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THE COLD-WAR SEA

Lars Fredrik Stöcker, *Bridging the Baltic Sea: Networks of Resistance and Opposition during the Cold War*, Lexington Books, 2018.

For centuries, the sea has played a role in developing independent attitudes. Merchants, sailors, and explorers accepted the hardships of travel in the hope of gaining material profits, having adventures, and going beyond the horizon of everyday life. Rulers also noticed the power of the sea and wanted to make it their own expansion space, as Michel Mollat du Jourdin writes in his *Europe and the Sea* (English edition, 1993). The work by Lars Frederik Stöcker is actually an attempt to develop this idea in relation to the Baltic, the cool and capricious sea of northern Europe, which seems to create a natural barrier against the exchange of goods and people. In winter, the Baltic's destructive storms still threaten ships, even large passenger vessels, and the water temperature does not exceed ten degrees Celsius for most of the year. Nevertheless, the Baltic basin has been conquered by people for centuries, becoming a place of contact and confrontation. Since Viking times, the desires and needs of the Baltic population have been located beyond one territory.

This movement still exists today. Stöcker's book is the first synthesis of the fierce struggles in the Baltic region in the period known as the Cold War (1945–1989). While the author narrows his field of observation to three regions—Estonia, Poland, and Sweden——he yet presents a rich picture of the world. This kind of approach cannot be found in previous literature, at least not in the literature on the 20th century. Stöcker describes the history of these three areas in one narrative. In the past, authors have focused more on describing official and diplomatic relations, and in general have excluded Estonia, as not being a subject of international law but only a peripheral part of the Soviet empire during the Cold War.

Stöcker has decided to focus on the least researched sphere, namely, social contacts and poorly formalized initiatives, which are usually overlooked in the descriptions of official relations. Polish researchers have studied shorter periods of informal contacts, but only Polish-Swedish ones.[1] The secret operations of communist intelligence in regard to Swedish society and to Estonian and Polish emigrants are not discussed in Stöcker's work. The book describes cooperation through the Iron Curtain, rather than the history of curbing or interrupting traffic through the Baltic, although the author also notices difficulties in establishing contacts.

The work is written in historical style, with a preference for primary sources, a chronological layout, a descriptive method of analysis, a meticulous reconstruction of facts, and a display of findings from arduous archival queries in several countries and languages. Stöcker's argumentation is rooted in historical literature. Stöcker refers to Fernand Braudel's concept of long-term structures. Nevertheless, he is open to other points of view, as is evident in his use of sociological terms: for instance, the concept of social networks. He skilfully combines macro- and meso-historical perspectives. He writes for international readers and therefore he carefully explains matters that may be quite well known from the Baltic perspective but are not necessarily clear to a world audience. The study is certainly analytical, interpreting political processes and exploring relationships between very diverse phenomena.

In Stöcker's work, the action takes place on four levels. The highest level is the description of the region's possibilities and the key role of the sea, ports, and ships in the development of the anti--communist opposition, especially in Estonia. Stöcker emphasizes the importance of space, of geography as a basic factor affecting the course of events. Few have previously approached the issue from such a perspective. The second level is the politics of great powers and their governments, of intelligence services and political parties in the Baltic region. The bridging level concerns Estonian and Polish emigrants in Sweden. Finally, the fourth level involves the opposition movement in the Soviet Union, which is shown from the perspective of cooperation with, and even dependence on, the other, higher

[1] A. Kłonczyński, *My w Szwecji nie porastamy mchem... Emigranci z Polski w Szwecji w latach 1945–1980*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, Gdańsk 2012; P. Jaworski, *Most przez Bałtyk. Szwecja wobec „Solidarności" 1980–1982*, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Warszawa 2017.

levels. These dependencies of the opposition movements are still rarely noticed in national historiographies, which are limited to the national context. Meanwhile, Stöcker's approach is broad and not only transcends the national paradigm but also goes beyond the Iron Curtain and the East-West division. At the same time, the work also shows the unflagging power of national thinking, separating the Estonian and Polish diasporas despite the common destiny of the two subjugated nations. The large number of facts and their arrangement into developmental stages on a time axis are also valuable in Stöcker's study.

In the introduction, the author explains the terms he uses. He refers freely and broadly to studies on the Cold War, the opposition in the communist system, transnational contacts, social networks, and, finally, studies on emigration. His terminological digressions about emigration and exile are intriguing. He agrees with the thesis that war émigrés from Estonia were anticipatory and precautionary refugees (p. XVIII). They found themselves in exile as a result of expected repressions, which, however, did not actually take place. With regard to the first wave of Poles in Sweden, Stöcker uses the term "emigration," as if he did not share the idea that Polish settlement in Sweden was forced, as was the case with classic refugees.

The author outlines the international situation in the pre-war period, emphasizing differences rather than similarities between development paths in the Baltic region. On the one hand, there was democratic Sweden; on the other, there were growing dictatorships in other countries of the region. The right-wing and authoritarian tendencies in the Baltic States and in Poland evoked fear in Sweden in the 1930s (p. 7). At that time, Poland was perceived as a dictatorship by Swedish political circles. Communism only reinforced the existing view.

During World War II, smuggling corridors were formed between Sweden and the Polish territories occupied by the Germans. The Swedes kept sales representatives in Poland and bought coal from the Third Reich in Silesia. Trade cooperation created an opportunity for conspiracy activities, exchanges of information, and secret couriers. Stöcker describes the origins of post-war interaction very interestingly. Sweden was already a hidden ally for the Polish resistance movement (pp. 24–27). The Baltic routes to Estonia were even larger. They made it possible to evacuate over 20,000 Estonians in the summer of 1944, when the Soviet army entered the area. The

beginning of the Polish and Estonian diasporas during the war laid the groundwork for a lasting alliance with the Western Allies—Great Britain and the United States.

The long-term perspective allows Stöcker to trace the evolution of emigrants' impact on their countries of origin—from ideas of armed struggle, to transferring spies and activating guerrillas, up to the strategy of a war of words. This peaceful evolution of fighting methods resulted from the breakdown of hope for another war. It also turned out, however, that there was no possibility of penetrating the Soviet bloc states in any other way. More direct forms of struggle, such as those of the "Cursed Soldiers" in Poland and the "Forest Brothers" in Estonia, received a brutal response from the communist state and, under the conditions of dictatorship and violence, were doomed to failure. Hopes for a sudden, "recovering" breakthrough, however, left a mark on the consciousness of Estonian society. People hoped that western countries would come on a "white ship" to the shores of Estonia and free it from Russian oppression (p. 102).

Against the background of these hard realities, the history of the political emigration of the subjugated nations took a more successful turn. In a few places, the author describes the history of Polish and Estonian political diasporas in the context of their service to the American plan for an information war, which was waged primarily under the aegis of Radio Free Europe. Emigrants thus gained the opportunity to engage in political activity; they collected information from newcomers from the Soviet bloc countries and tried to transmit the news, in their languages, back to their countries over American radio. Of course, they were useful for western intelligence purposes (p. 130). However, it might be wondered whether Stöcker does not overestimate the potential of emigrants in this regard. The issue raises some questions, yet they will be difficult to resolve until the intelligence archives are opened.

Did Polish emigrants decrease in usefulness for the intelligence services after 1956? In this context, Stöcker emphasizes the growing alienation of the "old," pre-war generation of émigrés from national reality and their mythical ideas about the government in exile, its power and mission, which hindered contacts between the "old" émigrés and the society behind the Iron Curtain. However, the process of detente after 1956 could also be emphasized as it increased the possibility of penetrating the Soviet bloc countries from within, at least by western press correspondents accredited in Poland. They

sometimes obtained first-hand news and could observe the situation themselves. Tourists who came to Poland also felt greater freedom to establish contacts with Poles, moved independently around Poland, and sometimes came in contact with rebellious members of the intelligentsia. The same applied to Estonia to a small extent as well.

Official policies, which are generally well explained in this book, are compared to emigrants' actions. One overlaps, complements, and explains the other. However, Stöcker's approach to the complex issue of independence and the subordination of emigrants is debatable. Sometimes his description of the question is too one--dimensional, emphasizing the potential of the state and the power of geopolitical conditions. It would seem the interaction was more bi-directional and based on partnership. The expatriates also urged the United States to act because it was in their interest. This kind of approach to the subject would put emigrants in a more favorable light as the initiating party, an actor in the Cold War game. A deeper insight, from emigration sources, might add importance to their actions. Looking through the prism of state documents, it is easy to see the role of the diaspora as a tool in the Cold War game of the great powers. Stöcker's book lacks an individual perspective on what happened at the bottom, on smuggling routes and in emigrants' relations with visitors from behind the Iron Curtain. However, when the view is stretched spatially and temporally, it is usually difficult to put these small contexts in a normal-sized book.

Stöcker clearly shows various ambiguities in the behavior of those in power, which, however, allowed them to achieve optimal results in the complex political game. The policies of the state were two dimensional: officially, Sweden was neutral and, unofficially, it supported the countries of democracy and freedom, and made various gestures toward the Polish and Estonian diasporas. Secret support for the anti-communist diasporas allowed Sweden to deny its involvement in the event that facts contrary to the official position of the government should emerge. This dimension is signaled many times in Stöcker's work, yet it cannot be well documented due to the unavailability of sources. The secret relations, however, create a very interesting background to Stöcker's work and historians will certainly be able to study them more deeply one day. Stöcker sets out future research paths. If this invisible level appears in the future, the Baltic region may prove even more important. The Baltic zone is an area of infiltration and competition and therefore a rather central

place, although, of course, this permeability also took place in other sections of the border between the two worlds.

Estonians consider Sweden and Finland to have been crucial for the infiltration of Estonia. Is Scandinavia also significant to Poland? Probably not that much. Stöcker might have slightly overestimated the role of Sweden in the contacts between political emigrants and Poles remaining in their homeland (p. 170). However, large Polish cultural and political centers were not located by the Baltic Sea. The elite of the Polish intelligentsia travelled to the west rather than to the north of Europe. For Poles, Stockholm ranked lower as a metropolis of civilization than Paris, Rome, Vienna, or London. West Germany also attracted many more travelers from Poland, although it is difficult to identify one leading city there. At the same time, however, the author seems to understand this preference when he writes that Sweden was unique for Estonia but not so special for Poland. Geographical proximity does not necessarily determine the priority of contacts.

After 1956, as the Iron Curtain began to split, perplexities and dilemmas intensified in the emigrant community (p. 99). Ströcker consistently shows the community against a comparative background. Both Polish and Estonian emigrants were torn between having a pragmatic or fundamentalist approach to contact with their countries of origin. The resumption of tourist traffic brought opportunities, but it also gave rise to fears. The intransigents—as the uncompromising London community in exile was called—did not want to maintain contact with communist Poland and were firmly opposed to the legitimation of Soviet rule. Émigrés from Poland and Estonia were sometimes members of communist parties, and even envoys and provocateurs of Eastern European intelligence services. All tourists from communist countries remained in structures of dependence on communist statehood. Emigrants faced the classic dilemmas of a political opposition, which is traditionally spread between hard resistance and some compromise with the unfriendly reality.

Tourists from communist Poland were treated suspiciously by incumbent migrants as contaminated by communism but, on the other hand, they were welcomed as compatriots with whom the migrants could feel familiar and talk about national issues and ask them to distribute anti-communist publications back home. It was characteristic of Estonia that tourist traffic was smaller and its diaspora in Sweden was much more homogeneous. Escapes from

the Soviet Union were rare and the control was stricter. From the Polish perspective, the first contacts with the residents of Soviet Estonia could be seen as not very spectacular—innocent gestures and small groups. Later, however, these processes intensified (pp. 170–174). The KGB (Committee for State Security) seemed to have an advantage as the leading institution of the totalitarian state, but the whole machine of law enforcement was no longer as effective as in the Stalinist period. Therefore, the intelligence services did not know about all cross-border contacts.

Stöcker characterizes the new, post-1968 emigration, taking account of the most important facts, such as generational differences, the ideological genealogy of emigrants, as well as their motivations and resources. Stöcker's dissertation is devoid of the apologetic tendencies found in Polish literature on the subject. The book reflects the climate of dislike for politics and alienation from Polish affairs. Stöcker points out that only a small number of the emigrants of 1968 became involved in Polish activities (p. 142). The need to assimilate in a new homeland or escape into privacy prevailed. Similar processes of adaptation and depoliticization occurred in the Estonian diaspora, although—as the author notes——its members did not blend into Swedish society as quickly. The second generation of the Estonian exodus did not consist of a new wave of incomers, but of people born or raised in Sweden. However, like the new immigrants from Poland, the second generation of Estonians tried to emphasize their separateness, proclaimed a program of getting closer to the country, rejected the archaic images of the old generation of émigrés, and took a more pragmatic line. The difference between Estonia and Poland largely concerned the scale of activity, connections, and interactions. While Polish emigrants had better opportunities to penetrate Polish society, the greater isolation of Estonia limited contacts and potential influence.

The 1970s was a period when the climate of opposition revived in both Baltic regions dominated by the Soviets. In Estonia, this occurred earlier, at the beginning of the 1970s, yet on a smaller scale. The inner tendencies in the Soviet Union, which were the internal driving force of anti-Soviet movements, are outlined in the book (pp. 136–138). It was not only in Estonia that anti-Russian resentments were intensifying (pp. 166–170): as early as in the 1960s, Moscow had problems with the national sentiments of the leadership elites in Latvia and Ukraine. The different cultural

traditions of the center and the periphery, the deepening economic crisis, and the weakness of Marxist ideology were gradually leading to extensive tensions. On the other hand, the repressive power of the center in Moscow was declining. In this context, Stöcker could have somewhat deepened his analysis to show the status nature of repression and opposition. The elitism of dissident movements could have indicated the lack of social support, but this situation also meant that it was more difficult for the communist state to strike the protest movement—without publicity and further complications—as it involved well-known figures, including writers and intellectuals.

In the second half of the 1970s, Poland came to the foreground as the hotspot in Soviet Europe. The author shows the leading position of Polish oppositionists well. It seems to me that Stöcker again slightly overestimates the significance of Sweden. He is probably right when he emphasizes that most of the printing supplies went to the Polish opposition through the Swedish channel (pp. 187 and 189). It is worth noting, however, that the Independent Publishing House NOWA was also supported by Polish-German support networks: Andrzej Chilecki in Cologne, Peter Raina in Berlin, as well as Helga Hirsch and Hans Henig Hahn, to name only a few. I would be cautious in assessing the significance of Sweden in the smuggling of political emigrants' books to Poland (p. 188). The role of the Swedish channel certainly increased in the 1970s, but it was never as dominant as it was in regard to smuggling copy machines. Stöcker may, however, be right with respect to port cities such as Gdańsk and Szczecin. In these areas, the share of literature smuggled through the Baltic Sea could have been the highest.

I appreciate very much that Stöcker attempts to present a wide range of views on Polish émigrés and various animosities that occurred within the diaspora. However, the view that the older generation of the London diaspora played a smaller role in establishing contacts with the Polish opposition after 1976 could be more nuanced (p. 187). The first offset printing machine that reached NOWA was funded by the Polish government in exile in London. Jakub Úwićcicki, a Polish emigrant in Sweden, arranged the smuggling of this device but, in fact, he acted as a contractor of the government in London, which paid Ł2,000 for the purpose. One might also wonder how apt is the characterization of the editor Jerzy Giedroyc. Unlike the Polish government in London, Giedroyc maintained live contacts with the young emigrant community.

Indeed, as Stöcker rightly notes, Giedryoc established such contacts (p. 196), but there were marked tensions between him and the young activists in the early 1980s. This conflict took place primarily within emigrant circles and is thus difficult to document. Not only was it an ideological rivalry but also a struggle for influence, domestic contacts, and publishing opportunities. Traces of these tensions can clearly be seen in Jerzy Giedroyc's correspondence in the archives of the Kultura Literary Institute near Paris.

The workers' strikes on the Polish coast in 1980 opened a new phase of tensions in the Baltic zone. Due to the author's comparative approach, we also learn about the street fights in Tallinn, which took place just after the signing of the agreement in Gdańsk (pp. 213–214). Estonian youth went out into the streets chanting anti--Soviet slogans. Stöcker is right to be careful in assessing the links between this protest and the situation in Poland, but the comparative method used inevitably combines the events. This is an innovative presentation of the sequence of events, the result of using a wider research perspective. Poland, a rebellious Soviet satellite, somehow gave the impulse that invigorated and mobilized the Estonian dissident milieu, says the author. Tracking such dependencies is a strong point of the Swedish scholar's analysis, as researchers have rarely noticed these consequences of Polish events. Researchers have rather emphasized the relatively small echoes of the Solidarity movement in the Soviet Union, and concerns about the return of Polish nationalism in Lithuania and Ukraine.[2] Fears that Poles would return to the borderlands no longer played a role in Estonia.

Solidarity, which was then operating legally in Poland (1980––1981), established lively contacts with Swedish trade unions. Printing equipment was transported to Poland—this time through a legal route. Stöcker is unable to show the statistical picture of such aid as the action was highly spontaneous and fragmented. The situation of semi-freedom in Poland called the bridging role of political emigration into question. The thesis that liberalization in the Soviet bloc usually led to a decline in the significance of political emigration is confirmed, although the matter is presumably very complex. In the period when policies on foreign travel were more relaxed, emigrants gained new opportunities to reach the country with their message. Nevertheless, representatives of the Solidarity trade union were also travelling to Sweden.

[2] J. Holzer, *Europa zimnej wojny*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków 2012.

Western trade unions aimed at maintaining direct contacts with their Polish counterparts. Moreover, Swedish trade unions considered contacts with trade unionists in Poland as more natural and neutral than with groups with clearly opposing programs, such as the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR) and its representatives in Sweden. In this context, Stöcker describes a conflict for leadership in the Solidarity committee in Stockholm (1982). The Swedish unions did not wish Jakub Święcicki to become head of this institution because, in their opinion, he was not a trade unionist and did not belong to Solidarity at all (p. 228). Dislike for Święcicki—as the author explains—was not necessarily dictated by a reserved attitude toward KOR. The customs of the Swedish state separated the two roles of trade unionist and politician.

The position of Poles in the communist era was not as difficult as Poles were sometimes inclined to think. Communication between the small group of the Estonian opposition and the Estonian diaspora, however, became a greater challenge than such communication between the Polish opposition and its diaspora. The KGB watched the Estonian group carefully and in 1983 arrests took place, which actually broke up the opposition in that area, for a few years at least (p. 217). Thanks to the author's findings, we know that the operation of the Soviet special services was very similar to that of the Polish intelligence services against Józef Lebembaum's printing contraband in Lund, Sweden (1987). In 1981, a seaman came to Ants Kippar, the Estonian organizer of the communication channel in Stockholm, and offered his smuggling services. He sailed in the Soviet merchant fleet. Initially, everything went well and secret shipments were transported until 1983, when members of the Estonian opposition were arrested. The sailor turned out to be a man sent by the KGB. Thanks to him, officers could get access to confidential correspondence and penetrate the opposition environment in Estonia more deeply.

Stöcker describes the history of the flow of copy machines for the Solidarity underground through secret channels from Stockholm and Lund. He also captures the dynamics of smuggling actions, pointing to the flaws and difficulties, the peaks and troughs of waves. The author undoubtedly provides English-language literature with new information on smuggling actions. The comparison of Estonia and Poland is valuable in this context. However, when the author very aptly draws attention to the patronage of the American National Endowment for Democracy (NED) (p. 245), he might also

refer to Gregory Domber's findings[3] about the NED's aid for Poland. We also learn about the quiet consent of the Swedish police for the contraband activity; they did not interfere with the practice and even helped in a discreet and unpretentious manner (p. 235). Showing the movement of migrants in this broad international context is one of the strong points of Stöcker 's book.

Stöcker makes us realize that the dynamics of the Soviet bloc's disintegration could have been quite similar in Poland and Estonia, despite the fact that the twilight of communism occurred earlier in Poland thanks to the existence of the powerful social movement Solidarity. However, in the light of the facts presented by the author, it is virtually impossible to say that Poland was clearly the leader of changes just prior to the Soviet bloc countries regaining independence. In Estonia, mass—for a small society——protests were organized, declarations of independence were issued, and the Communist Party was in a state of decay as early as 1988. The national faction quickly revealed itself. All this showed that Estonian communism turned out to be a foreign body. The diaspora's smuggling activity clearly increased and there were signs of pluralism in the public debate. Estonian dissidents joined forces with their Lithuanian and Latvian counterparts (pp. 247–254). Therefore, when the history of the fall of communism is approached more comparatively, Polish achievements fade slightly. Nevertheless, we gain a broader perspective that makes us think about what can be considered exceptional in the history of Poland and what is analogous to other regions.

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Stöcker's book can be regarded as a very good work, including in the aspect of language. Stöcker's very good English, as well as his clear and precise way of expressing his thoughts, deserves recognition. While the book is written in academic English, its style is not linear and there is no one outstanding thesis at the beginning to which the author constantly refers. Stöcker uses numerous metaphors and nice literary expressions. This is certainly not a study written in the hermetic language of specialists in international relations. What I like most in Stöcker's work is his good

[3] G.F. Domber, *Empowering Revolutions. America, Poland, and the End of the Cold War*, University of North Carolina Press 2014.

hierarchization of problems. His great use of the existing literature also deserves appreciation. The author has studied the subject intensely. As revealed by the large number of footnotes, the author appears not to have overlooked any significant work on the topic. Perhaps it could be said that the author does not take much issue with this growing literature. He does discuss contentious questions, but his work is not polemical. At most, the author points out that one or another thesis would require verification or deeper insight.

Bridging the Baltic Sea is a real achievement in the study of the Cold War in the Baltic Sea area. It brings out various common little-known elements in the history of Baltic societies, such as the smuggling of consumer goods through the Baltic Sea, which, in fact, paved the way for the contraband of forbidden publications (vodka and publications transported on yachts between Poland and Sweden, p. 235). In today's Cold War studies, there is a growing interest in culture, economics, and social imaginations. Traditional (narrower) political views are losing their importance. Studies on the elite are giving way to studies on secondary, previously underappreciated actors, such as sailors and ferry passengers, who were couriers of forbidden culture. Stöcker does not break with the classic political perspective, but he also sees new approaches.

At the emotional level, the most intriguing aspect of Stöcker's work is that it captures the regional fears of Soviet domination and attempts to overcome it. These fears manifested themselves in varying degrees in different periods and areas and remain quite a characteristic phenomenon for nations on the outskirts of the empire. These fears by the Baltic Sea are historic and return cyclically when Russian imperialism intensifies. Today they also seem topical, given Russia's aggressive behavior in international politics. Thus, the historical analysis of this situation is attractive and can be treated as a reference work for researchers of contemporary tensions who would like to approach the problem from the long-term perspective.

In an era of narrow specializations and striving for quick scholarly results, hardly anyone would dare to write this type of work: it took about ten years for the author to complete it. However, this kind of slow analysis brings deepened and balanced research results, as well as effective and, at the same time, reliable judgments. Stöcker has written his book with a great sense of proportion and the ability to synthesize extremely complex issues. He has managed

to distance himself from his own Swedish cultural environment and break through the barrier of the Polish and Estonian languages to read sources independently, rather than to provide second-hand information.

Personally, I regret that Stöcker's findings were not known to me when I was writing *Tajna dyplomacja* [*Secret Diplomacy*] (2016), a book about emigration, opposition, and communication through the Iron Curtain. I would certainly have understood more about the story I was describing.

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