoother terrain the boundaries are not so obvious. Here, the boundaries of the Baltic-Pontic region lie on the shelomyan<sup>4</sup> of the Central Russian upland with two distinct nuclei, where the heads of the main rivers of the region meet or are close to each other. That is the already mentioned Okovsky forest in the north and Orel-Oskol 'upland' in the south. From there the conditional boundary can be drawn along the eastern watershed of the Don southwards. The boundary goes northwards through Valdai along the watershed of the 'long' Lovat with a continuation in the form of the Volkhov and the Neva. Due to the 'diffused' watershed boundaries it is convenient to use the clear river borders, the Don in the south, the Lovat-Volkhov-Neva in the north while still keeping visible the 'shelomyan' of the Central Russian upland.

The area between the western watersheds of the Danube and Oder and the eastern ones of the Dnieper and Lovat is quite huge. Inside the area there are the entire areas of today's Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. One or another region of Austria, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia as well as Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Russia are there too. Let us call this vast area the Baltic-Pontic intermarium.

This geographic entity was formed by the two territory strips belonging to the basins of the Baltic and Black Seas, the eastern and western ones<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Okovsky, or a 'laky' forest, is a system of small hills in the upper reaches of the Dnieper, Western Dvina, the Lovat and tributaries of the Volga River in the northern part of the Central Russian upland.

<sup>4</sup> Shelomyan — watershed. Compare 'The Song of Igor's Campaign', 'Oh Rus esi are behind the shelomyan' (Oh Rus, you are on the other side of the hill). In his articles on the domestic geopolitics of Russia by 'shelomyan' M. V. Ilyin calls the internal Russian watershed which became the linking structure of later Kievan Rus.

<sup>5</sup> Such a division was elaborated by Oscar Kaletski [3] who singled out in Central Europe its western (West Central Europe) and eastern (East Central Europe) parts. He included the regions populated by the Germans in the first one, and the area between Germany and Russia in the second one.

They are divided by the meridian array of the Carpathians; that is almost a latitudinal extension in the form of the Beskids, and then again by almost a meridian branch, the watershed of the basins of the Vistula and Odra<sup>6</sup>.

To the east of the Carpathian and Vistula-Odra watershed there are the river flows of the Black Sea (the Dniester, Southern Bug, Dnieper) which are combined with the rivers of the Baltic basin (the Vistula, Neman, Pregel, Western Dvina and the long rivers Velikaya and Narva, the Lovat and Volkhov and the Neva flowing through the lakes). This is a sort of *smaller Baltic-Pontic intermarium*. It forms the pre-Carpathian, and tentatively speaking, the pre-Vistula fill of Eurasia. It covers the lion's share of the greater intermarium and more clearly expresses the geographical intermarium syndrome. This syndrome, as will be shown later, is greatly enhanced by political factors. These circumstances make us put greater focus on the smaller intermarium in this article.

The basins of the Danube and Odra are located to the west of the Carpathians and their meridian extension in the form of the Oder-Vistula watershed. That is a geographically more sub-divided and heterogeneous space that breaks up into a number of territories, inter-related but significantly different from each other. Some of them are drawn to the Baltic Sea (Poland) and some others to the Black Sea (Romania, Bulgaria). Some others still feel their remoteness from the sea; those are located in and around the Danube structural basin, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary and Serbia. Besides, this stripe of territories is again divided along the gradient east-west of the river Danube and Odra (Oder). The right bank of the Oder and the left bank of the Danube clearly express the Baltic-Pontic syndrome. Accordingly, the left bank of the Oder and the right bank of the Danube demonstrate it to a much lesser extent and are oriented towards the western areas, more precisely towards the river basins of the North Sea and the Adriatic flows. In this sense, the symbolism of the dual city of Buda and Pest (Budapest) is very indicative.

Taken together this band of areas forms the Transcarpathian Sudeten-Oder fill of Europe. This area will also be considered but mostly as a zone of contact and interaction between the Baltic-Pontic region and Europe. In this zone, the Danube/Hungarian structural basin has a special role. Here in the Middle Danube and Alföld (Hung. *Alföld* — *lowland*), the steppe core of Pusta (Hung. *Puszta*<sup>7</sup>) is linked with the forest-steppe branches along the numerous rivers and with a forest frame running into various high-level zonalities. This niche had long attracted the ancient tribes who created the first language union, and then the Indo-European linguistic community. According to the com-

<sup>6</sup> At the same time, there should be recognised the importance of the Eastern Polish watershed between the Vistula basins, on the one hand, and the basins of the Dniester, Dnieper, Neman and Pregel on the other. The cross-migration area of Europe and Eurasia from each other to the north of the Carpathians is indistinct and is divided into a series of a kind of segments established by the basins of the rivers flowing into the Baltic Sea.

<sup>7</sup> The name *Pusta* goes back to the etymological root of the common slavic *\*pustь*, cf.: the Russian words *пусто*, *пустырь*, *пустыня*, the Serbo-Croatian words *pust*, *pusta*, *pusto*, the Slovak word *púšť*.

parative historical linguistics, it is quite likely that the main migration waves of the Indo-Europeans and possibly Slavs come from it [13].

In both geographical niches, pre-Carpathian and Transcarpathian the political and economic efforts of people create the place-developments that are historically associated with the European and Eurasian civilisational development processes. In other words, the development of these areas will be geopolitically self-determined by the interaction of the two civilized communities, Europe and indigenous Eurasia or the so-called Russia-Eurasia. The *mezhdumiriye* (Interworld) interface between the two civilisations arises. This *mezhdumiriye* has two belts, the western, Central East European, and eastern one, in fact East European.

Both belts are intermediate; both link Europe and indigenous Eurasia. They do link and not separate. The greater Baltic-Pontic region is a space of an intersection, overlapping of natural principles of Europe and indigenous Eurasia. The Eurasian steppes are deep in here. Their extreme western end is the above-mentioned Pusta. The European deciduous and mixed forests are stretched here. It is here that the forest-steppe belt has the greatest width, power and productivity, realisation of the principle of transition through overlapping itself.

However, there are obvious differences between the two belts. The western one focuses on Europe. It is closely related to it geographically, culturally and economically. The eastern belt is open to the Eurasian contacts; in fact it quietly and gradually merges with the core of the Earth.

### **The dual system of Europe and Eurasia**

At the mention of the double civilizational system of Europe — Eurasia there is usually an association with the counterpoints of the European modern and the Eurasian Russian system, the European capitalism and the Soviet socialism (anti-capitalism).

However, such a counterpoint is already contained in the division of the Roman Empire into the western one and eastern one actualised by the divergent civilizational fates of these two administrative entities after the fall of Rome in 476 AD and the establishment of the West European Christian republic in the west, and the Roman theocracy in the east.

No less important for Western Europe is another counterpoint, between the Roman civilisation and Celtic-Germanic barbarism (anti-civilisation). This opposition between civilisation and barbarism is starting to lose its meaning in the context of the western Christian chrysalis arising in the Dark Ages [9, p. 24—29], however it preserves the structural continuity in the 'formula of bipolarity'. The binary formula was refined and transformed into a tripartite one by the Treaty of Verdun in 843. The Charlemagne's empire was divided by his grandchildren into the West Frankish Kingdom of Charles II the Bald, the East Frankish Kingdom of Louis II the German and the Middle Kingdom of Italy, the property of the Franks' King and Emperor Lothair I, Lorraine located between the lower reaches of the Rhine. However, the Middle Kingdom, after the death of Lothair, was divided by his sons into three kingdoms, Lorraine, Provence and Italy.

An appropriate counterpoint provided the basis for the conceptual map of Stein Rokkan. It was also used by V. L. Tsymbursky in a narrower sense, in the spirit of conflict systems. Arguing on domestic programmes of the European ‘pupa-chrysalis’, our counterpart notes that ‘the most important of these programs in the geopolitical aspect was associated with the genetic bipolarity of the indigenous continental Europe, the bipolarity going back to the isolation and competition of two large provinces of the Frankish Kingdom of the early middle-ages, Neustria and Austrasia’ separated by the Rhine<sup>8</sup>. Based on them, ‘two major western Christian powers, the Kingdom of France and the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation were raised’ [14, p. 107—108] whose counterpoint structured the lay of powers in Europe until the Napoleonic Wars.

The consideration of bipolarity in the terms of conflict systems is without any doubt very productive. This is evidenced by the extensive literature on the bipolar world and the rivalry between the superpowers in the 20th century. From our point of view, it is not less but even more efficient to consider bipolar structures in the extended term not only taking into account the superficial powerful alteration but also deep civilizational changes.

In terms of interaction between civilisations, V. L. Tsymbursky considers ‘two cases in which civilisations form the binary systems, one element of the system being the ‘host civilisation’ and the other one, younger acting as a ‘satellite civilisation’. This concerns Europe and Russia as well as China and Japan. In the latter case ‘this is the Far-Eastern (the so-called Confucian-Buddhist) civilisation system, within which the ‘host civilisation’ China, with its continental aisles (Korea, Southeast Asia and near-Altaic regions) has stood out in the last fifteen hundred years and the ‘satellite civilisation’, Japan’ [14, p. 120].

At the same time, by the example of Russia and Japan Tsymbursky discovers ‘the difference in the types of geopolitical relations that can be installed inside the civilisations between the host civilisation and the satellite civilisation’ [14, p. 121]. What is the difference? In the case of China and Japan, the aspect of power and geo-strategic dimension is reduced to a minimum, and in the case of Russia, according to V. L. Tsymbursky, it is strengthened to a maximum extent.

In general, the relation between the two dual systems is probably identified with quite a high degree of precision. However, the apparent contrast between the two civilizational complexes in the logic of conflict systems looks far less straightforward taking into account the underlying geochronopolitical aspects. We will look at these aspects a little later as well as at the similarity and contrast-similarity of both systems at the eastern and western edges of the Old World. In the meantime let us follow V. L. Tsymbursky’s power binary logic of the conflict system in the space of Europe and Russia.

In full conformity with the logic of power struggles, V. L. Tsymbursky explains the ‘post-Peter rapid engagement of the newly formed Empire in the

---

<sup>8</sup> *Neustria* or sometimes *Neustrasia*, a ‘new’ land, currently Northern France inhabited by the Franks who came from the Rhine. *Austrasia* which is sometimes called *Auster*, the ‘eastern’ land.

world's military policy on the other side of the Baltic-Pontic-Adriatic strip' in the structural need for Europe to 'enhance its weakening eastern centre with the Russian forces'. Consequently the 'satellite civilisation is directly included in the power balance of the host civilisation' [14, p. 121—122].

The establishment of a dual conflict system was initiated in Europe, which, in a series of wars, created an aura of imperial shells turning into non-Europe. For this role the geopolitical logic destined radical Eurasia represented by Russia by the end of the 17th century. This was determined by the power and potential of the European supersystem which involved in the gravitation scope of the Westphalian system itself some embryos satellite systems, the Baltic-Pontic, Balkan and Mediterranean. These small systems seem to overlap each other with their separate elements. Sweden participates in the Westphalian and the Baltic-Pontic systems; France does in the Westphalian and Mediterranean etc. This leads to a gradual integration of individual conflict systems in the international Europe-wide system by 'gluing' them first (in the terminology of V. L. Tsymbursky) and then absorbing the border conflict systems.

As part of the dual system, Russia had to self-determine as a geopolitical partner in Europe. However, this was primarily done in the imperial logic. It was about the form and scale of expansion in different directions, which can be roughly limited to the basic geographic reference points, i. e. North, East, South and West.

The northern and eastern areas became those of the already established promotion and geopolitical development. There were not any challenging targets but obvious was the Lomonosov's prospect of the Russian increased power and, to say more, freedom because Pomorye, the northern regions and Siberia had long been the land of non-enslaved, free and savvy people. In the North, there were no settlements of the Cossack freemen, and in the east they were at a lower scale.

In the southern part, there was an ambitious goal for the Third Rome to fight against the pagans, and, in the long term, liberate Tsarigrad (Constantinople) and then the Holy Land.

In the West loomed up the temptation of the eventual reunification of Russia and a return to the basics, and then the even more ambitious goal of restoring a true Orthodoxy in the whole Christian world (even at the expense of compromises, repetition splits and self-loss).

The expansion of the Russian empire was determined primarily by external benchmarks. Those were mostly West and South, although some clarification is needed. Often the empire-building efforts would focus on the immediate, neighbouring areas but even in that case, the basic benchmarks could be guessed. An example of this kind is the direction of imperial expansion determined by Peter the Great. They are deliberately ambiguous. The north-western (Great Northern War), south-western (Prut campaign) and the Caspian (the war with Persia) expansion vectors represented the 'end-around' manoeuvres. They are, in fact, aimed at strengthening the indirect and potentially direct control over the Russian and Byzantine heritage in the Baltic-Pontic region. In this case, Peter refrained from the head-on policy of his ancestors (early Romanovs) to directly deal with the Polish-Lithuanian



Commonwealth and the Ottoman Empire, the owners of the long-awaited geopolitical 'prizes', the (West-)Russian and Byzantine ones.

As for the southern and western directions, there was a kind of a mirror version of the German geopolitical expansion. Teutonic drive for the East (*Drang nach Osten*) was transformed by the Russian Empire in the drive for the South. The German longing for the South (*Sehnsucht nach Süden*), a desire to get closer to the holy stones of Rome and to become the Holy Roman Empire turned into a longing for the West — the dream of stones of the land of holy wonders and the conversion of Russia into a super-European empire.

It is easy to see that the power incentives of expansion for Russia are supplemented, and in fact determined by the incentives related to 'honour' and therefore with the fate of ultimately civilizational self-determination.

A symbolic expression of the breakthrough formula in the history by imperial expansion was the creation of the new capital St. Petersburg by Peter the Great in the just conquered extreme north-western part, which was to reassert dominance over Russia diverse and therefore dangerous to the despots.

Moving-out of the imperial centre to the extreme periphery is not so unusual, that is a symptom of the overstressed Empire as evidenced by the classic example of Rome. Thus, under Diocletian, along with the formal capital, 'additional' power centres of tetrarchs, which changed their locations, such as Nicomedia, Antioch, Milan, Sirmium, Thessaloniki and Trier arose. Under Constantine, the centre of power shifted from Eburacum (York) to Trier and then to Sirmium, Serdica, and finally to Byzantium renamed Constantinople. Shifting the centre was due to the intention, first, to get closer to areas of development or discipline (higher efficiency), and secondly, to move away from the 'exhausted', too heavy and clumsy old core of the empire.

In the context of reshaping the imperial structure, the creation of Petersburg is more than ambivalent. This includes taking off the 'core' of Great Russia and approaching to the area of the main political events of the Great Northern War. There is a complex of establishment of a paradoxical and peripheral centre of a new conquest and hence of the internal despotisation of Russia. In the creation among the Neva marshes, almost 'abroad' of some sort of quintessential Europeanism, there was a claim of doubling the capital city, one for the europised Russia, the other one for the Orthodox 'third-worldism' of Europe. It represents a kind of restoration of the geopolitical vertical route from the Varangians to the Greeks, an indication of the direction of the onslaught of North (Baltic) Europe towards the wild field of the hated Pontic region. Finally, the establishment of a capital city in the Baltic Sea region, this 'Nordic Mediterranean region' is also a very definite sign of an entry into the European history.

So far, our analysis has focused on adding the non-violent, mostly cultural and spiritual aspects to the structural logic of the power configurations tracked by V.L. Tsymbursky. This is entirely consistent with the task of complementing the surface levels with the deep ones. But it is not only about linking levels but the scale of the systems themselves, in the prospects for review and analysis. Within our consideration is mainly the contact zone be-

tween Russia and Europe, their mutual penetration. This is important, especially for the understanding of the developments on the Baltic-Pontic isthmus. But it is equally important to consider the interaction of civilisations as a whole, in the aggregate and in the same context.

What does this mean in practice? Here is just one example. Very often, the historical role of Kievan Rus along with the Baltic-Pontic region as a whole is seen only as that of protection from the Mongol conquest of Europe. Till then Moscow remained only a small fragment of the former state. That is of course true, but something else is no less true. On the ruins of the Ruriks' broken power a successor of the world system is established (World System) 1250—1350 [1, 8]. In the 13th century, the nomadic empire of Genghis Khan 'closed' the chain of civilisations from the Central to the Far Eastern one and turned the bulk of the Old World into a single super civilisational space. Thereby a process started which eventually resulted in the globalisation. [6] There was a wrap-up of various plane 'patchworks' of civilisations in a holistic meta-civilisational spherical space. Of course, the crucial point in that was the great geographical discoveries and modernised expansion of Europe along the mackinder Crescents. But the similarity in the functions of the seamen of Vasco da Gama and Cossacks of Yermak also noted by Halford Mackinder suggests that the modernised closure of our planetary sphere was not only across the oceans but also through continents, primarily through the open spaces of the Old World and the core of the Earth. The civilisation of the indigenous Eurasia, that is Russia, has played and is still playing a key role in that affair structurally comparable to that of Europe.

In this extended perspective, the Europe-Russia interface cannot be limited to such a presumably important but a particular issue as improvement of the Kaliningrad exclave (or enclave, it depends). Structurally, Europe and Russia are the two antinomical origins of the global ecumene modernisation. Their role in the formation of the main alternative models of modernisation and globalisation is extremely high. The hypothesis of the functional specialisation of Europe and Russia in the world's development can be considered. Europe can play the role of an innovator and a driving force of that development, and Russia – that of a stabiliser [10]. However, these roles can be distributed among the four belonging to the two mirror inter-civilisational systems, the western one with Europe and Russia, and the eastern one with China and Japan.

The dual or more complex inter-civilisational systems are largely determined by the formation of a kind of ligaments between the civilisations or the interfaces of civilisational interaction. Typically these interfaces have a complex spatial and temporal structure.

In the spatial terms, in principle any geographical objects belonging to each of the civilisational domains and external territories can be used. However, in practice, the areas of the shared frontiers are primarily used. Even more, certain symbolically important objects can be specifically designed to address the challenges of the inter-civilisational interactions. These may include the communication and transport structures such as roads, rivers,

bridges, mountain passes, airports etc.; as well as the information channels and communication centres, e.g. libraries, publishers, radio stations etc. Finally, the objects of symbolic significance may be historical, cultural and natural sites, and even the various images of geographic identification.

The same is true for temporal landmarks and points of interaction between civilisations. Although in principle it is possible to use whatsoever events of the true stories or imaginary time, in practice it is more common and effective to refer to the events of shared history and especially to the experience of interaction in the common historical collisions.

For Europe and Russia the large areas of the Baltic-Pontic region from Krakow to Kostroma, from Narva to Poltava, from Austerlitz to Borodino, from Fakhra to Plevna, from Stalingrad to Berlin naturally become a priority for the interaction between civilisations. Irrespective of the significance of the global interface aspects, the space of *common coexistence* in Europe and indigenous Eurasia at the Baltic-Pontic isthmus can ensure the most productive interaction. However, this space can itself become a global actor, provided a number of conflicts and historical issues are resolved.

### **Prospects of the Baltic-Pontic region**

The definition of the Baltic-Pontic system as an interworld accentuates its functional role as a connection or rather a mutual ‘superimposition’ of the European and Eurasian civilisational communities. In the most general form, this is true with respect to the Central Eastern European interworld extension. Such a superimposition has a significant impact on:

- 1) the establishment of separate territories, independent polities or regions within them;
- 2) the relations between them;
- 3) the political arrangement and nature thereof.

Three issues remain uncertain.

One. The extent to which politicians and citizens of the analytically allocated areas and/or their constituent territories can conceptualise their existence, the ‘intended purpose’ in broader and substantive terms than a ‘bridge between East and West’ and ‘return to Europe’?

Two. What can the polities in Eastern and Central Eastern Europe offer to the world other than the developmental experience of failures, errors and confrontments with unexpected challenges of political development? What lessons have been learned? What achievements can be presented as role models for politicians and citizens in the other parts of the world to emulate?

Three. What place can the polities in Eastern and Central Eastern Europe independently have in the global politics, both individually and as special communities?

The answers to these questions should be given not by the political science but practice. That will be the practice to show whether the polities in Eastern and Central Eastern Europe, their people, political and cultural communities, and individuals remain only a material that is made through the superimposition of the European and Eurasian influences, or whether

they can be the subject of their own and global developments. Personally, I would be very pleased if a structured approach explicated in the paper could be supplemented with a new modification of the agentive one to see, in addition to influential powers, the developing entities of all sizes and nature which grow in all areas. In this case, one of course would have to improve significantly and even review the structural approach.

As for the current political science capabilities, the attempt we have undertaken only represents conceptual and analytical tools to provide greater clarity and meaningfulness to the three issues raised here. Processing the historical data proposed for the review with the chosen conceptual tools enables us to work out some assumptions and evaluations.

There is no doubt that the tenuous level of the Baltic-Pontic system by its very nature emphasizes both the potential for conflict and the power situation in the region and around it. There is nothing tragic or negative in it. Rivalry and conflict are quite a natural part of our lives. The issue is different. How should these conflicts be treated? How can one make use of the competition for his own and the overall development?

First of all, you need to learn how to go beyond the strict framework of the 'one-dimensional orientation'. Every conflict and every rivalry have many dimensions, and most importantly, meanings and messages.

It is to be expected that 'in the next few decades, in the geopolitical processes in these civilisational 'interworld' areas many local leaders and groups will try to fight for prestige and resources to seek support from a civilisation as if that's 'their' world, whereby the 'property' can be justified by different reasons, from the religious denomination, language and even the relative proximity of the state to this civilisational platform (as some Ukrainian leaders geographically prove their country's nearer proximity to Europe in comparison with Russia)' [14, p. 201]. The fact that the resources and prestige can be found on both sides of the interworld is quite encouraging. This means that politicians and citizens of the Baltic-Pontic region have a freedom of choice. It is greater, when we can more successfully address 'this world's issue of the day' and turn to the historical and, more broadly, chronopolitical dimensions. The freedom and the effective action capacity along with it will improve by an order of magnitude.

It is important not to enchain ourselves by the burning but tenuous collisions of conflict scenarios. You just need to move on to the deeper levels of the organisation. So, in the long-term evolution one can discern an analogy between the Baltic-Pontic system and its Central Eastern European counterpart, on the one hand, and the European 'belt of cities', on the other. All in all, one can identify quite vague but still recognizable grounds for the dual European-Eurasian superimposition acquiring its civilisational and political mission similar to that implemented by the 'belt of cities' in Europe. The 'belt of cities' has integrated the 'civilised' Roman and 'barbarian' Germanic 'wings' of Europe. It now serves as the EU structural core, the focus of its agentiveness. Similarly, one can probably think about the integration of Europe and Eurasia, the structural and agentive aspects of this long evolutionary process.

Clearly, in the Baltic-Pontic region for many reasons it is still not possible to achieve a superdensity and intensity of the political, economic, cultural and other 'short' transactions similar or comparable to those in the 'belt of cities'. However, this may be compensated for by the 'long' transactions between Europe and Eurasia. Thus, by the way, the conflict concerning the continuing Eurasian 'links' in the Baltic —Pontic region will be removed or reformatted.

Of course, a lot depends on how the civilisational interpenetration zone can be transformed in the interface of a more modern interaction between the political spaces in Europe and Eurasia. This crucially depends on the answers to the questions raised here.

However, it is not less important how the wider European and Eurasian communities will be using this interface to primarily transform the conflict dual system Europe-Eurasia into cooperative and capable of finding not only structural but also agentive unity. The structure, i. e. the OSCE, is available. Now it is time for the constituent polities to re-evaluate the opportunities offered by the OSCE. The political science can be conducive, if we can develop the study of various aspects of the political entities like the Baltic-Pontic system.

Finally, an essential issue requiring research is the assessment of the cultural and institutional ('civilization?') potential of the interworlds. To what chronopolitical extent are the potentials of Russia and Poland suitable for the combination with each other? How can these be complemented by the capabilities in the Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and the Baltic states? To ensure such a connection, if it is sensibly possible under the current conditions, one needs to develop a common identity and create common interaction structures between each other and with the environment. Moreover, over time one needs to create in the Baltic-Pontic region the 'gates to the global world'. According to the research literature, the 'gates' require a very high concentration of the advanced networking features.

Until now, even potentially there haven't been any metropolitan cities that can claim to be a 'global gateway' in the Baltic-Pontic region. However, the cooperation and mobilisation of the network capacity are capable of turning such centres as Warsaw and Kiev into at least 'windows'. This is even more realistic for the Baltic St. Petersburg which has tried to play the role of a 'window'. However, the Petersburg 'window' would be more effective, if it is more vigorously and substantively enhanced by its natural counterpart, the small Kaliningrad 'ventilator window'. Despite the 'diminutiveness' of the Kaliningrad enclave/exclave on the global or even European and Eurasian scales, its structural advantages can improve the efficiency of various international interactions. There is little to be done, namely to comprehend these benefits, to develop appropriate programmes, and to use them as a basis for the everyday life of Kaliningraders.

*The article is based on the RFH projects no. 10-03-00677a 'Generational change in the international systems as a state building factor' and no. 10-03-00678a 'The formation of states and nations in the post-Soviet space'.*

## References

1. Abu-Lughod, J. 1989, *Before European Hegemony: The World-System A. D. 1250—1350*, N. Y., Oxford university.
2. Halecki, O. 1980, *Borderlands of Western Civilization. A History of East Central Europe*, Safety Harbor, Simon Publications.
3. Halecki, O. 1962, *The Limits and Divisions of European History*. Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press.
4. Humboldt, A. von, 1845, *Kosmos*, Bd. I, Stuttgart-Tübingen.
5. Mackinder, H. 1996, *Democratic Ideals and Reality. A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction*. Wash., NDU Press.
6. Modelski, G., Devezas T., Thompson, W. R. (eds.). 2007, *Globalization as Evolutionary Process: Modeling Global Change*, New York, Routledge.
7. Parker, W. H. 1960, Europe How Far? *Geographical Journal*, Vol. 126, p. 278—297.
8. Abu-Lughod, J. 2001, Perestrukturiruja mirosistemu, predshestvujuwuju novomu vremeni [Perestrukturiruya world system, prior to modern times], *Vremja mira* [World time], Vol. 2.
9. Ilyin, M. V. 1995, *Ocherki hronopoliticheskoj tipologii. Problemy i vozmozhnosti tipologicheskogo analiza jevoljucionnyh form politicheskikh sistem. Chast' II. Hronopoliticheskaja perspektiva. Chast' III. Otechestvennaja hronopolitika* [Essays hronopoliticheskoy typology. Challenges and Opportunities of typological analysis of evolutionary forms of political systems. Part II. Hronopoliticheskaya perspective. Part III. domestic hronopolitika], Moscow, MGIMO.
10. Ilyin, M. V. 2001, Stabilizacija razvitiya [Stabilization of development], *Megatrendy mirovogo razvitiya* [Megatrends in world development], Moscow, Ekonomika.
11. Ilyin, M. V., Meleshkina E. Yu. 2010, *Balto-Chernomor'e: vremena i prostranstva politiki* [Baltic-Black Sea: time and space policy], Kaliningrad, Izdatelstvo Immanuel Kant State University of Russia.
12. Savitsky, P. N. 1991, Geograficheskie i geopoliticheskie osnovy evraziystva [Geographical and geopolitical foundations of Eurasianism]. In: *Evracija. Istoricheskie vzglyady russkikh jemigrantov* [Eurasia. Historical views of the Russian immigrants], Moscow.
13. Trubachev, O. N. 1991, *Jetnogenez i kul'tura drevnejshih slavjan* [Ethnogenesis and the culture of the ancient Slavs], Moscow, Nauka.
14. Tsymbursky, V. L. 2007, *Ostrov Rossija. Geopoliticheskie i hronopoliticheskie raboty. 1993—2007* [Island Russia. Geopolitical and hronopoliticheskie work. 1993—2007], Moscow, ROSSPJeN.

## About the authors

*Prof. Mikhail V. Ilyin*, Professor, Department of Comparative Politics, MGIMO-University; Vice-Dean for Research, Faculty of Applied Political Science, Professor, Department of Applied Political Science, National Research University — Higher School of Economics

E-mail: ilyin@politstudies.ru

*Dr Yelena Yu. Meleshkina*, Associate Professor, Department of Comparative Politics, MGIMO-University; Associate Professor, Department of Theory of Politics and Political Analysis, National Research University — Higher School of Economics.

E-mail: elenameleshkina@yandex.ru