



THE BALTIC SEA REGION

Cultures, Politics, Societies

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37 Common institutions for Baltic security

1. The Baltic Region and the rest of Europe

While none of the major issues about the Baltic region, notably the Russian-Baltic agenda, can be solved by international entities if there is no bilateral understanding at hand, it is also true that Baltic security cannot be of concern solely to the Baltic States and Russia. There are a number of reasons why the rest of Europe ought to pay more attention to Baltic security:

1. Europe cannot isolate itself from Baltic insecurity or, for that matter, from unrest in any of the territories of the former Soviet Union. Traditional concepts, such as “buffer” and “strategic depth” have a limited application in today’s Europe. A re-assertion of Russian hegemony over the Baltic States would have a destabilising effect on European security.
2. The Baltic area constitutes one of the few points where Russia meets the West. The relationship between the Nordic countries and the Soviet Union was, during the Cold War, a matter primarily of regional concern. Following the Cold War, Norway and Finland have become the border states to Russia for new combinations of West European co-operation, such as the European Union or the Western European Union. Together with Sweden, these Nordic states will condition general West European policies towards the Baltic states as well as towards Russia.
3. The Baltic area contains one of Russia’s main urban areas – Greater St Petersburg with 7 million inhabitants. It is perfectly possible to develop a policy that could benefit the whole region – the Scandinavian countries, the Baltic countries and Russia.
4. The Kaliningrad exclave, which has a large concentration of Russian forces outside Russia. The West is not likely to extend security guarantees to the Baltic States and traditional Western security instruments are not particularly useful in an area of gradual political and economic transition.

Even if the western part of Europe has launched a number of policy documents, it has seldom used the instrument at its disposition in dealing with these intricate challenges to its security. But standing back also entails a cost to be reckoned with, as has been shown by the Balkan experience. Refugee flows are just one of many scenarios that could be visible as a result of discrimination or political and economical collapse. The need to stigmatise and sanction the quest for “ethnic superiority” from predominant ethnic groups seems to be one lesson to be drawn from the Balkan war. Another is the urgency of codifying and enforcing the right of minorities both to protect them and to minimise the danger of manipulation of the minority issue by either the majority or the minority side of the conflict. An enhanced OSCE, possibly Partnership for Peace, seems to offer the best forum for dealing with the densely interwoven Baltic security problems such as the demilitarisation of the area, including Kaliningrad, the solution of border disputes, and the protection of minority rights.

The Baltic region has its best historic chance ever to equip itself with a co-operative security regime. It could again become a crossroads for Russian, German, Polish and Nordic influence. Unlike the past however, when the Baltic area formed the bedrock of European Great Power politics, the region in the future is likely to constitute a European subregion of transition from the countries of the European Union to Russia – the only of its kind in Europe. The uniqueness of the Baltic region will require unique solutions.

2. Institutions in the Baltic Region

The countries in the Baltic Region have for the most part been left to fend for themselves. Four of them are today members of a military alliance (Norway, Denmark, Poland and Germany). The other countries are, in a strict sense, militarily non-aligned. Many of them are in search of partners. For many, there is a fear that recently attained independence, restoration of statehood and/or democratisation will be threatened from inside or outside. Levels of economic development vary in the region. Economic performance, no matter at what level of development, does not meet expectations in some countries. All this contributes to a sense of uneasiness, if not insecurity.

During the 1990s, there have been significant steps taken to broaden the field of co-operation in the region. The main substance of this co-operation has been aimed in two directions, locally among the three Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and towards Western Europe between the Nordic countries, Germany, and parts of Central Europe.

Formalised co-operation between the Baltic States is a relatively new phenomenon. Neither in distant history nor during the interwar independent years of 1920-1940, were the Baltic states particular about concluding alliances with each other, and the presidents of the three states did not even hold a joint meeting. In 1923 Estonia and Latvia entered a ten-year agreement, which included economic co-operation, border issues and defence. Lithuania was left out because of its conflict with Poland due to the Polish annexation of the Vilnius area in 1920. The peak of Baltic co-operation was reached with the Baltic entente in 1934, which only lasted until 1937. During the Soviet era, the Baltic republics had little genuine co-operation. All vertical contacts between the republics went through Moscow and all horizontal contacts were discouraged and limited. During the 1980s, however, inter-Baltic contacts increased significantly through the co-operation between the popular fronts.

The informal contacts between the popular fronts during the era of Perestroika were formalised in 1991 when the Baltic Assembly was established, a bi-annual gathering of parliamentarians. During the 1990s co-operation between the three Baltic States was further developed with the creation of the Baltic Council, consisting of the Assembly and a Council of ministers, which holds regular meetings at presidential level and with prime ministers and ministers of foreign affairs.

The direction of co-operation towards Western Europe has been expressed by Estonia's re-establishment of its special relationship with Finland, while Latvia has declared its old Hanseatic ties with Germany and Lithuania its old historical ties with Poland. Taken together, co-operation at the local level and with Western Europe has cleared the way for a situation of lively and vigorous contacts and co-ordination of questions of mutual interest. During the past ten years, a number of agendas and specific programs have been launched and put into practice involving the creation and strengthening of a regional political, economic, cultural and environmental infrastructure.

But even though Baltic co-operation has taken a large step forward during the past ten years, this has to a large extent been directed towards the western part of Europe. Co-operative initiatives launched by the Baltic States directed eastwards have been few and far between. One important reason for this is the security policies of the Baltic states, whose aim it is to cooperate with western Europe as much as possible in order to put as much political distance as possible to Russia and to escape the status of Russia's special sphere of influence.

In terms of regional high politics, every kind of security policy that does not consider Russia as an integral part of any security structures runs the risk of being counterproductive. Russia is a part of the security environment of each Baltic State, whether they like it or not. And every effort to build a sustainable security environment in the Baltic area must therefore also include Russia. However, from the Baltic States' point of view, this is probably not due to a lack of political will, but more a result of the existing asymmetrical power relations in the area. Russia is a regional great power, and as such it has its own geopolitical ambitions. Furthermore, Russia's involvement in the creation of new security structures in the Baltic rim is dependent on Russia's transformation into an ordinary state with a functional democracy and economy. Russia's involvement in the Baltic region has, until today, been marked by its own geopolitical priorities rather than a sincere desire to shape regional security co-operation based on equality and consensus.

The only single international institution that covers the Baltic Region (as defined here) is the Council of the Baltic States. The Council of the Baltic States was set up in March 1992 with all 10 Baltic littoral states as members. The Council is an organisational framework that intends to increase co-ordination and ensure better results and efficiency of a wide range of activities that take place in the Baltic Sea region. The work of the CBSS is primarily based on a traditional inter-governmental model of co-operation, which is guided by principles laid down in the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris and other OSCE documents.

The activities of the CBSS are agreed on in the so-called Action Programmes, which are limited to three areas:

1. *Participation and stable political developments*, which includes such areas as local political initiatives, political participation, NGOs, civic security, educational exchange and free travel.
2. *Economic integration and prosperity*, in areas such as economic integration, transport, spatial planning and energy.
3. *Solidarity and burden-sharing in the Baltic Sea environment* in areas such as trans-boundary water-management, waste and chemicals, oil pollution, atmospheric deposition, non-polluting agriculture, protection of marine ecosystems and nature conservation in order to protect diversity.

The organisational body of the CBSS consists of a secretariat that was inaugurated on 20 October 1998 and is located in Stockholm, and is financed through contributions from the Member states. Along with the secretariat, the activities of the CBSS are supervised by the Council, which consists of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of each member state, with a rotating chairmanship on an annual basis. The purpose of the Council is to act as a forum for guidance and co-ordination among the participating states.

During the 1990s the CBSS adopted a number of guidelines for strengthening the organisation. At the third CBSS Summit in Kolding, Denmark, 12-13 April 2000, an important document was agreed on that in the future the CBSS should encompass all regional inter-governmental, multilateral co-operations among the members of the organisation. At an addi-

tional Ministerial session in Bergen, Norway, 21-22 June 2000, the Council decided to fully implement these recommendations concerning the new structure and working methods of the CBSS – with the exception that the independence of existing sectorised co-operation would be preserved.

The only existing institutions that explicitly deal with foreign and defence policies, and who have members in the region, are those associated with the European Union (e.g. the EU itself and WEU, the Western European Union), NATO (NATO itself, NACC, the North Atlantic Co-operation Council and PFP, Partnership for Peace), the CSCE (Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe) and the United Nations.

The atomistic nature of the security arrangements in the area has led to a debate as well as practical efforts to establish new institutional frameworks, covering at least some of the states. However, the future is difficult to predict, in particular due to the issues of Russia's political and economic development. This means that important elements of a security community have not yet emerged. Nevertheless, there is a growth in the communality of values (new democratic and market institutions) and an increasing responsiveness among many countries. New and constructive forms of behaviour are occurring. Thus, some of the factors we specified for a security community are increasingly present.

3. Four frameworks considered

Let us consider the four frameworks and their implications for security in the Baltic region. For an operational pluralistic security community there are four important functions to fulfil: first, the institution should *preserve the independence* of the members, by respecting the sovereignty of the member states, but also by being able to act in case of threats. A successful organisation, then, is one that contributes to reducing the fear of member states of losing national independence.

Second, it should manage to *keep the Baltic region peaceful*, i. e. contribute to an open sea and to arms control in the region. Third, it is important that it *incorporates the European powers* that have an impact on regional security. This refers in particular to *Russia*, being the foremost military power of the area, and *Germany*. Fourth, there has to be a *link to other centres and parts of the world*, notably, Western Europe, North America and the rest of the world. It is unlikely that the Baltic region will be isolated from all events in other regions. During the Cold War, tension was transported via alliances. Following the Cold War, economic ties, as well as refugee flows, arms trade, and international crime may provide such links.

The only multilateral international institutions that include the states in the Baltic region and at the same time encompass all the major powers in Europe and are linked to other parts of the world, are the European Union, the United Nations, OSCE and NATO. One important question to ask is therefore what the contribution could be of these four institutions with respect to the four functions listed above?

The table below is a point of departure for discussion. It shows that none of the available frameworks receives a full score. There are many question marks and doubts. The most inclusive is the United Nations. It should have many advantages, particularly as it incorporates all major states and security interests in the region. Its record in preserving the independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina is neither better nor worse than any other organisation. It may, however, have been able to maintain impartiality more than many others. Would the UN act swiftly and early to counter a threat to the independence of countries in the Baltic

region? It should then be remembered that one member of the region has the right to veto decisions in the Security Council. The answer will depend on the decisions of the Security Council and on the options available to the organisation. This might necessitate a change in the composition of the Security Council, as well as an extension of security options available to the United Nations. The present international debate on reforming and strengthening the UN does, in other words, have an important implication for the Baltic Region. For instance, many countries would like Germany, another Baltic Sea country, to become a permanent member of the Security Council.

The OSCE has many of the same advantages as the UN. It incorporates many of the interested parties, although it is restricted to “European” members. Japan is an observer. The broad definition of “Europe”, extending from Vancouver to Vladivostok, makes it an organisation of the North of the world. It has a record of dealing with Baltic regional affairs, in particular with Estonia and Latvia. Diplomatically, the OSCE has gradually increased its importance during the 1990s and has played a significant role in the Baltic region. Although it is an organisation under development, further reforms and the strengthening of its capacity may yield more important benefits to the Baltic region in the future. The paradox of the organisation is that its success rests on its lack of intrusion: it has not been perceived as a threat. Thus, it has been able to take up internal issues, e.g. the status of the Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia and Latvia. The OSCE is not seen as representing the interest of any particular member state, as decisions have to rely on a near-consensus. If it were to become more intrusive (“strong”), for instance, through a European Security Council arrangement, this might reduce its diplomatic effectiveness.

Table 17. Four possible frameworks for a Baltic security community

Framework/ Organisation	Does it preserve independence?	Does it contribute to Arms Control?	Does it incorporate Russia?	Does it incorporate Germany?	Does it link to USA?	Does it link to Third World?
EU/WEU	Provides “soft security” by interdependence, but lacks a clear foreign and defence policy	No	No	Yes	No	No
NATO	Strongest military institution, but uncertain future mission	Through CFE talks	No	Yes	Yes	No
OSCE	Diplomatic strength. No military functions. Decisions require consensus	Only through overlapping membership in CFE talks	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
UN	Committed to sovereignty, but would it act in the Baltic?	Yes. For instance chemical weapons. NPT.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

NATO is the only truly military organisation. Together with Russia, it is the foremost military power in Europe. It keeps the United States committed to European affairs. It is, however, a product of the Cold War, even if its military strategies and doctrines have been re-evaluated to a large extent. An important question is how NATO is viewed in Russia: as a potential threat or as a partner? Russia's attitudes have shifted, for instance, with regard to Poland's membership in NATO but it does not support NATO membership for all former Soviet block states. Furthermore, NATO is an organisation that is dominated by major powers. Its strategies are likely to reflect their concerns, more than those of smaller states. Certainly, NATO shares this feature with any other organisation. More than other organisations, it may be shaped by the overall security relations between the USA and Russia. It involves the immediate and basic defence interests of these two states in particular.

Finally, the EU might remain being less significant from a military point of view. However, it is an important actor in regard to building a security community in the Baltic Region, as it rests on economic co-operation rather than direct military security interests. Its strength lies in its ability to tie countries together into networks and thus prevent conflicts from emerging or escalating into serious inter-state disputes.

The EU's military abilities are likely to remain low for the foreseeable future. It is not likely to engage in military action to preserve the independence of small states, or play a role in arms control questions. The EU is, however, an arrangement presently undergoing significant change. During the 1990s, efforts have been made to co-ordinate the EU's foreign and security policy. Most notable is the creation of a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) which has both strengthened the Western European Union (WEU) and increased the capability of the EU to conduct a credible and efficient security policy. The WEU has developed an organisational structure that enables it to function more or less like NATO, except that it does not have an integrated command structure. In addition, during the EU summit in Cologne in 1999, it was decided that the EU and the WEU should merge and give the EU indispensable military means to carry out armed operations in matters of crisis management. As a result, new organisational bodies have been created such as a permanent Political and Security Committee (PSC), and a non-permanent Military Committee (MC), together with a Military Staff (MS) within the EU Council.

However, the creation of these new organisational bodies does not mean, a priori, that the EU is functioning more strongly and effectively in matters of security and military capabilities. What hampers a development in this direction is the question of the current decision-making structure in the Union and the disharmony among the members of the EU regarding Europe's future security policy, i.e. the relationship between the EU and NATO, the question of nuclear weapons and the questionable participation of neutral states in a Union with extended military capabilities.

The scoreboard of the four institutions regarding the building of a security community, then, gives a mixed result. There is no institution that by itself would be the only candidate for constructing such a framework. The states of the region already have links to the organisations, but in most organisations Baltic regional affairs take a low priority. Is this, then, an argument for creating entirely new organisations or frameworks? Should such frameworks be subsections of existing larger units or be entirely independent? This might be the most useful discussion to pursue.

There are subregional collective efforts that could be discussed. For instance, would closer security co-operation between Sweden, Finland and Norway today be an alternative that might benefit the entire region? Would such co-operation require a formal link to NATO?

Would similar co-ordination between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania be of military significance? There are also possible bilateral relationships, such as direct links between the USA and individual countries in the region, in the form of security guarantees. Would such assurances be credible? Would they be provocative?

Finally, there are the individual routes to security: maintaining a military defence so as to dissuade an aggressor from the most simple forms of tension he could possibly invent. This would amount to being a well-armed but neutral and/or non-aligned state. The military investments would be very costly and would reinforce the atomistic state concept in the region. A cheaper and equally peace-promoting alternative might be to contribute to the conditions for a security community.

The issues of institutions for a security community should be coupled with a thorough discussion on how contacts at all levels could be encouraged, and by doing so improve the development of common values, facilitate mutual responsiveness, improve the chances of economic growth and continuously transcend the borders to outside actors. The institutions mentioned should be encouraged to promote, rather than prevent, such conditions. Put differently: first, a community of security would have to emerge, and then an institution of a security community would follow. In due course, appropriate institutional forms may become logical and grow organically.

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