

# HEGEMONY AND LIBERATION IN WORLD WAR I: THE PLANS FOR NEW *MARE NOSTRUM BALTICUM*

Mart Kuldkepp

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ABSTRACT

This article studies the attempts made during World War I to imagine and build post-war Baltic Sea region with German-friendly Sweden as its leading power. Ideas to that effect were formulated and propagated in a transnational cooperation (what I call “the activist movement”) taking place in wartime Stockholm and Berlin. The activist circles included German, Swedish, Finnish and Estonian nationalist region-builders who were drawing on Sweden’s seventeenth-century legacy as a historical great power, as well as the geopolitical fears and hopes associated with its geographical position. In the article, I will outline the main features of activist thinking that make it, at least in my opinion, a transnational movement, and give an overview of the three different branches of the movement and their political aims. I will also bring a few more concrete case studies as examples of how such plans played out.

*Keywords:* activism, regionalism, Baltic Sea region, First World War

As World War I began, the stability of the then-current international system was immediately put into question. It was recognized in many politically interested quarters that the great-power conflict not only threatened Europe with immense destruction but also promised unprecedented changes in its political landscape. The exact nature of these changes, of course, was a matter of debate, which meant that parallel to successes and failures on the battlefield, visions of the post-war appeared as subjects of negotiation in diplomacy and propaganda. Plans for some kind of new Europe were included in war aims of the belligerents, discussed in privacy, furthered by secret agents and published in pamphlets and newspapers. Not unexpectedly, even most unorthodox visions of future geopolitical reconfiguration could thereby gain some political currency.

Naturally, there was much variation in what different groups were hoping for. In ruling circles of belligerent multinational empires, the prospect of redrawing state boundaries and creating new lines of influence fueled

imperialist ambitions of gaining control of even more resources and territories. Amongst patriots of “oppressed peoples” – representing national minorities of the very same empires – the war gave rise to hopes for some sort of national liberation that could range from increased cultural autonomy to outright political independence. In addition, there were radical social revolutionaries who denounced the idea of national interests altogether and saw the war as a chance to overthrow the system of bourgeois states that had caused it. And even in neutral states, “war parties” sprung up, eager to enter the conflagration and imagining that the war would somehow open a path towards future glory and/or the revival of ancient might.

This article is a study of one aspect of this ephemeral wartime dreaming: the hopes of creating – at Russian expense – a new post-war Baltic Sea region with Sweden as its leading regional power. In the following, I will refer to this plan as new *Mare Nostrum Balticum*.<sup>1</sup> Drawing on Sweden’s seventeenth-century legacy as a historical great power, as well as the geopolitical fears and hopes associated with its geographical position, the plans for this new region came to be negotiated in a peculiar atmosphere of cooperation in wartime Stockholm, in circles that included representatives of empires (Central Powers, above all Germany), of separatist Russian nationalities (Finns and Estonians), as well as of Sweden’s own war activists. Henceforth, I will refer to this unusual cooperative effort as “the activist movement,” and its plans and goals as “activist regionalism.”<sup>2</sup>

In first part of the article, I will briefly outline the main features of activist thinking that make it, at least in my opinion, a transnational movement,

<sup>1</sup> The term *Mare Nostrum Balticum* (“Our Baltic Sea”) was connected to the policy of *dominium maris baltici* (“Baltic Sea domination”) of Denmark and Sweden in the 16th and 17th centuries, aimed at establishing political, military and economic control over the Baltic Sea. See e.g. Jan Glete, “Cities, state formation and the protection of trade in northern Europe, 1200–1700,” *The dynamics of economic culture in the North Sea- and Baltic region*, ed. by Hanno Brand and Leos Müller (Hilversum: Verloren Publishers, 2007), 20. References to the historical concept of *dominus maris baltici* were often used by the activists. See e.g. Aleksander Kesküla’s report to the Swedish General Staff on 07.05.1917: Sveriges Krigsarkiv, Stockholm [henceforth KrA], Generalstaben, Utrikesavdelningen, E I d, vol 7, röda nummer 3275.

<sup>2</sup> The term “activism” will be elaborated further on in this article. What I mean by “regionalism” has been explained in detail elsewhere, and this discussion does not need to be repeated here (see Mart Kuldkepp, *Estonia gravitates towards Sweden: Nordic identity and activist regionalism in World War I* (Tartu: University of Tartu Press, 2014), 27–38). A useful working definition would be roughly “an ideology and movement aimed at geopolitical reterritorialization.” This means the process of imagining how present territorial entities could be politically divided and united in new and different ways. These ways are frequently imagined to be justified by historical precedent.

and give an overview of the three different branches of the movement and their political aims. In the second part of the article, I will bring in the form of case studies some concrete examples of plans made for a post-war Swedish-dominated Baltic Sea region. Since going fully into detail about the whole movement would be impossible in a single article, the three – interconnected – case studies will merely illustrate the variegated forms this activism took among various actors from around the Baltic Rim: German, Swedish, Finnish and Estonia.

### *Activism as a transnational movement*

One of the more unusual characteristics of the activist movement was its transnational and, to some extent, trans-ideological nature. Its members included Swedes, Finns, Estonians and Germans, conservatives and social democrats, all united by their shared opposition to Russia. Even though the alliance between all these different groups was obviously a largely tactical one, it also included a positive regionalist component as argued below.

The cooperative nature of the movement will appear less strange when it is realized that in many cases, the wartime goals of empires, national and social revolutionaries, and neutral war activists were closely intertwined.

All belligerents, probably without an exception, attempted make use of separatist and revolutionary movements in enemy territory in order to destabilize the respective foe's inner affairs. Such groups were secretly supported with arms and money, and given promises of future privileges. At the same time, empires also attempted to influence the neutrals, either with the goal of directly drawing them into the war as their allies, or at least of ensuring their benevolence in matters such as shipping and trade.

National and social revolutionaries, as well as the war activists of neutral states, naturally tried to take advantage of the great powers' newly found attention to their affairs in order to fulfill own aims of national or social liberation or reinvigoration. The particularities of their aims varied and were of course rarely fully compatible with the goals of the empires. If matters were kept discreet, however, it was possible to forge more or less stable tactical alliances between those weaker groups and the warring powers interested in supporting them.

The nationalities that hoped to gain something through cooperation with the enemy included, among others, the Irish, the Poles, the Czechs, and, not least, many of the national minorities of the Russian Empire. The national elites of Finns, Estonians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Georgians

and many others all adopted to some extent the hope that the war would weaken Russia enough to make possible greater autonomy or even full national independence for some or all of its subject peoples. To encourage this development, their emissaries turned to Russia's enemies – above all Germany – for moral and monetary support, and also received it to varying degrees.<sup>3</sup>

Somewhat more unexpectedly, the representatives of Finns and Estonians also courted Sweden, regarded by them as the leading state in Scandinavia, known to be anti-Russian in its sympathies (best exemplified in the well-known prewar agitation of Sven Hedin and others),<sup>4</sup> and supposed to be interested in regaining the territories lost during previous centuries – certainly Finland, lost in 1809, but perhaps also the Baltic Sea provinces lost through the Treaty of Nystad, 1721. Therefore, even though Sweden had declared itself neutral together with the other two Scandinavian states at the outset of the war, certain representatives of its eastern neighbors still hoped that with the help of Germans and pro-war activist Swedes, Sweden could be encouraged to join the war against Russia.

This shows that tactical alliances mentioned above did not only exist between revolutionaries, separatists and neutral war activists on one, and belligerent empires, on the other hand, but alliances could be tied between non-imperial groups themselves, especially if one of them was a stronger and more dominant one (in this case Sweden). Put differently, the same mutual opportunism found in e.g. the German General Staff's relations with Indian and Irish nationalists, brought together by common anti-British interests, was characteristic of the relations between Swedish, Finnish and Estonian nationalists inside the larger activist movement. The same Swedish activists, in turn, were a non-dominant partner in their relations with Germany, while the representatives of Finns and Estonians naturally also had their own direct contacts with Germany. In this way, a network-like structure of tactical alliances emerged between the different groups.

At the same time, the regionalist dream of the new Swedish *Mare Nostrum Balticum* was something that seems to have transcended purely tactical concerns and been genuinely shared across the whole movement – even

<sup>3</sup> On the various Russian nationalities turning to Germany for support, see Seppo Zetterberg, *Die Liga der Fremdvölker Russlands 1916–1918: ein Beitrag zu Deutschlands antirussischem Propagandakrieg unter den Fremdvölkern Russlands im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Suomen Historiallisen Seura: Helsinki, 1978), 15–41.

<sup>4</sup> About the anti-Russian agitation in Sweden in years before the war, see Gunnar Åselius, *The "Russian menace" to Sweden: the belief system of a small power security elite in the age of imperialism* (Almqvist & Wicksell International: Stockholm, 1994), 256–259.

if its German, Swedish, Finnish and Estonian variants differed in their particularities. The vision of the post-war Baltic Sea region led by Sweden was therefore not simply a Swedish imperialist project, meant to extend Swedish hegemony (with German support) at the expense of Russia, but it was also a project of national liberation for Finnish and Estonian activists. Thus, as I have argued elsewhere, activist regionalism can be seen as an example of a “pooling of nationalisms,” i.e. a regionalist construction building on certain shared features of all of the three national discourses represented in the movement.<sup>5</sup>

### *The three national branches of the Activist movement – and Germany*

As perhaps already evident from previous discussion, my use of the term “activism” is historical. It is derived from contemporary World War I usage in Finland and Sweden where it was employed to designate radical patriotic circles known for their German-friendliness, opposition to Russia and inclination for the “active” way of doing politics.

In Finland, the term was originally used to refer to the covert movement which developed from the turn of the century onwards with the goal of organizing active resistance to Russification policies in Finland (as opposed to the “passive resistance” promoted by other groups). Its members were recruited mostly from the Swedish-speaking upper class and student circles in Helsinki. Early on, it also employed international contacts to a significant degree, as its leaders (above all Konni Zilliacus) attempted to establish tactical alliances with other enemies of the Russian state. These included Russian revolutionary parties, Japan during the Russo-Japanese war, and even Sweden, the previous ruler of Finland, expected to entertain revanchist feelings towards Russia.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Kuldkepp, *Estonia gravitates towards Sweden*, 33.

<sup>6</sup> On the Finnish activists’ contacts with Russian revolutionaries and Japan, see e.g. Antti Kujala, “The Russian revolutionary movement and the Finnish opposition, 1905,” *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 5 (1980), 257–275; Antti Kujala, “The Japanese General Staff and the issue of the concerted anti-government action in the Russian Empire in 1904–5,” *The Russo-Japanese War in global perspective: World War Zero*, ed. by John W. Steinberg et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 261–280 and Michael Futrell, *Northern underground: episodes of Russian revolutionary transport and communications through Scandinavia and Finland, 1863–1917* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 1963), 51–84. The Finnish activists’ attempts to incite the Swedish General Staff to anti-Russian military action during the Russo-Japanese War are (to my knowledge) only described in a letter from Jonas Castrén

During World War I, a second wave of Finnish activism came into being with the goal of taking advantage of this new window of opportunity in order to achieve Finland's liberation from Russia. For this purpose, help was sought from Sweden and Germany, with a preference towards joint military action of both. As a way of thanks, Finnish activists expected Finland to enter into some sort of a close political relationship (federation or confederation) with German-friendly Sweden after the war. This relationship would have included common Swedish-Finnish military forces and common foreign policy, with Sweden given the leading role.<sup>7</sup>

Permanent Finnish offices in Stockholm and Berlin, led by Herman Gummerus and Fritz Wetterhoff respectively, were established almost at the outset of the war.<sup>8</sup> Cooperation with Swedish activists was also of early origin. Although this shared effort looked promising in the beginning – and persisted until the fall of the Tsarist Russia – the relations became strained rather quickly. In addition to different takes on the ultimate regionalist aims of the movement (see below), probably the most important underlying cause was the lack of anything approaching mass support for activism in Sweden. This tied the hands of Swedish activists that could not provide the support the Finns were asking for. As a result, Finns turned increasingly directly to Germany, even if they never wholly gave up the hope of Swedish engagement. German help they also received, most importantly in the form of the establishment of a Finnish national battalion in the German army: the Royal Prussian Jaeger Battalion 27 (*Königlich Preussisches Jägerbattalion Nr. 27*). An extensive smuggling of Finnish volunteers from Finland through Sweden to Germany began in 1915, with passive approval of Swedish authorities.<sup>9</sup>

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to Harald Sohlman from August 1914: Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm [henceforth KB], Gösta Mittag-Lefflers papper, L62:13: Castrén to Sohlman [undated] 08.1914.

<sup>7</sup> On the second wave of Finnish activism more generally, see e.g. Lauri Hyvämäki, "Kommunismi ja jälkiaktivismi," *Suomalainen Suomi*, 5 (1958), 277–278; as well as Matti Lauerma, "Aktivisternas linje," *Finlands utrikespolitik 1809–1966*, ed. by Ilkka Hakalehto (Stockholm: Prisma, 1968), 40–56. The regionalist plans of the activists are cursorily described in L. Torbjörn Norman, "Right-wing Scandinavism and the Russian menace," *Contact or isolation? Soviet-Western relations in the interwar period*, ed. by John Hiden and Aleksander Loit, *Studia Baltica Stockholmiensia* 8 (Stockholm: University of Stockholm, 1991), 339–340.

<sup>8</sup> For personal memoirs of Finnish political activities in respectively Stockholm and Berlin, see Herman Gummerus, *Jägare och aktivister: hågkomster från krigsåren i Stockholm och Berlin* (Helsingfors: Söderström & Co Förlags Aktiebolag); and Johannes Sundwall, *Kring Jägarbataljonen* (Helsingfors: Holger Schildts Förlagsaktiebolag, 1919).

<sup>9</sup> The most comprehensive studies of the jaeger-movement are Matti Lauerma, *Kuninkaallinen Preussin Jääkäripataljoona 27: vaiheet ja vaikutus* (Helsinki: Werner

Of course, even Finnish activists had problems with real political support in their homeland, which they tried to hide from Germans and Swedish activists, often outright lying about the supposedly good prospects for an anti-Russian uprising in Finland, and the general support among the population for the idea of a German occupation.<sup>10</sup>

In Sweden, the term “activists” was used to refer to the circles that were aiming to redirect Swedish foreign policy during World War I by making it abandon what was regarded as shameful neutrality, and enter the war as an ally of Germany. This was seen by Swedish activists as the opportunity to liberate Finland, humiliate Russia and to reclaim Sweden’s naturally given leading position in *Norden*, in line with the historical memories of the seventeenth century “Great Power Era” when Sweden had been a regional great power and a worthy opponent to Russia. The activists expected that liberated Finland would enter some sort of a close political relationship with Sweden in gratitude, and perhaps also hand over the ethnically Swedish Åland islands to Sweden. The other Scandinavian states, Denmark, and Norway, were subsequently expected to be drawn into the Swedish sphere of influence. As a side issue, the question of the Baltic provinces’ (lost in 1721) possible reunification with the former motherland also surfaced but paled in importance in comparison with the Finnish and Åland questions.<sup>11</sup>

Activists and activist-sympathizers in Sweden included several prominent people, both among conservatives and right-wing social democrats. They were journalists, writers, politicians, academics, officers and even members of the royal family. As some of the more high-ranking members

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Söderström Osakeyhtiö, 1966) and Matti Lackman, *Suomen vai Saksan puolesta? Jääkäreiden tuntematon historia* (Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Fritz Wetterhoff had particularly good ability to make his contacts believe he had strong support behind himself. See Olof Mustelin, “Fritz Wetterhoff,” *Finländska gestalter, X: fantaster och realister: Fritz Wetterhoff, Hjalmar Gabriel von Bonsdorff, Sara Wacklin, Gustaf Adolf Helsingius* (Ekenäs: Ekenäs Tryckeri Aktiebolags Förlag, 1974), 12. About Finnish activists’ cooperation with Germany, see Aaro Pakaslahti, *Suomen politiikkaa maailmansodassa I–II* (Porvoo, Helsinki: WSOY, 1933, 1934); Osmo Apunen, *Suomi keisarillisen Saksan politiikassa 1914–1915* (Helsinki: SHS, 1968).

<sup>11</sup> For a more comprehensive overview of the regionalist aims of Swedish activism, see Mart Kuldkepp, “Sweden’s historical mission and World War I: a regionalist theory of Swedish Activism,” *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 39:1 (2014), 126–146 and Sverker Oredsson, “Stormaktsdrömmar och stridsiver. Ett tema i svensk opinionsbildning och politik 1910–1942,” *Scandia* 59:2 (1993), 257–296. There are also some glimpses of a more ambitious Swedish program, supposedly connected to Ludvig Douglas and the Swedish General Staff. Its annexionist goals included, in addition to Åland, also northern part of Finland as well as the Kola peninsula. See KB, Gösta Mittag-Lefflers papper, L62:50:51 – Dagbok (27.10.1915), 144–145.

of the movement, one could name the world-famous explorer Sven Hedin, the ambassador of Sweden in Germany, Arved von Taube, *riksmarskalk* Ludvig Douglas, the mathematician and millionaire Gösta Mittag-Leffler, the professor of political science and member of the parliament Rudolf Kjellén, the minister of education, K. G. Westman, and the Queen of Sweden, Victoria. The most active personalities in the movement, however, were the young conservative anti-emigration activist Adrian Molin, and the German-friendly social democrats Otto Järte and Yngve Larsson.<sup>12</sup>

As their best-known exposé of activist views, Järte, Molin and Larsson published in cooperation with some others in the summer of 1915, a long and controversial manifesto called *Sveriges utrikespolitik i världskrigets belysning*. In the book, they called for Sweden's "bold involvement on the side of Germany" exposing their main regionalist agenda that advocated Swedish hegemony in all of Scandinavia and the Baltic Sea region. This publication was followed up in 1916 by the activist journal *Svensk Lösen*, edited by writer Sven Lidman. *Svensk Lösen* came out until the end of the war and both Swedish and Finnish activists participated in it.<sup>13</sup>

Building on common anti-Russian and pro-Finnish sentiments, the Swedish activists cooperated with Finnish activists residing in Stockholm. At the same time, even though they continually asserted they were acting only in Swedish interests, they also collaborated with Germany, taking advantage of the support found in influential German political and military circles for the idea of Sweden's alliance with the Central Powers in a joint campaign against Russia. However, it should be kept in mind that Swedish activism never had particularly good prospects in Sweden itself. It lacked the support of Swedish political parties, but even more importantly

<sup>12</sup> For attempts to create some kind of typology of the different branches of Swedish activism, see Mats Kihlberg, "Aktivismens huvudorgan Svensk Lösen," *Två studier i svensk konservatism, 1916–1922*, ed. by Mats Kihlberg and Donald Söderlind (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wicksell, 1961), 11–28; Torsten Gihl, *Den svenska utrikespolitikens historia IV: 1914–1919* (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & Söners Förlag, 1951), 108–110 and Michael Jonas, "Activism, diplomacy and Swedish-German relations during the First World War," *New Global Studies*, 18:1 (2014), 32–34.

<sup>13</sup> Otto Järte, Rudolf Kjellén, Yngve Larsson, Adrian Molin, *Sveriges utrikespolitik i världskrigets belysning* (Stockholm: Nordiska Bokhandeln, 1915). About *Svensk Lösen*, see Kihlberg, *Aktivismens huvudorgan Svensk Lösen*, 8–89. Of memoirs of Swedish activists, the most significant account is that of Adrian Molin: KB, Adrian Molins efterlämnade papper. L46:16A, "Aktivismens historia 1914–1917" (1932) [henceforth Molin, *Aktivismens historia*].



it lacked any real support among the people in a state that was at the very same time becoming increasingly more democratic.<sup>14</sup>

There was also a small group of exile Estonians in Sweden, who I would consider part of the activist movement.<sup>15</sup> They gathered around the self-appointed representative of Estonians there, Aleksander Kesküla, who first arrived in Stockholm in the autumn of 1914 and spent most of his war years in Sweden.

The mainstream of Estonian nationalism had remained mostly passive in the war, for even though Estonian nationalists were opposed to the Russification policies of the Russian state, they knew the most likely outcome of Russia's defeat in the war would have been Estonia's annexation by Germany. At the time, the land was still dominated by its historical Baltic-German nobility that was markedly German-friendly, and, what is more, conducting active annexionist propaganda in Germany.<sup>16</sup> In case of German victory, Estonians could thus at most have expected a degree of cultural autonomy under German protection. Much more probably, though, outright German rule in Estonia would have meant the enactment of Germanization policies replacing those of Russification, something that was certainly not regarded as an improvement over the *status quo*.<sup>17</sup>

Aleksander Kesküla was of different opinion, believing that Russia would and should be defeated through the strength of its enemies and its own inner weaknesses. At the same time, he attempted to influence

<sup>14</sup> About the Swedish activists' cooperation with Germany, see Inger Schuberth, *Schweden und das Deutsche Reich im Ersten Weltkrieg: die Aktivistenbewegung 1914–1918* (Bonn: Röhrscheid, 1981), Wilhelm M. Carlgren, *Neutralität oder Allianz: Deutschlands Beziehungen zu Schweden in die Anfangsjahren des ersten Weltkrieges* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wicksell, 1962) and Jonas, *Activism, diplomacy and Swedish-German relations*, 31–47. The indifferent attitude of the Swedish masses to either side in the war is mentioned in Gihl, *Den svenska utrikespolitikens historia IV*, 93–94.

<sup>15</sup> Contemporary Swedish and Danish use of the terms “Estonian activists” and “Estonian activism” (*Estniska aktivister/estnisk aktivisme*), although rare, has been attested in connection with Kesküla's activities. See Kuldkepp, *Estonia gravitates towards Sweden*, 40–41.

<sup>16</sup> I. e. propaganda meant to accomplish the annexation of the Baltic Sea Provinces to Germany. In many cases the émigré Baltic Germans were also advocating the settlement of German peasants in the Baltic Sea provinces as a way of solving the national question for good. About Baltic German propaganda in Germany, see e.g. Wilhelm Lenz, “Baltische Propaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg: die Broschürenliteratur über die Ostseeprovinzen Russlands,” *Die baltischen Provinzen Russlands zwischen den Revolutionen von 1905 und 1917 = The Russian Baltic Provinces between the 1905/1917 revolutions*, ed. by Andrew Ezergailis, Gert von Pistohlkors (Böhlau Verlag: Köln/Wien, 1982), 187–204 and the references therein.

<sup>17</sup> Kuldkepp, *Estonia gravitates towards Sweden*, 19–20.

Germany in the direction of not annexing the Baltic Sea provinces outright. Instead, he tried to persuade the German government towards respecting what he called the pro-Scandinavian interests of Estonians. This meant that, instead of annexation, Germany would have allowed Estonia to form some kind of a union with German-friendly Sweden. To realize that goal, Sweden would have needed to be drawn into the war on the German side and made to occupy Finland and Estonia. For that reason, Kesküla also launched a similar propaganda initiative in Sweden, trying to make the seventeenth-century motherland of Estonians aware of its obligations and possibilities not only in Finland, but also in the “former Swedish Baltic Sea provinces.”<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps due to the fact that German- or Entente-friendliness were hardly more than tactical choices for Kesküla, he could be more flexible in his political plans than either the Finnish or Swedish activists. Initially, in 1914–16, Kesküla tried to make Sweden join the German cause, carry out its historical mission of liberating Finland and Estonia, and take leadership in a post-war Swedish-Finnish-Estonian union. In 1917–18, as he became convinced that Germany would not be successful in the war, he switched his allegiance first to England and then to France, trying to make use of the interests of the Entente in order to reach similar aims.<sup>19</sup>

Another actor that was extremely important for the activist movement was of course Germany. Fritz Fischer has argued in his influential book about Germany’s war aims that the ultimate cause of the war was Germany’s ambition as a young revisionist power to attain for itself a worthy status in “world politics,” especially by challenging the British naval hegemony, which had made Great Britain the greatest colonial power of the period.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, as e.g. pointed out by Jeremy Black, it would be a mistake to see the German bid for power as somehow unique.<sup>21</sup> Smaller

<sup>18</sup> Even if not very explicitly, this program is already outlined in Kesküla’s first letter to the German government from September 10, 1914: Kesküla to German government 10.09.1914: Berlin, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts [henceforth PAAA], R 20983, p. 113. See also Kuldkepp, *Estonia gravitates towards Sweden*, 20.

<sup>19</sup> For a short overview of Kesküla’s political biography during the war, see e.g. Olavi Arens, “Aleksander Kesküla,” *Eesti Teaduste Akadeemia Toimetised: ühiskonnateadused*, 40:1 (1991), 30–34 and Kuldkepp, *Estonia gravitates towards Sweden*, 20–25. About Kesküla’s contacts with Germany, see Kaido Jaanson, “Eestlane Aleksander Kesküla ja Berliin: avang (september 1914 – mai 1915),” *Tuna*, 1 (2004), 12–38.

<sup>20</sup> Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht: die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914/18*. Dritte, verbesserte Auflage (Droste Verlag: Düsseldorf, 1964).

<sup>21</sup> Jeremy Black, *Great powers and the quest for hegemony: the world order since 1500* (Routledge: New York, 2008), 117.

countries, such as Serbia, could be just as guilty of territorial and political expansionism; and other great powers, such as Britain and France, were more than ready to go after the spoils of collapsing enemy empires, as the aftermath of World War I would later show.

This hegemonic ambition, often leading to wishful thinking and strategic overreach also prepared Germany for extensive use of tactical cooperation with “enemies of their enemy” for subversive and political purposes.<sup>22</sup> Among others, Germany actively cooperated with all three national branches of the activist movement. While the relationship between the German minister in Stockholm, Hellmuth Lucius von Stoedten, and the activists was often less than ideal, the activists also had high-ranking friends and supporters in Berlin who they frequently visited and conferred with. These included Vice State Secretary Arthur Zimmermann in the Foreign Office (*Auswärtiges Amt*) and Rudolf Nadolny (later replaced by Dietrich von Hülsen), head of the so-called *Sektion Politik* of the German General Staff (*Stellvertretende Generalstab*).<sup>23</sup>

All the same, wartime Germany should not be seen as a uniform entity with a clear line of policy and stable war aims. In many questions, the situation was the opposite – not least concerning the question of how the war could be won. When German hopes for a short war and an easy victory had waned by 1915, it became a pressing issue for the country’s leadership to decide whether the main German efforts in the two-front war should be directed at the West or the East. This, in turn, raised the issue of whether separate peace should be sought with Russia, an idea that found considerable support not least from *Auswärtiges Amt* and Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg. To prevent this from happening was, of course, of crucial importance to the activists, who all – Swedes, Finns, and Estonians – did what they could to urge for more attention to the Eastern Front.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Concerning the German policy of supporting (often in a very haphazard fashion) all manner of adventurers and self-appointed representatives of Russian national minorities, see Georgi Katkov, “German political intervention in Russia during World War I,” *Revolutionary Russia*, ed. by Richard Pipes (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), 80–112.

<sup>23</sup> About the Swedish activists’ conflict with Lucius, see Schubert, *Schweden und das Deutsche Reich in Ersten Weltkrieg*. About the activists’ frequent trips to Berlin, see Jonas, *Activism, diplomacy and Swedish-German relations*, 38–39. About the main German actors involved both in the *Revolutionierungspolitik* against Russia (most of whom were also connected to the question of Swedish involvement), see Zetterberg, *Die Liga der Fremdvölker Russlands*, 49–50.

<sup>24</sup> About the German dilemma in 1915 as to where to direct their war effort, see Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht*, 223–246 and Carlgren, *Neutralität oder Allianz*, 81–93.

Was the solution to this question be favorable to activists (which it ultimately was), there would have been another issue coming up: German territorial gains in the East. Especially in the second half of the war, a sharp conflict of views in this question emerged between the markedly chauvinist and pro-annexionist General Staff and the Supreme Command,<sup>25</sup> which were receptive to Pan-German and Baltic German propaganda and expected to conquer the areas on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea outright, and the more liberally oriented government and parliament (*Reichsregierung* and *Reichstag*), which, instead of outright annexations, supported the founding of a belt of German-friendly satellite states. Eventually, it was the first and more aggressive perspective that won out, even as Germany itself was being increasingly worn down by the material and human costs of the war.<sup>26</sup>

It is important to realize that unlike in the separate peace question, where all the activist branches took a similar stance, the differing German perspectives in the Eastern question were the cause of an important wedge in the activist movement. For the Estonian activist project, the probably less likely solution with a belt of German-friendly states was clearly the preferable one, as it would have made possible the desired closer association with Sweden. For most of Swedish and Finnish activists, however, the Estonian national issue was marginal enough that they were prepared to support a more radical German annexionist program (even the OHL and the General Staff were ready to make an exception to Finland). Yet, in either case, the enlistment of Sweden on the German side was a *condicio sine qua non*.<sup>27</sup>

In Germany, the question of whether an alliance with Sweden should be attempted depended most often probably on the more general attitudes towards the Eastern question. Opinions were again split with OHL being

<sup>25</sup> *Oberste Heeresleitung* or OHL, led by generals Hindenburg and Ludendorff.

<sup>26</sup> The conflicting German policies in the Estonian (and more generally, the Baltic) question, especially during the second part of the war, are treated in Karl-Heinz Janßen, "Die baltische Okkupationspolitik des Deutschen Reiches," 217–254, *Von den baltischen Provinzen zu den baltischen Staaten*, ed. by Jürgen von Hehn, Hans von Rimscha, Hellmuth Weiss (Marburg/Lahn: Herder-Institut, 1971), and Arved von Taube, "Das Auswärtige Amt und die estnische Frage 1917/1918," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 4 (1969), 542–580.

<sup>27</sup> Both Swedish and (especially) Finnish activists also cooperated with annexionist Baltic Germans. See especially the voluminous correspondence between Fritz Wetterhoff and various Baltic German politicians in the volumes *Baltian maita koskevaa I* and *II* in Suomen Kansallisarkisto, Helsinki, [henceforth KA], Wetterhoffin toimisto – Die finnl. Kanzelei, vol 15-16. Some Baltic German propaganda materials are also found among the papers of Adrian Molin: KB, Adrian Molins efterlämnade papper, L46:25 ("Estniska frågan").

in favor of the alliance, *Auswärtiges Amt* mostly against, or at least skeptical, and *Kaiser Wilhelm II* on the fence and open to influence in either direction. At the same time, *Auswärtiges Amt* itself was divided, with the State Secretary Gottlieb von Jagow against the idea, but Vice State Secretary (and von Jagow's later successor) Arthur Zimmermann enthusiastically for it. Similarly, the German minister to Sweden at the outset of war, Franz von Reichenau, supported the idea indeed too intensely for Swedish comfort, bringing thereby about his own replacement by Hellmuth Lucius von Stöedten, a known advocate of Russian-German separate peace and a sworn enemy of Swedish activism.<sup>28</sup>

But the differences of opinion should not be overemphasized, and even supporters of the separate peace could consider the activist solution a possible alternative. For example, Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, one of the main advocates of the separate peace, expressed in June 1915 as his opinion that German annexation of not only Courland but also of Riga and the whole of *Baltikum* could possibly still be achieved, but not without alliance with Sweden and the liberation of Finland from Russia.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, German alliance with Sweden and German annexionism in the East could be regarded as complementary standpoints, jointly forming a political alternative to the prospect of separate peace.

Even if Germany had adopted a fully pro-activist policy, however, there would still have remained the question of how much it would concede to Sweden in return for its participation in the war. Again, there seem to have been two major possibilities. The Swedish activists themselves generally expected Sweden to receive hegemony over the Åland Islands and to enter some sort of a close post-war political relationship with liberated Finland, thereby cementing the status of Sweden as the leading power in Scandinavia. This plan had the advantage that it was compatible even with an annexionist German policy in the East. Another and more ambitious scenario, which also aimed for Swedish influence over the Baltic Sea provinces (especially Estonia) was on the other hand not compatible with the German annexionism and was, therefore, less likely to succeed. Also,

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<sup>28</sup> See Jonas, *Activism, diplomacy and Swedish-German relations*, 34–35 and Schubert, *Schweden und das Deutsche Reich im Ersten Weltkrieg*. To explain in detail the reasons behind the different groupings' and individuals' attitudes lies outside the scope of the present article. Not infrequently, the ultimate explanation might simply be personal preference or temperament.

<sup>29</sup> Bethmann Hollweg to Falkenhayn 14.06.1915. Quoted in Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht*, 239.

as its major proponents it only had the tiny Estonian branch of the activist movement and was therefore probably even less likely to be realized.

Both variants of activist regionalism seem to have had their proponents in Germany, although without further research, it is difficult to trace the degree of support they had, and how the German attitudes evolved and fluctuated over time until its defeat in World War I and the simultaneous disintegration of the activist movement. However, the following three case studies should provide some further clues towards understanding German attitudes regarding Swedish hegemony and Finnish-Estonian national liberation, as well as the goals and activities of the three national branches of the activist movement itself.

### *The case of Wilhelm Ostwald*

My first case study concerns Wilhelm Ostwald (1853–1932), Baltic German laureate of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry (1909). He was born in Riga, present-day Latvia but worked at the University of Tartu between 1872 and 1881, and at Riga Polytechnicum from 1881–87. When he was awarded the Nobel price, he had already moved to Germany and was working at the University of Leipzig.

Between 1911 and 1915, Ostwald was active as the president of The Monist League (*Deutscher Monisten-Bund*). It was a philosophical and scientific organization founded in Jena in 1906 by German zoologist Ernst Haeckel, with the aim of promoting liberal values such as free thought and scientific study of nature and society. The ultimate goal of the monists was to unite different areas of knowledge into a single meaningful totality, leading to progress in all areas of life. At the same time, monism was not far removed from social Darwinism, presuming that a society organized in a rational way would be hierarchical, led by an elite who would, if necessary, employ eugenics and forceful euthanasia. Not merely a philosophical stance, monism thus functioned as a potent foundation for political and social movements – and even spiritual ones (somewhat paradoxical, given its atheist disposition).<sup>30</sup>

In Ostwald's case, the monist idea of unity of knowledge was closely connected to his own idiosyncratic system of "energetics" (*Energetik*).

<sup>30</sup> See e.g. Daniel Gasman, *The scientific origins of national socialism* (second edition: New Brunswick/New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 48; Todd H. Weir, "The riddles of monism: an introductory essay," *Monism: science, philosophy, religion, and the history of a worldview*, ed. By Todd H. Weir (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 1–44.

Whereas Haeckel had believed the central framework of progress to be biological evolution, Ostwald understood reality in all its different aspects as manifestations of “energy.” This meant that different phenomena could be hierarchically ranked by their level of “organization of energy,” motivated by his categorical imperative of monist ethics: “utilize energy, do not waste it.” This ideal naturally extended even to international politics. In May 1911, Ostwald preached to the Monist World Congress in Hamburg his idea of monism as a key to “world organization:” a solution to all of world’s problems.<sup>31</sup>

However, Ostwald’s energeticist progress ideals received a serious blow when World War I broke out and even internationally-minded academics were forced to take sides in the conflict. As a result, the monist movement was split into a pacifist and a warlike wing, with former pacifists Haeckel and Ostwald as leaders of the latter camp, trying to unite the monist vision of the rational world order with the idea of German leadership.<sup>32</sup>

On 6 October 1914 Ostwald held in Hamburg for a local Monist organization two related speeches titled respectively “Europe under German leadership” and “[Germany’s] inner reorganization.” In the former, he stated openly that “if the European peoples cannot be brought to peace by rational agreement, they can be brought to it by force, which Germany would be able to do after the victoriously concluded war.”<sup>33</sup> Writing in his Monist journal *Monistische Sonntagspredigten* under the title “The European balance,” he adds that “the future brain of Europe can only be Germany, since only Germany has fully understood the meaning of the cultural notion of organization and has started translating it into reality.”<sup>34</sup>

While claiming the cultural superiority of Germany, Ostwald also complained about Great Britain and France betraying “culture” by joining Russia. Already in the beginning of September, he had signed with 92

<sup>31</sup> Weir, “The riddles of monism,” 6–7.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>33</sup> Wilhelm Ostwald, “Europa unter deutscher Führung,” *Mitteilungen der Wilhelm-Ostwald-Gesellschaft zu Großbothen*, 3 (2002), 22.

<sup>34</sup> Wilhelm Ostwald, “Europäisches Gleichgewicht (Kriegspredigt),” *Monistische Sonntagspredigten*, 5. Reihe (1916), 304. About Ostwald’s monist views, see Kocku von Stuckrad, *The scientification of religion* (Boston/Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 80–87. His activities at the outbreak of World War I are also touched upon in “Ostwald vor 100 Jahren. 1914,” <<http://www.wilhelm-ostwald.de/seiten/s14.htm>> [accessed 06.03.2015]. The two Hamburg lectures have been published in Wilhelm Ostwald, “Europa unter deutscher Führung,” *Monistische Sonntagspredigten*, 5. Reihe (1916), 161–192, as well as Wilhelm Ostwald, “Europa unter deutscher Führung,” *Mitteilungen der Wilhelm-Ostwald-Gesellschaft zu Großbothen*, 3 (2002), 13–23, and Wilhelm Ostwald, “Innere Neugestaltung,” *Monistische Sonntagspredigten*, 5. Reihe (1916), 209–224.

other German academics the well-known manifesto *Aufruf an die Kulturwelt*, directed against “English webs of lies.”<sup>35</sup> Establishing an organization of intellectuals on the basis of this manifesto became subsequently the pretext for his journey to Sweden, which Ostwald offered to undertake to *Auswärtiges Amt* and Zimmermann in order to “work, in the spirit of scientific internationalism, for a better-justified judgment of Germans.”<sup>36</sup> Most probably, his real aim was different, and consisted above all in making regionalist propaganda, doubtlessly inspired by the recent German successes on the Eastern Front, where Germany had scored a major victory against Russia in the Battle of Tannenberg in late August 1914.

At the time being, there is no known source that outlines Ostwald’s ideas in the form that he presented them for Zimmermann. Wilhelm M. Carlgren notes that the project of a Nordic federation under Swedish leadership, the essence of Ostwald’s propaganda in Sweden, would not appear with clarity in German documents until next year.<sup>37</sup> However, there are clues also in several more contemporary sources, which can be used to try to reconstruct the outline of Ostwald’s main ideas in October 1914.

Most importantly, there is the long and detailed report that Ostwald wrote to Zimmermann after his return, listing his Swedish contacts and outlining all politically significant conversations – among others with the German minister Franz von Reichenau, his chemist friend Svante Arrhenius, *Riksantikvarie* Oscar Montelius, the artist Richard Berg, the Estonian politician Aleksander Kesküla and the leader of Swedish social democrats Hjalmar Branting.<sup>38</sup> To them, Ostwald argued that the outcome of the war would be a new “organization” of Europe, meaning that Germany would become the central power ruling the whole of Europe through its allies. One of those would be a “Baltic Federation,” consisting of Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland and “Baltia” (meaning the Baltic Sea provinces of Estonia, Livonia and Courland) with Sweden as the leading power and the

<sup>35</sup> Ostwald also took contact with the German General Staff, offering his services in the field of chemistry, which, however, were rejected. See Karl Hansel, “Ostwald als ‘intellektueller Kriegsfreiwilliger,’” *Mitteilungen der Wilhelm-Ostwald-Gesellschaft zu Großbothen*, 3 (2002), 25–26. For a further example of Ostwald’s “anti-Barbarian” rhetoric, see Wilhelm Ostwald, “Die Forderung des Tages (Kriegspredigt),” *Monistische Sonntagspredigten*. 5. Reihe, 1916, 159. The *Aufruf* has been treated in Jürgen von Ungern-Sternberg, Wolfgang von Ungern-Sternberg, *Der Aufruf “An die Kulturwelt”: das Manifest der 93 und die Anfänge der Kriegspropaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1996).

<sup>36</sup> Hansel, “Ostwald als ‘intellektueller Kriegsfreiwilliger,’” 25–26.

<sup>37</sup> Carlgren, *Neutralität oder Allianz*, 62.

<sup>38</sup> Ostwald to Zimmermann 03.11.1914: PAAA, R 20984, pp. 58–99.



King of Sweden as the Emperor. This Baltic Federation would ensure a better economic development for its members and act as a European bulwark against Russia. It might even be augmented with a liberated Ukraine, making the conglomerate stretch down to the Black Sea. The practical steps in the creation of this federation would have included Sweden entering the war on the German side and re-conquering Finland and “Baltia” which would then have become independent states ruled by Scandinavian princes. Denmark would then be persuaded to join the federation through the promise of Prussia returning Northern Schleswig to them.<sup>39</sup>

Most of Ostwald’s contacts in Sweden reacted to these ideas rather with fear and confusion than with enthusiasm. Almost the only person besides Kesküla to agree with Ostwald on these points was the famous Swedish mathematician and eminent activist Gösta Mittag-Leffler who invited Ostwald over to lunch on 25 October 1914, shortly after his arrival in Sweden. As Mittag-Leffler records in his diary, Ostwald was proposing basically the same plan that Mittag-Leffler himself had been supporting since earlier: the creation of a Scandinavian State consisting of Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland, with King of Sweden as the Emperor (*Kejsare*). The only differences from Mittag-Leffler’s plan were that Ostwald and Zimmermann had augmented this imaginary state with three great duchies (*storfurstendöme*): *Estland*, *Lifland* and *Kurland*; and had also stipulated that Northern Schleswig would be returned to Denmark.<sup>40</sup>

Before leaving Sweden without having achieved much, Ostwald managed to make an unfortunate public relations mistake. An interview with him, leaving a rather chauvinistic impression, was published in the liberal newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* on 28 October 1914.<sup>41</sup> There, Ostwald was reported to have argued openly that the German culture surpassed that of the rest of Europe, and that the war was not a war of German conquest, but a “war of organization:” a kind of a blessing helping Germany to convey her talents to everyone else. He suggested that post-war, there would be a complete rearrangement of the map of Europe. Instead of a conglomerate of absolutely equal states – an idea that England had been using to its own advantage – Europe would be re-arranged into an organized whole in which every European nation (except for Russia, which according to

<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, the return of Northern Schleswig to Denmark indeed took place after the war, even if under very different circumstances.

<sup>40</sup> KB, Gösta Mittag-Lefflers papper, Dagbok 50:49 (25.10.1914).

<sup>41</sup> “Det kulturella Tysklands sändebud. Ett samtal med Wilhelm Ostwald. En tysk fredsvän om världsläget,” *Dagens Nyheter*, 28.10.1914. For an English summary of the interview, see Gasman, *The scientific origins of national socialism*, 140–142.

Ostwald belonged to Asia) would be assigned a special role and position, with leadership belonging to Germany, and – in Germany – to the *Kaiser*. Whether the other states desired such a political union with Germany or not, Ostwald insisted that they would be compelled to participate.<sup>42</sup> For Sweden, this would mean Germany as a central power, allied with a “Baltic Federation” (*Baltiska statsförbund*) led by Sweden but also including “autonomous Finland” and “self-governing Baltic Sea Provinces” that would build a buffer zone against Russia. What is more, Ostwald claimed that his stay in Sweden, propagating these views, had the character of an official mission from *Auswärtiges Amt*.

The interview in *Dagens Nyheter* caused a minor outcry both in Sweden and Germany.<sup>43</sup> *Deutsche Tageszeitung* (6 November 1914) tried to assure the “Swedish friends” that Ostwald was in Sweden “certainly not” on “a quasi-official diplomatic mission,” as had been stated in the interview, and thought it necessary that the German government publish an official statement to disavow any such insinuations. It even argued that “a sort of border control” should be instituted in time of war, in order to keep away from neutral countries such guests, who lack everything necessary to influence the public opinion in a “politically sensitive, appropriate and advantageous” way.<sup>44</sup> Similar articles followed in other newspapers. As a reaction to the scandal, *Auswärtiges Amt* admitted that Ostwald’s trip had been undertaken with their knowledge, and Ostwald was somewhat justified in his feeling that he was on a quasi-official mission. However, they also said that Ostwald’s statements had been misreported in the press and he had not been actually entrusted with any official mission.<sup>45</sup>

This, however, does not mean that German authorities actually had nothing to do with Ostwald’s project. Most likely, he was conducting his propaganda at least with their tacit approval, even if not outright following

<sup>42</sup> According to Ostwald himself, the interview was “written in a thoroughly hostile tone” and the journalist “fights [...] with hands and feet against the realization of the idea of the Baltic Federation.” See: Ostwald to Zimmermann 03.11.1914: PAAA, R 20984, 73–74.

<sup>43</sup> See *Dagens Nyheter*’s answer the next day: “Världens organiserande. Ett vänligt projekt som icke lockar Sverige,” *Dagens Nyheter* 29.10.1914. In a letter from 29.10.1914 to his German publisher, Svante Arrhenius wrote that “the good Swedes listened to Ostwald’s Evangelium with laughter” and “Ostwald achieved perhaps the opposite of what he intended” (quoted in Hansel, *Ostwald als “intellektueller Kriegsfreiwilliger,”* 29). The German press controversy is treated at some length in Hansel, *Ostwald als “intellektueller Kriegsfreiwilliger,”* 32–45.

<sup>44</sup> The newspaper article in question is republished in Hansel, *Ostwald als “intellektueller Kriegsfreiwilliger,”* 28–29.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 37–38.

their orders. It seems that a similar plan to Ostwald's was also presented to Victoria, Queen of Sweden, during her talks with von Jagow at the end of November 1914.<sup>46</sup> Certainly, it was the same proposal that was brought up in May 1915 when Swedish Prime Minister Hjalmar Hammarskjöld visited Berlin for unofficial talks with German Vice State Secretary Arthur Zimmermann. As a return for a Swedish alliance with Germany in the war, Zimmermann promised to Hammarskjöld that Sweden would be given a leading role in Scandinavia, the territory of which would be enlarged with an autonomous Finland, autonomous *Baltikum* and the return of North-Schleswig to Denmark.<sup>47</sup>

As remarked by Karl Hansel,<sup>48</sup> Ostwald's vision for the post-war differed only in nuances from the one proposed by a far more famous pan-German regionalist Friedrich von Liszt, whose views were well-known also in Swedish.<sup>49</sup> This does not mean that those nuances were not important. What makes Ostwald exceptional amongst other Pan-German-minded intellectuals is that he did not support the annexation of any new territories to Germany, but rather saw the war as an opportunity to institute a hierarchical "organization" of states proceeding from principles of unity and effectiveness. In this connection, he was, as far as is known to me, the first one to propose the idea of some kind of a Baltic federation including both the Scandinavian countries and the Baltic Sea provinces, forming a counterweight against Russia. This makes it not improbable that the origins of the more ambitious version of the activist regionalist program are actually found somewhere in Ostwald's thinking.

The idea that Baltic Sea provinces would be ceded to Sweden, rather than to Germany, was also an important common denominator in Ostwald's and Kesküla's views. In fact, a month after Ostwald's visit, Kesküla explicitly stated to the Swedish General Staff that Ostwald had been the first one to propose the idea of a "North-Germanic Federation," encompassing

<sup>46</sup> Carlgren, *Neutralität oder Allianz*, 62.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>48</sup> Hansel, *Ostwald als "intellektueller Kriegsfreiwilliger"*, 32.

<sup>49</sup> Franz von Liszt, *Ett mellaneuropeiskt statsförbund* (Stockholm: C. A. V. Lundholm A.-B., 1914). Similar parallels could be drawn to the *Mitteleuropa* concepts of Friedrich Naumann and other contemporary German thinkers which in some cases also entered the public discourse about German war aims. For a handy introduction to Liszt's and Naumann's concepts, see: Bo Stråth, "Mitteleuropa: from List to Naumann," *European Journal of Social Theory* 11:2 (2008), 171–183. A thorough study of the history of concept in Germany until the end of World War II is found in Henry Meyer, *Mitteleuropa in German thought and action* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1955).

“Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Russian Karelia and the coastal area along the White Sea against the border of Siberia.”<sup>50</sup>

Even though Ostwald failed as a politician, his regionalist attempts were not forgotten. In one of his pamphlets from 1915, the father of Swedish geopolitics and activist Rudolf Kjellén writes that although Ostwald’s personal endeavor was discredited, the principles of his “organization policy,” i.e. the idea of a special Nordic Federation – had been accepted by the whole of Germany and should certainly not be ignored by Sweden either.<sup>51</sup> Still in 1916, Russian newspapers gladly reminded their readers of Ostwald’s propaganda in Sweden as a sign of overwhelming German influence in this purportedly neutral country.<sup>52</sup>

### *Two proposals from the Pelican Club*

Intensive activist agitation in Sweden began in the summer of 1915 with the publication of the book *Sveriges utrikespolitik i världskrigets belysning*.<sup>53</sup> As pointed out by Adrian Molin, the previous winter’s proto-activist ruminations around “strong” or “weak” neutrality for Sweden were thus replaced with a more radical question: “neutrality or not?” The reasons behind this shift were, according to Molin, the successes of the Hindenburg offensive in the east, new confidence in Sweden’s relatively and absolutely better military capacity than half a year earlier, as well as the belief on the part of Swedish activists that a time had arrived for Sweden to make, as Molin writes “a contribution of decided importance for its own and Europe’s future.”<sup>54</sup>

This perceived window of opportunity in time appeared when activists became aware of German alliance proposals to Sweden, especially the

<sup>50</sup> KrA, Generalstaben, Utrikesavdelningen, E I d, vol 2, röda nummer 671.

<sup>51</sup> Kjellén thought that German “seductions” such the promises of making the king of Sweden the Emperor of Scandinavia “had lost their sweetness for contemporary Swedes,” but nevertheless found that whether the Swedes like it or not, the post-war situation would make the relative isolation of smaller states from great powers no longer feasible. Should the Central Powers be thought victorious, it would thus make sense for Sweden to start preparing for its future in the German-controlled Middle Europe, and to join Germany already during the war in its fight “not only for its own, but also for Sweden’s security.” Rudolf Kjellén, *Hvadan och hvarthän? Två föreläsningar om världskrisen* (Stockholm: Hugo Geber, 1915), 61.

<sup>52</sup> Theodor Wennerström, *Sverige i ryska pressen under världskriget* (Stockholm: A. V. Carlsons Bokförlags-Aktiebolag, 1929), 39.

<sup>53</sup> Järte et al, *Sveriges utrikespolitik i världskrigets belysning*.

<sup>54</sup> Molin, *Aktivismens historia*, 13–14. The roots of Swedish activism leading to the publication of the book in question have also been treated in Kuldekepp, *Sweden’s historical mission and World War I*.

one made by Zimmerman to Hammarskjöld in May 1915 (discussed above). The frenetic activity that subsequently began in Stockholm had much to do with the desire to support and encourage these pro-activist tendencies in Germany. As the activists hoped, a Swedish-German alliance would have resulted not only in preventing the danger of German-Russian separate peace (activists were afraid that if Sweden remained neutral, it would be handed over to Russia as some sort of compensation), but also in the realization of the positive regionalist program of Swedish influence over Åland, Finland, and even North-Schleswig (which Sweden could in turn return to Denmark – conditionally!). According to Molin, this way, “finally a solid foundation would have been laid for Nordic politics under Swedish leadership.”<sup>55</sup> In other words, an opportunity was now there to carry out the program envisioned by Ostwald in the previous autumn, whether it included a “Baltia” or not.

Another factor giving further hope to the Swedish activists were the Finnish politicians who had begun to arrive in Stockholm, conducting their own propaganda for similar goals. Among the first to initiate collaboration with Swedish activists was the grand old man of Finnish activism, Jonas Castrén (at that point 65 years old), whom Molin had got to know already at the beginning of 1915. Castrén was advocating a similar program to that of Molin and other Swedes: Swedish intervention into the war on the German side against a German guarantee of the separation of Finland from Russia. This would have protected both Swedish and Finnish interests in the east. In addition to Castrén, others from the “older generation” of Finnish politicians gradually moved to Stockholm, including Adolf von Bonsdorff, Rafael Erich, and Samuli Sario. A second group of Finnish activists were the younger men involved in the jaeger-movement. This group was led by Herman Gummerus and included Almar Fabritius, Georg Achates Gripenberg, Pehr Herman Norrmén and others.<sup>56</sup>

Swedish and Finnish activists had close relations, as can be seen from the diaries of prominent members of the network such as Gösta Mittag-Leffler and Herman Gummerus.<sup>57</sup> At some point in the autumn of 1915, these less formal contacts developed into a series of regular meetings between Swedish and Finnish activists, known as *Pelikanklubben* or the Pelican Club, named after the restaurant Pelikan on Södermalmstorg in

<sup>55</sup> Molin, *Aktivismens historia*, 14–20.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 21–23.

<sup>57</sup> The wartime diaries of Gösta Mittag-Leffler are preserved in KB, Gösta Mittag-Lefflers papper, L62:50:48–58. Herman Gummerus’ diaries are located in KA, Herman Gummerus, vol 43.

Stockholm where they usually took place. There were no protocols being kept, at least as far as I am aware, but there are hints and descriptions of the atmosphere of the meetings, suggesting both good-natured enthusiasm for the common goals as well as fierce debates about their particulars.

Alfons Paquet, the German journalist and writer who was a friend and supporter of the activists, writes in his unfinished novel fragment *From November to November* (*Von November bis November*) that the Pelican Club brought together all manner of people who shared a disdain of Tsarist Russia: supporters of Finnish independence who would later build the core of the Finnish Whites in the Civil War of 1918, Finnish socialists who later would become the Reds of the same war, and Swedish activists who wanted to enter the war against Russia on German side in order to create, as Paquet puts it, “a romantic Nordic state” that would have also included Finland and the Baltic countries. In addition, there were fighters for Baltic independence, either bourgeois or socialist (such as Kesküla) who worked for the separation of their territories from the Tsarist state. And there were also German diplomats, journalists and agents working for the destruction of the Russian empire, hoping to revolutionize it from the inside, divide it up according to its ethnographic borders, or both. Paquet notes the activities of this heterogeneous club persisted until the Russian revolution, especially the second, Bolshevik one, brought an end to it. This was, of course, to be expected, since the common enemy of everybody involved, Tsarist Russia, was by then no more.<sup>58</sup>

According to the memoirs of Herman Gummerus, the Pelican Club included among its regulars almost all the Finnish activists staying in Stockholm, as well as Swedish activists or quasi-activists such as Otto Järte, Yngve Larsson, Arne and Nils Forssell, Tor Bonnier, Nils Söderqvist, Sven Lidman, Erland Hjärne, Nils Ahnlund, Sigfrid Siwertz and others, also including several higher officers. Among the regulars were also the German journalists Friedrich Stieve (married to Yngve Larsson’s sister) and Roderich Stintzing (working at the German legation), in addition to the aforementioned Paquet. The unofficial head of the club was Helge Robert Söderström.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Gerd Koenen, “Rom oder Moskau”: *Deutschland, der Westen und die Revolutionierung Russlands 1914–1924* (Tübingen: Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen, 2003), 182; Frankfurter Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Nachlass Alfons Paquet, Alfons Paquet, *Von November bis November* (1931/32), 75–80.

<sup>59</sup> Gummerus, *Jägare och aktivister*, 277. About the composition of the club, see also Kihlberg, *Aktivismens huvudorgan Svensk Lösen*, 21–22.

Plans for the post-war period began to be debated in the Pelican Club already during the early autumn on 1915.<sup>60</sup> In February 1916, two more or less complete proposals for a Swedish-dominated Baltic Sea region were put into writing after heated discussions between Swedish and Finnish activists. The first of them was penned by the Swedish lawyer and specialist in international law, Dr. Nils Söderquist, a man with a background in the defense-friendly circles around the right-wing social democrat Erik Palmstierna.<sup>61</sup> Söderquist himself is described by another activist-friendly German and visitor to the club, Stintzing, as an unusually passionate man dreaming of a Great-Scandinavian state, a federation between the four Nordic peoples standing in close connection with the German *Reich*. Stintzing also writes that soon after his proposal was ready, Söderquist cut ties with his activist friends, whom he accused of having betrayed their ideals in the name of lukewarm opportunism.<sup>62</sup>

Söderquist's proposal has the form of a constitutional draft, probably somewhat patterned upon the constitution of the German Reich. According to this document, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway and Iceland were to build an undissolvable (*ouppsägbar*) union, called the Nordic Federation (*Nordiska Förbundet*). The federation was to be governed by a council (*Förbundsrad*), consisting of the members of government of the member states and presided over by the king of Sweden with seat in Stockholm. In this role, the King would be invested with the title Emperor (*Kejsare*). The emperor was to appoint a chancellor (*Förbundskansler*). Foreign policy, diplomacy, war, and peace were supposed to be the responsibilities of these federal institutions (the emperor, the chancellor and the council). To make federal laws, there was to be a parliament (*Förbundsdag*) of 500 members, elected by all adult citizens of the federation. In the parliament, all of the federal languages could be used, including Finnish and Icelandic. There was to be a joint military under the command of the Emperor, common citizenship and a common flag – five golden crowns in a red field.<sup>63</sup>

There is little information about how exactly Söderquist's draft came to be written and how it was received by others in the activist circle. In 1956, Sven Lidman recalled that Söderquist had discussed its main ideas with him already in the autumn of 1915 (also confirmed by Palmstierna;

<sup>60</sup> At least according to what Sven Lidman could recall in 1956. See Kihlberg, *Aktivismens huvudorgan Svensk Lösen*, 86.

<sup>61</sup> Kihlberg, *Aktivismens huvudorgan Svensk Lösen*, 22.

<sup>62</sup> Stintzing, *Livsvandring*, 70–71.

<sup>63</sup> The draft has been published in Kihlberg, *Aktivismens huvudorgan Svensk Lösen*, 84–86. See also Norman, "Right-wing Scandinavism and the Russian menace," 339–340.

see below), and that later on, Söderqvist had collaborated on the draft with eminent Finnish activists von Bonsdorff, Sario, Gummerus and especially Erich.<sup>64</sup> Hand- or typewritten versions of the draft can be found among the preserved papers of several people connected to the movement,<sup>65</sup> which shows that it was at least reasonably widely spread.

In 1934, Finnish historian Aaro Pakaslahti mentioned Söderqvist's draft in his work *Finnish politics in the World War (Suomen politiikkaa maailmansodassa; Part II)*, eliciting a response in a review by Herman Gummerus, who claimed that although the authenticity of the draft cannot be questioned, it should not be regarded as "a plan created in cooperation of the Swedish activists with ours' that would have had a practical meaning in the then-present situation." Rather, according to Gummerus, the draft was "a loose fragment from the extremely varied discussions between friends, at a time when the whole of Europe was in motion and nothing seemed impossible." Therefore, he thought that Pakaslahti should have left it in the archive, "to bring happiness to future researchers."<sup>66</sup> It is, of course, understandable that 18 years later, Gummerus had reservations about its fanciful ideas. Already a well-informed contemporary commentator – and not by far the least sympathetic person to the activists – Erik Palmstierna characterized (on 27 October 1915) the constitutional draft being written as "childish babble."<sup>67</sup>

There was also a second constitutional draft from early 1916, this time penned by Finnish activist Rafael Erich, professor of Constitutional and International Law at the University of Helsinki and a future Prime Minister of Finland (1920–21). It should probably be seen as a closely related alternative to Söderqvist's proposal, given their origin at the same time and in the same activist circles.<sup>68</sup>

Nevertheless, Erich's proposal, *Draft of the principles for a Federation Treaty (Utkast till grunder för ett Förbundsfördrag)*,<sup>69</sup> differs in several ways from Söderqvist's. As L. Torbjörn Norman notes, there are some common

<sup>64</sup> Kihlberg, *Aktivismens huvudorgan Svensk Lösen*, 86.

<sup>65</sup> E. g. KB, Otto Järtes efterlämnade papper, L78:5; KA, Fritz Wetterhoff, Vol 1.

<sup>66</sup> Pakaslahti, *Suomen politiikkaa maailmansodassa II*, 38; Herman Gummerus, "Jägarrörelsens utrikespolitik" [review of Pakaslahti II], *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland*, 1 (1934), 189.

<sup>67</sup> Erik Palmstierna, *Orostdid I 1914–1916: politiska dagboksanteckningar* (Stockholm: Tidens Förlag, 1962), 138.

<sup>68</sup> The two drafts have previously been compared in Norman, "Right-wing Scandinavism and the Russian menace," 339–340.

<sup>69</sup> Erich's draft has been published in Norman, "Right-wing Scandinavism and the Russian menace," 345–348.



features such as a council and a chancellor, but whereas Söderquist imagined a closely-knit federation (*förbundsstat*), Erich aims at a confederation (*statsförbund*), called Confederation of the Nordic States (*De Nordiska Rikenas Statsförbund*).<sup>70</sup> The proposed confederation was to include Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Norway but was dissolvable by common consent. Similarly to Söderquist's proposal, King of Sweden was to be given the power of highest executive authority as the Federation President (*förbundsresident*) and be made the highest commander of the joint military. There is, however, no mention of imperial powers. As with Söderquist's proposal, there is a council and a chancellor, but no parliament, common citizenship or flag.

As has been pointed out by L. Torbjörn Norman, the fact that Erich (and other Finns?) preferred a confederation might be explained by them being afraid of too strong Swedish domination in a possible Scandinavian Federal State.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, it is likely that Erich's (and perhaps also Söderqvist's) draft was connected to a veritable ultimatum that Molin, dissatisfied with Finns' passivity in formulating a clear post-war program, had presented to Castrén, Sario, Bonsdorff and Erich on 28 February 1916, demanding to hear the Finnish aims concerning Finland's future after its eventual separation from Russia.<sup>72</sup>

The Finns were, of course, unwilling to disclose such aims. Johannes Sundwall, active in the Finnish bureau in Berlin, and writing soon after the war, notes that the Finns could not let their goal "to shoot the bear" be obscured by discussions about "the bear skin," and that the Finnish activists therefore carefully tried to further only certain kind of Swedish plans, while other tendencies were "less agreeable to us."<sup>73</sup> The conflict is very apparent also in the memoirs of Adrian Molin, who writes that instead of the program he had demanded, he received from Erich a lengthy P. M. which was politically useless on account of "its pros and cons, its on the one hand and on the other, its uneasy and over-scrupulous balancing." He furthermore says that for him, it was the last attempt to try to seriously cooperate with the Finns and that after this incident, the Swedish and Finnish movements went their separate ways.<sup>74</sup> Molin also characterizes Erich

<sup>70</sup> Norman, "Right-wing Scandinavism and the Russian menace," 340.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Molin, *Aktivismens historia*, 79.

<sup>73</sup> Sundwall, *Kring jägarbataljonen*, 169–170.

<sup>74</sup> Molin, *Aktivismens historia*, 80; see also Norman, "Right-wing Scandinavism and the Russian menace," 340. Molin's claim that the cooperation between the movements stopped at that point is, of course, an exaggeration.

disparagingly as a “mild and learned man, to a large extent characterized by his beautiful given name Rafael.”<sup>75</sup>

The P. M. accompanying Erich’s plan is nevertheless interesting in its own right as it elaborates the constitutional draft in several respects and provides extra information, revealing e.g. that Erich did not exclude a gradual development towards a more federal form.<sup>76</sup> In another and probably closely related P. M., sent to Molin already on 18 February 1916, Erich furthermore states that the list of the constituent territories of the future confederation could be amended with autonomous Iceland and Estonia, explicitly referring to the “Estonian people’s warm longing for independence and intimate political connection to Sweden as well as to the other Nordic states.”<sup>77</sup> In all likelihood, this relatively rare attention accorded to Estonia must stem from the influence of the Estonian Aleksander Kesküla.

### *Aleksander Kesküla’s* The Estonian question and the Nordic question

Aleksander Kesküla (1882–1963)<sup>78</sup> had originally made himself known as a social democrat and one of the most radical leaders of the 1905 Russian revolution in Estonia. Sought after by the Russian gendarmerie, he secretly

<sup>75</sup> Molin, *Aktivismens historia*, 22.

<sup>76</sup> KB, Adrian Molins efterlämnade papper, L46:24K (“Finska frågan, prof Erich”), Norman, “Right-wing Scandinavism and the Russian menace,” 340.

<sup>77</sup> KB, Adrian Molins efterlämnade papper, L46:24B.

<sup>78</sup> Kesküla’s importance has been recognized among historians since Werner Hahlweg’s and Z. A. B. Zeman’s publications of German archival materials relating to German support for the Russian Revolution: Werner Hahlweg, *Lenins Rückkehr nach Russland 1917* (Leiden: Brill, 1957); Z. A. B. Zeman, *Germany and the revolution in Russia 1915–1918* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958). Since then, Kesküla’s role as a mediator between Germans and Russian Bolsheviks has drawn attention particularly concerning the issue of “German money” that Lenin supposedly received from him (for an overview, see e.g. Alfred Erich Senn, “The Myth of German Money,” *Soviet Studies* 28:1 (1976), 83–90). A fairly comprehensive bibliography of works relating to Kesküla’s role in German contacts with Lenin is available in Jonathan D. Smele, *The Russian Revolution and Civil War 1917–1921: an annotated bibliography* (London: Continuum, 2003), 380–383. Of particular importance is the work of Michael Futrell, the only historian who managed to interview Kesküla while he was still alive: Futrell, *Northern underground*. More general studies over Kesküla’s career are few. A convenient, although short overview is found in Arens, *Aleksander Kesküla*. A more detailed, but also more fragmentary biography can be reconstructed on the basis of a multitude of articles by Kaido Jaanson (e.g. Jaanson, *Eestlane Aleksander Kesküla ja Berliin*; Jaanson, “Aleksander Kesküla and Sweden 1914–1918,” *Scandia* 69:2 (2003), 157–169). There is also a thorough account of Kesküla’s wartime role in the German-organized Liga der Fremdvölker Russlands in Zetterberg, *Die Liga der Fremdvölker Russlands 1916–1918*.

emigrated to Germany in 1909 and soon afterwards continued to Switzerland. There, he continued his activities in left social democratic circles and was a member of the famous *Arbeiterbildungsverein Eintracht*.<sup>79</sup>

At some point, his time in *Eintracht* ended in some kind of a conflict with other members. Kesküla's friend Adolf Gasser later reported that Kesküla spent thereafter "many sleepless, grueling nights" until finally deciding that "the left socialists of the western world were simply unsuccessful bourgeoisie, who still hoped to succeed in another way." Having thus freed himself from Bolshevism, he decided that the only way to destroy the hated Tsarist Empire was to learn the lesson of the Russo-Japanese war and the Japanese help to Finnish and Russian revolutionaries. He, too, would have to cooperate with western nationalists; the only force that could be seriously reckoned with to accelerate the revolution in Russia.<sup>80</sup>

The outbreak of World War I was exactly the opportunity Kesküla was waiting for. In the beginning of September 1914, he made contact with the German minister in Bern, Gisbert von Romberg. To Romberg, Kesküla claimed to have good contacts with both Russian socialists in exile (including the Bolsheviks in Switzerland) and Estonian separatists back home. According to Kesküla, Estonians were fearful of German annexation that would fortify the rule of the hated Baltic German nobility, and prove perhaps even more dangerous to Estonian national endeavors than the Russian rule had been. If, on the other hand, Germany supported unification of Estonia with Sweden, the whole population of Estonia would rise up in support of German invasion, and perhaps render valuable services to the German army. If Germany was willing to guarantee that Estonia would not be annexed, Kesküla personally wished to travel to Sweden in order to conduct propaganda in support for Swedish alliance with Germany and to prepare the uprising in Estonia. Romberg, in turn, deemed it harmless to give Kesküla some friendly assurance which would motivate him to set in motion with his propaganda endeavor.<sup>81</sup>

Following this encouragement, Kesküla wrote a letter to the German government, more extensively outlining his political aims, and asking for

<sup>79</sup> Alfred Erich Senn, *The Russian Revolution in Switzerland 1914–1917* (Wisconsin, MI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), 60. About *Eintracht*, see Karin Huser, *Bildungsort, Männerhort, politischer Kampfverein. Der deutsche Arbeiterverein "Eintracht Zürich" (1840–1916)* (Zürich: Chronos Verlag, 2012).

<sup>80</sup> Adolf Gasser, "Alexander Kesküla: ein estnischer Revolutionär (1964) – *Christ und Welt: ausgewählte historische Schriften 1933–1983* (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1983).

<sup>81</sup> Romberg to Bethmann Hollweg 12.09.1914. PAAA, R 20983, p. 112. See also Jaanson, *Eestlane Aleksander Kesküla ja Berliin*, 16.

German support for this mysterious movement, supposedly under preparation in Estonia, which had the aim of securing satisfactory national, civic and religious development for Estonians either through territorial reunification with the kingdom of Sweden or some other political combination.<sup>82</sup>

It is hard to say how much straightforward support Kesküla's Estonia-related plans actually received from Germany. What is certain is that German authorities quickly came to regard Kesküla as an energetic and useful person acting in German interests. Especially his good contacts with Russian exile social revolutionaries enabled him to play a relatively influential role in giving shape to the German *Revolutionierungspolitik* against Russia, eventually leading to the peace of Brest-Litovsk. In his role as a German agent, Kesküla could in turn use his German money, contacts, and influence to further his personal goal of Estonia's (re-)unification with Sweden. In most immediate terms, this meant making propaganda for a program which included Sweden entering the war on the German side, participating together with Germany in a joint attack on Russia, and occupying the Estonian territory, thereby once again liberating the Estonian peasants who, as Kesküla claimed, still considered themselves "Swedish prisoners in Russia."<sup>83</sup>

At the same time, Kesküla could be flexible in his aims. His "minimal program" consisted simply in Estonian autonomy (in either Russia or Germany). His "maximal program," as he put it in January 1915, was much more ambitious: "the consolidation of the Northern European cultural circles from Schleswig to Ural."<sup>84</sup> For Estonians with their "Great-Swedish" national interests, this meant cultural and political (re-)integration into the "Northern cultural sphere" through the creation of an independent Estonia as a member of a strong Nordic federation also including Finland (and perhaps some other territories further to the east, certainly Ingria) and led by Sweden. This new region was to be built on shared historical traditions and common security and economic interests, and would forever keep Russia at a distance from Europe.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Kesküla to German government 10.09.1914: PAAA, R 20983, p. 113. See also Jaanson, *Eestlane Aleksander Kesküla ja Berliin*, 16.

<sup>83</sup> See Kesküla's and Jakob Ploompuu's memorandum to Swedish activists from the spring of 1916, titled *An die Patrioten Schwedens*. Published in Kuldkepp, *Estonia gravitates towards Sweden*, 178–182.

<sup>84</sup> See Kesküla's telegram to Swedish General Staff 12.01.1915: KrA, Generalstab, Utrikesavdelningen, E I d, vol 2, röda nummer 903 and his earlier report to the same on 01.12.1914: KrA, Generalstab, Utrikesavdelningen, E I d, vol 2, röda nummer 671.

<sup>85</sup> Any detailed reconstruction of the nuances and the development of Kesküla's political programs is a task that has to be undertaken separately.

Kesküla was also flexible in other ways. He changed sides several times, cooperated with nearly anyone whom he regarded as useful<sup>86</sup> and was not averse to twisting the truth in ways that suited him. Certainly, the particularities of his plans were adjusted as the changing times demanded.

Kesküla embarked on his first propaganda journey to Sweden already in the autumn of 1914, roughly at the same time with Ostwald and became more or less permanently based in Stockholm in the autumn of 1915. It was at that later point he established contacts with Swedish activists such as Adrian Molin, Otto Järte, K. G. Westman and Johannes Kolmodin, as well as the officers of the Swedish General Staff and the editors of more influential newspapers.<sup>87</sup>

Already in the autumn of 1914, Kesküla had met twice – in Berlin and in Stockholm – with Wilhelm Ostwald who, as he later claimed to the Swedish General Staff, had been the originator of the idea of the Swedish-led Baltic Federation (see above). In a letter to Zimmermann from 13 October 1914, Ostwald describes his first meeting with Kesküla in positive terms. The *National-Est* Kesküla had been on his way to Stockholm with the aim of bringing his Fatherland out of the Russian rule, and it had soon become apparent that Kesküla's political ideas concerning the Baltic states<sup>88</sup> were to a high degree similar to those that Ostwald had himself presented to Zimmermann. Kesküla had also left a very good personal impression upon Ostwald.<sup>89</sup>

A second meeting between the two took place on 27 October, mediated by and in the presence of the German minister in Stockholm Franz von Reichenau.<sup>90</sup> Again, Ostwald brings up the good impression left by Kesküla, who he thought was seemingly free from personal ambition and only acting in the interests of his nation and its cultural development.<sup>91</sup> Ignorant of the extent of Kesküla's contacts with *Auswärtiges Amt*, Ostwald also

<sup>86</sup> This included Russian Bolsheviks in exile, Estonian, Finnish, Ukrainian, Lithuanian and various other emigrants, the diplomats of Germany and Entente, Swedish authorities, American peace activists, and so on.

<sup>87</sup> For cursory information about Kesküla's contacts in Sweden, see Gummerus, *Jägare och aktivister*, 193.

<sup>88</sup> The term used is *baltischen Staaten*, probably meaning all countries around the Baltic Sea.

<sup>89</sup> Ostwald to Zimmermann 27.10.1914: PAAA, R 20984, pp. 9–10; see also Jaanson, *Eestlane Aleksander Kesküla ja Berliin*, 17.

<sup>90</sup> The outline of their conversation is found in Ostwald to Zimmermann 03.11.1914: PAAA, R 20984, pp. 95–98.

<sup>91</sup> Ostwald to Zimmermann 03.11.1914: PAAA, R 20984, pp. 97–98.

recommended to Zimmermann that should the breakout of a revolutionary movement in Estonia be desirable, Kesküla could certainly be useful.

In short, the relationship between the two men seems to have been excellent, even if Ostwald's judgement was probably impaired by his naivety in political matters (as also demonstrated by his incautious interview in *Dagens Nyheter*). Kesküla in turn was certainly not averse to making use of Ostwald's name. In a letter to Romberg from 6 January 1915, Kesküla writes about the need to sharpen the latent Swedish-Russian conflict, mentioning that "Professor Ostwald has not yet done anything for us" and that his name "must be made use of in every possible way, whether with or without his participation." "Perhaps he can receive an honorary doctorate at the University of Tartu," Kesküla thought.<sup>92</sup>

Gummerus notes in his diaries that he had, probably for the first time, met Kesküla on 4 November 1915. Kesküla had described the situation in Estonia and presented his "minimal" and "maximal" programs – the first one implying Estonian autonomy and joint German-Swedish attack on Saint Petersburg; and the second one including Estonia as a member in a Nordic federation together with Ingria and possibly Northern Russia. Kesküla had also proposed to work jointly with Finnish and Swedish activists with the goal of drawing Sweden into the war. On 12 November 1915 Gummerus and Kesküla met again. On 16 November Erich was also included in their discussion.<sup>93</sup>

Molin also mentions in his memoirs that he had learned to know Kesküla in the autumn of 1915, characterizing him as "an interesting type" and "a younger counterpart to Jonas Castrén."<sup>94</sup> Kesküla also seems to have had a contact with Otto Järte.<sup>95</sup> Yet his opinion on the Swedish activists was not particularly high. In an interview to the Swedish General Staff on 25 January 1916 Kesküla complained that the activist ambition "lacked all grounding in *Realpolitik*" and its advocates were engulfed in "romantic shimmer," willing to ally themselves with Germany for Germanism's sake, without a true understanding of Sweden's economic interests in the east, and how severely Sweden would be threatened by a separate peace between Russia and Germany without having a say in the matter.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Kesküla to Romberg 06.01.1915: PAAA, R 20985, pp. 91–92.

<sup>93</sup> KA, Herman Gummerus, vol 43 (diary entries on 04.11, 12.11 and 16.11.1915).

<sup>94</sup> Molin considered Castrén to be "certainly a head higher than all the other Finns of the older generation." Molin, *Aktivismens historia*, 50, 21.

<sup>95</sup> An envelope, addressed to Järte is found in Kesküla's file at PAAA, Bern 1324 ("Kesküla und Russische rev. Propaganda"), p. 248785.

<sup>96</sup> KrA, Generalstaben, Utrikesavdelningen, E I d, vol 5, röda nummer 2055.

Neither was Kesküla too impressed by the Finnish activists. On 21 May 1915 Kesküla claimed to the Swedish General Staff that a joint Swedish-German operation against Saint Petersburg across Estonia and Ingria was at the time in Germany regarded as preferable to the Finnish activist goal of Swedish intervention via Finland. This statement of his bears the remark of the interviewer that it should be regarded as an expression of Kesküla's own Estonian-friendly political goals, implying Kesküla was trying to attach undeserved strategical importance to Estonia.<sup>97</sup> In January 1918, after having long time ago switched sides to the Entente, Kesküla characterized Finnish activists during a meeting with the Estonian nationalist leader Jaan Tõnisson as "scoundrels" in German service, anti-Estonian deep in their hearts and even secret enemies of the idea of Finnish independence, as they supposedly feared that the rise of Estonian and Finnish nationalism would endanger Swedish interests.<sup>98</sup>

The best-known relation of Kesküla's own views is the *Declaration of Estonians*, or, as it was titled in its French version, *The Estonian question and the Nordic question*.<sup>99</sup> It was a manifesto that he submitted to the Third Conference of the Union of Nationalities in Lausanne in June 1916.<sup>100</sup> Unlike e.g. Söderquist's and Erich's proposals, this document is not a constitutional draft and is more akin to a propaganda pamphlet. But perhaps this is exactly the feature that makes it characteristic of the Estonian perspective in activism, as it stresses the forces of history, culture, and fate in tying Estonia to Finland and Sweden, rather than emphasizing the constitutional features characteristic of Söderquist's and Erich's proposals. After all, the goal of mending of historical and cultural unity between Sweden and Finland, broken little more than one hundred years ago, needed little in the way of apology, explanation or legitimation. Estonia was a different case.

In Kesküla's vision, the Baltic Sea region was an ancient point of collision between three cultural areas (*Kulturkreis*): the East European cultural area or Russia, the Central European cultural area and the Northern European

<sup>97</sup> KrA, Generalstaben, Utrikesavdelningen, E I d, vol 3, röda nummer 1489.

<sup>98</sup> Mart Kuldkepp, "Intriigid, provokatsioonid ja iseseisvuse süünd: Eesti välisdelegatsioon ja Aleksander Kesküla," *Ajalooline Ajakiri*, 3 (2013), 338.

<sup>99</sup> Published as *La Question Esthoniennne et la Question Septentrionale: Mémoire présenté au nom des Esthoniens de la III conférence des Nationalités*, par M. Kesküla (Lausanne: Librairie centrale des Nationalités, 1918). The German original titled *Die Deklaration der Esthen* is found in PAAA, Bern 1324, pp. 248835–248866.

<sup>100</sup> About this major German-financed propaganda endeavor and Kesküla's role in it, see Zetterberg, *Die Liga der Fremdvölker Russlands*, 106–144 and Kaido Jaanson, "Eestlane Aleksander Kesküla ja Rahvuste Uniooni III konverents Lausanne'is 1916. aastal," *Akadeemia*, 12 (2000), 1824–1862.

cultural area. The latter included Iceland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden in the west, and Estonia and Finland as far as Karelia in the east. Estonia, which had historically belonged to the Northern European cultural area, was according to Kesküla annexed to the Central European area in the beginning of the thirteenth century, regained its place in the Northern Europe in the sixteenth century, had under the eighteenth century fallen under the yoke of Eastern Europe, and was now, at the time of the World War I, in need of liberation in order to once more regain its rightful place in the Northern Europe. Kesküla envisions the result of this reunification as a Swedish-Finnish-Estonian personal union under the Swedish king.

In his *Declaration*, Kesküla is engaged in a kind of a grand rhetorical struggle to achieve the recognition of Estonia as belonging to the same cultural sphere as Sweden and Finland. Its sweeping generalizations about Estonian and European history are at the same time a sign of the marginality of the Estonian activist movement, that, for all that it could have been, was exemplified mostly by Kesküla himself.

All of Kesküla's known Estonian collaborators (or agents) – Oskar Elevant, Gustav Paju, Arthur Siefeldt and others – seem to have been emigrants with little contact with their compatriots in Estonia. Even if there were instances of cooperation between Kesküla and wartime Estonian emissaries to Sweden (e.g., Jakob Ploompuu), these remained isolated cases.<sup>101</sup> Yet Kesküla was adamant in claiming that his “svecophilia” was not merely his personal conviction or fantasy<sup>102</sup> and that the movement aiming for Estonia's reunification with Sweden actually existed. Whether and how much truth there was in this claim, is still to be determined by future research.

### *Conclusions and consequences*

The First World War led to the whole or partial demise of several multinational empires and the appearance of many new nation-states, as well as the wholly unprecedented phenomenon of Communist Russia. But it is

<sup>101</sup> About the Ploompuu episode, see Mart Kuldkapp, ““Grundbesitzer aus Estland”: activist regionalism in the Baltic Sea area in 1916,” *Ajalooline Ajakiri*, 1/2 (2012), 137–165. Oskar Elevant and Gustav Paju are treated in Kaido Jaanson, “Eestlased Rootsi salapolitsei valvsa silma all Esimese maailmasõja ajal,” *Tuna*, 1 (2003), 19–31; Arthur Siefeldt in Kaido Jaanson, “Arthur Siefeldt-Simumägi (1889–1939): ühe eestlase elu Eestimaata,” *Õpetatud Eesti Seltsi aastaraamat 2004–2005*, 181–203.

<sup>102</sup> Kesküla to Steinwachs 03.03.1916: PAAA, Bern 1324, p. 218719; Kuldkapp, “Grundbesitzer aus Estland,” 143.



not only in hindsight that the war's geopolitical implications were understood. Such possibilities were apparent already during the war itself, both for the belligerent empires, and the often self-appointed private politicians attempting to use the war for own political advantage.

What Finnish, Swedish and Estonian activists had in common, justifying the use of the same denominator for their diverse activities, were their basic regionalist aspirations: the dream of the demise of Russia and of the new rise of Greater Sweden liberating and taking leadership of its once-lost territories. This goal followed from common anti-Russian security interests, historical memories of earlier Swedish-led regional consolidation, and the common understanding of the war-time being a chance ("a window of opportunity") of making this regionalist dream come true.

What makes activism especially interesting as a kind of regionalism was that it was not simply a Swedish imperialist project conjured up solely by Swedish conservatives. The ideas of Sweden's historically motivated leadership and the geopolitical axiom of the Russian menace were shared across this transnational movement. Therefore, activism shows how a Baltic Sea regionalism could be constructed solely on shared national ambitions, subsequently taking on a transnational significance. Swedish *stormaktsdrömmar* ("great power dreams"), Finnish and Estonian ambitions of liberation from Russia, and certain strands in German politics all came together in the shared image of the future post-war Baltic Sea region, consolidated and led by a re-emergent and heroic Sweden.

Of course, as we have seen, the different activist plans for a new *Mare Nostrum Balticum* varied in their particularities, reflecting personal and perhaps ideological differences, but, what is perhaps more interesting, also differences in national outlooks. Estonian activism (personified in Kesküla) had a slightly different – more cautious, but also more opportunist – attitude towards Germany, and accused the movement's Swedish and Finnish branches for blind trust and romantic attachment to this great country. Finns and Swedes in their turn could never reach the agreement about exactly how much of its national sovereignty (and territory) Finland would be prepared to hand over to Sweden after the war. Yet the core goal, the dream of the heroic Sweden as a worthy opponent to Russia, remained central to all of them.

There are all reasons not to overestimate the activists' influence and the probability that their plans could have become serious political alternatives – the probability, furthermore, declined together with German military fortunes. But even if the immediate political achievements of the

activists were limited, the movement must have affected the subsequent history of Baltic-Nordic regionalism, especially as far as the Swedish attitudes towards the Baltic countries were concerned. This is a topic that needs much more research, but just one telling example might suffice here as a conclusion to this article.

In January 1919, the Swedish envoyé to Paris, Albert Ehrensvärd, wrote to his foreign minister Johannes Hellner, that since justified doubts existed about the ability of Estonians and Latvians to sustain independent statehood, there had appeared the idea to build “a Baltic federation” (*ett baltiskt förbund*) which would include “the Scandinavian countries, Finland, Estonia, Livonia and possibly Lithuania and Poland.” According to Ehrensvärd, it was “above all Estonians and probably also Livonians” who supported this idea and were now trying to win Swedish support for it by promising Sweden “a leading role” in this new federation.<sup>103</sup>

Some ten days later, Ehrensvärd met a representative of Latvia in London, Henri Simson, who explained that the king of Sweden would preside over the federation council (*förbundsrådet*) bearing in this role the title of Emperor (*kejsare*). In a following report to Hellner, Ehrensvärd noted that “[i]t was thus professor Os[t]wald’s ideas turning up again in a different form” and that “[p]ersonally, Mr. Simson made a good impression, which I cannot say about his plans and proposals.”<sup>104</sup>

Therefore, it does not seem unlikely that the failure of activist regionalism in World War I to some extent also affected subsequent Swedish attitudes towards trans-Baltic regional cooperation. Wilhelm M. Carlgren has pointed out the extent to which interwar-era Sweden avoided having any active foreign policy directed at the Baltic countries, even though it was clearly in Swedish interests to preserve the post-war *status quo* and to oppose the revisionist aims of Russia and Germany. Instead, Sweden displayed an extremely cautious attitude towards the more or less desperate Baltic proposals for regional political and military cooperation which appeared some regularity until World War II and even beyond.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Stockholm, Riksarkivet Marieberg [henceforth RA], UD, 1902 års dossiersystem, Vol 287, Ehrensvärd to Hellner 06.01.1919. About post-war attempts to create a Baltic League, originally intended to encompass both the Baltic and the Scandinavian states, see e.g. Marko Lehti, *A Baltic league as a construct of the new Europe: envisioning a Baltic region and small state sovereignty in the aftermath of the First World War* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999).

<sup>104</sup> RA, UD, 1902 års dossiersystem, vol 287, Ehrensvärd to Hellner 15.01.1919.

<sup>105</sup> Wilhelm M. Carlgren, *Sverige och Baltikum: från mellankrigstid till efterkrigsår: en översikt* (Stockholm: Publica, 1993), 13.

On the occasion of the ten-year anniversary of Estonian independence, the Estonian-friendly journalist Ejnar Fors Bergström wrote in an article that “[o]ne does not need to be in any way an activist in order to wish that these warm feelings [for Sweden] would find an answer from the Swedish side and a more general knowledge would spread itself in our country about the newly liberated Baltic nations which have turned their eyes towards Sweden.”<sup>106</sup> It is perhaps telling that ten years after the activist movement had disintegrated, Bergström thought it appropriate to suggest that the idea of Baltic-Nordic co-operation could be divorced from the memory of wartime regionalist dreaming. If nothing else, it is certain that the plans for new *Mare Nostrum Balticum* had left a legacy of some kind.

MART KULDKEPP (b. 1983) is Lecturer in Contemporary Scandinavian History, Department of Scandinavian Studies/European Society and Politics, University College London.\*

### KOKKUVÕTE: *Hegemoonia ja vabanemine Esimeses maailmasõjas: plaanid uue Mare Nostrum Balticum'i loomiseks*

Esimese maailmasõja algus tõi praktiliselt kohe kaasa kahtlused Euroopa rahvusvahelise süsteemi senisel kujul püsijäämises. Paljudes väga erinevalt meelesstatud poliitilisel aktiivsetes ringkondades mõisteti kiiresti, et sõda ei ähvarda mitte ainult hävingu ja surmaga, vaid töötab kaasa tuua ka enneolematuid muutusi poliitilises geograafias. Nende muutuste täpne suund jäi esialgu mõistagi lahtiseks, mis tähendas, et rööbiti edu ja ebaeduga lahinguväljadel muutusid erinevad visioonid sõjajärgsest maailmast diplomaatia ja propaganda jaoks ajenditeks ja sihtmärkideks.

Käesolev artikkel uurib sõjaaegseid katseid rajada alust uuele sõjajärgsele Läänemere regioonile, mille juhtivaks poliitiliseks võimuks oleks pidanud saada Saksa-sõbralik Rootsi. Taoliste plaanide välja töötamine

<sup>106</sup> Ejnar Fors Bergström, “En nordisk republik: till tioårsminnet av Estlands självständighet,” *Göteborgs-Posten*, 25.02.1928.

\* Correspondence: Mart Kuldkepp, Department of Scandinavian Studies, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT, UK. E-mail: m.kuldkepp@ucl.ac.uk

ja nende heaks propaganda tegemine leidis aset rahvusüleses koostöös (nn aktivistlikus liikumises) sõjaaegses Stockholmis ja Berliinis. Sellega olid seotud nii Saksa ametivõimud kui ka Rootsi, Soome ja Eesti rahvuslased. Aktivistid toetusid oma lootustes Rootsi 17. sajandi suurvõimu-pärandile ning geopoliitilistele hirmudele ja lootustele, mis olid seotud Rootsi ja tema naaberriikide geograafilise asukohaga. Plaani teostumise vältimatu eeldus oli Rootsi sõttaastumine Saksamaa poolle ning Rootsi-Saksa ühispealetung Soome (ja ka Läänemereprovintside) vabastamiseks.

Artiklis antakse ülevaade aktivistliku mõtlemise põhijoontest ja selle kolme rahvusliku suuna (Rootsi, Soome ja Eesti aktivismi) eripäradest ning käsitletakse Saksa toetust taoliste plaanidele. Selle üldosa ilmestamiseks on lähemalt vaadeldud mõningaid näiteid aktivistlike kavade väljatöötamise ja nende heaks tehtud propaganda kohta. Tähelepanu all on Wilhelm Ostwaldi Rootsi-reis 1914. aasta sügisel; Rootsi ja Soome aktivistide koostöös nn Pelikani-klubis tehtud plaanid 1915. ja 1916. aastal ning samaaegne Aleksander Kesküla propaganda Eesti põhjamaisuse mõtte heaks.

Erinevad plaanid mõistagi varieerusid üksikasjades, seda tulenevalt nii isiklikest kui ka ideoloogilistest erimeelsustest. Peamine vastuolude põhjus peitus ilmselt siiski rahvuslike ambitsioonide eripärades. Eesti aktivistid (kes kehastusid peamiselt vaid Aleksander Kesküla isikus) suhtusid ettevaatlikumalt – aga ka oportunistlikumalt – Saksamaasse ning heitsid liikumise Rootsi ja Soome suundadele ette pimedat usaldust ja romantilist kiindumust selle riigi vastu. Soome ja Rootsi aktivistid omalt poolt ei jõudnud kuidagi kokkuleppele, kuivõrd palju oma rahvuslikust suveräänsusest (ja ka territooriumist) oleks Rootsi poolt vabastatud Soome ikkagi nõus Rootsile loovutama.

Peamine regionalistlik eesmärk: unistus heroilisest Rootsist kui geopoliitilisest vastukaalust Venemaale, oli keskse tähendusega aga kõigi aktivistide jaoks. Unistus uue Suur-Rootsi tõusust, mille roll olnuks tegutseda oma kunagiste valdusalade taasvabastaja ja sõjajärgse juhina, tulenes ühistest Vene-vastastest huvidest, mälestustest varasema, Rootsi poolt juhitud regionaalse konsolideerumise kohta ning arusaamisest, et just maailmasõda ja võimalus koostööks Saksamaaga kujutab endast harukordset võimalust taoliste plaanide elluviimiseks.

Seega polnud aktivismi näol tegemist ainult Rootsi imperialistliku projektiga, vaid need eesmärgid olid ühised kogu transnatsionaalse liikumise jaoks. Seega näitab aktivism, et Läänemere regionalism võis põhineda puhtalt ühistel rahvuslikel ambitsioonidel, millele seeläbi sai omaks transnatsionaalne tähendus. Rootsi radikaalsete rahvuslaste unistused

17. sajandi suurvõimuajast, Soome ja Eesti rahvuslaste lootused Venemaa võimu alt vabanemiseks ning teatud osa sõjaaegsest Saksa poliitikast said kokku kujutluspildis tulevases sõjajärgsest Läänemere regioonist, mis oleks ühendatud ja juhitud heroilise Rootsi poolt.

Kindlasti pole põhjust aktivistide mõjuvõimu üle hinnata. Tõenäosus, et neist plaanidest saanuks tõsiseltvõetav poliitiline alternatiiv, vähenes sõja venides ning Saksamaa ebaedu taustal. Ent kuigi aktivistide otsesed poliitilised saavutused jäid piiratuks, avaldas mälestus taolistest plaanidest ilmselt oma mõju Balti-Põhjamaade regionalismi järgnevale ajaloole. Eriti tõenäoliselt puudutas see Rootsi suhtumist noortesse Balti riikidesse, mille sõdadevahelise aja föderalistlike plaane (Balti Liit) nähti mingil määral sõjaagse läbikukkunud aktivismi poliitilise jätkuna.