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Russian Expansion in the Baltic in the 18th Century*

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Abstract:

Russia's expansion in the Baltic region in the 18th century was neither an obvious nor historically justified direction. It was Peter I who abandoned the expansion to the south and east in favor of the west. The rise of Russia's power on the Baltic was linked to the decline in importance of the 17th-century powers blocking its path to Europe: Sweden, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and the Ottoman Empire. When Peter I the Great took power Russia had no access to either the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea or the Sea of Azov. However, thanks to Peter I's consistent policy and the actions of subsequent Russian rulers, during the 18th century Russia not only gained access to the Baltic Sea, but also conquered several strategically important ports and became the largest naval power in that area. A symbolic confirmation of the change in the direction of Russian policy in the 18th century can be the transfer of the capital of the state from Moscow to St. Petersburg in 1712. St. Petersburg was a "window on Europe" for Russia and the wide access to the Baltic Sea enabled Russia to influence the fate of the whole of Europe. This article tries to identify the most crucial moments and events that determined the success of Russian policy on the Baltic in the 18th century.



In the 18th century, the balance of power in the Baltic Sea was completely transformed. At the beginning of the century Russia had no access to the Baltic Sea, no port of its own and consequently no Baltic fleet of its own. Sweden had

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the dominant position in the Baltic Sea. The countries standing in Russia's way to Western Europe were Sweden in the north, the Commonwealth in the central part of the continent, and the Turkish Empire in the south. However, the first decades of the 18th century saw a marked decline in the importance of these three countries. Moreover, two great conflicts at the beginning of this century, the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714) and the Third Northern War (1700–1721) changed the balance of political power on the continent.¹ In addition to the above-mentioned countries, as a result of these wars, the Netherlands, Denmark and Spain lost their importance, while the role of Prussia and Russia increased. The road to Russia's superpower position in Europe and the history of this state in the 18th century have aroused and continue to arouse great interest among Russian, Polish and Western European historians.² Therefore, this article is rather an orderly presentation of the most important findings of historiography on this subject, however with special emphasis on the situation concerning the territory of the so-called former Livonia (Inflanty), i.e., the present territories of Estonia and Latvia.

In the course of the 18th century Russia not only gained access to the Baltic Sea, but also acquired several strategically important ports and became the largest naval power in that area.³ Moreover, from a regional power it became a world power. In this article I would like to focus on the period from the beginning of the Third Northern War until the death of Catherine II the Great, i.e., the years 1700–1796. The short reign of Paul I (1796–1801) did not change the balance

¹ Павел Александрович Кротов, *Битва под Полтавой. Начало Великой России* (Санкт-Петербург: Фонд содействия реставрации памятников истории и культуры «Спас», 2014), 114–115.

² Among others: Georg von Rauch, “Die baltische Frage im 18. Jahrhundert (1957),” in: *idem, Aus der baltischen Geschichte. Vorträge, Untersuchungen, Skizzen aus sechs Jahrzehnten* (Hannover-Döhren: Verlag Harro v. Hirschheydt, 1980), 253–329; Walther Mediger, “Rußland und die Ostsee im 18. Jahrhundert,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas. Neue Folge* 16/1 (March 1968): 85–103; David Kirby, *Northern Europe in the early modern Period. The Baltic World 1492–1772* (London–New York: Longman, 1993); *idem, The Baltic World 1772–1993. Europe's Northern Periphery in an Age of Change* (London–New York: Longman, 1995); Игорь Владимирович Курукин, *Эпоха «дворских бурь». Очерки политической истории после петровской России. 1725–1762 гг.* (Рязань: Издательство «Наука», 2003); Paweł Krokosz, “Bałtycka polityka Rosji Piotra I,” in: *Stan badań nad wielokulturowym dziedzictwem dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, vol. 6, eds. Wojciech Walczak, Karol Łopatecki, vol. 6 (Białystok: Instytut Badań nad Dziedzictwem Kulturowym Europy, 2013), 279–314; Томаш Цесельский, “Речь Посполитая и балтийская экспансия Российской Империи в XVIII в.,” *Studia Slavica et Balcanica Petropolitana* 1 (2014): 118–134; Edward Czapiewski, “Obecność Rosji nad Bałtykiem w XVIII i na początku XIX wieku,” *Studia Slavica et Balcanica Petropolitana* 1 (2014): 135–143; Edward Carl Thaden, *Russia's Western Borderlands, 1710–1870* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014, originally published in 1985); Павел Александрович Кротов, *Российский флот на Балтике при Петре Великом* (Санкт-Петербург: Библиотека Морского собрания, 2017).

³ Cf. Simon Dixon, *The Modernisation of Russia 1676–1825* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

of power in the Baltic Sea. This almost one hundred year period can be divided into three stages: a/ the period of Peter I the Great;⁴ b/ the period of political turmoil and palace upheaval (1725–1762),⁵ and c/ the reign of Catherine II the Great.⁶ Therefore, this article will briefly characterise each of these three periods, with emphasis on Russia's territorial gains in the Baltic, the development of its navy, and the significance that this Baltic expansion had for the Russian Empire.

The reign of Peter I the Great and the Third Northern War

The characterisation of this period should be divided into two parts. In the first, the political situation and territorial expansion of Russia will be presented, followed by a brief characterisation of Russian naval activities in the Baltic Sea.

When Peter I the Great assumed state power (1672–1725, tsar from 1682 – independent rule since 1689 – fulfillment of power from 1698), Russia had no access to either the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea or the Sea of Azov. The only major port in the European part of Russia was at Arkhangelsk, but because of its climate and geography it was not the best place to develop trade and political contacts with the rest of Europe. Peter the Great, upon taking power in Russia, set himself the goal of transforming Russia into a great European power. He achieved this goal, though often by cruel methods. One example is the construction of St. Petersburg, which was built on marshy, swampy and unhealthy land. As the Russian historian Nikolai Karamzin aptly summarised this fact, the city was built on “tears and corpses”⁷.

The young Tsar's life passion became the sea and seafaring. And the tsar remained faithful to this passion until the end of his reign.⁸ According to the Russian historian Lev Gumilev, Peter the Great wanted to make Russia a “civilized”

⁴ More about this period: Reinhard Wittram, *Peter I. Czar und Kaiser. Zur Geschichte Peter des Großen in seiner Zeit. 2 Bände* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964); Erich Donnert, *Peter der Große* (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 1988); Robert Frost, *The Northern Wars: War, State and Society in Northeastern Europe, 1558–1721* (Harlow: Longman, 2000); Paul Bushkovitch, *Peter the Great: the Struggle for Power 1671–1725* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁵ More about this period: Евгений Викторович Анисимов, *Россия без Петра. 1725–1740* (Санкт-Петербург: Лениздат, 1994); Курукин, *Эпоха «дворских бурь»*; Zofia Zielińska, “Przyczyna rosyjskiej polityki zagranicznej w XVIII wiecznej Europie (epoka popiotrowa),” in: *Rzeczpospolita–Europa. XVI–XVIII wiek. Próba konfrontacji*, eds. Michał Kopczyński, Wojciech Tygielski (Warszawa: Optima JG, 1999), 203–218.

⁶ More about this period: Erich Donnert, *Katharina II. Die Grosse. Kaiserin des Russischen Reiches* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998).

⁷ “Ile osób zginęło, ile milionów i trudów zużyto, aby zrealizować ten zamiar? [budowy Petersburga – A.J.] Można powiedzieć, że Petersburg zbudowany został na łzach i trupach,” Николай Михайлович Карамзин, *Записка о древней и новой России в ее политическом и гражданском отношениях* (Москва: Наука. Главная редакция восточной литературы, 1991), 37.

⁸ Michaił Heller, *Historia Imperium Rosyjskiego* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 2000), 307.

power based on the Dutch model, build a strong naval fleet and develop trade contacts.⁹ In 1697–1698, together with the so-called Grand Embassy, he went on a tour of Europe as the first Moscow ruler to do so in 600 years, visiting the Netherlands and England, among other places. Before him, the only Russian monarch who traveled to the West was Prince of Kiev Izaslav Yaroslavovich in 1075 (to Worms to the court of Emperor Henry IV).¹⁰ Peter I returned from this trip not only with a resolution to carry out deep reforms in the state, but also with a plan to build a Northern Alliance – that is, a coalition of Russia, Saxony, the Commonwealth and Denmark against Sweden.¹¹ He also brought with him about 750 professionals, mostly Dutch craftsmen and military professionals.¹² On November 11/21, 1699, an anti-Swedish Russian-Saxon alliance was concluded in the village of Preobrazhenskoye, near Moscow, in which August II (1670–1733, king of Poland in 1697–1706 and 1709–1733) pledged, among other things, to persuade the Commonwealth to join the war.¹³ He concluded an analogous alliance with Denmark. The alliances concluded at that time eventually led to the creation of the so-called Northern League. The Commonwealth did not formally join the war until 1704, whereas Prussia and Hanover did so in 1715. The new Danish king Frederick IV struck the Duchy of Holstein in March 1700, the Duke of Holstein Frederick III took refuge with his close ally in Stockholm, and the same month Saxon troops entered Swedish Livonia from the Courland area. Russia could not enter hostilities against Sweden until after the peace treaty with Turkey, which was signed on August 8/19, 1700.

Peter I decided to fight the Swedes to gain free access to the Baltic Sea for reasons of personal conviction and political calculation. The tsar was primarily motivated by an appreciation of the role that international trade played in strengthening the state's international power, and he sought to replace foreign intermediaries with Russian ones in trade relations with Europe. Observing foreign ships in Arkhangelsk, he desired to create his own ports and his own fleet to export Russian goods to other countries.¹⁴ However, Peter I saw war with Sweden as more than just a way to gain strategically important borders and opportunities for lucrative international trade. For the tsar, defeating Sweden meant that Russia could develop and become a European power.¹⁵

⁹ Lew Gumilow, *Od Rusi do Rosji* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2004), 262.

¹⁰ Heller, *Historia Imperium*, 315.

¹¹ Władysław Andrzej Serczyk, *Piotr I Wielki* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1990), 79, 94–95; Lucjan Ryszard Lewitter, "Russia, Poland and the Baltic, 1697–1721," *The Historical Journal* 11/1 (March 1968): 3–34.

¹² Paweł Krokosz, *Rosyjskie siły zbrojne za panowania Piotra I* (Kraków: Arcana, 2010), 243–291.

¹³ Jacek Burdowicz-Nowicki, *Piotr I, August II i Rzeczpospolita 1697–1706* (Kraków: Arcana 2010), 168–170.

¹⁴ Mediger, "Rußland und die Ostsee," 89–90.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 91.

The beginning of the war was not favorable for Peter I and his allies. King Charles XII of Sweden (1682–1718, king from 1697–1718) first attacked Copenhagen and promptly forced Denmark to withdraw from the war.¹⁶ Augustus II unsuccessfully besieged Riga,¹⁷ whereas Peter lost the Battle of Narva (November 19/30, 1700). At the Battle of Narva, the Swedish army defeated the Russian army, which was four times more numerous. The easy Swedish victory caused Charles XII to miss the opportunity of eliminating Russia from the war, and for the next several years he became bogged down in fighting on the territory of the Commonwealth, which was unwilling and initially did not formally participate in these battles. The tsar used this time to reform his army,¹⁸ build his own Baltic fleet and occupy Livonia.

Still, in December 1701 Russian troops under later Field Marshal Boris Sheremetev (1652–1719) were wreaking havoc on the territory of Livonia, including a victory over Swedish general Wolmar von Schlippenbach (1653–1721) near the village of Erastfer (*Est.* Erastvere, 29 December 1701/9 January 1702), after which the Russians retreated due to a thaw. They returned with new forces in 1702 and on 19/29 July 1702 Boris Sheremetev scored another major victory over Wolmar von Schlippenbach near Hummelshof (*Est.* Hummuli). In the same year the Russians took Nöteborg (now Schlüsselburg) located at the mouth of the Neva River from Lake Ladoga on 26 September/11 October 1702, which gave the Russians considerable freedom of action in the Baltic region and provided security for the soon-to-be founded St Petersburg.¹⁹ In the third campaign of 1703 Sheremetev had already ravaged the whole of Livonia except for Riga, Parnava and Reval, which cities he did not even try to conquer. The Russians used scorched earth tactics, because by ruining Livonia they wanted to destroy the base for the Swedish army.

Further Russian successes occurred in 1704. The Russians captured Dorpat on July 13/24²⁰ and Narva on August 10/21, 1704. The inhabitants of Narva were

¹⁶ More about Charles XII: Ragnhild Marie Hatton, *Charles XII of Sweden* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968).

¹⁷ The Saxon army, supported by Polish and Lithuanian magnates from 1700, tried unsuccessfully to take control of Riga and the whole Livonia. The campaign ended with the defeat of the Saxon army in the Battle of the Daugava on 9/19 I 1701; Jānis Arājs, “Bitwa nad Dźwinią 9 lipca 1701 roku,” in: *Wojny północne w XVI–XVIII wieku. W czterechsetlecie bitwy pod Kircholmem*, ed. Bogusław Dybaś (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2007), 197–207.

¹⁸ Reform of the army of Peter I, see: Krokosz, *Rosyjskie siły zbrojne*; *idem*, “Armia Piotra I gwarantem mocarstwowej pozycji Rosji w Europie,” *Studia z dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej* 55/1 (2020): 9–49.

¹⁹ *Idem*, “Mała wojna’. Działania wojsk rosyjskich w Inflantach, Estonii oraz Ingermanlandii w latach 1700–1704,” in: *Stan badań nad wielokulturowym dziedzictwem dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, vol. 3: *Inflanty Polskie*, eds. Wojciech Walczak, Karol Łopatecki (Białystok: Instytut Badań nad Dziedzictwem Kulturowym Europy, 2012), 183.

²⁰ Борис Петрович Шереметев, “Военно-походный журнал (с 3 июня 1701-го года по 12 сентября 1705-го года) генерал-фельдмаршала Бориса Петовича Шереметева,” *Материалы военно-ученого архива главного штаба* 1 (1871): 153–170.

slaughtered and the city looted. Both cities were of great strategic importance to Peter.²¹ They were a protection for St. Petersburg, which had been founded a year earlier. On 30 August 1704, in the newly captured city of Narva, the Commonwealth concluded the “Second Treaty with His Imperial Majesty,” in which the fifth point stated that “[...] all the fortresses, cities and castles which in the whole Livonic Principality and the lands belonging to it, whatever of it belonged to the Commonwealth [...] shall be handed over to His Royal Highness and the Most Excellent Commonwealth without any reward and with pleasure’.²²

In 1705 the Russian army entered Courland. Although the Russians suffered a defeat on 15/26 July 1705 at the Battle of Gemauerthof (Murmiza, the Marble Court),²³ in the following weeks they captured the most important cities headed by Bovsk (14/25 August) and Mitava (4/15 September 1705) and took actual control of the principality.²⁴ The capture of Courland by the Russians was of great strategic importance, as it cut off the Swedish troops stationed in Livonia from the main forces of Charles XII operating on the territory of the Commonwealth.²⁵ Russian power in Courland did not last long, as the Russians lost the duchy already in 1706, yet retained their gains in Ingria and parts of Estonia.²⁶ Although the battles in Livonia continued, they were less intense than before. The situation changed only when Sweden lost the Battle of Poltava on 27 June/8 July 1709.²⁷ The Poltava victory decided the further course of the war, the defeat of the Swedish power, the rise of the Russian power, and the fate of the Baltic states.²⁸ It was in Poltava that Peter I the Great ordered Russian troops stationed in Livonia to attack Riga. On 4/15 July 1710 – after 6 months of artillery siege and in a situation of famine and pestilence in the city – the people of Riga surrendered the city on honourable terms.²⁹

²¹ More about it: Margus Laidre, *The Great Northern War and Estonia: The Trials of Dorpat, 1700–1708* (Tallinn: Argo, 2010), 148 ff.

²² *Volumina legum. Prawa, konstytucje y przywileje Królestwa Polskiego, Wielkiego Xięstwa Litewskiego y wszystkich prowincyi należących na walnych seymach koronnych od seymu wiślickiego roku pańskiego 1347 aż do ostatniego seymu uchwalonych. Volumen Sextum ab anno 1697 ad annum 1736 Acta reipublicae continens* (Petersburg: Nakładem i drukiem Jozafata Ohryzki, 1860), 83.

²³ Владимир Сергеевич Великанов, Сергей Леонидович Мехнев, “Курляндский поход Шереметева и «упущенная виктория» при Мур-мызе (Гуманэртгофе) 26 июля 1705 г.,” *Старый Цейхгауз* 57/1 (2014): 70–80; Владимир Сергеевич Великанов, Сергей Леонидович Мехнев, *Курляндская операция 1705–1706 гг. И сражение при Гемауэртгофе* (Москва: Фонд «Русские-Витязи», 2016); Karol Kościelniak, “Polskie źródło do przebiegu bitwy pod Gemauerthof/Murmizą z 26 lipca 1705 roku,” *Studia z dziejów polskiej historiografii wojskowej* 18 (2017): 47–61.

²⁴ Шереметев, “Военно-походный журнал,” 175–191.

²⁵ Krokosz, “Mała wojna,” 220–221.

²⁶ Цесельский, “Речь Посполитая,” 119.

²⁷ Gunar Åselius, *Birth of the Russian Empire. Tenacious retreat of Sweden as a great power* (Stockholm: Center for Baltic and East European Studies, Södertörn University, 2011), 31.

²⁸ Кротов, *Битва под Полтавой*, 568.

²⁹ Paweł Krokosz, “Sunt mihi quae valeant in Talea pondera. Opanowanie wschodnich nadbałtyckich prowincji szwedzkich przez armię rosyjską w 1710 r.,” in: *Stan badań nad wielokulturowym*

On that day the representatives of nobility and bourgeoisie of Livonia concluded an agreement with Field Marshal Boris Sheremetev, which went down in history as the capitulation of 1710 (*German: Kapitulationen*).³⁰

On 14/25 July 1710, the Livonian national marshal Reinhold von Tiesenhausen and 90 representatives of German nobility paid a solemn tribute to Peter the Great. The surrender of Riga was followed by the surrender of Parnava (12/23 August) and Reval (29 September/10 October).³¹ In the capitulation of Reval the Estonian nobility gained the restoration of their status as an autonomous province of Estonia and their former state privileges. The tsar confirmed to the local nobility the lands they owned, gave them possession of the estates confiscated by the Swedes, guaranteed freedoms for the Lutheran religion and confirmed German self-government, rights and language as valid in the area.³² Formally, the voluntary subordination to the Russian tsar protected Peter from plans to recapture the province by Sweden and from Polish aspirations to take possession of these territories, since according to earlier agreements Livonia was to belong to the Commonwealth (Augustus II).

Thus from 1710 Livonia ceased to be an area of warfare and it was possible to start healing the terrible wounds inflicted there by war, murders, fires, and plagues. The most devastating was the plague. The plague broke out in Courland and in the middle of May 1710 it wreaked havoc among the defenders of Riga and from there it spread to the rest of Livonia. According to the conservative data of German historians, the losses of the peasant population in Livonia reached 60% of the population, and in Estonia nearly 70% of the total peasant population.³³ The cities also suffered. Thus, for example, Riga with 8534 inhabitants and 1245 refugees in 1710 lost 2/3rds of its population due to the plague. In Parnava the losses amounted to more than half of the total population of the city. In Courland the population loss was about 50% of the total population of the principality. As late as 1725, nearly half of the cultivated land in Livonia lay fallow.³⁴

In the same year of 1710 Russia finally captured not only Livonia and Estonia, but also Vyborg and Keksholm (now Priozersk) on the Karelian Isthmus in addition to previously occupied Ingria, which gave Russia the opportunity to wage war on Finnish

dziedzictwem dawnej Rzeczypospolitej, vol. 7, eds. Wojciech Walczak, Karol Łopatecki (Białystok: Instytut Badań nad Dziedzictwem Kulturowym Europy, 2017), 233.

³⁰ The text of the capitulation of the Livonian knighthood of 4/15 I 1710 and the text of the capitulation of the city of Riga of 4/15 I 1710, see: Carl Schirren, *Die Capitulationen der livländischen Ritter- und Landschaft und der Stadt Riga vom 4. Juli 1710 nebst deren Confirmationen* (Dorpat: Druck und Verlag von E.J. Karow, Universitätsbuchhändler, 1865), 33–46, 63–72; more about it: *Die Kapitulationen der baltischen Ritterschaft im Nordischen Krieg*, eds. Karsten Brüggemann, Mati Laur, Pärtel Piirmäe (Wien–Köln–Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2013).

³¹ Krokosz, "Sunt mihi quae valeant," 255, 259–260.

³² Reinhard Wittram, *Baltische Geschichte. Die Ostseelände Livland, Estland, Kurland 1180–1918* (München: Verlag R. Oldenbourg, 1954), 134; Kirby, *Northern Europe*, 339.

³³ Wittram, *Baltische Geschichte*, 125.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, 125–126.

territory. According to the 6-point instruction given to Field Marshal General Prince Alexander Danilovich Menshkov (1673–1729) in February 1713 to negotiate peace with Sweden, Peter I made it a minimum condition that the provinces of Ingria and Karelia occupied during the war, including the city of Narva, would remain with Russia. In addition, Sweden was to recognize Russian control over the entire Estonian province of Reval (Tallinn). If necessary, the Tsar agreed to give up most of occupied Finland, but the area including Viipuri was to remain under Russian rule. As far as the Livonian province was concerned, the tsar continued to manoeuvre, formally recognising the necessity of granting Livonia to the Polish king, but if this happened, it would be without the Dorpat district (now Tartu in Estonia), which in any case he wanted to incorporate into Russia.³⁵ In practice, he no longer disregarded the agreements previously made with Augustus the Strong on this issue.³⁶

Peter I also sought to gain effective control over the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia. From 1561 Courland was under the fief rule of the Commonwealth and was ruled by the Kettler dynasty. When in 1698 the six-year old Frederick William (1692–1711) became the new duke, there was a dispute over the regency between the duke's uncle, his mother Elisabeth Sophie and so called supreme councilors supported by the local nobility. The chaos in the duchy was further aggravated by the Northern War, during which Courland was ravaged by Swedish, Polish and Russian armies. As Gustaw Manteuffel put it: "Nobody knew who actually was the lord of Courland: Frederick Wilhelm Kettler or his mother, Prince Ferdinand [uncle – A.J.], the highest councilors, August II, King Stanislaw Leszczyński, Peter I the Russian Tsar or Charles XII?"³⁷

When in 1709 prince Frederick William came of age (17 years) they began to think about marrying him off to a Russian princess. An envoy from Courland came to St Petersburg in June 1710 and Peter I agreed to marry the prince to his niece Anna Ivanovna (1693–1740), seeing this as a way to interfere in the internal affairs of the principality.³⁸ The wedding festivities lasted from November 1710 to January 1711 and were so exhausting for the young prince that he quickly fell ill and died on January 21, 1711.³⁹ Peter I, however, was not about to give up his excuse to maintain his influence in the principality. He sent Princess

³⁵ "48. Инструкция князю Меншикову, 1713 года февраль," in: *Материалы для истории русского флота: Часть IV* (Санкт-Петербург: Типография Морского Министерства, 1867), 70–71.

³⁶ In the years 1712–1718, the Commonwealth almost annually sent deputations to Russia with a demand to hand over Livonia; Цесельский, "Речь Посполитая," 120.

³⁷ Gustaw Manteuffel, *Zarysy z dziejów krain dawnych inflanckich, czyli Inflant właściwych (tak szwedzkich jako i polskich), Estonii z Ozyliq, Kurlandii i Ziemi Piltyńskiej*, ed. Krzysztof Zajas (Kraków: Universitas, 2007), 170.

³⁸ "3775. Июня после 2 и не позднее 10. Рузюлюции на предложения курляндских послов о браке царевны Анны," in: *Письма и бумаги императора Петра великого 10 (1710)*, modern edition by: Москва: Издательство Академии Наук СССР, 1956, 161–162.

³⁹ Manteuffel, *Zarysy z dziejów*, 172.

Anna Ivanovna, guards and advisors to Mitava. Although Courland continued to remain a fief of the Commonwealth, from 1711 the principality “was practically ruled from St Petersburg”.⁴⁰

The Russian successes on the Baltic coast after the Battle of Poltava were viewed reluctantly by the Western countries. England in particular took an increasingly hostile view of Russia. The Russian successes became England’s first warning sign of great concern due to the shifting balance of naval and commercial power in the Baltic. In 1710, the Tories came to power in England. This made it possible to begin Franco-British peace negotiations to end the War of Spanish Succession. This is important because France had traditionally supported Sweden in its conflict with Russia. In addition, when Emperor Joseph I died in 1711 and Charles VI ascended the imperial throne in 1711, England, Hanover, and Austria quickly provided guarantees to Swedish King Charles XII against Russia.⁴¹ Moreover, for Prussia and Hanover, the arrival of German troops in northern Germany as early as 1711 threatened their expansion plans in Swedish Pomerania.⁴²

When in 1712 allied armies of Russia, Saxony and Denmark were already on the offensive in Szczecin Pomerania, Peter I concluded an agreement with the ruler of the duchy of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, which had been in close relations with Russia for years. In exchange for help in calming down the internal situation in the duchy, the tsar obtained the opening of Mecklenburg to Russian trade, the possibility of using the local ports by the merchant and war fleet, the right of march of the Russian army and the right to establish military depots on the territory of the duchy. This gave Peter I actual power over the puppet ruler.⁴³ Russia’s extensive offensive operations conducted in almost the entire Baltic region, from Finland to the coasts of Sweden and Stettin Pomerania to the German principalities, provoked a strong reaction from the Western states. This is particularly evident after the end of the War of the Spanish Succession (on April 11, 1713, the Peace of Utrecht was concluded between France and the countries of the anti-Bourbon coalition, and on March 7, 1714, the Peace of Rastatt ended the fighting between France and Austria). Another important event for the balance of power in Europe was the death of King Louis XIV in 1715 and the accession to the throne of Louis XV.

Peter I wanted to take advantage of the change in the French throne (Louis XV was underage when he ascended to the throne) and tried to end the war with Sweden using French mediation. While in Paris in 1717, the tsar obtained France’s consent to act as a mediator between Russia and Sweden, and to stop the Bourbons from paying subsidies to belligerent Sweden.⁴⁴ Negotiations in the Åland Islands

⁴⁰ Mediger, “Rußland und die Ostsee,” 94.

⁴¹ Serczyk, *Piotr I Wielki*, 174.

⁴² Rauch, “Die baltische Frage,” 256.

⁴³ Mediger, “Rußland und die Ostsee,” 93–94.

⁴⁴ As early as August 1717, France was mediating the conclusion of peace between Russia and Prussia in Amsterdam; Krokosz, *Bałtycka polityka*, 297.

in 1718 dragged on, and the situation was further complicated by the sudden death of King Charles XII of Sweden, who was hit by a rifle bullet during the siege of Fredrikshald fortress in Norway. A major factor in the stiffening of the Swedish side was the support Sweden received from England at this time. England was not interested in strengthening Russia's position on the Baltic, not were Russia's previous allies, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Prussia. In the second decade of the 18th century Russian troops were stationed on the territory of the Commonwealth and thanks only to English and Austrian pressure was August II able to force Russia to withdraw Russian troops from Poland (1719). In the same year the Russian army left Mecklenburg.

Therefore, the tsar decided to resume offensive operations. In 1719 a Russian squadron was victorious in a battle off Osilia (Ezele), capturing all Swedish ships (3 ships, 92 guns)⁴⁵ and in the same year a large Russian landing near Stockholm threatened the Swedish capital. The following year Russia was again victorious against the Swedes in a naval battle near Granhamn Island (August 7, 1720), capturing four Swedish ships. This battle marked the end of Swedish domination in the Baltic Sea. These victories hastened the moment of peace.

The Russian victory over the Swedes was confirmed by the Peace of Nystad of 30 August 1721 ending the Third Northern War. The outcome of the war decided the fate of the Baltic Sea and northern Germany.⁴⁶ Sweden lost to Russia: Livonia, Estonia, Ingria and Karelia with Viipuri. Sweden also had to pay war reparations and was reduced to the role of a secondary state in the region. Other states also gained from the peace. Hanover gained the duchy of Bremen, Prussia gained the eastern part of Swedish Pomerania with Stettin and the island of Usedom, and Denmark and Norway gained acquisitions in northern Scandinavia. Saxony remained at war with Sweden until 1728 and with the Commonwealth formally until 1732. The Peace of Nystad (August 30, 1721), imposed by Russia on Sweden, in articles 9 and 10 confirmed exclusive Russian authority over the conquered territories. After 1721 the Baltic nobility were given incredible opportunities for advancement and service in Russian state institutions. As early as 1721 Peter the Great instituted a special decree facilitating the accession of Estonian and Livonian nobility to Russian offices. Many impoverished families took advantage of this right. These families sent their sons mainly to serve in the Russian army, which soon became the rule for knights from these territories.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Edmund Kosiarsz, *Wojny na Bałtyku X–XIX wieku* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1978), 272–274.

⁴⁶ Brendan Simms, *Taniec mocarstw. Walka o dominację w Europie od XV do XXI wieku*, transl. by Jan Szkudliński (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2015), 95–96.

⁴⁷ Михаил Юрьевич Катин-Ярцев, "Балтийско-немецкое дворянство на российской службе. XVII – конец XVIII в.," *Вестник Московского Университета. Серия: История* 8/2 (2000): 39–49.

As far as the development of the Russian fleet during the Northern War is concerned, it should be remembered that the first Russian attempts to gain access to the Baltic coast and to create their own fleet took place as early as in the 16th century. At that time, tsar Ivan IV the Terrible fought to conquer Livonia, but despite temporary successes and the creation of the so-called Narva Navigation, the attempt ultimately failed. Russia had no access to this part of the Baltic Sea (with minor exceptions) until the 18th century.

Construction of the Baltic Fleet began in 1702, when the Third Northern War was already in full swing.⁴⁸ The Russians did not have to wait too long for their first victory in the Baltic Sea, as it occurred on May 7/18, 1703. On that day Tsar Peter I (as Captain Petr Mikhailov) and Lieutenant Aleksandr Danilovich Menshkov (1673–1729) at the head of two companies of the Prieobrazhensky and Semyonovsky regiments, in 30 boats attacked at night a Swedish squadron consisting of 9 ships under the command of Vice Admiral Gideon von Numers (ca. 1647–1708). Using the cover of darkness and heavy rain, the Russians from 8 boats carried out the boarding and captured two Swedish ships, the 10-gun galliot “Gedan” and the 8-gun snow (Russian: шнява, German: Schnau; similar in design to a brig) “Astrild” moored near the left bank of the Great Neva. It was the first Russian victory in the Baltic⁴⁹ and nowadays (since 1996) the day of May 18 is celebrated annually as the Baltic Fleet Day.

In the first decade of the 18th century the Russians built a total of 15 frigates and 13 snows in their shipyards (Siasskaya, Olonets, Luga and Novaya Ladoga). However, these ships were of rather low firepower (rank 5 and 6), had numerous design flaws and quickly went out of service.⁵⁰ In that decade the Russians began the construction of larger ships of the line, with armed with about 50 cannons (“Riga,” “Vyborg” and “Parnawa” – ships classified in the 4th category/rank), which were launched in 1710.⁵¹

In the second decade of the 18th century, Sweden still retained its power position in the Baltic Sea, but Russian shipyards in Arkhangelsk and St Petersburg began to build new ships. In addition, between 1713 and 1716 Peter I decided to purchase warships abroad. Altogether in 1711–1721 Russia purchased 17 ships of the line and 7 frigates, of which 15 ships of the line and 5 frigates were purchased before 1717. On average, these ships had no more than 64 guns on board.⁵²

In the latter decade, or more precisely on 27 July/7 August 1714, the Russian fleet personally commanded by Peter I the Great achieved its greatest naval victory

⁴⁸ “1. Наказъ о строении кораблей на реке Сясь, 1702 г.,” in: *Материалы для истории русскаго флота, Часть 1* (Санкт-Петербург: Типография Морского Министерства, 1865), 1–3.

⁴⁹ Кротов, *Российский флот*, 207–215.

⁵⁰ Борис Валерьевич Колобов, *Создание и развитие Балтийского корабельного флота при Петре I. Автореферат диссертации на соискание учёной степени кандидата исторических наук* (Москва 1995), 7.

⁵¹ Колобов, *Создание и развитие*, 7, <https://cheloveknauka.com/sozдание-i-razvitie-baltiyskogokorabelnogo-flota-pri-petre-i>, accessed on 29 XI 2022.

⁵² *Ibidem*, 8.

in the war fought against Sweden. In the two-hour long Battle of Hango (Gangutem, Hangöudde, Fin. Riilahti) the Russians captured a Swedish admiral frigate and ten galleys.⁵³ The consequence of the victory was the final control of the whole Gulf of Finland by the Russians.⁵⁴ The news of the death of the English Queen Anne Stuart (1702–1707–1714) and the accession to the throne of the Hanoverian Prince George I (1714–1727) reached Peter the Great after the end of this battle. The victory of the Russian fleet in 1714 not only marked the end of Swedish rule at sea, but also enabled the Russians to occupy Finland until 1721. The new English king became a fierce opponent of the policy pursued by the tsar. George I was primarily concerned with the growing Russian influence in Mecklenburg, which directly threatened his Duchy of Hanover. He also did not want to let it come under total Russian control through Russian occupation of the Baltic ports and the shipbuilding trade.⁵⁵

After 1717 the Baltic Navy expanded by 17 more ships built in the St Petersburg shipyard that were armed with 66 to 92 cannons and 2 ships built in Arkhangelsk, each armed with 54 cannons. In the third decade of the 18th century another 7 ships of the line were built, including the first one with 100 cannons.⁵⁶ Thanks to the actions of Peter I the Great, the Baltic Russian fleet in the first quarter of the 18th century was not only created, but also took one of the top ranks in Europe in terms of the number of warships. In total, between 1696 and 1725, the Russians built 1104 vessels in three shipbuilding centers (St Petersburg, the Azov region, and the Caspian region), including 146 large ships of the line and frigates.⁵⁷ The Baltic fleet alone numbered 141 large sailing ships of the line and several hundred rowed ships in 1724.

A period of political instability and a reduction in Russian pressure on the Baltic Sea

Between 1725 and 1762 Russia was ruled by six rulers (Catherine I, Peter II, Anna, Ivan VI, Elizabeth Petrovna, Peter III), three of whom were women. All of the Russian rulers of the period realised that in order to maintain Russia's international power position it was necessary to secure Russian possession of the Baltic Sea, expand the land army, forge alliances, and interfere in the internal affairs of Sweden and the Commonwealth. Russia did not want and could not allow political and military reforms in these countries. Therefore, the Russians

⁵³ About this battle Cf. Павел Александрович Кротов, *Гангутская баталия 1714 года* (Санкт-Петербург: Издательство «Лики России», 2006).

⁵⁴ Serczyk, *Piotr I Wielki*, 173.

⁵⁵ Mediger, "Rußland und die Ostsee," 94.

⁵⁶ Колобов, *Созданиеиразвитие*, 8.

⁵⁷ Serczyk, *Piotr I Wielki*, 192.

did not shy away from using various means of diplomatic or military pressure (bribes, threats, military pressure, influence on the throne) to maintain the balance of power in the region created after the peace of Nystad. Russia was also concerned with strengthening its influence in the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia. After the death of the last representative of the ducal dynasty, Prince Ferdinand Kettler (1655–1737), Tsarina Anna Ivanovna led to the acquisition of the throne of Courland by her advisor and favorite Ernst Biron (1690–1772, Duke of Courland in 1737–1741 and 1763–1769). On June 23, 1737, in the presence of Russian cavalry, the Courland nobility elected the Russian-imposed E. Biron as their duke,⁵⁸ and the Commonwealth approved the election. The Russian influence on the fate of the duchy did not diminish even after Ernst Biron was banished to exile in 1741. The rule of the so-called supreme councilors in charge of the duchy's affairs during this period (1741–1762) remained under the control of Russian policy, especially since Russian troops were stationed in the duchy.

In the period under discussion, Sweden was the country that posed the greatest threat to Russian rule in the Baltic Sea. Sweden sought to regain its lost territories, and an opportunity to do so came during the so-called War of the Austrian Succession (1740–1748). The Russo-Swedish War took place between 1741 and 1743, and is also known as the “War of the Hats.” The name is derived from the ruling political party of the hats (Hattpartiet), which sought to regain territories lost to Russia in the early 18th century. The French were interested in starting this war in order to draw away Russian troops supporting the Austrians in the War of the Habsburg Succession. The immediate cause of the war was the assassination of Swedish diplomat Malcolm Sinclair (1690–17 June 1739), who was negotiating with the Turks for an offensive alliance against Russia. On August 8, 1741, the Swedes declared war, but right at the beginning of the war they suffered defeat in a land battle fought in Finland (the Battle of Lappeenranta – September 3, 1741), and their situation was further aggravated by tsarina Elizabeth's assumption of power in Russia. Although the new tsarina was ready to make small territorial concessions, no agreement was reached due to the exorbitant demands of the Swedes. Therefore, the Russian army entered Finland again and in August 1742 surrounded the Swedish army and forced them to surrender. After the Russians occupied Turku (Abo), the Swedes decided to conclude a peace treaty (August 7/18, 1743 – Peace of Abo), as a result of which Sweden lost to Russia relatively small areas of southern Finland with the towns of Lappeenranta (Sw. Vilmanstrand) and Hamina (Sw. Frederikshamn). Moreover, in Article 4 of the Peace Treaty of Abo, the Swedes confirmed the full, unquestionable and eternal rights of Russia to rule and possess the territories granted to Russia by the Treaty

⁵⁸ Klauspeter Strohm, *Die Kurländische Frage (1700–1763). Eine Studie zur Mächtepolitik im Ançiem Régime* (Berlin: Verlag dissertation.de, 1999), 154.

of August 30, 1721, i.e., to Estonia, Livonia, Ingria, part of Karelia with Viipur and to all other places and cities mentioned in the Treaty of Nystad.⁵⁹

During the War of 1741–1743 the Russian Baltic fleet avoided entering into naval battles with the Swedish fleet. This was due, among other things, to the fact that the powerful navy created by Peter the Great fell into ruin soon after his death. For this reason, Vice Admiral Zachar Danilovich Mishukov (1684–1762) was removed from his position as a commander of the fleet and an investigation was initiated against him. Z.D. Mishukov gradually returned to favor and in the following years commanded Russian squadrons many times in various campaigns in the Baltic (years 1745–1750). After the outbreak of the Seven Years' War (1756–1763) he was reinstated as vice admiral of the Baltic Fleet. In the Seven Years' War Austria, France, Saxony, Sweden and Russia fought against Prussia, Great Britain and Hanover.

Russia's participation in the Seven Years' War made it a real European power with a decisive influence on the balance of power in Europe. As British historian Brendan Simms put it: "By the middle of the [18th – A.J.] century it was clear who had won and who had lost. Turkey had never recovered from its defeat at the gates of Vienna. Sweden proved unable to recover from Poltava, [...] As for Poland, the superpowers were concerned not with its strength but with its weakness. [...] The great winners were the eastern powers: Prussia, which captured Silesia, and Russia, which began a seemingly unstoppable westward expansion'.⁶⁰ The reason for Russia's military involvement in the war was the growing role of Prussia during the reign of Frederick II the Great, which was perceived in Russia as a real threat to its western borders and its interests in the Baltic and in northern Europe. Russian plans for participation in the war included actions on land and sea. Among other things Russians wanted to occupy Prussian Memel (now Klaipeda) to make this port a base for Russian galleys. Moreover, already in March 1756 it was planned that after defeating Prussia the eastern part of this country would be given to the Commonwealth, which in return would give Russia the sovereignty over the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia and the so-called Polish Livonia.⁶¹ At the outbreak of the Seven Years' War, most of the Russian army was stationed around St. Petersburg, Estonia, Livonia and nearby areas. The Russians took up hostilities as early as 1757. Due to the needs of the British shipbuilding industry supplied by Russian raw materials, Russia did not fear British intervention even though Great Britain was allied with Prussia.

⁵⁹ "Ратификация Ея Императорскаго Величества, на трактате вечнаго мира, заключенной с Его Королевским Величеством и Государством Шведским в Абопе," 7 I 1743, no. 8766, in: *Полное Собрание Законов Российской Империи*, vol. XI, С 1740, no. 1743, from 7997 to 8848 (Санкт-Петербург: Печатано в Типографии II Отделения Собственной Ея Императорскаго Величества Канцелярии, 1830), 855–856.

⁶⁰ Simms, *Taniec mocarstw*, 122.

⁶¹ Mediger, "Rußland und die Ostsee," 100; Курукин, *Эпоха "дворских бурь"*, 370; Kirby, *Northern Europe*, 334.

Vice Admiral Z.D. Mishukov was active in the Baltic Sea. The fleet of 30 ships and 41 galleys undertook operations in various parts of the Baltic Sea, including the capture of Klaipeda, the blockade of Pilawa, and stationing in the roadstead of Danzig. In 1758 the fleet patrolled the Strait of Sound in an attempt to prevent the British fleet from entering the Baltic Sea. The unsuccessful Russian-Swedish attempt to seize Kolobrzeg's port and fortress from the sea in 1760 led to the resignation of Vice Admiral Z.D. Mishukov. The Russians did not capture Kolobrzeg until 17 December 1761 when the 34,000 – strong Russian land force was reinforced by a Russian fleet of 121 ships under the command of Vice Admiral Andrei Ivanovich Polansky (1698–1764). This victory, as well as other Russian successes during the Seven Years' War, soon lost its significance due to the death of Tsarina Elizabeth on January 5, 1762 (according to the new style). The new tsar, Peter III, immediately suspended military action and began peace negotiations with his adored King Frederick II of Prussia.⁶² The war ended with the victory of Britain and Prussia, and Russia gained no territory from the war and returned to Prussia the eastern part of the country it had occupied from 1758 to 1762. The Russian army that captured Prussia during the Seven Years' War forced the inhabitants of Livonia to deliver a huge number of horses and wagons. From Estonia alone 6,500 horses were requisitioned. In addition, an increase in the number of recruits was ordered.

During this period Riga managed to maintain its military and commercial importance and from the middle of the 18th century it clearly gained in the intermediation of Russia's trade with Europe. In contrast, other ports in Livonia and Estonia, such as Reval (Tallinn) and Pärnuva, lost their importance in Baltic trade to the growing St Petersburg. It is worth noting that during this period significant changes were taking place in the personnel of the Russian fleet. Gradually the Russians began to constitute the vast majority of the crews of the Russian naval fleet in the Baltic Sea. If still in 1715 Russian officers constituted only 13.6% of the total number of the Baltic officers, between 1726 and 1732 that percentage rose to 67%, and in 1764 it was already 85%.⁶³

The period of the reign of Catherine II the Great and the strengthening of Russia's superpower position in the Baltic Sea

During her reign Catherine II in domestic policy sought to strengthen and unify the structures of the state through top-down reforms, and in foreign policy she wanted to have a group of dependent and subordinate countries on her borders. In the case of the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia, the tsarina restored

⁶² Kirby, *Northern Europe*, 335.

⁶³ Колобов, *Создание и развитие*, 14.

Ernst Biron to the ducal throne in 1763, and later helped his son Peter Biron to take power in the duchy. In addition, in 1764 Catherine II facilitated the election of Stanislaus August Poniatowski as the king of Poland in order to maintain Russian influence over the entire Commonwealth. The outbreak and course of the Bar Confederation (1768–1772), as well as the support that Turkey gave to the Bar Confederation (Russian-Turkish War 1768–1774) forced Russia to change its plans and decide on the first partition of Poland. As a result of the first partition, carried out jointly with Prussia and Austria in 1772, Russia tore off from the Commonwealth the eastern area of the country of about 92 thousand km² which included, among others, the so-called Polish Livonia. From that moment forward, only the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia remained outside formal Russian rule. Soon Catherine II realised another dream of her great predecessor Peter I, namely after two victorious wars with Turkey (in 1768–1774 and 1787–1792) she incorporated into the Russian state the territory of the Crimean Khanate with Crimea, thanks to which Russia gained direct access to the Black Sea.⁶⁴

Success in the 1792 war with Turkey enabled Russia to suppress the reforms carried out by the Great Sejm in the Commonwealth. Russia could not and would not tolerate a fully independent Commonwealth strengthened by the May 3 Constitution.⁶⁵ The defeat of Poland in the war of 1792 resulted in the second partition of the country in 1793, and after the suppression of the Kosciuszko uprising, the third partition in 1795, which meant the complete liquidation of the Polish-Lithuanian state. As a result of the three partitions, Russia occupied more than half of the territory of the Commonwealth, as well as the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia in 1795. By absorbing this principality, Russia extended its coastline of the Russian state by another several hundred kilometers and gained the later important ports of Lipawa and Vindava.

Despite her successes on the Turkish and Polish fronts, Catherine II was unable to achieve similar successes at the expense of her northern neighbor. The tsarina initially sought to maintain Russian influence in Sweden using methods tried in earlier decades, and it was not until the late 1780s that this policy failed. The war of 1788–1790 was started by Sweden supported by Britain, the Netherlands, and Prussia. Russia was supported by the Danes. The reason for the war was to throw off Russian domination and regain lost territories. King Gustav III of Sweden (1746–1792, king since 1771) attacked Russia from Finland heading for St. Petersburg, but was quite easily stopped by the lesser Russian forces.

More important, however, were the naval operations. At the outset of the war the Swedes had a more modern and up-to-date fleet (23 ships of the line, 11 frigates, 140 rowed galleys), while the Russians had a more numerous fleet, but of poorer quality and outdated (49 ships of the line and 25 frigates). The condition of the Russian fleet

⁶⁴ Czapiewski, "Obecność Rosji," 135.

⁶⁵ Norman Davies, *Europa. Rozprawa historyka z historią* (Kraków: Znak, 1998), 749, 769.

was so bad that half of it could not even leave port. In the first half of 1788 the Swedes planned an extremely bold attack on St. Petersburg. To accomplish this, it was necessary, among other things, to blockade the Russian navy at Kronstadt. Although the Swedes managed to gain a slight advantage in a naval battle near the island of Gogland (Hogland) fought on July 17, 1788, they were unable to force the Russians to withdraw to Kronstadt.⁶⁶ Of the several naval battles fought in the following months of the war, the first and second battles at Svensksund (Russian: Rochensalm) were the most significant. The First Battle of Svensksund occurred on August 24, 1789, in which the Russians destroyed 33 Swedish ships. However, the Swedes were able to rebuild their fleet and a year later, on July 2–9, 1790, the Second Battle of Svensksund took place with 195 Swedish and 151 Russian ships. This was the largest naval battle in the history of Scandinavia, as together with auxiliary ships, a total of 500 ships, over 30,000 men and several thousand guns participated. In this battle, the Swedes were victorious and the Russians lost 53 of their ships. The Swedes claimed to have destroyed 40% of the Russian coastal fleet in this battle. The outcome of the battle hastened the conclusion of peace, especially since the Danes, who had been allied with Russia until then, concluded an alliance with Sweden in 1790 thanks to the intercession of Great Britain. As a result of the peace concluded on August 14, 1790 at Värälä, the *status quo antebellum* was restored and Sweden gained certain privileges in Russian ports. King Gustav III of Sweden succeeded in freeing Sweden from Russian influence, under which it had been since 1721.⁶⁷ Thus, Catherine II did not succeed in politically subjugating the Swedes and conquering Finland. The latter goal, i.e., the occupation of Finland would only be achieved by her son Alexander I in 1808–1809.

In domestic politics, Catherine II decided to change the special status that the Baltic provinces had enjoyed since the time of Peter the Great. In 1764 Catherine II toured Livonia, where she made personal acquaintances with the local nobility. But already that year she decided that the provinces enjoying considerable autonomy in the Russian state, i.e., Ukraine, Livonia, Estonia and the Russian part of Finland should be “Russified.” After a period of preparation, on June 3, 1783, the tsarina introduced a system of governorship in the Baltic governorates. This meant, among other things, an increase in the amount of financial benefits paid in direct taxes, especially for the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie, and the breaking of provincial autonomy laws. It should be added, however, that the reform was accompanied by a guarantee of total exemption from such taxes for the nobility and the consolidation of legal titles to the land held by knights. This did not satisfy the Baltic nobility, who protested loudly and long against the depletion of their privileges and even appealed for help to Sweden as a signatory of the Treaty of Nystad.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Kirby, *The Baltic World*, 19.

⁶⁷ Rauch, “Die baltische Frage,” 304.

⁶⁸ Kirby, *The Baltic World*, 24.

However, the social unrest that broke out then in the Baltic governorates was quickly quelled. The introduction of the governorate system in 1783 in Livonia and Estonia and at the turn of 1795/1796 in Courland was intended to unify these territories with the rest of the Russian Empire. According to Russian historians, this would undoubtedly have happened if it had not been for Paul I's decision to restore the old rights and privileges in the three Baltic governorates at the end of 1796. The tsar's abandonment of the system of governorship for many decades stopped the process of Russification of these territories and consolidated the maintenance of political, economic and social supremacy of the Baltic nobility in this area.⁶⁹ Thus, it can be assumed that throughout the period in question these provinces were particularly privileged compared to other parts of the Russian state and that Catherine II's reforms proved to be only a temporary threat to the autonomy of these territories. It should also be noted that during the reign of Catherine II it was practically impossible for the Baltic nobility to undertake military service in foreign countries, which had previously been a fairly common practice⁷⁰.

Catherine II also took care of the development of Russian Baltic trade. Between 1775 and 1787 alone, the number of Russian merchant ships increased from 17 to 141 vessels. However, despite the growth in the size of the Russian merchant fleet, throughout the 18th century the export of Russian raw materials and the import of European goods took place mainly on ships belonging to England and other European countries. Thus, for example, as late as the end of the 18th century about 64% of all exported goods were carried on English ships.⁷¹

Conclusions

Tsar Peter I the Great was one of the first Russian rulers to understand that the strength and power of his country was not determined by successive battle victories, but by numerous and lasting alliances that ensured diplomatic success.⁷²

Initially, Peter I did not realise that breaking the Swedish power in the Baltic Sea, or weakening Turkey, would cause concern in France and England, who caring for their own commercial interests would see Russia as a dangerous competitor.⁷³ Therefore, practically throughout the 18th century, the enemy of Russian expansion in the Baltic Sea was Sweden (except during the Seven Years' War), supported by its alliance with France, indirectly by Turkey, and (in principle) by Great Britain.

⁶⁹ Arkadiusz Janicki, *Kurlandia w latach 1795–1915. Z dziejów guberni i jej polskiej mniejszości* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2011), 95; Александр Николаевич Мосолов, "Курляндия под управлением Екатерины Великой (1795 год)," *Русский Вестник* 87/5 (1870): 56–57.

⁷⁰ Катин-Ярцев, "Балтийско-немецкое дворянство," 49.

⁷¹ Mediger, "Rußland und die Ostsee," 96–97.

⁷² Serczyk, *Piotr I Wielki*, 167.

⁷³ *Ibidem*.

Peter I's decision to build a new capital for his state not only made it easier for the ruler to introduce thorough reforms in the country, but also permanently tied the interests of Russian politics to Western Europe. St Petersburg was a "window on Europe," and its wide access to the Baltic Sea allowed Russia to influence the fate of all of Europe.

The incorporation of Estonia and Livonia into Russia proved to be very beneficial to the German elite in these territories in the following decades. The Baltic nobility gained the opportunity to participate in the task of Europeanising Russia. The tsar gained aristocratic subjects who were useful to the Russian state, and the Baltic Germans gained opportunities for extraordinary careers in the Russian army and administration, retained their privileges, religion, and dominant position in the area.⁷⁴ The fate of the rural population at that time was of no concern to anyone. It is worth noting that until the 1880s the official language in the area was German, not Russian.

Russia under Peter I underwent an accelerated modernisation. From a poor and backward country it became a power, a status it maintained in subsequent centuries. As the British historian Arnold Toynbee put it: "Instead of being forcibly westernised by their western neighbors – Poles, Swedes, Germans... – the Russians accomplished a difficult social transformation by their own hands, which allowed them to enter the community of western nations as a great power rather than a colonial possession or 'poor relative'."⁷⁵

Thanks to the victories of the Russian navy in the Great Northern War (1714 – Hango, 1720 – Granhamn) Russia secured its dominance of the Baltic and became the second largest European naval power after Britain in the 18th century.⁷⁶

Although Russia gained access to both the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea during the 18th century, Russia derived its greatest benefits and greatest opportunities for foreign trade development from Baltic trade.

Russia's mastery of the Baltic coast created favorable conditions for the development of trade and the Russian economy as a whole, which, however, was not fully exploited. Throughout the 18th century, Russia failed to realise Peter the Great's dream of a powerful merchant fleet in the Baltic. As late as the beginning of the 19th century, Russian ships accounted for only 9.2% of all merchant ships entering and leaving Russian ports in the Baltic Sea. The cargo capacity of Russian ships was 9.4% of the total tonnage of all ships calling at Russian ports, compared to 37.7% of British ships calling at Russia.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Rauch, "Die baltische Frage," 311.

⁷⁵ Quoted from: Heller, *Historia Imperium*, 341.

⁷⁶ Krokosz, "Mała wojna," 143.

⁷⁷ Mediger, "Rußland und die Ostsee," 96.