

## Preface

The term “Baltic” can be used in geology in several different meanings or scopes. The widest sense is “...pertaining to the ancient continent Baltica”, the narrowest one concerns only Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the three Baltic (or East Baltic) states. Most often, however, Baltic is understood as an area in between and is not exactly defined. Such a policy is grounded on certain similarities in geological structure (especially in tectonic framework), facies pattern of Palaeozoic sedimentary basins, and Quaternary glacial history. Therefore it is rather common that Baltic geology embraces also parts of NW Russia (St. Petersburg region in particular), Belarus, NE Poland, and Gotland, etc.

Baltic cooperation in geology, particularly in the field of regional stratigraphy, has been many-sided and active during the last four decades since the foundation of the Baltic Regional Stratigraphical Commission (BRSC) in 1969 as a regional unit of the Interdepartmental Stratigraphical Committee of the former Soviet Union. The BRSC convened regular meetings, organized field excursions, examination of palaeontological collections, etc., which served for a better understanding between geologists and for elaboration of stratigraphical classifications of geological systems on the East Baltic territory. The First Baltic Stratigraphical Conference in Vilnius in 1976 adopted the primary version of the unified stratigraphical classification with correlation charts for the entire Phanerozoic represented in the Baltic area.

Increasing independence of the Baltic states allowed reorganization of the BRSC in 1990 into a freer cooperation body – the Baltic Stratigraphical Association (BSA) composed of three national commissions, which later became decision-making bodies in the corresponding countries. The BSA served as a link between them, with the main task of convening the Baltic stratigraphical conferences (BSC). Since the Second Conference in Vilnius, 1993, the BSCs have become true international meetings, open for everybody. The Third BSC in Tallinn, 1996, was mainly devoted to the topic “High-resolution biostratigraphy and Baltic regional stratigraphy”, the Fourth BSC in Riga, 1999, to “Problems and methods of modern regional stratigraphy”, and the Fifth BSC in Vilnius, 2002, to “Basin stratigraphy – modern methods and problems”.

In 2003 the Regional Stratigraphical Commission of the northwestern part of Russia joined the BSA, and the new member organized the Sixth BSC in St. Petersburg, 23–25 August 2005. Around 120 people from 19 countries were

attending, besides Europeans and their closest neighbours also several colleagues from Japan, Australia, and the USA. An idea about the conference papers can be obtained from the book *The Sixth Baltic Stratigraphical Conference. August 23–25, 2005. St. Petersburg, Russia: Abstracts*, edited by T. Koren, I. Evdokimova, and T. Tolmacheva and published by All-Russian Geological Research Institute, St. Petersburg. Most of the 74 abstracts concentrate on different aspects of early Palaeozoic geology (especially Ordovician), also Devonian and Quaternary are well represented, but only a few papers discuss systems in between. This seems to correspond to the geological situation of the area and its long-lasting study history.

It has been a common practice to hold in the framework of the Baltic conferences also meetings of different other international bodies, e.g. the IGCP project working groups, stratigraphical commissions, etc. This tradition was continued in St. Petersburg, where the 6th BSC hosted IGCP projects Nos 491, 499, and 503.

This special issue of the *Proceedings of the Estonian Academy of Sciences, Geology* is composed of six full papers read at the conference, which all are contributions to IGCP project No. 503 “Ordovician palaeogeography and palaeoclimate”.

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