

BALTIC SEA REGION: MIGRATION AND CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

In April 2013 Stockholm hosted international scientific conference Migration and Cultural Encounters in the Baltic Sea Region. It was attended by historians from Germany, Denmark, Latvia, Poland, Russia, the USA, Finland, Sweden, and Estonia. Reports and discussions were devoted to interaction of migration and cultural processes in the European North in various historic epochs - from the Middle Age to our days.

The conference was organized by Russian and Swedish academic institutions and non-governmental organizations. The topic was in the fairway of the Russian presidency in the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) in 2012-2013. The forum was initiated by the General History Institute at the Russian Academy of Sciences, Center for the History of Northern Europe and Baltic Countries, Södertörn University, The Centre for Baltic and East European Studies, and the Baltic Civilization Institute founded three years ago by the Amber Bridge International Association.

Director of the General History Institute Academician Alexander Chubaryan sent a message of greetings to the conference in which he stressed the necessity to continue cooperation in the sphere: "History should promote rapprochement between peoples. Strict scientific analysis of past developments shall help design common denominators in assessing historic past," Academician Chubaryan wrote.

The conference opened with a reception in the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities. Besides hospitable host and Secretary Erik Norberg, present in the mansion of the Academy were President of the Swedish Institute of International Affairs Michael Sohlman, Director General of CBSS Secretariat Jan Lundin, Board Chairman of RusForest Company Sven Hirdman. Mats Hellström, who was Swedish ambassador to Germany in 1996-2001 and Governor of Stockholm County in 2002-2006 also attended. The forum ended with a reception in the Russian embassy to the Kingdom of Sweden offered by Russian Ambassador Plenipotentiary and Extraordinary Igor Neverov.

Addressing the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities head of the Northern Europe and Baltic Center of the General History Institute Alexsey Komarov offered his assessment of the Russian-Swedish academic contacts in the past decades. It is noteworthy that the first official Russian-Swedish symposium in 1976 opened in the same hall as the 2013 conference which was held in the format launched yet in 2011 when Moscow hosted international scientific conference Baltic Neighborhood: Russia, Sweden, Baltic Countries on the Background of Epochs and Developments, XVII-XX Centuries. In contrast to bilateral symposia the latest conference was attended by scholars from Russia and Sweden, as well as Latvia, Estonia, and Norway.

The main part of the conference took place in Södertörn University. Professor Vadim Roginsky, chief of the Department of Modern History of the General History Institute recalled

in his speech that "there has always been resettlement of peoples in history." World wars exerted specifically strong influence on it. Hundreds of thousands of people either emigrated or were expelled. Migrations changed the ethnic composition of the population specifically in the Baltic Sea region. Germans disappeared from some districts and were replaced by other

nationalities. The current population of Kaliningrad region comprises descendants of the migrants who resettled there. Today migration has a different character which can be seen everywhere. The processes have to be anticipated and necessary measures taken to prevent major conflicts. The problem is vital for Baltic countries and Russia as well, he said.

Less than a month passed since the end of the forum when modern barbarians from immigrant youth caused chaos in several districts of the Swedish capital. The co-authors of the monograph Is it Possible to Become a Swede? which is popular in Sweden participated in the conference - Professor Natalia Plevako from the Institute of Europe at the Russian Academy of Sciences and Professor Olga Chernysheva from the General History Institute. The book shows that even thoroughly elaborated immigration legislation and exciting tolerance of the Swedes do not guarantee successful harmony of interests and relations between indigenous population and immigrants.

President of the International Amber Bridge Association Yuri Sizov told the conference that in Northern Europe and the Baltic Sea region mutual understanding is easier than any-



where else on the planet. The history of relations between peoples inhabiting North-

ern Europe is millennium old. They have much in common as well as differences. "The common and different traits mean nothing good or bad. They offer a chance for mutual understanding which, in its turn, produces trust and leaves no place for mentorship and schooling. Mutual trust is possible only through joint implementation of practical tasks," Sizov said.

The forum will promote public perception of the fact that intercultural contacts enriched the peoples in the Baltic Sea region in previous epochs. As Jan Lundin was correct to say, "despite problems which sometimes emerged and keep emerging in the Baltic Sea region there is also a feeling of a family and community of peoples. Our mission is to enhance the feeling however so far we even failed to restore the freedom of travel which existed a hundred years ago."

The Amber Bridge Association and the Baltic Civilization Institute will make the results of the Stockholm conference of historians encourage preparations of new fundamental works about the unique region of Europe so that the third decade of partnership in the framework of the Council of the Baltic Sea States is marked by a new quality of regional cooperation.