

Re-thinking the Baltic Sea Region

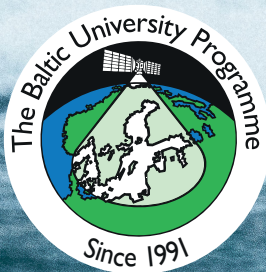
trends and challenges



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List of abbreviations

AC	Arctic Council
BA	Baltic Assembly
BASTUN	Baltic Sea Trade Union Network
BCCA	Baltic Sea Chambers of Commerce Association
BCM	Baltic Council of Ministers
BDF	Baltic Development Forum
BEAC	Barents-Euro Arctic Council
BoP	Balance of Payment
BRHC	Baltic Region Heritage Committee
BSLF	Baltic Sea Labour Forum
BSLF-SWL	Baltic Sea Labour Forum for Sustainable Working Life
BSLN	Baltic Sea Labour Network
BSPC	Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference
BSR	Baltic Sea Region
BSSSC	Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation
BSYP	Baltic Sea Youth Platform
BUP	The Baltic University Programme
CBOS	Public Opinion Research Centre in Poland
CBSS	Council of the Baltic Sea States
CMEA	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
CoE	Council of Europe
CPI	Consumer Price Index
CSCE	Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
DGB	German Trade Union Confederation
EAPC	Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council
EC	European Communities (European Coal and Steel Community, European Economic Community, European Atomic Energy Community)
eFP	Enhanced Forward Presence
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EOP	Enhanced Opportunities Partner
e-PINE	Enhanced Partnership in Northern Europe
EU	European Union
EUNIC	EU National Institutes for Culture
EUSBSR	EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HELCOM	Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission, also known as the Helsinki Commission
HOD	Head of Delegation

ICT	Information and communication technologies
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
LSI	Land-Sea Interactions
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NB8	Nordic-Baltic Eight
NCN	Nordic Council of Ministers
ND	Northern Dimension
NDPC	Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture
NEEDS	Needs-based Education and Studies in Societal Security
NFS	Council of Nordic Trade Unions
NGI	Non-Governmental Institutions
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRC	NATO-Russia Council
NRF	NATO Response Force
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PfP	Partnership for Peace
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
R&D	Research and Development
RSC	Regional Security Complex
SCSs	Subregional Cooperation Structures
SDGs	The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
UBC	Union of Baltic Cities
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VASAB	Visions and Strategies in the Baltic Sea
VJTF	Very High Readiness Joint Task Force
WFD	EU Water Framework Directive

Preface

The presented edition is an integral part of a series of educational and scientific publications, which was initiated by The Baltic University Programme's Coordinating Secretariat (Uppsala, Sweden) at the very beginning of its activity in 1991. It has been planned as an addition to the book *The Baltic Sea Region: Cultures, Politics, Societies* (Editor Witold Maciejewski, Baltic University Press, 2002), which describes the region, its common history and culture, and also social, economic and political developments. In a reduced format and with partially new texts the above-mentioned book was published in both Belarusian and Ukrainian.

The mentioned publications aroused considerable interest among students and teachers from the states included in The Baltic University Programme (BUP), as well as all those who were interested in regional issues, in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). From experience in both teaching and research, the publications issued by The Baltic University Programme have played and continue to play an important role in understanding historical and modern processes both regionally, globally, and nationally. Their content has become the subject of active discussions among students on topics related to the formation of regional identity, the definition of the core and boundaries of the Baltic Sea Region and both contradictions and prospects for regional construction. These discussions are a necessary condition for the formation of a regional community and regional consciousness and further academic debate in the region.

In 2020, an international group of researchers began preparing a new textbook dedicated to analysing the current realities of the Baltic region with particular emphasis on the south-eastern area of the Region as it is in this area where distinct changes have occurred and dramatic changes are ongoing. This publication has been prepared by authors representing different countries, universities and variety of disciplines and scientific methods. This interdisciplinary and inter-cultural



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approach provides an added value to the publication, and has also fostered academic co-operation and co-creation among the scholars, which has proved rewarding.

Because of the changes that the Baltic Sea Region constantly undergoes, there is much value in describing and highlighting recent tendencies, developments and events.

Thus, the aim of this book is to provide an overview of the issues that have been subject to change over the course of recent years. The current situation in the Baltic Sea Region is one of flux. It is currently at the centre of world events with new occurrences, new interpretations and new knowledge emerging frequently. Therefore, it should be noted, that whilst the authors of this work have made significant efforts in ensuring that the book is as up-to-date as possible and the most important processes in this part of Europe have been focused on, the present context prevents a complete analysis of regional construction.

The book has been written as a textbook for mainly undergraduate students but also has a wider applicability for all those interested in regional studies of the Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe. Published materials are accompanied by digitalised sources: video lectures, quizzes, etc. which are available through The Baltic University Programme Course Platform.

The production of the book has been made possible thanks to financing from the Swedish Institute in the framework of the project 'Digital at Home' led by The Baltic University Programme.

Within the chapters, we have prepared take-away sentences in the margins for easier 'assimilation' of the content, and the added QR codes will lead those interested to further materials or websites. In addition, for teachers, we have prepared some questions after each chapter, which can be helpful for further discussion with their students.

Acknowledgment

I would like to extend my gratitude to the Swedish Institute for their funding of the project. I would also like to thank the authors and contributors to the project. The past couple of years have been difficult ones for the Baltic Sea Region. At the beginning of the project, the Covid-19 pandemic began, whilst in the summer of 2020, mass protests broke out in Belarus regarding the falsification of presidential elections and the ongoing authoritarianism in the country. A number of the authorship team were dismissed from their posts due to their civic position. In early 2022, the Russian Kremlin, with complicity from the Belarusian regime, launched a full-scale war on Ukraine. Many Ukrainian colleagues have been forced to work in conditions of regular shelling and bombing. I therefore wish to once again express my sincere gratitude to my colleagues in the project as they have remained attentive and committed to their work.

Introduction

For years, the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) has been considered as a model example of the New Regionalism. That is an approach that observes the dominance of bottom-up processes, which are multidimensional and implemented in a multipolar and globalising world. The region has been a kind of laboratory for co-operation between old and new members of the European Union, NATO member states, and countries outside these structures, with a special focus on the Russian Federation. Co-operation was built on the experience of the Nordic countries, which shared their experiences with countries on the other side of the Baltic Sea. It was from this region and from this co-operation that the experience of regional co-operation with regard to environmental protection, infrastructure development, creation of twin cities, transportation and involvement of civil societies was supposed to flow (and did).

However, this region - as a peculiar product of the end of the Cold War - almost from its foundation also had a strong political vision inscribed in it: the integration of Russia into the values and institutions represented by the Western states. Russia never became a fully engaged state in the region's construction, and the project, as we see it today, failed to some extent. The escalating tensions already evident since 2014 (annexation of Crimea), and in a broader context since 2008 and the Russo-Georgia war, had its culmination in February 2022 and Russia's unprecedented attack on Ukraine. Today (June 2023), Russia is seen as a hostile, external, and foreign entity in the region. This is also reflected in the fact that after the prevalence of debordering processes in the BSR for many years, the tendency to create and recreate borders in the region is becoming increasingly seen and felt.

The ongoing war is now making it dramatically more difficult to build scenarios for the region's further development. The question of the region's future in the context of Russia's presence in the region is still relevant.



Tomasz Branka
Editor

Will the main paradox of Russia's presence in the region - that it cannot be fully considered part of the region, but neither can its presence and influence on the processes taking place be ignored - remain relevant?

It is already apparent, however, that the ongoing war, has led to a "tectonic shift" (see chapter from Stefano Braghiroli and Andrey Makarychev), which is manifested, among other things, in the fact that it has moved the Baltic position from the margins to the centre of the debate, and a re-orientation of Sweden and Finland from neutrality towards an application for NATO membership.

The dynamic changes in the region forcefully confirm A. Paasi's observance that "the region is never a finished entity but rather consists of a variety of institutions and processes and is perpetually 'becoming'" (Paasi 2009, 133)

The aim of this publication is to critically (re)approach the classical understanding of region and region-building processes in difficult times of war in the region itself. The publication also aims to freshly chronicle the processes that have taken place in the region over the past two decades. This publication is built around diverse contributions from scholars representing not only various academic specialisations (historians, political scientists, geographers, sociologists, etc), but also from various European centres where the Baltic Sea Region is a subject of reflection, therefore providing a distinct multidisciplinary analysis. To construct a platform of mutual understanding, the starting point for all the contributors was a common understanding of the Baltic Sea Region as a drainage basin. This project resulted in 11 contributions prepared by 13 authors, representing academic institutions from Belarus, Estonia, Italy, Poland, and Ukraine.

In the first chapter, **Anna Moraczewska** reaches out to consider the nature and definition of regions. She guides the reader through the varied criteria of regionalism, referring to the classic question of whether regions are naturally given or as a constructed entity by those living there.

She transfers theoretical approaches to the Baltic Sea

Region itself. She pays special attention to the institutionalisation of regional co-operation, which dates back to the 1970s.

Tomasz Branka attempts to answer the question of whether, in the current situation of the war in Ukraine, one can talk about the success of the project of constructing the Baltic Sea Region. He recalls that one of the goals was to invite Russia to co-operate, based on soft security and so-called low political issues. In his analysis, he refers to the concept of 'double impossibility' related to Russia's presence in the BSR: Russia can be neither completely integrated into nor separated from the region. He proposes to look at the processes taking place in the Region through the prism of the classic text by Ladis K.D. Kristof (1959), in which the author distinguishes between frontiers (an integrating factor) and boundaries (a separating factor).

Stefano Braghiroli and **Andrey Makarychev** begin with a general statement that the BSR is usually considered as the most successful integration project in post-Cold War Europe. The authors focus on analysing what influenced such a development of the region, describing the entire project as an experimental space for de-bordering, de-securitisation, soft security measures and practices of city twinning, and 'triangles of growth'. Specifying the goals of building the region, they point to two main ones: integrating the Baltic states into Europe and engaging Russia's northwestern regions and cities. In between, they see a third one related to the EU's expansion in 2004. In the second part of their text, they reflect on the consequences of the ongoing war for processes in the region. They already point out that Russia's war with Ukraine has led to the realisation of two of Putin's greatest fears: NATO expansion along Russia's western border and a more stable allied military presence along the same border.

Olga Malashenkova takes a detailed look at the most important economic indicators, allowing a comparison of the economic situation within the countries of the region.

She takes on the task of describing the economic trends

and challenges of the countries in transition and introducing sustainable development goals. **O. Malashenkova** concludes that the economy of the Baltic Sea Region in 2000-2021 was a story of progress and development, and that the region became a centre of international economic activity. However, it is important to mention that she ends her analysis in 2021, and therefore before the outbreak of war in Ukraine. Malashenkova stresses that Russian aggression has had a significant impact on the region's economic development affecting trade, energy, and tourism. The imposition of economic sanctions by the EU and the US has led to a decline in trade between the region and Russia, affecting the economies of several countries.

In defining the Baltic Sea Region in her article, **Anna Taranenko** takes into account not only geographical proximity, but also economic, political and cultural ties. She stresses that the area is characterised by high levels of economic and educational growth, well-developed infrastructure, significant business opportunities and a long tradition of co-operation. A special place is given to co-operation between countries in the field of environmental protection. The main purpose of her analysis, however, is to look at how Interstate and Non-Governmental Institutions influence regional awareness building in the Baltic Sea Region. Her text examines such aspects of elements as the potential of civil society in building regional awareness, regional identity projects, civic activism, cultural diplomacy, youth projects, digitisation, civil society capacity and regional integration.

Marta Skorek makes an analysis focusing on the interplay between sea and land. She reminds us that there are more than 250 rivers in the region draining fresh water into the Baltic Sea, a fact that clearly shows that both the marine and terrestrial ecosystems are closely interconnected and interdependent. The author postulates that in order to transform the Baltic Sea into a healthy and resilient marine ecosystem, both coastal and non-coastal states (both EU and non-EU countries) must strengthen cross-border co-operation.

To this end, she proposes that land and seas be treated as one space.

Another article written by **Anna Moraczewska** and **Olena Podolian** deals with the state of democracy in the BSR. Aided by various indices measuring the state of democracy, they conclude that the Baltic Sea Region is mostly made up of democratic states, but at different stages of development. There are also two authoritarian regimes in the region, Belarus, and Russia. Therefore, the authors propose a division into two dominant trends in the region: stable liberal democracies in the northern part of the region (the Nordic and Baltic countries) plus Poland, and growing autocracies in the east and south. They enrich this general division with more nuanced characterisations of individual countries.

Oksana Krayevska and **Marianna Gladys** take up the topic of colour revolutions in the post-Soviet space, describing their causes, driving forces and consequences. The chapter begins with an analysis of the phenomenon of colour revolutions themselves and the discussion of their characteristics, including the distinction from 'velvet revolutions'. The authors analyse in detail the colour revolutions in Ukraine: the 'Orange Revolution' of 2004 and the 'Revolution of Dignity' in 2014, highlighting the differences between these events. They note that the 'Orange Revolution' changed the geopolitical balance in the post-Soviet area, which was dominated by Russia until the 2004 events, while the 'Revolution of Dignity' was not only marked by unprecedented patriotism, but also showed the importance of the national idea of the Ukrainians.

Damian Szacawa has made an analysis of a highly relevant topic related to the security architecture in the Baltic Sea Region. The author, on the one hand, introduces the reader to the theoretical approach of the Regional Security Complex (RSC) concept, on the other hand, presents the evolution of the security architecture with emerging challenges and the response of international institutions. As a starting point, Damian notes that after the end of the Cold War, two processes could be observed in the BSR: a

gradual process of securitisation and a vigorous process of regionalisation. The author draws attention to the relationship of countries in the region with organisations such as the EU and NATO, analysing the most recent ones related to the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO. Like the other authors, he concludes that the international security concern in the BSR was primarily linked to the desire of former Soviet Bloc states to integrate into Euro-Atlantic security institutions.

Victor Shadurski takes our interest to the political regimes in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine and their impact on the situation in the Baltic Sea Region. The description of the respective regimes confronts the general thesis that democratic processes in the post-Soviet space largely depended on the political and economic situation in Russia. Russia, in turn, was not interested in deep democratic reforms in Belarus, Ukraine or other countries of the former Soviet Union. The author notes that Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, despite significant differences (population, territory), had almost similar starting positions in terms of living standards and the level of culture and education of their citizens. In the first years of independent development, these countries took similar steps to expand democratic reforms. Russia, in the eyes of V. Shadurski is the 'guardian' of the authoritarian system in the post-Soviet space. Belarusians have largely not adopted a democratic political culture. As explained, they did not have the experience of living in a stable democracy and were therefore highly susceptible to overt populism. In Ukraine, on the other hand, a strong national-democratic elite and a more developed civil society were evident. This, with the active support of democratic countries, contributed to the gradual evolution of democratic processes in Ukraine.

In the last chapter, **Anna Moraczewska** analyses religion as an important regulator of political life. This topic is relevant, as the Baltic Sea Region is the meeting place of four Christian denominations: Catholicism, Greek Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Protestantism. The author focuses mainly on the role of religion in Poland's political life.

She describes the historical role and position of the Church in Poland, including its special role under communism. She then focuses on the relationship between politics and religion, noting that Poland is unique in the region when it comes to public activity in religious ceremonies. The author notes that involving religion in politics and using it for political purposes is an activity that distracts religion from its primary tasks and can result in an increase in citizens' reluctance to actively participate in religious institutions.

The authors hope that this publication will contribute to a better understanding of the complex processes that have been taking place in the region in recent years, while encouraging students to make an intellectual effort and take a fresh look at this fascinating part of Europe.

Chapter 1

Defining the Region: Borders, States, Identity

by Anna Moraczewska

Introduction

Defining a region is a complex task as it is the result of taking on board a number of factors that determine a region's existence. In brief, this can be defined as a geographical area with its specific natural features, the appearance of shared norms and rules which are considered by a group of entities as well as a common initiative implemented by countries at local or central levels in planning policy, economy, social and cultural issues, etc. When dealing with a maritime region it is often the sea that becomes the most important factor stimulating the region-building processes.

New regionalism promotes a broader view of the region, not just as an isolated entity but rather as relational body which could be framed with the institutionalisation and which reacts on challenges in its external and internal environment. Moreover, regions may be more or less open to some initiatives and events taking place in and around it. Defining the Baltic Sea Region combines geographical factors, such as the sea at its heart, relational factors resulting from the interactions among its representatives and institutional factors formalising this cooperation. The values that the states and societies of the region share are also important. The year 2022 presented the Region with a difficult challenge in the form of an attack on Ukraine by Russia, the country geographically belonging in part to the Region. This has shaken not only the security of the Region, but also the unity of its values.

A region and regionalism

Borders are often drawn based around geographical, political and social determinants. The first will favour natural factors as geological structure, climate, landform, environmental features, etc. The second will focus on political entities, institutions, formal arrangements and common interests. The third will refer to people, nations, cultures, identity and social communities. Likewise Lars Rydèn defines region twofold – as naturally given or as a constructed entity by those living there (Rydèn, 2002: 27). Regardless a region and regionalism are a result of a

”Likewise Lars Rydèn defines region twofold – as naturally given or as a constructed entity by those living there.”

long-lasting and complex process. Each of the above-mentioned elements contribute to building the unique features of a given region.

A concept widely used today is globalisation, but, it is in fact regionalisation which is more common across the world. Building regionalism involves shaping new relationships and principles of cooperation. Its aim or effect is the separation of regional systems, the establishment of international organisations with a regional range, and the setting of laws regulating joint relations (Dumała, 1994: 37).

Three criteria of regionalisation can be distinguished: geographical, systemic and community of interests (Halizak, 2004: 274). Borders of a geographical region are based on climate zones, land relief, landscape, waters, fauna and flora. It refers to particular features of natural conditions and the proximity of neighbouring countries. These systemic criteria concentrate at existing interconnections between states and their interactions. The elements that form the regional unit can either consist of all a state's territory or distinct, smaller section. The last criteria define common regional interests that develop when members of the region re-define their national interests and create common regional concerns. Borders are drawn based around membership in different regional initiatives and organisations. Regionalisation can also be seen as a co-operative project, where unique features of the region are promoted, its values appreciated and common ties emphasised. Cezary Mik attributes great value to regionalism in international relations as it represents an intellectual agreement about existing differences between regions which are composed of individual richness and difference that should be protected and developed (Mik, 2019: 25). Since regions differ from one another there are several approaches investigating what constitutes a region. This is due to the fact that regional phenomena and processes are not identical and are the result of many factors: natural, historical, political, social and economic. As a consequence of these multifactor agents the region may be a part of a state or/and an area which is composed of several states or their parts.

”Three criteria of regionalisation can be distinguished: geographical, systemic and community of interests.”

”Regionalisation can also be seen as a co-operative project, where unique features of the region are promoted, its values appreciated and common ties emphasised.”

Another approach perceives regions as international or multinational bodies. All factors mentioned above may be of a great importance in creating borders of the region.

The term 'region' is an interdisciplinary subject of research and can be found in geography, biology, sociology, anthropology, economy, political science and history. British cartographer Albert Herbreton made the first systematic definition of the 'region', in his article from 1905. In his opinion, defining geographical regions creates an orderly arrangement of geographical divisions and systemises geography. He classified regions using four criteria according to their importance 1) configuration (based on geology and geomorphology of earth); 2) climate (air masses, temperature and precipitation levels); 3) vegetation; and 4) population density (Herbertson, 1905). Bernard Kayser treats regions as living and complex organisms which may develop themselves or even die as an effect of external agent (Kayser, 1966). Alfred Verdrossa defines the region as a cluster of states with a collective consciousness built on cultural heritage, political ideals, economic and social interests (Verdross, 1984: 452). By narrowing down these determinants, the region can be perceived as a resultant of various social interests pursued in a specific geographical space.

Franz J. Krezdorn understands region as a grouping of states, connected by relatively permanent ties and aimed at promoting common interests, in particular ensuring peace and security in a given region (Krezdorn, 1954: 15). Lars Rydén lists four demarcators which may be considered when defining to define the region: the people with their language, culture and religion, the landscape or the waterscape as the mixture of land and water represented by continents, islands, coasts, lakes and rivers, the biology of the life forms living in and characterising the zone and the last agent – the interrelations between these elements (Rydén, 2002: 8) Taking international relations into account, Saul B. Cohen distinguishes two types of international regions: geo-strategic and geopolitical. Geo-strategic regions are large areas of the Earth where interdependence exists as commercial, cultural, ideological and locational agents. Control over strategic sea and land

”Alfred Verdrossa defines the region as a cluster of states with a collective consciousness built on cultural heritage, political ideals, economic and social interests.”

routes is of great importance. Within strategic regions, there are geopolitical regions that are characterised by geographical proximity, complementarity of resources, and joint political and economic activities (Cohen, 1964: 61).

Among notions related with 'region' is the term – regionalism. It refers to a process of formation of regions themselves and represents a subfield of international relations that investigates regions of the world. Regionalism refers to policies therefore it is perceived as an important policy tool to influence the regional and global scene by states and non-state actors. Joseph Nye defined regionalism as a creation of policies performed by inter-state groups based around regions (Nye, 1968: vii). States or subregions may decide to establish institutions coordinating their relations and deepening regional cohesion. The European Union is the best-known example of regionalism with its economic integration, institutional development and power sharing among its members. Regionalism is an integral part of the multilateral architecture of the contemporary international relations regime and can be observed in all continents.

Considering the processes of institutionalisation of regional cooperation, Mwayila Tshiyembe lists several elements constituting the region, including the regularity and intensity of interactions between members, interdependence between states in a significant number of areas of public, economic and military activities and a system of action that delimits and regulates the activities of the actors who create and transform them. As a consequence, a new form of a multicultural, multidimensional and dynamic political entity arises, whose power is shared between national and supranational levels of action (Tshiyembe, 2012: 11).

From this perspective the region is not treated in a static manner, simply as a collection of states and members but as a result of their interactions and outcomes of the adopted aims and actions.

”Regionalism is an integral part of the multilateral architecture of the contemporary international relations regime and can be observed in all continents.”

Summing up, natural or geographical determinants could be interpreted as a frame for regional integration but are not indispensable. Sometimes they may be crucial, for example, in a maritime region, where a sea basin defines routes of communication, source of commodities, climate conditions and threats. On the other hand, social, political and economic ties unrelated to geographical factors determine the level of the regionality (intra-regional integration). History of the given region is also important. Along centuries regional communities and their structure have undergone many transformations or even disappeared. Some of them existed in collaborative relations and others were in disputes and conflicts. Therefore, the contemporary form of the region is to a large extent a result of changes that have taken place over the centuries. We may also add one more aspect - the regional identity, which may draw a different kind of border of the region.

From an optimistic perspective, this can shift into the formation of a responsible community of inhabitants of a given region for its shape, security and future. In this context, common identity, history, culture, political system or language can be a determinant in creating a formal region, where its inhabitants share common attributes. Usually boundaries of such a region are clearly delineated and there is a lack of disputes over the area a formal region covers. On the other hand, a functional region in geography is based on a certain kind of centre surrounded by interconnecting linkages, that create a set of activities or relations that take place within a region and are organised around a central hub. Such a centre may be a city but also regional organisations that define common goals, realise regional strategies and interconnect different entities present in the given region.

The Baltic Sea Region

The Baltic Sea Region (BSR) represents one subregion of the wider European area and, similarly to the Mediterranean region, the Barents Sea, the North Sea or the Black Sea region, bases its cooperation on the basin of water. The Baltic Sea is the central part of the region and

it is an inland, shallow and brackish sea. It consists of several of basins, separated by sills, and extends from 54°N to near 66°N. Its area is 385 thousand sq.km, the average depth is 52.5 m and it is connected with the North Sea by the straits of Kattegat and Skagerrak, the Little Belt, the Great Belt and the Sound. The salinity for the most part is between 4 and 8 ‰.

Due to its inland position, the long process of water exchange, and the concentration of many developed countries on the coastline as well as the mouths of many rivers, the Baltic Sea is a sensitive and vulnerable sea. For centuries the Sea, regional rivers and generally water played an important role in communication, transport, development and exchange.

The Baltic Sea Region is a maritime region in a geographical sense, delimited by coastline and hydrological characteristics, and in a functional and operational sense. The functional dimension is determined by legal regulations and institutions organised around the Baltic Sea, and the operational dimension is illustrated by the cooperation of the Baltic states on a multilateral and bilateral level. Andrei P. Klemeshev, Valentin S. Korneevets and others present interdisciplinary criteria for the delimitation of the Baltic Sea Region. There are: location at the Baltic Sea or near it; shared natural environment; joint environmental management; shared history; relations between a specific territory and the Baltic Sea; operational areas of international organisations and eligible areas of international programmes; joint pieces of legislation; close economic ties; cultural ties, cultural identity; transnational character; military security cooperation; counterterrorism cooperation and shared "Baltic" brand (Klemeshev, Korneevets, Palmowski, Studzieniecki, Fedorov, 2017: 11). As far as they are relevant they may complicate the delimitation of the BSR borders.

Physiographic borders of the Baltic Sea Region

Using geographical criteria, the range of the BSR could be wider or narrower.

These criteria represent many different issues and elements, which can complicate the delimitation of the BSR borders. The first option includes the Baltic Sea and its coastal states with their whole territory. They are: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, and Sweden. Even within this category, a narrower area can be drawn including just the littoral regions, instead of the countries as a whole. Russia is limited to the St Petersburg, Kaliningrad, Novgorod, Pskov and Karelia regions; Germany to the Hansestadt Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and Schleswig-Holstein; Poland is limited to the Pomorskie, Warminsko-Mazurskie, and Zachodnio-Pomorskie voivodships.

The second option draws a wider range and is based on a drainage basin/catchment area which takes into consideration the inland territories connected to the sea through rivers and waterways. In the past rivers were the main routes of social and economic communication and



Fig 1. The Baltic Sea Region as a drainage area.

Source: Elmgren, R. (2001). Understanding human impact on the Baltic ecosystem: changing views in recent decades. *AMBIO: A Journal of the Human Environment*, 30(4), 222-231.

had a crucial role in building regional integrity. With these criteria, the Baltic Sea Region consists of the whole territory of five and a share of four coastal countries as well as five inland states. In addition to the nine countries mentioned earlier, half of Belarus' land can be included as well as small parts of Ukraine, Czechia, Slovakia, and Norway. (Fig. 1)

Depending on which of the Danish straits is included into the Baltic Sea, the drainage basin may measure 1,634,000 km² or 1,721,000 km², according to HELCOM it is 1,740,000 km² (Klemeshev, Korneevets, Palmowski, Studzieniecki, Fedorov, 2017: 6). If the sea is included, the BSR extends to roughly 2,250,000 km². The Baltic Sea drainage area is treated by the authors as a key agent in defining the BSR not only from the physiographic perspective but also as an interconnected system of common responsibility for the Baltic Sea, as was reflected in the adoption of the region's catchment area in the Convention for the Protection of the Baltic Sea in 1974. Andrei P. Klemeshev and Valentin S. Korneevets use the criteria of attraction of the Baltic Sea drawing 50-km and 200-km coastal zones, instead of 12 and 200 nautical miles. They treat the closure of the sea as the major factor determining density of population and territorial development. From that perspective the Sea itself is the variable explaining the progress of the region, the attractiveness of coastal zones for people and the economy. The 200-km coastal zone, defined by the authors, may somehow refer to an exclusive economic zone, whereby a coastal country has control of all economic resources (e.g. fishing, mining and oil exploration), as well as of any pollution of those resources (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea). These may be an opportunity as well as a responsibility for the coastal state.

As the authors mention, the 50-km zone covers only a share of the territory of the coastal states however, there are five capitals located on the shore of the Baltic Sea: Copenhagen, Stockholm, Helsinki, Tallinn and Riga. Within a 200-km zone, the whole territory of Denmark and Estonia, almost all of Lithuania and Latvia and most of Sweden and Finland belong to the Baltic Sea Region.

Only small parts of Germany, Norway, Poland and Russia belong to the region. This means that the first six countries are more oriented around the Baltic Sea, whilst the latter four are less influenced by it and more continentally oriented (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. The 50- and 200-km coastal zones of the Baltic Sea.

Source: Klemeshev, A. P., Korneevets, V. S., Palmowski, T., Studzieniecki, T., & Fedorov, G. M. (2017). Approaches to the definition of the Baltic sea region. *Baltic Region*, 9(4), 4-20.

Depending on the criterion for delimiting the boundaries of the Baltic Region, it is inhabited by 50 to over 100 million people, which is between 7 and 18% of the population of the European continent and 1 to 4% of the world population. The Region is located on the northern periphery of Europe, away from the EU's decision-making and economic centres. Due to the range of the area and the size of the market, it is relatively medium size compared to other regions in Europe but it is unique and active in cooperation on different levels and among variety of actors (Moraczewska, 2009).

Functional borders of the Baltic Sea Region

The institutionalisation of regional cooperation dates back to the 1970s and 1980s, but a turning point in the integration processes and cooperation initiatives was the collapse of the bipolar system and the transformation of socialist countries into democratic and liberal states. The other objective factors shaping regional cooperation were: the accession to the European Union of Sweden and Finland in 1995 and Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland in 2004, the reunification of Germany, the economic development of post-communist states and increasing ecological threats to the Baltic Sea. All of them have transformed the position and capacity of states towards greater action in the region. Regional cohesion building was possible due to these changes as well as the will of regional actors. This regional cohesion is understood as a desired state and long-term goal of initiatives and actions resulting from both policy development at the national and regional level as well as from policies that show a clear regional dimension (VASAB, Territorial cohesion perspective of the Baltic Sea Region in 2030).

Based on legal regulations and institutions organised around the Baltic Sea functional borders can be drawn. Since there is a great number of regional initiatives only the most important will be considered. The mission of these regional initiatives is not based around individual interests, instead how they perceive the Baltic Sea Region as a space for strong cooperation. There are: HELCOM, Council of Baltic Sea States, VASAB 2010 and Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation.

The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission, also known as the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) is an intergovernmental organisation and a regional sea convention in the Baltic Sea area. HELCOM was established in 1974 to protect the marine environment of the Baltic Sea and it is a regional platform for environmental policy making. The signatories to the Helsinki Convention are nine Baltic Sea coastal countries: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Sweden and the European Union.

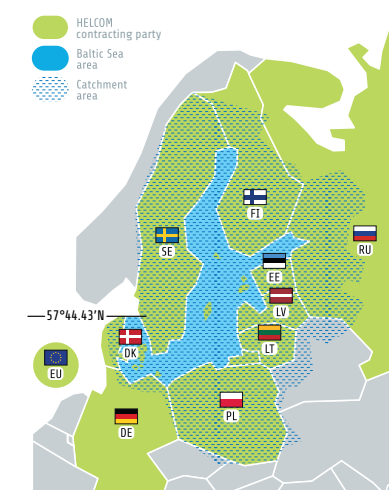


Figure 3. The HELCOM contracting parties in the Baltic Sea Region.

Source: HELCOM



QR-code to the website www.helcom.fi.

”A turning point in the integration processes and co-operation initiatives was the collapse of the bipolar system and the transformation of socialist countries into democratic and liberal states.”

The Convention has accepted the territory of activity which coincides with the drainage basin of coastal states. This methodology of bordering joins hydrological and political agents, which is logical considering the environmental priorities that are dependent on policy implementation.

The Council of the Baltic Sea States is an intergovernmental political forum for regional cooperation and consists of nine Baltic coastal states plus Norway and Iceland, as well as the European Union. It supports a regional perspective on different global challenges.

Established in 1992 to enhance the transition to a new international landscape, the organisation focuses on problems such as sustainability, societal security, research and innovation, and countering human trafficking. The membership structure extends the borders of cooperation of the BSR by adding the rest of the Nordic countries – Norway and Iceland. These countries do not have access to the Baltic coastline and Iceland does not belong to the water catchment area in any part. Nevertheless, the subject of cooperation is consistent for all members and may lead to the building of a Baltic identity beyond the coastal states. When compared to the Baltic Sea water catchment area, the CBSS is oriented north, rather than east and south.

Visions and Strategies in the Baltic Sea (VASAB) is the macro-regional intergovernmental co-operation body concentrated on spatial planning and development in the BSR. VASAB's goals concentrate on territorial and marine issues. It supports and develops urban networking, urban-rural cooperation and maritime spatial planning.

VASAB is integrated into the network of the Council of the Baltic Sea States organisation, however it doesn't overlap the membership structure. It joins state and sub-region members. Instead of Norway and Iceland, Belarus is included into the common area of cooperation. Included in the organisation are: Belarus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden as entire territories and Germany limited to the Mecklenburg-



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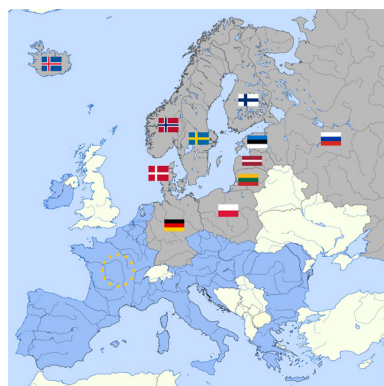
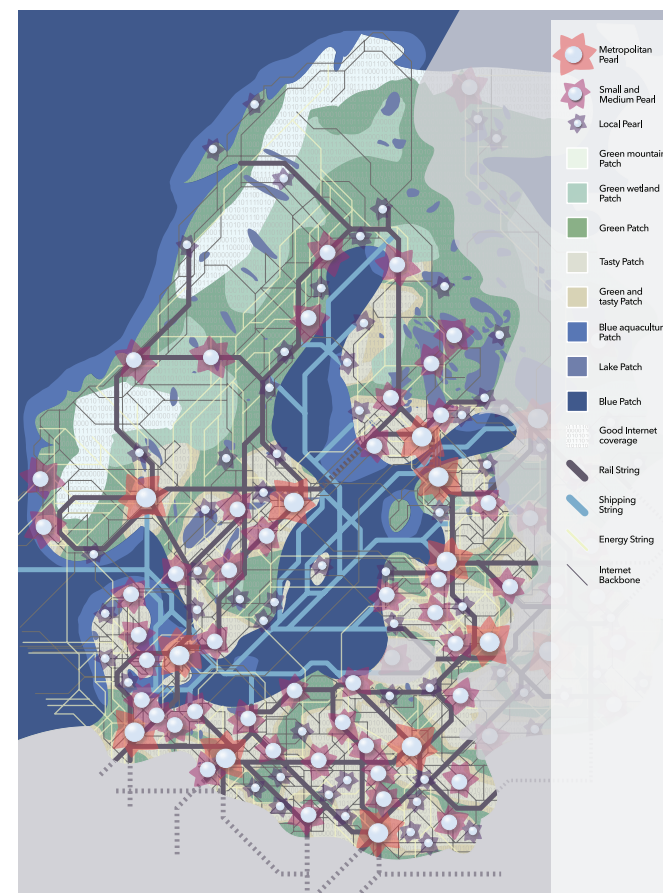


Figure 4. The Baltic Sea Region as a co-operative body within the Council of the Baltic Sea States.



QR-code to the website www.vasab.org.

Figure 5. The Baltic Sea Region as a co-operative body within VASAB.

Source: VASAB

Vorpommern and Schleswig-Holstein regions, and Russia confined to Kaliningrad, Pskov, Leningrad Oblasts and St. Petersburg. By including Belarus, VASAB has abandoned the strictly coastal criterion of membership and provided added value to achieve a well-integrated and coherent BSR. On the other hand, it is close to the range of the Baltic Sea catchment area.

The Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation (BSSSC) is a political network for decentralised authorities of the Region. Its members are regional authorities in nine Baltic Sea littoral states: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden, Poland and Russia plus Norway. The main goals of the BSSSC are to facilitate partnerships and strengthen interregional cooperation in the areas of the environment, climate, energy, circular economy, transport and accessibility, maritime policy and to promote cohesion policy in the Region.



QR-code to the website www.bsssc.com

Considering the decentralised level of cooperation this network goes beyond subregions and integrates the entire territories of the coastal states and Norway into the Baltic Sea Region. The BSSSC abandons the drainage basin of the Baltic Sea and within its priorities, is oriented to the North than the East. It promotes the Northern Dimension as a joint policy of the European Union, Russian Federation, Norway and Iceland. However, given Russia's actions against Ukraine and the response of EU countries to this, the Northern Dimension has narrowed down to Norway and Iceland excluding Russia from participating in regional initiatives.

Studying the territorial range of the four presented regional units, the Baltic Sea Region, is in all cases based on territories adjacent to the seashore and in a few cases includes areas of neighbouring countries. It seems that cooperation in the northern part of the region is better developed than in the north-south dimension. This is mainly due to the long-term isolation of the two sides of the region during the Cold War. However, the 21st century was marked by the construction of a regional identity that consolidated mutual north-south cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region. However, the later exclusion of Russia as a cooperating state, changed the range of the Region and may have influenced greater consolidation of the rest of the states in the face of a common threat.

On the other way, the Baltic Sea catchment area is covered in various ways, but in all cases, it is not a key determinant of the subjective scope of cooperation.

Operational borders of the Baltic Sea Region

The last perspective to define the BSR, as presented in the article, is based on two instruments. The first one perceives the Region as a part of the European Union where all littoral states are members, with the exclusion of Russia. It is expressed in the form of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. The second is interrelated with the previous one and it is the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme.



Figure 6. The Baltic Sea Region as a cooperative body within Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation.

Source: BSSSC

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is an agreement between member states of the EU and the European Commission to facilitate cooperation between the Baltic Sea states in order to cope with challenges facing the Region, such as sea pollution, the impact of climate change, and cross-border crime. The engaged stakeholders represent different levels of governance: the national level, regional and local authorities, inter-governmental and non-governmental bodies. The Strategy brings together the EU member states: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden. Non-EU countries are also participating in some activities work. They include Norway, which is often involved and Russia, which is less willing to follow all aims of the Strategy, and is suspended since 2022, and in addition, Iceland and Belarus are sometimes involved.

Cooperation with non-EU neighbouring countries is integrated into the main actions. Hence, we may delimitate a core area of cooperation limited to the Baltic Sea littoral states and peripheries of collaboration including Norway, Russia, Belarus and Iceland. Another instrument which also acts in the EU environment is the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme. It is an agreement between EU member states Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden as well as the northern parts of Germany and the partner countries of Norway and the northwest regions of Russia, until 2022. The Programme is funded by the European Union and approved by the European Commission.

The Interreg cooperation area covers the territories of eight countries – seven members of the EU and Norway, as well as the northern regions of Germany and Russia. The German participants are the States (Länder) of Berlin, Brandenburg, Bremen, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Schleswig-Holstein and Niedersachsen (only NUTS II area Lüneburg region) and the Russian representation used to include St. Petersburg, Arkhangelsk Oblast, Vologda Oblast, Kaliningrad Oblast, Republic of Karelia, Komi Republic, Leningrad Oblast, Murmansk Oblast, Nenetsky Autonomous Okrug, Novgorod Oblast and Pskov Oblast.



QR-code to the website www.interreg-baltic.eu/about

In comparison to previous maps, the regional scope of inclusion, particularly in terms of Germany and Russia, has been extended. On the other hand, Belarus and Ukraine are not parts of the region. Cooperation with Russian territories has been suspended.



Figure 7. Baltic Sea Region within Interreg Programme.

Source: Interreg Baltic Sea Region ©IB.SH

The above-presented delimitations, based on various Baltic Sea organisations, are not uniform, but contain many consistent features. The Baltic Sea is the main point of reference and the centre of the region. The coastal states participate in all initiatives, but hinterland states (such as Belarus) or those without access to the Baltic Sea may also be part of some initiatives – for example Norway and Iceland. It seems that the most appropriate method of determining the extent of the Region is to base it on the Baltic Sea drainage area. Firstly, it alludes to the history of the region, when the rivers were communication routes, and for the Vikings they were also routes for inland conquests, and secondly, today the quality of these rivers largely determines the pollution of the sea basin and places state responsibility for it and sphere of cooperation (HELCOM, 2019).

On the other hand, a regional identity based on shared values of freedom, sovereignty, democracy, free market excludes Russia in any part of its territory from the Region, seen as a community of these values.

Conclusions

Defining the region is a complex process since many criteria can be used to draw its borders. Geography and natural conditions are an indispensable element of it, but the emerging initiatives of regional cooperation raise awareness among its inhabitants about belonging to a certain type of community. When taking into account legal subjectivity at the state level, some of these initiatives include both geographic and political factors. The formalisation of regional cooperation influences the development of the region and builds its identity. It allows the inhabitants of the region to become aware of their key role in shaping the living conditions in a given area. The specificity of marine regions is their coherence with the terrestrial water network and the sea basin. The Baltic Sea Region has a chance to become a leader in building a regional identity based on the protection of the vulnerable marine ecosystem, including all countries belonging to the Baltic Sea catchment area.

Referring to the international situation in which the Baltic Sea Region found itself after Russia's military attack on Ukraine in February 2022, it is important to point to a redefinition of co-operation priorities in the region and the adoption of the direction of strengthening traditionally understood security. At the beginning of the 21st century, the BSR could be considered a unique opportunity to develop constructive co-operation with Russia based on shared values and ideas, but now relations between Russia and rest of the Baltic Sea Region states looks like the weakest link in the region-building project. Paradoxically, the self-identification of Russia as an enemy has contributed to the consolidation of cooperation among the states of the region. However, the direction of this co-operation is dominated by a trend of increasing threat and uncertainty.

Questions for a discussion

1. How do regions grow?
2. Which factors: geographical, cultural, political, economic can motivate regional entities to develop intense and long-lasting cooperation?
3. Is there a regional identity at all and what can build it?
4. What is the role of a sea basin in building regional cooperation?
5. What is the role of regional organisations/institutions in building regional identity?

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Chapter 2

Navigating toward a resilient Baltic Sea: or why rivers do matter

by Marta Skorek

Introduction

While the Baltic Sea is the heart of the Baltic Sea Region (BSR), the rivers flowing into it from the territories of both its coastal and non-coastal states may be compared to its bloodstream. It seems that the most appropriate method of determining the extent of the region is to base it on the Baltic Sea drainage area (Henningsen, 2011) as it captures the very nature of the marine space by connecting the inland to the sea through rivers and waterways (Rydén, 2002: 9, 25). It also makes the ecological condition of the Baltic Sea contingent upon the quality of water flowing into the Baltic Sea from land sources (Rydén, 2002: 9, 25; Hammer, 2015: 81, 83).

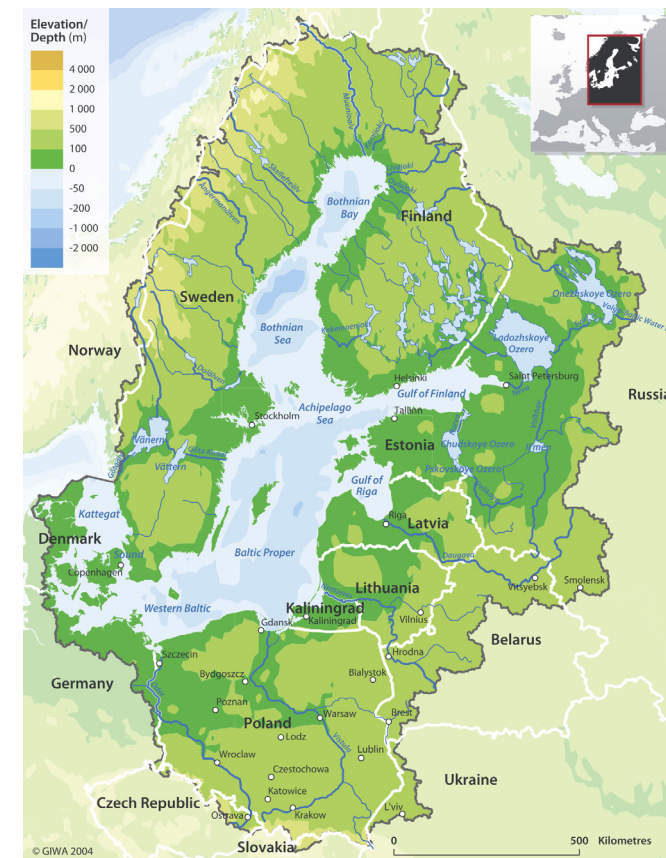


Figure 1. Map of the Baltic Sea and its upstream catchment area /1/. © GIWA.

Source: HELCOM (2006: 5)

In order to turn the Baltic Sea into a healthy and resilient marine ecosystem, both coastal and non-coastal states (both EU and non-EU countries) need to strengthen cross-border co-operation.

It is certainly easier said than done. Therefore, the main aim of this largely conceptual chapter is:

- To explore the nature of land-sea interactions (LSI) in the BSR, i.e. what happens when the sea and the land interact;
- To highlight the role played in the process by the rivers flowing into the Baltic Sea;
- To focus on one piece of EU legislation, i.e. the Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC), to demonstrate how transboundary river basin management may look both in theory and practice; and
- To recommend resilience thinking as a direction along which to look in order to at least partly address the complex challenges faced by the Baltic Sea, e.g. the climate crisis.

For obvious reasons, this chapter does not exhaust all the possibilities of engaging in regional collaboration at the land-sea interface but rather attempts to serve as a point of departure for a different way of thinking about LSI in the context of the drainage basin (the catchment area). Furthermore, the chapter corresponds to the topic of the course Re-thinking the Baltic Sea Region: Trends and Challenges in the following manner:

- By exploring LSI in the context of transboundary river management, it is well embedded in the dominant sustainable development discourses, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, Blue Growth as well as Baltic 2030, and the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.
- The chapter makes references to the multiple synergies and overlaps to be identified among other landscapes (the socio-economic and political ones) in the context of Global Transitions and Agenda 2030 as all human activities, be they social, cultural, economic, political or military, are embedded in the biosphere (all of the life-supporting ecosystems) rather than external to it (Folke et al., 2016);
- The whole chapter revolves around the idea of re-thinking the region in light of the following changes:

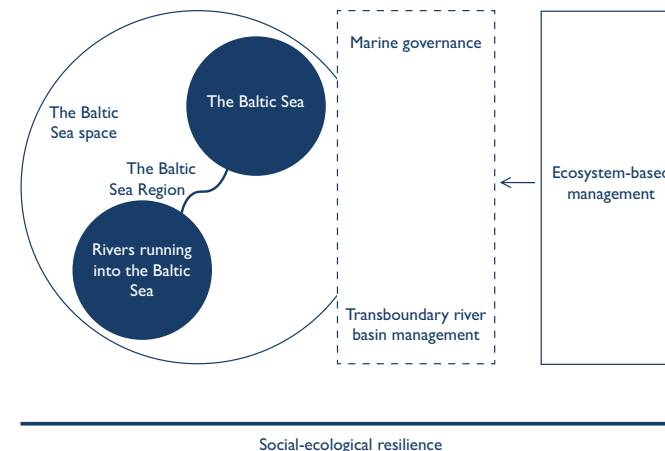


Figure 2.A conceptual framework

1. Human-induced climate crisis;
2. Tense and unstable geopolitical situation caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its international implications, including but not limited to military tensions, suspended co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region between the Baltic Sea states and Russia (e.g. HELCOM, and the CBSS), and economic disruptions on the global market; and
3. Russia's military aggression against Ukraine resulting in environmental destruction or 'ecocide' (Watts, 2023), with air and water pollution spreading across state or other administrative borders.

- Last but not least, some of the ideas and conclusions contained in this chapter may also hold true for other marine regions of our Blue Planet.

Developing a conceptual framework

As the topic of the land-sea interface and its management exhibits complexity, a conceptual framework (fig. 2) has been developed to help visualise the relationships among various concepts relevant to transboundary river management in the Baltic Sea Region.

Baltic Sea space, with the Baltic Sea at its heart, is usually defined as an 'arm of the North Atlantic Ocean', extending northward from the latitude of southern Denmark almost to the Arctic Circle and separating the Scandinavian Peninsula from the rest of continental Europe.

"The largest expanse of brackish water in the world, (...) semi-enclosed and relatively shallow (...)" (Couper & Mutton, 2019). Both the sea and the coastal areas may be viewed as one complex ecosystem. To reflect this interconnection, the Baltic Sea Region has been defined in terms of a drainage basin to encompass all of the countries (places) through which water flows into the Baltic Sea, i.e. EU coastal states: Poland, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania; non-EU coastal state: Russia as well as Norway, Belarus, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia (Henningsen, 2011).

The drainage basin definition of the BSR has been selected to underscore the impact of both coastal and non-coastal states on the Baltic Sea marine ecosystem, thereby stressing the need to incorporate LSI into policymaking processes. To accomplish that, at least two approaches need to be put in place:

- Marine governance: As state or local governments are unable to regulate activities at sea or to solve complex challenges, such as sea protection or climate change, on their own, they need to co-operate with numerous actors, e.g. researchers, businesses, or non-governmental organisations (Van Tatenhove, 2011: 95; see also Steffek, 2009 for non-expert actors). It is crucial to remember that marine governance needs to account for the multiple interactions occurring across the land-sea interface (to be explained below); and
- Transboundary river basin management: Managing water resources should occur across state or administrative borders as water in general, and rivers in particular, do not respect man-made borders (Directive 2000/60/EC of ... (the Water Framework Directive (WFD)) to be further discussed in this chapter; see also the Baltic Sea Region map and the water cycle in this chapter).
- That is why the WFD introduced the idea of a river basin district as an area designated according to the biogeographical conditions of a given river basin rather than the political or administrative ones.

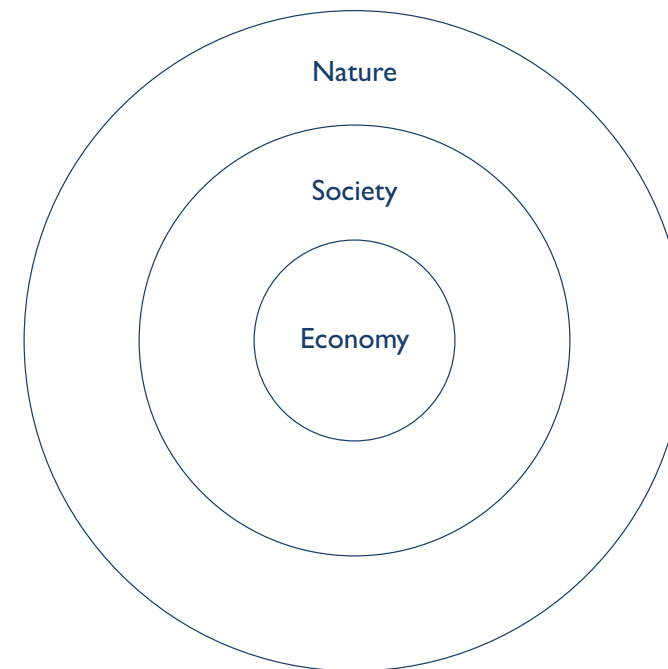


Figure 3. The diagram showing the relationship between economy, society, and nature. Based on C. Folke's lecture notes of the early 1990s.

Source: Folke et al. (2016).

When managing a marine ecosystem or its resources, we need to take into account all interactions occurring in the entire ecosystem, including people and their activities and impacts (ecosystem-based management (EBM)). Then it would be possible to maintain a given ecosystem in a healthy, productive, and resilient condition (Gilek et al., 2016:7). Furthermore, EBM recognises the interconnections among the sea, land, and atmosphere (Kidd et al., 2019: 247), and calls for collaboration among scientists, business sectors and policymakers to address environmental issues and their management in a holistic, adaptive, collaborative and integrated manner (Gilek & Karlsson, 2016). In other words, it sees the marine space as one ecological unity (Pyc, 2011: 100), with people being perceived as part of the ecosystem (Söderström, 2017: 4-5). Such an approach to management is in line with a social-ecological system approach. As people are part of nature, societies and ecosystems cannot be separated from each other but should be studied as an integrated whole (Folke et al., 2016; Guerrero et al., 2018). What is more, both societies and ecosystems need to be governed as a unified socio-ecological system (Pyc, 2011: 289), which makes any separation between social and ecological systems artificial and arbitrary (Folke et al., 2016; Stibbe, 2015).

To illustrate this approach, Figure 3 on the previous page shows that all human activities, be they economic, social, cultural, or political, are embedded in nature (Folke et al., 2016). As the concept of nature may appear to be too vague to be used in the context of marine governance, it may well be replaced with that of the biosphere¹.

As social-ecological systems experience numerous changes and disturbances, it is of utmost importance to ensure that they remain resilient. While ‘resilience’ has been defined by the Stockholm Resilience Center as the capacity to deal with change and continue to develop, social-ecological resilience is the capacity to adapt or transform in the face of change in social-ecological systems, particularly unexpected change, in ways that continue to support human well-being (Chapin et al., 2010, Biggs et al., 2015 as cited in Folke et al., 2016). To put it simply, if a resilient system, e.g. a person, a sea or an economy, experiences a shock or disturbance (e.g. a disease, pollution or a stock market crash), it can deal with it and still continue to develop (What is resilience?...). As the Baltic Sea is both a social and ecological system, we can talk about its social-ecological resilience.

When the sea and the land interact

Before embarking on any Baltic Sea-related project, it is crucial to explore the nature of the space where the sea meets the land. As might be expected, the Baltic Sea Region, with the Baltic Sea at its heart, is an example of a dynamic, lively and relational space (Jay, 2018). Both the sea and the land are constantly interacting with each other in multiple ways and at different scales (land-sea interactions), which may be broken down into the following categories:

- Land-sea processes: natural, material, and physical flows occurring at the land-sea interface (e.g. rivers carrying sediments to the sea or sea waves damaging coastlines);
- Cross-system threats: a change in one system (i.e. the land or the sea) having a detrimental effect on another (e.g. agrichemicals, if used improperly or irresponsibly,

”While ‘resilience’ has been defined by the Stockholm Resilience Center as the capacity to deal with change and continue to develop, social-ecological resilience is the capacity to adapt or transform in the face of change in social-ecological systems, particularly unexpected change, in ways that continue to support human well-being.”

¹ The biosphere is “relatively thin life-supporting stratum of Earth’s surface, extending from a few kilometres into the atmosphere to the deep-sea vents of the ocean. The biosphere is a global ecosystem composed of living organisms (biota) and the abiotic (nonliving) factors from which they derive energy and nutrients.” (<https://www.britannica.com/science/biosphere>). In other words, the biosphere is the part of the Earth where all life can exist.

can make their way into the sea and contaminate the water);

- Management and policy decisions: our (human) decisions taken with regard to managing both land and marine ecosystems having an overarching influence on the two previous categories (e.g. the designation of conservation areas and its implications; or transboundary river basin management) (Pittman & Armitage, 2016).

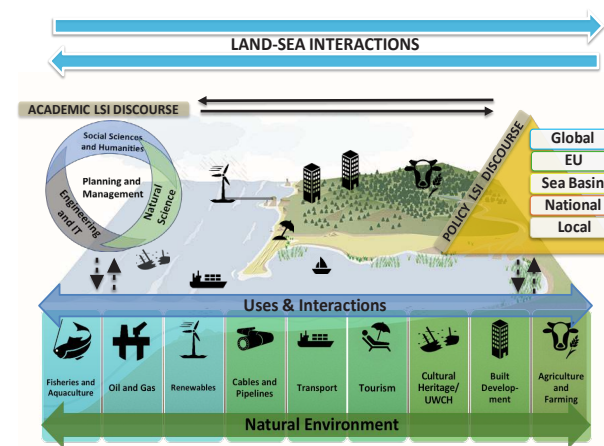


Figure 4. Land-sea interactions.

Figure by Sarah Mahadeo & Andrea Morf, Nordregio.

Source: Morf, A., (Ed.) et al. (2019: 11).

While various sediments and effluents² make their way into the sea via waterways and direct runoff, we cannot forget about atmospheric emissions (e.g. carbon dioxide from landward activities). Falling with rain into the sea, they contribute to the acidification³ of the Baltic Sea (Kidd et al., 2019: 253). Apart from the above-listed types of land-sea interactions, the following need to be added into the mix to get a broader picture: various users of the marine and coastal ecosystems with different values, interests, and cultural backgrounds, as well as legal systems, institutions, and different types of knowledge shaping human activities occurring at the land-sea interface (Kidd et al., 2019: 251; Morf, A., (Ed.) et al., 2019: 5, 17). The figure presented below has been included to help visualise the multidimensionality of the marine space with its numerous interconnections occurring at the interface between terrestrial (land) and marine environments (Morf, A., (Ed.) et al., 2019: 11).

² Effluents: liquid waste that is sent out from factories or places where sewage is dealt with, usually flowing into rivers, lakes, or the sea (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/pl/dictionary/english/effluent>).

³ (Sea/ocean) acidification: the worldwide reduction in the pH of seawater as a consequence of the absorption of large amounts of carbon dioxide (CO₂) by the oceans (<https://www.britannica.com/science/ocean-acidification>).

Once we have understood and appreciated the existence of numerous interactions occurring across the land and the sea, we may be able to adapt our institutions as well as our ways of thinking about and acting toward, the fluid, dynamic, and lively Baltic Sea space (see Jay, 2018 for the concept of lively space). One way of approaching such a mind-blowing complexity is by taking a closer look at the rivers flowing into the Baltic Sea and their impact on the Baltic Sea.

Why rivers?

There are over 250 rivers discharging freshwater into the Baltic Sea (Taminskas & Povilanskas, 2021a: 17), which clearly demonstrates that both marine and terrestrial ecosystems are closely interconnected and interdependent. In other words, natural processes and human activities on the land (even in remote parts of the world with no access to the sea) impact on the sea directly or indirectly. In order to better visualise it, we often refer to water as 'the bloodstream of the biosphere' (Water as ...) and look at the water cycle to trace the journey of a water drop in its various states and through multiple ecosystems (see Figure 5).

As can be seen in Figure 4, rivers are naturally an important part of this process. However, apart from carrying freshwater into the sea, they⁴ also bring sediments, waste, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and other substances⁵ which contaminate the water, e.g. priority substances and trace metals (Ibragimow et al., 2019: 36).

They usually come from land-based sources of pollution, such as forest industry, agriculture, semi-rural and rural settlements, and industry (Ibragimow et al., 2019: 36). As there is relatively limited water exchange with the North Sea, the Baltic Sea is particularly vulnerable to the input of nutrients, contaminants, and hazardous substances from its major rivers (Taminskas & Povilanskas, 2021b: 22). Needless to say, all of these substances are harmful both to people and animals, and the wider marine and coastal ecosystem (Kidd et al., 2019: 253).

”There are over 250 rivers discharging freshwater into the Baltic Sea, which clearly demonstrates that both marine and terrestrial ecosystems are closely interconnected and interdependent.”

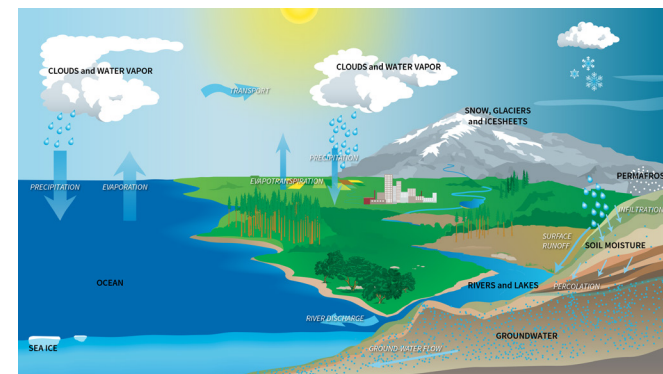


Figure 5. The water cycle.

Source: NASA

The list of challenges is seemingly endless. We may also add the loss of a river's natural capacity to purify water due to river engineering, or the impact of pollution on transitional waters, such as lagoons or estuaries. Due to their complexity, these examples of LSI-related challenges clearly lie outside the scope of this chapter (see Povilanskas et al., 2021 for the ecology and economy of transitional waters). Although it may seem to be beyond our human capacity to deal with all these fluid and cross-border challenges, countries in the Baltic Sea Region try to coordinate their actions to jointly manage rivers in order to improve their water quality (transboundary river basin management).

Transboundary river co-operation: theory v. practice

As has been shown above, there are multiple levels, directions, and points of interaction between the land and sea ecosystems that we can analyse from a variety of angles and research perspectives. One of them falls under the broad category of transboundary river management (see Land-sea interface: Useful definitions). In the Baltic Sea Region, there are various regulations in place adopted by such institutions as the Helsinki Commission or the European Union, and aimed at improving the quality of river water flowing into the Baltic Sea. Both EU Member states and non-EU states may (or even should) enter into such co-operation. However, due to space constraints, these opportunities cannot be adequately addressed in this article.

⁴ Major rivers of the Baltic Sea drainage basin: Neva, Vistula, Oder, Nemunas, Daugava, Kemijoki, and Göta (Dobrzycka-Kraheil & Bogalecka, 2022).

⁵ For detailed information on priority substances visit the following website: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-dangersub/pri_substances.htm

Therefore, special emphasis has been placed on one important piece of EU legislation, i.e. Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy or, for short, the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) (the WFD)⁶. The WFD has been chosen for the following reasons:

- It regulates the protection of ground, inland, transitional, and marine waters;
- It calls for a ‘good ecological and chemical status’ of freshwater;
- It focuses on the ecological boundaries rather than the geographical or political ones (Bohman & Langlet, 2015: 64-65), thereby providing a more holistic view of river management; and
- It requires that Member States co-operate at the regional level and across state borders to meet the expectations set out in the WFD (O’Higgins et al., 2019).

In other words, meeting the objectives of the WFD requires the “integration between organizations directly involved with water management (...), the integration between water management and other sectors, such as spatial planning (...), [and] the integration of international river basins in the context of transnational cooperation” (Hedin et al., 2007: 11). Far from being flawless, the WFD is an important document in the EU’s water policy with the river basin district introduced as the basic unit in water management (Ibragimow et al., 2019).

To illustrate the process of translating the WFD⁷ into practice, the co-operation among Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic in the transboundary management of the Oder River may serve as a case in point (see Ibragimow et al., 2019 for two case studies: the international basin districts of the Oder River and the Torne River). The countries involved see the need for transboundary co-operation in the Oder River management, and some actions have been taken to facilitate the process, such as building new sewage treatment plants, modernising the existing ones, or handling contamination from old landfills

or post-industrial sites (Ibragimow et al., 2019: 33-34). On the other hand, they encounter multiple challenges stemming from differences in:

- Their institutions and legal systems;
- Policy interpretations and priorities; and
- Norms and classifications regarding the condition of the river, all of which are partly caused by culture-specific approaches to river protection (Ibragimow et al., 2019: 37).

In order to streamline their co-operation, the countries involved need to put into practice their understanding of how the river basin functions, what influence societies with their economies exert on its ecosystem, and how their administrative structures and other socio-cultural differences impact on the transboundary management of the Oder River (Ibragimow et al., 2019: 36). The 2022 Oder river crisis clearly testifies to the importance of adopting such an integrated, social-ecological approach to river management, with full knowledge of its impact on the life-sustaining ecosystem of the Baltic Sea.

How resilience thinking may help

As might be expected, there are no silver bullet solutions to complex challenges, such as transboundary river management or land-sea interactions. However, as the WFD “(...) introduced an innovative approach to water management, based not on national administrative or political boundaries, but on natural geographical and hydrological formations: the river basins” (Water is for life ... 2010: 6), the question remains as to what kind of thinking may support it. To answer this question, it may be advisable to look at the Baltic Sea through the lens of social-ecological resilience with its people-in-the-biosphere perspective and its focus on adaptation and development in the face of a disturbance (Folke et al., 2016). The reasons for thinking about land-sea interactions in the BSR in terms of social-ecological resilience have been broken down into 3 categories: the climate crisis, one space, and fluidity.

⁶ More information on the WFD and its implementation at: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-framework/index_en.html

⁷ More information on the WFD and its implementation at: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-framework/index_en.html

In the face of the climate crisis there is an urgent need to make the Baltic Sea resilient as extreme weather patterns threaten both people and ecosystems alike (see Reusch et al., 2018 for climate change impacts in the BSR and the perception of the Baltic Sea as a time machine in the context of the climate crisis). Due to the climate crisis the LSI in the BSR (may) undergo a constant (sometimes even radical) change (Morf, A., (Ed.) et al., 2019: 83), which calls for transboundary and transnational co-operation (Pittman & Armitage, 2016). Then the idea of the land and the sea being treated as one space (Morf, A., (Ed.) et al., 2019: 82) may be supported by the social-ecological system approach (Folke et al., 2016) which sees people as an integral part of the biosphere, and as individuals affecting, and affected by, the ecosystem they depend upon for survival (Stibbe, 2015). While it may be useful at times to talk about natural, social, economic, political or cultural aspects of the land-sea interface, we also need to develop integrated ‘whole system’ perspectives to account for its nature and interconnections, and to inform management decisions and actions taken at the land-sea interface (Kidd et al., 2019: 262). Finally, the fact that the Baltic Sea drainage basin is a fluid space undergoing constant change requires us to be adaptable and innovative in the face of these challenges (Walker et al., 2004, Folke et al., 2010 as cited in Folke et al., 2016).

Although there is no universal recipe for dealing with complex challenges, we may apply the social-ecological system approach and social-ecological resilience (Folke et al., 2016) to our thinking about the Baltic Sea and the whole BSR, as well as to governing the marine space more holistically.

Concluding remarks and a way forward

While the Baltic Sea may be described as ‘a sick patient in a stable condition’⁸, the land-sea interactions in the BSR in general, and its rivers in particular, are the key to addressing some of its most pressing ecological issues, such as pollution or eutrophication⁹. Navigating toward a resilient Baltic Sea, with the rivers flowing into it as a crucial part of the equation, is by no means an easy

”The idea of the land and the sea being treated as one space may be supported by the social-ecological system approach which sees people as an integral part of the biosphere, and as individuals affecting, and affected by, the ecosystem they depend upon for survival.”

⁸The author of this comparison unknown to me.

⁹ Visit the websites of: the Helsinki Commission: <https://helcom.fi/> or of the World Wildlife Fund: <https://www.wwfbaltic.org/> for more information on the state of the Baltic Sea.

process. However, it should be based on one simple perception that the Baltic Sea does not stop at the shore, and that all of the world’s waterways are interconnected across time and space.

That is why the conclusions generated in this chapter are also relevant to all European seas and may be used to develop resilience thinking in the context of other sea basins. What is more, the interactions at the land-sea interface, between both seawater and freshwater ecosystems, clearly testify to the fact that the distinctions made between marine and terrestrial systems or coastal and non-coastal states need to be approached critically due to the fluid, dynamic, and lively nature of the land-sea continuum (Jay, 2018). Last but not least, our well-being and livelihoods in the BSR fully depend on the ability of the Baltic marine space to provide ecosystem services (Garpe, 2008; Kidd et al., 2019: 253, 257), e.g. seafood production, waste regulation, or recreation. However, in order to help both the Baltic Sea and the rivers flowing into it, maintain their social-ecological resilience, we also need to carefully and critically scrutinise our everyday decisions, choices and actions as consumers, voters, and civil society members, and introduce the necessary lifestyle changes.

Questions for a discussion

These questions have been inspired by Thomas Lundén’s approach to boundaries as entities to be transgressed as they are ‘practical necessities rather than holy walls’ (2004: 212).

1. Where is the border separating the land from the sea?
2. Why can it be challenging at times to think and act in terms of land-sea interactions?
3. What role can the rivers flowing into the Baltic Sea play in helping us think about marine space in terms of land-sea interactions?
4. Does thinking and acting along social-ecological lines support or hamper this process? Why?
5. In the context of the climate crisis affecting the BSR across the board, is the idea of social-ecological resilience more adequate than that of sustainable development? Why?
6. Challenge question: How to cultivate a more holistic way of thinking about the Baltic Sea and its land-sea interactions? Please share your local, culture-specific recommendations.

Additional task

Discover the nature of borders (boundaries) in land-sea interactions in the BSR and their social-ecological implications. Represent their nature either linguistically or visually through descriptions, drawings, pictures, photos, symbols, metaphors, poems etc. Useful questions to ask: What is the nature of the interaction between the sea and the land? Where does something begin? Where does it end? What to include in the representation? What to exclude? Why?

Expected outcome: Developing the understanding of borders (boundaries) in LSI and their both conceptual and material nature; using various creative tools to capture the nature of LSI, thereby translating the scientific issue into an art form; engaging in public communication of scientific knowledge, as well as working at the nature-culture interface.

Recommended reading

Pre-reading: NASA Earth Science: Water Cycle. Source: <https://gpm.nasa.gov/education/articles/nasa-earth-science-water-cycle>

Reading for the chapter: Water is for life: How the Water Framework Directive helps safeguard Europe's resources (2010). The European Commission.

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Chapter 3

The Baltic Sea Region over the last decades: the region in the making, again

by Tomasz Branka

Introduction

The Baltic Sea Region (BSR) was considered a particularly successful example of regional cooperation, which often even served as a model for the so-called 'new regionalism'. The multiplicity of actors, the diverse scope of cooperation and the bottom-up nature of the initiatives were pointed out. However, from its inception, the region was also a challenging political project, in which attempts were made to bring the Baltic States and Poland into Western integration structures, and to incorporate Russia more firmly into cooperation with Western institutions. With regard to the Kaliningrad Oblast - which is strongly linked to the Baltic Sea - solutions were explicitly proposed (Moshes, 2003; Browning 2003; Gänzle, Müntel 2011), providing for the creation of a 'pilot region' that would be given special status in relations with the European Union. Kaliningrad Oblast was believed to have the potential to become a specific "laboratory of EU-Russia cooperation" (Palmowski, 2003) facilitating broad economic collaboration. It was activities carried out - among others - in the BSR that were supposed to contribute to limiting the thinking about Russia as "the other" and to bring Russia closer to the West (Jakniunaite and Vaicekauskaite, 2017: 109). However, the idea to build a balance in relations between the EU and the Russian Federation was already violated in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea. Russia's unprecedented attack on Ukraine in February 2022 forced a change in the perception and assessment of the development of the Baltic Sea Region to date. This article attempts to answer the question of to what extent the process of building the Baltic Sea Region can be considered a success and whether it is possible and profitable to construct such a region without Russia's active and positive participation.

'Regionness' under pressure

Even before the outbreak of full-scale war in Ukraine, K. Musial (2021: 10) pointed out that the modern Baltic Sea Region, instead of being a zone of cooperation, was gradually becoming a battlefield for domination and hegemony "both in the cognitive and hard security sense".

"From its inception, the region was also a challenging political project, in which attempts were made to bring the Baltic States and Poland into Western integration structures, and to incorporate Russia more firmly into cooperation with Western institutions."

The narrative of the region itself has also been challenged: instead of slogans of cooperation and collaboration, the option of rivalry has become more and more prevalent, and in addition, a self-regarding, national interest has gained a strong foothold in the rhetoric of governments in many states of the region (Musial, 2021: 10). Consequently, it has become increasingly difficult (even before 2022) to speak of a coherent concept of the Baltic Sea Region. If we accept that the term "regionness" is understood as a situation in which the process of regionalisation has advanced far enough for a region to attain some intrinsic regional features (Väyrynen, 2003: 39), then the geopolitical situation in North-Eastern Europe entering the third decade of the 21st century, has a negative impact on such a process in the Baltic Sea area (Musial, 2021: 10). One can also refer to the perception of 'regionness' proposed by Hette and Söderbaum (2000). In this understanding, it is a process of "area is transformed from a passive object to an active subject, capable of articulating the transnational interests of the emerging region" (2000: 461). This transformation is taking place in stages, so it can be assumed, following these authors, that the region can be a region "more or less", and "the level of regionness can both increase and decrease" (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000: 461). The authors propose five levels of regionness model (Hettne and Söderbaum, 2000:463-468): from (1) Regional space (simply understood as geographical contiguity, and even called as a 'pre-regional zone'); through (2) Regional complex (with an increase in interaction – both: positive and/or negative – and more frequent contact between communities in the region); (3) Regional society (characterised by complex interaction between many types of actors, and not confined simply to state relations); (4) Regional community (where the region is increasingly becoming an active entity with a distinct identity, transcending - though not negating - the former national borders), to (5) region-state (which indicates the rise of a new multicultural, multilayered and more dynamic political entity, which should be distinguished from a nation-state)¹. The Baltic Sea Region raised hopes that, referring to the above levels, it was within its reach to enter and remain at Regional community level.

¹ The authors are far from determinism and emphasise that not every region will go through all the successive levels of regionness, and not necessarily in the same way.

Today, however, the progressive rebordering processes are hitting even the status of Regional society.

Consequently, the BSR has not fully become the 'new region' that its creators envisioned: a region where problems are solved jointly by all interested stakeholders and grassroots transnationalism flourishes. Instead, the BSR states are divided by differing security perceptions and foreign policy goals (Jakniunaite & Vaicekauskaite, 2017: 103).

From the beginning, Russia's role and position has been one of the greatest challenges, but also goals to be achieved in building the region. It is hard to argue that the BSR concept was designed standalone, with no broader aspirations to include Russia in cooperation at various levels. It is this element - inviting Russia to interact in the region - that can be considered, one of the characteristic elements of the construction of this project. Especially supported by the Nordic states were efforts to engage Russia in a regional cooperation framework based on soft security and so-called low political issues (Browning & Joenniemi 2004). Such activities were intended to offer the country participation in various initiatives, and thus to bring the relationship to such a level that any potential conflict would become unprofitable. This is because it would have to (and did) challenge and break the relations built in the region. Moreover, as can be seen in current events after February 2022, this has led to a situation in which previous 'collaborators' or 'partners' in the region, are called 'enemies'. This resounded clearly, for example, in Russian comments after Sweden and Finland officially announced their readiness to join NATO structures². At the same time, such a situation did not arise unexpectedly or suddenly in 2022, or even since the annexation of Crimea in 2014. The reasons can be sought earlier, as far back as the 2008 Russian-Georgian war. It was this very conflict that rekindled the BSR's fear that Russia would resolve conflicts by resorting to hard security. Thus, Russia slowly but consistently moved (or - returned) to a place in the region defined as a "threat" (Jakniunaite & Vaicekauskaite: 2017, 110).

² After announcing readiness to join NATO, Sergei Ryabkov, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, warned "I have many doubts that the coming period will be peaceful for our northern European neighbours" (Roth, 2022).

The scenario we are currently witnessing would therefore indicate at least a partial failure of the 'Baltic Sea project', or more broadly, of EU policy toward Russia in the region. While the EU's flagship Northern Dimension program was unquestionably and in fact directed northward, in practice it was, after all, still 'Russian' in nature. Thus, it was, as it were, the northern branch of the eastern, Union policy, or to put it another way, the policy was as much northern as it was (still or dominant) eastern. The dividing line was clearly drawn with the expansion of NATO and the EU to include the BSR states. Even then, the main paradox of Russia's presence in the region was clearly visible: it cannot be fully treated as part of the region, but neither can its presence and influence on the processes taking place be ignored. So, an element has emerged in the region itself that posed a threat to its development. Thus, as it were, from its beginnings the BSR has had to face a situation where one important actor in regional cooperation has status as both an official insider and a constant outsider (Jakniunaite and Vaicekauskaite, 2017: 110).

Russia also never became a fully engaged state in the region's construction, although it was undoubtedly a very important actor in the region. As it is assessed "for Russia the Baltic Sea Region hardly exists" (Jakniunaite and Vaicekauskaite, 2017: 119). Such an ambivalent approach to engaging in the region's construction is explained by, among other things:

- Russia's superpower ambitions and positioning itself as a power that negotiates and plays with other powers. This influences the preference for bilateral relations with world (or at least regional) powers;
- Russia builds and strengthens its identity based on a vision of the West as the enemy. What is 'West' of Russia has often been perceived (and now - in fact - exclusively) as a hostile world and one set on weakening or even destroying Russia. It is therefore necessary to defend against such a process - unless it can be taken over or controlled - rather than to strengthen it (e.g. by working for the development of the region in question);

"The main paradox of Russia's presence in the region was clearly visible: it cannot be fully treated as part of the region, but neither can its presence and influence on the processes taking place be ignored."

- Russia's difficult and sometimes even hostile relations with the Baltic States and Poland (for more details, see Jakniunaite and Vaicekauskaite, 2017: 112-115).

BSR as a model of 'new regionalism'

The term 'new regionalism' is most often used to define the so-called second wave of regional cooperation processes, which dates back to the 1980s. This is the moment when regional civil society calls for regional solutions to some local, national and global problems (Hettne, 1994: 10).

'Old regionalism' referred to states as the dominant actors in international relations. It was therefore the states that decided the shape of the region, its institutional form, and the processes within it. The process of region-building was therefore top-down, and was characterised by asymmetry of power and an arrangement of internal relations: centre - periphery (Czyz, 2018). Also, objectives were set top-down from the point of view of the whole state or even a group of states, rather than (or not in a dominant way) with reference to the needs of the region and the community living there.

In the 'new regionalism', there is consequently a mobilisation of local actors, government representatives and business to identify development potential and stimulate the development process of the region (Ziomek, 2010). The focus on more actors (e.g. NGOs, religious and charitable groups, interest groups) involved in the co-management of the region also requires a higher level of social capital and associated trust.

Intriguingly, Väyrynen (2003) pointed out that the period at the end of the Cold War and the growing trend towards globalisation, as well as the increasing complexity of international relations, meant that the very concept of 'region' could degenerate into an empty idea. With this view, what sense would it make to engage in regional processes when the prevailing trend points to the development of global ones?

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In practice, however, the end of the bipolar world rather contributed to the “restoration of regional sovereignty” (Väyrynen, 2003: 28), and the new regionalism began to be seen as a kind of antidote (or protection) to the challenges (or threats) of globalism. Väyrynen (2003: 43) defines the goals of the new regionalism in its relation to globalism by explicitly writing that “according to new regionalism, regionalisation is intended to control access to a particular region to protect it against the process of globalisation”. Thus, the BSR was the poster child for the so-called new regionalism (Jakniunaite and Vaicekauskaite 2017: 104). What is particularly interesting about the Baltic Sea Region analysed in the concept of new regionalism is the accentuation of the open borders of the region. These cannot be clearly delineated and timeless, as they change depending on the issues at hand (Ziomek, 2010). Linked to this understanding of the new regionalism is the approach to ‘regionness’, which points out explicitly that it does not need “fixed boundaries” (Väyrynen, 2003: 40), or rather that these boundaries will be constantly changing.

In short, it is possible, following B. Hettne (1994, 7-8), to point out three main areas in which ‘new regionalism’ differs from ‘old regionalism’:

- ‘new regionalism’ took shape in a multipolar and globalising world, as opposed to ‘old regionalism’, which formed in a bipolar Cold War regime dominated by the roles of states;
- ‘new regionalism’ is dominated by bottom-up processes, while ‘old regionalism’ was supervised from above and often from outside (e.g. by superpowers);
- ‘new regionalism’ is multidimensional, more complex, and focused on guiding processes, while ‘old regionalism’ tended to have specific, predetermined goals to meet, and the effort was directed at shaping the right layout of the institutional structure.

Given that one of the dominant markers of the new regionalism was a bottom-up approach to defining (and solving) regional problems, it can be assumed that the

Baltic Sea Region can be considered as a place of origin of this new regionalism (Zauchka, 2013: 179). For it was there that cooperative initiatives were coming transnationally from non-state actors, or – and this happens more often – non-state actors were included in regional projects. It was in this region that a visible shift in the post-Cold War logic took place: the glue that was supposed to bind states (and the region) together in Baltic Sea cooperation became ‘soft security’ issues. This – given the broadening to the meaning of the term security – concerned and affected each of the potential actors – despite their differences. ‘Hard security’ was of course not forgotten, but these were left to international organisations such as NATO and OSCE – in perspective (Jakniunaite and Vaicekauskaite, 2017: 107).

Perhaps, in part, this complacency about being a ‘model’ of the new regionalism also contributed to a dormant vigilance for the dysfunctional factors that scratched this almost ideal surface of regional cooperation.

In analysing the region’s (partial) failure, observers noted complacency in policy, lack of leadership and lack of vision for the next phase of regionalism: “the bigger problem was that different BSR states held different understandings of their regions, varying conceptions of the levels and types of security cooperation they were to engage in together, and incompatible perceptions of each other” (Jakniunaite and Vaicekauskaite, 2017: 111).

From borders to frontiers and back

The existence and shape of the Baltic Sea Region has been the subject of ongoing debate among scholars and practitioners in recent decades. It has resulted in numerous approaches and arguments. Several criteria have been used to delimit the BSR, such as natural criteria, socio-economic criteria, administrative or political criteria, spatial criteria, or cultural, historical, ethnic criteria.

Ladis K.D. Kristof, in his classic article (1959), makes a deep analysis of the meaning and relations between the words frontiers and boundaries.

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He introduces a clear distinction between the two concepts, which, all too easily, can be used as synonyms. In Kristof's explanation, the frontiers can be seen as lines between different societies or identities. In other words, it "becomes meeting places not merely of different ways of physical survival, but also of different concepts of the good life" (Kristof, 1959: 270). In order to keep the state territory integrated, the frontier lands "have to be controlled and bound to the state" (Kristof, 1959: 272). The frontier then – as noted by Kristof – "is an integrating factor" (Kristof, 1959, 273), but at the same time, as explained by Lamar and Thompson (1981), the frontier is a zone of competition between "indigenous" and "intrusive" societies. It corresponds also to Jack Forbes' idea of the frontier as an "inter-group contact zone", where different "ethnic, national or cultural groups" interact for a period of time (Forbes, 1968: 15). Frontiers, therefore - as opposed to the expected permanence of boundaries - are constantly under threat of change. It is also worth mentioning that Kristof emphasises that originally the frontier was "not a legal concept and not, or at least not essentially, a political or intellectual concept" (Kristof, 1959: 270). In the given case, however, the key assumption is that the frontier is not an end, but rather a beginning is crucial (Kristof, 1959: 270).

In opposition, the term boundary "indicates certain well-established limits (...) of the given political unit" (Kristof, 1959: 270) and can be used appropriately for the present-day concept of the state. The boundary separates the sovereign (...) political units from one another (Kristof, 1959: 273). As Kristof (1959: 271) puts it: "sovereignty is territorial; hence it must have a certain known extent: a territory under exclusive jurisdiction limited by state boundaries". For him boundary is a manifestation of the state's "centripetal forces", while the frontiers are "a manifestation of centrifugal forces" and a challenge to the nation-state (1959, 273). Based on this distinction, a conclusion can be drawn, that the frontier is outer-oriented and the boundary – inner-oriented (Kristof, 1959: 271-272).

It is worth recalling the text by Houtum and Lacy (2017), who emphasise that frontiers, is not only a movement for

"For Kristof boundary is a manifestation of the state's 'centripetal forces', while the frontiers are 'a manifestation of centrifugal forces' and a challenge to the nation-state."

integration, connection, and openness to the new and collaboration. They pointed out that frontiers have been used to justify "brutal expansionism, predatory colonisation and exploratory imperialism", citing the still lively debate about whether frontiers are "liberating or oppressive, empty or populous" (Houtum and Lacy, 2017). They therefore proposed that frontiers should be considered in several dimensions³: from imperial frontiers (associated with empires seeking to legitimise expansions or universal ambitions); frontiers of imagination (where frontiers are studied and analysed through their perception and not just their physical manifestation in real space); frontiers of exploration (where frontiers are the promise of something unknown, unrecognised, which was originally due to the lack of technical possibilities to demarcate terrain or the unreasonableness of setting precise borders (e.g. in desert areas)); frontiers of integration (which not only facilitate cooperation but also interpret and explain what is different. in desert areas); to frontiers of integration (which not only facilitate collaboration, but also interpret and explain 'the other'. Although as the authors note: "... the uniqueness and diversity of border dramas makes any frontier translation and its validity inevitably controversial" (Houtum and Lacy, 2017).

In this view, it can be assumed that the Baltic Sea Region was intended to lead to a situation where it would be characterised by a high presence of Kristof's frontiers. A place where differences will be visible (in the case of the BSR, the reasons for this could be easily multiplied), but where action for the common good will prevail. Even as Russia became an increasingly dysfunctional factor, the borders in the rest of the BSR were still intended to serve an integrative function and serve as a 'contact zone between groups'.

However, it seems that Kristof's borders in "the Baltic Sea Region 2023" are no longer an area of competition between "indigenous" (i.e., BSR minus Russia) and "intrusive" (Russia) societies - because the factors that inspired and created the glue for the construction of the 'indigenous' element are beginning to be missing (or at least diminishing).

³ Dimensions, where - as with many other concepts in geography - 'historical interpretations, morality and political implications of the frontier are contested by power'.

This directly corresponds with the words of K. Musiał (2021) cited above, about the negative impact of current events on 'regionalness' of the Baltic Sea area. If we maintain the understanding of 'regionness' as a process of region-building, characterised by 'some intrinsic regional features', then it is impossible to encompass the entire region by this term at present. Boundaries are currently being built, oriented inwards. Thus, the process of developing frontiers is halted or hindered, for as Houtum and Lacy (2017) put it "the political implication of thinking more in terms of boundaries than of frontiers are thus far-reaching, for frontiers animate the sort of imagination that boundaries may smother". Thus, the Baltic Sea Region after many years of debordering dominating, the trend to create and recreate borders in the region has marked its increasingly stronger presence (Branka, Donaj and Janczak, 2010).

Summary

Makarychev and Segbers (2017) define Russia as an "uncooperative neighbour" and stress the "double impossibility" related to Russia's presence in the BSR: Russia can be neither completely integrated into nor separated from the region. In such a situation, it may be necessary to redefine the role that has been placed on the region and 'reinvent the region'. Already in 2017, it was analysed that "eliminating Russia from the BSR would entail an overhaul of the core idea behind the BSR's formation, which would probably change regional cooperation to that of any other sub-region of the EU with particular interests and specific projects" (Jakniunaite and Vaicekauskaite, 2017: 112).

While it is clear that the region is fractured in its 'original' post-Cold War image, the question remains about the continued policies of the remaining countries in the region. Will they find it important and necessary to care about strengthening frontiers (in K. Ladis understanding) and orienting outwards, or will there be a return to hard-security logic in the face of threats, and inward orientation will take the upper hand. In the latter scenario, the BSR will be covered almost exclusively by the K. Ladis

"The region is never a finished entity but rather consists of a variety of institutions and processes and is perpetually 'becoming'."

'borders', 'regionalness' will start to fade even faster and the region itself will become an example of missed opportunities. However, this does not extinguish the cautious optimism that "the region is never a finished entity but rather consists of a variety of institutions and processes and is perpetually 'becoming'" (Paasi 2009: 133). Indeed, such is the nature of frontiers, which facing outwards are "both a source of danger and a covered prize" (Kristof, 1959: 271).

Questions for a discussion

1. In what aspects can the construction of the Baltic Sea region be considered a success and in what aspects a failure?
2. Referring to the distinction introduced by Kristof Ladis, do you think we currently have more frontiers or borders in the Baltic Sea Region?
3. Explain what is the 'double impossibility' related to Russia's presence in the BSR.

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Chapter 4

Emergence and consolidation of regionalism in the Baltic Sea Region and its implications in the context of the war in Ukraine

by Stefano Braghiroli & Andrey Makarychev

Introduction

The Baltic Sea Region (BSR) was a focal point of academic studies, where authors considered the area and their research, from the prism of projecting the EU's normative power and establishing institutional frameworks for regional governance, as exemplified by the Council of Baltic Sea States (Mälksoo, 2006). Within the framework of the liberal international order, the region was expected to embody the possibilities embedded in EU's neighbourhood policy (Buscaneanu, 2016) and aimed at investing in region-making at Europe's margins through sharing positive experiences of cross-border co-operation in such areas as environmental protection, infrastructural development, twin cities, transportation, and engagement with civil societies. The projection of the EU's principles, rules, and even values were key to what might be dubbed "normative regionalism" (Makarychev, 2018) promoted by the EU as an intrinsic element of the post-1991 liberal consensus. The BSR is usually considered as the most successful integration project in post-Cold War Europe, which is explained by the fortunate convergence of the EU's policies and resources on the one hand and the Nordic countries' commitments to share their experiences of region-making with their Baltic neighbours on the other (Kuusik and Raik 2018). Many post-Soviet countries pay attention to, and expose demand for, learning from the best Baltic practices in education, civil society development, public service, financial and economic sustainability (Gamkrelidze, 2019).

In this chapter we discuss two major issues: what is the specificity of the BSR as a post-Cold War project of region building, and how the initial design of the BSR was altered by the war in Ukraine that restarted on February 24, 2022.

Regionalism in Europe after the Cold War: A Retrospective Outlook

Regions are usually defined by the scholarly community in terms of geographical proximity (or in terms of geographically uniting factors as, for example, a sea), common interests in specific policy fields, shared identity (a feeling of cohesiveness), and normative frame, including institutions.

From a political science perspective, regionalism is referred to as a structural element of the international society, while regionalisation - as a policy of territorial states to promote regional cohesiveness, along with a division of labour between state and regional institutions.

In the post-Cold War literature, regional studies were influenced by two major clusters of theories. One is of liberal pedigree, with the globalisation paradigm and liberal institutionalism¹ at its core (Keohane and Martin, 1995: 39-53). Region-building and globalisation are regarded as mutually constitutive phenomena in the sense that the global world is (to be) more region-based than nation-based. Regions look for their niches and roles to play in a global work, and the most successful of them might produce norms and practices that become global, which makes multi-regionalism one of possible models of globalisation. In the meantime, unsolved regional problems might significantly influence the global security agenda.

By the same token, both region-building and globalisation question the decisive role of the nation state which loses its monopoly on defining politics. From the perspective of the English school (Buzan, 2014), regions socialise into the global milieu in three ways - through regional systems (interest-based and potentially conflictual interactions), regional societies (with common institutions), and regional communities (common identities, norms and - ideally - values).

Within the globalisation paradigm, contours of many regions are shaped by global-scale events (such as the end of the Cold War). Being products of political cycles, many regions are elements of globalisation as connectors, bridges and zones of contacts, which contributes to deterritorialization, networking and governance beyond nation states. Moreover, success stories of region-building can be replicated elsewhere thus giving spill-over effects².

The second cluster of theories is of social constructivist background and explains the importance of norms and identities for regionalism. Regions are not given by the virtue of nature or geography; they are socially and

cognitively constructed through communication and learning. Regional identity (a 'we-feeling' based on representations of Self and Others) is a desirable but not indispensable precondition for region-building; the lack of shared identity can be compensated by common institutions and policy practices.

Both globalist and constructivist³ approaches agree that regional integration is an inherent part of the liberal consensus established in Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The geopolitics of spheres of influence gave way to region-making aimed at a gradual projection of liberal principles beyond the Western core and the transformative inclusion of former Soviet countries. In this regard, region-building was one of the ways to extend norms and principles of the liberal international order beyond the Western core through different regimes of integration and trans-governmentalism in multiple policy spheres.

From a governance point of view, regional integration (as opposed to co-operation) implies the emergence, consolidation, and diffusion of a relatively strong supranational core and the construction of institutions 'above the states' that would manage - considering the emergence of a division of labour between agents and principals - the delegated sovereignty. From this perspective, regional integration, along with liberal consensus embodies further, a post-sovereign perspective on inter-state relations and dilutes unrestrained intergovernmentalism towards a multilevel mode of governance. Regions that emerged at Europe's eastern frontiers and encompassed non-EU participants (the BSR, as well as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and the Union for Mediterranean) linked the EU with neighbours via positive interdependence, project-specific institutions, networked interconnections (city-to-city partnerships; environmental protection groups, etc.), as well as values of trust, consensus and social equality. For example, the Finnish program Northern Dimension supported by the EU and conceptually related to the normative background of the Baltic regionalism was meant to transform the EU-Russian border from a barrier to an interface.



QR-code to the website www.cbss.org.

¹ In basic terms, liberal institutionalism is a theoretical perspective in the context of international relations that holds that international cooperation between states is feasible and sustainable, and that such cooperation can reduce conflict and competition.

² In the context of European integration theory spillover implies the successful integration of certain policies is possible only if the surrounding policy areas are also successfully integration.

³ According to the constructivist perspective (both as a theory and as a practice) relevant developments of international relations are shaped by ideational aspects (that socially constructed), rather than simply by material factors.

Such interdependence worked also as a vector of regional integrated governance through which the idea of resource sharing and sectorial sovereignty pooling is diffused. However, such influence and transformative power proved less effective beyond the EU borders where the limits of transformative regionalism and Normative Power Europe could be well assessed.

As we will learn, it is relatively rare that regional inter-governmental institutions successfully mitigate military conflicts. Regional fora are not effective antidotes to security problems, especially when they aim to connect spaces (i.e. European and Eurasian ones) characterised by different value systems and regimes, which turn ultimately into different understandings of the meaning of co-operation itself. The divergence not only in terms of constitutional language and goals, but also in terms of long-term objectives and of the overall value system might - on the contrary - turn fora of regional co-operation, in that context, into incubators of conflict potential. Rather than diffusing conflicts, the fundamental disagreement on the rules and the goals of the game would ignite them.

Baltic Sea Regionalism: Aims and Factors

Against this backdrop, the BSR can be approached as a product of the end of the Cold War and the strengthening of the liberal international order. It was designed and developed as an experimental space for de-bordering (cross-border connectivity), de-securitisation, soft security measures and practices of city twinning, and 'triangles of growth'. By the same token, it became a testing ground for theories of non-offensive defence, regional security complexes, as well as glocalisation (Ekengren, 2018). Many of the most inspiring concepts so dear to the hearts of political geographers and scholars in critical geopolitics (Koch, 2016: 807-814) – liminality, marginality, peripherality, in-betweenness, hybridity – have been applied many times to the region (Paasi, 2022).

From the outset, the BSR co-operation has two broad political aims. One was to integrate the Baltic states into Europe, and prepare them for EU and NATO membership

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(international socialisation). Another purpose was to engage with Russia through such initiatives as the Northern Dimension promoted by Finland and basically aimed at offering a non-political/managerial/technocratic relation with Russia's north western regions and cities. An example of such an endeavour was the transformation of the Kaliningrad Oblast into a pilot region of EU-Russia targeted co-operation (Chelminiak, 2021: 263-275).

In between these two dimensions, a third - more hybrid - factor can be identified. That is the emergence, diffusion, and consolidation of the Neighbourhood as a spin-off of the 2004 EU enlargement. Following the integration of the Baltic and Central and Eastern European states, growing attention was placed on engaging with the space 'in-between' the European Union and Russia. Such engagement followed two different - and often competing - trajectories. On one hand, it stressed the necessity to create modes and spaces of co-operation with Russia, without making the Neighbourhood a zero-sum game but rather building a 'common' or 'shared' idea of Neighbourhood in which the BSR would have played a connecting role. On the other hand, especially following the inauguration of the Eastern Partnership it prompted a wave of Europeanisation towards the former Soviet space and, in particular, Eastern European and the South Caucasus. In the case of the Baltic States, emphasis has been clearly situated on this second developmental trajectory.

However, the gradual transformative dynamics driving Europe away from the expectations of the 1990s towards a post-liberal type of international society had various spatial transfigurations in Europe as one of its effects (Skleparis, 2016). The BSR seems to be one of the fastest changing parts of the continent, generating new challenges to the liberal European order, and simultaneously confirming the attractiveness of the Euro-Atlantic security orders, as exemplified by the Finnish and Swedish bids for NATO membership (Alberque and Schreer, 2022). It is these changes that served as a starting point for this chapter as an endeavour to address new trends and developments emerging in this specific and highly volatile part of Europe.



QR-code to the website <https://www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu/>

Three Pillars of the Baltic Sea Regionalism

The post-Cold-War agenda in this part of Europe could not secure a uniform model of regional integration based on a combination of liberal and post-modernist conceptualisations of political space. Instead, the BSR moved in the direction of a multi-order and multi-layer spatial entity (Flockhart, 2016). Each of these orders has behind it a certain logic, rationale, and policy agenda, and in this sense resemble fields in Pierre Bourdieu's theorisation of spatial differentiation. Three of these regional fields are fundamental for the future of the BSR: good governance, energy transportation, and security (Makarychev, 2020).

In the field of good governance through de-bordered regional networking, the focal point is a "soft space of planning" which facilitates "join-up" projects of diffusion and policy transfer practices (Metzger and Schmitt, 2012) in such spheres as environmental protection, biodiversity, transportation routes, and tourism. The nodal points in this field are EU-funded projects dealing with spatial planning, clean and efficient shipping, maritime safety, renewable energy, human welfare, educational and learning activities, and digitalisation. The impact of Europeanisation also progressively diluted the dimension of statehood in the BSR within the framework of post-sovereign European structures and supranationalism. In many instances and specific policy areas the rules of supranational decision-making have guaranteed a louder and stronger voice to small member states, while their growing centrality both within the European and transatlantic structures has propelled their priorities and key interests more broadly.

Within the order of liberal governance, certain biopolitical motives and incentives are strongly featured, including protection of biodiversity, development of bioeconomy, food production activities, biofuel production and a plethora of environmental initiatives (clean water, sanitation, clean energy, sustainable agricultural systems, 'silver', 'circular', 'blue' and 'green' economies, climate action, etc.). Despite the distinctions in their practices of tackling the Covid-19 pandemic, the Baltic countries have



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revealed a fair degree of interactive coordination of their policies when it comes to border closure and its step-by-step opening. This combination of policy coordination with policy distinctions seems to be typical for the situation within the EU as a whole during and after the pandemic. The sense of Brussels' inaction at the beginning of the crisis has pushed neighbouring countries to look for bilateral solutions in border management and information sharing to prevent the virus from spreading. Yet in the meantime, a lack of due coordination of member states' domestic and foreign policies, including those related to the functioning of the Schengen zone, has contributed to a broad diversification of these policies. Under these conditions policy coordination became feasible either on a country-to-country basis, with some degree of reciprocity, or within a small group of countries (for example Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have a long record of developing joint policies in many areas). Arguably, regionalism – as exemplified, for instance, by the Council of Baltic Sea States – fell as a victim of COVID-19, failing to produce meaningful anti-crisis policies at the regional level.

In the energy transportation field, the main actors are Russia and Germany who play the geopolitical role of both insiders and outsiders in the region, being motivated by pragmatic considerations rather than common European values (Rettmann, 2018). The 'special' Russian-German relations (Timmins, 2011) were always creating disagreements among regional states, and – what is more consequential – infused a strong sense of the logic of great power management into the fabric of the Baltic space-in-the-making. In spite of a rhetoric of 'pan-European energy security', the Nord Stream project was divisive and left in opposition a group of EU members (Poland, Sweden and the Baltic states) that tended to accuse Germany of acting unilaterally rather than in a concerted manner (Lang, 2016). The debate around the Nord Stream pipeline clearly points to the very core of Berlin's Baltic policies: "The pressure the federal government faced from economy representatives, but above all from states like Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Brandenburg, seemed to be more important than the security interests of countries like Sweden, Poland, or the Baltic states" (Meister, 2019).

In the security field the main actors are NATO and Russia (Hoffmann, 2017). The core point in the debate is NATO's unpreparedness to deter a probable Russian military incursion against Baltic states, and a concomitant perspective of a defeat (Bond and Shlapak, 2017). NATO's perceived inability to protect the Baltics against a Russian attack was stated by the commander of US ground forces in Europe, General Ben Hodges (Zeeler and Delany, 2016), and the retired U.S. Navy Capt. Chuck Nash (Corombos, 2016). Russia's provocative actions and NATO's buildup in the BSR may lead to confrontations, the Supreme Commander of the Swedish Armed Forces General Micael Bydén has warned, followed by the former British general Alexander Richard Shirreff (MacAskill, 2016). The scepticism towards the prospects of deterring Russia in the BSR has amounted to assuming irrelevance of efforts to provide security at regional level (Veebel, 2018). Overall, European integration, along with transatlantic structures, imply a strong component related to security, understood in a wider and holistic framework. In both cases of NATO and the EU, centrality itself represented the main source of security for the BSR. The overall understanding both from the Baltic States and from the potential adversaries of the region, being included in a network of alliances and intertwined structures of joint power and collective governance represent the strongest source of security and - by reflection - of deterrence against potential adversaries' assertive temptations. In this sense, with EU and NATO membership, most of the BSR appears to have overcome the key limit of Baltic security experienced in the inter-war period: i.e. isolation. 'Never alone' has become a key theme of individual and collective foreign and security policy in the region.

Russia as a Security Challenger

The major challenging factor for the BSR as a part of the Euro-Atlantic international order is Russia's drastically dissimilar attitudes to regionalism: for the Kremlin, small neighbouring countries (e.g., the Baltic states) are perceived as troublemakers who play a disproportionate role in international affairs. This negative attitude implied de facto a denial of their unconditional sovereignty and was justified by civilisational or cultural arguments.

The Kremlin's traditional narrative depicts the Baltic states' foreign policy perspective (and actions within the European and transatlantic structures) as 'immature' and 'Russophobic', unable to undertake the pragmatic 'necessary' steps to reduce deeply rooted tensions and historical path dependency. Moscow's narrative was traditionally grounded in the 'divide-and-rule' approach towards the EU and NATO. A number of (especially) Western European member states have not been immune to this narrative, sometimes portraying the Baltic states as obsessed about Russia and hawkish in relations with Moscow. This convergence of misperceptions has often undermined the Baltic states' capacity to successfully affect Brussels' Russia policy and contributed to widening the gap between 'old' and 'new Europe'.

Additionally, such a 'divide and rule' approach and the existing differences among the EU member states when it comes to the EU's Russia policy have undermined its consistency and the EU's capacity to over time play a consistent and unitary game. This policy emerged as a hybrid blend of supranational aspirations and domestic and particular interests clashing, competing, and overlapping not always coherently. Additionally, what ultimately undermined the overall consolidation of effective spaces of co-operation between Brussels and Moscow was the growing uneasiness and incompatibility between the two actors that increasingly took the shape of a clash of interests as much as of values. This basically meant that the two actors spoke two fundamentally different languages, with the BSR increasingly emerging as the fault line between liberal values and illiberalism.

Issues that Moscow has traditionally instrumentally used to weaponise the relations with the Baltic states include the rights of the Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia and Lithuania and the status of the Russian language in those countries, the memory of World War Two and the understanding of the Soviet occupation and its consequences - radically different in Moscow and in the Baltic states, and the lack of agreed border treaties between Russia and its Baltic neighbours.

”The Kremlin’s traditional narrative depicts the Baltic states’ foreign policy perspective (and actions within the European and transatlantic structures) as ‘immature’ and ‘Russophobic’, unable to undertake the pragmatic ‘necessary’ steps to reduce deeply rooted tensions and historical path dependency.”

Such issues develop and grow within the framework of Moscow's post-imperial understanding of the 'Pribaltika' region. Such a post-colonial perspective marks a clear difference between Russia's attitude with the Baltic states and with Finland or Sweden.

An interesting example in this respect is provided by Estonia's recent membership of the United Nations Security Council. Confronted with Estonia's pragmatic diplomacy implying the de-ideologisation of non-geopolitical issues and the wide use of people-to-people contacts, Moscow could have hypothetically profited from it, especially given its growing international isolation. By making good use - at an international stage - of Tallinn's potential for engagement, Moscow could hope to crack the traditional wall of diffidence and mistrust with its western neighbours and rebuild its international reputation in the West. Russia could therefore portray Estonia's openness to engagement in a number of bilateral issues as a good diplomatic practice that conveniently contrasts with the more intransigent and uncompromised approach of other Baltic and Central and Eastern European governments. This approach would be especially significant from Moscow's perspective since Estonia was a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. Instead, Russia has consciously chosen to disregard this and to reproduce its traditional neo-colonial tones towards Estonia and its foreign policy without attaching any value to Tallinn's symbolic and substantial steps. Overall the message is clear: according to Moscow's imperial perspective, no pragmatic middle ground is allowed between all-accepting vassals and unrepented foes.

Scenarios implying an open preparation for a war are openly discussed in Western (Goble, 2016) and Russian (Kiseliov, 2016) media, exacerbated by provocative publications in Russia calling for a pre-emptive annexation of the "Baltic limitrophes" (Ischenko, 2016). In the aftermath of the BBC film *WWIII: Inside the War Room* some Russian analysts mentioned that the predominantly Russophone residents of Latgale – a Latvian region that, according to the BBC plot, might trigger a nuclear war between Russia and NATO – "wish to see Latvian-Russian

border similar to the border between Finland and Russia, but these expectations are rebuffed by the official Riga" (Ranks, 2016).

Regionalism in Times of War: the Ukraine Connection

How has Russia's aggression against Ukraine changed the BSR? First, the Baltic states became the frontrunners in lobbying for a tougher policy of containment and deterrence towards Russia. After 2014, they had a moral right to say: we told you so years ago, we were right in assessing Russian intentions as dangerous, and this is not because of our phobias or a specific post-Soviet trauma, but because we know Russia better and can look at it in a soberer way, without illusions and wishful thinking. The message is basically addressed to Germany, a country with strong historical and cultural connections to the Baltic states, but whose image in the Baltic states is deteriorating because of slow and indecisive reaction to what the Baltic states consider the core security issue – Russian aggression against Ukraine, with all possible reverberations for the BSR itself (Schmelter, 2023).

For the Baltic states, engagement with Russia is not on the agenda anymore. Cross-border interaction is stalled and largely discontinued, people-to-people contacts drastically diminished, trade flows reduced to the minimum. As a sign of the growing isolation of Russia, Moscow has withdrawn from the Council of Baltic Sea States, the major regional organisation.

Additionally, the events that followed Russia's unprovoked attack of February 24 have determined an incredibly high degree of coordination among the Western allies, never witnessed before. In particular, the tight coordination between the United States and the EU and between the EU and NATO has been one of the key factors behind the effectiveness of the Western response against Russian aggression. As part of the new activism of NATO and the Western allies and of the emerging geo-political perspective of the EU, we have been witnessing a new centrality for the BSR and of the Baltic states as agenda setters.

Traditionally, seen in Brussels as peripheral or non-mainstream in policy areas such as security, defence, and foreign affairs, the Baltic states have demonstrated a renewed capacity to contribute very effectively to set the agenda of both NATO and the EU in this new geo-political reality.

The new geo-political reality determined by Russia's war against Ukraine has determined a tectonic shift and has moved Baltic and Estonia's position from the margins to the centre of the debate and of the decision-making and agenda setting process in times of emergency. This, practically, has also implied a more visible presence of NATO's forward presence in the region and might, in the near future, determine an end to the taboo of the alliance's permanent presence beyond the German border with stable allied troops and weapon systems in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

Second, the most important change concerns a re-orientation of Sweden and Finland from neutrality towards an application for NATO membership. In particular, Estonia was always pushing Finland, its kin country, to this option, but it was only the mass scale Russian invasion in Ukraine that convinced Helsinki to take practical steps. Swedish and Finnish membership is militarily important because any redeployment of Russian military infrastructure to the northern borders is a relief for the Ukrainian army that fights the invasion on its soil.

Paradoxically, Russia's unprovoked war against Ukraine has made possible two of Putin's biggest fears: NATO enlargement along Russia's Western border and a more stable presence of allied troops and armaments along the same border. Additionally, one of Moscow's biggest perceived security threats since Peter the Great - the closure of the Baltic Sea - is coming into being, as a consequence of the war. With the exception of Saint Petersburg and Kaliningrad, the Baltic Sea is now de-facto a NATO's mare nostrum and Moscow's maritime isolation and capacity to trade via the seas is dramatically undermined by the regime of international sanction experienced by its vessels.

Third, Russian speakers in Estonia and Latvia became a significant issue again. Many of them implicitly or explicitly justify the aggression, but this is not an overwhelming supported position: thus, in in Spring 2022, Latvia only around 20 per cent were sympathetic with Putin's war against Ukraine, about 25 per cent were against, and the rest appeared undecided (LSM, 2022). This means that Russophone communities in the Baltic states are redefining their attitudes to the idea of the Russian world. The war can enhance and intensify their distancing from Russia and a feeling of confusion due to Russian war crimes and atrocities. Their desire to be protected by Russia is gradually dropping (LSM, 2022). To this it should be added that a growing borderisation of the EU's eastern frontier is taking place as a result of Russia's war against Ukraine. And to this end, the BSR appears increasingly key both geographically and politically (Szacawa and Musiał, 2022).

Following the ban of Russian flights to the EU and vice-versa, all the EU member states bordering Russia - Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Finland - have stopped issuing visas to Russian citizens or very severely reduced their number. Moreover, the Baltic states - together with Poland and other Central and Eastern European member states - have promoted at the EU-level a debate to adopt a coordinated approach within the Schengen Area aimed at reducing Russia's access to the EU. As the months passed, we have witnessed a growing centrality of the BSR and its member states in EU decision-making, where the pendulum has decisively shifted eastwards. Additionally, the very dimension of Europe's Normative Power has been re-interpreted, re-defined, and - ultimately - re-shaped in the light of the dimensions and (geo-)political priorities discussed above. In this sense, access for Russian citizens to the EU and the growing internalisation from Brussels' side of Baltic demands provides a good example of Baltic Europeanisation.

Conclusions

This overview and contextualisation of Russia's role in the BSR through the prism of regionalism highlights how the development of loose structures of regional co-operation in a complex liminal context does not guarantee by itself the emergence, diffusion, and consolidation of a positive spill-over in terms of integration. The diffusion of institutional (inter-governmental) fora - if not accompanied by diffusion of 'shared values' - is inexorably challenged once interests diverge. As highlighted in our discussion looking at the challenge posed by Russia in the context of the BSR, when geopolitics takes precedence over loosely defined objectives and only superficially agreed common interests, the instrumentality of spaces of regional co-operation as vectors of shared security and insured co-operation is revealed.

This analysis is instrumental in a better understanding of how the Baltic Sea Regionalism is connected to Euro-Atlantic security. This is a particularly sharp question in light of Russia's aggression against Ukraine that is perceived in the Baltic states as a major encroachment against the liberal international order of which NATO and the European Union are major institutional pillars. With prospective NATO membership applied for by Sweden and Finland, the Baltic Sea area has become more secured from a military perspective, which strengthens solidarity and interconnections between Russia's western neighbours.

From this perspective, Russia emerges not simply as a dividing factor and potentially disruptive actor in the BSR, but - increasingly and, especially, after February 2022 - as an external and foreign entity in the context of a highly integrated and political, economically, and militarily interconnected region. While the Baltic Sea appears more and more to be a 'Western liberal lake' both in terms of values and of structures of governance, today's Russia emerges more and more as an unfitting and aggressive island of illiberalism and post-imperial revanchism.

”While the Baltic Sea appears more and more to be a ‘Western liberal lake’ both in terms of values and of structures of governance, today’s Russia emerges more and more as an unfitting and aggressive island of illiberalism and post-imperial revanchism.”

Such a misfit in a relatively small geographical and geopolitical space and the difficulty to contain it meaningfully and 'Europeanise' it through normative power, poses a very real challenge to the structures of European and Euro-Atlantic regional integration in the BSR. In the context of the war in Ukraine, as discussed in this chapter, this substantiates into a potentially fundamental threat to the three main pillars of such construction: good governance, energy, and security. While such a threat has been made evident by Russia's war against Ukraine, it appears deeply rooted in Moscow's more than two decade-long rejection of liberal values and embracing of autocratising illiberalism which implies a revanchist expansionist attitude towards an ill-tolerated neighbourhood and an almost religious cult of uncontained sovereignty in a rather supranational regional context.

Whether this misfit will increase or reduce is very much dependent on the outcome of Russia's aggression against Ukraine and on both its domestic consequences for Putin's regime and the unity of the liberal-democratic front. This, ultimately, will also affect patterns of convergence or divergence in the wider Baltic Sea Region for the decade to come with broader repercussions at the continental level.

Questions for a discussion

1. How would you characterise the process of regionalisation of the BSR before and after February 2022?
2. What are the pre-conditions for the potential re-integration of Russia in the process of regional cooperation in the BSR?
3. How has the centrality or peripherality of the BSR changed in the light of the war in Ukraine?

Recommended reading



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Chapter 5

Development of the Baltic Interstate and Non-Governmental Institutions and Their Role in the Building of Regional Consciousness

by Anna Taranenko

Introduction

The main aims of the chapter are to discuss international organisations in world politics, regional co-operation in Europe, the development of the Baltic interstate and non-governmental institutions, and their role in the building of regional consciousness. The main problematic issues are such aspects as interstate relations in the Baltic Sea Region in regards to enhancing interstate and non-governmental co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region, civil society potential for regional consciousness building, regional identity projects, civic activism, culture diplomacy, youth projects, digitisation, civil society potential and regional integration.

Regional Organisations in Europe: Baltic Perspective

Regional organisations are an important subset of international organisations. They aim to help address regional issues pertinent to a particular group of subjects and entities. Important domains thereby are economic, ecological, social, cultural, and civic. International organisations have traditionally been very active in Europe due to strong civil society traditions in the region. In particular, the Council of Europe (CoE) is one of the most renowned regional organisations with broad membership encompassing 47 member states. It has a special structure within its framework, the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) for organisations with participatory status with the CoE. One of the main current challenges of CoE is to strengthen civil society and develop participatory democracy on a pan-European basis (Council of Europe, 2021).

Regional Diversity

While looking further at the Baltic Sea Region of Europe, it is worthwhile to note that it is comprised of a number of subregions influencing the area's specific features. While defining a region, one considers not only geographic proximity but also economic, political, and cultural connections. The region is comprised of countries with various cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds, a history of governance, and types of political regimes.

“While defining a region, one considers not only geographic proximity but also economic, political, and cultural connections.”

Thereby one needs to consider that there are various theoretical approaches to Baltic regional studies, as outlined in Chapter 1 Lars Rydén (in Maciejewski, 2002) holds that the Baltic Sea drainage basin includes wholly or partly the territory of 14 countries altogether with some 85 million inhabitants. According to the Baltic Development Forum (2018) approach, the region consists of 11 nations and over 100 million dwellers. Per EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) (2021), this area includes 12 countries and about 85 million residents. For this publication, it is suggested to follow the definition of Rydén (in Maciejewski, 2002) including 14 countries. One can distinguish such partly overlapping subregions or clusters within the Baltic region, as Nordic and Eastern European. Usually, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Iceland are considered Nordic countries. Important subregional organisations in this regard are the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers. It is worthwhile noting that Nordic countries have been at the core of regional co-operation growth in the Baltic Sea area. The Baltic States are Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. These three countries are characterised by strong cultural, economic, and political ties. After the USSR's disintegration, these three Baltic states gravitated to the North European vector of Baltic co-operation. In particular, Sleivyte (2008) notes that the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), since gaining their independence in the 1990s, have been rethinking their place on the regional and global levels. The subregion of Eastern European states includes Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, and the western part of the Russian Federation.

On the political level, one can distinguish the so-called Western and post-Soviet states in the region, depending on the start of their Baltic integration, in particular, within the framework of the European Union. The region consists of a founding member of the European Union, fairly new EU members and non-member states. Sweden, Finland, Germany, Denmark, and Norway are characterised as states with strong traditions of Western democracy and well-developed democratic institutions. These countries are EU members, except for Norway.

Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovak Republic started their integration into Western European structures in the 1980-1990s after breaking away from the Soviet sphere of influence, just like Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania did prior to disintegration of the USSR. There is a growing co-operation between the Baltic (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), Nordic and Eastern European states within the region. Skilling (2018) holds that there has been strong income convergence of the Baltic States and Poland, accompanied by a continuing strong performance by the Nordic economies. This level of co-operation is impressive in comparison, for example, with other subregions of the European Union. Economic and social collaboration gradually leads to joint political projects, and such co-operation brings the countries of the area closer in institutional terms step by step.

The situation in such Eastern European post-Soviet states, as Ukraine, Belarus and Russia is currently unstable. Since the start of the unprovoked Russian aggression in February 2022, Ukraine has been fighting for its sovereignty and democratic values, whilst in the Russian Federation, democracy development is further declining and authoritarian traditions are prevailing. The deterioration of democratic institutions is also noted in Belarus. In particular, the results of Presidential elections 2020 were not recognised by the EU states and the majority of European states. Thus, the countries of the region have various political regimes – from well-developed Western democracy to authoritarian rule.

Growing Regional Co-operation. Ecological Development as a Core of Regional Co-operation

The Baltic region countries have been engaged in various co-operation projects throughout centuries. Karlsson (2004) notes that the peoples of the Baltic Sea Region have a long and changing history of transnational relations (Risse-Kappen, 1995a: 3, as cited in Karlsson, 2004). Therefore, regional co-operation has become a considerable factor of economic and social growth.

Tomenendal and Raffer (2017) hold that regional agglomerations of related organisations and businesses are supposed to have positive effects on the regional economy in terms of growth and innovation. The principles of co-operation are based on common development strategies on governmental, regional and local levels, involving participation of think tanks, infrastructure projects and businesses (Palmowski, 2021).

Interstate relations in the Baltic region are characterised by sufficiently high level of co-operation. Palmowski (2021) notes that the sea and inland hinterland of Baltic Europe form a unique macro-regional unit. Close co-operation ties, high level of mutual trust stemming from neighbourhood relations and similar cultural values contribute to the region's economic convergence, emergence of joint business and social projects.

The Baltic region is characterised by a diversity and complexity of subregional relations in the framework of other European organisations. Thereby the dimensions of co-operation are, first of all, socioeconomic and cultural rather than political and security ones. Moreover, ecological development and environment protection have been at the core of regional co-operation in the Baltic area. The idea behind such co-operation is that an insufficient number of mutual initiatives may result in a lack of co-operation among people of the Baltic region countries, which will affect such sectors as health, security and ecology (Environmental Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region (2018). A significant progress was noted in the Baltic Sea Region from 1990 to 2014 with regard to environmental co-operation advancement (Environmental Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region (2018).

Despite certain economic and geopolitical challenges affecting co-operation among the Baltic Sea countries, it is advisable to continue developing projects of common social interest, such as environment protection, marine safety, ecology research and fighting pollution, which can potentially bridge ideological gaps between governments.

”Moreover, ecological development and environment protection have been at the core of regional cooperation in the Baltic area.”

”A significant progress was noted in the Baltic Sea Region from 1990 to 2014 with regard to environmental co-operation advancement.”

Co-operation with the EU

The Baltic region countries have a long and dynamic history of economic and diplomatic connections. Strong collaboration and competition relations are an inherent attribute of the region from the beginning of its civilisation formation (Palmowski, 2021). One of the most important regional organisations related to the Baltic Sea area is the European Union. The EU attaches great importance to the development of the Baltic region within the general European framework. The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is aimed at establishing co-operation between EU institutions, national government, Baltic area organisations and civil society networks in order to promote funding opportunities, streamline community project development and thus contribute to the prosperity of the Baltic Sea Region.

Co-operation prospects in the Baltic Sea Region appear to be impressive. Since 2004, the Baltic Sea has become an internal sea of the EU, and it has enhanced co-operation of the countries in the area (Palmowski, 2021). At the same time, it should be noted that there are certain specific features pertinent to European co-operation in this regard. For instance, Sweden and Denmark from the Nordic subregion are EU members, however they are not in Eurozone. Norway is not an EU member state, yet it signed the Schengen Agreement. Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation from the broadly defined Baltic region are not EU members. Various dimensions of relations with the EU contribute to the region's diversity and provide opportunities for further growth. In 2009 the Baltic Sea Region collaboration framework was further enhanced with the start of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, which potentially can bring the region to leadership positions on the international arena (Baltic Development Forum, 2018).

Besides, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region encompasses a number of ecological and social projects, such as clean water, protected marine wildlife, safety of transportation, effective energy and communities' well-being in the area.

”Besides, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region encompasses a number of ecological and social projects, such as clean water, protected marine wildlife, safety of transportation, effective energy and communities' well-being in the area.”

Touching upon the geopolitical perspective, it was expected to involve the Russian partners to a greater extent in the Strategy implementation and, in general, contribute to international collaboration in the Baltic region. To this end, non-EU members Iceland, Norway, Russia and Belarus were welcomed to co-operate on areas of common regional interests. For instance, one can mention the initiative the Northern Dimension (ND).

This unites the EU, the Russian Federation, Norway and Iceland since 1999. Yet, the further deterioration of democracy standards in Russia and Belarus, in particular, the Russian aggression against Ukraine make co-operation with these countries particularly problematic. Overall, as to the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region implementation, according to the European Commission report, the key result is that it gathered stakeholders from different states, spheres and levels (EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, 2021). Further results include the improvement of water quality, business development stimulation and educational projects' growth, for instance, the Baltic Training Programme (EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, 2021). The EU-funded Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme is aimed at supporting innovative and climate-neutral initiatives in the Baltic Sea area (About Interreg Baltic Sea Region). Among ecological co-operation initiatives between EU- and non-EU states one can note the first loan provided from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to Vodokanal St. Petersburg (Russia) for the restoration of wastewater treatment plants, as the construction of a wastewater treatment plant in Kaliningrad in 2017 (Environmental Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region (2018).

At the same time, the generally quick co-operation growth pace has been challenged by certain setbacks such as differences in the level of economic development between the long-standing and new EU members, differences in approaches of political elites and national protectionism trends. Besides, regarding future forecasts, one can note a changing labour landscape related to technological advancements and a wide usage of automation and artificial intelligence projects that affect labour and trade markets.

”The further deterioration of democracy standards in Russia and Belarus, in particular, the Russian aggression against Ukraine make co-operation with these countries particularly problematic.”

Skilling (2018) notes that the Baltic State region growth is facing a series of risks – from protectionism, to a weaponisation of international commerce, to geopolitical risk. In a similar vein, Druzhinin and Prokopyev (2018) note that the difference between the eastern and western countries of the area remains considerable, based on a study on how the EU-inspired common economic space impacted the economies of the Baltic States during 1995-2015. Among positive co-operation trends in the area Skilling (2018) notes the eight country-strong statement on Eurozone reform – signed by six of the Baltic states. It is further recommended to strengthen integration within the region, while at the same time deepening connections between Europe and Asia (including the Arctic Route project) (Skilling, 2018). Thus, the Baltic states and subregions demonstrate significant capacity for further interstate co-operation supported by the EU.

Gradual Shaping Up of Regional Identity

Regional consciousness and identity building are important concepts for European politics. Regional identity is a kind of spatial identity on a certain scale defined as the meso-level, located between the national and local levels (Pohl, 2001). Thereby there are two conflicting approaches to defining regional identity – one is focused on a topographical view of culture and politics, while the other is focused not on territorially bounded regions, but on networks stretched through and beyond regions (Tomaney, 2020). Thereby regionalism is seen as being founded on ancient or ethnocultural understandings (Tomaney, 2020). Regions are particularly important in the EU where both the Union shaping up and the 'Europe of regions' are specific manifestations of the re-considering of state spaces and assignment of new meanings to territory (Paasi, 2009). Also, regional identity has been determined in the EU's cohesion policy as a vital element for regional development (Paasi, 2009).

The concept of regional identity shaping up in the Baltic Sea area is a subject of further discussion. Processes of region building and identity formation in the Baltic Sea are closely connected (Schäfer, 2005).

Policy-makers who construct the identity of the Baltic Sea Region through their discourses also construct the region as a whole, thereby the identity of the region is determined as the sum of characteristics that define its individuality (Schäfer, 2005). The most prominent characteristics of the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) are its post-modern qualities, symbolised by the metaphor of Olympic rings Europe, its inclusiveness and its overlapping networks (Schäfer, 2005). Other characteristics are defined as a common history, Europeaness and economic success (Schäfer, 2005). Thereby each of the three aforementioned characteristics can be a dividing factor between the BSR countries and Russia due to historical perceptions and economic conditions (Schäfer, 2005).

The Baltic region has been demonstrating an impressive economic and political growth over the past decades. Balsiger and VanDeveer (2018) state that regional agreements increasingly point to some sort of ecoterritoriality, state actors are increasingly complemented by nonstate or substate actors, and the scope shifts beyond purely environmental issues to encompass broader notions of sustainable development. Sologub (2015) arrives at a conclusion that the region construction process is being continued, and it involves a wide range of actors: NGOs, local and regional authorities, scientific organisations, higher education institutions, business structures and international organisations. It can be underscored that regional perspective is vital for boosting intergovernmental co-operation in the entire Baltic area. Co-operation among various types of stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Region is being promoted, and it is highly important to focus on aspects that unite the countries of the area and promote a synergistic effect of its development and further growth.

Efforts are being made to enhance political co-operation in the region. Among concerning trends one can note rise of right-wing populism and nationalism in the Baltic region states. Similar trends can be traced not only in post-Soviet countries of the region, but also in well-developed Western democracies.

Danielson et al. (2018) note that anti-EU-scepticism has led to democratic backsliding in Poland, Germany, the Nordic and Baltic countries. The authors discuss the concept of 'Europe of different speeds' and its different interpretations by various member states and subregions of the EU. According to the authors' viewpoint, the Russian Federation has been conducting an unfriendly policy, ignoring international duties and demonstrating a lack of progress in economic development (Danielson et al., 2018). Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 aggravated political and security context of the region.

The potential of further interstate co-operation is being actively explored. Vasilieva and Kosov (2017), particularly, suggest turning to legacy of Hanseatic traditions and studying its value for current Baltic region development. The authors note that recent economic and trade co-operation in the region has been complicated by geopolitical confrontations between Russia and Western counterparts (Vasilieva and Kosov, 2017). One of the key solutions to the problem can be using the potential of information society and innovative growth (Vasilieva and Kosov, 2017). Khoma and Kokoriev (2021) analyse the relation between democracy and the principle of tolerance in the Baltic countries and the authors arrive at a conclusion that the countries encounter similar challenges of enhancing the principle of tolerance and countering intolerance. Vorotnikov (2017) studied the relations of the Scandinavian-Baltic region states (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden) and Ukraine in political and economic sectors. Divergent stances regarding the Russia-Ukraine war continue being the most important stumbling block in the relations between Russia and the states of the area (Vorotnikov, 2017). Overall, current events in Ukraine and Belarus challenged the political status quo of the region. It is necessary to continue furthering diplomatic efforts in order to promote political stability in the area.

Regional initiatives are very important for building confidence and mutual trust. These initiatives can bring closer various subregions of the Baltic Sea area such as Nordic, Baltic and Eastern European closer together.

In particular, regional identity shaping up is one of priority areas listed by the Council of the Baltic Sea States (Council of the Baltic Sea States, 2021), while policy areas of Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation include cohesion policy, culture and regional identity (Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation, 2021). Perhaps, it can be a bit premature to talk about a fully shaped Baltic regional identity, however co-operation is ongoing and keeps growing vibrantly.

Interstate Institutions in the Baltic Sea Region: Specific Features and Cases

Among important interstate organisations of the region one can note associations dealing at parliamentary, executive and municipal levels. There are organisations focusing on environmental, cultural and social issues of common regional interests. Some of the specific features of interstate bodies' co-operation are as follows, soft model of institutionalisation, growing parliamentary and intergovernmental co-operation, growing co-operation at municipal and sub-regional levels as well as a focus on a range of social and economic issues.

It should be noted that the most prominent interstate Baltic regional organisations are referred to as 'co-operation', 'political forum', 'political network', 'platform' etc. For instance, the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) is defined as an "intergovernmental political forum", Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea (VASAB) as "intergovernmental multilateral co-operation", Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation (BSSSC) as "political network", the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference as "forum for political dialogue", Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM) as "regional platform for environmental policy making", Union of Baltic Cities (UBC) as "leading network of cities". These definitions testify to a soft model of institutionalisation focusing on economic and social rather than political and security ones. As noted, political union represents the most advanced form of international integration (Levels of Economic Integration) with respective "hard power" mechanisms, whereas "soft

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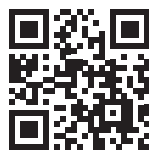
planning” practices are defined as reaching beyond administrative borders and seeking synergies between actors across territorial boundaries through informal or semi-formal governance networks (Faludi, 2013; Stead, 2014; Purkarthofer, 2016, as cited in Mattila and Heinilä, 2022). The concept of soft, informal and networked planning and governance originally emerged in the 1990s – based largely on Habermas’s theory of communicative rationality – and provided a normative model for restoring the legitimacy of new planning and governance practices (Mattila and Heinilä, 2022).

Even in the broader framework of the European Union, the concept of ‘soft-core’ Europe is currently being discussed. A soft-core EU is made up of the overlapping participation of different clusters of member-states in the EU’s many policy communities – all administered by a single set of EU institutions, all with voice across communities but with a vote only in those areas in which they participate (Schmidt, 2019). Current debates over the future of Europe divide based around what kind of differentiation would work best: multi-speed, hard core or what is named a soft-core Europe (Schmidt, 2019). The Baltic region states currently have different economic, social and political characteristics, therefore they are rather focusing on initial steps of institutionalisation.

One should note a significant growth in parliamentary and intergovernmental co-operation among representatives of legislative and executive bodies of the Baltic region states. There is co-operation amongst relevant ministries from the Baltic Sea countries. There are initiatives which connect parliamentarians, decentralised authorities, ministries dealing with spatial and infrastructural development, as well as national heritage protection in the Baltic Sea area.

There is ongoing collaboration at the municipal level between Baltic area cities. The Union of Baltic Cities (UBC) is an organisation which represents a network of cities from the Baltic Sea area. In the 2020 Overview Local Government in the Nordic and Baltic Countries, five out of eight countries have had significant

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consolidation at the municipal level in recent years (SKL International, 2021). And the BSSSC consists of regional authorities from the Baltic Sea littoral states - Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Germany, Poland, Lithuania and Norway (Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation, 2021).

Collaboration in the Baltic Sea Region is developing on a range of social, ecological and economic aspects. CBSS aims to address issues related to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Climate Agreement, Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, the Palermo Protocol and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and translate them into regional actions on the ground (Council of the Baltic Sea States, 2021). HELCOM is aimed at enhancing co-operation in the ecological sector among Baltic Sea states. The Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation (BSSSC) is focused on aspects such as maritime policy, energy and climate, transport and infrastructure, as well as culture and regional identity (Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council, 2021).

One of the most renowned organisations which played a leading role regarding integration in the Baltic Sea Region is the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS). The CBSS organises at the intergovernmental level in order to enhance co-operation in the region. The CBSS was founded in 1992 when the system of international relations cardinally changed after the disintegration of the USSR. One of the organisation’s goals was to establish co-operation ties among various countries pertinent within the Baltic Sea area and provide a smooth transition to a new international order. The CBSS is the leading organisation regards to the environmental protection dimension. The first Baltic Sea States Summit took place in 1996 in Sweden, and the Agenda 21 initiative announced there was set up by the Ministers of Environment (Council of the Baltic Sea States, 2021). The organisation remains highly relevant in the 21st c. and today its focus is on social policies, sustainable development, research and human rights.

The organisation enjoys the EU support. The CBSS consists of 11 member states (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Sweden), as well as the EU Commission. Russia's participation was suspended due to its illegal war against Ukraine. The Council's work is centred on three priorities: regional identity, prosperous region; and security (Council of the Baltic Sea States, 2021). These three goals guide the organisation's development in the 21st c. The Prosperous Region goal includes projects aimed at strengthening economic development initiatives in the member states which are oriented towards the growth and well-being of communities. The Safe and Secure Region goal involves a peaceful development of the region and the protection of the population from risks and emergencies. The Regional Identity dimension gives attention to culture, history and national heritage preservation of particular regions in order to celebrate diversity and jointly shape up the multifaceted Baltic regional identity.

Regarding the Security dimension, some of the important initiatives of the organisation are projects on anti-trafficking, child protection and civil security. Regarding the Prosperous Region dimension, the organisation's projects are aligned with the UN 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals. Thereby a special focus is placed on green energy development and relevant project implementation with the goal of protecting the environment and ensuring the well-being of communities. Priority areas in this regard are labour co-operation, science collaboration, sustainable development, climate dialogue and sustainable maritime economy (Council of the Baltic Sea States, 2021). As to the Regional Identity dimension, top priorities at the moment are culture, higher education and youth development and respective projects aimed at establishing long-term co-operation among various generation groups from member states, promoting tolerance, understanding and building trust. The organisation is active in the culture sector development. Two specialised structures, Ars Baltica and the Baltic Region Heritage Committee focus on cultural co-operation and regional heritage protection (Council of the Baltic Sea States, 2021).

The organisation makes considerable efforts to promote regional consciousness shaping up. In 2021-2022 Norway holds presidency of the Council.

The **Baltic Region Heritage Committee (BRHC)** was founded in 1998. The member states are Denmark, Sweden, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany and Norway. Russia was suspended from participation in BRHC work due to its unprovoked aggression against Ukraine. It consists of representatives responsible for cultural heritage protection and promotion in the respective member states. The members represent the national bodies in charge of cultural heritage preservation (Baltic Region Heritage Committee, 2021). The organisation is aimed at promoting cultural heritage preservation and its use as a vital resource for the Baltic region integration.

Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea (VASAB) is also related to the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) network. The organisation's participants are national representatives of relevant ministries and regional-level political leadership (VASAB, 2021). The BalticRIM project took place between 2018-2020, in co-operation with a range of other organisations, including BSSSC, VASAB, HELCOM and Finnish Divers' Association. The goal was to further heritage protection initiatives and efficient tourism development, in line with the EU Blue Growth initiative which is aimed at marine sector protection (Baltic Region Heritage Committee, 2021).

The **Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC)** was created in 1991. It consists of representatives of 11 national and regional parliaments of the Baltic Sea Region countries, as well as five parliamentary organisations. The member states are Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, and Sweden. Russia stopped its participation in BSPC activities in May 2022. The organisation helps to establish efficient connections between elective political bodies, executive authorities and civil society groups in the region. Besides, it serves as an important communication platform for parliaments of the EU and non-EU member states.



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The BSPC includes a range of other vibrant organisations in the Baltic Sea area, in particular, the CBSS, BSSSC, the Baltic Sea Labour Network (BSLN), HELCOM, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea States (The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, 2021). A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea States and the BSPC which is an important step of growing European co-operation. The BSPC promotes the common identity shaping up of the Baltic Sea Region (The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, 2021). The BSPC has working groups on topics such as climate change and biodiversity, migration and integration, sustainable tourism and civil security (The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, 2021).

The Nordic Council was created in 1952. It is one of the oldest organisations in the region. First of all, it is focused on interparliamentary co-operation. Its member countries are Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Greenland, Åland and the Faroe Islands. Activity areas of the organisation encompass legislation and justice, digitisation, projects for persons with special needs, environmental protection, social and youth projects, energy and sustainable development, gender equality, culture and language, education and research. Some of the current initiatives include Nordic Day 2022, COP26: Choosing Green, International Branding of the Nordic Region, the Nordic Gender Effect at Work, Nordic Food Policy Lab and the Competencies of the Future (The Nordic Council, 2022). In particular, the Nordic Council sees education and training as key competencies of the future and invests in efforts helping people to develop necessary respective skills to cope with the complex future challenges.

The Nordic Council of Ministers represents a structure for intergovernmental collaboration in the Nordic region. Its goal is to maximise the synergistic effects of individual contributions of the organisation's member states. The organisation's vision is that the Nordic region will turn into the most integrated and sustainable region globally by 2030 (The Nordic Council of Ministers, 2022).

Therefore, current Council efforts are directed towards achieving this goal.

The Union of Baltic Cities (UBC) was founded in 1991. The member cities are located in Denmark, Germany, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Poland. Russia's cities are not listed on the organisation website any more. And the Ukrainian city of Vilnyansk is included as an associated member city. The union's work is aimed at establishing fruitful co-operation between the member cities and further develop their growth. The organisation is focused on such sectors as social development, cultural heritage promotion, youth support, health protection, innovation and technology advancements. The UBC works actively on the implementation of regional strategies, in particular, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) (The Union of Baltic Cities, 2021).

The UBC implements a wide range of projects such as Baltic Sea Cultural Cities and Regions, Needs-based Education and Studies in Societal Security (NEEDS), UMBRELLA 2.0 (enhancing transnational co-operation), Baltic Sea Youth Platform (BSYP), ReSit - Situational Picture of Volunteerism for Societal Resilience and Sport for Values (The Union of Baltic Cities, 2021).

The main focus of the Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation (BSSSC) is collaboration between regional authorities of the Baltic states. BSSSC members are Sweden, Latvia, Norway, Finland, Germany, Estonia, Poland, Denmark and Lithuania. In addition, the organisation has close co-operation ties with the EU and seeks to coordinate national and European policy interests in the Baltic area (The Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation, 2021). The BSSSC featured the project by the European Youth Forum selecting Klaipda as European Youth Capital for 2021, which was the first time that a Nordic and Baltic city received such recognition (The Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation, 2021).

One more important organisation described in Chapter 1 is the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission – (Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) founded in 1974.

This organisation is specifically designated to deal with ecological issues. The organisation's members are Denmark, the EU, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Sweden and Russia. Co-operation among member states is very active at the ministerial level. The Contracting Parties are represented by Heads of Delegation (HOD) (Helsinki Commission, 2021). HELCOM manages such initiatives as Baltic Data Flows project, HELCOM BLUES (biodiversity and effective regional measures for the Baltic Sea), BSR WATER (continuous cross-sectoral co-operation and knowledge transfer in water management), Capacity4MSP platform (strengthening capacity of maritime spatial planning) (Helsinki Commission, 2021). HELCOM activities are aimed at safeguarding the Baltic Sea marine environment, in particular, one of the important recent programmes was the Baltic Sea Action Plan which is designed to restore good ecological conditions of the Baltic Sea environment by 2021 (Baltic Sea Organisations).

When looking at the Baltic Sea Region as a whole, especially close co-operation should be noted among the three states usually denoted as, namely, Baltic countries - Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The governments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania collaborate very fruitfully, in particular, under the framework of the **Baltic Council of Ministers (BCM)**. BCM was founded in 1994. The member states are Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. It became an important milestone for trilateral co-operation, in view of addressing post-Soviet development challenges and planning further European integration steps. The council is very active in the realm of culture sector development (architecture, performing arts, library, museum and information science, theatre and film production etc.). One should note vital projects such as Baltic Museology Summer School, International Folk Festival Baltica, Baltic Seminar of National Libraries and Baltic Film Days (Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021).

The **Baltic Assembly (BA)** was founded in 1991. The member states are Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. The organisation is aimed at promoting parliamentary co-operation among the three countries.



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The Baltic Assembly helps to establish co-operation among respective national parliaments and executive authorities and also advises on important political matters. Since 2011 the Baltic Innovation Prize has been awarded under the auspices of the organisation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2021; Baltic Assembly, 2021).

Thus, one can note considerable potential for collaboration and important enhancing co-operation among intergovernmental organisations in the Baltic Sea Region. There are certain challenges such as differences in levels of economic growth and divergent political stances of the Baltic countries on certain matters. Yet, overall, the interstate co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region appears to be fruitful and promising.

Non-governmental Institutions in the Baltic Sea Region: Specific Features and Cases

Non-governmental institutions play an important role in bringing people of the Baltic Sea Region closer. Some of the specific features of non-governmental co-operation are as follows, strong civil society potential for regional consciousness building, focus on science and technology projects; social, economic and labour protection projects; culture diplomacy, as well as education and youth initiatives. Non-governmental institutions' (NGI) activities include, among other, social, environmental, advocacy and human rights issues. They aim at promoting social or political change on a broad or local scale. NGI are critical for promoting citizen activities, developing conscious society and building communities. They are helpful in defining group identity based on different determinants, e.g. regional identity.

Baltic region countries have strong civil society traditions. Götz and Hackmann (2019) note the synergetic effects resulting from the collaboration of governments and voluntary associations, which increase the civic engagement for society, with regard to a hybrid theory approach.

The Baltic region consists of societies that have different experiences with their respective neighbours, including the exercise of power by occupational states, yet the political culture of committed individuals may be considered one of the main determining factors for inner constitution of citizenship which is at the core of civil society development (Götz & Hackmann 2019).

Civil society has a considerable potential for regional consciousness building in the region. The Baltic Sea Region offers exceptionally rich material for the discussion of civil society, because it experienced the demolition of communist regimes, welfare state crises, and the move from a centralist stance to the networks-oriented one (Götz & Hackmann, 2019). Thereby the civil society potential can be effectively used in order to balance out relations and establish a beneficial dialogue between political leadership and the countries' grass root communities.

Non-governmental co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region is developing dynamically. There are important economic, scientific and technological projects. In particular, the Baltic states are well-known for their innovative projects and considerable digitisation progress. The countries of the region welcome the growth of numerous startups that promote economic development, create jobs, improve business climate and contribute to the prosperity of the population. In particular, Estonia and Finland are famous for technological advances in digitisation and e-governance development sector, while Denmark is known for innovative social and community projects, for example, the cutting-edge Aarhus Public Library. Alongside such corporations as Nokia, Ericsson and Skype, the region has a multitude of small and medium firms that create jobs for the labour market and attract investment (Baltic Sea Region: A Global Digital Test Hub, 2017).

There is an ongoing dialogue between different stakeholders in the area focused on furthering vital technological and developmental projects. It is worthwhile mentioning the project Connecting Digital Start-up Ecosystems in Nordic Cities launched in 2017.

The idea was to select three cities in the region and establish connections among them in order to promote experience exchange regarding work with startup communities. The cities were Aarhus (Denmark), Gothenburg (Sweden) and Turku (Finland) and the project was supported by Baltic Development Forum. The main activity in the project was a workshop to discuss how these cities work with start-uppers and promote beneficial idea exchange (Connecting Digital Start-up Ecosystems in Nordic Cities, 2017). At the same time Wernberg and Andersson (2017) note that even though Baltic countries are tech leaders, none of them is leading in all automation sectors, which presents opportunities for learning from neighbouring countries. The digitisation and information technology sector is definitely one of the realms in which cross-sectoral co-operation among the Baltic region states can be especially fruitful. In this regard one can also note such an organisation as the Baltic Development Forum (BDF) which was set up as a research centre and communication hub for the Baltic area residents.

Civil society organisations lay the foundation for further mutually beneficial social and economic co-operation in the region. Co-operation among non-governmental organisations, especially cross-border projects serves as an important catalyst for deepening co-operation and building regional consciousness in the Baltic Sea area. Vasilieva and Kosov (2017) hold that Baltic cities are involved in co-operation projects encouraging the enhancement of interstate ties and the development of community networks. At the same time the process of interstate and intercultural exchanges is not always unproblematic. Particularly, there is an issue relating to high-skilled worker migration in the region. Kirch (2018) further explores the topic of European migration, per the study findings, high levels of migration of skilled workers had a negative impact on innovative potential in Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. In this regard one can mention such labour protection organisations as the Baltic Sea Labour Forum (BSLF), Baltic Sea Trade Union Network (BASTUN), Council of Nordic Trade Unions (NFS) and Baltic Sea Chambers of Commerce Association (BCCA).

There is a strong focus on cultural and public diplomacy, educational and environmental projects in the region. Co-operation in the education sector continues to grow. Vasilieva and Kosov (2017) note that an important case is the Baltic Universities Partnership which is aimed at promoting sustainability in the region. Murashova and Loginova (2017) look at the level of interest of Baltic Sea area researchers in interacting on scientific projects in University–industry sector. Universities and industries growing interest in common projects (Butcher & Jeffren, 2005, in Murashova & Loginova, 2017) has led to a significant increase in co-operation and the number of scientific publications has doubled in 2010–2014 (Murashova and Loginova, 2017). While enhancing further co-operation in the region, focus should be on developing networks among civil society groups, labour unions, educational institutions and cultural associations. In this context one can mention such initiatives and organisations as Nordic-Baltic Mobility Programme for Culture, Sweden-Lithuania Cooperation Fund, The Baltic University Programme (BUP), Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDPC) and Baltic Culture Fund.

The **Baltic Sea Labour Forum (BSLF)** was created in 2011 stemming from the Baltic Sea Labour Network (BSLN) activities, which testifies to the importance of community networks enhancement in the region. Member states are Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Finland, Latvia, Poland, and Lithuania. Russia is not included in the list of the organisation members any more. The main idea of the forum is to promote experience exchange among labour market participants in the Baltic area. The priorities are labour mobility, demographic challenges, lifelong learning, inclusivity and youth employment (Baltic Sea Labour Forum, 2021). For instance, BSLF implements the Baltic Sea Labour Forum for Sustainable Working Life (BSLF-SWL) project to improve work conditions and lifelong learning for an elderly labour force in order to promote active ageing and employability (Baltic Sea Labour Forum, 2021).

The **Baltic Sea Trade Union Network (BASTUN)** was founded in 1999.

Participant states are Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Germany, Poland and Norway. Russia is not included in the list of the organisation members any more. It consists of 11 million union members. BASTUN is an organisation for information and experience exchange among members of trade unions from the Baltic Sea Region, as well as for protecting their interests. BASTUN co-operates with CBSS and BSPP which testifies to effective intergovernmental and community co-operation in the area. The organisation aims at exerting political and societal impact, implements joint initiatives and places urgent Baltic region-related topics on the agenda of the trade union network (Baltic Sea Trade Union Network, 2021). BASTUN events were featured on the YouTube channel Nordisk TV (Baltic Sea Trade Union Network, 2021).

The Nordic subregion is an important neighbouring area for the Baltic region, therefore it is vital to mention organisations such as the **Council of Nordic Trade Unions (NFS)** whose main goal is to represent the interests of trade union members and promote co-operation among the unions of the Nordic countries. It was founded in 1972. The Council includes 15 organisations and thus represents over 8.5 million trade union members from such countries as Iceland, Finland, Sweden and Denmark (including Faroe Islands and Greenland). The Council promotes co-operation on areas of common interest via knowledge exchange and advocacy efforts (Council of Nordic Trade Unions, 2021). NFS in co-operation with the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) implements The Road Towards a Carbon-Free Society project. NFS engages in dialogue with respective governments, Nordic Council of Ministers and the EU (Council of Nordic Trade Unions, 2021).

The **Baltic Sea Chambers of Commerce Association (BCCA)** was founded in 1992 in Germany to promote causes significant for business development in the Baltic Sea Region. The organisation includes 51 Chambers of Commerce from Germany, Denmark, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Norway, Finland, Russia, Sweden, and Poland.

The Chamber includes almost half a million (over 400,000 firms) from various market fields of Northern European countries (Baltic Sea Chambers of Commerce Association, 2021).

The Nordic-Baltic Mobility Programme for Culture. The initiative promotes co-operation between Nordic and Baltic subregions in the culture sector and culture diplomacy. It was founded in 2009. The Nordic subregion is represented by the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Baltic subregion by Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. The programme supports individual artists, culture organisations and networks. The programme provides funding for mobility of individuals, organisations and groups (Nordic-Baltic Mobility Programme for Culture, 2019). The Programme holds such events as an online Nordic Language Café, nordiSKulptur 3, Movie Night, discussions and seminars, for instance, a Sustainable Fashion Panel, as well as Climate Action at the Nordic COP26 Hub in Helsinki (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2021).

Following up on the topic of Nordic and Baltic subregions' collaboration, it is important to note co-operation between Sweden and Lithuania under **Sweden-Lithuania Cooperation Fund**. The Fund's work is aimed at enhancing co-operation between these neighbouring countries. The organisation was founded fairly recently in 2018. It promotes projects strengthening bilateral co-operation, especially youth initiatives stimulating creativity, co-operation, mutual trust and social growth. Special focus is placed on network building among the young generation representatives (Sweden-Lithuania Cooperation Fund, 2021). The Cooperation Fund awards travel grants, media grants (for articles that present new sides of Sweden/Lithuania) and project grants (joint development in Lithuania and Sweden, co-operation between young people) (Sweden-Lithuania Cooperation Fund, 2021).

Regarding the Nordic region, it is further important to note the **Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDPC)**. It was founded in 2010 involving Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation and the European Union.

The EU, Norway and Iceland suspended until further notice all activities of the organisation involving Russia. The organisation welcomes creative projects aimed at culture development and research promotion in the region with the ultimate goal of enhancing co-operation between the Northern region partners. The Partnership welcomes collaboration in the creative industry sector, promoting experience exchanges and streamlining innovation policies in the partnership states (Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture, 2021). Other interesting projects are a Bootcamp for Creative Entrepreneurs, Cross Innovation Workshop for Creatives and the Art of Staying Healthy (Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture, 2021). EU National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) and NDPC received a grant from the European Commission for the Support to the Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture project (Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture, 2021).

Besides, strong co-operation relations should be noted among the Baltic countries of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, particularly, in the realm of culture development. The **Baltic Culture Fund** was set up in 2018. The main idea is to promote culture development and international co-operation among the three Baltic states, and to this end, joint projects and events are held under the auspices of the organisation. It provides grants for culture project development. The Fund promotes projects in the sphere of literature, arts, theatre, performances, architecture and archives management encouraging cross-cultural initiatives. The Fund especially supports cultural events outside the Baltic countries, such as concerts, festivals, performances with a Baltic focus, as well as events promoting internationalisation of culture (The Baltic Culture Fund, 2021).

Coalition Clean Baltic unites environmental NGOs from the Baltic Sea area with the goal of improving the Baltic Sea environment (Coalition Clean Baltic, 2022). One can also mention such organisations focused on environment protection, for example, the Latvian Environment Protection Club, Estonian Green Movement, Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, Friends of the Baltic, Lithuanian Fund For Nature and Latvian Green Movement.

These organisations work to preserve the environment of the Baltic Sea area and promote ecological awareness among the local people.

The Baltic Development Forum (BDF) was created in 1998. It was an important research centre and communication platform for the Baltic Sea Region community aimed at strengthening co-operation ties among politicians, businessmen, educators and community activists. The idea was to coordinate regional policies, facilitate and streamline decision-making processes and create competitive advantages for the region actors. The BDF was set up in order to serve as the Baltic region development platform which united counterparts from politics, business, academia and media (Baltic Development Forum, 2021).

Unfortunately, the Forum Secretariat stopped functioning in 2018, yet the organisation has made a significant contribution to the development of the Baltic region during 20 years of its operation. Thus, one can note important economic, social, digital, educational and environmental projects and considerable growing co-operation between non-governmental organisations in the Baltic Sea Region which helps to shape up and solidify regional identity. BDF centres its work around four key areas - providing platforms, generating knowledge, facilitating dialogue and managing projects (ICT and digital economy, water and blue growth, energy, regional promotion) (Baltic Development Forum, 2021).

The Baltic University Programme (BUP) is an initiative encompassing approximately 100 universities from 10 Baltic Sea Region states. It was launched in 1991. The Programme's mission was to promote co-operation among countries of the post-Soviet space and their Western vis-à-vis, first of all, centred on environment protection issues of common significance. The goal was to promote mutual understanding and co-operation among the Western European countries related to the Baltic Sea area, as well as the new democracies and nations in transition. Co-operation with higher educational establishments from Russia and Belarus was suspended after the full-scale



QR-code to the website www.balticuniv.uu.se

”Co-operation with higher educational establishments from Russia and Belarus was suspended after the full-scale Russian invasion into Ukraine in February 2022.”

Russian invasion into Ukraine in February 2022. The BUP Coordinating Secretariat is located at Uppsala University. The Programme is based on the idea that academia plays a key role in society growth and that higher educational institutions can promote effective international co-operation. The education of the young generation, a focus on life-long learning, and by conducting relevant research, the BUP contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals as indicated by the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (The Baltic University Programme, 2021). Within the framework of the Programme there are numerous educational and cultural activities, such as seminars, workshops, tours, exhibits and conferences. There is such an institutional body as the Students' Parliament representing students from the BUP participating universities in order to contribute to the Programme rollout and management.

The Programme's activities are centred around key themes in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in particular, Climate Change, Renewable Energy, Sustainable Societies, Sustainable Water Resources, Urban-Rural Development, Sustainable Mobility and Tourism, Circular Economy, Education for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Food Systems (The Baltic University Programme, 2021). The goal is to promote safe, healthy, clean and democratic environments by means of joint projects and an internationalisation of education. An interesting dimension in this regard is sustainable mobility. In view of current migration trends and global increases in transportation means, it is important to consider environmental protection and raise awareness about reasonable and smart uses of transportation and energy resources. A focus is placed on cycling, walking and usage of public transportation. Another vital dimension in this regard is circular economy. The essence of circular economy is that a product is made recyclable and appropriate for secondary and modified usage. There is significant progress at the local level in the Baltic Sea area in this regard, however circular economy projects need to be further promoted and expanded.



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One more important dimension is Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). It is necessary to promote the ideas of healthy lifestyle, climate change, responsible usage of available resources and curbing overconsumption. These initiatives help to incorporate such important topics into educational projects and curricula in order to shape up new sustainable development thinking in young generations.

In 2021 the BUP celebrated its 30th anniversary. In order to commemorate this important milestone, a series of thematic online seminars (Space Bridges 2.0) was planned. The second initiative in this regard was to collect a book of BUP stories and share people's memories, successes and reflections by means of storytelling.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that interstate and non-governmental institutions play a considerable role in building regional consciousness in the Baltic Sea area. The process of regional consciousness building has been dynamically advancing thus far in economic, social, cultural, ecological and educational dimensions. There are important regional identity development projects among the countries and subregions of the Baltic area. These projects help to establish understanding and build mutual trust among the countries. One can note successful co-operation and considerable potential for further growth among governmental organisations in the Baltic Sea Region. There are certain challenges such as different levels of economic development of various Baltic countries, as well as lack of understanding on certain political issues. Yet, overall, co-operation prospects appear to be highly promising. Besides, one can witness vital growing co-operation among non-governmental organisations in the Baltic Sea Region.

Multidimensionality and intensity of regional co-operation in the Baltic Sea area is being further discussed. It is still questionable if the extent of co-operation initiatives translates into actual regional consciousness and identity. The process of region conceptualisation is based on a division of labour, which emphasises the power of regional

”It is still questionable if the extent of co-operation initiatives translates into actual regional consciousness and identity.”

elites in the institutionalisation processes, yet it is the people of the Baltic Sea Region who have to adopt common features for a Baltic identity to come into being (Paasi, 2009). Through continued exploration of Baltic Sea Region background, culture and identity, the people of the Baltic countries can build a deeper understanding for each other and a more resilient region (Regional Identity, CBSS, 2023). Yet, presently, one can hardly see convincing signs of the Baltic identity shaping intensification. In particular, Russian aggressive foreign policy poses a serious threat to the security of the Baltic Sea area.

Nevertheless, collaboration in the region continues. As noted by the Council of the Baltic Sea States representatives, “the water connects us, but culture unites us”. Through highlighting shared culture, Baltic countries can strengthen the Baltic Sea Region identity, and in the long-term, and bolster co-operation (Regional Identity, CBSS, 2023). It is premature to speak of a well-shaped Baltic regional identity, yet there are important co-operation projects and initiatives in the area. Further perspectives for development can be related to digitisation, economic integration, co-operation on environmental protection projects, cultural diplomacy and educational exchanges.

”Further perspectives for development can be related to digitisation, economic integration, co-operation on environmental protection projects, cultural diplomacy and educational exchanges.”

Governmental Organisations				
Name	Year of foundation	Member states	Specialisation	Current status
Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)	1992	Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Sweden), EU Commission. Russia's participation was suspended	Intergovernmental, political, environmental, social policies, sustainable development, research and human rights, culture sector, regional identity, prosperous region; and security	Active

Baltic Region Heritage Committee (BRHC)	1998	Denmark, Sweden, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany, Norway. Russia was suspended	Promoting cultural heritage preservation and its use as a vital resource for the Baltic region integration	Active
Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea (VASAB)	1992	Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Sweden), EU Commission. Russia's participation was suspended	Heritage protection initiatives, efficient tourism development, marine sector protection	Active
The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC)	1991	Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Sweden. Russia stopped its participation in BSPC activities in May 2022	Establishing efficient connections between elective political bodies, executive authorities and civil society groups in the region; communication platform for parliaments of the EU and non-EU member states	Active
The Union of Baltic Cities (UBC)	1991	Denmark, Germany, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Poland, Ukraine. Russia's cities are not listed on the organisation website any more	cooperation between the member cities, social development, cultural heritage promotion, youth support, health protection, innovation and technology advancements	Active

The Nordic Council	1952	Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Greenland, Åland and the Faroe Islands	Interparliamentary cooperation, legislation and justice, digitisation, projects for persons with special needs, environmental protection, social and youth projects, energy and sustainable development, gender equality, culture and language, education and research	Active
Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation (BSSSC)	1993	Sweden, Latvia, Norway, Finland, Germany, Estonia, Poland, Denmark, Lithuania	Collaboration between regional authorities of the Baltic states, coordination of national and European policy interests in the Baltic area	Active
Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission – (Helsinki Commission (HELCOM))	1974	Denmark, the EU, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Sweden, Russia	Ecological issues, environment protection	Active
Baltic Council of Ministers (BCM)	1994	Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania	Trilateral cooperation in political, social and cultural sectors	Active
Baltic Assembly (BA)	1991	Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania	Promoting parliamentary cooperation	Active

Non-governmental Organisations				
Name	Year of foundation	Member states	Specialisation	Current status
The Baltic Sea Labour Forum (BSLF)	2011	Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Finland, Latvia, Poland, Lithuania	Labour mobility, demographic challenges, lifelong learning, inclusivity and youth employment	Active
The Baltic Sea Trade Union Network (BAS-TUN)	1999	Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Russia, Germany, Poland, Norway	Information and experience exchange among members of trade unions from the BSR	Active
Council of Nordic Trade Unions (NFS)	1972	15 organisations and over 8.5 million trade union members from Iceland, Finland, Sweden, Denmark (including Faroe Islands and Greenland)	Representing interests of trade union members and promoting cooperation among the unions of the Nordic countries	Active
The Baltic Sea Chambers of Commerce Association (BCCA)	1992	51 Chambers of Commerce from Germany, Denmark, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Norway, Finland, Russia, Sweden, Poland	Business development in the Baltic Sea Region	Semi-active
The Baltic Development Forum (BDF)	1998	Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Poland, Russia's Northwestern region including Kaliningrad	Four key areas - providing platforms, generating knowledge, facilitating dialogue and managing projects (ICT and digital economy, water and blue growth, energy, regional promotion)	Inactive since 2018

Sweden-Lithuania Cooperation Fund	2018	Sweden, Lithuania	Strengthening bilateral cooperation, especially youth initiatives stimulating creativity, cooperation, mutual trust and social growth	Active
Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDPC)	2010	Originally - Iceland, Norway, Russia, the EU. Later the EU, Norway and Iceland suspended until further notice all activities of the organisation involving Russia	Creative projects aimed at culture development and research promotion in the region with the ultimate goal of enhancing cooperation between the Northern region partners	Active
Baltic Culture Fund	2018	Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia	Culture development and international cooperation among the three Baltic states	Active
Nordic-Baltic Mobility Programme for Culture	2009	Nordic Council of Ministers and Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia	Support of individual artists, culture organisations and networks, funding for mobility of individuals, organisations and groups	Active
The Baltic University Programme (BUP)	1991	90 universities from Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden, Ukraine (cooperation with Russia and Belarus was suspended after the full-scale Russian invasion into Ukraine)	Key themes in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals	Active

Questions for a discussion

1. What is the role of international organizations for regional cooperation?
2. What are the characteristics of interstate relations in the Baltic Sea Region?
3. What are the important regional identity development projects in the Baltic area?
4. How do cooperation projects help to establish understanding and mutual trust among the countries of the Baltic region?
5. What are the cases of successful cooperation projects in the Baltic area?

Additional task

Group project: Develop biking tour/marathon across the countries of the Baltic area aimed at promoting an environmental cause (Make Baltic Clean!)

1. Define your audience and outreach mechanisms.
2. Plan the biking tour/marathon route. Please include places of cultural value, meetings with activists, local government, municipalities, volunteers, youth groups, librarians, artists in order to promote the cause.
3. Plan the project monitoring and assessment.

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Chapter 6

Re-thinking security architecture in the Baltic Sea Region

by Damian Szacawa

Introduction

The Baltic Sea, located in Northern Europe, is a semi-enclosed sea with an area of just over 415,000 km². For maritime security and shipping, it is crucial to maintain control over the Danish straits (which connect the Baltic to the North Sea and give access to the North Atlantic) and over the main islands of the Baltic Sea (Bornholm, Gotland, Saaremaa, and the Åland Islands). This was the reality at the time of the Vikings and it is the reality today at a time of increasing confrontation in the region between EU/NATO states and Russia.

The Baltic Sea Region (BSR), as understood in this chapter, is composed of the Baltic Sea and ten states with their whole territory. First of all, there are nine coastal states (the three Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia; the three Nordic states of Denmark, Sweden and Finland; as well as Germany, Poland and Russia). Moreover, due to political, cultural and economic ties as well as a shared history, Norway is also included. After the end of the Cold War, all these states were part of a regional security architecture and maintained political and security relations within international organisations. Basic data on area, population, economy and military dimension are provided in Table 1 and Table 2.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it is intended to provide a minimum theoretical knowledge of the regional security complex (RSC) and regionalism. Secondly, by analysing these processes in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR), the chapter will describe the evolution of the security architecture with emerging challenges and the response of international institutions to changes in the security environment.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first subchapter presents the theory of RSC and a few practical real-life examples. After that, the text is organised in a chronological way and the second part briefly reiterates the history of the rivalry between states in the Baltic Sea Region in the past and during the Cold War. Then the Baltic Sea Region after the end of the Cold War is analysed,

Country	Area	Population	GDP	GDP Growth
	[km ²]	[2022]	[current prices, billion US dollars, 2022]	[% , 2022]
Denmark	43,094	5,873,420	391.6	3.8
Estonia	45,228	1,331,796	38.1	-1.3
Finland	338,145	5,548,241	280.83	1.6
Germany	357,022	83,237,124	4,075.19	1.8
Latvia	64,589	1,875,757	41.15	2.8
Lithuania	65,300	2,805,998	70.33	1.9
Norway	323,802	5,425,270	579.27	3.3
Poland	312,685	37,654,247	690.55	5.1
Sweden	450,295	10,452,326	585.94	2.8
Russian Federation	17,098,242	143,449,300 [2021]	1,775.80 [2021]	4.7 [2021]
Source	CIA World Factbook	Eurostat; The World Bank (Russian Federation, 2021)		

followed by the NATO enlargements in 1999 and 2004. Finally, the fifth section deals with the post-2014 security developments and recently Finland's and Sweden's path to NATO.

Regional Cooperation and International Security in the Baltic Sea Region: theory of regional security complex (RSC)

After the end of the Cold War, two processes could be observed in the BSR.

Table 1. Basic characteristics of states in the Baltic Sea Region.

Sources: CIA World Factbook 2022 (area), Eurostat & the World Bank (population, GDP, GDP growth).

“After the end of the Cold War, two processes could be observed in the BSR.”

Country	Defence expenditure		Military & Security forces	
	[million US dollars, 2022]	[Share or real GDP, %]	Active	Reserve
Denmark	5.487	1.38	15,400	44,200
Estonia	0.815	2.16	7,200	17,500
Finland	5.96	1.68	19,250	238,000
Germany	60.967	1.49	183,150	32,650
Latvia	0.852	2.08	6,600	15,500
Lithuania	1.741	2.47	23,000	7,100
Norway	8.4	1.51	25,400	40,000
Poland	17.132	2.40	114,050	0
Sweden	8.07	1.38	14,600	10,000
Russian Federation	87.9	4.95	1,190 000	1,500,000
Source	NATO & Military Balance 2022 (Finland, Sweden, Russian Federation)			

Firstly, a gradual process of securitisation (Balzacq, Léonard and Ruzicka., 2016), which incorporated further areas of international policy into international security issues, particularly focusing on non-military security threats (rights of national minorities, organised crime, environmental pollution, disparities in economic and social development, illegal migration, prostitution, infectious diseases, etc.). Secondly, a vigorous process of regionalisation aimed to counter the above-mentioned threats (Söderbaum, 2016: 119–131). There was hardly any cross-border cooperation in the BSR during the Cold War, and no network structures, which in a sense remained not only on the sidelines of global politics but also

Table 2. Defence and military characteristics of states in the Baltic Sea Region.

Sources: NATO 2023 & Military Balance 2022 (Defence expenditure, military & security forces).

maintained the Nordic balance (Arter, 2016: 368–381). The BSR suddenly became a laboratory for peaceful change and overcoming existing borders and divisions (Neumann, 1992).

For these reasons, the BSR is a relevant level of analysis of international security, between the national and the global levels. The validity of this assumption is also indicated by the process of evolution in international security, related both to the collapse of the Soviet Union and to the evolution of the perception of threats to this security, which increasingly began to include non-military threats. This led analysts of international security to begin to recognise the process of regionalisation, caused by the fact that a given group of threats, often of a non-military nature, are present in a particular region. A landmark work was done by Barry Buzan (1983), who expanded the traditional understanding of international security to include further sectors: political, economic, social and environmental, and introduced the concept of a "regional security complex". Buzan and Wæver (2003: 489) define the Regional Security Complex (RSC) as "a set of units whose major processes of securitisation, desecuritisation, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another". In other words, they note the geographical dimension of international security, in which the interdependence of the security (positive or negative) of individual units is visible to a much greater extent between the units of such a security complex and thus, as it were, distinguishes the complex in the international environment.

The theory of RSC implies an evolution of the established links between units. This evolution is related to a feature of the international system, which is change. In most cases, RSCs are relatively permanent in nature and are modified through gradual evolution (although there are cases of abrupt change – turning points or critical junctures, e.g. 9/11 terrorist attacks or just the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022), which could be facilitated by security externalities (Lake and Morgan., 2010).

"Regional Security Complex (RSC) is a set of units whose major processes of securitisation, desecuritisation, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another."

This process usually involves a change in the structural elements of the RSC, and according to Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll (2010) is driven by three variables: regional structure (balance of power between states in the RSC), regional power roles (including main narratives and patterns of historical behaviour), and regional power orientations (security dynamics).

History of the rivalry between states in the Baltic Sea Region

The history of states surrounding the Baltic Sea is mainly a history of rivalry and confrontation between powers, interrupted by periods of cooperation between some states, such as the Kalmar Union (1397-1521) and the Polish-Lithuanian personal union (1385/86-1569) replaced by the Union of Lublin of 1569 after which the so-called Commonwealth of Both Nations (1569-1795) was established. This sea was exploited by the Varangians (9th-10th centuries), who set out from the area of present-day Sweden and, after crossing the Baltic and then the Baltic-Black Sea isthmus, hired themselves out as mercenaries to the Byzantine Empire. Later, the Baltic was dominated by the Hanseatic League, which spread its trade networks from London to Novgorod and, after the war with Denmark (1360-1370) that ended with the Peace of Stralsund, became the leading commercial and military power in Northern Europe. In the 16th century, the Hanseatic League declined in the face of the rise of territorial states. During the Livonian wars for the sovereignty of the Baltic Sea (*dominium Maris Baltici*) between 1558 and 1582, Russia was pitted against a coalition of Denmark, Sweden, and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In the first half of the 17th century, as a result of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), Sweden under Gustav II Adolf imposed its supremacy in the Baltic. Shortly afterward, Tsar Peter the Great founded St Petersburg (1703) and provided Russia with a significant port and outlet to the Baltic. By the end of the Great Northern War (1700-1721), the Russian Empire emerged as a major power. Much later, after 1871, the unified German Empire began to play a dominant role: the Baltic became the 'German Lake' and remained so until the end of the Second World War.

”History of the states surrounding the Baltic Sea has mainly been a history of rivalry and confrontation between powers.”

The end of the Second World War marked a renewed reconfiguration of the balance of power in the BSR, with the Soviet Union becoming the dominant state, occupying the entire eastern coast and playing a hegemonic role in the states occupied by the Red Army (See more in Gerner, 2002).

During the Cold War, the Nordic balance prevailed in the Baltic Sea. It was divided between the Soviet Union and its satellites (Poland, German Democratic Republic), NATO member states (Federal Republic of Germany, Denmark, Norway) and neutral states (Sweden, Finland). David Arter (2016: 368–381) points out that the concept of “Nordic balance” has three different meanings and therefore it can be used as a descriptive term, an explanatory tool (used to explain why these regional security arrangements were established and how they were protected from Cold War threats) and a prescriptive concept (normative elements which were perceived as reflecting the best interests of the Nordic states and were visible in some initiatives, for example 1963 Kekkonen’s Nordic nuclear-free zone idea). But in the first sense, it was used to describe the post-war security arrangements in the BSR, the basic premise of which is the existence of a high degree of interdependence between the security policies of the Nordic states combined with an awareness of the impact of changes in one state on the other states in the region and the superpowers (who would be forced to apply an automatic correction mechanism to maintain the balance in question). NATO controlled the Danish straits, but its ships struggled to penetrate the Baltic Sea, where the Soviet Northern Fleet, based in an ice-free port in Kaliningrad, dominated (Godzimirski, 1999). The collapse of the Soviet Union brought the end of the Cold War (confrontation of military blocs) and again changed the geopolitical configuration of the region. Russia now has only two narrow windows to the Baltic Sea: the St Petersburg area and the Kaliningrad (Königsberg) semi-exclave, between Lithuania and Poland.

Baltic Sea Region after the end of the Cold War

In the following years, more states in the BSR joined NATO and the EU (see Figure 1 on page 135).

”The collapse of the Soviet Union brought the end of the Cold War and changed the geopolitical configuration of the region.”

Sweden and Finland applied to join the European Communities in July 1991, and after the completion of accession negotiations and a referendum (1994), they joined the European Union on 1 January 1995. The approach of 'reluctant Europeans' to European integration is well known as part of 'Nordic exceptionalism' or pragmatic functionalism, which means that they engaged actively with the EU in some areas (mainly related to the internal market and liberalisation in EU negotiations) while staying out and create a firm bastion against EU integration in others, i.a. welfare politics (Grøn and Wivel, 2017). This marked a change in the previous policy of neutrality of both states, which was based on the premise of non-alignment in peacetime, aiming at neutrality in war (Arter, 2016: 381–389). Poland (in 1994) and all three Baltic states (in 1995), applied for EU membership. Despite initial difficulties, they succeeded in meeting the accession criteria (Copenhagen criteria): (1) stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities; (2) a functioning market economy; and (3) the ability to take on the obligations of membership. After long-term and difficult negotiations, they received an invitation to join the EU at the European Council in Copenhagen in December 2002. They formally became members of the EU on May 1, 2004, after European referendums and ratifications of the Accession Treaty (Szczurbiak and Taggart, 2005).

In addition to the economic benefits claimed by supporters of integration, pointing to the advantages of EU integration, an equally important gain, albeit more difficult to measure, is the increased security of the Baltic States and Poland. Joining the EU could be perceived by new members as equal with a 'de facto' participation in a security community that supports the European integration process. Soon the Baltic states and Poland realised that although the Union cannot provide military security guarantees such as NATO's Article 5, full EU membership makes them an integral part of the process of building a united Europe (van Ham, 1999). Moreover, the integration of the Baltic States and Poland into the European Union was the fastest way and the most effective tool to strengthen non-military security.

There have also been changes in terms of military alliances. The last Russian military troops left Poland and Lithuania in 1993, and Estonia and Latvia in the summer of 1994. This allowed for an expansion of cooperation with NATO, which launched the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme in 1994. The PfP allowed states from Central and Eastern Europe (mainly former Warsaw Pact members) the possibility of close cooperation with NATO, without committing themselves to supporting NATO member states following the Washington Treaty (Cottey, 2018). In 1999, Poland joined NATO (together with Hungary and the Czech Republic), and in March 2004 the three Baltic States did so (Tiirmaa-Klaar, 2006).

Finland and Sweden also joined the PfP, thereby weakening their previous policy of neutrality, but their participation was not seen as a first step towards membership of the Alliance. However, despite this, three pragmatic implications for the BSR states could be indicated. Firstly, the PfP demonstrated the validity of the concept of interoperability in terms of standards and procedures for dealing with crises, implemented by the states aspiring to become NATO members (Poland and the Baltic States) and the non-aligned states of Sweden and Finland (Archer, 2008). Secondly, it influenced the direction of the development of the armed forces in the Baltic States, and initiated a controlled process of restructuring the military forces, in line with regional and international interests. These states escaped the two-pronged interpretation of the state's defence policy – to maintain the existing model of territorial defence with minimal involvement in defence missions, or to start the process of building a professional army and participating in international operations. As a result of the PfP experience, subsequently reinforced by the membership of the Alliance, states in the region maintained their defence allocations at current levels, while strengthening the emphasis on the implementation of collective defence principles and developing specialised units, aligned with international NATO standards.

”Three pragmatic implications of the PfP for the BSR states could be indicated: increasing interoperability of standards and procedures, development of the armed forces, and involvement in NATO international operations.”

Improved interoperability was achieved by ensuring greater transparency in the national defence budgeting and planning process, maintaining the capacity and readiness to participate in peacekeeping operations under the auspices of the UN or Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and joint planning, training and exercises. Third and finally, PfP member states have moved closer to Alliance standards through maintaining a delegation at NATO Headquarters and involvement in NATO international operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina (IFOR: 1995-1996, SFOR: 1997-2004), Kosovo (KFOR: since 1999), Afghanistan (ISAF: 2001-2014), and Libya (Operation Unified Protector: 2011). Therefore, by supporting NATO activities, the BSR states can confidently claim to be “providers” as well as “receivers” of security in Europe (See more: Männik, 2008; Miniotaite, 2008; Ozolia, 2008).



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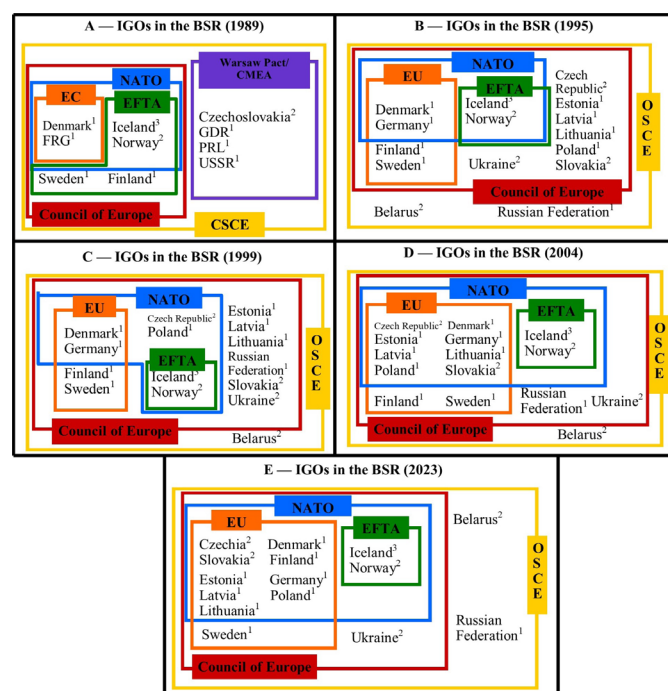


Figure 1. Evolution of the membership of international governmental organisations in the Baltic Sea Region from 1989 to 2023.

Source: authors own compilation based on data from the websites of the aforementioned organisations.

- 1 - littoral states of the Baltic Sea
- 2 - states in the Baltic Sea drainage basin
- 3 - close cooperation with the Baltic Sea and Nordic regions

- CMEA - Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
- CSCE - Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
- EC - European Communities (European Coal and Steel Community, European Economic Community, European Atomic Energy Community)
- EFTA - European Free Trade Association
- EU - European Union
- NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- OSCE - Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

NATO's eastern enlargement: crucial change for the Regional Security Complex in the Baltic Sea Region

NATO's eastern enlargement took place in two phases: in 1999 and 2004. After the historical events of 2004, referred to as the “Big Bang enlargement” (Browning & Joenniemi, 2003, p. 484) or the “dual enlargement” (Hubel, 2004, p. 283) the BSR became a kind of “minimap” of European international institutions (see Figure 1). This means that numerous international organisations have intersected it and formed the regional security complex (RSC). There are two levels of RSC in the BSR. The first one is made by European or Euro-Atlantic organisations like NATO, EU, OSCE, and Council of Europe. The second level is composed of subregional cooperation structures (SCSs) and transnational networks. Institutions from both levels are involved in the governance of international security in the BSR, while the degree of involvement of BSR states in the functioning of the above-mentioned international institutions varied (as was shown in Case 1).

Case 1. States from the BSR and NATO

The relationship between NATO and the states of the BSR is an example of diversified membership which has evolved over the years. Based on this criterion, there are four types of state in the BSR. Firstly, the original members (or the founder members): Denmark and Norway (plus Iceland) had been members since NATO's creation in 1949.

The second group includes states that joined the Alliance later, such as Germany, i.e. West Germany in 1955 and East Germany, following the incorporation of its Länder into West Germany in 1990, Poland as a result of the first eastern enlargement in 1999, the Baltic States of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, which were admitted during the second wave of eastern enlargement in 2004, and recently Finland, which has become the 31st member state of the Alliance on 4 April 2023.

“Institutions from both levels are involved in the governance of international security in the BSR, while the degree of involvement of BSR states in the functioning of the above-mentioned international institutions varied.”



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“The relationship between NATO and the BSR states is an example of diversified membership which has evolved over the years.”

Thirdly, aspiring for NATO membership – now only Sweden, together with Finland applied for NATO membership after Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022. As of June 2023, Sweden’s accession process has not yet been ratified by Hungary and Turkey. It is worth remembering that Sweden and Finland have defined themselves as militarily non-aligned states for most of the 21st century. At the same time, they had been cooperating closely with the Alliance since the 1990s, as states participating in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) since 1994 and in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) since 1997 and were involved in NATO missions (IFOR, SFOR, KFOR).

Finally, Russia which was a partner on special terms since May 2002 through the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), is involved in NATO decision-making, except for matters concerning the admission of new members, defence planning, the Strategic Concept, military deployment and Article 5 action. Following the launch of full-scale aggression against Ukraine Russia lost its partner status as it was agreed at the NATO Madrid Summit in June 2022 and the Strategic Concept was then adopted. However, the NRC itself was not abolished to maintain an open channel of communication, but Russia was presented as “the most significant and direct threat to Allies’ security and peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area”. Therefore, it is again very close to its status during the Cold War, when Russia was NATO’s main enemy (case developed from the following sources: Dahl, 2018; Dahl and Järvenpää, 2013; Magula, Rouland and Zwack, 2022; NATO, 2022; Simon, 2004; Sraders, 2021).

Following NATO enlargements in 1999 and 2004, some of the main security issues that conditioned regional cooperation in the post-Cold War period have been resolved. In general, it can be argued that the willingness of states to provide security is the dominant issue driving

”Following NATO enlargements in 1999 and 2004, some of the main security issues that conditioned regional cooperation in the post-Cold War period have been resolved.”

each state’s incentive to cooperate within the alliance. This is evident in both the realist and liberal approaches to security (Browning & Joenniemi, 2004, pp. 234–236). The difference between these approaches relates to the nature of this motivation. While in the case of realists, the nature is negative – states cooperate through alliances (and/or bandwagoning) directed against threats emanating from other states, which are presented using the rhetoric of exclusion and “othering” on – “us and them” (Prozorov, 2011). For liberals, there is a positive inclusion, or securitisation, of other problems of broader security into issues of regional cooperation – these new problems, coming not from other states but existing in international reality, were seen as a way of escaping traditional security threats. The nature of soft security threats – transnational, regional or even global in scope – means that no single state can cope with these threats (Wæver, 1995).

This international security concern was primarily linked to the desire of former Soviet Bloc states to integrate into Euro-Atlantic security institutions. Among these states, the so-called Euro-Atlantic vector has been present since the early 1990s, intensifying especially during dangerous events in Russia reflecting instability (the 1991 coup, conflict between Yeltsin and Parliament in 1993, difficulties with the withdrawal of Russian troops, problems of the Russian-speaking minority, or the intervention in Chechnya in 1994). Another factor that became obsolete (as it turned out, only temporarily) was the mutual relations between Russia and other BSR states, mainly the Baltic States, generally related to the settlement of recent history, the protection of national minorities and border problems (Archer & Jones, 1999). Their place was taken by global issues like the joint fight against terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or, on the other, by soft security threats at the regional level (Tassinari & Williams, 2003). It means that after 1989 the BSR witnessed a ‘battle’ between new and old perceptions of security. This new understanding of security, derived from the experiences of policymakers in the Nordic states, found fertile ground for practical implementation in the BSR.

”The international security concern in the BSR was primarily linked to the desire of former Soviet Bloc states to integrate into Euro-Atlantic security institutions.”

However, the old understanding, based on military national security considered in terms of a zero-sum game, is still present in Russia, but also in the thinking of policymakers in the Baltic States (Archer, 1998, pp. 117–134).

In the relationship between regional cooperation and international security, such circumstances lead to some consequences. Firstly, to internationalisation of the BSR which could be describe as a parallel increase in the significance of external factors and a simultaneous decline in the importance of regional cooperation, which developed during the transition period and was supposed to prevent the emergence of a security “grey zone” in a post-Cold War no man’s land (Bailes, 1999, p. 159; Cottey, 1995, pp. 156–157). This was particularly evident concerning the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) in 2004-2008, which reduced top-level meetings and ceased further initiatives – the CBSS Commissioner on Democratic Development in 2003, Eurofaculties in Tartu, Vilnius and Riga in 2005 (Szacawa, 2021: 23–36). The US also gradually withdrew funding from the BSR transition replacing the Northern European Initiative with the Enhanced Partnership in Northern Europe (e-PINE) in 2003 – with no funding for the Baltic States, which had been successful in the transition (Möller, 2007: 181–208). At the same time, the EU was not yet ready to enter more firmly into the BSR with its macro-regional strategy, which only happened in 2009.

Secondly, there was an increase in the importance of security concerns in regional cooperation issues, with a clear division of security tasks in the BSR. Soft security issues have been left to a bottom-up approach, where regional actors can facilitate them. Thus, future challenges for the BSR were presented as security issues, i.e. as factors of existential importance, requiring cooperation, e.g. problems of environmental pollution and biodiversity, chemical munition dumped on the Baltic Sea bed, use of natural resources, climate change, organised crime, and human trafficking. And lastly – in contrast, military hard security remained in the sphere of inter-state interaction, and threats of this kind were dealt with top-down approaches,

”Consequences of the relationship between regional cooperation and international security include a decline in the significance of regional cooperation, and an increase in the importance of security concerns.”



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with the help of NATO, the EU, and the instruments of these institutions (Browning and Joenniemi, 2004b).

a. Internationalisation of the Baltic Sea Region

The process of multidimensional transformation of states, economies and societies initiated at that time has achieved significant results as a result of NATO and EU enlargement on two dimensions. Firstly, concerning NATO’s institutional adaptation – the eastern enlargements of the Alliance can be recognised as one of the final stages of its institutional adaptation after the end of the Cold War. At the Prague Summit in November 2002, 7 states (3 from the BSR) were included. It is worth noting at this point that before the final decision was taken, NATO decided to regulate its relations with the Russian Federation. This was done through the signing of a partnership agreement at the Rome Summit in May 2002, based on which the NRC was created. In this way, NATO obtained Russia’s consent to enlarge and established relations with Russia in a way that had not been possible before. As an aside, it may be added that earlier opponents of enlargement gave four arguments related to democratisation, civilisation, gentlemen’s agreement, and geopolitics (Kramer, 2002). One problem that is linked in time to enlargement, but stems from the international situation, is a change in the nature of NATO. While the new states sought to join the old Alliance, with its strong military guarantees from the USA, these changes have led them to join an organisation not focused, as before, on providing collective defence but devoting more and more resources to “out of area” operations (Michta, 2009).

Secondly, it is also important to note the management of peaceful changes in the BSR. As a result of numerous preventive measures taken in the BSR by international organisations (OSCE, CBSS, EU), potential security threats in the region (use of force by the Soviet Union in Vilnius in 1991, presence of Russian troops until August 1994, issues of Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia and Latvia, refusal of Russia to officially recognise the border with Latvia and Estonia, transit to the Kaliningrad region) did not develop into a serious long-term crisis (Bjurner, 1999).



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These factors meant that changes in the BSR began to be increasingly determined by external forces rather than by states and non-state actors in the BSR. Moreover, we should not forget the enlargement of the EU to include the states of the BSR in 2004 and other factors that influence the evolution of the RSC from the outside, which include, i.e.: the foreign policy of the USA (Lieber, 2018) and China's growing importance for the BSR states (Stpniewski and Kuczyska-Zonik, 2021). Significantly, some players in the region were less affected by NATO enlargement than other states in Europe – Sweden and Finland remained outside the Alliance for years afterwards, which expanded to include more states in Central Europe – Croatia and Albania (both in 2009), Montenegro (2017) and the Republic of North Macedonia (2020). The enlargement of NATO brought the states of the region into the game between the US and the Western European members of NATO (especially those centred around France and Germany), as witnessed by the famous statement about “Old” and “New” Europe by US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in 2003, or the controversy when Donald Trump was US President (Schreer, 2019).

b. Soft security issues – the role of Subregional Cooperation Structures

The 2004 enlargement of the EU and NATO to BSR states began a brief window (from the perspective of a centuries-old history) in which confrontation gave way to regional cooperation. Never in the past have so many regional international organisations and agencies worked to maintain and expand cooperation in the region. In 1992, the CBSS was established with the main objective of developing cooperation between the states of the wider region (Iceland is also a member of the CBSS). It included Russia until 2022, cooperation with which was suspended at the beginning of March 2022 following Russia's aggression against Ukraine. After that, Russia decided to withdraw from the CBSS on May 17, 2022 (Szacawa and Musiał, 2022).

”The process of multidimensional transformation after NATO and EU enlargement together with NATO’s institutional adaptation meant that changes in the BSR began to be increasingly determined by external forces rather than by states and non-state actors in the BSR.”

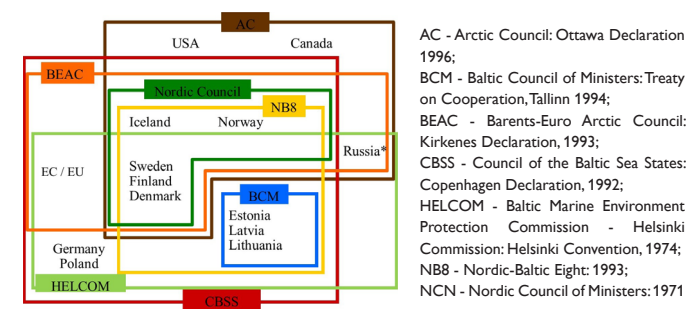
”The 2004 enlargement of the EU and NATO to BSR states began a brief window in which confrontation gave way to regional cooperation based on many international organisations and agencies worked to maintain and expand cooperation in the region.”

The states of the Baltic Sea also participate in other subregional cooperation structures (SCSs) covering areas of different sizes (see Figure 2): in the Baltic Council of Ministers (three Baltic states), the Nordic Council of Ministers (five Nordic states), the Nordic-Baltic cooperation NB8 (3 Baltic + 5 Nordic states), the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission – known as the Helsinki Commission, or HELCOM (9 Baltic littoral states + EU), the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (5 Nordic states, Russia, European Commission), and the Arctic Council (5 Nordic states, Russia, USA, and Canada).

The Baltic RSC is also driven from the inside i.e. by the evolution of the international institutions acting in the control/management model of security in the region, like the EU and its Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) (Etzold, 2017; Rosas and Ringbom, 2023), and the CBSS (Szacawa, 2021). However, the internationalisation of the BSR has made it difficult for the region to remain a good “experimental testing ground for the enlarged EU” (Tassinari, 2003, p. 8), as it became one of the regions of Europe that has to deal with socio-economic problems and contain non-military threats. The BSR's relatively low relevance would be further evidenced by the weakness of its regional institutions – the CBSS and HELCOM, despite their non-military merits, are certainly not the main security institution in the region (Szacawa, 2021, pp. 29–36).



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AC - Arctic Council: Ottawa Declaration 1996;
 BCM - Baltic Council of Ministers: Treaty on Cooperation, Tallinn 1994;
 BEAC - Barents-Euro Arctic Council: Kirkenes Declaration, 1993;
 CBSS - Council of the Baltic Sea States: Copenhagen Declaration, 1992;
 HELCOM - Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission - Helsinki Commission: Helsinki Convention, 1974;
 NBR - Nordic-Baltic Eight: 1993;
 NCN - Nordic Council of Ministers: 1971

* Reaction of the Subregional Cooperation Structures after Russia's Invasion of Ukraine:
 AC - On March 3, 2023 western partners (the Arctic 7) refused to meet and work with Russia
 BEAC - On March 9, 2023 western partners excluded Russia from activities but have not taken a formal decision on suspension of Russia.
 CBSS - On March 3, 2023 Russia was suspended from further participation in activities. On May 17, 2023 Russia decided to withdraw from the CBSS
 HELCOM - On March 4, 2023 a "strategic pause" of HELCOM was announced by the EU and Member States of the European Union (H 9)

Figure 2. Subregional Cooperation Structures in the Baltic Sea Region (2023).

Source: authors own compilation based on data from the websites of the aforementioned organisations.

c. Security governance in the Baltic Sea Region - the role of NATO

The concept of security governance underpins the security of the actors in international relations, based on the regular and predictable behaviour of participants embedded in shared beliefs and values (Emil J. Kirchner & Dominguez, 2011). After the end of the Cold War, NATO became the most important and prominent multilateral institution in the European security system (Mölder, 2006). NATO's specific mission was to play a central role in transmitting these predictable behaviours and shared values to new regions such as Central and Eastern Europe and the BSR, which was also one of the main objectives of the Pfp, the EAPC, the NRC, and the NATO-Ukraine Council (Gheciu, 2005; Hyde-Price, 2000).

In the case of the BSR, there is a widely shared conviction that, because of the plethora of security threats, a single organisation would not provide security on all dimensions in a satisfying manner (Adler & Greve, 2009; Galbreath & Gebhard, 2010; Hofmann, 2011). Therefore, one of the main foreign policy objectives of states in the BSR should be to seek effective coordination of efforts, undertaken by various institutions, i.e. EU, OSCE, Council of Europe, subregional cooperation structures, transnational networks and international regimes (Gänzle, Kern, & Tynkkyne, 2023). Nevertheless, NATO remains the only organisation in the BSR with the capacity to provide hard security guarantees including defence and deterrence by punishment/denial, which protects Allies.

The enlargement of NATO in 2004 has further integrated the states of the region into the regional security governance in the BSR. This shows that building sustainable peace relations in the region requires not only formal regional cooperation but also what Karl Deutsch (1957) already stated – a “security community”, which requires many efforts directed at overcoming the deep-held economic and social divisions, incorporating networks and cooperation structures, building trust, based on truth, mutual communication, responsibility and prudence (Levinsson, 2002, pp. 436–445).

”After 2004 NATO remains the only organisation in the BSR with the capacity to provide hard security guarantees including defence and deterrence by punishment/denial, which protects Allies.”

Security in the Baltic Sea Region after 2014

The development of international relations and above mentioned processes result in a very different role for the BSR in the first two decades of the 21st century than during the Cold War period, when the area stayed on the periphery of the main axis of conflict in Europe. Russia's foreign policy had a special place here, as the BSR is one of the few places where Russia interacts directly with the West. Carl Bildt (1994) argued that Russia's foreign policy towards the Baltic States would be a litmus test of a new direction of Russia's approach towards Europe. However, despite Russia's involvement into a dense network of international organisations and SCSs, cooperation with Kremlin has never been easy. It has been mainly influenced by energy supplies, environmental issues and geopolitical disputes. As a result, strong tensions have emerged in the BSR over the past few years, triggered by numerous Russian military provocations and large-scale military exercises (Dahl, 2018b). Russia's revisionist policy was based on a provision that great powers can divide the world into spheres of interest, the possibility to use military force integrated with other means of nonmilitary character, as well as the use of soft power and historical narratives about the 1941-45 Great Patriotic War (Persson, 2018). This policy, culminating in President V. Putin's proposals for a significant revision of the regional security architecture in Central and Eastern Europe, presented in mid-December 2021, worried states in the BSR who want the security guarantees provided by international organisations (NATO and the EU) to be reaffirmed. Already the Russian war against Ukraine (which started in February-March 2014) amounted to the political isolation of Russia and the restriction of contacts at the highest level in regional organisations and had repercussions not only in the Baltic region but also for the Black Sea region (Bogdanova and Makarychev, 2020). In addition to the above-mentioned provocations on the sea and air borders, the situation was also exacerbated by the dispute over Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia and Latvia and the related theme of defending the so-called “Russian world”, for which Russia, according to its doctrine, bears political and military responsibility (Bergman, 2020; Cheskin, 2015).

”Cooperation with Russia has never been easy, because it was influenced by energy supplies, environmental issues and geopolitical disputes. After 2014, strong tensions have emerged in the BSR.”

As a result, the states on NATO's eastern flank, as well as Finland and Sweden, were increasingly concerned about the scenario of a hybrid war with Russia. To counter this, at the NATO Summit in Wales (Newport, September 4-5, 2014), it was decided to consolidate defence and deterrence postures on the eastern flank. At that time, the reforms of the NATO Response Force (NRF) were implemented, including the creation of a high-readiness multinational brigade – a 5,000-strong Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) (Gotkowska, 2018). The military experience gained on the battlefield during NATO missions, as well as the initiative of Sweden and Finland, led also to an expansion of cooperation between NATO and two Nordic non-aligned states. Both states were granted Enhanced Opportunities Partner (EOP) status. This status meant greater opportunities for personalised dialogue between the special partner and NATO. Priority areas of cooperation included holding regular political consultations, developing cooperation on participation in Alliance military exercises and exchanging information, identical to the declaration signed in May 2018 by Sweden, Finland and the US (Cotter, 2018).

Further decisions strengthening NATO's eastern flank were made at the 2016 NATO Warsaw Summit. It was then decided to establish the so-called Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP). The forces comprising the eFP were fully deployed in July 2017 and comprise four battalion-sized multinational battle groups. The framing nation led the battalion-sized battle groups in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Poland respectively: Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States. Troops from these states are supplemented by soldiers from other alliance states. It has also been noted that Sweden's and Finland's close cooperation with NATO is one of the key elements in maintaining the Alliance's capabilities and effectively protecting the Baltic states. All these states view the BSR as a unified strategic space. They thus operate within a deteriorating security environment in which the importance of collective defence is increasing (Friis, 2017). The ongoing northern enlargement of NATO to include Finland and Sweden is an important addition and is referred to as a "geopolitical gamechanger" or a "quiet revolution"

(Ålander, 2022, p. 49) which is caused by Finland's and Sweden's 'Copernican revolution' (see Case 2).

Case 2: Finland and Sweden's path to NATO (2021-2023)

In the wake of Russia's aggressive actions in Eastern Europe, Sweden and Finland sought closer cooperation with NATO, which intensified after the 2014 annexation of Crimea. At that time, the two states intensified consultations and regular political dialogue and agreed to exchange information on hybrid warfare and coordinate training and military exercises. Both states participated in the NATO Response Force (NRF) and signed the Host Nation Support agreement for mutual support of allied troops. It has enabled logistical assistance to be provided to NATO forces that can use Swedish and Finnish territory both during joint military manoeuvres and in a crisis. At the end of 2021, Finland has taken further informal steps towards rapprochement with NATO on a political as well as military level. This was evidenced, among other things, by the decision made on December 10, 2021, to choose the F-35 Lightning II multirole fighter aircraft, manufactured by the US company Lockheed Martin.

Demands made by Russian President Vladimir Putin in December 2021 to review the European security architecture and to ban new members from joining NATO, thus challenging the Alliance's 'open-door' policy, triggered heated debate in Sweden and Finland. These ultimatums were unacceptable to both Nordic states as they would limit their sovereignty to make decisions based on their national interests. Furthermore, Russia's aggressive actions contributed significantly to the dynamic increase in the number of supporters of NATO membership among Swedish and Finnish citizens in January-April 2022.

"In the wake of Russia's aggressive actions in Eastern Europe, Sweden and Finland sought closer cooperation with NATO, which intensified after the 2014 annexation of Crimea."

This was perfectly evident in Finland, where as recently as the first half of January only 27% of Finns were in favour of Finland's NATO membership, while 42% were against it. After Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, the number of supporters of NATO accession began to increase and by the end of February 2022 supporters became majority. By the end of March 2022, more than 60 per cent of Finns believed that Finland should join NATO, and in a mid-April 2022 poll, almost 70 per cent were already in favour of joining NATO.

Decision-makers in both states took the next steps relatively quickly, including preparing security reports, debates in parliaments and taking formal action. In Finland, the formalities were completed on May 17, 2022, when the Eduskunta (Finnish Parliament) approved by a huge majority (in favour: 188, against 8, 3 abstained) the decision to apply for NATO membership. In Sweden, the vote did not take place because the position of the majority of the parties had already been known for a long time, and the Sweden Democrats changed their mind in the early spring of 2022. After a debate in the Riksdag (Swedish Parliament) on May 16, 2022, an extraordinary meeting of the government led by Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson decided that Sweden would apply for NATO membership. Therefore on May 17, 2022, the foreign ministers of Sweden and Finland (Ann Linde and Pekka Haavisto) signed their states' applications. These were delivered simultaneously to NATO headquarters in Brussels the next day.

The submission of the applications for NATO membership by the Finnish and Swedish representatives was a 'historic moment' for European security and international relations in the BSR. The applications were accepted at the NATO Madrid Summit on June 29, 2022. Both states received an official invitation, and the accession protocols were signed on July 5, 2022, after the completion of accession talks.

”The submission of the applications for NATO membership by the Finnish and Swedish representatives was a 'historic moment' for European security and international relations in the BSR.”

Despite the rapid pace of the ratification process in which, under national requirements, individual NATO member states agreed to admit Finland and Sweden to the Alliance (20 states including all BSR states did so in July 2022, and another eight by the end of September 2022) Hungary and Turkey blocked NATO enlargement until the end of March 2023. The final step is to notify the individual states' decisions (ratification instruments) to the US government, which is the depositary of the Washington Treaty.

The enlargement process has been completed in the case of Finland, which as of April 4, 2023, becomes the 31st member of NATO. Sweden, on the other hand, is still awaiting ratification of its accession protocol by Hungary and Turkey, which for various political and military reasons have still not done so (case developed from the following sources: Ålander, 2022; Alberque & Schreer, 2022; Arter, 2023; Dahl, 2018a).

Conclusions

The enlargement of NATO to include the BSR states of Poland (1999), Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (2004) and Finland (2023), together with close cooperation with Sweden, which as of June 2023 was still outside the NATO, has specific consequences for both member and non-member states of the BSR, as well as for the many international institutions that focus on the non-military dimensions of international security.

The regional security complex in the BSR is functional in nature, i.e. its emergence has been determined by the embeddedness of states' foreign policies in the post-Cold War international environment based on multilateral cooperation and multi-dimensional integration. These increased interactions led to the realisation of the *raison d'être* of the states of the former Soviet Bloc - i.e. the enlargement of NATO and the EU and thus the elimination of the security grey area.

The cooperation in the non-military area of international security, which has been developed since the early 1990s within the framework of subregional cooperation structures, has over time led to a 'spill-over' effect of this cooperation into a hard military dimension.

Following Finland's entry into NATO (and the expected enlargement to Sweden), the geostrategic situation in the Baltic Sea Region will change. The enlargement of NATO to include the two Nordic states, apart from the symbolic change in the regional security architecture, will also have practical significance. At the political level, the security policies of both states will in many places be in line with those of Poland and the Baltic States, especially about the identical perception of threats from Russia and the strengthening of NATO's eastern flank. At the strategic level, it will ensure better control over the sea routes in the Baltic Sea and strengthen the ability to assist the Baltic States in the event of possible aggression on their territory (by land, sea and air). And at the operational level, the ability of both states to defend their territory and contribute to the development of NATO's collective forces will strengthen the regional capacity of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

”The enlargement of NATO to include Finland and Sweden, apart from the symbolic change in the regional security architecture, will also have practical significance at political, strategic, and operational levels.”

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Questions for a discussion

1. How did the post-Cold War transformations shape the Regional Security Complex in the Baltic Sea Region?
2. Name three of the key consequences for the Baltic Sea Region of NATO's eastern enlargement.
3. What are the main 'pros and cons' of NATO enlargements for the Baltic Sea Region? Please compare the eastern enlargement of 1999 and 2004 with the northern enlargement of 2023.
4. What are the most important challenges to international security in the Baltic Sea Region today?

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Chapter 7

The economy of the Baltic Sea Region: A comparative analysis of state development models

by Olga Malashenkova

Introduction

The goal of the chapter is to provide an overview of sustainable development and economic development in the Baltic Sea Region. It aims to establish a theoretical foundation for a state's economic development and analyse economic development indicators in the region between 2000-2021. The study aims to contribute to a better understanding of economic development in the region and to provide insights that can be used to promote sustainable economic growth in the future.

The chapter offers an insight on economic indicators in countries included as Baltic Sea Countries. The complex nature of Baltic Sea Region economic analysis lies in the country composition of the region. It is important to keep in mind that the countries of the region differ significantly in terms of economic and institutional indicators. In general, the Baltic Sea Region consists of EU member states (early entrants and late entrants) as well as non-EU countries.

Obviously, the economic situation in each country affects the overall economic development of the region. What challenges and economic trends do the countries of the region face? What strategies do the countries use to address these challenges?

In order to answer these questions, a brief analysis is proposed for the following areas of research:

1. Sustainable Development and Overview of Economic Development in the Baltic Sea Region
2. The theoretical foundation of a state's economic development
3. Analysis of economic development indicators in the Baltic Sea Region in 2000-2021.

Due to the dramatic changes in the economic situation throughout Europe and countries around the world, including the Baltic Sea Region after the Russian aggression toward Ukraine on February 24, 2022, this chapter is limited to the analysed period between 2000 and 2021.

This chapter is about the economy of the pre-war period. The war greatly affected the entire region. Its consequences can have widespread impacts and may demand a separate study.

Thus, upon completion of this chapter, students will comprehend the condition of economic progress in the Baltic Sea Region preceding the Russian aggression towards Ukraine, which commenced in 2022. Moreover, all students, regardless of their field of study, will have the ability to grasp the main models in economic development of the state and interpret themselves particular economic indicators that illustrate the economic development of the region or country.

Sustainable Development and Overview of Economic Development in the Baltic Sea Region

Sustainable development is the overarching paradigm of the United Nations. This concept was described in the 1987 Brundtland Commission Report as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 54).

There are four aspects of sustainable development – society, environment, culture, and economy – that are interrelated, not separate. Sustainable development is a way of thinking about the future in which environmental, social, and economic considerations are balanced in the pursuit of a better quality of life. There is a difference between sustainable development and sustainability. Sustainability is often seen as a long-term goal, while sustainable development refers to many processes and ways to achieve it. The economic aspects of sustainable development will be focused in this chapter.

Sustainable economic development is a comprehensive process aimed at solving socio-economic problems, improving the living conditions of the region's population and the state of the environment by achieving a balance between the social and economic spheres (Roos et al., 2021).

The development of the Baltic Sea Region is influenced among others by the Sustainable Development Goals. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a collection of 17 interlinked global goals were established in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly as a global framework for addressing the most pressing social, economic, and environmental challenges facing our planet (Transforming our world, 2015). The SDGs are intended to guide countries and organisations worldwide in setting their agendas for sustainable development by 2030. For the countries of the Baltic Sea Region, the SDGs offer a roadmap for achieving sustainable development that considers the unique challenges and opportunities of the region. The goals address a range of economic, social, and environmental issues, including poverty reduction, job creation, education and sustainable infrastructure. Many of the goals among the sustainable development goals¹ relate to economic objectives in one way or another.

The Baltic Sea Region, comprising fourteen countries², has been a focus of sustainable development policies and initiatives over the past two decades. And while these sustainable development policies and initiatives often do not cover all countries in the region and are often local, they certainly have an impact on the sustainable development of the region as a whole.

The region has experienced significant economic growth in recent years, with many of its countries classified as high-income economies. According to the World Bank, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of the Baltic Sea Region countries ranged from \$8,880 in Latvia to \$64,710 in Norway in 2020 (World Bank, 2021). This growth has been driven by sectors such as manufacturing, trade, and services. In 2019, the manufacturing sector accounted for 20% of the total employment in the region, while the trade and services sectors accounted for 18% and 17%, respectively (BSR Policy Briefing, 2020).

The economic growth in the Baltic Sea Region can be attributed to several factors. First, the region benefits from its geographical location, which provides easy access to major markets in Europe and Asia.

”The Baltic Sea Region Strategy aims to strengthen economic, social, and environmental development in the region by promoting innovation, improving transportation infrastructure, and increasing the use of renewable energy sources.”

¹These include SDGs #1, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16.

²In this chapter, the following 14 countries are considered as countries of the Baltic Sea Region: Belarus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Sweden, Ukraine.

Second, the region has a highly educated workforce, which is attractive to foreign investors. Third, the region has a well-developed infrastructure, including a modern transportation network and advanced telecommunications systems. Fourth, the region benefits from a stable political and economic environment, which provides a favourable business climate for both local and foreign investors.

However, the region also faces economic challenges. One such challenge is a lack of diversification, as many countries in the region are heavily reliant on a few key industries, such as natural resources, manufacturing, and tourism. This overreliance on a narrow range of industries can make the region vulnerable to economic shocks and fluctuations in commodity prices. Another challenge is the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and transition towards a more sustainable economy. The region has set local ambitious climate goals, including becoming carbon neutral by 2050 (Nordic Council, 2021), but achieving these goals will require significant investments in renewable energy and sustainable infrastructure.

To address these challenges, the Baltic Sea Region has adopted various economic development strategies. One such strategy is the Baltic Sea Region Strategy, which was launched in 2009. The strategy aims to strengthen economic, social, and environmental development in the region by promoting cooperation and collaboration among the countries of the region (European Commission, 2009). The strategy focuses on five key areas: innovation, transport, energy, environment, and tourism.

Innovation is a critical component of the Baltic Sea Region’s economic development strategy. The region has a strong tradition of innovation, with many world-renowned companies, such as Nokia, Ericsson, and Kone, originating from the region. Gross domestic expenditures on research and development rose on average worldwide from 2.05 in 2000 to 2.63 in 2021. However, the region’s governments have recognised the importance of innovation and have invested heavily in research and development (R&D). For example, in 2020, Sweden spent 3.3% of its GDP on R&D, while Finland spent 2.7% (Eurostat, 2021).

”The Baltic Sea Region has experienced significant economic growth, but faces challenges related to overreliance on a few key industries and the need to transition towards a more sustainable economy.”

The Baltic Sea Region Strategy aims to promote innovation by supporting research and development, promoting entrepreneurship, and facilitating the commercialisation of research results.

Transport is another key area of focus for the Baltic Sea Region's economic development strategy. The region's transportation infrastructure is critical for connecting the region to the rest of Europe and beyond. The region has invested heavily in modernising its transportation infrastructure, including upgrading its ports, rail networks, and highways. The Baltic Sea Region Strategy aims to further improve the region's transportation infrastructure by promoting interconnectivity and interoperability between different modes of transport, reducing bottlenecks, and improving the efficiency of transportation systems.

Energy is another critical component of the Baltic Sea Region's economic development strategy. The region is heavily reliant on renewable energy sources, such as wind, solar, and hydroelectric power (See below in Figure 6 in Section 3). In fact, the region has some of the highest levels of renewable energy production in the world. For example, Denmark generates over 40% of its electricity from wind power (International Energy Agency, 2020). The Baltic Sea Region Strategy aims to promote the transition towards a more sustainable and low-carbon economy by supporting the development of renewable energy sources, promoting energy efficiency, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The environment and sustainability are also key areas of focus for the Baltic Sea Region's economic development strategy. The region is home to a diverse range of ecosystems and species, and it faces several environmental challenges, such as pollution and climate change. The Baltic Sea Region Strategy aims to promote sustainable and environmentally-friendly development by protecting and restoring ecosystems, reducing pollution, promoting sustainable resource use, and addressing climate change.

Tourism is another important industry in the BSR's economy. The region is home to many cultural and natural attractions, including historic cities, pristine beaches, and natural parks. The tourism industry has significant potential for further growth and development, particularly in the areas of sustainable tourism and cultural tourism. The Baltic Sea Region Strategy aims to promote sustainable and responsible tourism by developing and promoting high-quality tourism products, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting environmental and social sustainability.

Summarising, in the past few years, the economic progress in the Baltic Sea vicinity has been notable, thanks to sectors like manufacturing, trade, amenities, and others. Nevertheless, the region encounters different obstacles, including the absence of variety and the necessity to curtail greenhouse gas discharges. To resolve these predicaments, the locality has accepted several economic expansion plans, such as the Baltic Sea Region Strategy, intended to fortify economic, societal, and ecological progression in the area through cooperation and partnership between the countries. The primary emphasis areas of the plan comprise innovation, transportation, power, surroundings, and tourism. Sustainable economic evolution in the area hinges on attaining the Sustainable Development Goals.

The theoretical foundation of a state's economic development

Economic development models refer to a variety of strategies and approaches that have been created to foster economic growth within a region or country. Each country has its own unique economic development model, which is based on particular theoretical frameworks.

There are several different theoretical approaches to economic development, each of which emphasises different factors and processes as important for promoting economic growth and improving living standards in low-income countries. In this section, we will review some of the most current theoretical approaches to economic development.

Neoclassical Growth Theory is perhaps the most widely recognised and influential theoretical approach to economic development (Solow, 1956, Romer, 1990). This approach emphasises the role of technology and human capital in promoting economic growth, and argues that growth is primarily driven by investment in physical and human capital, which leads to increases in productivity and output. The neoclassical growth theory also emphasises the importance of market-oriented policies, such as free trade, deregulation, and privatisation, in promoting economic growth.

Critics of neoclassical growth theory argue that it overemphasises the role of market forces and underestimates the importance of institutions, social norms, and political factors in promoting economic development. In particular, representative of neoclassical school argue that neoclassical growth theory fails to account for the ways in which power, inequality, and social conflict can hinder economic growth and development (Solow, 1956, Romer, 1990).

Institutional and Political Economy Approaches to economic development emphasise the importance of institutions, social norms, and political factors in shaping economic outcomes (North, 1990, Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012). These approaches argue that economic development is closely tied to the quality of governance, the nature of political institutions, and the distribution of power and resources within a society.

Institutional and political economy approaches also emphasise the importance of historical legacies and path dependence in shaping economic development. Representative of institutional school argue that the current state of a country's economy is the result of a complex interplay of historical, political, and social factors, and that any attempts to promote economic development must take these factors into account (North, 1990, Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012).

”Neoclassical growth theory emphasises the role of technology and human capital, while institutional and political economy approaches focus on the importance of institutions and political factors for economic development.”

New Structural Economics is a more recent approach to economic development that seeks to integrate the insights of neoclassical growth theory and institutional and political economy approaches. This approach emphasises the importance of structural transformation, or the shift of resources from low-productivity to high-productivity sectors, as a key driver of economic development (Justin Yifu Lin, 2010).

New structural economics also emphasises the importance of context-specific policies and institutions in promoting economic development. It argues that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to economic development, and that policies and institutions must be tailored to the unique needs and circumstances of each country.

Achieving sustainable economic development through a workable economic model is one of the most pressing issues in both economic theory and policy. Therefore, to analyse and compare economic growth patterns in the Baltic Sea countries, we will examine the factors that determine economic growth, which most economists currently agree on. To comprehend the sustainable development of economies in the Baltic Sea Region, we will explore the principles of the theory of the wealth of nations (Cowen and Tabarrok, 2021). According to the book *Modern Principles of Economics* authors (Tyler Cowen and Alex Tabarrok) show that wealth of nations is composed of a set of characteristics. Ultimate causes of wealth are Geography, History, Ideas, Culture and Luck. This leads to institutions, followed by incentives. After incentives, the factors of production are listed as follows: Physical capital, Human capital, and Technical knowledge. The factors are brought together by Organization. The factors of production lead to the immediate result, GDP per capita.

The geographic and historical background, culture, and some other factors of the countries of the Baltic Sea Region have already been discussed or will be discussed in other lectures in this course (see chapter 'Defining the Region'). Here we will focus on the specific patterns that impact specifically on economic growth.

”New structural economics seeks to integrate the insights of neoclassical growth theory and institutional and political economy approaches, emphasising the importance of context-specific policies and institutions tailored to the unique needs and circumstances of each country, for promoting sustainable economic development.”

The key to producing and organising the factors of production are institutions that create appropriate incentives. What institutions facilitate investment and the efficient organisation of factors of production? There is considerable agreement that key institutions include the following:

- Property rights
- Honest government
- Political stability
- A dependable legal system
- Competitive and open markets

By understanding how well these institutions work in particular countries, we can benchmark and make recommendations for the development of more stable institutions that create 'healthy' incentives for the economy.

Healthy incentives create the right signals to allow factors of production to develop using the laws of free market regulation. The factors of production such as Physical capital (the stock of tools including machines, structures, and equipment), Human capital (tools of the mind; the productive knowledge and skills that workers acquire through education, training, and experience), and Technical knowledge (knowledge about how the world works that is used to produce goods and services) are brought together by Organization and lead to the immediate result, GDP per capita.

In general, economists in modern science agree that there are two main types of economic growth, which determine the existence of economic development models: Catching-up growth and Cutting-edge growth (Cowen and Tabarrok, 2021).

The first type of Catching-up growth: Growth due to capital accumulation. This approach uses economic indicators such as GDP, accumulated capital or investment to analyse economic growth.

The second type of economic growth is Cutting-edge growth: Growth due to new ideas. Here we based on the economics of ideas. Ideas can be freely shared with any number of people, and ideas are not devalued. Better ideas let us produce more output from the same inputs of Factors of production. The economic indicators of the innovation economy are commonly used to analyse economic growth within this approach.

Economic development indicators

Regardless of which model of economic development a country chooses, there are universal economic indicators that characterise the dynamics of economic development and demonstrate the transformation in the sustainability of the economy of a country or region. Various international organisations analyse economic profiles of countries that we will use for the purposes of our chapter. For example, the World Bank (World Bank Country Profile, 2022) and the United Nations (UNCTAD, 2022) accumulate data and make it available to the public in up-to-date formats.

In the upcoming section that analyses economic development in the Baltic Sea Region, we use the World Bank's approach to define several economic indicators, listed below (The World Bank, 2023).

1. Gross Domestic Product (GDP): The total value of all goods and services produced within a country's borders in a specific period of time, usually a year. It tells us how much all the goods and services produced in a country are worth a year.
2. GDP per capita: The total value of a country's GDP divided by its population, providing an estimate of the average economic output per person.
3. GDP growth rate in %: The percentage change in a country's GDP over a specific period of time, typically a year, indicating the rate of economic growth or contraction. The speed at which a country's economy is growing or shrinking over time.
4. Poverty headcount ratio: The percentage of people in a country who are considered to be living in poverty, based on a certain income level.

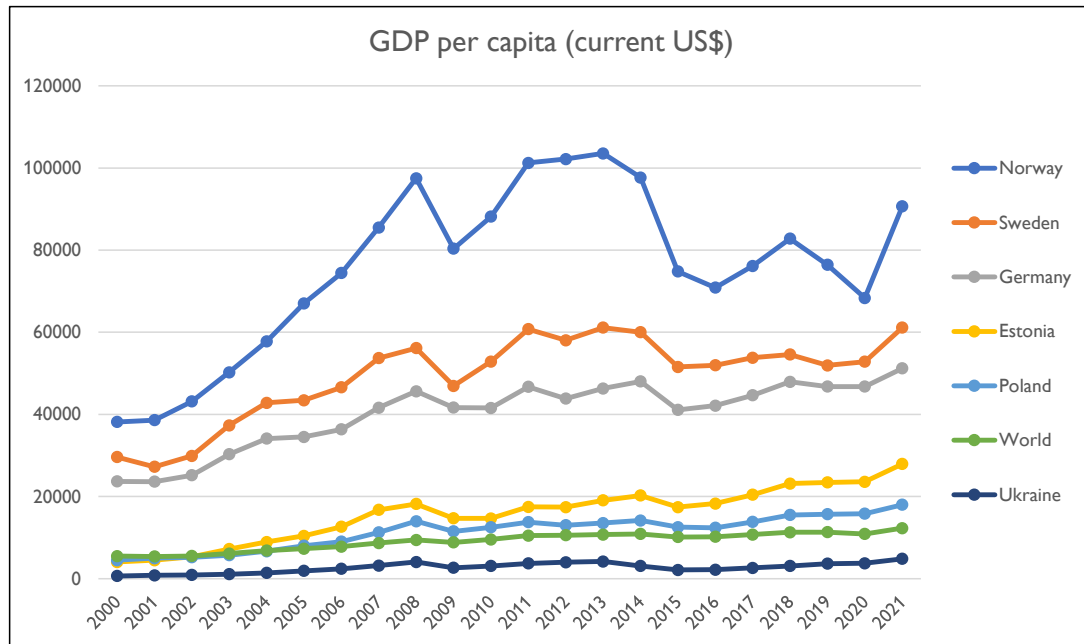
We will use Poverty headcount ratio at \$2.15 per day (2017 PPP) (% of population) as the percentage of a country's population living below the poverty line of \$2.15 per day (in 2017 Purchasing Power Parity terms), indicating the proportion of the population living in poverty.

5. Share of services in GDP: The percentage of a country's GDP that is generated by the service sector, including industries such as transportation, retail, and finance.
6. Share of goods in GDP: The percentage of a country's GDP that is generated by the production of goods, including industries such as manufacturing, agriculture, and mining (or cars, clothes, and food).
7. Inflation: The rate at which the general level of prices for goods and services is increasing over time, typically measured as a percentage change in a price index such as the Consumer Price Index (CPI). We hear often about Inflation as the rate at which prices for things like food, clothing, and housing are going up over time.
8. Unemployment is a measure of the percentage of the labour force that is without work but actively seeking employment. It is calculated by dividing the number of unemployed individuals by the total labour force and expressing the result as a percentage. In simpler terms, it tells us how many people in a country don't have a job but are looking for one. High unemployment rates can indicate a struggling economy, while low unemployment rates may suggest a strong economy with many job opportunities available.
9. Exports and imports of goods and services: The value of goods and services that a country sells to other countries, and the value of goods and services that it buys from other countries, indicating the level of international trade.
10. Foreign direct investment (FDI): Investment made by a company or individual in one country into a business located in another country, with the aim of establishing a lasting interest or control over that business. When a person or company from one country invests money in a business in another country, in order to make money or gain control over that business.

11. Net FDI inflows: The difference between the amount of foreign direct investment received by a country from abroad and the amount of foreign direct investment made by that country in other countries, indicating the net flow of investment into or out of the country.

12. Research and development expenditures: The amount of money that a country spends on research and development activities, including basic and applied research as well as experimental development, indicating the level of innovation and technological advancement in the economy. We can consider R&D as the amount of money that a country spends on creating new ideas, products, and technologies. This can show the country's ability to innovate and adapt to new economic realities. Countries that have increased their R&D spending over time are often those with dynamic and growing economies.

Summarising, economic development models refer to strategies and approaches that promote economic growth within a region or country. Neoclassical Growth Theory emphasises technology and human capital and market-oriented policies, while Institutional and Political Economy Approaches highlight the importance of governance quality, political institutions, and power and resource distribution. New Structural Economics integrates the insights of the first two models and emphasises structural transformation and context-specific policies and institutions. Institutions create appropriate incentives and promote the development of factors of production, including physical capital, human capital, and technical knowledge. Thus, factor-driven catch-up economic growth and innovation-driven advanced economic growth ensure sustainable development for the country. Therefore, based on the theories described above, in the next paragraph we turn to an overview of economic indicators to observe the dynamics of the economic transformation of individual countries of the Baltic Sea Region for 2000-2021.



Analysis of economic development indicators in the Baltic Sea Region in 2000-2021

We use the World Bank interactive online tool in this chapter to visualise economic trends in the Baltic Sea Region over the period 2000-2021. The reader can experiment with the interactive tool on their website.

The standard of living of the population is measured and compared using GDP per capita. In essence, this indicator tells how well people live. The growth rate of GDP per capita serves as a key indicator for assessing changes in the quality of life over time. It offers valuable insights into whether the overall standard of living is improving or declining within a given population.

Figure 1 shows that the GDP per capita of all the countries has generally increased over the 21-year period, with some fluctuations and differences in growth rates. It is obvious that the standard of living in the Baltic Sea Region is higher than the world average. Only Belarus and Ukraine had a GDP per capita lower than the World average. Norway has consistently had the highest GDP per capita among the countries included, while Ukraine has had the lowest.

Figure 1. GDP per capita (current US\$) – Estonia, Germany, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Ukraine, and World, 2000-2021.

Source: World Bank, 2022



QR-code to the website www.data.worldbank.org

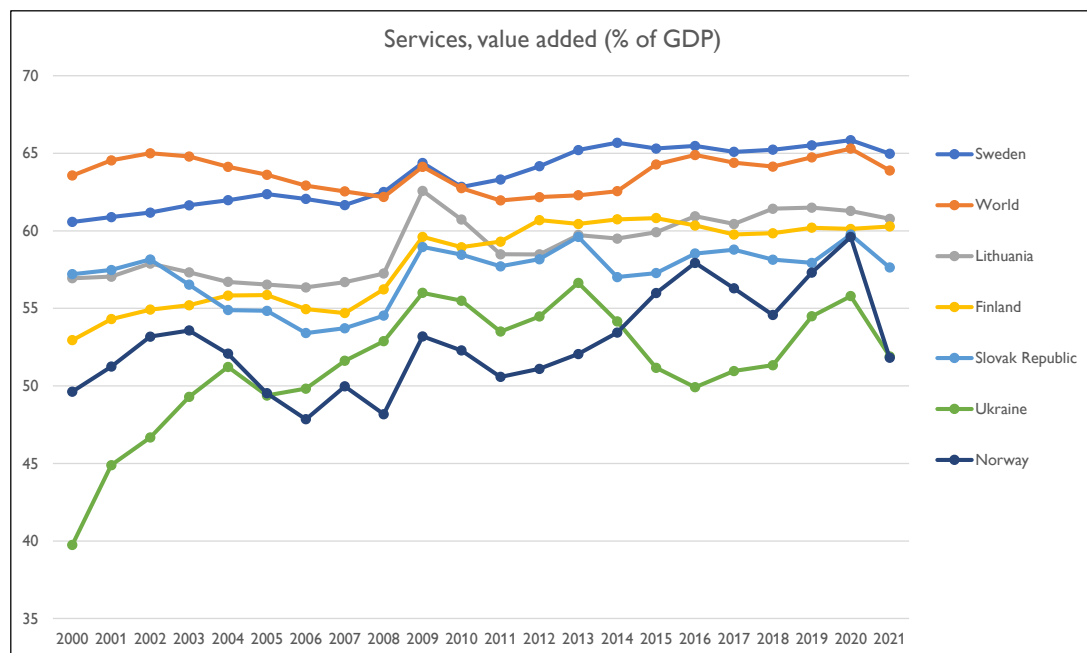
The gap between the highest and lowest GDP per capita has gradually decreased over the years, with some countries like Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia catching up with the others. There are some noticeable dips in GDP per capita for some countries during the global financial crisis of 2008-2009, and again during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The GDP per capita growth rate grew unevenly across the region. Predictably, the more underdeveloped countries had higher GDP per capita growth rates, with the exception of Germany, where the GDP per capita growth rate increased the most over 21 years (see Table 1).

Country Name	GDP per capita growth rate 2021 to 2000
Germany	9.33
Ukraine	7.35
Lithuania	7.20
Russian Federation	6.88
Estonia	6.86
Latvia	6.29
Belarus	5.72
Czechia	4.45
Poland	4.00
Slovak Republic	3.94
Norway	2.34
Denmark	2.21
Finland	2.20
Sweden	2.06

Table 1. Growth rate of GDP per capita in 2021 compared to 2000, BSR. Note: Data are calculated by the end of 2021, i.e., before Russian aggression in Ukraine.

As we will show later, this is due to a higher rate of innovative economic growth. The economic transformation in the Baltic Sea Region is evidenced by the transition from a predominantly manufacturing-oriented economic structure to one increasingly dominated by service industries. This shift signifies a noteworthy evolution in the region's economic landscape.

Figure 2 shows the dynamics of the service sector's contribution to GDP in the Baltic Sea Region over a period of 21 years.



Denmark, Norway, and Sweden had the highest service sector contributions to GDP throughout the period, consistently hovering around 65%. Finland and Germany started with lower service sector contributions in 2000 but have steadily increased over time. Lithuania and Slovakia, as well as Estonia, Latvia and Poland started with much lower service sector contributions but have experienced steady growth over the years. Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine had the lowest service sector contributions throughout the period. Overall, the graph shows a general trend of increasing service sector contributions to GDP across all countries over the past two decades. However, the rate of growth varies greatly among the countries, with some experiencing rapid growth and others only modest increases. Additionally, there are significant differences in the level of service sector contribution to GDP among the countries, with Denmark, Norway, and Sweden being highly service-oriented economies, while Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine rely more heavily on other sectors.

Overall, this data suggests that the Baltic Sea Region has undergone a notable shift towards a more service-driven economy over the past two decades.

Figure 2. Services, value added (% of GDP) - Finland, Lithuania, Norway, Slovak Republic, Sweden, Ukraine, World, 2000-2021.

Source: World Bank, 2022

The general upward trend in service sector contributions across all countries underscores the region's increasing focus on service-based activities as a driver of economic growth. However, the varying rates of growth among countries demonstrate the diversity of economic trajectories within the region. These findings highlight the importance of the service sector in shaping the economic landscape of the Baltic Sea Region. Service sectors in the Baltic Sea Region primarily include Financial Services, Information Technology and Telecommunications, Tourism and Hospitality, Transport and Logistics, Healthcare and Medical Services, etc.

The dynamics of the manufacturing sector shows a general trend of declining manufacturing sector contributions to GDP across most countries over the past two decades. However, the rate and extent of decline vary greatly among the countries, with some experiencing relatively stable or even growing manufacturing sectors, while others have seen significant declines. Additionally, there are significant differences in the level of manufacturing sector contributions to GDP among the countries. In the Baltic Sea Region, the following industrial sectors are commonly found- Automotive Industry, Electronics and Electrical Equipment, Machinery and Equipment Manufacturing, Chemical Industry, Shipbuilding and Maritime Industries, Wood and Paper Industries, Textile, Food, Energy and Renewable Resources, Construction and Building Materials and others.

Over the past 21 years in the Baltic Sea Region, the inflation rate has displayed fluctuations, with certain countries experiencing relatively high inflation rates in the early 2000s, notably Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia, with double-digit inflation. However, most countries in the region have succeeded in maintaining relatively low inflation rates since then, and some even encountered deflation during economic recessions. Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland and Germany and consistently exhibited the lowest inflation rates, averaging below or around 2%. In contrast, Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia faced significantly higher inflation rates, averaging over 7% (World Bank, 2022).

As for unemployment, there was a general decline in unemployment rates across most countries in the Baltic Sea Region during the 21-year period. Denmark, Norway, and Sweden consistently reported the lowest average for the period unemployment rates, while Latvia, and Ukraine had the highest rates. Notably, some countries, including Poland, Czech Republic, Estonia, and Lithuania, managed to significantly reduce their unemployment rates over the years, even amidst economic crises such as the global financial crisis of 2008-2009 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (World Bank, 2022). Overall, the data reflects positive trends of declining unemployment rates and relatively stable inflation levels in the region.

International trade in the Baltic Sea Region has generally shown positive growth trends in both exports and imports. Germany has been a dominant player, leading in both total export and import values. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have demonstrated significant export and import growth rates, while Poland and the Czech Republic have maintained relatively steady rates (World Bank, 2022). The region's overall trade dynamics have been influenced by global economic events, with some countries experiencing fluctuations and varying degrees of recovery since the global financial crisis.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows over the past 21 years in the Baltic Sea Region have displayed fluctuations and varying degrees of stability. Germany consistently received the highest FDI inflows among the countries, except for a sharp decrease in 2020. Russia also received significant FDI, though its inflows have been more volatile recently. Countries like Poland, Czech Republic, and Estonia experienced consistent growth in FDI inflows, while others, including Belarus, Ukraine, and Latvia, witnessed more volatile FDI patterns, with significant declines in certain years (World Bank, 2022). The main sectors in which investments have been made in the region include industries such as manufacturing, technology, finance, and energy, among others, with countries' FDI attractiveness varying based on their economic performance and policies.

Based on the theoretical concepts explored in the second section, the economic growth and transformation of standards of living are heavily influenced by the economics of ideas and investments in innovation. Consequently, it is pertinent to examine the indicator of 'Research and development expenditure' to better understand the role of innovation and intellectual capital in driving economic progress and development. By analysing this indicator, we can gain insights into the extent to which countries prioritise and harness innovative practices to enhance their competitiveness and foster sustainable economic expansion.

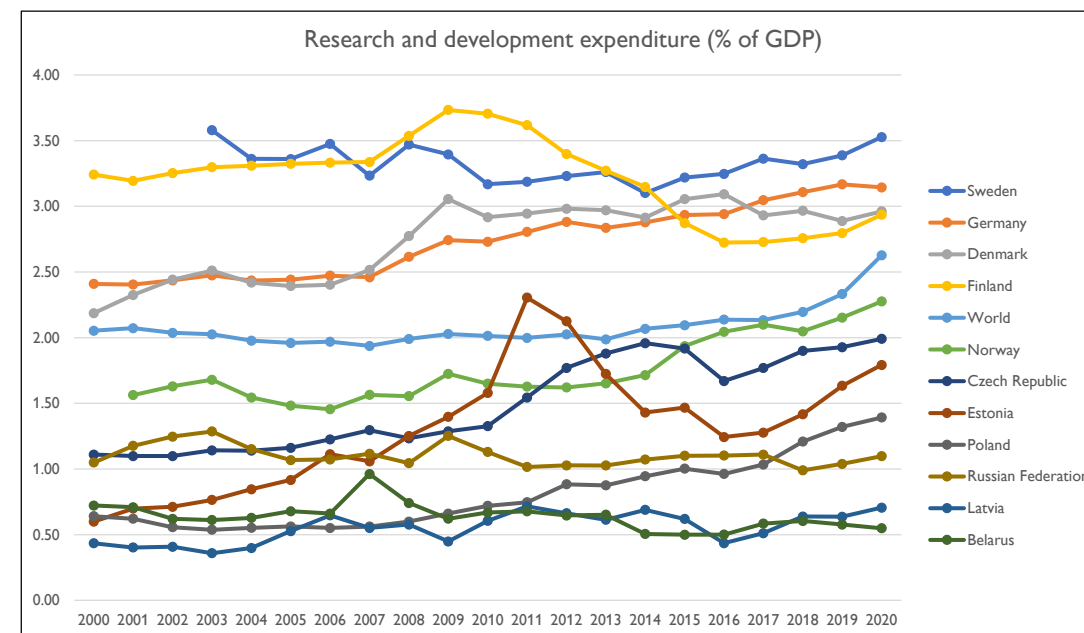
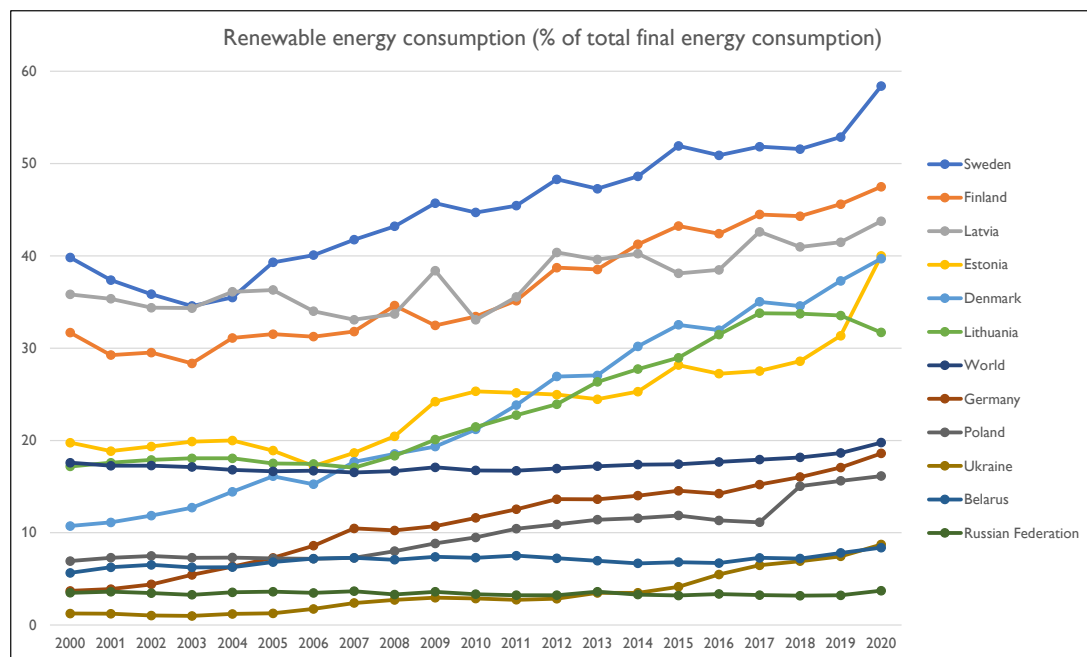


Figure 3 depicts the trends in research and development (R&D) expenditure as a percentage of GDP in the Baltic Sea Region over the 21-year period from 2000 to 2021. Germany consistently led with the highest R&D expenditure as a percentage of GDP among the countries, although there was a slight decrease in 2020. Denmark, Finland, and Sweden also displayed high levels of R&D expenditure relative to their GDP. In contrast, countries like Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia allocated relatively low proportions of their GDP to R&D. Poland and the Czech Republic experienced gradual increases in R&D expenditure over the years, but their levels remained comparatively lower.

Figure 3. Research and development expenditure (% of GDP) – Belarus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Russian Federation, Sweden, World, 2000-2021.

Source: World Bank, 2022



Overall, the graph underscores significant variations in R&D investment across the countries, with those with higher levels enjoying a competitive advantage in innovation and technological development, which has important implications for their long-term economic growth and competitiveness.

Figure 4 indicates the transition and progress made in incorporating renewable energy sources into the overall energy consumption mix in the BSR. The data clearly indicates that a considerable number of countries in the region surpass the global average for renewable energy adoption. Sweden, Finland, Latvia, Denmark, Estonia, and Lithuania demonstrate dynamic and consistent progress in increasing the share of renewable energy in their total final energy consumption. On the other hand, countries like the Russian Federation and Belarus show very limited dynamism in transitioning their energy consumption towards alternative and renewable sources.

Based on the data analysed above on economic development, we can say that the Baltic Sea Region countries have experienced robust economic growth in the past two decades.

Figure 4. Renewable energy consumption (% of total final energy consumption) – Belarus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russian Federation, Sweden, Ukraine, and World, 2000-2021.

Source: World Bank, 2022

The main drivers of this growth include:

1. Globalisation: The Baltic Sea Region countries have become more integrated into the global economy, primarily due to their membership in the European Union and growing trade with Asia. This integration has opened up new markets, increased trade volumes, and attracted foreign direct investments.
2. Technology and Knowledge-based Economy: There has been a shift towards a more knowledge-based economy, with increased investments in the education sector, research, and development. The region has embraced technological advancements, particularly in the IT sector. This has enabled the region to become a hub for tech start-ups and attract skilled labour, which has contributed to the growth of the knowledge-based economy.
3. Infrastructure Investments: Significant investments in infrastructure, especially transportation, energy, and communication, have enabled the region to attract investments and open up new economic opportunities.
4. Shift from Manufacturing to Services: The region has moved away from traditional manufacturing to service sectors like IT, hospitality, and tourism, among others.
5. Green Economy: The region has embraced the concept of a green economy, with the adoption of renewable energy sources, green infrastructure projects, and eco-friendly policies.

The Baltic Sea Region experienced the largest decline in GDP growth in 2008-2009 during the global financial crisis, as well as some decline in 2014-2015. In addition, the Covid 19 pandemic had a significant impact on the region's economic growth decline in 2020. Despite the impressive economic transformations, the Baltic Sea Region countries face several challenges that could jeopardise their economic progress.

In particular Economic Disparities: While some countries in the region, like Sweden and Finland, have recorded robust economic growth, others, like Latvia and Lithuania, have lagged behind.

“The Baltic Sea Region countries have experienced significant economic growth in the past two decades, driven by globalisation, technology, infrastructure investments, a shift from manufacturing to services, and a green economy.”

This widening economic gap could impact the region's stability and growth. Despite its many successes, the Baltic Sea Region is still facing several challenges that threaten its progress. For example, economic inequality, which can lead to social and economic problems. Countries like Latvia, or Ukraine and Belarus, for instance, have higher levels of inequality than other countries in the region.

Finally, the region's extensive dependence on exports means that it is vulnerable to fluctuations in global markets, which can have a significant impact on the region's economic growth.

Conclusion

The Baltic Sea Region has experienced significant economic growth in recent years, driven by sectors such as manufacturing, trade, and services. The region benefits from its geographical location, highly educated workforce, well-developed infrastructure, and stable political and economic environment. However, the region faces challenges such as a lack of diversification and the need to transition towards a more sustainable economy. To address these challenges, the region has adopted various economic development strategies, including the Baltic Sea Region Strategy, which focuses on areas such as innovation, transport, energy, environment, and tourism. By promoting cooperation and collaboration among the countries in the region, the strategy aims to strengthen economic, social, and environmental development in the Baltic Sea Region. Overall, the Baltic Sea Region's economy in 2000-2021 has been a story of progress and development, with the region becoming a hub for international economic activity. Once again, this chapter centers on the economic conditions that prevailed during the pre-war era. It is worth reiterating that the theoretical framework expounded herein should serve as a guide for those who wish to embark on an independent exploration of the impact of the war on the region's economic progress beyond 2022.

Anticipating independent research, we can only point out that the Russian aggression to Ukraine has had a significant

impact on the economic development of the Baltic Sea Region, affecting trade, energy, and tourism. The imposition of economic sanctions by the EU and the US has led to a decrease in trade between the region and Russia, affecting the economies of several countries. Energy security has become a concern, with some countries seeking to reduce their dependence on Russian gas by diversifying their energy mix. The decline in tourism has also had an impact on the region, with some countries seeking to diversify their markets.

However, the Baltic Sea Region has been showing resilience in the face of these challenges, taking measures to cope with the economic consequences of the Russian aggression. Countries have diversified their trade partners, seeking opportunities in other regions, and invested in renewable energy sources to enhance their energy security.

Questions for a discussion

1. What are the Sustainable Development Goals and how do they relate to the Baltic Sea Region?
2. What economic challenges does the Baltic Sea Region face, and what strategies have been adopted to address these challenges?
3. What are the different theoretical approaches to economic development, and what are the key factors they emphasise?
4. What is the neoclassical growth theory, and what are its main critiques? What is the new structural economics approach, and how does it differ from neoclassical growth theory and institutional and political economy approaches?
5. What are the economic indicators used by the World Bank to analyse economic development in the Baltic Sea Region, and how do they provide insight into the sustainability and transformation of the economy of a country or region?
6. To what extent has economic development varied across the countries of the Baltic Sea region during the observed time period, and what factors may have influenced the observed differences in economic growth?

Recommended reading

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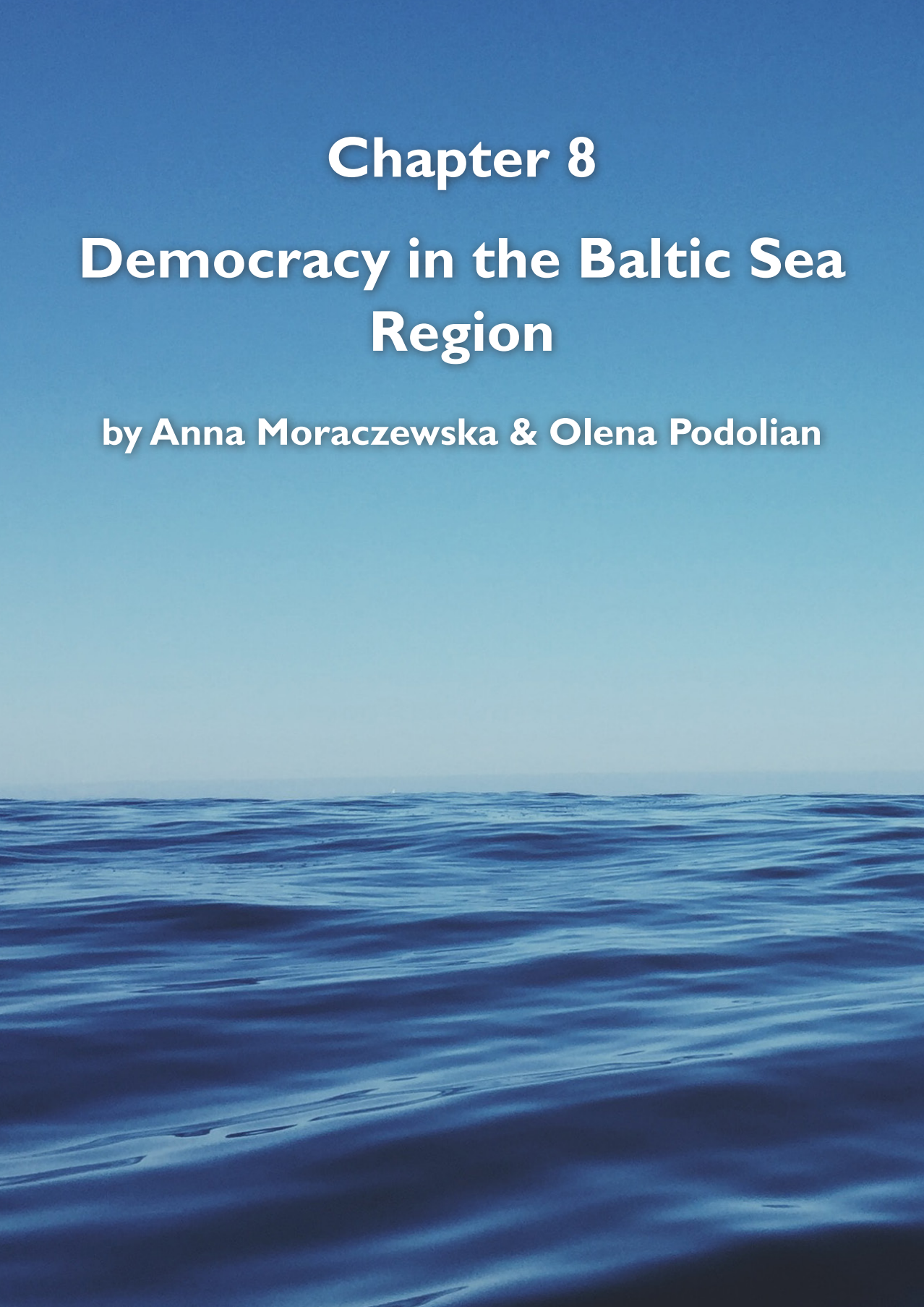
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Chapter 8

Democracy in the Baltic Sea Region

by Anna Moraczewska & Olena Podolian

Introduction

The key idea of democracy is when people at different levels (local, national, and international) govern themselves. Democracy is said to be a system ruled by the people, of the people, for the people, giving it a representative dimension. Democracy is known as the best, although sometimes awkward, political system to enable people to find agreements among competing ideas and values. Citizens of democratic states are allowed to express their opinions, influence political processes and enjoy different freedoms. On the other hand, democracy is not an ideal system but from the known alternatives, it is the best, as Winston Churchill said (Quinault, 2001)

The study of democracy is not an easy task and can be based on many indicators. It largely depends on what we consider to be the determinants of democracy and how long the system has existed in a country. We can also analyse the crisis of democracy and the imbalance of its basic determinants. As Brigitte Geissel, Marianne Kneuer and Hans-Joachim Lauth state, the minimum standard of democracy is that there exist institutions that permit citizens to exercise self-government via elections (Geissel et al., 2016: 574). Other academics mention democratic rights and political liberties as the key elements (de Marneffe, 1994). Researchers have developed more than a dozen measures of the quality of democracy to assess its level and establish its viability. The Democracy Index measures pluralism, civil liberties and political culture based on 60 indicators grouped in five different categories. It divides countries into full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes and authoritarian regimes (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2022). Freedom House, measuring global freedoms, rates people's access to political rights and civil liberties for 210 countries. When concentrating on democracy governance, it compares scores of 29 countries from Central Europe and Central Asia and bases the measurement on national and local governance, electoral process, independent media, civil society, judicial framework and independence, and corruption (Freedom House, 2022).

”The minimum standard of democracy is that there exist institutions that permit citizens to exercise self-government via elections.”

The Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development in its Sustainable Governance Index examines three parameters among which there is the quality of democracy expressed in four indicators: electoral processes, access to information, civil rights and political liberties and last, the rule of law.

This chapter aims to overview the state of democracy in the Baltic Sea states. First a general picture will be given using a comparative method and then individual countries will be presented. The authors will use different indicators of democracy, mentioned above, to give a wider picture of the investigated issue. The countries are divided into four groups based on the level of democracy and geographical position: Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland and Sweden; Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania; Central European countries: Germany and Poland and Eastern European countries: Belarus, Russia and Ukraine.

State of democracy in the BSR

From the historical perspective, the Baltic Sea Region is characterised by heterogeneity and variability in the process and level of democracy across countries. Li Bennich-Björkman (2002: 287-289) delineated two waves of democratisation in the region: the first wave referred to setting up an institutional framework of democracy in post-communist countries and the second wave referred to the appearance of a democratic political culture all over the region. Since 1989 post-Soviet countries have been called transition states facing many challenges in transforming their authoritarian political systems into democracies and centrally planned economies into free market economies (Bennich- Björkman: 2002). Then, the largest enlargement of the European Union (EU) in 2004 included four transition countries of the Region: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, integrating them into Western structures. This act confirmed the identification of these countries with the ideas of liberalism and democracy. Since then, eight of nine littoral countries of the Baltic Sea have been members of the EU. With the Lisbon Treaty of 2007, the countries consolidated co-operation within the EU and the Baltic Sea Region.

”From the historical perspective the Baltic Sea Region is characterised by heterogeneity and variability in the process and level of democracy across countries.”

These eight countries constitute democracies and the question has shifted towards considering the quality of democracy rather than its presence. On the other hand, tendencies towards autocratisation, defined as the substantial decline of core institutional attributes of electoral democracy (Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019: 1095), can be observed in the Region. Russia, after the period of democratisation in the 1990s, began step by step to move away from this system towards authoritarian rule. Two countries - Belarus and Ukraine, belonging to the Region based on the Baltic Sea drainage area, were characterised by changing directions of democratic development. Belarus under the rule of Lukashenka deepened the authoritarian regime, while Ukraine, after the Orange Revolution, headed slowly toward democratic reforms. Independent factors have also influenced the quality of democracy in the region. Throughout 2020 and 2021 all states of the Baltic Sea Region were hit by restrictions on movement related to Covid-19, including the implementation of curfews and lockdowns.

The Democracy Index is an index elaborated by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) for 165 independent states and two territories, and it is based on 60 indicators, divided into five categories: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, functioning of government, political participation and political culture (EIU 2022). Each investigated country is classified into a specific type of regime from a choice of four: ‘full democracies’, ‘flawed democracies’, ‘hybrid regimes’ and ‘authoritarian regimes’. Assigning a country to a specific regime category depends on the score obtained between 0 and 10. The lower the score, the lower quality of democracy is calculated. Full democracies are nations where civil liberties and fundamental political freedoms are not only respected but also reinforced by a political culture conducive to the thriving of democratic principles. Flawed democracies are nations where elections are fair and free and basic civil liberties are honoured but may have issues (e.g. media freedom infringement and minor suppression of political opposition and critics). Hybrid regimes are nations with regular electoral frauds, preventing them from being fair and free democracies.



QR-code to the EIU report *Democracy Index 2022* on www.eiu.com

”The majority of countries within the Baltic Sea Region are democratic, albeit to a different degree, but there are also two authoritarian regimes: Belarus and Russia.”

Authoritarian regimes are nations where political pluralism is non-existent or severely limited (EIU 2022).

The EIU Report ‘Democracy Index 2022’ concludes that the scores of more than half of the states either declined or stagnated. Compared to other countries, Western Europe was characterised by a return to higher scores of democracy than during the pandemic, when many governments implemented different prohibitions. The majority of countries within the Baltic Sea Region are democratic, albeit to a different degree, but there are also two authoritarian regimes: Belarus and Russia, ranked at the end of the whole ranking.

Table 1. Baltic Sea Region countries ranking on Democracy Index 2022 – 2013 in alphabetical order.

Source: Economist Intelligence Unit (2022).

Country	Rank in 2022	Regime type	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013
Belarus	153	Authoritarian regime	1.99	2.41	2.59	2.48	3.13	3.13	3.54	3.62	3.69	3.04
Denmark	6	Full democracy	9.28	9.09	9.15	9.22	9.22	9.22	9.2	9.11	9.11	9.38
Estonia	27	Flawed democracy	7.96	7.84	7.84	7.9	7.97	7.79	7.85	7.85	7.74	7.61
Finland	5	Full democracy	9.29	9.27	9.2	9.25	9.14	9.03	9.03	9.03	9.03	9.03
Germany	14	Full democracy	8.8	8.67	8.67	8.68	8.68	8.61	8.63	8.64	8.64	8.31
Latvia	38	Flawed democracy	7.37	7.31	7.24	7.49	7.38	7.25	7.31	7.37	7.48	7.05
Lithuania	39	Flawed democracy	7.31	7.18	7.13	7.5	7.41	7.47	7.54	7.54	7.54	7.24
Norway	1	Full democracy	9.81	9.75	9.81	9.87	9.87	9.87	9.93	9.93	9.93	9.93
Poland	46	Flawed democracy	7.04	6.6	6.85	6.62	6.67	6.67	6.83	7.09	7.47	7.12
Russia	146	Authoritarian regime	2.28	3.24	3.31	3.11	2.94	3.17	3.24	3.31	3.39	3.59
Sweden	4	Full democracy	9.39	9.26	9.26	9.39	9.39	9.39	9.39	9.45	9.73	9.73
Ukraine	87	Hybrid regime	5.42	5.57	5.81	5.9	5.69	5.7	5.7	5.42	5.84	5.91

EUROPE DEMOCRACY INDEX

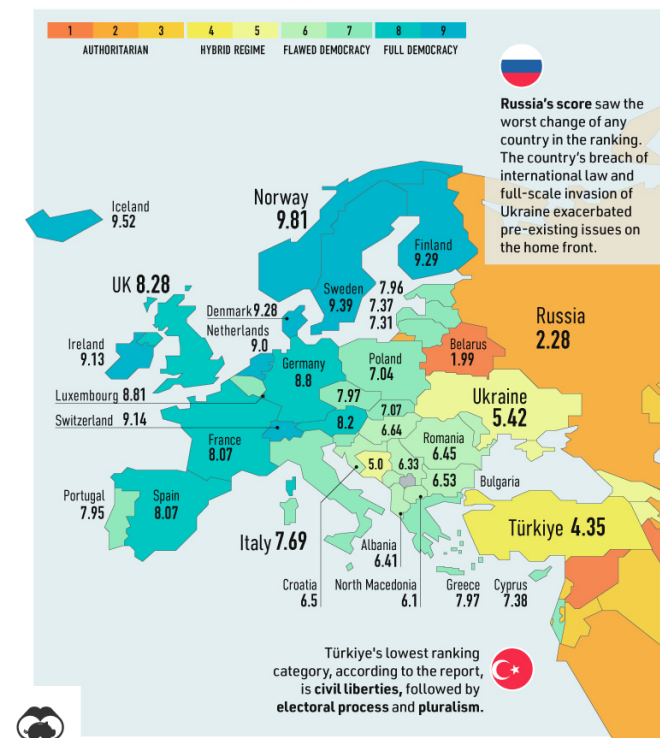


Figure 1. Europe Democracy Index.

Source: Visual Capitalist. Based on EIU Democracy Index 2022.

Russia had the biggest decline in score of any country in the world in 2022. Its full-scale invasion of Ukraine was accompanied by all-out repression and censorship at home. Russia has been on a trajectory away from democracy for a long time and is now acquiring many of the features of a dictatorship (EIU, 2022: 4). Nevertheless, Belarus ‘achieved’ the lowest score, 1.99, in the Region, and position 153 out of 167. Referring to its scores, we can observe a continuous decline in liberties. Also Poland, since 2015 when the nationalist-populist Law and Justice party (PiS) won the election, has shown significant declines in the quality of democracy compared to other countries in the Baltic Sea. Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine has redefined the main priorities of Ukraine and the vital importance of defending national sovereignty, without which real freedom and democracy are unattainable (EIU, 2022: 4).

‘Democracy Index 2022’ concludes that the scores of more than half of the states either declined or stagnated.

Country	Rank	Electoral process and pluralism	Functioning of government	Political participation	Political culture	Civil liberties
Norway	1	10	9.64	10	10	9.41
Sweden	4	9.58	9.64	8.33	10	9.41
Finland	5	10	9.64	8.33	8.75	9.71
Denmark	6	10	9.29	8.33	9.38	9.41
Germany	14	9.58	8.57	8.33	8.13	9.41
Estonia	27	9.58	7.86	6.67	6.88	8.82
Latvia	38	9.58	6.07	6.11	6.25	8.82
Lithuania	39	9.58	6.43	6.11	5.63	8.82
Poland	46	9.17	6.07	6.67	6.25	7.06
Ukraine	87	6.5	2.71	7.22	6.25	4.41
Russia	146	0.92	2.14	2.22	3.75	2.35
Belarus	153	0	0.79	3.33	4.38	1.47

Table 2. Indicators of democracy for the Baltic Sea States in 2022.

Source: Economist Intelligence Unit (2022).

Compared to other countries, Western Europe was characterised by a return to higher scores of democracy than during the pandemic, when many governments implemented different prohibitions. The majority of countries within the Baltic Sea Region are democratic, albeit to a different degree, but there are also two authoritarian regimes: Belarus and Russia, ranked at the end of the whole ranking. The Report states that Russia recorded the biggest decline in score of any country in the world in 2022. Its invasion of Ukraine was accompanied by all-out repression and censorship at home. Russia has been on a trajectory away from democracy for a long time and is now acquiring many of the features of a dictatorship (EIU, 2022: 4). Nevertheless, it was Belarus that ‘achieved’ the lowest score – 1.99 in the Region and 153 position out of 167. Referring to its scores we can observe a continuous decline in liberties. Also Poland, since 2015, when the nationalist–populist Law and Justice party (PiS) won the election, has shown significant declines in the quality of democracy compared to other countries in the Baltic Sea. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has redefined the main priorities of Ukraine and the vital importance of defending national sovereignty, without which real freedom and democracy are unattainable (EIU, 2022: 4).

Looking at the whole Region, its average score was rather

high at 7.16 compared to the world’s average which was 5.28. This was largely due to the consolidated democracies in the Nordic countries, which ranked the highest in the world, but on the other hand, the underscoring was a consequence of the two authoritarian regimes in the Region. Norway, included in the BSR drainage area, took the first position in the world ranking. Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, were among the top six most democratic countries. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland have been classified as flawed democracies with Estonia reaching a score of almost 8 and Poland with a score of little over 7. All these states may be still named young democracies. Germany is the only exception with a score of 8.8 which qualifies it as an established democracy.

By analysing individual indicators of democracy for the BSR states we observe high disparities, even as extreme as 10 points in the electoral process and pluralism between Norway, Finland, Denmark, and Belarus. Political culture was assessed as the highest in Norway and Sweden (10.00) and the lowest in Russia (2.22). Among democratic countries, Poland represents a limited level of civil liberties and is close to Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia according to the rest of the indicators. Since 2015, judiciary and media reforms in Poland have put the country in a collision with European norms and as an effect, a sanctions procedure initiated under Article 7 of the EU Treaty was imposed on Poland (EIU 2022 Poland). War-torn Ukraine had the lowest score in the functioning of government which is a consequence of the situation. However, wars can be perceived as the biggest drivers of political and social change, which gives hope that Ukraine will continue its struggle not only for sovereignty but also for deeper democratisation.

A cross-country analysis

For the review of democratic progress in countries in this chapter, narrative reports and scores from several democratic indexes have been used. The principal ones are two publications of Bertelsmann Stiftung: Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) for the post-socialist/Soviet states and Sustainable Governance Indicators (SGI) for the old Nordic democracies and Germany (country reports) as well as Varieties of Democracy Institute’s (VDI) democracy reports.

Democracy Index				
Country	BTI/SGI (2003-2022)	EUI (2006-2022)	FH/NIT (2009-2023)	VDI (2018-2023)
Denmark	Liberal democracy	Full democracy	Consolidated democracy	Liberal democracy
Finland	Liberal democracy	Full democracy	Consolidated democracy	Liberal democracy
Sweden	Liberal democracy	Full democracy	Consolidated democracy	Liberal democracy
Estonia	Democracy in consolidation	Flawed democracy	Consolidated democracy	Liberal democracy
Latvia	Democracy in consolidation	Flawed democracy	Consolidated democracy	Liberal democracy
Lithuania	Democracy in consolidation	Flawed democracy	Consolidated democracy	Liberal democracy/electoral democracy (since 2017)
Germany	Liberal democracy	Full democracy	Consolidated democracy	Liberal democracy
Poland	Democracy in consolidation	Flawed democracy	Consolidated democracy	Liberal democracy/electoral democracy (since 2017)
Belarus	Hardline autocracy (2006-2008, 2012-2016, 2022)/moderate autocracy (2010, 2018-2020)	Authoritarian regime	Consolidated authoritarian regime	Electoral autocracy
Russia	Highly Defective democracy/moderate autocracy (since 2014)	Hybrid regime/authoritarian regime (since 2011)	Consolidated authoritarian regime	Electoral autocracy
Ukraine	Defective democracy	Flawed democracy/hybrid regime (since 2011)	Transitional or hybrid regime	Electoral democracy/Electoral autocracy (since 2017)

The indicators have been triangulated with those from Nations in Transit (NIT) by Freedom House and The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Democracy Index, as well as World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders (Rapporteurs Sans Frontiers, RSF). The status of democracy in all countries discussed here according to these four indexes is summarised in Table 3.

The conceptual model applied for the review is one of political democracy as comprised by (i) popular sovereignty and (ii) political liberties. They are operationalised as (i) regularly held elections in a fair and correct manner and (ii) freedom of expression, freedom of association, political participation and rule of law (no institution in a society is empowered to act outside the law) (Bennich-Björkman, 2003: 284).

Denmark, Finland and Sweden

Liberal democracies in the three Nordic countries have been the most stable over the period under review, with the Baltic States coming a close second, as analysed next, with the rest of countries following in the order of descending level of democracy. Denmark, Finland and Sweden have continuously scored in the top 10% of different democratic indexes (EUI, SGI, VDI) regarding clean elections, freedom of association and expression, and rule of law. Interestingly, whilst Finland often lagged behind Denmark and Sweden, Estonia at times outperformed them.

All three countries' regimes are consolidated and well-functioning democracies, which belong to the most developed not only in the region but also in the world (Ekman and Schartau, 2017: 122). Like for the rest of the region, the challenge for Nordic liberal democracies has been the rise of populism and radical right. The last two decades saw the rise of populist radical right parties in all three countries. This is partly attributed to the migration crisis in 2014-2017 caused by the war in Syria (Hagelund, 2020). As argued by Cas Mudde and Cristobál Rivora Kaltwasser (2012), the populist radical right does not oppose majoritarian democracy per se, but is critical of specifically liberal democracy.

”Denmark, Finland and Sweden have continuously scored in the top 10% of different democratic indexes (EUI, SGI, VDI) regarding clean elections, freedom of association and expression, and rule of law.”

To the left Table 3. Status of democracy in the Baltic Sea Region countries according to different indicators.

Source: the authors' compilation from the democracy indexes.

Country	Total score	Electoral processes	Access to information	Rule of Law	Civil Rights and Political Liberties
Denmark	8.9	8.2	9	9.8	8.7
Finland	9.1	9	10	8.3	9.3
Sweden	9.3	9	9.3	9.5	9.3

Table 4. Quality of Democracy according to Sustainable Governance Indicators 2022.

Source: Sustainable Governance Indicators (2022).

Therefore, the populist radical right's rise represents both a corrective – giving a voice to those groups not usually participating in politics - and a threat to liberal democracy due to its anti-elitist and anti-establishment stance. Traditionally, freedom of media is the most firmly established in these three, amongst other Northern European, countries. All three countries have scored amongst the top 10 on media freedom globally during the period under review, with a few exceptional years.

Denmark is a liberal democracy with free and fair electoral procedures, scoring 4th on quality of democracy by SGI (SGI, 2022). All political parties have the right to equal airing time on the radio and television. Private media - mostly newspapers - tend to include all parties and candidates; however, a decline in their number has seen a concentration of ownership in a few national newspapers, which means reduced media pluralism. Likewise, financing can be a limiting factor as the larger parties have an advantage over smaller ones. Political parties are financed through membership fees, support from other organisations or corporations, and state subsidies. Sources of private donations over DKK 20,000 must be made public, although a few ways to circumvent this rule have been reported, for which reason private donations are feared to lack transparency. Meanwhile, public support for political parties has been gaining importance (SGI, 2022: 25-26). The populist radical right Danish People's Party with its strict immigration policy preference has been present in Folketinget, the Danish parliament, since 2001, although with worse election results and thus fewer seats since 2019.

Freedom of expression is protected by the Constitution (Article 77) and the strong norm of non-interference,

as well as by the judicial system. The public media (radio and television) are independent, have editorial freedom and a high degree of pluralism. Whilst traditional media overall face increasing competition from online news and social media, and the readership of print media has been declining, print media and television still play an important role in public debate (SGI, 2022: 29, 53). In 2006, Denmark dropped from the 1st to 20th place in the World Press Freedom Index because the authors of the Mohammed cartoons, published there in autumn 2005, received serious threats due to their work and had to be given police protection (Reporters Without Borders, 2006). Denmark recovered to 8th place in 2008 when the crisis over the Mohammad cartoons was over and three journalists of the daily newspaper Berlingske Tidende, who had been charged with publishing the details of classified intelligence reports in 2004 about the lack of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, were acquitted (Reporters Without Borders, 2006). However, in 2010 Denmark again dropped from the 1st place, shared with Finland and Sweden in 2009, because of murder attempts against cartoonists Kurt Westergaard and Lars Vilks and a consequent risk of self-censorship "in a climate of rising extremism and nationalism" (Reporters Without Borders, 2010).

Denmark has a long tradition of rule of law. The judiciary is independent even though the government appoints judges. The courts can review governmental actions, i.e. there is judicial review (SGI, 2022: 33).

Finland is a liberal democracy with free and fair electoral process, scoring 2nd on quality of democracy by SGI (2022). The access of political parties and candidates to the media is fair. However, there are practical and financial constraints on access to media, foremost televised debates, for smaller parties. This bias is problematic considering the increased impact of such debates on the electoral outcome (SGI, 2022: 27). However, social media plays an increasing role in candidates' electoral campaign, which makes them less dependent on party organisations and external funding.

Electronic voting was tested in three municipalities in the 2008 elections but has not been adopted yet, in contrast to Estonia. In the wake of several scandals regarding party financing, new legislation was implemented in 2008-2009. It requires disclosing sources of funding and bans donations from foreign and anonymous donors as well as corporations holding government contracts, which has improved the quality of party financing (SGI, 2022: 28-29). The populist radical right True Finns Party made its breakthrough in 2011 and has been present in the parliament since, with increasing representation in 2019 and 2023 as Finns Party (after the split of 2017). It opposes immigration and has encouraged discrimination against ethnic minorities and asylum-seekers (SGI, 2022: 35).

Freedom of expression is guaranteed in Finland by the 2003 Act on the Exercise of Freedom and Expression in Mass Media and is supported by both political and public discourse. Due to fairly high media consumption, there is a strong market with high competition, which promotes high-quality journalism. Like in the two other Nordic countries discussed in this chapter, media are plural, including both print and online/social media. The Council for Mass Media acts as an independent self-regulating organisation for media outlets, whereby both public and private media enjoy sufficient independence from the government. The Council has generally avoided interfering with press freedoms, apart from a few exceptions in last years (RSF, 2014, SGI, 2022: 30-31, 59). Finland headed the World Press Freedom Index from 2009 until 2016. However, in 2014 two obstacles to the development of a conducive environment for freedom of information were revealed: imprisonment for defamation in certain circumstances, and ownership of almost all the national media by just three companies. In practice, however, journalists receive jail terms extremely rarely and media pluralism is high, despite the concentrated ownership (RSF, 2014). That notwithstanding, two journalists of the Helsingin Sanomat newspaper were convicted for revealing state secrets in January 2023. For these reasons Finland was ranked down a few places since 2017 (RSF, 2023).

The rule of law is a basic pillar of Finnish society, even if somewhat weakened by an absence of the Constitutional Court. Yet overall, the judiciary is independent from the executive and legislative branches (SGI, 2022: 35-37).

Sweden is a liberal democracy with well-regulated electoral processes, scoring 1st on quality of democracy by SGI (2022). Its electoral system meets the highest requirements of eligibility, transparency and political participation. For the first time during the period under review, the populist radical right Sweden Democrats party with an anti-immigration policy entered Riksdag, the Swedish parliament, in 2010. In the subsequent elections in 2014 and 2018 its representation steadily increased, and in 2018 it emerged as the second-largest force in the parliament, having formed a new right-leaning government. This development has been more pronounced than in the two other Nordic states.

Political parties receive both public and private funding. In contrast to Denmark and Finland, however, there is no regulation for them to make their financial reports public. In spring of 2018, the government passed legislation increasing the transparency of party financing. In light of the elections the same year, already extensive public debates on the issue intensified again (SGI, 2022: 34).

All political parties and candidates have equal access to the national and other media. The equality of access to the media is guaranteed by the public service rules of the public Swedish Television (SVT) and Sveriges Radio (SR). However, as in both other Nordic countries and elsewhere in Europe, online and social media are on the rise, especially amongst young people. Whilst the new media have become more important for political campaigning, their selectivity of information leads to narrower consumption of information than in traditional media (SGI, 2022: 33-34). Namely, a difference in the types of political questions debated in traditional media (the economy, the labour market and health) and social media (migration, equality, law and order and taxes) was reported (Lochow and Söderpalm, 2019).

Freedom of expression in Sweden is both valued and well-protected. Freedom of the press is guaranteed by the oldest Freedom of the Press Act in the world, enacted in 1766. The media are independent of the government, although governmental institutions offer financial support to newspapers, especially smaller ones, and magazines. During the period under review, the media market has expanded, and as a result, SVT and SR face high competition from private radio and television channels. An important reform was made in 2019, whereby public radio and television stations started being funded through the tax system instead of the annual license fee scheme (SGI, 2022: 61). Whilst public radio and television remain central to the media system, newspaper circulation has dropped in the last couple of years. Most newspapers experience a gradual shift from conventional print subscription to digital ones. Like in the other Nordic and Baltic States discussed here, concentration of ownership has increased in the past few years due to decreased income from advertising and competition for readers' subscription fees between newspapers. Nevertheless, the overall quality of political coverage and media reporting remains high (SGI, 2022: 35-36, 61).

Other concerning developments include threats to journalists in 2018, which the government addressed by convicting the several people responsible and setting up co-operation between the police, certain media outlets and journalists' unions; a surge in cyber-harassment of journalists covering organised crime or religious issues; and new legislation which undermined the confidentiality of journalists' sources (RSF, 2018, 2019, 2023). As also in Estonia and Finland, online harassment of journalists has presented a new problem. Whereas in Nordic Region the most aggressive harassment comes from China and Iran, Baltic journalists are targeted by Russian trolls (RSF, 2020).

The rule of law is a fundamental norm in Sweden. Like the other two Nordic states considered above, Sweden does not have a constitutional court but has a system of judicial preview, carried out by the government and public agencies. However, the political parties and other actors

usually reach agreements, whereby courts traditionally serve as "tools of political executive power"; this renders judicial review less important than in the Anglo-Saxon tradition (SGI, 2022: 39).

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

During the period under review, Estonia's regime has been consistently evaluated as a flawed democracy (EIU), democracy in consolidation (BTI), consolidated democracy (FH) and liberal democracy (VDI). This includes both the design and functioning of the political institutions as well as widespread approval of democratic principles in society, which provides for political stability (BTI, 2022: 40). On 1 May 2004 Estonia joined the EU, which formalised its successful completion of the post-communist transition (BTI, 2006: 1).

In terms of popular sovereignty, since restoration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the parliamentary elections to Riigikogu, the Estonian parliament, were regularly held nine times. (The president in Estonia is elected indirectly, by the parliament). Elections in Estonia are free, fair and meaningful in terms of filling political positions and determining public policies. Their specific feature is internet voting, available with electronic ID cards, which most of the population has. In the 2019 parliamentary elections, 44% of votes were cast online, demonstrating a clear increase since 31% in 2015 (BTI, 2022: 9). In the latest 2023 parliamentary elections, for the first time more than half - 51% of votes - were cast online (Valimised, 2023).

By far the most concern for Estonia's liberal democracy in last two decades under review was the time that the radical right Conservative People's Party (EKRE) was in the governing coalition, from April 2019 to January 2021. However, despite its polarising agenda (in particular, on migration and equality rights, mostly same-sex marriages and abortion) and the provocative rhetoric, few of its controversial ideas were included into the coalition agreement. Therefore, it did not cause a change in the overall policy direction.

"Estonia's regime has been consistently evaluated as a flawed democracy (EIU), democracy in consolidation (BTI), consolidated democracy (FH) and liberal democracy (VDI)."

Otherwise, since the early 2000s, the party system has stabilised and the overall policies of various governments have been "remarkably consistent", even when the centre-left Centre Party replaced the liberal Reform Party heading the government coalition in 2016 (BTI, 2022: 3-6).

When it comes to political liberties, freedom of expression is enshrined in the Constitution (Article 47) and is unrestricted in practice due to the pluralism of media outlets (BTI, 2006: 5). There is no censorship. Estonia has ranked consistently high on the World Press Freedom Index (14th in 2022). Although the inclusion of the radical right EKRE party in the governing coalition in 2019 signalled some risks to media freedom, such as occasional hostility to some liberal journalists, they did not materialise (BTI, 2022: 11). Generally, the pluralism of private media guarantees a free expression of opinion; media, in particular the public broadcaster, is unbiased. Although the government holds a stake in a few cultural and education publications, they enjoy full editorial independence. Due to prolonged economic decline, in 2012 Estonia, like Latvia, suffered cutbacks in media personnel, which affected quality and scope of press coverage (NIT, 2012: 6). Since the start of the period under review, there were three Estonian-language and two Russian-language independent dailies, private radio stations and commercial television stations with public programmes (BTI, 2006: 5). However, an important concern remained about a limited ability of Russian-language public media to broadcast to the Russian-speaking population, which kept watching Russian television channels. This left them exposed to misinformation and propaganda (BTI, 2022: 10). In the wake of annexation of Crimea and start of Russia's war on Ukraine, these concerns intensified, prompting the Estonian government to launch a public Russian-language television channel ETV+ in 2015. However, in 2020 it still accounted only for 1% of viewing time, compared to 12% for the three most popular Russian channels.

The latest concern was that some of the new expert members of the Public Broadcasting Council appointed by the governing coalition in 2020 had too strong links to

governing parties, implying that the board might be controlled by the government (BTI, 2022: 10-11).

Full freedoms of association and participation are guaranteed to civic groups by the Constitution (Article 48) as is right of assembly (Article 47), which may be restricted for usual reasons (national security, public order and morals). They are observed in practice and no undue restrictions apply, whereby non-citizens are prohibited from joining political parties and holding public office. The right of association does not require formal registration by a public authority. Nevertheless, levels of civic activism have remained low during the whole period under review (BTI, 2003: 4-5, 2022: 10).

Finally, the rule of law is upheld in Estonia. There is a clear separation of powers and the judicial system is independent of the government and free from party pressure, with an independent and strong Constitutional Court. In 2019, EKRE made pointed attacks on judiciary, yet their suggestions for fundamental reforms were not included in the coalition agreement (BTI, 2022: 12). Therefore, civil rights and freedoms remain guaranteed and no restrictions, apart from the above-mentioned regulations for non-citizens, apply (BTI, 2003: 5).

Like Estonia's, throughout the last two decades Latvia's regime has been evaluated a flawed democracy (EIU), democracy in consolidation (BTI), consolidated democracy (FH) and liberal democracy (VDI). In terms of popular sovereignty, since restoration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the parliamentary elections to Saeima, the Latvian parliament, were regularly held ten times, as well as early parliamentary elections in 2011. (The president in Latvia is elected indirectly, by the parliament). All of them have been declared free and fair by international observers (the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the EU); so were two other regular elections: local and European, since Latvia together with two other Baltic States joined the EU on 1 May 2004. In May 2002, the parliament removed a clause that required candidates for public office to demonstrate proficiency in Latvian.

"Latvia's regime has been evaluated a flawed democracy (EIU), democracy in consolidation (BTI), consolidated democracy (FH) and liberal democracy (VDI)."

This was a positive step, since in the past this provision had limited the political participation of naturalised ethnic Russians (and was noted as an infringement by the European Court of Human Rights in April 2002). However, in 2002 approximately 22% of Latvian population remained disenfranchised, since they were non-citizen residents; the same repeated in the referendum on the EU membership in April 2003 as well as in the elections to the European Parliament in May 2004. Otherwise, all Latvian citizens are granted active and passive suffrage (BTI, 2003: 4, 2006: 4). The elections are managed by the Latvian Central Commission, which is a non-partisan institution (BTI, 2016: 8).

The main problem with the Latvian political system has been multipartyism leading to government instability (BTI, 2022: 5). Another concern was a disproportionate influence of three wealthy tycoons, known as ‘oligarchs’, over the parliament and therefore government; this phenomenon is more characteristic of other post-Soviet states discussed below, than of Estonia and Lithuania. In summer 2011, then President Valdis Zatlers called a referendum on the recall of the parliament because it refused to lift the immunity of a wealthy and influential MP in order to assist a highly publicised anticorruption investigation, he cited this influence as threatening the very basis of democracy in Latvia (NIT, 2012: 5). In the early elections in September 2011, two out of three oligarch-dominated parties were not re-elected, whereas the third one (the conservative Union of Greens and Farmers) entered the parliament, but initially not the governing coalition, and went into opposition. However, in the parliamentary elections of 2014 the Union of Greens and Farmers increased their share of the vote and returned to government, holding the prime minister’s post from 2016 to 2019 (BTI, 2022: 5-6). Therefore, Zatlers’ referendum had failed to break the pattern of Latvian politics and the political system remained unreformed, characterised by small, fractured and unstable parties (BTI, 2014: 2). They tend to campaign on personalities rather than programmes or policies (BTI, 2018: 6-9), a problem which is common for the wider post-Soviet region.

In order to furthermore weaken the political influence of oligarchs, substantial legislative reforms were made in order to increase the regulation of political party financing (NIT 2012: 3). They included reducing limits of political parties’ income from private sources and introducing public financing from 2012, as well as limiting the scope of election advertising (BTI, 2020: 10, 2022: 10). Those measures were important for political participation, as until 2012 Latvia remained one of the few EU Member States with political parties being entirely privately financed. That left the parties open to political influence from wealthy patrons such as oligarchs and lack of transparency in policy-making (BTI, 2010: 6). Although those reforms limited the political influence of oligarchs, private money continues to play a crucial role in party financing (BTI, 2020: 10).

Moving from popular sovereignty to political liberties, freedom of expression is guaranteed by Article 100 of the Latvian Constitution. This right is actively enforced by the court system, in particular by the Constitutional Court. There is no censorship. De jure and de facto, the media are independent and free from direct governmental influence. They provide open and pluralistic political reporting and therefore serve as a watchdog on politics (BTI, 2003: 13). At the start of the period under review, in 2003, their position was strengthened by two decisions of the Constitutional Court. One ruling removed the language quota which had required at least 75% of commercial television and radio broadcasting to be in Latvian. The other nullified the criminal code article that set heavy penalties for conscious falsification of information about politicians (BTI, 2006: 4).

However, there are a few systemic problems in this sphere. A principal and long-standing problem is that the oversight of the media remains politicised. It is carried out by the National Electronic Mass Media Council, which supervises radio and television as well as print and electronic media. It is comprised of representatives from different political parties elected by the parliament.

”Until 2012 Latvia remained one of the few EU Member States with political parties being entirely privately financed.”

Furthermore, opaque ownership of the majority of private media, especially the daily newspapers and - increasingly important - internet news portals, led to concerns of biased reporting and hidden political advertising (BTI, 2010: 6, 2020: 9). For example, in the parliamentary elections in October 2010 media access was a major concern for free and fair elections, due to their unclear ownership (including Diena, Latvia's leading daily newspaper), resulting in claims of political bias (BTI, 2012: 6). Moreover, the electoral period was characterised by violence and censorship (RSF, 2010). Finally, public media are underfinanced, which is a problem considering that public media journalism both retains the highest quality and that journalists in public media act as a check on power-holders by independently covering the political system, investigating corruption and incompetence (BTI, 2018: 10). However, even private print and electronic media faced financial challenges (e.g., in 2020 30 journalists of the oldest commercial television channel were fired after the change of ownership (RSF, 2020)). Therefore, in 2020 and 2021 the government provided extra public financing for print and digital media, both commercial and public, to compensate for falling advertising revenues during the Covid-19 pandemic (BTI, 2022: 11).

There are no formal restrictions on association or assembly rights, which received constitutional status with an adoption of bill of rights in 1998 (BTI, 2003: 4, 2022: 10). Nevertheless, the level of demonstrations and protests has been low. In the period under review, there were two major anti-government protests: in November 2007 and in January 2009, after the severe - the deepest in the world at the time - economic recession hit Latvia and the government introduced radical austerity measures between 2008 and 2011. After some of the latter protests turned into riots, the government and Riga local authority banned public gatherings in the old town of Riga, where the parliament building is located (BTI, 2010: 2, 6).

As for the rule of law, the separation of executive, legislative and judicial branches of power is anchored in the Latvian Constitution.

Although the parliament elects the president, all post-Soviet presidents have acted independently of the parliament (BTI, 2012: 7). Whilst in 2002 consolidation of the rule of law was still inadequate, in particular regarding independence of judiciary and prosecution for abuse of office (BTI, 2003: 5, 2006: 5), by 2022 the judiciary established its autonomy from other branches (BTI, 2022: 13). In the last two decades, the executive branch has mostly respected the independence of the other two branches. Moreover, the Constitutional Court serves as an important check on both the government and the parliament by effectively supervising the constitutionality of laws, government and administration (BTI, 2008: 6, 2022: 12).

Like those of Estonia and Latvia, for the last two decades Lithuania's regime has been evaluated a flawed democracy (EUI), democracy in consolidation (BTI), consolidated democracy (FH) and liberal/electoral (since 2017) democracy (VDI). Also similar to the two other Baltic States, Lithuania's political and economic transformation was influenced by its determination to join the EU on 1 May 2004. In terms of popular sovereignty, since restoration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the parliamentary elections to Seimas, the Lithuanian parliament, were regularly held eight times, and presidential elections seven times, as well as eight local and four European Parliament elections. There are no constraints on free and fair elections. Usually there are few irregularities and if they happen, they are dealt with by the Central Electoral Commission. For example, in the October 2012 parliamentary elections a record-breaking number of incidents of voter fraud were fixed (NIT, 2013: 7). Currently, electronic checks of voter identification are used to effectively preclude multiple voting i.e. voting more than once (BTI, 2022: 7). In the last parliamentary elections in October 2020, pro-democratic and pro-European parties convincingly won, demonstrating the resilience of Lithuanian democratic institutions (BTI, 2022: 43).

”Lithuania’s regime has been evaluated a flawed democracy (EUI), democracy in consolidation (BTI), consolidated democracy (FH) and liberal/electoral (since 2017) democracy (VDI).”

The same holds for the external projection of the democratic liberal order: Lithuania's foreign minister "vehemently rejected" Belarus' request to extradite Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, opposition leader and probably the real winner of 2020 presidential elections (NIT, 2015: 16).

Regarding freedom of expression, unrestricted freedoms of opinion and of the media are guaranteed by the Constitution and function in practice (BTI, 2006: 4). Private media provide a diverse selection of print and electronic outlets. However, the ownership of media lacks transparency because disclosure is not required. This can lead to increasing concentration of media ownership in the hands of few companies and, together with commercial and owners' influence over editorial content, pose a risk for independent journalism. This risk increased because of financial losses during the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst local (regional) media outlets are important, they are financially dependent on local administrations, which again compromises their independence (BTI, 2022: 9). Like in the two other Baltic States, by 2012 the prolonged economic decline led to shrinking advertising budgets of private companies and put financial pressure on mass-media, which became increasingly dependent on state institutions for support. Allegations also arose of media outlets engaging in extortion schemes, whereby they threatened businesses and politicians with fabricated negative publicity if they refused to purchase advertising contracts (NIT, 2012: 6). In 2013, the authorities raided the offices of the Baltic News Service in Vilnius, confiscated computers and interrogated journalists about a leaked government document that implied Russia was trying to discredit the Lithuanian president (NIT, 2014: 6).

Freedoms of association and of assembly are unrestricted within the basic democratic order (BTI, 2006: 4). For example, the LGBTQ+ pride marches, which attracted a lot of counter-protests, when they started in 2010, by 2019-2020 were held with record attendance. The Communist Party and other organisations associated with the Soviet regime are banned. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the restrictions of public gatherings were enforced in "a proportionate and non-partisan way" (BTI,

2022: 8). Namely, even when cultural and sports events were banned, political protests were allowed, albeit under social distance rules (BTI, 2022: 9).

In terms of rule of law, mutual checks and balances have been in place the whole period under review, and governmental powers are consistent with democratic order. Abuses of power by office holders are generally prosecuted (BTI, 2003: 3, 2022: 11).

The judiciary branch is independent from the government and therefore is free from unconstitutional interventions from other institutions. However, in 2019 EU-wide surveys revealed that the underfinanced Lithuanian judicial system was vulnerable to business pressures (NIT, 2019: 6). The president's administration is free from party political pressure and at the same time presidents have not exceeded their constitutional powers during the period under review (BTI, 2022: 10).

Poland and Germany

At the start of the period under review, Poland's regime was evaluated as flawed democracy (EIU), democracy in consolidation (BTI), consolidated democracy (FH) and liberal democracy (VDI), precisely as the Baltic States' above. However, whilst its democracy status has remained as a 'flawed democracy' in EUI Democracy Index, it has been downgraded to defective democracy (BTI) and electoral democracy since 2017 (VDI) and semi-consolidated democracy since 2020 (FH).

This happened due to a gradual yet substantial erosion of freedoms of expression and association and rule of law (in particular, of judicial constraints on the government), all of which has undermined the country's democratic foundations. So much so that Poland has been considered amongst the 10% top-autocratising countries in the "third wave of autocratisation" (VDI, 2019: 5, 2022: 25). Therefore, Poland has been one of the regional power players whose democracy level has significantly receded (VDI, 2018: 21).

"Poland's regime was evaluated as flawed democracy (EIU), democracy in consolidation (BTI), consolidated democracy (FH) and liberal democracy (VDI)."

Namely, Poland, Russia and Ukraine together account for the majority – ca. 85% - of the population under study in this chapter. In terms of political sovereignty, since 1990, elections were free and fair (BTI, 2003: 3). In total, nine parliamentary and seven presidential elections have been held since 1990. In 2010, Poland's democracy demonstrated its resilience following a tragic plane crash in Smolensk, in which the president, together with senior civilian and military leadership, perished. Nevertheless, early presidential elections were held and other vacant positions were "quickly filled according to legal and constitutional requirements" (NIT, 2011: 6).

However, the 2019 parliamentary elections (both national and to the European Parliament) and the 2020 presidential elections fell short of standards. The OSCE Election Assessment Mission noted that technically, the elections were pluralistic and competitive, but the campaign and treatment of candidates were not always fair (BTI, 2022: 8).

In 2015 and 2019 the parliamentary elections resulted in the Law and Justice Party (PiS) winning a majority again. On both occasions, PiS formed a government with two smaller parties, for the first time since the regime change in 1989. The PiS-dominated government pushed through legislative changes which increased the role of political appointees in bodies administering elections (VDI, 2019: 22). As a consequence, PiS has come to dominate the executive, legislative and judicial branches and the democratic accountability of essentially its government has become limited (BTI, 2022: 8).

In 2020, the presidential elections were postponed from May to June under pressure from opposition due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The election campaign was unfair to opposition politicians, in part due to political control over the public broadcaster (NIT, 2021: 8). Despite 6,000 complaints submitted (regarding difficulties with voter registration, on-time ballot deliveries and voting abroad), the Supreme Court quickly declared the elections valid and the President Andrzej Duda returned to the office with a rather narrow margin of less than 500,000 votes (BTI, 2022: 8, 12).

Turning to political liberties, freedom of expression is constitutionally guaranteed by Article 54 of the Constitution and is mostly realised in practice. However, the competitive attempts by political parties to exert influence on public broadcasting services were registered already at the start of the period under review, in 2003.

However, since Lech Kaczynski became president in October 2005 and Jaroslaw Kaczynski, his twin brother, became prime minister in July 2006, prosecution of news media has been increasing (RSF, 2007). Currently the main problem is that public media - Public Polish Television (TVP) and Polish Radio - are almost completely controlled by the conservative PiS government, which turned them into its mouthpiece (RSF, 2018, 2019). In 2015/2016, media laws were amended, which enabled the new conservative government, rather than the National Broadcasting Council (the supervisory body over public media guaranteeing freedom of speech), to appoint heads of public media and change the editorial policy. Thereby the government has taken control of public media and its censorship of the media has worsened (RSF, 2016, VDI, 2020: 17, BTI, 2023: 25).

In particular, since 2015, the split between the pro-government public media and private media, which display a pluralism of views, has become more pronounced. The National Broadcasting Council has become politically exploited and imposed fines on journalists for alleged partisan reporting (BTI, 2022: 9). The government's nearly complete control over the judiciary, discussed below, has adversely affected press freedom as some courts use Article 212 of the penal code, allowing imprisonment of journalists on defamation charges of up to a year. Even though so far judges have only imposed fines, this leads to self-censorship (RSF, 2021). The government promotes partisan and pro-government discourse and even hate speech in public media, as for example against Gdansk mayor Paweł Adamowicz who was murdered in January 2019 (RSF, 2019). In addition, the government increased the funding of public media in March 2020.

In December 2020 the government bought the Polish Press Agency (consisting of 140 regional and local newspapers – four-fifths of the total in the country - and 500 internet portals with 17.4 million users) from the German Verlagsgruppe Passau through the state-owned oil company Orlen, as part of the strategy of “re-Polonising the privately-owned media” (RSF, 2022). At the same time, whilst private media receive no financial support from the government, the government’s control of the judiciary, increased criminalisation of defamation and a planned introduction of advertising tax has started to have a negative effect on private media. The increasing concentration of media ownership by the government, control of and limitations put on public media, and pressure on private media have reduced freedom of expression (NIT, 2021: 2, BTI, 2022: 10, VDI, 2023: 25). As a result of all the above, Poland has kept falling on the World Press Freedom Index, from the 18th place in 2015 to 57th place in 2023 (RSF, 2023).

The freedoms of association and assembly are constitutionally guaranteed and unrestricted, with the government generally respecting the right to form and join associations. However, discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community has increased again and the measures against the Covid-19 pandemic included a ban on demonstrations (i.e. public gatherings of more than five people). In October 2020, the Constitutional Tribunal’s ruling in favour of a nearly total ban on abortions resulted in country-wide protests. They were met with a disproportionate police response, which contrasted with the milder response to earlier radical right organisations’ demonstrations against the emergency measures (NIT, 2021: 11, BTI, 2022: 9).

However, by far the largest problems have concerned the rule of law. Formally, a clear separation of powers, with mutual checks and balances, is guaranteed by the 1997 Constitution. Indeed, in the beginning of the period under review, the judiciary branch functioned as an independent monitoring authority, free from unconstitutional intervention by governmental agencies; the Constitutional Court gained legitimacy based on its work (BTI, 2003: 3, 8, 2006: 4).

However, the situation has dramatically changed since PiS took power in 2015: the separation of powers has become severely limited, thus checks and balances have been reduced. Since the government managed to establish nearly complete control over the judicial system, this affected the judiciary in particular: judicial constraints on the government decreased and institutional accountability became limited (VDI, 2018: 21, 28). The Constitutional Court was deprived of its autonomy in 2016, when PiS appointed its own candidate to replace the retiring presiding judge (NIT, 2017: 11); the National Judicial Council, responsible for judicial appointments, followed suit in 2017 and since then the ordinary courts and the Supreme Court have been further politicised by means of legislation. Moreover, the president of the Supreme Court, appointed in 2020, is a close ally of the PiS (BTI, 2022: 11). Judicial independence was further diminished through lowering the retiring age for judges and controlling judicial appointments (VDI, 2020: 22).

Most importantly, in 2018 the Disciplinary Chamber of the Supreme Court was established and in January 2020 the so-called muzzle-law was passed. That law enabled the government to punish individual judges who question the judicial changes by the government and apply the EU law (NIT, 2020: 1). The anti-crisis shield introduced by the government to support the economy during the Covid-19 pandemic further limited the operational capacity of judiciary (BTI, 2022: 11). Likewise, the parliament’s propensity to investigate the government has also substantially declined (VDI, 2022: 20).

This dismantling of democracy and the rule of law by PiS has since December 2019 resulted in numerous demonstrations and protests against judicial reforms in 160 cities, the most known, as well as reported by independent private media, being the March of a Thousand Robes on 11 January 2020. At the EU level, the European Commission initiated several infringements against Poland for impairing the independence of the judiciary and opened Article 7 (of the Treaty of the EU) procedure against Poland (BTI, 2022: 11).

”The situation has dramatically changed since PiS took power in 2015: the separation of powers has become severely limited, thus checks and balances have been reduced.”

At the moment of writing, the European Commission has referred Poland to the Court of Justice of the EU for violations of EU law by the Polish Constitutional Tribunal and its case law. This might result in imposition of financial sanctions.

In sum, the general course of the PiS toward political clientelism and curtailment of checks and balances has been impeding the impartial functioning of the rule of law. The illiberal and populist government remains Poland's greatest challenge (BTI, 2022: 41).

According to the EIU, from 2003 to 2022, democracy in Germany was evaluated as a full democracy and ranked 14th out of 167 political entities analysed (EUI, 2022). Electoral process and pluralism were assessed the highest among the indicators (9.58 out of 10 points). According to Freedom House, political rights in Germany scored almost the maximum of 39 out of 40 points and civil liberties 55 out of 60 (2023). Freedom House states that the political system of Germany burdened by a totalitarian past is highly sensitive to any manifestation of authoritarianism. Germany has shown a generally stable and resilient system since the mid-20th century, however the rise in popularity of right-wing movements is observed in connection with the large influx of immigrants and the open-door policy of former Chancellor Angela Merkel. Thus, like in the Nordic countries, since the migration crisis in 2015, populism was on the rise in Germany. However, the results of the 2021 federal elections, in which both the radical right anti-immigration Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and the radical left die Linke lost votes, might demonstrate decreasing polarisation (SGI, 2022: 2, 5). Under the Political Parties Act, political parties finance their activities through state funding (which has an upper limit and must be matched by private funding), membership fees, donations and sponsorships. The latter receive criticism for the relatively high thresholds for disclosing funding sources as obstructing transparency: donations under EUR 10,000 do not need to be reported (SGI, 2022: 32). SGI put Germany's quality of democracy in 7th position out of 41 OECD and EU countries (SGI, 2022).

”According to the EIU, from 2003 to 2022, democracy in Germany was evaluated as a full democracy and ranked 14th out of 167 political entities analysed.”

Freedom of expression, press and broadcasting is guaranteed by the Constitution (Art. 5), censorship is prohibited (with usual exceptions). Strong constitutional guarantees and an independent judiciary, as discussed below, ensure strong media freedom. The German Press Council protects freedom of the press in the print media, which are largely self-regulated and traditionally independent of political interference. As elsewhere, however, the latent crisis of publishing houses and newspapers due to an increasing role of the internet-based media (83%) undermines their pluralism. Between 1995 and 2020, daily newspaper circulation decreased more than twice; five leading daily newspapers dominate the nationwide print market (die Süddeutsche Zeitung, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Die Welt, Handelsblatt and Bild) (SGI, 2022: 34-35). In 2021, during protests against Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, dozens of journalists were attacked by extremists and conspiracy theory believers. For this reason, press freedom dropped to 13th place, from ‘good’ to ‘fairly good’ (RSF, 2021). The trend of violence against journalists and arbitrary arrests even increased, ‘costing’ Germany five places down to 21st in 2023 (RSF 2023).

Apart from a general framework for the operation of public and private broadcast media (the Interstate Treaty on Broadcasting and Telemedia), there are no media regulations at the federal level and broadcast media are regulated by Länder (German States) laws. As in other developed countries, private broadcasters have been losing their share of the market to streaming providers. Television remains the most consumed media (94%), although it is increasingly losing relevance for younger people; it is closely followed by radio (92%) and internet (83%). Overall, Germany has a comparatively pluralistic and diversified media ownership structure, as well as decentralised television and radio markets with two main public broadcasters (ARD and ZDF) operating at the national level and a number of high-quality political radio programmes. This media pluralism is enhanced by availability of international broadcasters (CNN, BBC World, CNBC Europe and Al-Jazeera) (SGI, 2022: 35, 56).

The equality of media access by all parties is guaranteed by Article 5 of the Political Parties Act. The television airtime is allocated based on each party's result in the previous general elections. Airtime for campaigns is free of charge in public media and cannot be charged more than 35% of commercial advertising in private media. Although in the 2021 OSCE report political and election coverage in Germany was considered to be fair and balanced, some concern was raised regarding the "inequitable access to media' and 'potentially biased coverage" (OSCE, 2021: 2). Indeed, there is an ongoing criticism of media for generally covering the largest parties, in particular ones in government (SGI, 2022: 30-31).

As for freedom of association, the Constitution ensures the right to peaceful assembly, except for outlawed groups, such as those advocating Nazism or opposing democratic order. Any manifestation of racism or antisemitism is penalised by law, and supporting Nazism or glorifying the ideology of Hitler is forbidden.

Finally, as for the rule of law, the judiciary in Germany is highly independent from political influence. It has significant institutional power, such as to review the legality of administrative acts. The Federal Constitutional Court, whose decisions are final, ensures that all state institutions obey the constitution (SGI, 2022: 38-39).

Ukraine

During the last two decades, Ukraine's regime has been evaluated as a flawed democracy until 2011 and a hybrid regime since (EIU), defective democracy (BTI), transitional or hybrid regime (FH), electoral democracy, and since 2017 - electoral autocracy (VDI). In terms of popular sovereignty, since its independence, Ukraine has held regular, albeit not completely free and fair, elections. Although quality of the elections in Ukraine has scored lower than in the three Baltic States, regularity and competitiveness of elections are what principally differentiate its post-Soviet political development from that of most other former Soviet republics (except Georgia and Moldova).

"Ukraine's regime has been evaluated as a flawed democracy until 2011 and hybrid regime since (EIU), defective democracy (BTI), transitional or hybrid regime (FH), electoral democracy and since 2017 - electoral autocracy (VDI)."

Another particularity of the political system of Ukraine is that it is a parliamentary-presidential republic, i.e. the government is dually accountable to both the parliament and the president, in contrast to both parliamentary Baltic States and (super-)presidential Belarus and Russia. However, a gradual erosion of democratic institutions, political rights and liberties such as freedom of expression, association, and rule of law, took place during President Yanukovich's term in office since 2010. As a result, by 2012 the country was turned into an electoral autocracy. The annexation of Crimea and the invasion of the south-eastern region of Donbas in Ukraine by Russia in 2014 prevented the recovery of the democratic institutions (VDI, 2019: 23).

To date, seven presidential, six parliamentary and over seven local elections have been held. Most of them were essentially free and fair, albeit usually with some problems. During the period under review, the example where an election clearly did not meet the democratic standards was the second round of the presidential elections on 21 November 2004 – it was assessed as the most fraudulent in the history of independent Ukraine (BTI, 2008: 8). The International Election Observation Mission, jointly organised by the ODIHR, the Parliamentary Assemblies of NATO, OSCE, the Council of Europe and the European Parliament, issued a critical statement that the elections had not met international standards for free and fair conditions for democratic elections (BTI, 2006: 6). This blatant election fraud ignited mass protests known as 'Orange Revolution'. Combined with Western pressure, the protesters' key demand of a re-run of elections were satisfied and, under almost free and fair conditions, the opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko won on 26 December 2004. The subsequent parliamentary and local elections in March 2006, as well as early parliamentary elections in September 2007, met the formal requirements of free and fair elections; however, the disparity in financing election campaigns remained an issue as many parties were sponsored by oligarchs (BTI, 2008: 8).

The next presidential elections of the winter 2010 that brought Viktor Yanukovich into office were almost entirely free and fair, although the OSCE noted a deficient legal framework and unbalanced broadcasting in the media. The local elections in October 2010 were already interpreted as a step backwards by domestic and international observers. Namely, regulations were changed shortly before them, favouring large parties. Moreover, there were irregularities on voting day and the misuse of administrative resources (BTI, 2012: 9). The parliamentary elections in October 2012 fared even worse and received significant criticism from domestic and international observers for large-scale abuse of administrative resources and severe procedural violations (opaque campaign financing and vote-buying, harassment, rejection of registration of 400 candidates as well as problems with formation of election commissions, vote counting and tabulation) (NIT, 2013: 2). State-controlled media coverage was biased in favour of the ruling Party of Regions (48% vs. 13% given to the opposition). The Central Election Commission, a supposedly independent collegiate body, was not impartial, since its members were political appointees, and its work was not fully transparent. Consequently, the election results in five (out of 225) single-mandate districts could not be established and repeated elections were scheduled (BTI, 2014: 2).

After the mass protests in winter 2014, known as 'Euromaidan' or 'Revolution of Dignity', led to regime change, early presidential elections took place in May and parliamentary elections in October of 2014. They were recognised as free and fair, reversing the downward trend under Yanukovich. A few irregularities noted in single-mandate constituencies did not affect the overall outcome (BTI, 2016: 3). In the 2020 local elections, voters in some districts close to the war zone could not vote, and Covid-19 pandemic measures were not properly implemented everywhere due to a lack of resources (BTI, 2022: 10).

As for the issue of political liberties, although freedom of political expression is guaranteed and censorship is prohibited in Ukraine by the Constitution and respective laws, the situation varied from 2003 to 2023. Until the

Orange Revolution in 2004, freedom of expression was severely constrained. Both national observers and international organisations, such as the OSCE and the Council of Europe, criticised the president's and government's interference in media, in particular pressure on opposition media and independent journalists, exertion of influence on the parliamentary and presidential campaigns. After the repeated second round of the presidential elections on 26 December 2004, freedom of expression improved both for individuals and the media.

Likewise, press freedom enhanced dramatically as the media coverage of elections became significantly more balanced, providing citizens with a pluralism of positions. The practice of censoring the media by sending them administrative guidelines on media content (temnyky), practised by President Leonid Kuchma's administration, was gone, as largely was state censorship (BTI, 2006: 6-7, 2008: 5-8, 2010: 8). In 2005-2009, there was no obvious state censorship (BTI, 2012: 11). However, freedom of expression deteriorated again during years of Yanukovich's presidency (2010-2014): media coverage of political events became less balanced, whereby the largest media outlets and major television channels ignored the opposition or public protests; in June 2010, two opposition channels were stripped of their frequencies; the incidents of censorship grew and there were attacks on journalists, including the disappearance of journalist Vasyl Klymentyev (RSF, 2011/2012, BTI, 2012: 3, 2014: 5). So much so that in October 2010 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe issued a warning to Ukraine over infringements of freedom of speech and the press (BTI, 2012: 11). The growing concentration of leading media ownership in the hands of pro-government oligarchs, pressure on media that further increased in the run-up to the 2012 parliamentary elections and continued in 2013, as well as frequent violence against journalists that went unpunished, all meant that by the end of 2013, there had already been a "significant erosion of the freedom of information won in the Orange Revolution" (RSF, 2014). Reflecting this development, in the World Press Freedom Index Ukraine plummeted from 89th place in 2009 to 127th place in 2014 (RSF, 2014).

"After the mass protests in winter 2014, known as 'Euromaidan' or 'Revolution of Dignity', led to regime change, early presidential elections took place in May 2014 and parliamentary elections - in October 2014."

After the change of political regime in the wake of Euromaidan, in April 2014 the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's parliament, finally passed a law that enabled launching public broadcasting. In 2014, state pressure on media outlets eased (NIT, 2014: 5), whilst the re-transmission of at least 15 Russian television channels was suspended because of misinformation about Russia's invasion (NIT, 2015: 3). The display of Russian films, in particular those glorifying Russian military and security services, was banned in February 2015 (BTI, 2016: 3).

Nevertheless, despite some improvements until 2020-2021, such as pluralism and open criticism of government in media, important deficiencies have persevered. Amongst them is media access. Even though there is a pluralism of both print and electronic media, as well as broad distribution of ownership, due to low profitability, most of national and local media outlets are either owned by, or depend on, private business interests (most often financial industrial groups or oligarchs), who use them as a political instrument. Local media outlets are also often owned by the authorities (BTI, 2008: 9, 2012: 11). Therefore, access to media for candidates remains unequal (BTI, 2022: 9). Following Volodymyr Zelenskyy's election as president, prevailing impunity led to an increase in violence against journalists (RSF, 2020). Last but not least, Russia's numerous war crimes in Ukraine have significantly worsened security for journalists, currently estimated as 'very serious', thus bringing Ukraine's score down to 79th (RSF, 2022).

Freedoms of association and assembly are guaranteed by the Constitution. The peaceful Orange Revolution was an example of the unrestricted exercise of rights to association and assembly within a basic democratic order (BTI, 2006: 6). In its wake, in 2005-2009, rights of political organisation and assembly were generally respected (BTI 2012: 10). As with the freedom of expression, they deteriorated under the presidency of Yanukovich, when pressure on certain groups of activists, some Ukrainian NGOs and foreign foundations grew. The freedom of assembly became clearly limited when the courts prohibited various assemblies on invalid grounds, often by request from local

authorities; from 2009 to 2012, peaceful assemblies were prohibited four times more often than before, adding up to 200-360 times every year (BTI, 2014: 11). Since the post-Euromaidan change of political regime in 2014, rights to association and assembly have been widely respected, with exception of periods of lockdowns due to Covid-19 when they were temporarily restricted, with some excessive measures, until summer 2020. In 2019-2021 there were numerous peaceful protests by civil society and political opposition regarding laws or political decisions. Whilst there were no restrictions, there were several clashes with the police or threats and violence from non-state groups, e.g. regarding equal rights for the LGBTQ+, despite police protection (BTI, 2022: 11).

In terms of rule of law, the Ukrainian Constitution provides for a division of powers and hence an independent judicial branch. However, as a legacy of President Kuchma's time in office (1994-2004), the independence of the judiciary and the parliament was severely impaired, because the government could exert administrative pressure on both (BTI, 2003: 5). In their turn, powerful oligarchs and lobbying business groups can exercise influence over the government. In contrast to them, political parties are situational and personalistic and therefore wield comparatively little influence (BTI, 2006: 6). This makes Ukraine's political parties' landscape broadly comparable to Latvia's.

In July 2019, newly elected President Zelenskyy called early the parliamentary elections, the latest to the date, by terminating the mandate of the parliament on legally disputable grounds (BTI, 2022: 9). After an anticipated landslide victory in the elections, Zelenskyy's hastily created and staffed party Servant of the People received an unprecedented single-party supermajority in the parliament. It went into the so-called 'turboregime' of law-making, ignoring both parliamentary procedures and the opposition's proposals. Observers identified procedural violations in two-thirds of the bills passed by the party between August and November 2019 (NIT, 2020: 9).

Whilst unity of this party in the parliament lasted only until mid-2020, it created problems for the formal separation of powers. The Office (formerly Administration) of the President has become the principal decision-making authority which conflicts with what is written in the Constitution. This is reminiscent of both President Kuchma's omnipotent administration and of consolidation of power under Yanukovich (BTI, 2016: 10). This meant that the president and his party effectively established control over both legislative and executive branches of power (BTI, 2022: 10).

It is important to note that everything written here applies only to the territory of Ukraine controlled by the government. According to international law on belligerent occupation (the Fourth 1949 Geneva Convention), the occupying country is responsible for provision of rights in territories it occupies. Tellingly, conditions in the territories occupied by Russia since 2014 are equated with those in Afghanistan, Belarus and Eritrea (FH, 2023: 14).

Russian Federation and Belarus

Prior to the period under review, the core characteristics of a democratic system had been formally established in Russia. Nominally, the Russian election system remains democratic even at the end of this period (BTI, 2022: 9). Generally, access to voting and the voting process are free, although the electoral system is designed to favour the president's party. There are severe problems with fairness of elections through manipulation of electoral campaigns by the state administration: constraints on candidate registration, often denied to opposition parties and candidates, on media access (biased media coverage on state-controlled television) and bans on opposition demonstrations. Electoral fraud is more widespread in rural districts (BTI, 2014: 6). For these reasons, Russia's regime is evaluated as hybrid regime until 2011 and authoritarian since then (EIU), highly defective democracy until 2014 and moderate autocracy since (BTI), consolidated authoritarian regime (FH) and electoral autocracy (VDI). Seven parliamentary and seven presidential elections have been held since 1991.

”Russia’s regime is evaluated as hybrid regime until 2011 and authoritarian since then (EIU), highly defective democracy until 2014 and moderate autocracy since (BTI), consolidated authoritarian regime (FH) and electoral autocracy (VDI).”

Already by 2003, there were significant deficiencies in the freedom of the press and an independent judiciary (BTI, 2003: 8), and unfair media coverage played at least a partial role in the victory of the governing party United Russia in the parliamentary elections that year. Increasingly uneven competition in both presidential and parliamentary elections was a sign of authoritarian tendencies, even though the 2004 presidential elections were free from irregularities (Ekman and Schartau, 2017: 141).

However, since then the Russian government grew more authoritarian and increased restrictions on alternative sources of information and civic activity (VDI, 2018: 15). In the 2007 parliamentary elections, competition was even lower and international observers from the OSCE and FH claimed that they failed to meet democratic standards (Ekman and Schartau, 2017: 141).

In December 2011, fraudulent parliamentary elections led to the largest protests since the 1990s across the country. Many participants were arrested. Despite the protests, in March 2012, Putin was re-elected as a president. The ODIHR estimated that, although the presidential elections were fairer than the preceding parliamentary elections, there had been no genuine competition; after Putin's re-election the demonstrations subsided. The president's administration and the government increased pressure on critical journalists, civic groups and NGOs. In 2006, a new bill strengthened control over NGOs, so that a number of foreign organisations such as Amnesty International were negatively affected (Ekman and Schartau, 2017: 142).

In 2012, association and assembly rights were further restricted by legislation that dramatically increased fines for participating in unauthorised demonstrations as well as allowed the authorities to arbitrarily change their location. In 2020 State Duma, the lower house of the federal parliament, passed laws which tightened the regulation further: organisations were required to report their planned activities and even individuals could be labelled as 'foreign agents'.

As a result, most organisations stopped their work after having been placed on the list (BTI, 2022: 10-11). Finally, the nationwide protests in early 2021 due to the arrest of the anti-corruption activist Aleksey Navalny were met with uniquely repressive crackdown, with more than 12,000 people detained.

Freedom of expression is guaranteed by the Constitution and relevant legislation is in place. However, in practice mass-media and journalists are under heavy pressure. Already by the start of the period under review, there were attacks on freedom of the press in the name of ensuring political stability in Putin's understanding (BTI, 2003: 14). On Putin's accession, all nationwide mass-media was put, at least indirectly, under state control. At the same time, private media and investigative journalists were harassed. Both processes resulted in a backsliding of freedom of the press. Since 2003, the press situation in Russia is estimated as 'not free'. The most known investigative journalists, who were assassinated, were Anna Politkovskaya in 2006, Marina Pisareva in 2007, Natalya Estemirova and Stanislav Markelov in 2009 (Ekman and Schartau, 2017: 125). These assassinations were blamed by the Russian state on the second Chechen war, as were the massive human rights' violations and restrictions on freedom of movement. Combined, these factors led to a considerable setback for the country's democratic development (BTI, 2003: 8). From 2000 to 2020, at least 37 professional journalists were killed in Russia in connection to their work, in most cases with complete impunity (RSF, 2020).

By 2006, 90% of the main mass-media, foremost the leading electronic media, that accounted for 90% of the information space and formed public opinion, were under the control of the state executive. 15 years later, the most influential media outlets remain directly controlled by the state (to give a few examples, in the press: Rossiyskaya Gazeta; television: Rossiya 1, Channel One, NTV; radio: Radio Rossii, Vesti FM; news agency/internet: TASS) (BBC, 2022). As a result, media coverage of the elections was systematically biased and critical views were reserved to a few newspapers and radio stations with very limited reach, often only online.

In 2011-2012, the state responded to the opposition protests with a wholesale crackdown: defamation was re-criminalised and control of the internet, including large-scale traffic disconnections during protests in Moscow (RSF, 2020), tightened. This marked the start of a new era in relations between the state and society, presenting "huge challenges for freedom of information" (RSF, 2013). The start of Putin's fourth presidential term was marked by an 'avalanche of draconian laws, arbitrary arrests and searches, impunity and police violence'. By attempting to block the encrypted messaging service Telegram, the regime demonstrated its determination to achieve a "sovereign internet", as internet is the main source of information and news, in particular for the youth (RSF, 2019). In March 2020, a new law was passed that introduced substantial fines and even criminal punishment for spreading misinformation or insulting the state in traditional or social media (BTI, 2022: 11).

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia on 24 February 2022 reflects this process. Earlier in 2014 Russia, having failed to block Ukraine's Association Agreement with the EU and force it to join Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union, annexed Crimea and invaded Donbas. The physical war had been preceded by a propaganda one (RSF, 2023). Following the full-scale invasion, the propaganda intensified and Russia started spreading disinformation in the newly occupied territories of southern Ukraine. News sites and social media have been blocked in occupied Crimea, having turned it into "a news and information black hole" (RSF, 2020). Russia also intensified the crackdown on the remaining independent Russian media outlets by banning, blocking and declaring them 'foreign agents' or 'undesirable organisations', subjecting the rest to military censorship. As a result, in 2023 Russia scores an historically low 164th place – out of 180 countries and territories (RSF, 2023).

Likewise, freedoms of association and assembly are guaranteed by the Constitution. However, in practice they have been considerably restricted, progressively so during the period under review.

Namely, opposition - smaller liberal and right-wing parties – have been systematically discriminated against by the state administration and in the state media; NGOs critical of regional or federal governments were harassed by state agencies; demonstrations and assemblies by opposition parties and movements were prevented under administrative pretexts or banned, whereas unauthorised demonstrations were violently dissolved by the police, leading to arrests of participants (BTI, 2014: 7-8). Whereas a serious democratic setback became visible shortly after Putin's return as president in 2012, whereby assembly and media freedoms were seriously restricted, they were restricted even further during the Covid-19 pandemic. No political gatherings were allowed and even one-person pickets (which did not need authorisation and were not prohibited during pandemic) were systematically suppressed by the police (BTI, 2022: 10). However, in early 2017 Aleksey Navalny organised mass protests against government corruption in 2017 (VDI, 2018: 15) and in early 2021 countrywide demonstrations against corruption were organised again (BTI, 2022: 40).

In the light of the above, it is hardly surprising that there are serious deficiencies in the rule of law as well as checks and balances amongst the executive, legislative and judicial branches of power. During the period under review, the president has maintained a stable majority in parliament; since the 2016 parliamentary elections United Russia has held a super-majority there, and even the so-called 'systemic opposition' parties almost unanimously support the official line. The same happens in the Federal Council, the upper house of the federal parliament, and at the regional level. Hence the legislature maintains only a very limited review function. The role of regional assemblies is even more limited than that of the federal parliament, as primary decisions are made by the governor and not the assembly. Following the fraudulent referendum on constitutional amendments in 2020, constitutional reform further reduced the separation of powers as it greatly expanded the powers attributed to the presidency, allowing the acting president to potentially rule until 2036 (Hutcheson and McAllister, 2021, NIT, 2021: 3, BTI, 2022: 10-12).

The judiciary has constitutionally guaranteed independence. However, it is seriously undermined by its dependence on political authorities, whereby courts follow direct orders from the government, both at the regional and federal levels. High-profile cases of such dependence are the criminal case against Pussy Riot's performance in the Moscow cathedral in 2012, as well as criminal investigations against opposition leaders such as Boris Nemtsov and Aleksey Navalny (BTI, 2014: 9). By 2021, the role of judiciary became even weaker (BTI, 2022: 3). The takeover of the relatively autonomous Highest Court of Arbitrage by the more government-controlled Supreme Court in 2014 was a serious blow to "what remained of judicial independence" (BTI, 2022: 12). Finally, in 2015, the Constitutional Court ruled that decisions of international courts can be overruled if they do not correspond to the Russian constitution, and in 2016 the parliament adopted the corresponding law about judgments of the ECHR.

Belarus is infamously known as "Europe's last dictatorship", because, since 1994, its first and only president Alyaksandr Lukashenka has consolidated a hyper-presidential regime, enabling him to become the longest-sitting European president (NIT, 2022: 4).

From 2003 to 2023, Belarus' regime was evaluated as an authoritarian regime (EIU), moderate or hard-line in 2003-2022 (BTI), consolidated authoritarian regime (FH), and electoral autocracy (VDI). As early as 2000, the OSCE and Council of Europe evaluated parliamentary elections and 2001 - presidential elections as undemocratic (BTI, 2003: 3-4, 2014: 6). In the latter, the framework was already undemocratic with unequal conditions favouring the incumbent, as he both controlled the executive vertical of power and the media. Since 2001, no elections have been recognised as free and fair, albeit to a various degree. Thereafter Lukashenka's power increased, yet its legitimacy decreased, and democratic rights were restricted as his regime monitored and repressed the opposition, civil society, independent media, and private business sector (BTI, 2014: 3). The depth of repression is witnessed by cases of disappearance and alleged murder of Lukashenka's political opponents and journalists.

"From 2003 to 2023, Belarus' regime was evaluated as an authoritarian regime (EIU), alternating between moderate and hard-line in 2003-2022 (BTI), consolidated authoritarian regime (FH) and electoral autocracy (VDI)."

Nevertheless, elections continue to regularly take place in Belarus as the *modus vivendi* to fill political posts (BTI, 2003: 4). In total, six presidential and seven parliamentary elections have been held since independence. The formation of electoral commissions, which count and tabulate votes, remains a problem, as the opposition is not meaningfully represented in them and there are several systemic procedural problems and violations (BTI, 2014: 7). Between 2004 and 2016, when two independent candidates entered the parliament, the opposition was not represented at all. However, that did not last: in the run-up to the parliamentary elections of November 2019, even though a record number of democratic candidates registered, their registration was rejected by the authorities – so once again no opposition or independent candidates won any seats (BTI, 2022: 9).

During the period under review, two important events took place. First, in December 2010, the regime allowed opposition candidates to campaign more openly as part of the attempted ‘thaw’ in its relations with the EU that took place in 2008-2010. However, the elections were neither free nor fair and led to the re-election of Lukashenka for a fourth term. Moreover, once re-elected, he pursued “a vindictive persecution of opposition candidates and their supporters” (NIT, 2011: 6), whereby the regime renewed a crackdown on opposition activists, NGOs, independent media, and protesters. The suppression of political opposition continued into 2011, also out of the fear of the demonstration effects of the Arab Spring protests. Protesters were beaten and hundreds were detained, and several high-profile opposition candidates were imprisoned. In the summer 2011, the regime applied extreme force to a new series of demonstrations that adopted “deliberately innocuous tactics like wordless clapping” (NIT, 2012: 4, 21). During this second wave of repression, the chair of the Human Rights Centre Viasna, Ales Bialiatski, was arrested and sentenced to 10 years in prison, where, still incarcerated, he won the 2022 Nobel Prize (together with the Russian human rights organisation Memorial and the Ukrainian human rights organisation the Center for Civil Liberties).

The parliamentary elections of September 2012 followed the same pattern, albeit with minor improvements to the electoral code in the run-up and without large protests afterward, and hence without brutal crackdown. Even though some opposition candidates managed to register, there was no genuine competition and only candidates loyal to the regime got elected as members of parliament, so that the opposition did not gain a single seat (BTI, 2014: 2). After the elections, the prominent human rights organisation Platforma was dissolved and Viasna was evicted from its offices (NIT, 2013: 4). Consequently, the ‘thaw’ ended and the EU re-imposed sanctions against Lukashenka’s regime that had been briefly lifted; Belarus became more deeply involved in the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union as well as started to re-orientate towards China as an alternative to both the EU and Russia (BTI, 2014: 3). Freeing political prisoners and allowing mild criticism prior to the 2015 presidential elections led to another ‘thaw’ in 2014-2019, a period of attempted democratic concessions to again co-operate with the West, foremost the EU and IMF, in order to compensate for decreasing Russia’s support (NIT, 2016: 3-4). Since it ended, Belarus has been strengthening its strategic partnership with China (BTI, 2022: 4-5).

Second, the largest protests ever broke out following the fraudulent presidential elections on 9 August 2020. Prior to the voting day, Lukashenka had eliminated his main opponents by disqualifying or even imprisoning them. Furthermore, using the pandemic as an excuse, unprecedented barriers to election observers were introduced. As a result, the ODIHR did not send a monitoring mission, and the absence of international observers reduced the integrity of the elections even further. According to independent national observers, Lukashenka’s victory was made possible because of manipulation, fraud, threats and violence. Nevertheless, it was announced, even though there was evidence from a few dozens of election commissions across the country and the independent platform Golos that Svetlana Tsikhanouskaya, the wife of Siargei Tsikaunouski, one of the three imprisoned contesters, had in fact won (BTI, 2022: 9).

This is why the protests erupted against the official results of the elections (VDI, 2023: 29). After security forces perpetrated violence against protesters in the first days of 9-11 August, peaceful protests amounted to 300,000-500,000 people across the country (BTI, 2022: 11). Those mass protests demonstrated an unprecedented pro-democratic mobilisation of the society (VDI, 2023: 29). The police violence against peaceful protests that followed was also unprecedented: hundreds of people were injured and tortured (more than 1,000 testimonies only in 2020), several people were killed, there were mass arrests and internet shutdowns. Despite such a violent crackdown, the protests continued, but as a reaction to it, by late 2020-early 2021 they transformed from mass street actions into community and cultural activism. In March 2021, the regime further toughened the punishment for unsanctioned protests (BTI, 2022: 4, 10-11).

In terms of political sovereignty, freedom of expression is significantly curtailed. Even though public debate exists, it is manipulated and dominated by the state, which controls television, radio and the print media (BTI, 2014: 9). The major media sources have been under the president's control the whole period under review, with periods of insignificant relaxation of media control as part of above-mentioned 'thaws' in the regime's relations with the EU (RSF, 2009, NIT, 2010: 33). Russian television has been the only alternative to the Belarusian state one (BTI, 2003: 4). Independent media were harassed by the authorities, increasingly so after the 2010 presidential elections: premises were searched and equipment confiscated, internet sites were blocked and more than 100 journalists were arrested, 30 of them imprisoned (RSF, 2011, 2012). The state media, especially the most popular sources, such as television, is used by the government to justify its decisions and shape public opinion against the opposition by means of manipulation, regulation and control (BTI, 2014: 7-9). As in other spheres, in the wake of the 2020 presidential elections, repression of journalists reached an unprecedented level of brutality, including violence, arbitrary arrests and detention towards hundreds of them. The authorities also revoked or denied accreditation of foreign correspondents

and launched a large-scale censorship campaign, having blocked 70 webpages of independent media outlets and depriving the most popular online outlet Tut.by the status of mass-media (RSF, 2021, BTI, 2022: 15-16). In response, journalists employed innovative means to continue their work: to circumvent government blocking, independent Belarusian outlets moved en masse to the messaging service Telegram (NIT, 2021: 15). Unprecedentedly, on 23 May 2021 Lukashenka ordered the Ryanair flight 4978 over Belarusian territory to be landed in Minsk to arrest Roman Protasevich, the co-founder and former editor-in-chief of the influential Telegram channel Nexta – an act which has been classified in the EU and the US as state terrorism and air piracy (The Economist, 2021).

Freedom of assembly is provided by the Constitution but is tolerated only to an extent where it is not threatening the regime's control over political space and public opinion. For example, in spring 2011 even the so-called 'silent protests', with no banners or voiced demands, were violently dispersed by the authorities. Moreover, later that year the restrictions on freedom of assembly were tightened further through amendments to legislation that required official permission for any public gathering; activities of unregistered groups were penalised. Even under such stifling conditions, in 2019 some protests against the construction of a battery plant in Brest took place (BTI, 2014: 8, 2022: 10). For all the reasons presented above, conditions of political participation had deteriorated as far as possible by the start of the period under review. Representatives of the opposition, when it still officially existed, could not enforce electoral campaigns and democratic elections; if they sued the government, the courts decided in favour of the latter (BTI, 2003: 8).

Regarding the rule of law, this is monopolised by the president. He has the right to issue decrees that have the force of law, and his administration prepares most laws (BTI, 2022: 12). All political institutions depend on the president's administration, which heads the power vertical and controls all political institutions and levels of administration.

Moreover, from the end of 2019, there has been a trend of staffing the president's administration by security officials, giving security agencies (the Security Council and the infamous KGB (State Security Committee)) senior roles in political decision-making. In June 2020, a career security official was even appointed the prime minister to consolidate the power grip before the latest presidential elections. Since August 2020, security officials became the base for regime survival by suppressing the protests. Likewise, the judiciary was instrumental in legitimising the repression of protesters and political opponents of the regime: in 2020 more than 33,000 people were detained (BTI, 2022: 10-14).

The National Assembly, the Belarusian bicameral parliament, has rather a decorative role, as it has no power over the government, not even over the state budget, which can be approved by the government or amended by presidential decree. For example, the members of parliament in its fifth convocation (2008-2010) initiated and passed only one piece of legislation themselves. The opposition is excluded from all political institutions and therefore – from political decision-making and shaping public opinion, as it relies on a handful of small independent media outlets online. The judiciary is directly subordinated to the president, who appoints and dismisses judges. Moreover, it heavily depends on the government at national and regional levels; courts are organised by the executive branch which can intervene into trials, especially in cases considered to be important to the interests of the regime. No surprise that the regime abuses judicial power, using it as a tool of punishment and repression against opponents: democratic opposition and independent media (BTI, 2014: 7-10, 2022: 10-13).

Importantly, Russia's war in Ukraine has been having significant repercussions for Belarusian sovereignty, as Lukashenka allowed Russian troops to operate from Belarusian soil (FH, 2023: 27).

Conclusions

Democracy in the Baltic Sea Region remains strong, although not coherent. Due to Russia's war on Ukraine, the situation in the Baltic Sea Region is uncertain and unstable in many aspects. It affects all states and their decisions regarding, for example, Finland's and Sweden's membership of NATO. Evolution of this war may also affect democracy in the countries of the region in different ways. There are greater inclinations to strengthen state power in the face of the threat and thus populist and nationalist trends are emerging. The region can now be said to be polarised due to the existence of democratic and authoritarian regimes.

From a long-term perspective, over the last two decades, democratisation in the Baltic Sea Region reflects two distinct trends. One is that in terms of regime type, two different 'islands', or trajectories, of democratisation and autocratisation can be observed: stable liberal democracies in the northern part of the region (Nordic and Baltic States), Germany and Poland (although in 2017 it regressed from liberal to electoral democracy) and increasing autocracies in the east and south, in the former Soviet Union: Ukraine (hybrid regime/electoral autocracy, depending on the index), Belarus and Russia (authoritarian regimes/harsh electoral autocracies). This tendency remains contained to the former socialist and Soviet states, though, bar the Baltic States which firmly remain on a democratic trajectory together with their Nordic neighbours.

This former trend, also known as the third wave of autocratisation, has characterised the region since 2018. This is in sharp contrast to the 1990s, a decade before the period under review (2003-2023). Then, when the Soviet Union collapsed, in some of its former republics, foremost the Baltic States, and satellites in Central and Eastern Europe, such as Poland, participatory democracy increased to an extent where it overtook democratisation in some other world's regions such as the Middle East and Northern Africa, Asia Pacific, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

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Currently, this trend is in reverse, demonstrating a substantial decline – not least due to harsh autoratisation in the most populous country of the region, Russia, since the late 1990s (VDI, 2019: 14). However, this development was mirrored by the growing popular demand for democracy as reflected in rising numbers of pro-democracy protests in autocratic countries (VDI, 2020: 3).

From a global perspective, in 2021 only 13% of the world population lived in liberal democracies. Whilst in 2014 there was a peak number – 42 liberal democracies in the world, - by 2021 their number decreased to 34, a level similar to the period after the Cold War, in 1995. Even more remarkable is that six of these countries are in the Baltic Sea Region: three Nordic states: Finland, Denmark, Sweden and three Baltic states: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. In contrast, other countries of the region are governed by authoritarian regimes, predominant in the world. Namely, Belarus and Russia are amongst the most autocratic regimes in the world, and Ukraine risks following their path (VDI, 2022: 12).

Whereas Ukraine was amongst the top democratisers in the region prior to the war, its trajectory has been reversing, as well as reversed from outside by Russia, since 2014. As wars bring different changes, one can hope that democratic and liberal ideas will prevail as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian war, bringing greater consolidation of freedom trends to the whole Baltic Sea Region.

Questions for a discussion

1. What are the main indexes of democracy and the indicators they use?
2. What is the role of democracy for the people and for politicians?
3. What are the trends of democratisation in the Baltic Sea Region?
4. What are challenges for democracy in the Baltic Sea Region?
5. How could you promote democracy in your country?

Recommended reading

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Olena Podolian expresses her gratitude to Peteris F Timofejevs, senior lecturer at the department of Political Science, Umeå University, for his valuable expert insight on the regional radical right parties.

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Chapter 9

Colour revolutions in the post-Soviet space: causes, driving forces and consequences:

The case of Ukraine

by Oksana Krayevska & Marianna Gladyshevskaya

Introduction

At the end of the 20th - beginning of the 21st century, the political world turned out to be oversaturated with acute and dangerous events which are often called revolutions. At the same time, the disappearance from the historical scene of large-scale revolutions as a way of social change and the appearance of a new form - lighter, shorter and more diverse forms of revolutionary action, in particular the so-called 'velvet' and 'colour' revolutions, woven into the context of 'transition' as a longer social transformation, were recorded. Geographically, the 'colour revolutions' occurred in post-socialist area countries, as well as former Soviet Union member states. Nonviolent revolutions in the late 20th century in countries such as Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, etc. can be identified as 'colour revolutions'. A wave of so-called 'velvet revolutions' swept through these states, which became the foundation for the beginning of the 'colour revolutions'. Thus, the study of a new type of revolution is undoubtedly relevant, because at moment we observe the export of nonviolent revolutions to countries in Asia and the Middle East. In 1989, citizens across Central and Eastern Europe took to the streets to overcome the communist dictatorship and assert their rights to democracy and to live in a free society. For more than a decade, the citizens of post-communist countries have used their right to peaceful manifestation to prevent authoritarian rule, corruption, and undemocratic elections. In fact, the evolutionary dynamics of the change in the ruling elites gained a wide resonance, which was the impetus for the beginning of revolutions. Ukraine was no exception, following the example of other countries of the former Soviet Union. Ukraine has reconsidered the possibility of regime change, where the process of transition to democratisation on its own seemed unlikely. The Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004 was the first attempt by the population to change the old order through nonviolent struggle. This revolution opened a new chapter in the history of Ukraine and led to significant changes in international politics, but the logical conclusion of the demands set by the 'Orange Revolution', were not achieved in Ukraine. As a continuation of the struggle for democratisation and economic and political development,

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the country was shaken by a new wave of revolution, later called the 'Revolution of Dignity', which was not only marked by unprecedented patriotism, but also showed the importance of the national idea of the Ukrainians. Of course, the 'colour revolutions' have radically changed the situation in the international arena at the start of the 21st century. For the first time, post-communist states and the countries of the former Soviet Union were given the chance to become independent actors in the international arena, and within their country - to change the rules of the game from the old authoritarian elite to a new democratic opposition.

Definition of the term 'revolution'. 'Colour revolution' vs 'Velvet revolution'

The concept of revolution occupies an extremely important place in the socio-political life of society. The phenomenon of revolution has been the subject of attention for political thinkers since ancient times, but it has not yet been given an unambiguous interpretation. The term "revolution" (from the Latin word "revolution" - turn, coup) means radical, profound, qualitative changes in the development of certain phenomena of nature, society, means of production, various branches of knowledge (Political Encyclopedic Dictionary, 2004: 13). Revolutions arise and take place as a result of the accumulation of contradictions in the process of evolutionary development, which are resolved by revolution, leap, and abrupt change.

S. Huntington stated (2004: 270): "revolution is a rapid and fundamental internal change, which is achieved by force, involving internal change of dominant values and myths of society, its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and political activity of government".

The issue of classifying revolutions in political science remains open despite a large number of attempts since the middle of the 19th century to identify a clear system of criteria for distinguishing them.

The types of revolutions identified by scientists have a vague framework, or scientists deliberately ignore such facts and features of revolutions that cannot 'fit' into the developed classification. Some select such revolutionary phenomena that fit their pre-developed classification, or simply indicate the revolutions that they focused on in developing their classification. At the same time, the 'uncomfortable' revolutionary processes that are knocked out of it are ignored.

E. Giddens (1999: 568) singles out a number of conditions that make it possible to consider certain political changes as a revolution: 1) there are "mass social movements" in the revolution; 2) the revolution leads to large-scale reforms or changes; 3) the revolution involves the threat of violence or its use by members of the mass movement. The concept of 'revolution' in historical retrospect has undergone an in-depth analysis in the study of the phenomenon. During the period of development and practice of the concept itself, its essence has deepened considerably. Examining the phenomenon of revolution, it should be noted that its very essence has not changed, only the means of carrying out revolutions, the scenario of their implementation, the impact on society and the system as a whole have changed.

This is why the generally accepted definition of revolution remains relevant today. Revolution is the overthrow of the old regime and the implementation of radical changes in society. Examining various definitions and concepts of revolutions, it should be noted that the influence on the formation of each of them was carried out through the prism of seeing certain causes and goals, through the analysis of historical events that influenced the formation of approaches of different periods.

Current typologies of revolutions have not acquired a single standard, as every revolution has its own features and criteria. Thus, it is impossible to typologise revolutions according to one model, because, while analysing them, it is necessary to pay attention to their individual features.

In our chapter we would like to focus on two types of modern revolutions: 'velvet' and 'colour' ones.

The term 'velvet revolution' was introduced into scientific circulation to define one of the methods of overthrowing communist regimes. Between 1989–1991, the collapse of communist regimes occurred due to a number of different scenarios: 1) gradual reforms (Poland, Hungary); 2) the violent removal of the old government due to popular uprising (Romania); 3) as a result of the collapse of communist empires (states formed on the territory of Yugoslavia and the USSR); 4) through the "velvet" revolutions (East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria) (Romanyuk, 2005: 22). Thus, 'velvet revolutions' differ from previous revolutions in that the change of the political regime mostly took place without the use of weapons.

The goal of the 'velvet revolutions' was the overthrow of communist regimes and the de-totalitarianisation of society. However, the revolutions at the beginning of the 21st century took place in other socio-political conditions, since they set themselves other goals (democratisation of post-communist systems), which were generated by specific conditions and reasons. Therefore, the revolutions at the beginning of the 21st century should be separated into a special, post-communist type of revolutions.

The phenomenon of the 'colour revolution' as a political phenomenon of modern times still does not have a clear definition. Various approaches to understanding the essence of the 'colour revolution' can be reduced to the following main directions:

- 'colour revolution' is considered as a modern example of revolutionary transformation carried out according to traditional rules of revolution involving the masses and changing the political system;
- 'colour revolution' is a type of coup d'état, in which power is seized by opposition forces without active participation of the masses;
- 'colour revolution' is a modern analogue of the 'velvet revolution' of the late 1980s;

"The goal of the 'velvet revolutions' was the overthrow of communist regimes and the de-totalitarianisation of society."

- 'colour revolution' is not an objective process, but a constructive or political technology imposed by external forces for a coup in the state.

According to the above-mentioned approaches we may consider the revolution in Serbia (2001), Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004, 2013-2014) and Kyrgyzstan (2005) as 'colour revolutions'. In addition, we may also include unsuccessful attempts with a similar scenario in Belarus (2006), Armenia (2008), and Russia (2012). 'Colour revolutions' in former Yugoslavia, Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan are to some extent similar to 'velvet revolutions' as they took place through mass protest movements, and had one method of actions.

According to D. Lane (2008: 529), "colour revolution" is a rather complex dynamic process, the classification of which depends on the result of the transformations. As he states: "if the interests of the elite were realised with the help of citizens, it is a coup d'état. System mode change in this case does not occur. In this case, they try to make changes at the expense of changes in the ruling elite, and not in the socio-political system. If the intentions of the rebels were realised in structural transformations, it can be claimed that the revolution took place".

C. Kirshenblatt (2010: 474) argues that mass protests against the large-scale falsification of elections by representatives of the current regime is the most important feature of "colour revolutions". The legitimisation of such revolutions among the international community and the population was facilitated by the fact that the protest actions were aimed at protecting the democratic rights of citizens.

A. Sambros (2005) defines the following features of 'colour revolutions':

1. 'colour revolutions' are possible only in those societies that are not yet divided into classes according to the capitalist principle or have not yet realised this division;
2. the form of revolution is mass meetings, demonstrations

and picketing, which the opposition conducts after elections, the results of which do not satisfy the opposition. In this case, the opposition declares the falsification of the declaration of will and the violation of election procedures. Mass protests lead to revoting or to the violent seizure of instruments of authority by a protesting crowd and the flight of key political figures from the country and holding of elections. In both cases, the opposition comes to power;

3. the revolution takes place under anti-corruption and radical democratic slogans;
4. on the eve of the revolution, numerous youth organisations are formed, which later form the so-called 'field units of the revolution';
5. bloodless character.

M. McFaul (2005) defines 'colour revolutions' as phenomena that can form a radical push for democratic transformations and identifies seven factors that are necessary for the success of such revolution: the presence of a semi-autocratic, not a fully autocratic regime; unpopularity of a political leader; existence of a unified and organised opposition; availability of independent mass media, which should inform the population about the falsification of elections; the ability of the opposition to mobilise the population for protest actions; the possibility of independent election monitoring; the discrepancy between the coercive forces of the regime.

The main premise of "colour revolutions" is the well-known curve of "relative poverty" in political science, described by the American political scientist T. Gurr (2011: 18). Not seeing prospects for themselves and their peers within the framework of the old regime, people support opposition movements, associating them with hopes for the renewal of power (Makarenko, 2005).

The 'colour revolutions' in the post-Soviet space took place in a period of democratic transit, which was initiated, or at least declared, by the ruling elites of the respective countries.

But this transit was complicated by the lack of democratic traditions and market relations in the previous Soviet period, the formation of a clan-oligarchic or neo-patrimonial type of regimes, a strong bias towards presidential power, which had a huge impact on the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government.

Revolutionary situations arose from the background of dissatisfaction in some societies with the political and socio-economic development and the political course of the ruling elites in general, and for the most part, reached their peak in connection with an election. Their driving forces were active young people who longed for rapid and radical change. The development of revolutionary events was greatly influenced by an external factor, which experts assess as the use of a set of technologies of 'soft power' in order to give domestic and foreign policy processes in these countries the desired character, in order to establish externally controlled regimes inside the country.

It should be noted that 'colour revolutions' had their own symbolism in the countries where they took place. For example, the symbol of the 'colour revolution' in Georgia was a rose, in Kyrgyzstan a red tulip, in Egypt a lotus, and in Tunisia a jasmine. Only in Belarus did protest movements use the image of an animal - a bison, but it was in vain.

According to the methods of struggle against the current government, the 'velvet' revolutions were, indeed, mild and, with the exception of Romania, practically happened without human casualties and radical violations of the law. In the 'colour' revolutions, at least in their most illustrative examples - Georgian, Ukrainian and Kyrgyz - violation of the legal sphere was observed both during street protests and in the process of political decision-making. A clear example of the latter is the third round of the 2004 presidential election in Ukraine.

It should be noted that the 'Colour Revolutions' have fully used new types of technology in influencing the masses (networks, social media etc), which were not widely available to participants in the 'Velvet' Revolution.

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It is no coincidence that the mass protests during the parliamentary elections of April 2009 in Moldova are called not only the 'Lilac' (lilac) revolution but also the 'Revolution on Twitter'. At the same time, the capabilities of traditional media sources, including newspapers and television, also played a role in mobilising the masses in both cases, but the extent to which they were used depended on who used them.

Examining the phenomenon of 'colour revolutions', we may conclude that 'colour revolutions' occurred by the demands of the times. Having studied the definition and characteristic features of 'colour revolutions', we emphasise that they are significantly different from previously known classical revolutions. 'Colour revolutions' have some features in common with the 'velvet revolutions', but in their goals and ideas they differ significantly: if the task of the 'velvet revolutions' was the overthrow of communist regimes, totalitarian systems and the construction of a new democratic society, then the 'colour revolutions' occurred in semi-democratic societies, their cause was usually a falsification of elections or the adoption of illegal decision by the authorities.

'Colour revolutions' in Ukraine: case study

In this article we propose to consider in more detail the examples of 'colour' revolutions in Ukraine in 2004 and 2013-2014.

The 'Orange Revolution' of 2004 was not directly caused by foreign policy problems, but rather by problems accumulated in domestic political life, and a lack of consensus among political elites on the direction of development of Ukrainian society (but also on the foreign policy vector).

At the same time, the revolution of 2004 once again demonstrated that, unlike the elites (political, financial and economic), Ukrainian society was ready and committed to domestic political change and adherence to European standards, models and practices of political, economic, socio-cultural life.

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The very possibility of falsifying or manipulating the choices made by citizens during the elections provoked opposition from the masses and led to rapid self-organisation and activity, albeit nonviolent opposition to such developments. The 'Orange Revolution' has shown that the choice in favour of an European, democratic model of development made by Ukrainian civil society forces the political elite to listen and adapt to this choice.

The administration of President Yushchenko, who came to power as a result of the 'Orange Revolution' and victory in the second round of the 2004 presidential election, has often been described as 'pro-Western'. However, it was difficult to note any special achievements of the new administration on the path of Ukraine's integration into the single economic, political and secure European space. The biggest problem for the new President was the relations with his colleagues in the Revolution and, in particular, the deep conflict with Yulia Tymoshenko, who was appointed Prime Minister. Thus, the political elite found themselves in political quarrels, rather than conducting a radical transformation of Ukraine's political and economic system. However, during Yushchenko presidency (within the framework of the implementation of Ukraine's EU Integration Strategy, adopted in 1998) negotiations began in 2007 on concluding a new basic agreement (Association Agreement) between Ukraine and the EU instead of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, as well as the negotiations on visa liberalisation between Ukraine and the EU. Also during Yushchenko's presidency, Ukraine intensified negotiations aimed at joining the World Trade Organisation, which were successfully completed by Ukraine's accession to the organisation in 2008. However, on the domestic political front, Yushchenko failed to form a strong political coalition to implement reforms and modernise the political, social and economic spheres in Ukraine.

In the 2006 parliamentary elections, the Party of Regions (the opposition party to democratic and pro-western parties) won, and the government was headed by Viktor Yanukovich.

At the same time, the discussions (both internal and international) over Ukraine's possible accession to NATO were intensified. In 2006, during a meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission in Brussels, Viktor Yanukovich declared that Ukrainian society was not ready to join the Alliance. It should be noted that a number of political forces and parties in Ukraine, including the Party of Regions, widely used anti-NATO rhetoric for their party electoral purposes, in line with Russia's policy of preventing NATO expansion to the east and American influence in the region. However, the NATO Bucharest Summit Declaration of April 2008 supported the future membership of Ukraine (and Georgia) in NATO. However, Ukraine did not receive a Membership Action Plan (MAP) amid a lack of consensus among Ukrainian society and politicians on the issue, as well as the Russian-Georgian conflict in August 2008, which clearly demonstrated Russia's readiness to control the 'post-Soviet' sphere of influence, as well as the unwillingness of a number of NATO members to support Ukraine's rapid integration into the Alliance. Confrontation with NATO (despite quite positive bilateral relations with most members of the organisation), and more specifically with the United States, has gradually become a fundamental principle of Russia's international policy. The Russian leadership has consistently stressed the rejection of NATO's expansion to the east, the approach of 'NATO infrastructure' to Russia's borders, the threats associated with the location of missile defence facilities in Eastern Europe, the inspiration for 'colour revolutions', etc. In this context, it has become an arena of confrontation between Russia and the West.

Viktor Yanukovich's victory in the 2010 presidential elections was the beginning of a gradual reduction of Ukraine's course towards closer integration with the Euro-Atlantic community and an increasing dependence on the Russian Federation. At the same time, Russia continued its aggressive policy of ultimatums and economic pressure (introduction of trade and customs restrictions, blackmail regarding the price of gas) in order to consolidate Ukraine in the zone of its exclusive political and economic influence.

Immediately after being elected president, Viktor Yanukovich signed the so-called Kharkiv Agreements to extend the stay of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol until 2042 in exchange for a reduction in the price of Russian gas for Ukraine.

It is significant that the catalyst for the revolutionary events of 2013-2014 in Ukraine and the subsequent armed aggression of Russia against Ukraine was the actual termination of the Ukrainian government's course of European integration, despite the full readiness to sign the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine. The mass demonstration of Ukrainians was a response to violence, the curtailment of democratic freedoms and the de facto usurpation of power, and demonstrated readiness for public mobilisation to protect both their own civil rights and interests (both civil and democratic society) and to shield against external aggression.

A significant difference between the events of 2014 and 2004 was that social mobilisation did not take place around a specific political force, but around the idea of modernisation and radical change to Ukrainian society as such, regardless of political (opposition) forces seeking to come to power. And the reason was the irresponsible policy of the corrupted government, which was not just inconsistent and did not ensure the fulfilment of its obligations towards society (including the European path of development), but directly and cynically denied the very possibility of Ukrainian society to make free choices. The events of November 30, 2013, when President Yanukovich refused to sign the Association Agreement at Vilnius Summit, directly demonstrated the disregard for the principles of democracy and freedom and readiness to force society to abandon the ideals of democratic and free development through organised violence. Once again, the driving force of the protests was students. The main thing is that in response to the violence against young people who sought changes and protested against the narrow-minded policy of the government, all of Ukrainian society was immediately mobilised.

The outcome of the Revolution of Dignity was a complete

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change of ruling elites and at the same time the end of Revolution led to the start of Russian invasion. In March 2014 after conducting a false referendum, the Crimean peninsula was annexed by the Russian Federation. It used the pretext that power in Ukraine was seized by nationalists and radicals and that people of the Crimea 'decided' to end their relationship with Ukraine and join Russia. Later similar separatists movements started in the East of Ukraine in Donbas where the power was seized by pro-Russian rebels with the help of the Russian army and so called People's Republics – 'Donets People's Republic' and 'Luhansk People's Republic' were declared.

S. Vysotsky (2014), a Ukrainian journalist and active participant of the Revolution of Dignity, assessed the following achievements of 'the Revolution of Dignity' for the Ukrainian people and for all of Europe: A powerful national shift took place. The Ukrainian people once again demonstrated their indomitability and will. No matter what events befall the country in the future, one thing is clear - Ukrainians cannot be forced into the fold. The European Union, despite all the specifics of its foreign policy, physically cannot leave Ukraine out of its consideration. Despite the fact that the signing of the Association Agreement (AA) did not take place at that time, the leadership of the European states placed efforts for signing of the AA and very soon it happened when newly elected President Poroshenko signed it in June 2014. The Maidan became a platform through which a new cohort of young leaders emerged in a short time and set the tone for Ukrainian politics. It was a surprise that the structures that had already been written off in the river of extra-parliamentary reality, calling them 'radicals' and 'relics' turned out to be strong. The Youth Nationalist Congress (YNC), UNA-UNSO and others became the most effective and ready for action, rapidly using their own forces in the formation of the revolution. The revolution unmasked Ukrainian authorities. Yanukovich finally 'opened up', stopping his ambiguous activity, trying to work on two poles. By bowing his head to Moscow and at the same time dealing with the protesters, he deprived himself of any chance to be re-elected for a second term of the presidency by legitimate methods.

”The outcome of the Revolution of Dignity was a complete change of ruling elites and at the same time the end of Revolution led to the start of Russian invasion.”

The 2014 presidential elections of Ukraine showed that the majority of the people in Ukraine were in favour of fair and open elections and also confirmed the course towards European integration as the newly elected President Petro Poroshenko was a clearly pro-European leader.

Parliamentary elections which took place on October 26, 2014 showed a radical renewal of politicians. Deputies who have been in the Supreme Council since Ukraine's independence were replaced by representatives of the younger generation, some of whom have never been in the deputies' corps.

Conclusions

The phenomenon of revolution in the modern world arose spontaneously and accidentally but became one of the main elements present in the post-communist world. In an unconventional way, revolutions challenged authoritarian (semi-democratic) regimes. There will be more reason for democratic optimism when, after the 'colour revolutions', changes and reforms are actually implemented, instead of the rotation of elites. The 'colour revolution' has its origins in the presence of a 'controversial event', for example, election fraud; imprisonment of an opposition leader; signing (or refusal to sign) a legal act. The peculiarities of 'colour revolutions' include the ability to occur only in those societies that are not yet divided into classes. They take place under anti-corruption and radical-democratic slogans with mass rallies and demonstrations. The main political force of the revolution is not a political party, but a broad coalition of non-governmental organisations, in turn, they are organised not by the counter-elite, but by a part of the old one, which was already in power.

But, in turn, expectations from 'colour revolutions' can be quite unpredictable: a change of elite does not always mean the introduction of a course for political and economic development; the inability of the new government to overcome corruption in the power verticals; conflicts that arise in the international arena

”The phenomenon of revolution in the modern world arose spontaneously and accidentally but became one of the main elements present in the post-communist world. In an unconventional way, revolutions challenged authoritarian (semi-democratic) regimes.”

during the weakening of the state in the process of revolutionary change; revival, or the so-called recurrence of a new revolution.

The 'Orange Revolution' in Ukraine in 2004 had very deep and objective reasons for its occurrence, the main motivation for its beginning was the falsification of elections. The 'Orange Revolution' is a social phenomenon and the result of a number of factors that existed in Ukraine before 2004, such as: economic tensions, attempts to seize state power by certain financial and industrial groups; bureaucracy, personal enrichment of government officials and their unjustified social benefits; approval of the state's priorities over human interests; complete lack of social optimism due to inefficient social security; media involvement; immaturity of the middle class as the basis of stable development; pervasive corruption; low income and living standards; rising unemployment; an oligarchic regime that tried to monopolise medium and large business; degradation of the education and science system; ignoring the interests of the indigenous Ukrainian nation and the interests of national minorities on the territory of Ukraine; gross violations of the principles of justice and legality; arbitrariness of power and crime of the previous regime; falsification of the results of the presidential election in the second round; low level of public confidence in the ruling regime of Leonid Kuchma and trust in the 'orange' opposition.

The 'Orange Revolution' is political in nature, as it ended with the removal from power of the political group of former President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma, as well as the coming to power of Viktor Yushchenko, who led a new political team whose members promised to bring justice, to overcome corruption, and to improve the living standards of the people in the country. The 'Orange Revolution' fully corresponds to the features of the 'colour revolutions', among which we will name the following: the key moment for its implementation was the election, which was rigged; there were mass demonstrations and rallies that took place not only in the capital but also in other cities of Ukraine and were aimed not at supporting a particular candidate, but at protecting the right to

choose; the 'Orange Revolution' was organised not by the counter-elite, but by the old elite, which in previous periods held positions of power in the state; youth organisations Pora, Studentska Khvyliya, Chysta Ukraina and others formed the so-called 'field detachments of the revolution', which launched student action of public disobedience 'Freedom not to stop'; non-violent nature; slogans during the revolution were anti-corruption and pro- democracy; the main political force during the revolution was not a political party but a broad coalition; during the 'Orange Revolution' information technologies were used, which had a direct impact on the course of events of the revolution, as well as on its coverage in the media space; the political consequences of the 'Orange Revolution' led to a change in the geopolitical orientation of the country.

The 'Orange Revolution' changed the geopolitical balance in the post-Soviet space, which until the events of 2004 had been dominated by Russia. Relations with the Russian Federation deteriorated as a result of a change in the country's political leadership. Russia perceived the change of power in Ukraine as a threat to the implementation of its plans, as it is the main supplier of energy resources to post-Soviet and European countries.

The causes of the political crisis in Ukraine in 2013 began to accumulate long before it began. Among the factors that laid the foundation for the largest and longest protest that took place in Ukraine during the years of independence were: the authoritarianism of Viktor Yanukovich, who sought to build a strong presidential republic modelled on the Russian Federation by returning the 1996 Constitution, reduction of the powers of the Verkhovna Rada; the great influence of oligarchic clans (the president's entourage) on the Ukrainian government; centralisation of power; development of the shadow economy; corruption that spread in the authorities of different hierarchies; high taxes; non-transparency of doing business; Ukraine became one of the poorest countries in Europe; low levels of social, medical and educational support; suppression of freedom of speech; neglect of the principles of the rule of law; violations of election legislation during elections;

”The 'Orange Revolution' changed the geopolitical balance in the post-Soviet space, which until the events of 2004 had been dominated by Russia.”

unsuccessful implementation of reforms called "Wealthy society, competitive economy, efficient state", criminal cases against former leaders of the 'Orange Revolution', which was not the case in democracies and developed countries. The above-mentioned reasons given by Viktor Yanukovich's government were more than enough to escalate the revolutionary situation, as Ukraine took a 'step back' in the political, economic, social and other spheres of life, returning to the problems of the 1990s. The protest was fuelled by the refusal to sign the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union, as well as the government's attempts to disperse peaceful demonstrations by force on the night of November 30, 2013.

The 'Revolution of Dignity' was almost completely different from the 'Orange Revolution' and contained the following characteristics: the impetus for the revolution was not the falsification of election results, but the refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the EU; the form of the revolution was mass rallies and demonstrations, which led to the forcible seizure of government buildings; support and presence of priests of different denominations, united by the desire for justice; a characteristic feature of the Maidan is the People's Chamber as a tradition of the 'Revolution of Dignity'; live music on the Maidan; Maidan Sich with various historical and cultural content (hundreds, huts, embroidered shirts, trousers, 'Cossack' style, etc.); conducting interesting actions (for example, performances 'Don't be silent!', a 130-metre poster-banner with appeals to the authorities and the people, etc.); the use of violence by the authorities during the revolution; know-how - creation of Automaidan; application by the authorities of a number of tactics and techniques for the victory over the Maidan, such as: intimidation, organisation of the Anti-Maidan, 'mining', discrediting the revolution, portraying the protesters as extremists; escalation of clashes, confrontation with the use of incendiary mixtures, light and noise grenades reinforced with elements of destruction, and constant assaults on barricades, seizure of administrative premises, involvement of firearms, which killed more than a hundred Ukrainian citizens.

Analysing the dynamics of transformations in revolutionary events of late 2013 - early 2014, it was noted that the main victory was the Maidan, which became the ticket for the Ukrainian nation to a better future. Viktor Yanukovich and most of his associates left Ukraine with shame after the failure of their policy. The main positive changes after the events on the Maidan include the emergence of a real Ukrainian idea; during the Maidan, a large number of new faces were formed, who showed indifference and courage at such a critical moment for the state; the revolution gave impetus to the restoration of historical events that took place on the Maidan, in turn, the restoration of democracy ('people's chamber'); the main signal of the end of the revolution was the election of the President of Ukraine when Petro Poroshenko won in the first round; the next step towards a reset was the election to the legislative branch of government, which allowed the population to see new faces in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. Along with the positive factors of transformation in Ukraine, there were also negative ones that affected the entire Ukraine. Ukraine is at war with Russia. The main reasons for these events were Ukraine's desire for independence in choosing a geopolitical vector of its policy.

Questions for a discussion

1. Was the dynamics of colour revolutions different in the defined cases (Ukraine, Georgia) and why?
2. What was the role of external actors in the colour revolutions?
3. Did the colour revolutions fail? If yes, why?, if not, why? Explain and justify your answer.
4. Will colour revolutions happen in future and in what parts of the world?

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Chapter 10

Political regimes in Eastern European countries (Russia, Belarus, Ukraine) and their impact on foreign policy

by Victor Shadurski

Introduction

According to the geographical principle (the presence of a coastal sea line and/or the location of a country or part of its territory in the watershed zone of the sea), the Baltic Sea Region includes three post-Soviet states: Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine¹. For centuries, Russia has been a source of military tension in the Baltic Sea Region. It often appeared in conflict with countries belonging to the Western Christian civilisation (the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Sweden, the German Empire, the Baltic countries). The boundaries between the two opposing parties underwent repeated changes. The composition of the rival blocs also developed dynamically (Maciejewski, 2002; Shadurski, Maciejewski, 2004).

After the Second World War, the Baltic region was divided into two separate areas by the 'iron curtain', which hindered political and economic ties and human contacts. As the result of the Velvet Revolutions in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (in the late 1980s) and the collapse of the USSR (late 1980s - early 1990s), the former satellites of the Soviet Union – Poland and Czechoslovakia (since 1993 Czech Republic and Slovakia), as well as the Soviet Union republics of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, geographically belonging to the Baltic region, – declared their rejection of confrontation and were actively involved in the process of building a 'common European home'.

In the early 1990s, in Europe, including the Baltic, there were hopes for the elimination of dividing lines between the countries that belonged within the Bipolar system, that emerged after World War II to the opposite military-political blocs (the Warsaw Pact alliance and NATO). As already noted, these hopes became the reality for the six states located in the Baltic Sea basin, which had joined both the European Union and NATO by the year 2004.

As for the three geographically, historically and culturally interconnected states (Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine), the process of transformation in domestic and foreign policy turned out to be longer and more contradictory.

”In the early 1990s, in Europe, including the Baltic, there were hopes for the elimination of dividing lines between the countries that belonged within the Bipolar system, that emerged after World War II to the opposite military-political blocs (the Warsaw Pact alliance and NATO).”



Belarus and Ukraine marked on a map of Europe.

Photo: Alexrk2 via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0

Using the example of these three states, one can trace the dependence of their internal and external policies, including their relation to the dynamic Baltic Sea Region, on the political regimes established in the countries. Since the second half of the 1990s, the relations of Belarus and Russia, in which authoritarian tendencies were becoming increasingly evident, have been deteriorating significantly with the other countries in the Baltic region. Ukraine declared its pro-European aspirations after gaining independence and ran into not only internal resistance but also external opposition from Russia during the process of the implementation of 'its own European vector'.

Thus, in the 21st century, after a short break, division lines began to revive in the Baltic region. The climax of the degradation of the political systems of Russia and Belarus and their policies toward the Baltic region was the Russian aggression against Ukraine. The bloody war was supported by the Kremlin's satellite – the regime of Alexander Lukashenka in Belarus. This event not only prevented the transformation of this part of Europe into a safe territory with close political, economic, and cultural co-operation, but once again turned the Baltic Sea Region into a zone of tough confrontation with unpredictable prospects.

This article proposes to consider some objective and subjective reasons for the emergence of the very dangerous political confrontation between the countries, geographically located in the Baltic Sea basin.

We must agree with the authors of the analytical report prepared within the framework of the project of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, that one of the main reasons that creates serious obstacles to the establishment of constructive and pragmatic co-operation between all countries of the entire region is the peculiarities of the political regimes established in Russia and Belarus, as well as their aggressive foreign policy (Slunkin, 2021). The example of Ukraine demonstrates the attempts of the country's ruling elite to avoid the strengthening of authoritarian rule and, as a result, the desire to build foreign policy on democratic principles.

Since 2014, Ukraine has been forced to defend its European democratic choice against bloody Russian aggression. In February 2022, the Kremlin unleashed its military potential on Ukrainian territory, demonstrating a complete disregard for its international obligations and both the written and unwritten rules of warfare. What happens on the Ukrainian fronts affects not only the fate of Ukraine's statehood but also the security and stability of Europe, including the Baltic Sea Region.

Political regime: concepts and types

It is necessary to define the basic terms that are used in the article. The political (state) regime is understood as a system of methods and means of exercising political (state) power. In modern science, there are three main types of political regimes: totalitarian, authoritarian, and democratic (Van den Bosch, 2013). In practice, these types of political regimes do not work in their pure form. Therefore, there are lots of different varieties of regimes. According to Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, the "hybrid political regime" is a transitional type, characterised by both authoritarian and democratic tendencies (Levitsky, 2010). A democratic political regime (it undoubtedly exists in all the states of the Baltic region (except Russia

and Belarus) includes the direct participation of citizens in solving state issues (direct democracy) or their participation in political decision-making through elected representative bodies (parliamentary or representative democracy). A democratic political regime guarantees the rights and freedoms of citizens, the observance of law and order, the existence and protection of various forms of property, and the pluralism of opinions. A democratic political regime presupposes the existence of a multi-party system and relies on a relatively high socio-economic standard of living for the population, effective control over crime, and open justice.

Authoritarian anti-democratic political regimes imply the monopoly of one political party or movement ("party of power") led by an authoritarian leader or group; the presence of one "official" ideology; the restriction of private ownership; the minimisation or absence of political rights and freedoms; a sharp stratification of the population according to class, caste, confessional, and other characteristics; a low economic standard of living for the main segments of the population; and an emphasis on punitive measures, coercion, and aggressiveness in foreign policy (Geddes, 2018).

The totalitarian regime can be characterised by the term 'total'. It does not have a reasonable justification for the intervention of the state both in the private lives of people and in the affairs of civil society. Stalin's USSR and Nazi Germany were classic examples of totalitarian regimes. Currently, North Korea meets the criteria of a totalitarian state.



Meeting of the leaders of the three Soviet republics (Belarus, Russia and Ukraine) in Belovezhskaya Pushcha Viskuly, on 8 December 1991.

Photo: RIA Novosti archive, image #37986, Yuriy Ivanov, CC-BY-SA 3.0

To understand the essence of the 'political regime' and to determine its type, a number of proven features (criteria) are used:

- the degree of people's participation in the formation of political power, as well as the methods and mechanisms of such participation;
- the real separation of powers, the quality of the relationship between the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government;
- correlation of human and civil rights and freedoms with the rights of the state; guarantees of the rights and freedoms of the individual;
- the degree of media freedom, publicity in society and transparency in the activities of the state apparatus;
- the place and role of non-state structures in the political system of society;
- the nature and quality of political leadership;
- political and legal status and role of security forces of the state (army, police, state security agencies) in society;
- the presence of political pluralism in the field of state and public relations, including in the form of a multi-party system.

The counterbalance to the state is represented by 'civil society'. This concept can be defined as a set of social relations that are not connected to state bodies or commercial structures (Civil society, 2022). 'Civil society' is connected with the concept of 'opposition'. The opposition can be characterised as a movement, one or more political parties or groups that oppose, mainly ideologically, the government, administration, party, or other political body that controls the country (Blondel, 1997).

The domestic and foreign policies pursued by the state are closely related to the type of political regime. This topic has received a lot of attention in the scientific literature. For example, the well-known American scientist James Rosenau noted that the basic sources of foreign policy of "open" and "closed" regimes are fundamentally different (Rosenau, 1966).

For example, democracies are mostly characterised by a desire to reach a compromise, a course towards mutually beneficial co-operation, the peaceful resolution of disputes, etc. Countries with democratic forms of government have many internal mechanisms that limit the adoption of radical and hasty foreign policy decisions. Public opinion also plays an important role.

In building relations with other countries, authoritarian regimes are much less inclined to take public opinion into account. Many foreign policy decisions are made spontaneously, without real analysis of the consequences, and they depend on the emotional and physical state of the leader, his intellectual abilities, and moral principles.

Aggressiveness in foreign policy is a natural attribute of authoritarian regimes. This is due to the fact that the ruling groups seek to convince the population of their country that the cause of internal difficulties is not the unsuccessful decisions of the authorities, but the 'malicious intent' of external actors. Such an opaque policy allows for some time to distract the broad masses of the population from serious socio-economic problems and to create the illusion of the correctness of the political course that is being pursued. Authoritarian rulers practically do not accept criticism, they react against its authors with all the power of state propaganda. However, it should be recognised that authoritarian states do not necessarily carry out aggressive actions along the external perimeter of their countries, in some cases, they try to pursue a policy of "peaceful coexistence" (Geddes, 2018).

Belovezha Accords of the three leaders of the Soviet republics (December 1991) – the start of the formation of political regimes in the new post-Soviet states

On 8 December 1991, in the Belovezhskaya Pushsha forest, the leaders of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine signed the Agreement on Establishing the Commonwealth of the Independent States, which implied the rejection of the Treaty on Establishing the USSR of 1922.

This agreement became the final stage of the 'parade of sovereignty', which began at the end of perestroika (Shushkevich, 2018). After the events of December 1991, 15 new post-Soviet independent states gained the ability to conduct their own internal and foreign policies. Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, despite considerable differences in population size and size of the territory, had almost similar starting positions in the living standards and cultural and educational levels of their citizens. During the first years of independent development, the countries took similar steps to expand democratic reforms. However, from the very beginning, specific features in the development of the aforementioned states, which previously constituted a single political and economic complex of the Soviet Union, began to appear.

Differences between the emerging political regimes in the countries were due to the influence of various objective and subjective factors. The political choice of the post-Soviet states depended on the geopolitical, national and historical, cultural and religious characteristics of the peoples inhabiting them, the level of economic development, the availability of natural resources, a number of other factors (demographic, territorial, military).

Subjective reasons also played a role in the choice of the paths of state-building. Primarily, these were the influences and activities of reputable national leaders who were able to offer society adequate answers to internal and external challenges. The internal convictions and personal qualities of the leaders of states, their ability to co-operate and compromise, or their tendency towards forceful methods of rule and authoritarianism, were of great importance.

Along with national characteristics, there were general development trends. Thus, in the first years of independent development, most of the post-Soviet states declared a course towards the formation of democratic models, following the example of the united West that 'won' the Cold War. This course involved the separation of the three branches of government, the creation of political parties, the holding of open elections to legislative bodies and heads of state, the introduction of market economy

”Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, despite considerable differences in population size and size of the territory, had almost similar starting positions in the living standards and educational levels of their citizens. During the first years of independent development, the countries took similar steps to expand democratic reforms.”

methods, an increase in the role of local government, and other measures. A serious contribution to the strengthening of security and stability in the region and the world was made by Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan renouncing nuclear weapons located on their territory and acceding to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

An economic crisis caused by the collapse of the unified agrarian-industrial complex of the USSR, which existed in conditions of rigid centralisation, constituted a serious challenge for young democracies. It is a well-known fact that all the most important economic decisions for more than 70 years were made in Moscow and had to be locally implemented without fail (Nove, 1993). The political elites who came to power in the national republics had no experience with independent management of the economy. They often could not offer optimal solutions to problems, and, as in previous years, counted on the help of the Moscow bureaucracy.

In conditions of economic difficulties, a significant part of the population of the new states, predominantly middle-aged and older, living in rural areas and small towns, was disappointed with democratic processes. Their external manifestation was long and seemingly ineffective discussions in parliament, which were constantly broadcast on television. People saw in these endless bitter disputes mainly the personal interests of politicians. In the public consciousness of the citizens of the studied countries, democratic values were not associated with an increase in living standards, but, on the contrary, they saw the causes of the economic crisis in democratisation.



The leaders of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, and the heads of their governments signed an Agreement on the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (Belovezhskaya Pushcha, Viskuly, December 8, 1991).

Photo: RIA Novosti archive, image #848095, U. Ivanov, CC-BY-SA 3.0

The instability of political regimes that declared a course towards democratisation was facilitated by the low political culture of former Soviet citizens. This culture was characterised by the following features:

1. preference for a strong state and authoritarian forms of government (historically, such a state was associated with a sole ruler), the existence of a firm belief that only a strong state headed by a 'strong hand' is able to ensure the country's security and social guarantees for the population;
2. unwillingness to actively participate in political life, which 'does not end well'.

The described moods were more likely not the 'fault' of the citizens, but their 'misfortune'. Throughout their history, the peoples of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, with rare exceptions, had practically no experience of democratic governance. Since the mid-1990s, in the three countries analysed, the situation began to differ markedly. In Belarus, democratic elections (July 1994) resulted in the election of a populist politician, the director of a loss-making agricultural enterprise, Alexander Lukashenko, to the presidency. He managed to establish an authoritarian regime in Belarus in a little over two years (November 1996) (Korosteleva, 2004). In Russia, the oligarchic model of power was gaining momentum, headed by the ambitious, but inefficient Boris Yeltsin, who retained the image of a democratic ruler inside and outside the country (Yavlinsky 2022).

Ukraine remained a parliamentary-presidential republic, experiencing strong inter-regional contradictions. The combination of new market mechanisms and the strong state regulation that remained in the country created the conditions for the expansion of corruption and the growth of distrust of the population in the authorities (D' Anieri, 2015).

Russia - the 'keeper' of the authoritarian system in the post-Soviet space

After the collapse of the USSR, Russia became its legal

successor. It acquired the status of a permanent member of the UN Security Council, which implied obtaining the status of a great power. Russia remained the largest state in the world in terms of territory, which had a heterogeneous society in a multicultural and multi-ethnic respect.

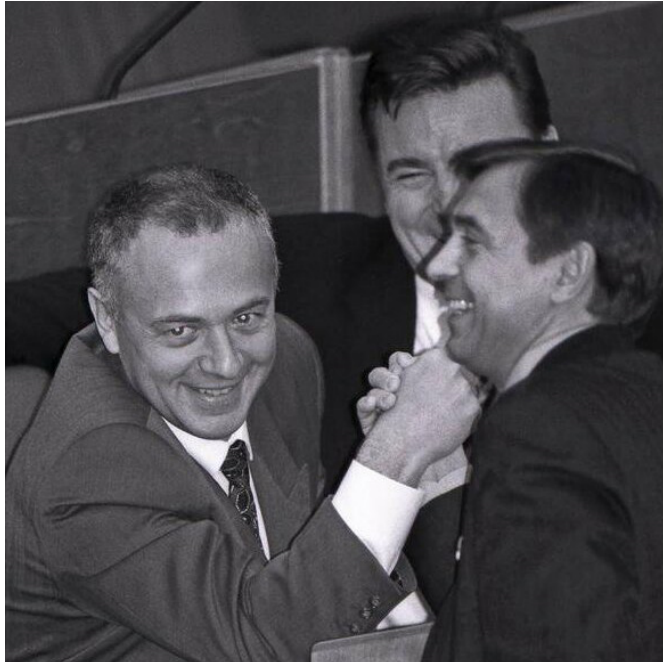
The occurrence of democratic elections to the Congress of People's Deputies of the Russian Federation (March 1990), the election of Boris Yeltsin to the post of President (June 12, 1991), the declaration of democratic principles and market reforms by state bodies, and the ban on the Communist Party shaped the prospects for Russia's transformation into a sovereign democratic state. However, the democratic project in Russia faced serious internal and external challenges from the very beginning. In fact, authoritarianism was established in the country in the form of the personal power regime of President Boris Yeltsin, who concentrated enormous powers in his hands (Bogaturov, 2015).



Russian President Boris Yeltsin and his associates at a makeshift podium outside the 'White House' (House of Soviets of the Russian Federation) after the defeat of a military coup attempt in the USSR (22 August 1991).

Photo: www.kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0

The Russian leadership, with the support of representatives of many democratic countries, has embarked on a course of rapid privatisation, as a result of which the main natural resources have ended up in the hands of a small group of oligarchs associated with the authorities. According to Russian politician Grigory Yavlinsky, the fraudulent scheme of transferring the largest state property to a narrow circle of random people close to power has led to a merger of state power, property, and business at all levels, from the Kremlin to the village administration.



Andrey Kozyrev, Russian Foreign Minister (11 October 1990 - 5 January 1996), a supporter of the Kremlin's 'democratic' foreign policy course, during a meeting of the State Duma (4 December 1996).

Photo: www.duma.gov.ru, CC BY 4.0

Thus, the foundation was laid for a corporate state of the mafia-oligarchic type (Yavlinsky, 2022). For such a state-political model, real democracy was a threat.

As the American researcher Timothy Snyder wrote, in the 1990s and 2000s, the West had a significant impact on the post-Soviet space through the spread of its economic and political models, the English language, and the expansion of the EU and NATO. At the same time, uncontrolled American and European capitalism has drawn wealthy Russians into the realm where East and West converge: the realm of offshore bank accounts, shell companies, and anonymous deals that legalise what is stolen from the Russian people (Snyder, 2018: 12). According to Professor Snyder, the situation in Russia was also worsened by the American belief that the market itself will give rise to the necessary institutions (and not that the market economy needs suitable institutions) (Snyder, 2018: 25).

Under the guise of democratic slogans in the fall of 1993, Boris Yeltsin issued a decree to terminate the activities of the parliament, the Congress of People's Deputies and the Supreme Soviet of Russia, which had become fiercely opposed to the president. After a two-week confrontation,

the so-called 'shooting of the White House' (the residence of the Supreme Soviet of Russia) took place in the centre of Moscow. Instead of the previous system of legislative power, it was proposed to create a Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, consisting of the State Duma and the Federation Council. The events described received an ambiguous assessment in the West, since Yeltsin's opponents criticised him from a communist standpoint.

Thus, the reason for Russia's turn to authoritarianism after a short turbulent period can be explained: the lack of the necessary political culture, the lack of experience in governing as a democracy, the immaturity of civil society in Russia. A significant part of Russian officials and citizens saw authoritarianism, centralisation, and consolidation of power as opportunities to ensure the concentration of resources in strategic directions (Przeworski, 2015).



President Yeltsin visits US President Bill Clinton (White House, 1994)

Photo: Bob McNeely, Courtesy of the White House

It should be noted that Boris Yeltsin and his entourage successfully mastered democratic rhetoric in dealing with domestic and foreign media, which was rather positively assessed in the West. The perception of Russia as a 'liberal' country was fuelled by competition between various central Russian media, primarily television channels owned by rival oligarchic groups (Boris Berezovsky's and Vladimir Gusinsky's). Intense televised debates maintained some semblance of the presence of free speech in the country. In reality, the ruling group formed in the 1990s was not interested in genuine democracy, its main goal was to maintain power and the material wealth seized as a result of privatisation.

Another significant feature of Boris Yeltsin's policy, necessary for understanding the Kremlin's attitude towards neighbouring countries, was the foreign policy concept of "democratic solidarity" (Melville, 2005). It assessed the United States as Russia's main partner. After it began to establish close relations with the countries of the united West, the Kremlin considered it possible to abandon costly co-operation with the former Soviet republics of the USSR, as well as provide large-scale support for the national regions of Russia. Giving a speech in Kazan in August 1990, Boris Yeltsin uttered a textbook phrase that reflected the essence of his policy in the first half of the 1990s: "Take as much sovereignty as you can swallow" (Yeltsin, 2015).

However, subsequent events showed that Yeltsin's declarations were just a front for his opposition to Mikhail Gorbachev. At a meeting of the Security Council on 28 November 1994, a small group of people from Boris Yeltsin's entourage approved the plan for the entry of troops into Chechnya without the consent of the representative bodies, which led to many years of bloody conflict in the North Caucasus.

Despite serious illness, Yeltsin, with the support of the oligarchy, won his second presidential election (summer 1996). During his second term he could not fulfill his public duties in full, for health reasons, but still used the right to appoint high officials. In the last months of his presidency, he appointed a KGB officer, Vladimir Putin, a little-known official who had moved to Moscow from St. Petersburg, as head of government and made Putin his successor (31 December 1999). In March 2000, Vladimir Putin was elected President of Russia. Authoritarianism in Russia received not only a new embodiment but also a new format for domestic and foreign policy. The task of the new head of state remained the same: preventing the participation of society in the control of state power and protecting oligarchic property. The new president began an active transformation of the political regime in Russia. The main direction of his policy was the consolidation of central power, the subordination of oligarchic groups to the Kremlin through the redistribution of accumulated wealth, and the reduction of local self-government.

Putin's policies, accompanied by populist imperial slogans, have received massive support in the country. At the same time, the creation of a rigid vertical of executive power became his new priority (Myers, 2015).

Strengthening the state apparatus, with complete subordination of the executive branch to other branches of government, coupled with the rise in export prices for hydrocarbons, allowed Vladimir Putin to carry out some socio-economic transformations within a short period of time and increase the level of income for some layers of society. The period that allowed Russia to solve many economic problems was figuratively called "fat years", in contrast to the 1990s, which publicists described as "the dashing 90s" (Time of the 90s, 2022). It should be noted that the Russian leadership, whose actions received not only broad support within the country, but also recognition in the world, did not abandon the declaration of democratic reforms and values. Authoritarian and even totalitarian leaders understood the high prestige of democratic values among the population and tried to exploit this circumstance for their own interests.



Execution by government troops of the White House, the seat of the rebel Congress of People's Deputies and the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation (October 3-4, 1993).

Photo: Bergmann via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 3.0

The model of 'sovereign democracy' was developed at the Kremlin in the first half of the 2000s. Many experts were critical of the concept proposed by the Russian leadership, calling it "imitation democracy" (Masha, 2006). As conceived by the authors, the specificity of the regime of sovereign democracy is its reliance on the majority of society, which is not ready for full participation in the governance of the country through democratic procedures, and therefore needs the constant guardianship of an enlightened authoritarian government (Krastev, 2006).

Public support is achieved through an effective economic policy, an increase in the standard of living for the majority of the population, and their social protection. To a large extent, this was a reproduction of the socio-political model created since the mid-1990s in Belarus, but in a new 'propaganda' package.

With its ideological basis, the growing authoritarian regime of Vladimir Putin made up 'old' theories about Russia as a 'separate civilisation' ('special' path, 'unique' mentality, 'spiritual bonds'), which is something qualitatively different from the rest of the world, including the European Union. Due to this, the Russia propagandists were able to justify the sharp criticism of Russia by the democratic world for Russia's violation of universal human norms and international obligations.

It became clear that as the first two terms of Putin's presidency were ending, he did 'not want' to violate the country's Constitution, therefore, he manipulated this by making Dmitry Medvedev, the then head of government, his successor for the next presidential term. The new president did not have his own 'team' or a party on which he could rely; therefore, after completing his presidency, he again handed over the 'throne' to Vladimir Putin. However, the new period of Putin's tenure as head of the country (from 2012) coincided with the growth of global and local challenges, including a decline in world oil prices, for which the economic well-being of Russia depended.

The unpopularity of Vladimir Putin has become noticeable in recent years. It took place amid the decline in living



Two dictators attend joint Belarusian-Russian military exercise Zapad-13 (Belarus, September 2013)

Photo: www.kremlin.ru, CC BY 3.0

standards of the population and an increase in protest moods. These problems were behind the increased persecution of the opposition (Alexei Navalny and others). The 'decision' of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation (Summer 2020) to remove the restrictions on the presidential term in office (the so-called 'zeroing of terms') caused serious criticism in the country and abroad.

Democratic processes in the post-Soviet space largely depend on the political and economic situation in Russia, which is the dominant power in the region. It should be acknowledged, that Russia was not interested in deep democratic reforms in Belarus, Ukraine, or other former Soviet states. The emergence of democratic forces in the newly independent states could highly likely contribute to a strengthening of Euro-Atlantic co-operation (for instance, in the Baltic states) and escape from the influence of Moscow. Therefore, support from the Kremlin, mainly economic, goes to those politicians who demonstrate a hostile stance toward the West.

Russia's policy as a source of military-political tension in the Baltic region

After the collapse of the USSR, sovereign Russia has displayed various, seemingly even opposite, patterns in its foreign policy. It started by building close relations with the countries of the united West (the policy of 'democratic solidarity' implemented in the 1990s by Boris Yeltsin and Andrei Kozyrev) and has moved towards implementing a policy based on the principles of pragmatism and flexibility ('selectivity') associated with the minister and then the head of government, Yevgeny Primakov. At the same time, the partnership with the West was not questioned.

With the country's rapid economic growth based on high prices for hydrocarbon resources, the Kremlin returned to the former Soviet course of Moscow's claims to world leadership and, as a result, a rivalry with the United States and other Western countries (a policy of 'proportionate responsibility for global development').

"Democratic processes in the post-Soviet space largely depend on the political and economic situation in Russia, which is the dominant power in the region. It should be acknowledged, that Russia was not interested in deep democratic reforms in Belarus, Ukraine, or other former Soviet states."

The reduction of a Russian presence in the so-called 'near abroad' (in the former Soviet Union republics) was particularly painful in Russia throughout history. Russia's relations with the Baltic States were affected most severely by the crisis. After gaining independence in 1991, the Baltic States chose a reorientation to the west and integration into Euro-Atlantic structures as the goal of their internal and foreign policy development. At the same time, if NATO (with the leading role of the United States) was viewed as a 'cornerstone' of their security, the European Union (EU) was viewed as a source of financial assistance and a guarantor of economic stability.



Commonwealth of Independent States summit (Sochi, 11 October 2017)

Photo: www.kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0

From the very beginning of the 1990s, Moscow did not recognise the right of neighbouring countries to build their independent policies on the basis of a democratic choice. Back in early 1994, Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev announced Russia's 'special interests' in the former Soviet republics. After that, this 'special interest' was constantly filled with concrete content, primarily via the mechanism for the supply and transit of Russian hydrocarbons.

Even during the Soviet period, the Kremlin began to master this 'weapon', when, on April 17, 1990, the Council of Ministers of the USSR decided on the economic blockade of Lithuania, and, above all, the cessation of energy supplies. Residents of Vilnius and other cities on harsh nights were forced to light fires to warm themselves up, but they withstood this test. Moscow at that time was forced to retreat (Eidintas, 2015: 192).

The process of NATO's eastward expansion, and above all the inclusion of Poland (1999) and the Baltic countries (2004), as already noted, was the main irritant for Russia (Sarotte, 2021). At the height of the 'Kosovo crisis' in the spring of 1999, the Russian president decided to turn to the last argument - nuclear weapons. Boris Yeltsin made a principled decision to amend the military doctrine of the Russian Federation, which was officially adopted in 2000. It stipulated Russia's right to "first nuclear strike", which the Soviet Union voluntarily renounced in the late 1970s (Kontseptsiya 2002: 109–121).

In Moscow's politics, the Baltic Sea and its surrounding territories have played an important, if not a primary, role throughout their long history. At the same time, even after the collapse of the USSR, Russia was not interested in equal co-operation with the countries of the region, especially with Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. However, realising the benefits and advantages of participation in the intergovernmental and public structures of the region, the Kremlin took an active part in them.

As mentioned above, Vladimir Putin's accession to power in Russia was accompanied by a favourable economic situation. Oil prices continued to rise, and the Russian budget received abundant revenues from energy trade. For the first time in many years, the government was able to allocate significant funds to improve the living standards of the population without, of course, infringing upon the wealth of the new Russian elite. The joy of success could only affect the views of the authorities and society about the place of Russia in the world. In a situation of some political euphoria, the emergence of a new foreign policy doctrine was expected.

On June 27, 2006, at a working meeting with ambassadors and representatives of the Russian Federation at the Russian Foreign Ministry building on Smolenskaya Square, President Putin delivered a conceptually rich speech. The following thesis was at the core of it: "Russia as a whole should bear responsibility corresponding with its position and capabilities for global and socio-economic development" (Prezident, 2006).

Thus, the president directly referred to the strengthening of the country's economic positions and proposed to bring Russia's political influence in the world in line with its acquired economic opportunities. Russia has adopted the doctrine of bringing Russia's political influence in line with its economic and military-political capabilities. In Moscow's new policy, great importance was given to the use of instruments related to the supply of energy resources. The Kremlin has relied on energy policy as the main means of applying pressure on neighbouring countries, transit countries, and consumers of its raw materials (Kuzemko, 2014).

The most famous of Putin's speeches, presented 'a new understanding of the role of Russia in global politics', was at the Munich Security Conference (February 2007). The Munich theses of the Russian leader became the subject of active discussion and, at the same time, condemnation in Europe and the world. They launched a new confrontation in the world and in the Baltic region. The Russian-Georgian war (2008), which began shortly after the declaration of a new Russian 'line of conduct', added additional arguments to substantiate the positions of all warring parties.



Pro-Russian Berkut special forces officers at a roadblock at the entrance to the Crimean Peninsula (10 March 2014).

Photo: Sasha Maksymenko, CC BY 2.0

A sharp exacerbation of Russian-Ukrainian relations occurred in 2014 – collisions on the Maidan (February 2014), the annexation of Crimea (March 2014) and the ongoing war in Donbass – creating a threat to security in Europe, including the Baltic region. According to many researchers, the Baltic Sea Region, which after the end of World War II was considered a region of 'eternal peace' and

”The Kremlin has relied on energy policy as the main means of applying pressure on neighbouring countries, transit countries, and consumers of its raw materials.”

co-operation, is increasingly viewed by both Western and Russian experts as a likely area of collision in interests between Russia and the West. Russia's political relations with almost all states in the region have worsened significantly (Vorotnikov, 2018). From that moment on, the Baltic Sea Region, a relatively stable area characterised by the expansion of economic ties, the creation of new transport corridors, and a rapid increase in tourist flows, began to turn rapidly into a zone of tension.

In March 2015, Russia officially announced its withdrawal from the Treaty on the Limitation of Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), although in fact the Kremlin suspended its participation from the treaty back in 2007. It was then that Russia stopped reporting data on its armed forces, the concentration of troops, which created threats to stability and security in the region (Vyhod, 2015).

The opposing parties introduced mutual economic and personal sanctions. Not only did the regional system but also the global system of international relations appeared to be under threat. In April 2015, the Swedish government document 'Key Directions of Defence Policy 2016–2020' was published. The document reflected the views of the country's political leadership on defence issues. If earlier Russia was perceived in Sweden as an unstable and unpredictable partner curtailing democratic transformations, after the Ukrainian crisis it is now referencing the deteriorating situation in Europe and Russian aggression. According to Stockholm, the next blow could be dealt to the Baltic States, which have historically been the scene of a clash of interests between Russia and Sweden (Försvarspolitisk, 2015).

While emphasising the role of the authoritarian government in the revival of the imperial policy of Russia, it should be noted that it is precisely this policy that received large-scale support from the population of Russia. The lack of experience of living under democratic rule made a significant part of Russian society easily vulnerable to populism. Many Russian citizens still believed propaganda about the power of Russian weapons and the hostility of the surrounding world.

This was confirmed by the noticeable improvement of Vladimir Putin's rating after the annexation of Crimea. Whereas from 2008 Putin's rating gradually fell and approached 60%, from January 2014, when active protests about Ukraine and Crimea began, the ratings began to grow steadily. In May 2014, 83% of respondents expressed their support for the president (in April - 82%, and in March - 72% of Russians) (Levada, 2014). Such support strengthened the confidence of the Kremlin dictator in the need to implement of further aggressive plans. This led to a treacherous attack on Ukraine in February 2022 (Domannska, 2022).

With its hostile actions, the Kremlin has placed itself outside of interstate interactions in both bilateral and multilateral formats. At its meeting on March 3, 2022, the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) announced, that there was no possibility to continue the co-operation with the Russian Federation within the framework of the CBSS. At the same meeting, it was announced that the Council suspends the participation of the Republic of Belarus in activities as a CBSS observer state (Declaration, 2022). As the result of an active discussion about strengthening their defence potential in the face of Russian aggression, neutral Sweden and Finland decided to join NATO in order to receive collective guarantees for the defence of their territory (Madrid Summit, 2022).



Populist politician Alexander Lukashenko during his first presidential election campaign (July 1994).

Photo: www.president.gov.by

The only ally (satellite) of the degrading Russian regime was neighbouring Belarus, where state power was usurped by dictator Alexander Lukashenko.

To a great extent, throughout the period of independent development, the political and economic situation in Belarus has been determined by Belarusian-Russian relations. Russia remains the main, though not the only, market for Belarusian industry and agriculture, and the Belarusian economy is heavily dependent on the prices of Russian energy resources (Putin, 2019).

Belarusian authoritarianism is a threat to development and stability in the Baltic Sea Region

Events that started in the spring of 2020 have placed Belarus, previously characterised by external stability and predictability, at the centre of the world's media attention. According to the Central Commission on Elections and the Conduct of Republican Referendums of the Republic of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, who has been in office since July 1994, received 80.1% of the votes (Vienkina, 2020). The mass protests by Belarusian society against the falsification of the results of the presidential elections were the reason for the sharp increase in interest in the small post-Soviet state.

The brutal crackdown on peaceful demonstrators drew strong condemnation both domestically and internationally. The rude actions of the authorities, in turn, triggered new and stronger peaceful protests. Belarus was plunged into an acute crisis, the essence of which was a growing conflict between society and the authorities. In the fall of 2020, the authoritarian regime succeeded in suppressing massive street demonstrations, but the conflict between Lukashenko, who received a well-known description of 'Europe's last dictator' that came from US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (Rice, 2005), and Belarusian society was transformed into other forms.

The paradox of Belarusian history is that Alexander Lukashenko, was elected to the highest state office as a result of the first and, so far, last democratic election in July 1994. With the support of the general population, he won an open competition between the representatives of the 'party of power' and other venerable politicians.

American researcher Gregor Ioffe called Lukashenka's coming to power in 1994 a "conservative popular revolution," the essence of which was the populist mobilisation of the masses directed against the oligarchic system that flourished during the premiership of Vyacheslav Kebich (Ioffe, 2004).



Mass demonstration in Belarus against rigged presidential elections and brutal violence against civilians (Minsk, 16 August 2020)

Photo: Viktor Palstsiuk via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0

Lukashenka's election program, like any other populist program, was eclectic and included conflicting approaches. The fight against corruption and organised crime remained his main program slogan throughout the entire period of his tenure in power. He repeatedly stated that he had achieved serious results in the fight against crime. Speaking about his personal merits, the head of state publicly admitted to violating the law: "You asked to clear the streets of Minsk and roads from bandits. I did it for you!" said the Belarusian leader at a pro-government rally on August 16, 2020 (Lukashenka, 2020).

Lukashenka won the presidential elections amid the crisis of the parliamentary system in the mid-1990s. This crisis prompted a demand from a large part of society for a 'strong hand' in the form of a sole presidential power. Why did democracy fail in Belarus, unlike its neighbouring Baltic states and Poland? In short, there are several factors.

The Belarusian people did not adopt a largely democratic political culture. They had no experience living in a stable democracy and, therefore, were very vulnerable to outright populism. A serious challenge for an independent Belarus was the absence of a strong, reformist, and nationally oriented elite.

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The country was dominated by an anti-reformist and anti-national post-communist establishment (Wilson, 2011).

As already noted, the political course of the elected president and his entourage was based on the desire to 'return to the Soviet order' before the 'Gorbachev' period. Present in Lukashenka's speeches were his intentions to restore the USSR, a state that had gone into history. Already in August 1994, in an interview with the Moscow TV journalist Andrei Karaulov, the newly-elected president declared "his readiness to reunite with Russia" (Karbalevich, 2010: 127).

But a more significant reason explaining the desire of the ruling group to work closely with Russia was the strong dependence of the Belarusian economy on the Russian one, which was formed during the Soviet period. This aspiration was supported by a large part of the population. Throughout the following years, the authoritarian regime, with varying degrees of success, fought against the democratic norms and traditions that were formed during the parliamentary period. The separation of the three branches of power is the most important condition for democratic development and, therefore, a serious obstacle to the formation and strengthening of personal rule. Lukashenka put into practice the concept of a "trunk" (presidential power) on which the rest of the branches of power (legislative and judicial) should grow (Rovdo, 2009: 137).

A rigidly centralised presidential vertical was the main instrument of Lukashenka, with the help of which he managed to control the entire system of power from top to bottom. The so-called personnel register of the president, whose inclusion was carried out on the basis of personal loyalty, was at its core. The aforementioned register includes appointed by Lukashenka 850 people, who have "protection and immunity" (Gutyro, 2019).

The upper floors in the presidential personnel vertical were occupied by the Presidential Administration, the National Security Council and the State Control Committee.

The heads of administration at the three levels of local government became the guides of presidential power on the ground. The above-mentioned 850 officials were responsible for the appointment of lower-level managers in all spheres, including educational institutions. Already on September 19, 1995, Lukashenka liquidated district councils in cities, replacing them with local administrations included in the presidential personnel register by his decree (Sannikov, 2005).

The second most important pillar of the authoritarian regime was the disproportionately massive Belarusian military apparatus. The publication of the Russian newspaper *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, dated 8 August 2020 (Belorusskie, 2020), reported that a “monstrous” number of police officers were concentrated in Belarus, making it essentially a police state. The newspaper cited data that for each 100,000 Belarusians there were 1,442 law enforcement officers. While in Russia and the United States, these numbers were 508 and 256 police officers, respectively. In absolute figures, the number of employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Belarus is estimated at 87,000. The State Security Committee (KGB), with up to twelve thousand employees, remained an influential power structure, that was at the core of the country’s political persecution. About 65,000 people served in the Belarusian army. In addition to the structures listed above, the president had other law enforcement agencies at his disposal (the Presidential Security Service, the State Border Committee, the Operational Analytical Center, the Prosecutor’s Office, and the Investigative Committee). They were also widely used to persecute opposition structures and suppress demonstrations (Belorusskie, 2020).

Authoritarianism has eliminated the independence of the judiciary. In Belarus, the so-called ‘telephone law’ spread on a large scale, when higher leaders dictated decisions to judges based on their selfish group interests. The norms that protected democratic principles in practice were gradually excluded from the legislation.

In its activities, the ruling regime constantly relied on outright lies, distortions of information, and the imitation of democratic processes. As noted above, to disguise authoritarian rule, the authorities used the institutions traditionally associated with democracy. Denying the feasibility of the separation of powers, the Belarusian authorities at the same time preserved the state institutions that had become habitual (Parliament, the Constitutional Court, and others). They ‘whitewashed’ their lack of independence and subordination to the executive branch. The presidential vertical also did not benefit from holding elections at various levels. In reality, these elections were neither transparent nor free.

To give the non-free elections a ‘democratic tint’, the authorities were forced to allow the opposition forces to participate in nominating alternative candidates for the presidential and other elections and to carry out some campaign work, including occasionally being present in the state media.

Belarusian authorities assigned special emphasis to official propaganda and prevented the dissemination of free and objective information. The prohibition of the free conduct of sociological polls has become a big problem for Belarus. In such conditions, the real moods of society and the political preferences of the population remain unclear. This approach caused great damage to both society and the state apparatus. The authorities did not have feedback, nor did they know exactly the reaction of the population to their actions (Vozyanov, 2021).

However, prior to the events of 2020, the transformation of Belarus from an authoritarian state into a totalitarian state was restrained by several circumstances. Firstly, it should be noted that a significant private sector, including the development of small and medium businesses, emerged in Belarus as a result of economic reforms in the first half of the 1990s. The authorities agreed with the activities of the private sector, but sought to keep it under their complete control. In particular, tight control existed in relation to large and medium-sized enterprises.

The existence of a liberal procedure for the departure of Belarusian citizens abroad before the COVID-19 pandemic can be called a forced concession of the Belarusian regime to economic and public interests. The existence of a relative freedom of cross-border mobility allowed millions of Belarusians to travel outside the country for various purposes. The scale of travel by Belarusian citizens can be evidenced by the fact that Belarus ranked first in the number of Schengen visas issued per capita (Shadurski, 2022). It is obvious that the mass trips of Belarusians abroad, the reception of foreign guests in the country, and numerous international contacts at the level of institutions and organisations contributed to the strengthening of the Belarusian civil society.

The significant participation of the Belarusian state and public organisations in international projects and events, including within the framework of the Baltic Sea Region, served as a brake on the strengthening of authoritarianism. Thus, in January 2009, Belarus managed to become an observer state in the Council of the Baltic Sea States. This status allowed Belarus to systematically participate in the practical activities of the Council and in the processes of co-operation in the Baltic as a whole (Sovet, 2021).

This government initiative was supported by a number of researchers who, for various reasons, considered Belarus an integral part of the Baltic region. Politicians and experts believed that active regional co-operation would contribute to the formation of an additional Baltic (northern) identity among Belarusians. It is known that the core of the region is the Nordic countries, which have implemented the model of a socially oriented state of universal well-being. The countries of the North demonstrated a rejection of an aggressive foreign policy, adherence to the ideas of human rights, special attention to environmental issues, and a preference for the development of international co-operation at the level of 'low politics'. They were critical of supranational forms of integration. Such approaches were very relevant for Belarus, both to preserve its national identity and to strengthen state sovereignty. The thesis about the need for Belarus' participation in the regional Baltic construction

was substantiated in a textbook published in the Belarusian language in 2004 (Shadurski, Maciejewski, 2004).

Considering that Belarusian rivers bring half of the fresh water to the Baltic Sea, Belarus's partner countries in the Baltic region were particularly interested in projects for the construction of treatment facilities, the use and protection of natural objects, as well as bilateral and multilateral initiatives in the fields of small hydropower, transport, and tourism. The listed projects were a solid basis for mutually beneficial co-operation, and they were reported in detail by Belarusian and foreign media.

Obtaining observer status in the CBSS coincided with the launch of the Eastern Partnership program (May 2009), initiated by Sweden and Poland, who were already active in co-operation within the Baltic Sea Region. On June 28, 2021, the Belarusian regime 'shot itself in the foot': The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus announced the suspension of its participation in the project "due to the impossibility to fulfil obligations under the conditions of the sanctions and restrictions imposed by the European Union" (Zayavlenie, 2021).

Favourable economic conditions on the world market and the import of hydrocarbons from Russia at below world prices allowed the Belarusian government in the first decade of the new century to maintain a sufficient standard of living for a broad segment of the population. In Belarus, a so-called social contract was established between society and the government when, in exchange for the 'non-interference' of the population, the state guaranteed certain social services to it.

The economic situation in Belarus deteriorated markedly after the presidential election that took place in December 2010. After the brutal dispersal of protests, in which thousands of citizens participated, the West became more critical of the Belarusian authorities. Russia realised that Belarus had no freedom to manoeuvre and began active measures to strengthen its control over the neighbouring economy.

The destruction of the so-called Belarusian socio-economic model ('Belarusian miracle') began, within which a certain balance of interests was maintained between the authoritarian authorities and society.

In the spring of 2011, the Belarusian Ruble collapsed. Prices began to rise dramatically. The discontent of the population grew stronger. 'The carrot disappeared'. The authority had only 'the stick'. Despite the significant drop in living standards, social protests did not reach the scale expected by the opposition. This time, the authorities held their own, largely thanks to Russian financial support (Kłysinski, 2011).



Democratic Belarus leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya addressing the European Parliament (Strasbourg, 24 November 2021).

Photo: CC-BY-4.0: © European Union 2021 – Source: EP

The critical attitude of society towards the authorities significantly decreased as a result of the event in Ukraine. The capture of Crimea by Russia and military actions in Donbas led to a wide discussion of the dangers of Russian interference in the affairs of Belarus and the role of the country's leadership as an objective defender of sovereignty. Belarus announced its desire to participate in resolving the situation in Ukraine. It offered a platform for negotiations between the warring parties under the auspices of the OSCE.

The 2015 presidential elections were apparently the calmest in the history of modern Belarus. Hoping for the evolution of the political regime in Belarus, the EU suspended (2015) and then lifted the bulk of the sanctions against official Minsk (2016).

Like other authoritarian regimes, Minsk was characterised by the practice of constantly searching for the country's

'enemies'. Domestic and foreign figures, political, economic, and social groups (entrepreneurs, supporters of the Belarusian language, independent media, NATO, the USA, neighbouring countries, and many others) were chosen to play the role of 'opponents of Belarus'.

The propaganda constantly cultivated the stereotypes of the united West, especially Poland's hostility towards Belarus. These stereotypes were preserved among a significant number of people, primarily among the older generation. It is with Poland, as well as with neighbouring Lithuania, that the most diplomatic scandals and interstate conflicts happened (Gargalyk, 2022).

Russia has been and remains the main external partner of Belarus. The Kremlin unconditionally supported the Belarusian regime in its repressive policies. Authoritarian governments have established the closest ties in the military sphere (Dogovor, 1999). Great tension in neighbouring Poland and the Baltic countries was caused by regular military exercises of the so-called 'Union State', which were held on the territory of Belarus. So, according to the decision of the two dictators, adopted in 2009, joint strategic exercises were held every two years.



Repressive Belarusian security forces block the way for a peaceful demonstration (Minsk, 6 September 2020).

Photo: Homoatrox via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0

Thus, the West-2021 exercises were held in September 2021 at five training grounds in Belarus and nine in Russia, with the participation of 200,000 military personnel and 760 pieces of military equipment. NATO countries have traditionally seen them as a threat to security in the region.

In Minsk and Moscow, on the contrary, they insisted on the planned nature and defensive orientation of the exercises (Dorokhov, 2021).

Joint military exercises of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus, 'Allied Resolve - 2022', which were unscheduled from 10 to 20 February 2022, on the territory of the Republic of Belarus, became a prologue to aggression against Ukraine. According to the exercise scenario, the territory of Belarus was attacked by four neighbouring states. From the north, it was attacked by Neris, Pomorie, and Klopia. From the south, the Dnieper treacherously attacked Belarusian territory. However, the Russian and Belarusian troops gave a decisive rebuff to the aggressors (Soyuznaya otreshimost', 2022). Thus, from a state that not without reason claimed the honorary status of a 'donor of European security', in the words of the Belarusian analyst Valery Karbalevich, Belarus has turned into a destabilising factor not only in the region of Eastern and Central Europe but also in a wider space and has become a source of threat to regional security (Karbalevich, 2022).

The introduction, starting from the fall of 2020, of new and more sensitive sanctions than in previous periods, did not stop the illegitimate leadership of the country, but also inspired it towards new criminal actions, which only increased the negative international reaction.

Thus, on May 23, 2021, under the guise of a fictitious threat of a planted bomb, the Belarusian authorities forced a Ryanair plane flying from Athens to Vilnius to make an emergency landing in Minsk. The pilots were ordered to fly to the capital of Belarus a few minutes before the aircraft could enter Lithuanian airspace. A Belarusian Air Force MiG-29 escorted the plane. After the Ryanair plane landed in Minsk, no bomb was found on board, but two passengers were detained: opposition journalist Roman Protasevich and his companion Sofya Sapeha, who later received a six-year prison term on charges of administering the 'Black Book of Belarus' Telegram channel. Shortly after the act of air piracy, most European countries closed the skies for Belarusian aircraft, including cargo ones (Belarus, 2022).

Based on the report of the special investigation, the ICAO Council decided to condemn Belarus for the false report of mining and the forced landing of the aircraft. The Belarusian government was directly accused of unlawful and deliberate interference with the flight, which endangered the aircraft and everyone on board. The ICAO Council came to the conclusion that the Belarusian authorities thus violated the Convention 'On the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Civil Aviation' dated September 23, 1971. In addition, the Belarusian authorities, by their actions, violated the Convention on International Civil Aviation of December 7, 1944 (Dispetcher, 2022).

However, the negative international reaction did not stop the authoritarian government from launching new provocations against neighbouring countries. In the spring of 2021, a migration crisis arose on the border between Belarus and the EU countries. Its essence was that hundreds of migrants from Africa, the Middle East and Asia, who received visas and organisational support from the Belarusian authorities, went to Lithuania both illegally and through official border checkpoints. After officials in Vilnius decided to return the migrants to Belarus, the flows of illegal immigrants were redirected to Poland, and then to Latvia. These countries also decided not to let migrants through, but to return them to Belarus. The situation seriously escalated in November 2021. With the support of the Belarusian law enforcement agencies, a convoy of about 2,000 migrants ended up on the neutral territory of the Belarusian-Polish border near the Bruzgi checkpoint, after which they tried to break into Poland. Having been rebuffed by the Polish border guards, the migrants did not give up their attempts to illegally cross the border in small groups and set up a spontaneous camp near the border crossing. As already noted, there is numerous evidence that these illegal actions of aggressive migrants were supported by representatives of the Belarusian law enforcement agencies. The migration crisis almost led to the complete closure of the border between Belarus and Poland. Lithuania has also declared a similar readiness (Neuman, 2021).

Later, the Belarusian authorities placed the migrants in a logistics centre near the border. For their repatriation from Minsk, EU structures organised evacuation flights. On March 22, 2022, the reception camp for migrants in Bruzgi stopped its work, but even after that, the border services of Lithuania and Poland continued to report cases of illegal border crossing and attempts to attack it. So, for example, as recently as July 15, 2022, 23 people tried to illegally enter Poland (MVD 2022). Thus, the stimulation of illegal migration to the countries of the Baltic region has become another example of the criminal policy of the Belarusian regime.



Ukrainian presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko speaks on Independence Square in Kyiv, November 2004.

Photo: Dr. Marion Duimel via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0

During the aggravation of the migration crisis, the Belarusian authorities used the most primitive and cynical methods of disinformation. Through the mouths of a former Polish soldier who hid in Belarus in December 2021 after committing a crime, Belarusian propagandists began to actively spread fake news that the Poles were secretly killing migrants in the border area (Lukashenka, 2022).

The accelerated degradation of authoritarian power in Belarus coincided with the culmination of Russia's aggressive policy, the culmination of which was an unprovoked armed attack on Ukraine. Contrary to the Belarusian constitution, the territory of Belarus was used by the Kremlin to attack a neighbouring country. On the eve of the war, the authorities initiated changes to the Basic Law, as a result of which the provisions on the non-nuclear status of Belarus and its desire for a neutral status disappeared from the constitution (Constitution, 2022).

At the lowest level were the relations with almost all European states, and above all with neighbouring ones.

Thus, the long-term authoritarian policy of Lukashenka did not provide favourable internal and external conditions for the development of the young state, strengthening its sovereignty. The country faced a real threat of a creeping incorporation of Belarus into the Russian Federation.

Democratic Ukraine is the main bulwark of deterring Russian aggression in the Baltic Sea Region

The political development of Ukraine had noticeable differences from the Russian and Belarusian models. The scientific literature and the expert community still have lots of discussions about the topic of the modern political regime in Ukraine and the stages of its evolution over the past three decades (Minakov, 2021). During the presidency of Leonid Kuchma (1994–2005), Ukrainian democracy was showing signs of strain. In the presidential elections in 1999, President Kuchma's administration used a variety of means to foil serious competition. By 2001, when Kuchma was implicated in the murder of an opposition journalist, one could no longer speak of Ukraine as a 'democracy' without adding substantial qualification. Terms such as "delegative democracy" or "competitive authoritarianism" were used instead (D'Anier, 2007).

The recognition of the Kyiv regime as democratic despite some, even significant, shortcomings is considered the dominant point of view. Such a regime is called unconsolidated democracy (Minakov 2021). It is hybrid (that is, temporarily combining authoritarianism and democracy). Another extreme point of view, defended by Russian and Belarusian propagandists, does not recognise the existence of democracy in Ukraine. It defines the regime as extremely nationalistic and anti-popular. The latter point of view is extremely politicised and therefore initially biased in its essence (Dibb, 2022).

The development of the political regime in Ukraine is based on the democratic achievements of the 90s, on the centuries-old historical and cultural background of the Ukrainian people.

”Thus, the long-term authoritarian policy of Lukashenka did not provide favourable internal and external conditions for the development of the young state, strengthening its sovereignty. The country faced a real threat of a creeping incorporation of Belarus into the Russian Federation.”

The situation in Ukraine was similar to the processes in Russia during the first period of the presidency of Boris Yeltsin and in Belarus before the election of Lukashenka (July 1994). As already noted, this model is characterised by the election of authorities, the desire to introduce a system of separation of powers, the emerging multi-party system, and a pluralism of opinions (Minakov, 2021). Unlike neighbouring Russia and Belarus, these achievements persisted in Ukraine in subsequent decades, defining it as a pro-European country striving for democracy and a market economy.

In the framework of the pro-European policy of Ukraine, an important place belonged to co-operation with the states of the Baltic region. Since January 1999, Ukraine has had observer status in the Council of the Baltic Sea States, which allowed the country to become more actively involved in regional initiatives.

The Ukrainian leadership has made attempts to create pro-European regional interstate associations, alternative to the structures led by Russia. Thus, in 1997, the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development was established, which, by the first letters of the names of the participating countries (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova), was called GUAM (until 2005, when Uzbekistan became part of the organisation - GUUAM). Since 2006, Lithuania and Poland, as well as other states in Central Europe, have been actively participating in GUAM events.

The existence of a strong national-democratic elite, a more developed civil society, a parliamentary form of governance, the active support of democratic countries (as it was in the Baltic states) contribute to the evolution of democratic processes in Ukraine. These processes, despite some deviations, are growing (Wilson, 1997).

The Ukrainian national-democratic elite was able, despite strong pro-Russian sentiment in Eastern and Southern Ukraine (about 35% of Ukrainian citizens consider Russian their native language), to implement a robust language policy. It is well known that the Ukrainian language is the

”The existence of a strong national-democratic elite, a more developed civil society, a parliamentary form of governance, the active support of democratic countries (as it was in the Baltic states) contribute to the evolution of democratic processes in Ukraine.”

only official language, in contrast to Belarus, where since 1995 both Belarusian and Russian have had the status of official state languages. However, the authoritarian government gave priority to the Russian language, which did not create an opportunity for linguistic equality (Goujon, 1999). It can be assumed that state building on a cultural and ethnic basis made Ukraine more resilient to external influence than Belarus, whose leadership was based on a political state building principle.

The main criterion for classifying Ukraine as a democratic state can be defined as regular democratic elections, which practically did not take place either in Russia or in Belarus. They are generally recognised by international structures as free. During the sovereign development of Ukraine, six people representing various political forces were elected as heads of state. In 2019, regular elections were held, at which a new politician, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, was elected to the highest state post. His victory and Petro Poroshenko’s recognition of his defeat even before the official results appeared were a democratic sign. A similar situation existed during the 2010 elections, when Yulia Tymoshenko and Viktor Yanukovich entered the second round and the latter became president.

Thus, the previously mentioned American scientist Timothy Snyder emphasised that democratic elections are a guarantee of the continuation of the history of the state. Since every citizen can make a mistake in choosing, democracy turns the set of mistakes made into a general certainty in the future (Snyder, 2018: 26).



President Volodymyr Zelenskyy votes in the Verkhovna Rada elections (Kiev, July 21, 2019).

Photo: www.president.gov.ua, CC BY-SA 4.0

In the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, rival political forces are traditionally represented. It results in heated debates that often go beyond the accepted norms. In terms of these indicators, the behaviour of Ukrainian legislators differs markedly from the behaviour of Belarusian parliamentarians, who do not have open discussions. Legislative acts proposed by the executive branch, as a rule, receive unanimous support.

In recent years, in Ukraine, there have been signs of an increase in the standard of living of the population and an increase in the effectiveness of the activities of state institutions. Before the war, the process of transferring local power to self-government bodies and the delimitation of legislative and executive bodies was underway.

At the same time, it would be a mistake to exclusively assess the situation in Ukraine before the start of large-scale Russian aggression in February 2022 in a positive manner. According to Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index, Ukraine has been identified as the most corrupt country in Europe (Corruption, 2022). The authorities are constantly announcing new measures to combat this vicious phenomenon. However, so far, the progress in combating corruption is not very noticeable.

A serious obstacle to the expansion of Ukrainian democracy was the presence of representatives of the oligarchy in politics. Understanding the danger of the oligarchs, especially in a war, the country's leadership, led by President Zelenskyy, began to fight this challenge. On June 30, 2022, the Ukrainian president enacted the Regulations on the Register of Oligarchs, which, according to the decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, include 86 people. Persons included in the list will be prohibited from financing parties, buying objects of large-scale privatisation, and financing political campaigns. Serious restrictive measures will be taken against the oligarchs, up to the deprivation of Ukrainian citizenship (SNBO, 2022).

What other factors can be highlighted that influenced the

establishment of a special model of political regime in Ukraine that is less subject to authoritarianism than in Belarus and Russia?

At the time of gaining independence in 1991, Ukraine was a country of regions, each of which had its own history, cultural characteristics, and geopolitical aspirations. The heterogeneity of Ukraine and the rivalry of strong and fairly autonomous regional elites created a strong obstacle to the strengthening of the central government and its slide towards authoritarianism (Minakov, 2021). On the other hand, it prevented the unification of society on the basis of the cultural and linguistic communities and hindered economic reforms in the country.

The western part of Ukraine, (especially historical Galicia – Lviv, Ternopil, and Ivano-Frankivsk regions), historically gravitates towards Central Europe. For centuries, these territories were part of the Austrian and then Austro-Hungarian empires, in which they had the opportunity to develop their national-cultural (Ukrainian language) and religious (Uniatism) characteristics. Eastern Ukraine has traditionally been oriented towards the so-called "Russian world" (Korosteleva, 2004).



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy speaks jointly with Polish President Andrzej Duda at a plenary session of the Verkhovna Rada (Kyiv, 22 May 2022).

Photo: www.president.gov.ua, CC BY-SA 4.0

The idea of Ukraine's belonging to Western European civilisation was met with enthusiasm in the western part of Ukraine, favourably in the central Kyiv region, and rather negatively in the eastern Russian-speaking part of the country (the Donbas and Crimea). Many experts saw a threat to the unity of the country in the strong regional polarisation (the existence of 'two Ukraines').



The Ukrainian village of Yakovlivka after Russian massive shelling (3 March 2022).

Photo: www.dsns.gov.ua, CC BY-SA 4.0

Like other phenomena of political life, the rivalry between eastern and western Ukraine has both negative and positive consequences.

Thus, the regional rivalry demanded political forces to establish certain decision rules and contributed to an active debate in the media, thereby enhancing political participation in all areas of the country. The central government in Kyiv is trying to reconcile the regions by offering to support common compromise approaches in assessing the history of Ukraine, etc. (Shadurski, 2014).

An important role in building a democratic state was played by Ukraine's desire for close co-operation with the outside world, including the states of the Baltic region. Thus, unlike Belarus, throughout its post-Soviet history, Ukraine has sought to pursue a pro-European course aimed at close integration into European structures. In 2014, Ukraine and the European Union signed an Association Agreement, replacing the previous Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and Ukraine. In February 2019, the Verkhovna Rada legally enshrined in the Constitution of Ukraine the course towards joining NATO and the European Union. The preamble of the new edition of the Constitution speaks of "the European identity of the Ukrainian people and the irreversibility of the European and Euro-Atlantic course of Ukraine" (Konstitutsiya, 2019).

Ukraine developed the closest relations with Poland and Lithuania. On July 28, 2020, in Lublin (Poland), a Joint

"Thus, the regional rivalry demanded political forces to establish certain decision rules and contributed to an active debate in the media, thereby enhancing political participation in all areas of the country. The central government in Kyiv is trying to reconcile the regions by offering to support common compromise approaches in assessing the history of Ukraine, etc."

Declaration of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine was signed on the creation of the Lublin Triangle - a trilateral regional alliance for political, economic, and social co-operation among the three states, aimed at strengthening the dialogue between them, supporting the integration of Ukraine into the European Union and NATO.

It is important to note that in the conflict with Russia, the countries of the Baltic Sea Region unconditionally support Ukraine. Thus, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland have expressed official support for the prospect of Ukraine's accession to the EU. As the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Dmytro Kuleba noted, It was these states that provided proportionally the greatest material support to the fighting Ukraine (Kuleba, 2021).

The European orientation of Ukraine, the spread of the Ukrainian language, and the formation of a national version of the origin and development of the Ukrainian nation were painfully perceived at all levels of the state and society in Russia. According to many Russian politicians and experts, Ukrainians are part of the 'big Russian world' and cannot claim to be unique. In Russia, at the official and unofficial levels, powerful resources were directed at promoting and substantiating the thesis that Ukraine had no right to be an independent state. The importance of Ukraine for Russia has been discussed in many studies. One of the most famous publications on this topic is *The Grand Chessboard* by Zbigniew Brzezinski: "Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire.



Soldiers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the liberated village of Vysokopillia near Kherson (27 September 2022).

Photo: www.armyinform.com.ua, CC BY-SA 4.0

Without Ukraine, Russia can still struggle for imperial status, but then it would become a largely Asian imperial state” (Brzezinski, 2016).

After the dramatic events of 2014, experts and politicians have characterised the bilateral relations between Russia and Ukraine as hostile. In the new military doctrine of Ukraine, approved in September 2015, the Russian Federation was declared its military adversary (Ukraina, 2015). On February 24, 2022, Ukraine became the object of unprovoked Russian aggression. With the support of the Belarusian dictatorship, the Kremlin attempted to destroy the Ukrainian state, which seeks to pursue a democratic and pro-European policy. The Ukrainian people are forced to bear huge losses in order to protect not only their freedom, but also the democratic values, security, and stability of both Europe in general and the Baltic Sea Region in particular.

Conclusions

Democratic reforms that began in the post-Soviet space after the collapse of the Soviet Union were curtailed due to a number of objective and subjective reasons in a number of states, including Belarus and Russia. The example of Russia and Belarus clearly demonstrates the futility of an authoritarian political regime, which only in the initial short period was able to ensure the development of the country through the use of administrative methods. However, over a longer period of time, the strengthening of the president’s personal power began to play the role of a brake with large-scale negative consequences.

Obviously, the growing authoritarianism in Russia and Belarus is leading to serious negative results. The consolidation of power has strengthened imperial and extreme nationalistic sentiments. The degradation of authoritarian regimes in Russia and Belarus and the growth of internal socio-economic problems has increased the desire of dictators to shift their failures and mistakes onto external forces. This logic of authoritarianism eventually led to a massive aggression against democratic Ukraine.

Authoritarianism in the countries belonging to the Baltic Sea basin is a threat to the security and stable development of the studied region. This allows for the emergence of new dividing boundaries. Hence, the need for a mobilisation of all democratic forces in the struggle against authoritarianism is timely. The policy of appeasing the aggressive essence of dictatorial regimes, as practice has shown, leads to tragic consequences.

Questions for a discussion

1. What does the concept of ‘iron curtain’ mean? What are the consequences of the ‘iron curtain’ on the current development of the Baltic Sea Region?
2. What types of political regimes exist? How can you characterise the political regimes established in the states located in the watershed zone of the Baltic Sea?
3. Why are the states with an authoritarian political regime characterised by an aggressive foreign policy? Please verify this pattern on the example of the Baltic Sea Region.
4. Why will the Ukrainian people defeat aggressive Russia?
5. Why did Ukraine, in contrast to neighbouring Belarus, demonstrate a pro-European course of development throughout its independent history?

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Chapter 11

Religion as an important regulator of political life: The case of Poland

by Anna Moraczewska

Introduction

The Baltic Sea Region is known for its multiculturalism. A diversity of languages, religions, and people may be considered a feature of the region. It makes it complex and worth investigating. Multiculturalism can be perceived as a disintegrative or integrative agent, however, it depends on many other determinants which may unite or split inhabitants of any region. (Kymlicka, 2014, 2011). Ideas that come from culture usually define our identity and values. Zygmunt Bauman connects cultural development with the emergence of a modern state which could promote concrete ideas and discipline people to a common legislature (Bauman, 1992, 1999). Religion seems to be the most primal factor that defined communities and was an instrument of exercising power over the population since ancient times (Mariya, Omelicheva, and Ranya Ahmed, 2018). In a broader sense, religion can play an integrating role, maintaining the stability of a specific social system. Peter Ludwig Berger believes that religion links social norms, values, and institutions with their sacred counterparts, becoming a factor of social integration (Berger, 1967). Emile Durkheim defined religion as 'a system of related beliefs and practices relating to sacred things, that is, separate and forbidden, beliefs and practices that unite all believers into one moral community called the church' (Durkheim, 1990: 41). All cultures, he argued, had a religious dimension. On the other hand, history is full of religious conflicts and wars. This presents it as an instrument of political impact and a disintegrative agent.

The Baltic Sea Region is a meeting point of four Christian denominations: Catholicism, Greek Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. Moreover, Judaism was present in the Baltic Region for several centuries before World War II, where it enriched the Region's multiculturalism. As the process of human migration is a permanent element in shaping the ethnic composition of countries and regions, there are also many minority religions in the Baltic region, such as Islam, Karaims, Armenian Orthodox, and many others. On the other hand, secularisation may be observed as a result of pluralisation and liberal ideas spreading among modern

”Peter Ludwig Berger believes that religion links social norms, values and institutions with their sacred counterparts, becoming a factor of social integration.”

societies (Jonkers and Wiertz, 2019). Pluralisation in religion, the roots of which can be looked for in the Protestant Reformation, established a new set of values such as the separation of the religious and secular spheres of life, promotion of freedom and wealth as a dominant value, and beliefs of individualism and separation from religion determinism. The process of globalisation has enhanced this tendency and redefined the role of religion as a source of values and norms.

In this chapter, the role of religion will be presented and exemplified by Poland as a part of the Baltic Sea Region. Poland has been recognised by Thorleif Pettersson, as a kind of outsider on the cultural map of the Region at the end of 20th century. It identified more with the traditional-conservative values and less with the social-capital one which positioned Poland far away from other countries in the Region (Pettersson, 2002: 174). Generally, the countries which scored high on religious adherence had high scores reflecting a traditional-conservative view on family life (Pettersson, 2002). This situation has evolved in Poland after the political and economic transition mostly connected with the European Union membership and the openness of its markets to liberal ideas but religion is still perceived as an important factor for most citizens. Moreover, the position of the Catholic Church is still crucial in Poland and it tries to maintain its influence on social and political life.

Functions of religion

Religion is a historical, social and cultural phenomenon and performs several interrelated functions in the life of man and human societies. Alfred Zych distinguishes: worldview function, integrating, regulative, educational, prophetic, cultural and existential functions (Zych, 2012). Some others also mention political-ideological function of religion (Williams, 1996: 368).

Religion as a specific form of shaping self-knowledge tries to interpret the processes taking place in the universe, nature, society and man himself/herself.

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Through the doctrine, it influences the worldview of a religious man, shapes a specific system of values and gives him/her motivation to act. The worldview role of religion concerns the issue of explaining the world – constituting the basis for valuation and an element of the motivational structure (Wnuk and Marcinkowski, 2012). In a broader sense, religion can play an integrating role, maintaining the stability of a specific social system. Peter Ludwig Berger believes that religion links social norms, values and institutions with their sacred counterparts, becoming a factor of social integration (Berger, 1967). The presence of meaningful relationships with other people who, through their shared values, help to maintain motivation to achieve a given goal and support the individual in a situation of uncertainty.

Analysing the history of mankind, one can indicate many examples of national and social consolidation and integration of believers – from the times of the first Christians to the present day. On the other hand, religion can be a factor of social disintegration when it fulfils a selective function, segregating people of different faiths and being the source of intolerance, religious struggles and the denial of national or social agreement (Zych, 2012). Close to an integrative function is the regulative function of religion, which consists in the creation and sanctioning by religion of a specific system of values and norms appearing as motives for the behaviour of believers. This function is interrelated with an educational one. The educational function of religion is based on the implementation of a system of principles, ethical and moral canons and shaping the personality in accordance with the religious doctrine. According to Bartłomiej Dobroczyński, each religion regulates the way people should interact with each other, how to treat their own and strangers, how to relate to women, children, birth and death, etc (Dobroczyński, 2009). Moreover, religion can be a factor of social control by sanctifying the norms and values of a particular social system.

The cultural function of religion refers to religious rituals related to aesthetics, cult and art. In a cultural system, impressions, emotions and aesthetic feelings support and

strengthen religious faith, introducing man through the beauty of poetry, music, painting, sculpture or architecture to the ideological influence of religion. Often, sacred institutions also play a culture-forming role, with aesthetic elements serving as a means of leading people to religion. (Zych, 2012) As a result we can observe a sacred art which consists of all works inspired in a special, spiritual way. They are not only inspired by religious motives, but also express transcendent truths about the place of man in the world and the hierarchy of beings. Religion, therefore, related to human expression, has the ability to influence human emotions and feelings, shaping the aesthetic sense of the individual and giving him/her the opportunity to participate in culture, as well as allowing them to fulfil in religious rituals and finally giving the opportunity to meet the internal needs of experiencing beauty, perfection and/or the sublime (Zych, 2012)

The political and ideological role of religion focuses on creating social order, as well as modelling behaviour consistent with religious principles. Historical experiences confirm religion as an important factor of political struggles. 'Religion has legitimated regimes, siphoned potential grievances into other-worldly concerns, provided organisational support for social movements, and offered a conception of justice that mobilised participation for change' (Williams, 1996). The political ideologisation of religion occurs when religion is set to realise group goals that politics actually fulfils. Both religion and ideology contain practical guidelines. On their basis, strategies of action are planned, through which the goals indicated by the religious and ideological doctrine are achieved. German philosopher of religion, Bernhard Welte, distinguished four forms of the ideologisation of religion, including among others ideologisation through social instrumentalisation. It consists of using religion to gain power over people and maintain it. Religion is turned into an instrument in the hands of politicians, and often a facade that may cover the fair goals that politicians pursue. An example of this type of aspirations and activities is provided by political parties which legitimise their programs with religious doctrine (Welte, 1980).

”The political and ideological role of religion focuses on creating social order, as well as modelling behaviour consistent with religious principles.”

In modern countries there are two rules governing the place of religion in the public sphere: guaranteeing religious freedom and the neutrality of the state in terms of worldview. Religion is considered a private matter of an individual, possibly practised within religious communities. However, professing religion has no influence on human activity in the public sphere. Sometimes, a phenomenon may arise whereby religious and church environments adopt concepts and thought patterns that belong not so much to the Christian tradition, but to the field of politics. According to Ryszard Legutko, one of the characteristics of liberal democracy is the politicisation and ideologisation of various spheres of social life. In such a situation, it is easy to conflict the different ways of understanding various issues concerning individual and collective life by representatives of the liberal trend and Christian thought. The Church can then either accept or oppose the liberal vision of the world. This is especially true in the field of morality (especially issues such as family and sexual ethics, abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, etc.). Contemporary liberal democracies have adopted in their legal systems ways of understanding these issues different from their understanding in the Christian tradition (Legutko, 2012: 251). Liberal democracy adopts the principle of pluralism and tolerance in relation to any views that accept the formal rules of the game in force in a democratic state. The Church, on the other hand, cannot by its very nature tolerate what it deems wrong and sinful. Generally a state with a neutral worldview should ensure equal rights for all its citizens, in which no group uses state institutions to impose its own moral or religious principles on others. Such a group can be not only a religious community, but also a group of people professing ethical views limited to the values constituting the framework for the functioning of a democratic state.

Image of religiousness of Poland in the Baltic Sea Region

In comparative terms, Poland is an exceptional country in the Baltic Sea Region when it comes to public activity in religious ceremonies. Figure 1 shows the countries of Europe where Poland definitely stands out from the rest

”A state with a neutral worldview should ensure equal rights for all its citizens, in which no group uses state institutions to impose its own moral or religious principles on others.”

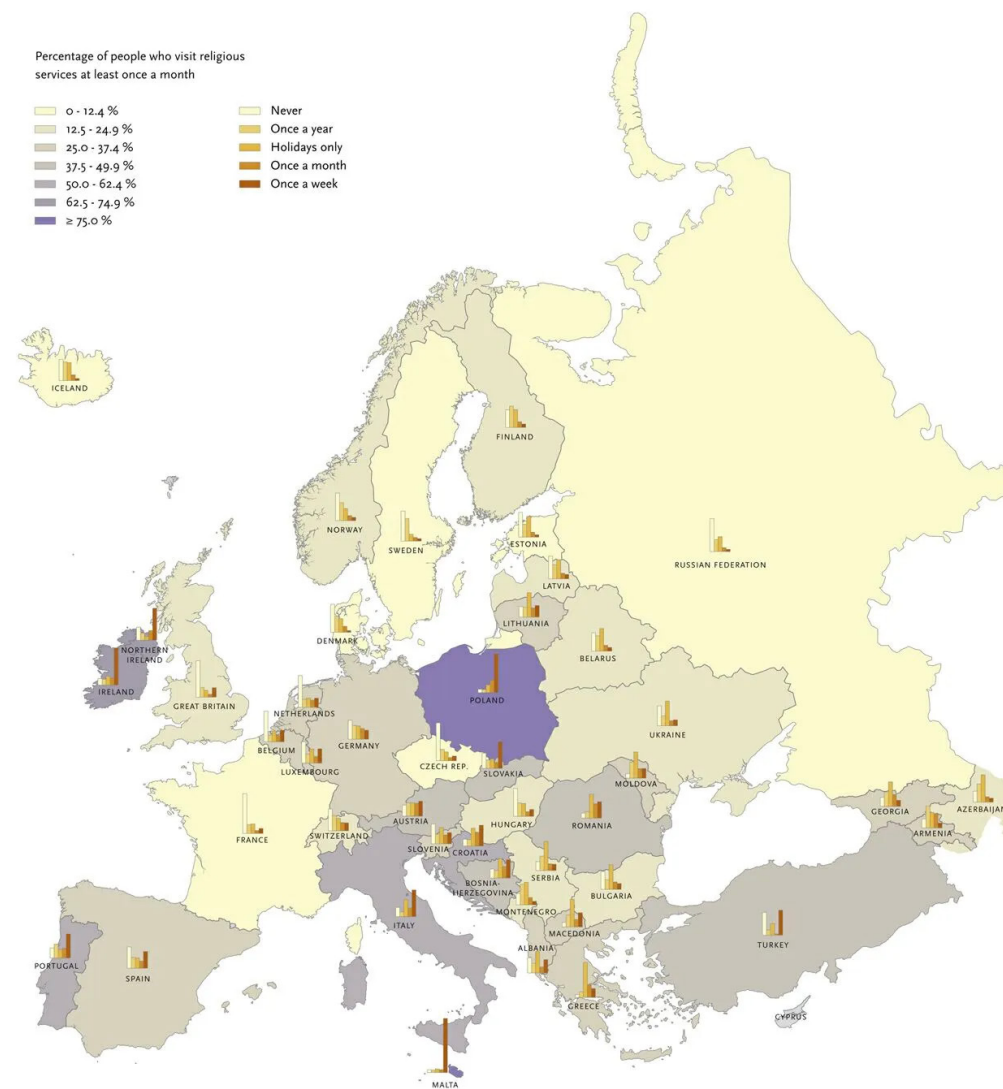
”In comparative terms, Poland is an exceptional country in the Baltic Sea Region when it comes to public activity in religious ceremonies.”

in this aspect. According to data from the Atlas of European Values, more than 75% of Poles visit religious services regularly. It thus differs from the others, where religious activity is definitely lower.

According to the data, Danes, Swedes, Russians and Estonians are the most passive in this aspect in the region, not exceeding 12.4% participation in religious ceremonies. Visitors of religious services in Norway, Latvia, Belarus and Ukraine range between 25% and 37.4%. Residents of Lithuania and Germany are slightly more active: 37.5-49.9%.

Figure 1. Percentage of people who visit religious services at least once a month.

Source: Atlas of European Values, Tiburg 2022, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0



Going into more detail on the Figure 1, Poles are also the most frequent visitors to religious services in the region. Most do so once a week or at least once a month. For the rest of the region, this practice is definitely reversed. In Estonia, Sweden, Norway, Latvia, Denmark and Germany, the largest proportion are those who do not practise religion at all and the smallest proportion are those who do so once a week. In the other countries of the Baltic Sea Region, religious activity is mainly done only during holidays.



QR-code to the website
www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu

The juxtaposition of religiosity to identification with feeling European may also be interesting. According to a survey, there is a noticeable gap between these two factors in different countries. (Atlas of European Values, 2022: 14) The gap can be observed in the percentage of those feeling European between religious and non-religious people. For example, in Sweden and Germany being religious hardly impacts being European, while in Lithuania and Poland religion is identified with Christianity as the historical core of European development. On the other hand, in Poland a group of religious people identify 'feeling European' with the European Union which promotes different kinds of liberties, among which is homosexual marriages, abortion, euthanasia, that deny the foundations of the Christian faith. It concerns a more conservative, and usually older group of Poles and can usually be traced back to the views of some of the Catholic Church clergy shared during mass in church.

The role of religion in the political life of Poland

Taking into account historic events in Europe such as the Eastern Schism in 1054 and the Reformation in the 16th century, individual states in the Baltic Sea Region began to profess various forms of Christianity. The division of the Church into the East and West meant that Orthodoxy was dominant in modern-day Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. On the other hand, as a result of the Reformation, the Scandinavian countries and Germany began to profess Protestantism. German and then Russian influences in today's Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia resulted in the appearance of representatives of Protestantism and

Orthodoxy. In Lithuania, in addition, ties with Poland contributed to the emergence of representatives of the Catholic Church. Poland remained the only country in the region with the domination of the Roman Catholic faith. In the 20th and 21st centuries, a religion that was considered as significant in many countries of the Baltic Sea Region was Islam, whose representatives came to the territories of states in migratory movements. In most countries of the region, there are fewer followers of Catholicism than Muslims. Only Poland is an exception in this area. As it was presented in the previous section of the chapter in most Baltic Sea Region countries religious activity is decreasing and many people declare themselves to be non-believers.

Historically religion has often played an important role in the Polish nation. According to Zdzisław Krasnodebski, it is part of the Polish political tradition to listen to the opinions of clergy, especially in relation to important situations concerning the life of the community. On many occasions throughout Polish history, especially at dramatic moments, religious interpretation was often referred to (Krasnodebski, 2011). The very adoption of Christianity in 966 from the Czechs was motivated by the protection of the newly emerging state of Poland against the German Christianisation action, which could threaten the independence of the young state. Most Polish Catholics know well such historical events as entrusting Poland to the Blessed Virgin Mary by the Polish King Jan Kazimierz in 1656 and proclaiming Mary Queen of the Polish Crowns; defeat of the Swedes in 1655 who attacked Jasna Góra, a place of Marian devotion, thanks to Saint Mary; the victory of the Polish Army over the Red Army during the Polish-Bolshevik war in 1920 which is often referred to in Polish culture as the miracle on the Vistula (River), attributing this victory to God's forces. Catholicism, professed by a significant part of society, became a source of national unity in Poland, and its clergy repeatedly undertook explaining national glory or national decline in terms of traditional religious symbols and religious values. Before World War II, the population of Poland was multi-ethnic and multi-religious.

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According to the census of 1931, there were 5 large religious groups formed by the followers of 5 denominations: Roman Catholic (64.8%), Orthodox (11.8%), Greek Catholics (10.4%), followers of Judaism (9,8%) and Protestants (2.6%) - in total over 99% of the population. After the Second World War, as a result of several events, Poland became a country largely homogeneous in terms of religion, in which 86.7% to 95.5% of the population are Roman Catholic. This was caused by changes to borders, especially the Eastern Borderlands inhabited to a large extent by the Orthodox population, escape and displacement of Protestants from the Western and Northern Lands after WWII, the extermination by the Germans of almost the entire Jewish population in the Holocaust, the emigration to Germany of further groups of mainly Protestant people from the Western Lands and the North as a result of state repressions and the emigration of the Jewish population who survived the Second World War after March 1968.

Many Polish historians, sociologists, and religious scholars believe that religion played an important role in the social and cultural life of Poles during the communist era. The Catholic Church became a place where society could shelter from the influence of communist propaganda and gave the possibility of contact with various historical, spiritual, intellectual, and customary experiences. The communist authorities, using 'controlled secularisation', tried to devalue the axiom of the native religious system, but paradoxically, the propaganda activities contributed to the strengthening of the national patriotic and religious symbolism. (Zarzecki, 2012: 101). Contrary to other countries from the communist bloc, the authorities, seeing Poles' strong attachment to religion, tolerated the existence of a socio-cultural space functioning under the patronage of the Church, probably hoping that over time the processes of secularisation would intensify and the social impact of religion would weaken. (Legutko, 2008). During this period, a few clergy played an important role, becoming guides of the Polish nation or symbols of the struggle against the communist system. They were Karol Wojtyła, elected head of the Catholic Church in 1978, Bishop Stefan Wyszyński imprisoned by the Polish

”The Catholic Church became a place where society could shelter from the influence of communist propaganda and gave the possibility of contact with various historical, spiritual, intellectual, and customary experiences.”

authorities for his views, and Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko murdered by the security services for his activity for the freedom and solidarity of Poland. All of them were raised by the Catholic Church to be saints or blessed.

The 'Solidarity' (Solidarność) - social movement fighting for the basic rights of citizens, was also closely related to the institution of the Church. The aim of this movement was, inter alia, restoring weakened social ties based on belonging to a national community. Its leader – Lech Wałęsa, later elected President of Poland, always demonstrated his faith, by placing a plaque with the image of the Virgin Mary on the lapel of his jacket. The activities of 'Solidarity' supported by the Catholic Church caused the latter to acknowledge its significant contribution to the overthrow of communism. This determined its actions after 1989, when it tried to exert a direct influence on political life in sovereign Poland. On the other hand, as Krasnodebski claims, a certain part of the Polish church hierarchy had a problem with finding itself in the conditions of liberal democracy. In his opinion, it was incorrect to expect some official representatives of the Church, that the provisions of state law would guarantee the observance of Catholic moral principles in the new reality (Krasnodebski, 2005: 35).

Based on two state documents - the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 1997 and the concordat agreement between Poland and the Holy See concluded in 1993, the role of religion in Poland is based on three principles: 1. Mutual autonomy and independence of the political and religious community (state and Church); 2. Religious freedom, both on an individual and public level and 3. The impartiality of the state in matters of ideology and religion. Art. 25 sec. 3 of the Constitution states that "relations between the state and church and other religious associations are shaped on the basis of respecting their autonomy and mutual independence in their scope, as well as cooperation for the good of man and the common good" (The Constitution of the Polish Republic, 1997: art. 25). The autonomy and independence of the state and the Church by no means exclude the Church's concern for the 'common good' of the whole society.

It is implemented in the form of cooperation with state institutions, e.g. as part of service to the needy, care for the national culture and its heritage, or participation in the education of young people. Hence, many political events or the commemoration of historical events are accompanied by representatives of the Church and holy masses are celebrated. On the other hand, the clergy renounce any participation in secular authority by self-limiting the exercise of the passive electoral right. The Church also does not establish its own party.

The freedom of conscience and religion guaranteed in the Constitution also includes the right of parents to provide their children with moral and religious education and teaching in accordance with their convictions. After 1989, religion lessons were introduced to schools, but on a voluntary basis. Alternatively, pupils can take ethics lessons. Moreover, the Military Ordinariate and pastoral care in uniformed services was established. Since no religion can be privileged, the Catholic Church in today's Poland - as opposed to the interwar period - formally does not have the statute of a privileged religion. It follows directly from the Constitution that the same rights obtained by the Catholic Church must apply to other religious and religious associations.

However, the Catholic Church in Poland has reserved a metapolitical role for itself - as a teacher of universal ethical and moral principles, also relating to the public or political dimension of life (Katolicka Agencja Informacyjna). Depending on the results of parliamentary elections and the selection of a ruling party representing more liberal or more right-wing views, ethical and moral principles based on Christianity are visible in the socio-political life of Poland. Seeing the commitment of Catholic clergy to political affairs, some parties have tabled a draft law on a secular state that aims to introduce "the first stage of separation between church and state." They do not recognise that the provisions of the Constitution regulate it sufficiently and that some parties give more permission to the church authorities to influence the law in Poland. Political parties with left-wing and centre-left views (Nowa Lewica, Inicjatywa Polska) consider it

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unacceptable to place religious symbols (the cross) in public institutions (the Sejm, schools), to combine state ceremonies with religious ceremonies, state funding of the Church Fund, financing of contributions for social insurance of clergy from public funds, the state financing of sacred investments, or the introduction of a rigorous anti-abortion law (TVN, 2017). The Law and Justice party (PIS), ruling Poland since 2015, is a party representing conservative, national and a Christian-democratic ideology. Important links are believed to exist between this party and the authorities of the Catholic Church. It has started cooperation with the national-Catholic Radio Maryja, and its electorate is mostly composed of people actively involved in religious life. Some of the legislation passed by PIS, concerning inter alia, the right to abortion or the school curriculum, its attitude towards LGBT, represents ideologies identified with the teaching of the Catholic Church. Conservative views of the party are accompanied by national ideas that refer to the interwar period in Poland. A manifestation of this is, for example, the introduction of the slogan "BÓG HONOR OJCZYŻNA" (God-Honour-Fatherland) to Polish passports in 2018. On the other hand, it should be emphasised that the inclusion of radical representatives of the Catholic Church in the political sphere by this party also resulted in a distinction within the church itself between the supporters of the orthodox law and its more liberal version.

In 2020, the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) issued a communiqué on the religiosity of Poles in the last 20 years. It shows that the vast majority of Poles invariably declare themselves as believers since the end of the 90s - over 90%. Until 2005, it remained at the level of 96%, and for ten years it has been very slowly but steadily falling - 91% in 2020, which is still a high level. On the other hand, the share of people who are classified as somewhat or complete unbelievers is slowly growing: in 2007, four out of a hundred people considered themselves non-believers, and in 2019 this percentage was twice as high (8%). In the case of religious practices until 2005, the share of believing and practising respondents was 57%-58%, and non-believing and non-practising respondents -3%.

In the period 2005-2013, the share of the former group decreased to 50%, and the percentage of the second - doubled (to 6%) (CEBOS, 2020). Considering the results of these studies, it would be excessive to say that the phenomenon of secularisation is progressing among Poles, but a decrease is somewhat visible especially among young, well-educated and well-to-do people. (Secularisation can most generally be defined as the process of religion's withdrawal from social life, and religion then becomes a subsystem or one of the proposals for a pluralist society.)

According to earlier investigation of CBOS from 2006, the importance given to religion in the everyday life of Polish people was directly proportional to the age of the respondents. Older respondents considered religion as a very important value in life much more than younger respondents. On the other hand, an inverse relationship concerns socio-demographic characteristics such as education and the size of the place of residence. The higher the degree of education of the respondents and the larger the city in which they live, the less importance was given to religion in everyday life. Moreover, religion is a more important element of life for Polish women than for men, and for people with right-wing political views it is much more important than for respondents with a centrist or - especially - left-wing orientation. According to the data of the Central Statistical Office of Poland, at the end of 2011, several religions were declared in Poland within the denomination of Catholicism. (Catholicism - 86.9% - mainly Roman Catholic Church - 86.7%, Greek Catholic Church - 0.14%, Old Catholicism - 0.12%; Orthodoxy - 1.31%, Protestantism - 0.38%, Jehovah's Witnesses - 0.34%, Buddhism - approx. 0.04%, Islam - 0.013% and Judaism - 0.004%). Polish society looks homogeneous in terms of religious denomination. The decline in those following Catholicism is quite slow. Religion is still seen as part of the national identity and tradition. Additionally, the politicians' reference to values based on religion maintains a significant position. Most Poles declare a Catholic religion, even despite a lack of religious activity. As it was mentioned earlier, the process of secularisation is visible but not universal.

”Secularisation can most generally be defined as the process of religion's withdrawal from social life, and religion then becomes a subsystem or one of the proposals for a pluralist society.”

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that the positive position of the Catholic Church in Poland is diminishing. It may not impact faith so much but religious practice can be threatened. There are quite numerous (though varying in scope) symptoms of crisis in the Polish Catholic Church like: dissatisfaction with the hierarchy of the Church; losing support from young people who are becoming increasingly secularised; sexual abuse scandals; losing trust; falling number of trainee priests since the start of the century just to name a few. According to IBRiS, one of the polling institutes in Poland, the level of trust for the Church dropped from 58% of Polish Catholics in September 2016 to 40% in November 2020, while the level of distrust jumped from 24% to 42%. Another source pointed out that over the past 25 years, the decline in young people's statements of belief in God has been about 20 percent, and the decline in religious practice has been as much as 50 percent (Raport Kociól w Polsce).

Conclusion

The position of Polish religiosity seems to be related to the institutionalised Catholic Church, which at many times in the history of the state, functioned as a guarantor of national identity. When the territory of Poland was divided by Tsarist Russia, Prussia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, religion was a conjunction of the nation scattered among various powers. Religion was also an expression of the independence and freedom for Poles from the political dependence of Soviet Russia. These conditions contributed to its rooting in the social and political life of Poland. As Marcin Zarzecki claims, Catholicism in Poland is associated with a sense of national identity, and the combination of religion with national identity in the stereotype of "Pole-Catholic" is a testimony to the inclusion of the Catholic Church in the category of the nation - a strictly political category (Zarzycki, 2012). Some Polish scholars of religion go even further in determining the importance of religion to the state. Ryszard Legutko, perceives Christianity as a crucial factor ensuring continuity between the European cultural heritage and the present day of the Old Continent, combining various intellectual and spiritual traditions.

”The position of Polish religiosity seems to be related to the institutionalised Catholic Church, which at many times in the history of the state, functioned as a guarantor of national identity.”

In his opinion, Christianity is the last example of a great social force that deepens the intellectual and spiritual experience of Europeans and the last major trend that may still constitute a real alternative to the liberal trend (Legutko, 2008). The Spanish-American sociologist of religion José Casanova encouraged Poles to show that modernity and Catholicism can coexist very well, and that Poles can positively influence the shape of the European continent in that matter (Casanova, 2005).

In contemporary Polish society, there is still a need for the sacred, in which traditional (religious) values encountering liberal ideas look for their new place and try to maintain their position in such categories as family, national community or gender identity.

However, involving religion in politics and using it for political purposes is an activity that distracts religion from its essential tasks and may result in an increase in the reluctance of citizens to participate actively in religious institutions such as the church. If political parties legitimise their programs with religious doctrine, the spheres of the sacred and the secular are blurred. Similarly, if the clergy influence the shape of state law, they violate the principle of independence of the authorities from institutions other than the state and its citizens. In the long run, such a strategy does not seem to be beneficial for either one or the other.

Questions for a discussion

1. What was the role of religion in state-building process?
2. Do you think that religion may play an important role in national identity building? Why?
3. Can you recognise any special occurrences when religion can be used as a tool of political influence?
4. What could replace religion in the future?
5. What can you say about the role of religion in your country.

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Conclusion

This publication is the result of months of work by an international team of researchers whose research and teaching interests are related to the Baltic Sea Region. One of the distinguishing features of this book is the interdisciplinary and intercultural nature of the authorship team.

The chapters included in the publication are written using a variety of scientific approaches and methods and they differ in structure and style of presentation. In some chapters there is an indication of regional processes within a global context, allowing a comparative analysis of the Baltic Sea Region with other similar territorial communities. In addition, further texts assess the most general trends in the development of the region throughout the period after the collapse of the USSR without considering specific events and figures. Some authors, on the contrary, focus on more specific processes affecting either one country or a group of countries. As the general analysis of the publication shows, the greatest discussion is caused by the question of defining the borders of the Baltic Sea Region, as well as the criteria for assigning certain states to it. This situation is characteristic of virtually all inter-state regions in the world, whose existence is already formally recognised and debated in academic literature and the public consciousness, and one which is still emerging and developing.

The above characteristics can also be attributed to the achievements of the publication, it serves as a good example of collective creativity, authors with different experiences reach a compromise in the basic assessments of certain processes and personalities, and agree on terminology and controversial theses. It is, therefore, encouraging that a team of researchers has managed to work effectively together, creating a well-rounded result.

To briefly summarise the results of the presented volume, I would like to briefly formulate a few final hypotheses.



Victor Shadurski
Editor

After the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Iron Curtain, the Baltic Sea Region represented a promising space for cooperation between European states, which have been divided for decades. It led to a promising opportunity to spread the successful practice of development in Northern Europe towards the countries of Eastern Europe that had removed totalitarianism. This experience concerned not only political and economic but also cultural and educational reforms.

According to the logic of the authors of the book, Baltic regional cooperation was one of the means of spreading the norms and principles of the liberal international order beyond the Western core through various integration regimes and intergovernmental interaction in many policy areas. From the very beginning, the construction of the Baltic Sea Region had two main political objectives. The first was to integrate post-Soviet and post-socialist countries into Europe and prepare them for membership in the EU and NATO. This task was fully completed. It should be emphasised that the new members of the European Union have received the most targeted political and economic support from the Baltic Sea Region's partner states (Germany and the Nordic countries).

Another initiative, supported primarily by Finland, was to include the north-western regions and cities of Russia in regional cooperation through various economic, environmental, and socio-cultural initiatives.

The Baltic Sea States is a good example of peaceful coexistence of different languages, cultures, and religions. The region is a meeting place for four Christian denominations: Catholicism, Greek Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. Moreover, the Jewish religion was present here for several centuries before the Second World War and significantly enriched the multiculturalism of all peoples. In recent decades, the number of migrants from Islamic states in the northern part of the Baltic Sea Region has increased, making the region even more multi-faith and multicultural. Throughout history, migration and religion have proved a diverse and often fraught issue in the region and one in

which many processes remain at play. Special attention should be paid to the achievements of the Nordic countries in the environmental sphere, which have been successfully proliferated and implemented throughout the region in the form of sustainable development programs.

Namely, ecological development and environmental protection have laid the basis for cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region. The region's achievements in the harmonious coexistence of society and nature are widely used by many nations on all continents of the world. Along with intergovernmental cooperation, non-governmental public organisations as well as cooperation at the 'low level' (municipalities, business structures, public associations and, educational/cultural institutions), have contributed towards the formation of regional identity.

A certain alarm signal for the stability of the region, which mainly includes small and middle-sized independent states, was the expanding cooperation between Russia and Germany in the energy sector. As these are large states with coastal territories on the Baltic Sea the expanding cooperation had a significant impact, not only in the focus region of this work but also on a European scale. In their interaction on the transportation of fossil fuels, they were guided by corporate rather than pragmatic pan-European interests. Close Russian-German relations not only brought disagreements into relations between the states of the region but also asserted the priority of economic pragmatism over liberal values that were laid in the foundation of the emerging Baltic space. The Nord Stream project, contrary to the rhetoric of the initiators about their great role in the 'pan-European energy security', caused sharp disputes in the region, resulting in Poland, Sweden, and the Baltic countries accusing Germany of unilateral actions and economic selfishness to the detriment of the security interests of smaller partner countries. In the end, Germany had to abandon its dangerous and unpromising cooperation with Russia.

The accumulation of significant financial resources obtained from the export of energy resources to Europe

has greatly contributed to the resumption of an aggressive imperial rhetoric being carried out by Russia against neighbouring independent states. Ignoring the interests and sovereignty of small countries and recognising the exclusive right of the great powers to decide major international issues was the dominant principle of the policy of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union that replaced it. Such a policy was adopted by the Russian Federation after a short period of 'searching' after the collapse of the USSR. The most serious challenge for the states of the region after the end of the Second World War was Russia's war against Ukraine, which began in 2014. The situation was aggravated by the actual occupation of Belarus, which is under the rule of Lukashenka's dictatorship, the incessant threats from the Kremlin against Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, and other countries in the Baltic Sea Region, which created a real threat to the stability of not only the region but also the whole of Europe.

By its criminal actions, Russia actually and formally placed itself outside of regional cooperation and was excluded from intergovernmental and non-governmental structures in the region. On the other hand, this circumstance contributed to the consolidation of democratic participants in the regional project, strengthening collective responsibility in the field of security, and uniting the participating states around NATO. A vivid confirmation of the process that has begun was the submission of an application to join the alliance from Sweden and Finland, both previously maintained a neutral status.

In the current circumstances, the prospects for Belarus' participation in multilateral Baltic cooperation remain unclear. The authoritarian leadership of Minsk, which is actually a vassal of the Kremlin, unleashed repression against Belarusians with pro-European sentiments. The results of the confrontation between the authoritarian leadership and democratic forces depend not only on a change in the internal situation in Belarus but to a greater extent

on the victory of Ukraine over the Russian army.

Russia's war against Ukraine has become a great test of strength for the Ukrainian people and Ukrainian statehood. Some of the most active allies of Kyiv have been states from the Baltic Sea Region, above all Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. The governments of these countries, based on historical legacies and experience, understood the reasons and consequences of the aggressive action of the Kremlin leadership and have tried to convince other sceptical and more cautious partners of the need, not only for Ukraine's victory but also for the destruction of Russian imperialism. The importance of military-political, historical, and cultural principles contributing to the rapprochement of states on a bilateral and multilateral basis comes to the fore.

It is well known that Ukraine has firmly stated its aspiration to become a member of the EU and NATO. In advancing towards this goal, the Ukrainian state and society will have to go through a complicated procedure. In this, they can benefit from the experience of other EU member states, above all the aforementioned states in the Baltic Sea Region. It is known that in the process of European integration, Ukraine will face problems that were previously successfully solved by Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, which had similar starting positions after the collapse of the USSR. This circumstance, in our opinion, will strengthen not only the importance of the Baltic Sea Region for Ukraine but also Ukraine for the region.

Thus, at present, the Baltic Sea Region is the most turbulent and dynamic part of Europe, facing very acute military and political security challenges associated with Russia's aggressive policy. The uncertainty of the prospects for the internal state and external influence of Russian imperialism does not allow an objective prediction of the development of the Baltic region, as well as the states located on its territory. Therefore, the presented volume is limited to analysing the processes in the region as of today and does not pretend to present the prospects for the formation of the region not only in the long and medium term but also in the near future.

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Photo: Anna Hartvig



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Photo: Institute of Central Europe

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Re-thinking the Baltic Sea Region

trends and challenges

This book has been created within the project Digital at Home which has focused on the internationalisation of higher education, aiming at rethinking the concept of internalisation and how it is being conducted in education at universities. The project owner has been The Baltic University Programme (BUP) which is one of the largest university co-operations in the world, with about 100 participating universities in the Baltic Sea Region, co-operating for education and research in Sustainable Development and Democracy. The project has been financially supported by the Swedish Institute (SI).

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