The Baltic Sea Region
Cultures, Politics, Societies
Editor Witold Maciejewski

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1. German, Danish, Swedish and Russian

After the Vienna Congress in 1815, the Baltic area had only four independent peoples: the Danes in Denmark, the Russians in the Russian empire, the Swedes in Sweden and the Germans to the south of the Baltic Sea. The German area was, however, divided into smaller ones of which the most influential was Brandenburg-Preussen. Sweden had lost its last possession on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, Finland, to Russia; Poland was divided between Brandenburg-Preussen, Russia, and the Austrian empire; and Norway had been forced into a union with Sweden. Consequently, only German, Danish, Russian, and Swedish could develop in total freedom. All the other languages were hindered in their development, some more than others, with the exceptions of Norwegian and to some extent Finnish.

2. The two Norwegian languages

In Norway the break-up of the century-long subordination under Denmark and the union with Sweden gave national forces more freedom to act. This change influenced the development of the literary language which, having been Danish, became in the course of the 19th century more and more Norwegianized. This standard language took the name Riksmål and later Bokmål. In the last half of the century when Norwegian culture had a long period of development, this language was refined by the great authors Ibsen and Bjørnson. But this was not enough for the most nationally-minded Norwegians. In the middle of the 19th century the Norwegian language reformer Ivar Aasen suggested a new Norwegian language based on what he considered the purest Norwegian dialects, the so-called Landsmål. Later this language got the name Nynorsk (New Norwegian). After some decades of struggle, Landsmål was recognized in 1892 as an equal language of education. The Norwegianization of Riksmål/Bokmål continued after Norway’s independence in 1905.

Though many attempts have been made to get the two languages closer to each other, Norway still has two official languages. One difference between the use of Bokmål and Nynorsk is that the former language has more of a spoken standard than the latter, the users of which normally tend to use their own dialects as the spoken language.
### Table 7 b: Germanic languages of the BSR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historic languages of the Baltic region</th>
<th>Territory</th>
<th>Majority l. Number of speakers</th>
<th>Minority l. Number of speakers</th>
<th>Earliest written records</th>
<th>Regional/cross-ethnic usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>GERMANIC</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>West Germanic:</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Baltic region</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>10th c.</td>
<td>Baltic region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yiddish</td>
<td>Baltic region</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>14th c.</td>
<td>–</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low German 1300–1500</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>8th c.</td>
<td>Baltic region 13th – 16th</td>
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<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>9th c.</td>
<td>Western Baltic region</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Nordic:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Danish</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>5,000,000</td>
<td>+ Norway, Sweden, Germany</td>
<td>9th c. runic, 13th c. Latin</td>
<td>Nordic community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>8,900,000</td>
<td>300,000 in Finland</td>
<td>9th c. runic, 13th c. Latin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwegian (2 languages, Bokmål and Nynorsk)</td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>4,300,000, 500,000 of which speak Nynorsk</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>20th c.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>?Gotlandish</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15th c.</td>
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<td>?Bornholmish</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
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<td>!?Álvdalian</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>East Germanic:</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>† Gothic (extinct in the Baltic region in ca 500)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4th–6th centuries</td>
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</table>

### 3. The diversified Saami languages

The Saami dialects or languages are spoken by approximately 40,000 people in four countries, Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia. The differences between some of the dialects could be compared to the differences between Swedish and Danish, or in the case of other dialects between Swedish and German. These differences result from the fact that the speakers of Saami live over a very large geographical area and in more recent times because the vocabularies of Saami have been influenced by the dominant languages in the respective states.
In the 1947 peace treaty between Finland and the Soviet Union, the Saamis in the Petsamo corridor, which had been Finnish territory from World War II, were allowed to choose between staying in the Soviet Union or moving to Finland. Some villages chose to move, others stayed. Even though the people of these villages are speakers of the same language, today they have problems understanding each other due to the influence from Finnish on one side, and Russian on the other.

The history of the Saami languages’ codification is a history of interference from the outside. The Saami languages have usually been codified by priests or by non-Saami linguists. There have been many orthographical projects, and the Saami languages have been written, and are currently being written, both with the Latin and the Cyrillic alphabets. Only in the post-World War II period have the Saamis themselves had some influence on the codification of their own languages.
4. Finnish

When Finland became a Grand Duchy of Russia in 1809 it had been a part of Sweden for about 600 years. The official language of Finland was Swedish, while Finnish was used mostly in the religious sphere. Most of the area’s leading people were also Swedes. Due to the annexation by Russia, the Swedes became a minority in Finland, though Swedish was preserved in the country as the language of administration during most of the 19th century. This century also saw a large number of authors writing in Swedish, among them Finland’s national poet, Johan Ludvig Runeberg. This was a result of the promises made by the Russian tsar Alexander I that the country be governed according to the laws from the Swedish period.

The Finnish language, however, eventually gained more status. A very important step forward for the Finnish literary language was the publication by Elias Lönnrot of the Finnish folk epos Kalevala in 1835 and in the final version in 1849. But still, a decree was published in 1850 that forbade the publication of literature in Finnish except for religious and some economic literature. The striving for a more Finnish Finland, however, had been already awakened, and the more liberal tsar Alexander II yielded to these efforts. In 1863 came the so-called language rescript which stated that within 20 years Finnish would be equal to Swedish in the courts and in administration. However, full equality between Swedish and Finnish in administration was not gained until 1902. The second half of the 19th century also witnessed a rise in the number of authors writing in Finnish. Aleksis Kivi is probably the most important.

The Russification efforts came late to Finland, in the 1890s. Though the 1905 revolution meant a short break in these efforts, they were soon resumed with the ultimate goal of making Finland a totally integrated part of Russia. The revolution and Finland’s independence furthered the use of the Finnish language but in 1919 Finnish and Swedish became the official languages of Finland, except for the Åland islands, which became a neutralized monolingual Swedish area according to international agreements, the first of which was signed in 1921.

The position of Finnish and Swedish in Finland caused a heated struggle between so-called Fennomans and Suecomans in the second half of the 19th century. Such struggles have flared up now and then in Finland but with diminishing intensity after World War II. The most recent discussions of the issue occurred in the 1990s and concerned the status of the Swedish language in the Finnish school system.

The situation in Finland has also caused the Finns in Sweden, the overwhelming majority of whom are post-War work migrants, to demand recognition as a national minority and, at least partly, the same rights as the Swedes in Finland. At present the approximately 300,000 Swedish-speaking persons (about 6% of the population in Finland) have extensive rights and a strong culture. As to identity, they belong to Finland. Finland’s municipalities are officially defined as either monolingual or bilingual. A munic-
ipality is deemed bilingual if more than 8% of the population or more than 3000 people primarily speak a language other than that of the majority. If the number of non-majority language speakers is below these cut-off points, the municipality is officially monolingual. For example, the municipalities of Åbo (Turku), Vasa (Vaasa), and Helsingfors (Helsinki) are considered bilingual since the Swedish-speaking minority numbers more than 3000 persons. In all bilingual municipalities as well as in the state administration, all administrative personnel must be bilingual.

The experience of Finland shows that it is possible to create a functional system of state bilingualism and to integrate the members of an earlier dominant group into the society.

5. Estonian

The high languages of the Estonian part of the Russian empire were German and Russian. The use of Estonian, which has had two written languages since the 17th century, a northern Estonian and a southern Estonian variant, was reduced mostly to the religious and judicial spheres. In the 19th century, the northern variant became the basis for a modern literary language. In the 1850s, an Estonian cultural life got a start, which even the Russification efforts in the late 19th century could not stop. When Estonia became independent after the revolution, Estonian became the national language, and the language was modernized as well. At the same time the minorities, Russians, Germans, Jews, Swedes, and Latvians got extensive rights which were regulated in the Law on Cultural Autonomy of 1925.

The Soviet occupation in 1940 changed the situation considerably. In the post-war period the population balance changed through extensive immigration from other republics. While the Estonians in 1934 comprised 92% of the population, they amounted to only 61.5% in the 1989 census. The corresponding figures for Russians are 4.4% and 30.3%. Regarding language, the percentage of people with Russian as their mother tongue was higher than these figures indicate, due to the fact that many of the other Soviet nationalities claimed Russian as their mother tongue—for example, 54.5% of the Ukrainians, 67.1% of the Belarusians, 78.3% of the Jews, 56.5% of the Germans, and 29.1% of the Latvians. The Estonians, however, were very true to their native language: only 1.1% claimed Russian as their mother tongue.

Demographic changes, together with the Russification efforts especially from the seventies, made the linguistic situation in Estonia a diglossic one, with Russian as the dominant language in most official spheres of life. The reaction against the Russification, however, was strong and became more pronounced in the more liberal climate in the late eighties. In 1989 the Language Law was passed which gave Estonian the status of official language in the republic. This law does not intrude very much on the rights of the Russian-speaking population. Instead, it is better seen as a way to protect Estonian. After independence in 1991 the role of Estonian has been enhanced, and the role of Russian consequently diminished. But the Russian speakers still have, in regard to their language, all the minority rights spelled out in international documents.
Minority Fenno-Ugric languages

Karelian
Since the early Middle Ages, the Karelian area has been a bone of contention, an area divided between East Slavic states and Sweden-Finland. At present most of the Karelian area is a republic in Russia. In the 1989 census only 10% (78,910) of the population in Karelia was Karelian, whereas Russians constituted the majority (73.6%). Of the Karelians in Karelia, only 51.5% claimed Karelian as their mother tongue. The number of Karelian speakers diminished sharply in the younger age groups.

Even though the first written text in Karelian are dated back to the 13th century (a birch bark letter from Novgorod) and the 16th century (some runic texts), the first attempts to codify the Karelian language came in the early 19th century (a catechism in Cyrillic script). The 1930s saw an attempt to create a literary language with Latin script for the Karelians in the Tver region. These are descendants of Orthodox refugees from Swedish Karelia who fled the harsh Swedish Lutheranization policy in the 17th century.

In Soviet Karelia, Finnish was the main language but in 1937 it was banned, and in its place a Karelian-Russian mixed literary language was created. This language, however, existed for only a short period. In the post-World-War-II period Finnish and Russian were used, and only in recent years has Karelian undergone a renaissance. Some schoolbooks and at least one journal have been published; the language is taught in some schools; Karelian and Vepsian are studied at the university in Petrozavodsk.

Vepsian
In the 1989 census the number of people declaring themselves as Veps in Russia amounted to 12,176 people. Of these only about 6000 spoke Vepsian. The main bulk lived south of Karelia in the Vologda and Leningrad region, using Russian as their first language. The Veps language was codified in the 1930s (with Latin script); this form is also used in the present-day attempts to revive the Veps language. The Veps have demanded an autonomous Veps region.

Ingrian
The speakers of Ingrian today comprise probably fewer than a hundred people. The Orthodox Ingrians are descendants of a group of Karelians who migrated southward along the Izhora river. The Ingrians settled in Ingermanland, that is what is now the Leningrad region. An attempt to codify the Ingrian language was made in the 1930s, but the language was used for the most part only in schoolbooks.

When Ingermanland became Swedish in the Peace of Stolbova, 1617, the Swedes tried to convert the Ingrians to the Lutheran faith. As a result, many of the Ingrians fled to Russia. To replace them, the Swedish authorities encouraged the immigration of Lutheran Finns, who are called Ingermanlandians. Descendants of these immigrants are still found in the area, although their number has declined considerably due to emigration and assimilation. In the last few years a Finnish revival has taken place in the area. The number of Ingrians has also fallen drastically, a result of the area's very troubled history and of assimilation by the Russian population.
Minority Fenno-Ugric languages

Votian
Closely related to the Estonians linguistically, the Votes also settled in the Ingermanland area. The number of Votian speakers is probably fewer than 20. The decline of the Orthodox Vote group is a result of assimilation by the surrounding Russians. Votian has, as far as has been possible to establish, never been used as a written language.

Livonian
The Livonian language has been spoken on the shores of the gulf of Riga in Latvia up to the present. How many Livonian-speaking people there are left is not clear, but estimates place their total at fewer than fifty. The number of Livonians has dwindled in this century due to assimilation to the Latvians and to forced migrations from the area in connexion with the two world wars. As a written language, Livonian was used in the second half of the 19th century and up to World War II. The few publications in Livonian were reading-books, song-books, calendars, and a journal (Livli 1931-39). A small-scale Livonian renaissance has been underway in recent years.

Saami languages
The Saami dialects are usually divided into three main groups, East Saami, Central Saami and South Saami. The great differences in pronunciation, morphology and vocabulary, as well as the geographical distribution of speakers, explains why there are as many as six Saami standards, the South Saami in Sweden and Norway, the Lule Saami in Sweden and Norway, the North Saami in Norway, Sweden and Finland, the Inari Saami and the Skolt Saami in Finland, as well as the Kola Saami on the Kola peninsula in Russia.

Map 26. Saami languages. Ill.: Radosław Przebikowski
Meänkieli – the youngest language of the Baltic region

Birger Winsa

Meänkieli is one of the five officially recognized minority languages in Sweden, beside Finnish (Suomi), Romani Chib, Saami and Yiddish. It has its roots in a Finnish dialect, spoken in the Torne River valley in the northern part of Sweden since the eleventh century. There are about 30,000 speakers of Meänkieli.

Until April 2000 Meänkieli was considered a Finnish dialect in the Torne (Tornio) valley, but since then it is a recognised language on the west side of the Torne river. On the Finnish side of the Torne valley the local variety is a dialect in a subordinated relation to Standard Finnish.

The concession of the Swedish Riksdag recognizing Meänkieli was preceded by a debate when some Finnish politicians in Sweden argued in the late 1990s that Meänkieli was a Finnish dialect. One reason for some resistance was that if Meänkieli were recognised, Finnish would have no territorial basis of its own, i.e. some 200,000 Finns in Sweden would be excluded from territorial status. The Torne valley is the natural territory for Finnish and/or Meänkieli. Hence, political, economic and strategic reasons affected resistance.

Furthermore, it is naive to compare the variety spoken on the Finnish side with the variety spoken on the west side of the border. In linguistic and social terms these varieties were comparable some 150 years ago. Today the ecologies of these varieties vary greatly. The Finnish Tornedalians are dominantly monolinguals, are all entirely literate in Finnish and are associated with the majority group. The Swedish Tornedalians, associated with a minority group, are only literate in Swedish and often speak two or even three languages (Saami). These social differences leave an impact on ethnicity, identity, language planning, and on the attitudes toward the respective spoken varieties. In their physical appearance the varieties are fairly similar, whereas the social aspects differ. However, any definition carried out by a linguist should precede from the perspective of revitalisation of a variety, and hence terms such as ‘language’ and ‘dialect’ may be considered from the language planning perspective.

It was, furthermore, not due to purely linguistic or ethnic matters that affected the term Meänkieli (Meän kieli ‘Our language’, Meänkieli ‘Torne valley Finnish’). Even the terms Meänkieli and “Torne valley Finnish” have political implications, which the minority activists began to reflect in the mid 1990s. If we name Meänkieli as “Torne valley Finnish” there is an obvious risk that various forces in society and in the Nordic countries subordinate the term under Standard Finnish, according to local activists. Obviously, the term as such attracts this form of categorisation. One activist claims that Meänkieli exists in a context of strategies and is one attempt to transfer influence to the minority group so that their voice can be heard in the Swedish Parliament, and hence release resources to the revitalisation of the spoken variety, and says this is an important reason for the term. The language resources would otherwise risk being invested only in southern Sweden, according to Tornedalian activists.

The strategy already does seem to indicate positive results. Municipalities on the Swedish side, which have supported Meänkieli and Saami, have better development in cultural domains. The municipalities Pajala and Kiruna have more amateur theatricals, more songs and more literature in Meänkieli, Saami, and Swedish, as compared to Haparanda (Övertorneå) and Gällivare. Hence, institutionalisation of the local language seemingly promotes also cultural development of the majority language, whereas the neglect of the minority languages results in weak cultural development.

The term Meänkieli has, however, received better response in the Finnish part of Torne valley, whereas Meänkieli in Sweden and somewhat in southern Finland is sometimes ridiculed and used in a deprecatory context by politicians, researchers and administrative staff. In the Finnish Torne valley, terms such as Meän koulu ‘Our school’, Meän maa ‘Our land, i.e. Swedish and Finnish Torne valleys’, Meän markkinat ‘Our fair’, Meän talo ‘Our house’ etc are used to mark the common heritage of the Tornedalians. The term Meänkieli seemingly promotes regionalisation and focuses attention on the common heritage of the Tornedalians (“We Finnish and Swedish Tornedalians have a common language/dia-
lect and culture”), which should not be underestimated, although the political connotations of the term are probably of greater importance.

Table 7c. Finno-Ugric languages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finno-Ugric</th>
<th>Territory</th>
<th>Majorities</th>
<th>Minorities</th>
<th>Earliest written records</th>
<th>Cross-ethnic usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finnish (Balto-</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>5,000,000</td>
<td>Russia, Sweden, Norway</td>
<td>16th c.</td>
<td>Finnish-Karelian-Ingrian</td>
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<td>-Finnish)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Finnish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>5,000,000</td>
<td>Russia, Sweden, Norway</td>
<td>16th c.</td>
<td>Finnish-Karelian-Ingrian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>–</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>20th c.</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
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<td>Karelian incl.</td>
<td>Russia</td>
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<td>70,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Olonetsian</td>
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<td>Võro</td>
<td>S. Estonia</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>?</td>
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<td>Estonia</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>17th c.</td>
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<td>Latvian</td>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>di- or triglossia, Latvian and East Slavic</td>
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<td>Saami</td>
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<td>18th c.</td>
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<td>Åkkaala (Babinian)</td>
<td>Norway, Sweden, Finland,</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>very few</td>
<td></td>
<td>diglossia, Nordic, Finnish or East Slavic communities</td>
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<td>Inari</td>
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<td>Kemi † 19th century</td>
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<td>Kildin</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1,000</td>
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<td>Lule</td>
<td>2,000</td>
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<td>Northern (incl.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Torne and Sea</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saami</td>
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<td>Pite</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>Skolt</td>
<td>500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southern Saami</td>
<td>500</td>
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<td>Ter</td>
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<td>Ume</td>
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