

**From de-securitisation to  
re-securitisation:  
Sub-regional  
multilateralism around the  
Baltic Sea**

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## Abstract:

This paper traces the development of sub-regional multilateralism around the Baltic Sea from the building of regional security via de-securitisation to cooperation through the *re-securitisation* of certain issues of common concern. We map the sub-regional cooperation formats in and around the Baltic Sea basin, trying to account for the factors that have contributed to their emergence and discuss their continuing relevance today. Our central aim is to capture the logic and dynamics of sub-regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea region by identifying the most significant shifts in sub-regional multilateralism over the last two decades.

## 1. Introduction

This paper traces the development of sub-regional multilateralism around the Baltic Sea from the building of regional security via de-securitisation to cooperation through the *re-securitisation* of certain issues of common concern. Our substantive focus on the security dimension of the sub-regional cooperation formats and our empirical emphasis on Nordic-Baltic cooperative frameworks in particular draws on our respective expertise and experiences. Consequently in the following pages, we devote only modest attention and space to the economic, environmental and cultural sub-regional cooperation formats.

The Baltic Sea region (BSR)<sup>1</sup> is often cited as a particularly close network of multifunctional cooperation, providing strong evidence of successful regionalisation in an enlarged Europe. Today, the region embraces 11 countries and sub-regions – the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania; the Nordic states of Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Iceland; and also Germany and Poland, and north-western Russia (i.e., St. Petersburg, Murmansk, Novgorod and Kaliningrad). Whilst the Cold War temporarily cut through the traditionally close economic and cultural relations between the nations inhabiting the Baltic Sea area, the end of this era created circumstances particularly conducive to different multilateral cooperation initiatives in the region. Most pertinently the BSR emerged, in the opinion of many, as a microcosm or laboratory for solutions to European security problems, capturing the manifold challenges and opportunities of the post-Cold War era (Perry et al. 2003, 3).

The formal eradication of the east-west political division brought together in the BSR countries with various security interests and agendas. The end of the Cold War also brought changes in the institutional framework of the region. New frameworks, such as the Baltic Council (1991), the Council of the Baltic Sea States (1992), The Barents Council (1993) and the Arctic Council (1996) were established. With the recent enlargements of the European Union (EU) and NATO, the number of political actors with occasionally overlapping agendas has further increased in the region.

In the course of extending the Nordic cooperation model to the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, the latter's quest for "hard security guarantees" met with the Nordics' traditionally "soft security"-centric approach, creating

occasional mismatches of mutual expectations.<sup>2</sup> The contrast between the post-modernist, post-security-oriented Scandinavian states and the Baltics, desperately seeking international security guarantees after their historical escape from the grip of their eastern neighbour, could not have been sharper. During the ideological conflict of the Cold War, the *Norden* had indeed emerged as a community of *a-security* in which communality was built on other issues more prominent than the redundant security concerns. Back then, Nordic identity was conceived as a model of anti-militarism, as a third way between the colliding East and West based on humanitarian principles, peace, cooperation, disarmament, and a distinctive model of the welfare state (Wæver 1992, 77). The *Nordic community of a-security* was thus occasionally cited as the standard example of an uncontested *security community* within which states do not consider using force to resolve their disputes. Curiously, however, the emergence of this security community was due to the intentional process of “de-securitisation”, or the progressive marginalisation of mutual security concerns in favour of other issues (Wæver 1998, 69). There has consequently been a deliberate absence of security institutions, leaving security cooperation as perhaps the least developed area at the sub-regional level.

Whilst this pattern of de-securitisation was strongly advocated by the Nordic states for the mutual interaction vis-à-vis and between the Baltic three and Russia after the end of the Cold War and throughout the following decade, the emergence of new actors with more polarised “Eastern” and “Western” identities inevitably shifted the inner dynamics of sub-regional cooperation. By now, it has become evident that a degree of *re-securitisation* is back on the regional agenda. Even a cursory look at the agendas of the various sub-regional cooperation formats demonstrates the extent to which more and more issues – such as energy, economy, environment, or migration - are being cast in security terms. With the renewed strategic importance of the BSR and the Barents Sea for Russia’s political and economic interests, as well as the EU’s related energy concerns, the continuing validity of the post-modernist and somewhat self-congratulatory understanding of the BSR as a paradisiacal sphere of *a-security* is open for debate.

This is precisely the question raised and tentatively addressed by our paper, which otherwise has modest ambitions. We aim to trace how the BSR has moved from building security via de-securitisation back to sub-regional cooperation through the *re-securitisation* of certain issues of common interest. We map the sub-regional cooperation formats in and around the Baltic Sea basin, trying to account for the factors that have contributed to their emergence and discussing their continuing relevance today. Due to our expertise in security and defence issues, the focus of our paper is the assessment of the dynamics of the sub-regional cooperation formats in the BSR that are related to security broadly conceived. Our central aim is to capture the logic and dynamics of sub-regional cooperation in the BSR by identifying the most significant shifts in sub-regional multilateralism over the last two decades. First, we will analyse the rupture created by the end of the Cold War. The immediate post-Cold War dynamics are then examined against the backdrop of the changes brought to the region in relation to the EU and NATO accession processes of the three Baltic states. Finally, we discuss the emergence of a resurgent Russia on the regional security scene and analyse its implications for Sweden and Finland’s NATO perspectives and for the overall spirit of multilateral cooperation at the sub-regional level.

## 2. Analytical framework and time periods

Our approach builds on the analytical categories of Ole Wæver, namely his notions of *a-security*, *de-securitisation*, and *(re)securitisation*. In combination with some of the concepts described by Carl-Einar Stålvant (2007) as characteristic of the developments of the BSR over the last two decades (i.e. *regionalisation* and *stabilisation*), we have developed our own analytical framework in order to better link the chronology of events with the specific logic and dynamics of sub-regional cooperation in the BSR. Our analysis could be further linked to the thoughts of Pertti Joenniemi who has outlined three key ways of articulating security in contemporary Europe that represent fundamentally different logics to the notion of security as well as to its political space, borders and subjectivity more generally. These discourses are: *common security*, *liberal security* and *a-security* (Joenniemi 2007, 130-33). The notion of common security embraces rather than excludes difference, conceiving security as “a joint and unifying concern rather than as a divisive issue calling for containment and elimination of a hostile other” (ibid., 130). The inclination towards dialogue and partnership, negotiations and compromise captures well the common security-spirited underpinnings of the early Nordic-led cooperative initiatives in the BSR. This endeavour towards security through cooperation has not always made the easiest of bedfellows with the competitive notion of *liberal security*, however, which has arguably been entertained by the Baltic three in their relations with Russia. A liberal understanding of security is specifically premised on the enforcing of a set of normative preconditions (i.e. democracy, human rights, market economy, respect of law and good governance) for dealing with others. The three Baltic states’ more assertive, interventionist and change-prone vision of security therefore came to considerably shake the alternative regional vision of the Nordic countries in the 1990s.

Accordingly, we identify as the first significant phase in modern multi-lateral cooperation in the BSR the more or less exclusive Nordic cooperation during the Cold War, when the Scandinavian states constituted a community of *post-security*, or *a-security* of a sort. The notion of *a-security* indicates the non-exhaustiveness of the security-insecurity bifurcation, essentially referring to the deprivation of security of its negative or positive connotations (Joenniemi 2007, 135). A community of *a-security* has consequently moved past or escaped the pressure to pursue politics in a register dictated by traditional security concerns.

We will then turn to the changes created by the end of the Cold War in the BSR, analysing the new openings and challenges in Nordic-Baltic cooperation as well as the attempts to increasingly engage the former *Big Other* – Russia – in sub-regional cooperation formats. This immediate post-Cold War period could be described as a phase of stabilisation, democratisation and de-securitisation of the Baltic states’ security concerns. Yet another shift affecting the sub-regional atmosphere was brought about by the three Baltic countries joining NATO and the EU. This new dynamic has been further accompanied by the gradual awakening to the fact that the optimism about Russia’s eventual (and indeed rapid) democratisation had been somewhat misplaced. The most recent phase in the sub-regional state-of-mind towards cooperation could thus be characterised as a stealthy shift towards the re-securitisation of the BSR as the issues traditionally conceived as belonging to the “hard security” basket have silently crept back to the sub-regional cooperation agenda. Hence, the original Nordic community of *a-security* where communality was framed on the basis of codes *other* than security has moved from the engagement of the Baltic three and Russia and the attempts to de-securitise their mutual concerns by encouraging manifold cooperation in areas traditionally conceived as belonging to

*low politics*, to the facing by the community of the prospect of *re-securitisation* of multiple issues in its fold.

Our conclusion is intentionally provocative: since the existing sub-regional cooperation formats are hardly equipped to address the re-emerging hard security challenges in the BSR, the question of Finland's and Sweden's potential membership in NATO becomes a more and more legitimate one to ask.

### **3. The logic and drivers of cooperation in the BSR**

#### **3.1. Building the Nordic community of a-security during the Cold War era**

Nordic institution-building after the end of the Second World War (WWII) was greatly helped by the common historical and cultural traditions of the Nordic countries which had historically facilitated transnational contacts on all levels of society. The concept of *Norden* has indeed had a strong impact on the identity of the Nordic states for decades. The geographical proximity of states in the region, the relative isolation of the Scandinavian Peninsula from the rest of Europe by the Baltic Sea and the close historical and cultural ties and shared socio-political ideology among the states of the region manifested in the concept of the Nordic welfare state,<sup>3</sup> have helped to create a strong regional identity.

The Nordics have discussed, planned and conducted different co-operation projects for the last 30 years. The Nordic model of co-operation functioned during the time of Cold War as a complex web of social, political, and economic contacts and was traditionally situated at the level of low politics. The Nordic countries had similar political and social institutions, ideologies, party systems and ways of life. There has always been strong opposition to deep integration and supranationality. Intergovernmental co-operation and non-governmental organisations have been essential to Nordic co-operation and many matters have traditionally been solved through personal contacts (Williams 2000).

An argument can be made that the soft security path of the subsequent Baltic Sea regional co-operation has been greatly influenced by the early form of Nordic co-operation. Sweden's attempt to prevent Norway and Denmark from joining NATO and to establish a defence alliance and a customs union after WWII failed, and NATO was preferred by both Denmark and Norway to the isolationist Nordic option. The security interests of the states in the region could hardly be described as common. Sweden remained neutral and Finland had an agreement with the Soviet Union, which excluded its membership of any military alliance up until the 1990s. Rational considerations and the shadow of the Soviet Union thus largely shaped Nordic policies after the war (Værnø 1999, 186).

The first successful institutionalisation of Nordic co-operation emerged with the creation of the Passport Union in 1952 and the founding of the Nordic Council as a forum for Nordic parliamentary interaction. The founding of the Nordic Council of Ministers brought co-operation to the governmental level (Williams 2000). Arguably, Baltic Sea co-operation was initially promoted by four functional factors: the promotion of democratic institutions; serious environmental problems; a sense of regional identity, and the will to create a growing region within Europe (Haukkala, 1999, 24).

The longest standing common concern triggering multilateral cooperation around the Baltic Sea basin has been related to the protection of environment, especially the prevention of the maritime pollution. The *Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic*

Sea was signed already in 1974, ratified in 1980 and subsequently revised in 1992. This convention led to implementation of the so-called **Helsinki Commission (HELCOM)** with a permanent secretariat in Helsinki since the early 1990s. HELCOM focuses on the protection of the marine environment of the Baltic Sea and on the drafting of respective laws for the region.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the elements of *Realpolitik* have never been absent from Nordic cooperation: common organisations offered the advantage of division of labour for tackling common concerns, but also enabled the balancing of individual Nordic states' asymmetrical relationships to other major powers in the region (Mouritzen 1995, 13). Pooling the political efforts of the individual member states further strengthened the role of the Nordic states in acting as a group in world politics, making the relative political weight of the region in the international arena bigger than each state could ever have achieved independently. The Nordics themselves took great pride in managing to maintain peace and stability in their region with their special model of development and cooperation during the Cold War years (Lepik 2004).

### **3.2. The post-Cold War interlude**

Not surprisingly against that backdrop, the Nordic countries have traditionally been the drivers of cooperation in the region. After the end of the Cold War, Norway has further provided a link between regional cooperation arrangements in the Baltic Sea and Barents Sea basins. Germany, although the political and economic heavyweight in the region and participating in the sub-regional activities primarily through its northern *Länder*, has not matched the level of commitment of the Scandinavian countries, partly due to its historical orientation towards the Central European region instead.

Altogether, with the end of the Cold War it became clear that new drivers for sub-regional cooperation were needed in order to compete with the strong pull of the EU and NATO in addressing the security problems in the region. The Nordic states consequently began to seek more influence in the Baltic states and Russia, acknowledging that the physical and mental enlargement of the region meant that it was no longer constituted of exclusively Nordic models of society. After the end of the Cold War, there has thus been a shift towards broader cooperation, taking into account all the states in the region and based on a wider range of subject areas. Ever since, sub-regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea basin has been carried out in a spirit of inclusion vis-à-vis Russia, in order to engage it in a constructive and friendly manner in regional forums and diminish the possibility of confrontation and uncontrolled activity on Russia's part.

The most important intergovernmental superstructure of the region created after the end of the Cold War is the **Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)**, founded as an umbrella organisation to facilitate interaction among the Baltic and Nordic countries in 1992. The CBSS became the first forum for fostering trust and confidence between the countries with their different political, economic and historical backgrounds. The CBSS provides an overall political forum for regional cooperation in the spheres of economy, investments and infrastructure, cross-border cooperation and regional development, environmental and maritime safety, civil society and security. The members of the Council are the 11 states of the Baltic Sea region and the European Commission. Whilst cooperation in the Baltic Sea basin does not really address security in a traditional sense, the CBSS has nevertheless invested considerable effort into soft and civil security issues (e.g.. promoting nuclear and radiation safety, building confidence through the promotion of democracy and human rights, facilitating trade and investment across

borders by dismantling trade barriers, making rules and procedures compatible and promoting twinning agreements).

These tasks are divided between three working groups of the Council:

- (1) the Working Group on Assistance to Democratic Institutions;
- (2) the Working Group on Economic Cooperation, and
- (3) the Working Group on Nuclear and Radiation Safety.

Important roles are also played by the Commissioner for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Including the Rights of Persons belonging to Minorities, and the Committee of Senior Officials. The highest working level of the CBSS is the annual Session of Foreign Ministers, where representatives of the observer states – Ukraine, USA, UK, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Slovakia – also participate.

A number of regional and sub-regional structures has been loosely attached or related to the CBSS over time, such as the **Baltic Development Forum**, **Baltic Sea Chambers of Commerce Association**, **Baltic Sea Forum *Pro Baltica***, **Baltic Sea NGO Forum**, **Baltic Sea Trade Union Network (BASTUN)**, and the **Union of the Baltic Cities**.

Another cooperative framework was founded in Stavanger, Norway, in 1993 with a declared mission to unite the decentralised authorities in the BSR and continue building a strong Baltic sub-region in post-Nice Europe. **The Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation (BSSSC)** format includes the regional authorities of the 10 Baltic Sea littoral states. The work of BSSSC is based on the Lisbon Agenda and the Gothenburg Agenda, the White Paper on Youth and the European Youth Pact, the Territorial Cooperation Programmes, the ENPI (European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument) and the Northern Dimension. For the time being, the framework's top priorities are declared to be: transport and infrastructure, maritime policy, sustainable development, developing renewable energy sources, promoting healthy lifestyles, especially among the youth, advancing civil security, with a focus on the trafficking of human beings. Energy efficiency, marine environmental issues and economic affairs are regarded as the areas of concern by the BSSSC.

**Nordic-Baltic 8 (NB8) (formerly known as the 5+3 format)** is yet another regional cooperation initiative embracing Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. This format is designed to advance political dialogue and practical cooperation via annual meetings of prime and foreign ministers and other ministers and public officials by coordinating political positions and developing common platforms on issues related to the Baltic Sea region, energy and climate questions, international organisations (i.e. United Nations, OSCE, Council of Europe), and in foreign and security political questions. The track record of practical cooperation between the NB8 foreign ministers has shown some encouraging developments lately (particularly as regards to consular issues, diplomatic representation in third states, and the training of young diplomats). The three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania further coordinate their cooperation programmes in educational, cultural, social and economic spheres through the representations of the **Nordic Council of Ministers**.

Although **the Baltic Euroregional Network** project was officially concluded in December 2007, it continues to work as an informal cooperative framework between the border regions of the Baltic Sea countries. This project was designed to develop cross-border cooperation in the Baltic Sea region, with a focus on furthering the Baltic states' cooperation with Russia and Belarus.

Parliamentary cooperation takes place within **the Baltic Assembly** and **the Nordic Council**, which has been conducted in a flexible format of smaller working groups since 2005. Two core treaties have regulated the cooperation between the respective organisations:

- (1) The Palanga Treaty of 30 May 1992 which aimed to share the Nordic experience of building democratic institutions as well as planning cooperation in different areas, such as environmental protection, security, culture and education, market economy, agriculture and energy. The essence of this cooperation was thus the Nordics' aid to the three Baltic states.

- (2) This treaty was updated and renewed in Kalmar on 26 of September 1997 with the aim to intensify relations between the two parliamentary institutions and to strengthen the overall significance of the parliamentary dimension in Nordic-Baltic cooperation. The areas of cooperation remained more or less the same, with the addition of a few specific themes, such as fighting organised crime and illegal immigration.

The accession of Finland and Sweden to the EU in 1995 gave rise to a need to consider matters involving the BSR at the European level. As a response to this, the Union established a special **Northern Dimension (ND)** policy based on a Finnish initiative launched in 1997. The aim of the ND is to stabilise the north of Europe by engaging the Baltic states and Russia in the activities of the Western community. Russia has been generally unsatisfied with the record of the ND so far on the grounds that it has not had its views taken into consideration to a sufficient degree. There have also been problems with the financing and thus the practical implementation of the political declarations and lists of projects under this framework. The Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP) which was launched in 2001 has nevertheless provided a workable model for concrete project cooperation in the field of environmental protection and nuclear safety (Aalto et al. 2008). The Northern Dimension Health and Social Well-being partnership is also in operation, but with more modest results in terms of concrete multilateral projects. The possibility of an energy partnership remains at the core of the new ND, which is a more flexible framework with the equal partnership of Russia, Norway, Iceland and the EU. In that regard, the new ND supposedly radically differs from the **Baltic Sea strategy for the EU** which was initiated by the European Parliament in 2006-2007 and to which the European Commission has also provided its commitment.

### **3.3 Post Cold-War security challenges**

The end of the Cold War brought about a complicated transition of the BSR from a zone of confrontation to the area of potential co-operation and integration. The Nordic co-operation that during the Cold War was mostly dealing with non-military issues was complemented by security and defence issues (Tiilikainen 2006, 50). The changing security situation in Europe after 1989 not only presented a challenge to the security policies of the Nordics and other Western states but also provided an opportunity to extend some elements of Nordic neighbourhood security to the Baltic states that regained their independence in 1991. It soon became obvious that not only was the stability of the three Baltic states of direct importance for the Nordic countries, but the latter could also make a contribution to it (Archer and Jones 1999, 172).

With the pull-out of the Russian troops from the Baltic states in 1994 and the general reduction of military force levels in the region, the overall predicament in the region changed and the main question became how to combine security with stability and political reform (Stålvant 2007, 31). An astonishing variety of strategies was devised, not the least by Nordic countries. Such measures contributed to the reduction of tensions and dissolution of traditional enemy images,

with an eye on paving the way for more omnipotent, responsive and apt security sector. Many scholars claimed the co-operation between the Baltic Sea states at that time to be an illustrative laboratory for overcoming insecurity traps and for realising a more secure environment (Stålvant 2007, 31-32).

The liberation of the Baltic states from the Soviet Union brought the questions of their national security and societal stability to the fore of regional debates. On the other hand, stable internal conditions also had to be secured in Russia by fostering economic, democratic and social development in the country. The Nordic countries took a firm lead in this process, developing a number of concepts with an eye on enabling the Baltic states to move into a more stable and secure environment

The notion of the so-called “Nordic-balance” as the combined effect of Finland with its adjustment policy with the then Soviet Union, Norway and Denmark as NATO members, and Sweden with its non-alignment policy with a large element of political “bridge-building” had served them all well as a buffer between East and West during the Cold War (Værnø 1999, 187). This specific security situation had helped the Nordic countries to develop a post-modern approach to security that they eagerly attempted to export to the Baltic states as well. This post-modern approach comprised of several concepts in its turn.

First, there was the notion of *comprehensive security* implying the largely non-military nature of the new security agenda and the increasing prominence of environmental, economic, human rights and societal issues. The Nordics thus introduced the Balts with the concept of a broadened and “softened” understanding of security. In addition, the concept of *civic security* implying the security of society, and yet another notion of *co-operative security* were introduced as well. The latter was supposed to deal with the subject and object of security, whereas the subject referred to “us” and the object to the surrounding instability and the potential of disorder (Archer and Jones 1999, 173-74).

The threat perceptions of the Nordics were largely similar in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War. The official line of all the Nordics had it that there was no military threat foreseeable against their countries anymore as the East-West confrontation had been peacefully concluded (Værnø 1999, 191). Russia was no longer conceived of as a military threat but rather as a complex security concern. There was also remarkable confidence among the Nordics about the natural acceptance of these perspectives by the Baltic states as well. A constructive co-operation was accordingly advocated with Russia as it was seen as fundamental to the stability of the region. The bottom line of this policy was an endeavour to avoid any possible confrontation with Russia, to prevent insulting Russia in any way that could have potentially turned it into a more troublesome neighbour. With this “soft engagement” policy aiming at maximum impartiality, the Nordics also hoped to escape the dilemma of Russia-first vs. the Baltics-first (ibid., 196-97).

Finland’s and Sweden’s entrance into the EU in 1995 positioned them on a safe side politically as well as security-wise. Norway was already a member of NATO and Denmark of both organisations. Finland emphasized at the time that their foreign policy was now defined by the EU and Russia was no longer important. Sweden, on the other hand, has no common border with Russia and is militarily protected by Finland’s as well as the Baltic states’ buffer.

However, the EU was not too eager to elaborate a political dimension towards the BSR. The Baltic Sea Initiative was ratified in 1996 by the European Commission but it was first at the Helsinki Summit 1999 when it was stated that democracy promotion was an integral part of the EU’s enlargement strategy. The Northern Dimension initiative put forward by Finland in 1997

was a purposeful attempt to engage Russia through closer co-operation, making thus also a contribution to the BSR security. The ND then became the regional aspect of the EU strategy and intended to support the EU's policy toward Russia from the perspective of its close neighbours. The Finnish initiative met various reactions across the region. The Baltic states, especially Estonia and Latvia were critical about the initiative because of their different and indeed a much more sensitive relationship to their big neighbour.

Neither the formation of the CBSS nor the launch of ND did envisage any hard security guarantees for any of its members. No Nordic country was willing or able to offer military protection of the Baltic states either. Military security, however, was the most important and urgent issue for the Baltic states as the fear of Russia's possible resurgence seemed to overshadow everything else. As a result, the Baltic states focused a critical mass of their political energy on the EU and NATO accession processes (Vares 1999, 156).

Clearly, external influences have often speeded up the process of transition and the Nordic countries have definitely played an immense role in building up and training the Baltic defence forces from the scratch, as well as building up the Defence Ministries and tutoring the staff in personnel management, civil-military relations, legal frameworks of defence, and procurement matters. However, by assisting the Baltic Three, the Nordic countries have also supported their search for the EU and NATO membership as the Nordic framework of security never offered the Baltic states a hard security solution they had been after since regaining their independence after the Cold War.

The hard security dimensions brought out the differences in security concepts among the Nordic countries and made the already quite difficult balancing acts even more delicate. The Nordics still prefer to adhere to the so-called "fair weather policies"; they tend to say that "soft is the answer" because there is no threat of military kind conceived. Accordingly, conflicts should be handled by peaceful means within a collective security framework (Værnø 1999, 196).

#### ***3.4 Post-enlargement challenges – Russia as a driver of security policy***

In the changed security-political circumstances of the post-dual enlargement era, these cooperation formats, the CBSS most prominently, face a new set of challenges in developing and promoting issues of common interest. However, as we well know, shared challenges do not always translate into common policies. The post-Cold War era from 1991 to the EU's eastern enlargement in 2004 was characterised by intensified Nordic-Baltic co-operation and attempts to integrate Russia through co-operation whilst maintaining the same security structure. The post-enlargement era has demonstrated that co-operation and integration may not necessarily guarantee security.

It has often been argued that the eastern enlargement of the EU has made the BSR an internal sea of Europe since, apart from Russia, the Baltic Sea is surrounded exclusively by EU members. In spite of that, the region has not really become more homogeneous. The existing co-operation networks have been challenged by the presence of the EU and NATO policies in the region, just as the EU and NATO themselves face the trial of finding their way through the different networks and cooperative formats already existing in the region in order to carry out their own policies and initiatives.

The biggest challenge of the post-enlargement era has thus been the securing of the BSR while the hard security factor has had to be played down to the lowest common denominator, and there is no common regional voice in the matter. Fabrizio Tassinari has distinguished three different groupings in the region according to their foreign and security policies towards the region: 1) Germany and Nordic countries; 2) Poland and Baltic countries; 3) Russia. While the first grouping is committed to de-securitisation of regional cooperation via close collaboration in the non-military sector, Poland and the Baltic three entertain a more modern view of security and have remained sceptical about regional prospects in containing resurgent Russia's ambitions. Russia, in its turn, has preferred regional cooperation as an alternative to NATO's enlargement (Tassinari 2005, 391-92).

Obviously, differences in geo-strategic outlook and historical experience among the Nordic states themselves have been an obstacle to any solution requiring complete mutual trust (Bailes 2006, 3). These differences are due to the reliance on different security concepts and threat perceptions, membership of different organisations, and different military alignment policies. Each Nordic country wants to strengthen the security impact of the organisation in which it itself seeks security. It is important to each of them that cooperative efforts are initiated in a forum where they themselves can participate in the decision-making process. Hence, Sweden and Finland search for security guarantees in the framework of the common European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) while the Baltic states, Denmark, Poland and Germany put more trust in NATO to deal with their respective concerns.

One of the main stumbling blocks in finding a common voice in regional security has been the Baltic Sea states' different interpretation of Russia's actions and also their different relationships with Russia. The Balts are often blamed for overdoing their fear of Russia while the Nordic countries do not seem too eager to see Russia as a threat at all. The Nordics try to 'Europeanise' Russia while the Balts tend to emphasise that Russia is and will remain more a non-European entity in terms of western democratic values. There is a need for an open dialogue about Russia between the Nordic and the Baltic states.

This argument boils down to the problem of the post-modern and modern understandings of security, the latter implying territorial threats. Obviously, the Baltic states joined the EU and NATO for security reasons. However, as several scholars point out, insecurity also resulted in terms of NATO's and the EU's security interests in distant geographic regions, which have no relevance for Baltic security (Tromer 2006, 93). This is not the only source of insecurity though. There is still a certain neglect of the fact that together with the launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004, aimed at stabilising the countries bordering the EU, the EU entered Russia's domain of interest.

The developments during the period 1991-2004 left the immediate neighbours of Russia as well as the Western community in general, with the impression that despite the debates about NATO enlargement, the treatment of Russian minorities and other inconvenient issues, Russia was still looking for a workable relationship with its neighbours and with the West. Even such a burning question as the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Baltic states could be solved with the help of Western mediators (Liik 2008). Hopes were high and Russia was treated as a developing democracy.

It soon became clear that Russia was not interested in playing by the same rules as the other Central and Eastern European transition democracies. After NATO and EU enlargement, Russia adopted a much harsher attitude towards the West. This change was made possible by different developments inside Russia and in the world. Inside Russia, the KGB clan had managed to consolidate its power. Growing oil prices helped to boost the Russian economy, which considerably increased the self-confidence of those in power (ibid.). On a larger scale, Russia opposed US hegemony, advocated a multipolar world and defined itself as a geopolitical rival of the West (Ehin and Avery 2007, 2).

The concept of *sovereign democracy*, detailed by Kremlin aide Vladislav Surkov, was partly a manifestation of that self-confidence (Krastev 2008). The term is vague but its core point is based on the idea that Russia has its own set of democratic values, but they emerge from Russia's own historical experience and they are distinct from what the West understands as democracy. According to the former Russian defence minister, if there is western democracy, there should also be eastern democracy (Popescu 2006, 1).

Russia's aggressive mood almost certainly also expressed itself in anxiety over the Rose revolution in Georgia in 2003 and Orange revolution in Ukraine in 2004. These events were interpreted as the US's and NATO's attempt to expand Western influence in the region.

According to Liik, it was no longer necessary for Moscow to have a workable relationship with its former satellites. On the contrary, it was useful to keep them as a problem that could be raised on the international level or to portray them as hopelessly Russo-phobic. Around 2004, the ghosts of history also came marching back to haunt current day relationships (Liik 2008).

As a result, Russia has completely changed its policies towards its neighbours, be they members of NATO and EU or not. While the EU considers democratisation a precondition of stability and security, Russia regards democratic neighbours as a threat to its authoritarian regime. While the EU's policy in the neighbourhood is based on positive conditionality, Russian policy relies more on sanctions and threats. The EU's interest is to diversify its energy supplies while Russia's interest is to control the key transit routes for energy supplies to the EU and the post-Soviet states (Ehin and Avery 2007).

There are surely areas other than the military sphere where the Baltic states have a different outlook compared with many other actors in the region, such as the questions of ethnic Russian minorities, immigration and investment. None of these is considered to be a potential threat to the survival of states by Germany, Poland or the Nordics. Large-scale immigration would pose a threat to their identity. On the other hand, the economies of the Baltics are so small that even limited investments can give an investor control over strategically important sectors (Neretnieks 2006, 361).

During the second term of Vladimir Putin's presidency, Russia has not only demonstrated increasingly authoritarian tendencies, but also exposed its intentions to restore its former great power position in Europe (if not globally) via its political and economic clout, and has not hesitated to use Europe's dependence on its energy for its own political benefit. Russia has in the past, and undoubtedly will in the future, sought to exploit weaknesses in the new democratic systems of the Baltics and meddle in their domestic politics in order to weaken their institutions,

increase civil strife and polarise their societies. The methods used are as simple as they are effective: from agitation of the ethnic Russian minorities, through the use of corrupt state officials and the exploitation of non-transparent decision- and policy-making processes to the cut-off of oil (in the case of Mazeikiu oil refinery in Lithuania) and cyber attacks (Russia's response to the Estonian Government's decision to relocate a WWII monument). The results of this can be as relatively benign as the creation of a pro-Russian political faction and as malign as the "russification" of the political system (where democratic institutions and processes are but a façade behind which a Russian-style oligarchy hides). Latvia, for example, already exhibits the first signs of this malignant process. In any event, these Russian attempts at de-democratisation are a direct threat to the cohesion of the region and the European Union; and therefore a regional security threat.

According to some points of view, the Baltic states are putting too much trust in NATO and effort to bring their defence forces into line with NATO requirements instead of strengthening the capabilities of the ESDP, which would help to bring them under the same security roof as the Nordics. From a rather different perspective, it would be a nightmare scenario if both Sweden and Finland were to get tied up in the defence of the Baltic states, which is probably also the reason why Sweden prefers Nordic defence co-operation to making the ESDP a more effective instrument. Thus, for the Baltics, NATO is the only security option for time being.

Hence, it would have been naïve to expect a closer security co-operation between the Baltic Sea states. The Nordics' aim has been, and to a large extent still is, to promote their own security within an indivisible European security community and to maintain a US balance of power/engagement in Europe, including the Baltic Sea. They do not want to be locked into a separate arrangement or into a concept of a security region in an area where Russia is striving to be a hegemonic power. Despite having supported the Baltic states' independence, they have always avoided being drawn into Russian-Baltic conflicts.

### **3.5. Conclusions: calls for re-securitisation of the BSR identified**

The war in Georgia in August 2008 reinvigorated the Baltic states' traditional security concerns as Russia's behaviour was taken to be blunt proof of the collapse of the dream of an emerging post-modern security system in Europe, where states reject the use of force for resolving disputes and do not consider invading each other. Anxiety about the possible revival of a traditional geopolitical confrontation at the EU's and NATO's eastern fringes – and thus also prominently in the BSR – has consequently been quite openly present in recent Baltic and Polish security discourses. This could possibly indicate a further shift towards the *re-securitisation* of interaction between different players at the regional level. After all, as we know from Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, regions are socially constructed entities, being contingent on the security practices of their constituent actors and thus conducive to either reproduction or change in their patterns of securitisation, de-securitisation and re-securitisation (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 48).

Against this backdrop, future developments in the intra-regional security scene would largely depend on the particular preferences for securitisation which prevail at the regional level. By becoming members of the EU, the Baltic states also signed up to a post-modern security agenda, promoting the stability of global economic and environmental systems and openness in

the international system. However, the Russia-Georgia conflict demonstrated that territorial integrity still cannot be taken for granted, even in Europe. Handling hard security threats requires traditional power politics, which is certainly not a capacity that the ESDP structures can provide for today. Although complemented by soft security issues, the autonomous nation state and autonomy will remain the essence of the Baltic states' national security.

One cannot say that the Nordic countries have not been touched at all by Russia's unpredictable behaviour, which we have been witnessing for quite some time already. For a couple of years, the Nordic states have been working on a common defence co-operation agreement which was signed in November 2008 by the Defence Ministers of Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark and Iceland. This initiative is mostly about rationalising the resources as a result of substantial cuts in Nordic countries' defence budgets especially in 2004. The initiative includes the co-operation on different defence-related areas like education, training and procurement and there is no question of the lack of interoperability of forces. Other purposes of this co-operation format are declared to be increasing of the security of the Arctic and Barents Sea region and increasing the common Nordic contribution to UN missions in Africa. However, there is a lack of focus on the BSR. According to the words of the Swedish Defence Minister, Sten Tolgfors, this co-operation framework would in principle work like NATO's Article 5, meaning that in case of an attack against one of the Nordic countries, the others would come to help. Nevertheless, despite being members of the EU and being tied to Nordic co-operation, Sweden and Finland still have no legal obligation to act in the case of an attack against one of the Baltic states.

There are three main security challenges in the BSR today, which, in the worst scenario, might require military intervention:

- Environmental security: degradation of the Baltic Sea and the risks posed by intensive tanker traffic. As of 2008, it has been reported that 16-17% of the Baltic Sea is lifeless, which is the gravest threat in the long run. Being the most heavily shipped sea in Europe, the Baltic is vulnerable to ever increasing shipping and tanker traffic. A huge tanker accident could have very serious consequences.
- Energy security: Russia uses its energy supplies as a foreign policy lever. Nord Stream would assist Russia in applying this policy even more actively in the BSR and the risk of having supplies cut off for political or other reasons would move the project into the EU's security realm. Nord Stream would also bring about the increase of Russia's military presence in the BSR;
- Territorial security: Russia has declared its firm intention to protect its compatriots outside Russian borders using all means necessary, including military means. This statement, combined with Russia's military campaign in Georgia, places several Baltic Sea states - especially the Baltic states and Poland but to some extent also Finland - under threat, even if only a slight one.

The first two challenges are closely connected. The risks of environmental damage will increase simultaneously with the implementation of the Nord Stream project. In addition to the possible damage to the sea bottom and the increased traffic, there will also be an increased Russian military presence in the Baltic Sea. It would give Russia an excuse to act assertively, putting other Baltic Sea states under pressure to follow in order to tackle challenges (Larsson 2008, 1-13). The question is under which flag the challenges will be met? The pipeline has already divided the EU and the BSR. Both EU and NATO members, Germany (Russia's main partner in the project) and Denmark favour the project. Finland has been ambiguous in its statements

starting with a “no” for environmental reasons and finishing with Finland’s former Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen’s statement that the need for gas is so big that it is almost a national duty to be a part of it. Sweden opposes for environmental reasons, while Estonia and Poland are firmly against the pipeline for environmental and security reasons. Latvia might favour the pipeline for the sake of its own deals with Russia. Lithuania opposes the project in order to save its own gas transit routes.

While the fact that today the CBSS as a key sub-regional cooperation format also embraces the EU and the US as observers is in itself encouraging, the influence of this institution in handling regional security issues remains limited. So far, the CBSS has hardly been effective in finding consensus between the regional players on issues of security. Although it has promoted consultations and cooperation among its members in some security-related fields, its focus has nonetheless been limited to so-called “soft security issues” (Hubel 2004, 289). If the CBSS cannot be equipped with functions it was not originally designed for, the question of whether the region would perhaps benefit from extending the organisations with more traditional security functions to a larger number of core states in the region emerges.

For now it seems that NATO is the only hard security provider in the BSR. Unless the EU comes up with a common energy policy and a coherent policy towards Russia and gives a proper boost to the ESDP, the prospects of NATO membership for Finland and Sweden will become the key issue in the BSR in the near future.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note how widely the names of the Baltic Sea differ among its littoral states. For instance, Germans, Swedes and Finns describe it as the "Eastern Sea" (*Ostsee*, *Östersjö*, *Itämeri*), whereas for Estonians it the "Western Sea" (*Läänemeri*). The "Baltic" is invoked only in Latvian and Lithuanian, and Polish, English, and Russian (Brüggemann 2003, 349).

<sup>2</sup> An evocative example of a cooperation initiative which did not come true was Carl Bildt's proposal of September 1996 in the area of Baltic-Nordic security cooperation, namely the creation of a Northern Partnership for Peace (NPPF) which would have promoted military cooperation within a "5+3" framework. The governments of Sweden and Finland rejected the idea immediately.

<sup>3</sup> The Nordic model is generally more decentralised than the continental model, focusing more on local governance. It entails a highly developed and government-funded welfare state that provides generous unemployment benefits. The equality in the Nordic model is achieved by high taxation of the greatest earners.

<sup>4</sup> Today, the Baltic 21 project, founded as a regional equivalent to the Agenda 21, fulfils similar functions in its commitment to sustainable development in the areas of environment, social and economic issues.