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## Is Russia a “good CBSS citizen”?

Czy Rosja jest „dobrym obywatelem RPMB”?

**Abstract:** This study examines Russia’s policies towards and within the Council of the Baltic Sea States in the aftermath of the Ukrainian and other international crises. More specifically, this paper analyses Russia’s interest in and expectations from the CBSS, as well as Moscow’s institutional behaviour in the Council. The CBSS is viewed by Russia as both a centrepiece and cornerstone of the regional governance system. Moscow also sees the CBSS as an important tool for overcoming the politico-diplomatic isolation where Russia found itself with the start of the Ukrainian crisis. With the help of the CBSS, it retains its ability to influence socioeconomic, political, environmental, and humanitarian developments in the Baltic Sea region. Russia favoured further the Council’s three long-term priority areas: a regional identity, a sustainable and prosperous region, and a safe and secure region. Russia favoured further the Council’s institutionalization and strengthening of its role in the regional governance system. Despite the fact that Russia’s relations with other CBSS member-states remain tense and that Moscow does not always manage to use the Council to promote its interests in the region, the CBSS is still seen by Russia as an important platform for regional cooperation.

**Keywords:** Russia, Council of the Baltic Sea States, Baltic Sea region, multilateral diplomacy, international cooperation

**Streszczenie:** Niniejsze opracowanie analizuje politykę Rosji wobec Rady Państw Morza Bałtyckiego i w jej ramach w następstwie kryzysu ukraińskiego i innych kryzysów międzynarodowych. W szczególności opracowanie analizuje zainteresowanie i oczekiwania Rosji wobec RPMB, a także instytucjonalne postępowanie Moskwy w Radzie. RPMB jest postrzegana przez Rosję zarówno jako centralny element, jak i kamień węgielny regionalnego systemu zarządzania. Moskwa postrzega także RPMB jako ważne narzędzie przezwyciężenia polityczno-dyplomatycznej izolacji, w której znalazła się Rosja wraz z początkiem kryzysu ukraińskiego. Z pomocą RPMB zachowuje zdolność wpływania na rozwój społeczno-gospodarczy, polityczny, środowiskowy i humanitarny w regionie Morza Bałtyckiego. Rosja poparła trzy obszary długoterminowego priorytetu Rady: tożsamość regionalną, zrównoważony i zamożny region

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oraz bezpieczny i chroniony region. Rosja opowiadała się za dalszą instytucjonalizacją Rady i wzmocnieniem jej roli w regionalnym systemie zarządzania. Mimo że stosunki Rosji z innymi państwami członkowskimi RPMB pozostają napięte, a Moskwie nie zawsze udaje się wykorzystać Radę do promowania swoich interesów w regionie, Rosja nadal postrzega RPMB jako ważną platformę współpracy regionalnej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Rosja, Rada Państw Morza Bałtyckiego, region Morza Bałtyckiego, dyplomacja wielostronna, współpraca międzynarodowa

## Introduction

Prior to the Ukrainian crisis which started in 2014, the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) has traditionally been seen as one of the success stories of regional cooperation and as a role model not only in Europe, but also globally.<sup>1</sup> The BSR players managed to develop very close and fruitful cooperation in the socioeconomic, political/diplomatic, environmental, and humanitarian/cultural spheres. They also created a dense institutional framework in the region which included various forums, organizations, and associations, such as the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Helsinki Commission, the “Baltic window” of the Northern Dimension, the Nordic countries cooperative programs for the region, including Russia, the Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation, the Union of Baltic Cities, the Baltic Development Forum and so on. There were solid grounds to expect that the above cooperative and integrationist developments would result in building a unified, prosperous, and more secure region.

Even such alarming “calls” as the deployment of elements of the US missile defence system in Poland near Kaliningrad (2011) and Moscow’s rather modest retaliatory measures (2012) did not inspire much concern about the future of the region.

However, the situation in the BSR changed radically in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis. Russia was no longer perceived by other international actors as a responsible and reliable regional partner. The BSR countries started to view Russia as a threat or revisionist power aiming to establishing its dominance in the region rather than a promising partner in the region-building process. They started to pay attention

1 *Freedom, Security, Justice – Common Interests in the Baltic Sea Region*, Helsinki 2010; A. Makarychev, A. Sergunin, *Russia’s role in regional cooperation and the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)*, “Journal of Baltic Studies” 2017, vol. 48, no. 4, pp. 465-479.

not only to Russia’s military potential, which can be effectively deterred by the NATO military build-up, but also to Moscow’s so-called “hybrid warfare” capabilities, which posed non-traditional/unexpected threats to their security.<sup>2</sup> All BSR countries joined the EU economic and political sanctions against Russia. Many regional multilateral institutions (including the CBSS) and cooperative projects were frozen for a while. The focus of the BSR agenda has clearly shifted from the soft to hard security problematique.

In this “new reality,” which is characterized by the lack of mutual trust between former partners and global and regional uncertainties, the BSR countries (including Russia) have had to revise their regional strategies and attitudes to the existing multilateral institutions.

This study aims to examine Russia’s policies towards and within the CBSS, which is seen by Moscow as the most important BSR institution, in the aftermath of the Ukrainian and other international crises. More specifically, this paper analyses Russia’s interest in and expectations from the CBSS, as well as Moscow’s institutional behaviour in the framework of this intergovernmental forum. The latter issue is of particular interest for this study for two reasons: Firstly, there are practically no scholarly works on Moscow’s institutional behaviour within the CBSS framework. Analysts preferred to study Russia’s policy in the BSR at large, mentioning its behaviour inside the CBSS only *in passim*.

Secondly, it is interesting to see how Russia behaved inside the CBSS in the context of the tense situation in the BSR as a whole. To what extent has the lack of trust between the BSR countries and Russia affected the relations between them within the Council and the effectiveness of its work? Has Russia behaved irresponsibly and unconstructively inside the CBSS, playing the role of a trouble-maker? Or did it behave like a “good citizen,” that is, as a responsible and constructive member of the Council who played by the established rules, supported the main CBSS initiatives, and made an adequate financial contribution to this institution’s budget? This is important to understand, since very often foreign analysts extend a general critical attitude to Russian policy in the BSR and to Moscow’s policy within the CBSS.

2 A. Sergunin, *The Baltic Sea region after the Ukrainian crisis and Trump: a Russian perspective*, The Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS Report), Copenhagen 2019, no. 4.

## 1. Theoretical framework

Most organizational behaviour theories pay attention to actors' typology, motivation, and role in decision-making as well as to problems, such as individual and group behaviour patterns, formal and informal leadership, and institutional rule making and breaking.<sup>3</sup> However, within the framework of these theories, there are practically no works devoted to evaluating the behaviour of members of an organization in terms of their loyalty, responsibility, productivity, usefulness, and effectiveness.

The "good citizenship" theory, which dates back to political thinking of the city-states of Ancient Greece,<sup>4</sup> is helpful for assessing not only some country's citizen performance but also organizational behaviour of members of various international institutions. With time, the "organizational citizenship behaviour" theory emerged as an integral part of the organizational behaviour approach. This theory is based on the assumption that citizenship (membership – in the case of international organizations) brings with it both privileges and obligations. Each citizen (member) has a duty, or an obligation, to be a good citizen (member). After all, a nation (international organization) is only as healthy as its individual citizens (members).<sup>5</sup> Based on various works studying Russia's institutional behaviour in different international organizations and forums,<sup>6</sup> I propose the following criteria for assessing Russian behaviour in the CBSS: compliance with the rules adopted by the Council and the presence/absence of violations

- 3 See, for example, *Organizational Behavior*, S. Ivanko (ed.), University of Ljubljana Press, Ljubljana 2013.
- 4 R. Develin, *The Good Man and the Good Citizen in Aristotle's „Politics“*, "Phronesis" 1973, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 71-79, doi: 10.1163/156852873X00069.
- 5 M. Schudson, *The good citizen: A history of American civic life*, MA: Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1998; P.M. Podsakoff, S.B. MacKenzie, J.B. Paine, D.G. Bachrach, *Organizational citizenship behaviors: a critical review of the theoretical and empirical literature and suggestions for future research*, "Journal of Management" 2000, no. 26, pp. 513-563, doi: 10.1177/014920630002600307.
- 6 A. Chater, *Explaining Russia's relationship with the Arctic Council*, "International Organization Research Journal" 2016, vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 41-54; A. Sergunin, *Thinking about Russian Arctic Council chairmanship: Challenges and opportunities*, "Polar Science" 2021, doi: 10.1016/j.polar.2021.100694; A. Sergunin, *The United Nations* [in:] *Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy*, A. Tsygankov (ed.), Routledge, Abingdon 2018, pp. 355-366; D. Voronchikhina, *Arktichesky sovet kak mezhdunarodny forum sotrudnichestva gosudarstv: uchastie Rossii* [the Arctic Council as an international forum of the state cooperation: the participation of Russia], "Ars Administrandi" 2019, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 306-329 (in Russian).

of these rules; the level of Russian representation in the CBSS management bodies; the degree of Moscow's support for the initiatives of other forum members; the amount of financial support of the Council; and the degree of Russia's participation in CBSS projects.

Before the evaluation of Russia's institutional behaviour, I'll try to describe Moscow's perceptions of and expectations from the Council.

## 2. What does Russia expect from the CBSS?

The CBSS was and still is seen by Russia as both a centrepiece and cornerstone of the regional governance system, which is confirmed by the Russian strategic documents<sup>7</sup> and leadership's numerous statements.<sup>8</sup> As compared with other regional and subregional organizations and forums (such as the EU, Nordic institutions, Northern Dimension partnerships, BSSSC, etc.), the CBSS is viewed by the Kremlin as a more representative (in terms of its geographic scope), multidimensional (in terms of areas covered by its activities), science-based, and efficient international entity.<sup>9</sup> Despite the fact that ten other CBSS member-states belong to Western institutions that do not include Russia (NATO, EU, Nordic organizations), Moscow still feels itself comfortable in the Council because it functions there on the equal footing and is able to partake in the CBSS decision-making.

Moscow also sees the CBSS as an important tool for overcoming the political and diplomatic isolation that Western countries have tried to

7 V. Putin, *Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации* [The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation], 30 November 2016, <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201612010045?index=0&rangeSize=1> [9.08.2021] (in Russian).

8 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Выступление и ответы на вопросы СМИ Министра иностранных дел Российской Федерации С.В. Лаврова в ходе пресс-конференции по итогам министерской сессии Совета государств Балтийского моря в формате видеоконференции, Москва, 19 мая 2020 года* [Statement and responses to mass media by the Minister of Foreign Affairs S.V. Lavrov at the news conference on the results of the Council of the Baltic Sea States ministerial online meeting, Moscow, 19 May 2020], [https://www.mid.ru/sovet-gosudarstv-baltijskogo-mora/-/asset\\_publisher/3qDBEoPYRt7R/content/id/4133375](https://www.mid.ru/sovet-gosudarstv-baltijskogo-mora/-/asset_publisher/3qDBEoPYRt7R/content/id/4133375) [9.08.2021] (in Russian); Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Выступление первого заместителя Министра иностранных дел Российской Федерации В.Г. Титова на министерской сессии Совета государств Балтийского моря, Рейкьявик, 20 июня 2017 года* [Statement by the First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs V.G. Titov at the Council of the Baltic Sea States ministerial meeting, 20 June 2017], [https://www.mid.ru/sovet-gosudarstv-baltijskogo-mora/-/asset\\_publisher/3qDBEoPYRt7R/content/id/2794141](https://www.mid.ru/sovet-gosudarstv-baltijskogo-mora/-/asset_publisher/3qDBEoPYRt7R/content/id/2794141) [9.08.2021] (in Russian).

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plunge it into in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis. With the help of the CBSS, it retains its ability to influence regional socioeconomic, political, environmental, and humanitarian processes.

Prior to the Ukrainian crisis and the rise of tensions between Russia and the West, Moscow favoured eventual transformation of the CBSS from the intergovernmental discussion forum to a full-fledged international organization (with formal charter, institutional structure, and power to conclude binding agreements).<sup>10</sup> However, with the outbreak of a “new Cold War” in East-West relations, the Kremlin realized that any plans to make the CBSS an intergovernmental international organization seemed unrealistic. All Council member states introduced economic sanctions against Russia. Eight BSR countries, being NATO member states, cancelled military-to-military contacts with Russia, initiated military build-up, and increased their military activities in the region, including deployment of additional NATO forces in Russia’s vicinity, large-scale land and sea military exercises, air and sea patrolling, and so on. Generally, mutual trust between Russia and the rest of the CBSS member states was significantly undermined. Russia’s activities in the Council’s framework decreased in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis – at least for a while. It took some time to identify areas where cooperation between Moscow and other BSR countries was still possible and delineate them from the conflictual issues.

For the above reasons, Russian diplomats and politicians stopped to speak about providing the CBSS with new legal powers and its transformation from a “discussion forum” to a full-fledged international organization.

There can be at least two explanations why Russian leaders changed their mind about the Council’s status. Firstly, in the current – conflictual - situation it is unrealistic to expect that non-Russian CBSS member states (especially NATO countries) would agree to create a new full-fledged regional intergovernmental organization where Russia would have equal standing with Western states. Secondly, as the Kremlin seems to believe, the CBSS under the current circumstances, being an informal and flexible institution, can provide a preferable cooper-

10 A. Pritsepov, S. Petrovich, *Russia’s Presidency in the Council of the Baltic Sea States*, “International Affairs” (Moscow) 2012, vol. 58, no. 5, p. 14.

ative platform and be more efficient than a formalized organization with rigid structure, rules, and procedures. For example, as "classical" international organizations (e.g., UN and OSCE) demonstrate, if there are antagonisms between member states in turbulent times, the whole work of these institutions can be blocked. In contrast with these traditional institutions, the CBSS not only survived the crisis in Russian-Western relations, but also made some modest progress in developing BSR cooperation in specific areas, such as climate action, environmental and civil protection, fighting human and drug trafficking, smuggling, Baltic shipping, cross-border cooperation (CBC), and so on.<sup>11</sup> Generally, now Russia has fewer expectations for the CBSS than earlier. For example, Russia's CBSS chairmanship agenda for 2012-2013 had ambitious plans (1) to foster cooperation in the field of modernization and innovation with a focus on clusters of growth; (2) to promote tolerance as a means of combating the tendencies of radicalism and extremism in the BSR; (3) to enhance people-to-people contacts and facilitate the visa regime in the region, and so on.<sup>12</sup>

Obviously, most points were picked up from the EU-Russian bilateral agenda, where they were discussed, though without much success. Some of them, like, for example, visa facilitation in the BSR agenda, looked largely irrelevant since the CBSS simply had no policy prerogatives in this domain.<sup>13</sup> In the past, Moscow also saw the CBSS as a sort of a bridge between Russia and the EU Strategy for the BSR (EUSB-SR). However, Brussels was reluctant to fully integrate Moscow into its regional strategy and agreed only to some limited forms of cooperation. With aggravation of EU-Russia relations in 2014, Moscow no longer views Brussels as a reliable and important partner in the BSR, preferring to develop its regional strategies either through the CBSS and other subregional multilateral institutions or through bilateral (country-to-country) channels.<sup>14</sup> However, both the EU and Russia believe that their cooperation is still possible at the subnational level

11 CBSS, *Vilnius II Declaration. A Vision for the Baltic Sea Region by 2030*, 1 June 2021, <https://cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Vilnius-ii-declaration.pdf> [9.08.2021].

12 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *The Russian Presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (July 2012-June 2013)*, <http://goo.gl/borgnZ> [9.08.2021].

13 A. Makarychev, A. Sergunin, *The Russian Presidency in the Council of the Baltic Sea States: Thin Socialization, Deficient Soft Power?*, CEURUS EU-Russia Papers 2013, no. 11.

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in the CBC form. Given tense relations between Brussels and Moscow, both the EU and Russian leadership underlined that shifting the focus of EU-Russian bilateral cooperation from the national to the regional and local levels would be an appropriate solution.<sup>15</sup> Most EU-Russia CBC programs in the BSR were executed in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) designed for the 2014-2020 period. There were six ENI CBC programs related to the BSR: Baltic Sea Region, South-East Finland-Russia, Estonia-Russia, Latvia-Russia, Lithuania-Russia, and Poland-Russia programs.<sup>16</sup> Based on the positive experience of these programs, both Brussels and Moscow plan to continue their BSR cooperation in the CBC format.

In general, EU-Russia CBC programs provide a very effective instrument for the promotion of strategic cooperation between partner countries, even in the post-2014 environment. Relations between some EU member states and Russian institutions in the transportation, border management, environmental, healthcare, educational, and cultural sectors seem to be very strong, and there is great willingness to continue cooperation. These practical forms of cooperation appear to be strongly supported at high political levels both in the EU countries and in Russia, despite ongoing diplomatic tensions.

As for the Russian vision of the CBSS, for the same reasons as that ended plans to turn the Council into an international organization, Moscow had to abandon the idea of bringing hard security issues to the CBSS agenda, which it had suggested in the pre-Ukrainian period. According to present-day Russian assessments, the Council should retain its role as an international body dealing only with the “soft” security issues, such as socioeconomic problems, environmental issues, climate action, maritime safety, civil protection, connectivity and social cohesiveness of Baltic regions, youth, gender equality, research, educational, and cultural cooperation, etc.<sup>17</sup> To sum up, presently, Moscow has fewer expectations of the CBSS than in the past, but this does

15 EEAS-DG NEAR, *European Neighbourhood Instrument Cross Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020*, Mid-term review 2017, p. 6, [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/180611\\_eni\\_cbc\\_-\\_mid-term\\_review.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/180611_eni_cbc_-_mid-term_review.pdf) [9.08.2021].

16 N. Bobylev, S. Gadal, V. Kireyeu, A. Sergunin, *EU Russia cross border cooperation in the twenty first century: Turning marginality into competitive advantage*, "Regional Science Policy & Practice" 2020, vol. 12, no. 5, pp. 841-859, <https://doi.org/10.1111/rsp3.12316>.

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not mean that it does not value this multilateral institution and does not attach importance to it in its Baltic strategy. On the contrary, in the context of Russia's narrowing opportunities for exerting its geopolitical influence in the BSR, the importance of the Council has increased for Moscow, although Russia, given the current realities, has to set less ambitious goals in the region.

### **3. Russia's institutional behaviour**

Russia's conflict with Ukraine has clearly further isolated Russia from the BSR's wider regional community. One of the most visibly negative repercussions was the cancellation, upon the insistence of the EU, of the CBSS summit (originally scheduled to take place in Turku in June 2014) – a gesture similar to Russia's de facto expulsion from the G8. Another effect was the rise of hard security concerns among certain BSR countries leading to a remilitarization of the region and side-lining the CBSS, which was unable to be a hard security provider. Evidently, these developments were in sharp contrast to the optimism which was popular among students of Baltic regionalism immediately after the end of the Cold War. As a direct result of Russia's conflict with Ukraine, a new debate on NATO membership occurred in nonaligned Sweden and Finland (Braw 2015; Siitonen 2015),<sup>18</sup> and Poland and the three Baltic states have appealed to the US and NATO for stronger hard security guarantees and expanded military protection in the face of an alleged Russian threat.

It should be noted that, despite the growing tensions between Russia and the rest of the BSR countries in the context of the Ukrainian crisis, Moscow did not abandon multilateral diplomacy in the region, including the CBSS.

As for the first criterion of Russia's organizational citizenship behaviour – compliance with the CBSS rules – Moscow has never violated them. On the contrary, Russian representatives have always

18 E. Braw, *Moscow Mutters Warnings as Nordic Pair Edges Closer to the Alliance*, Politico, 24 August 2015, <http://www.politico.eu/article/sweden-finland-nato-russia-defensenordic-military/> [9.08.2021]; J. Siitonen, *The Current Finnish NATO Debate is More Open than Ever Before*, John Hopkins University, Washington DC 2015.

closely monitored compliance with CBSS regulations and initiated its updating.

As far as the second criterion of “good citizenship” is concerned in terms of the level of Russia’s representation in the CBSS management bodies, Moscow has always made sure that its representatives are in key positions and control those areas of the Council’s activities that relate to the most important of Russia’s national interests in the BSR. For example, currently, Russian nationals occupy a number of key CBSS management positions, including Project Support Facility Coordinator, Senior Adviser for Sustainable & Prosperous Region, and Program Coordinator for Baltic 2030.<sup>19</sup> As for the third criterion – the degree of Moscow’s support for the CBSS initiatives – Russia has always been supportive and constructive of other Council members’ proposals. For example, Russia played a crucial role in reformulation of CBSS long-term priorities which took place amidst the Ukrainian crisis. In light of an evaluation and review of the CBSS five long-term priorities approved at the 7th Baltic Sea States Summit, held in Riga in 2008, the CBSS – under the Finnish presidency (2013-2014) – has decided to mainstream three renewed long-term priorities – Regional Identity, Sustainable & Prosperous Region, and Safe & Secure Region.<sup>20</sup> Russia actively supported and contributed to the CBSS Baltic 2030 Action Plan (June 2017),<sup>21</sup> which offers a framework to support macro-regional, national, and sub-regional implementation of the sustainable development strategy for the BSR. The Baltic 2030 Action Plan includes six priority focus areas, representing a practical way to address the complexity of the 2030 Agenda in the BSR. The Focus Areas are deeply interconnected and reflect a holistic approach to achieving the 2015 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

*Partnerships for sustainable development.* Macro-regional, multi-stakeholder, inclusive partnerships are at the core of the Baltic 2030 Action Plan. According to this document, all stakeholders should take responsibility for increasing regional cooperation and achieving

19 CBSS, *Contact us*, <https://cbss.org/contact-us/> [9.08.2021].

20 CBSS, *Annual Report for the Finnish Presidency 2013-2014*, p. 28, [https://cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CBSS\\_AnnualReport\\_2013-14.pdf](https://cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CBSS_AnnualReport_2013-14.pdf) [9.08.2021].

21 CBSS, *Realizing the Vision. The Baltic 2030 Action Plan*, June 2017, <http://www.cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Baltic-2030-Action-Plan-leafleteng.pdf> [9.08.2021].

sustainable development. Existing and new partnerships in the BSR should focus on exchange of knowledge and development of innovative, concrete, and practical solutions to common challenges.

*Transition to a sustainable economy.* Transnational cooperation is crucial for successful transition to a sustainable economy. This focus area includes several interconnected challenges: to increase energy efficiency and provide affordable clean energy, to reduce waste, to manage resources wisely, to adopt sustainable consumption and production practices and lifestyles, to create sustainable agricultural systems, to reduce water pollution and protect ecosystems, to ensure productive employment and decent work for all, to promote research and innovation, and to support “silver,” “circular,” “blue,” and “green” economies. Interestingly, Moscow, whom Denmark and Poland, both Baltic States, often accuse of “energy imperialism,” has enthusiastically supported these initiatives.

*Climate action.* Work on climate change should integrate both mitigation and adaptation, which requires enhanced regional cooperation. This focus area encompasses several related dimensions: emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction management related to climate and weather risks, monitoring emerging health risks, food security risks, responding to stresses in regional ecosystems, and other challenges. The goal in this area is to mainstream climate change adaptation into all planning and sectoral development processes to strengthen the resilience of infrastructures and society and to support the implementation of the UN Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction in the region. Russia’s support for climate change mitigation strategies was in striking contrast with Donald Trump’s stand on this issue and consonant with other BSR countries’ positions.

*Equality and social well-being for all.* The BSR includes countries that are rated among the world’s most equal – but also some of the world’s most rapidly changing societies, moving in the direction of rising inequality. Gender equality and the rights of children are given special priority in this focus area. It also supports cooperation in shared demographic challenges: aging populations, migration, economic and social inequalities, health-related challenges, social inclusion, and addressing crime, violence, and acts of discrimination which people face in the BSR.

*Creating sustainable and resilient cities and communities.* Populations, economic activities, social and cultural interactions, as well as environmental and humanitarian impacts, are increasingly concentrated in cities, and this poses massive sustainability challenges in terms of housing, infrastructure, basic services, food security, health, education, decent jobs, safety and natural resources, and others. At the same time, supporting positive economic, social, and environmental links between urban, peri-urban, and rural areas by strengthening national, macro-regional, and sub-regional development planning is crucial. Since 2013 Russia has been trying to introduce strategic planning principles to urban sustainable development programs. In 2014, Moscow adopted a special law on strategic planning which obliged all three levels of power – federal, regional, and municipal – to have development strategies which should be based on the sustainable development concept.<sup>22</sup> The Russian north-western municipalities draw heavily on the BSR countries' experiences in this area by implementing the concepts of “smart” or “green” cities.<sup>23</sup> *Quality education and lifelong learning for all.* Rapid social and technological changes bring the need to develop an approach to quality education and lifelong learning throughout the BSR. This focus area includes a special emphasis on scientific literacy and research and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education and innovation, which can support sustainable development from an economic, social, and cultural perspective. Professional associations, such as the Baltic Sea Region University Network, where Russia closely cooperates with other BSR countries, are particularly useful in this regard.

The Baltic Agenda 2030 Action Plan represents not only a regional sustainable development strategy, but also provides a useful and firm link between a regional organization and a global institution (UN). In other words, with the help of this action plan, the CBSS is able to

22 V. Putin, *Федеральный закон от 28 июня 2014 г. № 172-ФЗ «О стратегическом планировании в Российской Федерации»* [The Federal Law, 28 June 2014, no. 172-FL “On Strategic Planning in the Russian Federation”], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 28 June 2014, <https://rg.ru/2014/07/03/strategiadok.html> [9.08.2021] (in Russian).

23 A. Sergunin, *Applying EU standards to planning Russian Arctic cities' sustainable development strategies: challenges and opportunities*, “Environmental Knowledge and Policy Innovation between East and West. Lessons Learned and Not? Open Science Conference Proceedings, Minsk, 28-30 May 2019”, Varaksin A.N., Minsk 2019, pp. 108-109.

translate the UN global sustainability strategy to a regional one which takes into account the local particularities and better serves the BSR's specific needs.

Moscow played an important role in drafting the Reykjavik Declaration adopted at the CBSS 25th anniversary meeting (June 2017), which highlighted further priorities for the Council's sustainability strategy.<sup>24</sup> The document encouraged the CBSS to continue working actively to achieve tangible results within its above-mentioned three long-term priorities: a regional identity, a sustainable and prosperous region, and a safe and secure region. More specifically, the CBSS was invited to identify and launch new project activities, with a view to achieving concrete results within each of the following subject areas:

*Sustainable development.* The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change marked the beginning of a new era in global cooperation for sustainable development, although the US, one of the biggest polluters of the world, decided to withdraw from this agreement under the Trump administration. The CBSS plays an important role in delivering regional responses to the global challenges outlined in the 2030 Agenda, including through increased cooperation on mitigation and adaptation to climate change. As mentioned above, the CBSS responded to this UN initiative by adopting the Baltic 2030 Action Plan to meet the global SDGs at regional level.

*Youth.* The BSR countries believe their young are the future of the region. Learning about, and from, each other contributes to strengthening regional identity. In this context, the Baltic Sea Youth Dialogue is an instrument for building transnational trust and mutual understanding, especially in challenging times, and should provide the basis for sustainable BSR youth cooperation in media, education, science, and the labour market.

*Human trafficking.* The CBSS task force against trafficking in human beings has been operating successfully with Russia's active participation since 2006. The current global migration reality has led to

<sup>24</sup> CBSS, *Declaration on the Occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Council of the Baltic Sea States*, 20 June 2017, <http://www.cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/The-Reykjavik-Declaration.pdf> [9.08.2021].

a significant rise in the number of refugees and displaced persons in Europe who are at risk of being exploited by traffickers. Against this background, it is important that the task force continues its endeavours to prevent trafficking in human beings. Referring to the successful CBSS conference of 2017 on soft security and migration, the CBSS was encouraged by the foreign ministers to promote further cooperation on this issue among the BSR countries. Although migration currently is not a serious challenge for Russia, Moscow, being in solidarity with its Baltic neighbours actively supports their efforts in this area.

*Child protection.* Russia participates in the CBSS expert group on children at risk, which has been highlighting issues of regional concern since 2002, such as children in alternative care, promoting child-friendly justice, preventing trafficking and exploitation of children, as well as promoting the best interests of children in migration. Child protection issues are highlighted in the 2030 Agenda as an important priority of the societal security strategy. The CBSS expert group has extensive experience from its work on child protection and is in a strong position to follow up on the 2030 Agenda.

*Civil protection.* Since 2002 the CBSS Civil Protection Network has been developing activities to strengthen resilience to major emergencies and disasters in the region. Increases in the intensity and frequency of extreme weather conditions make it important to accelerate these efforts through enhanced cooperation at all levels of government and in line with the objectives of the UN Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Some experts believe that this dimension of the CBSS activities is the most important one and tend to equate the societal security concept with the ability to resist natural and technogenic catastrophes in the BSR.<sup>25</sup> Moscow believes that it can significantly contribute to civil protection in the region because Russia has both a solid material-technical base and practical experience in this sphere.

At the same 2017 anniversary meeting, the BSR foreign ministers invited the CBSS to appoint an independent group of advisors, including representatives from civil society. The task of the inde-

25 J. Wolanin, *Common societal security culture in the Baltic Sea Region: basics and the way forward*. Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat, 13 December 2017, <https://cbss.org/publications/common-societal-security-culture-in-the-baltic-sea-region-basics-and-the-way-forward/> [9.08.2021].

pendent group was to elaborate a report with recommendations for a vision for the BSR beyond 2020 on the future role of the CBSS and the means to expand its impact as a forum for political dialogue and practical cooperation in the region. The independent group (where the Russian participant played a prominent role) presented its report and recommendations to the CBSS for consideration in June 2018. The group recommended to further use and strengthen the CBSS as a key platform for regional cooperation and communication, as well as confirmed three current long-term priorities (a regional identity, a sustainable and prosperous region, and a safe and secure region) as strategic goals for the foreseeable future.<sup>26</sup>

Seven key recommendations to the member states and governments were made:

*Dialogue and Communication:* The CBSS has to confirm its role, regardless of existing tensions and misunderstandings, as a stable forum for unhindered communication about common problems. Communication and dialogue are key for the success of regional cooperation in all fields. It was noted that no other organization has the mandate to initiate and organize a high-level political dialogue within the region, encompassing all issues of importance. The group members strongly advised that properly prepared meetings of CBSS foreign ministers should take place on an annual basis.

*Sustaining High-level Political Contacts:* According to the Vision, beside the regular meetings on the level of foreign ministers, meetings of heads of state or government should also be convened. The authors of the document made a rather bold suggestion that these meetings would not take place within the context of the CBSS (even if the CBSS Secretariat could play a role in their preparation) but would rather be meetings of the *Baltic Sea Region*. This would then allow these meetings to provide political guidance also to the other entities in the region and, by doing so, enhance cooperation, create synergies, and avoid overlapping of effort. Within this context, the roles and functions of

26 CBSS, *Vision for the Baltic Sea Region beyond 2020. Report by the Council of the Baltic Sea States Vision Group*, June 2018, <https://cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Vision-Group-Report.pdf> [9.08.2021].

the political and practical/project levels of the CBSS need to be clearly defined, enabling them to complement and profit from each other.

*Role of Secretariat:* According to the Vision, the role of the CBSS Permanent International Secretariat in Stockholm has to be strengthened and made more efficient. It has to ensure the continuity of the institutions' work, provide input into the ministerial meetings, and implement decisions taken at ministerial or Committee of Senior Officials level. The experts believed that the Secretariat has the potential to regularly prepare strategic expertise on the most important BSR problems from a common, shared perspective. The Secretariat's Terms of Reference should be reviewed. The Secretariat requires the resources, tools, and capacity to better serve the member states' governments and other stakeholders.

*Funding:* The CBSS member governments need to make sure that they provide sufficient financial resources for implementation of the Council's projects.

*Other regional actors:* An analysis and operational audit of existing regional cooperation structures should be conducted by the Secretariat. The final goal of such an audit should be to search for ways and means to transform the CBSS into an instrument for creating synergies in regional cooperation.

*EU and Russian Strategies for the Baltic Sea region – synergies:* The Russian representative in the expert group managed to include a recommendation that in areas of common concern the CBSS should work to ensure that the existing regional strategies – the EUSBSR and Strategy of Socioeconomic Development of the North-West Federal District of the Russian Federation – create synergies and results.

*Belarus:* The Vision called the CBSS to take into account the fact that Belarus is geographically part of the BSR and, for this reason, Minsk and CBSS member states can jointly provide a substantial contribution to regional cooperation in areas such as environmental and civil protection as well as education. The expert group even went so far to recommend beginning practical cooperation which may lead in the future to concrete consideration of Belarus becoming a CBSS member state.<sup>27</sup> Moscow actively partook in the discussion on the CBSS

27 CBSS, *Vision for the Baltic Sea Region...*



Reform Roadmap which was approved during the Latvian chairmanship in 2018-2019.<sup>28</sup> Russia also supported the Danish presidency in its efforts to adopt revised Terms of Reference of the CBSS and of the CBSS Secretariat. Moscow was helpful in preparing a number of other important documents: Orientations for the CBSS role and engagement within the EUSBSR and the Northern Dimension, Operational Guidelines for CBSS Practical Cooperation, Guidelines for CBSS Fundraising, renewed mandates and new regional strategy for the Expert Group on Children at Risk 2020-2025, and new terms of reference and strategy for the Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings 2020-2025.<sup>29</sup>

It should be noted that even the coronavirus pandemic was not a serious obstacle to the BSR countries' cooperation in the CBSS framework. Some important events at the end of the Danish chairmanship, including the final ministerial meeting, were held in an online format, but this did not prevent the ministers from evaluating the Danish presidency as one of the most effective. In addition to the adoption of the above-mentioned documents, under the Danish chairmanship a new CBSS Director General for the Secretariat was appointed and the Council's Secretariat got new premises in Stockholm.

Continuing to work in the context of the coronavirus epidemic, Russia supported the main priorities of the Lithuanian Presidency program (2020-2021):

- sustainable development, especially in the field of developing green industry;
- green and maritime tourism as important sectors in reviving regional economies, increasing the region's visibility and giving employment opportunities to young people;
- civil protection in the region and strengthening resilience in the region against major emergencies and disasters;

28 CBSS, *Annual Report for the Latvian Presidency 2018-2019*, <https://cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Annual-Report-Latvia-2018-2019.pdf> [9.08.2021].

29 CBSS, *Annual Report for the Danish Presidency 2019-2020*, <https://cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Annual-Report-Denmark-2019-2020.pdf> [9.08.2021].

- fighting human trafficking for labour exploitation in the region, as well as prevention of violence against children.<sup>30</sup> Moscow played a significant role in adopting the Vilnius Declaration II, which suggested the BSR vision up to 2030,<sup>31</sup> and the CBSS Action Plan for 2021-2025.<sup>32</sup> These documents were approved by the CBSS ministerial (video)conference (1 June 2021), where the Council's chairmanship was passed to Norway for 2021-2022.

As to Russia's contribution to the Council's budget, Moscow has always been punctual in its financial support of the CBSS. From the inception CBSS, Russia believed that the Council's Secretariat should have enough financial resources to properly manage the CBSS activities. Moscow played a key role in establishing the CBSS Project Support Facility in 2012 and its further development during Russia's chairmanship of the Council in 2012-2013.

Concerning the final criterion – Russia's participation in CBSS projects – Moscow has always actively participated in various projects within the Council – environmental, infrastructural, educational (Eurofaculties in Kaliningrad and Pskov), youth, etc. Immediately after the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, there was a short-term decline in Russian project activity due to the fact that a number of projects initiated by Moscow were discontinued or postponed. However, quite quickly, Russia was able to resume its rather intensive project activities under the CBSS auspices. Over the past three years, Russia has participated in 19 of the 46 projects initiated by the CBSS. Only three countries were ahead of Russia: Finland (23 projects), Sweden (23 projects), and Latvia (22 projects) (see map 1).

30 CBSS, *Lithuanian Presidency Program 2020-2021*, <https://cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Lithuanian-Presidency-Programme-2020-2021.pdf>.

31 CBSS, *Vilnius Declaration II. A Vision for the Baltic Sea Region by 2030*, 1 June 2021, <https://cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/vilnius-ii-declaration.pdf> [10.08.2021].

32 CBSS, *From Policy to Action! CBSS Action Plan 2021-2025*, 1 June 2021, <https://cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/cbss-action-plan.pdf> [10.08.2021].

**Map 1. Member-state participation in the CBSS projects funded by the Project Support Facility**

Source: CBSS, Project Support Facility, <https://cbss.org/psf/>.

Currently, Russia participates in four of six ongoing projects:

- Baltic Sea Region Mobilities for Young Researchers
- Young People Network for Balticness (YoPeNET)
- Youth Networking for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Baltic Sea Region

THALIA – Towards thoughtful, informed, and compassionate journalism in covering human trafficking.<sup>33</sup>

In June 2021, the Project Support Facility approved eight new projects, two with Russia’s participation: “Rural Cultural Planning” and “Child sexual abuse crimes in media-coverage: Providing expertise for sustainable media support of the CSA crimes survivors in the Baltic Sea Region.”<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> CBSS, *Ongoing Projects – CBSS*, <https://cbss.org/psf/ongoing-projects/> [10.08.2021].

<sup>34</sup> CBSS, *Eight projects selected for PSF funding 2021*, 22 June 2021, <https://cbss.org/2021/06/22/eight-projects-selected-for-psf-funding-2021-2022/> [10.08.2021].

## Conclusions

Several conclusions emerge from the above analysis:

Russia has important economic, societal, humanitarian, environmental, and military-strategic interests in the BSR even though this region is not of highest priority for Moscow's foreign policies. During recent years, the Kremlin's interest in the BSR has grown because of the implementation of the Nord Stream 2 project, the need to respond to the EUSBSR, the spill over effect of the Ukrainian crisis in the region, as well as the military build-up and increase in military activities of the US/NATO.

So far, Russia's BSR policies have turned out to be less assertive compared to other regions where Russian and BSR countries' interests overlap, such as Eastern Europe or the South Caucasus. Russia's geoeconomics and geostrategic ambitions in the BSR are still rather high, supported – contrary to the 1990s and early 2000s – by political willingness and money.

As for Moscow's CBSS institutional behaviour, it met all the basic criteria of "good citizen" behaviour. Russia strictly observed the CBSS rules and actively participated in the work of its management structures. Moscow supported all major Council's endeavours in areas such as sustainable development, energy security, environment protection, climate change mitigation and adaptation, conservation of biodiversity, maritime safety, civil protection, connectivity of Arctic regions, telecommunications, sustainable fisheries, well-being of local communities, preservation of regional historical heritage, and so on. Moscow was helpful in attracting financial resources to the CBSS and enhancing its project activities. Russia favoured furthering the Council's institutionalization and strengthening its role in the regional governance system. In other words, Russia has a rather impressive record of being the Council's "good citizen."

At the same time, there were serious changes in Russia's thinking about the CBSS in the post-Ukrainian era. Moscow does no longer wants to transform the Council into a full-fledged international organization, preferring to keep the CBSS as an informal and flexible intergovernmental mechanism which is better designed for difficult times than "classical" international organizations. Russia has also abandoned its previous plans to bring hard (military) security problematic onto the Council's agenda, and currently it favours retaining the

CBSS competencies only in the soft security sphere. Moreover, Moscow failed to use the CBSS as an interface with the EUSBSR and has to rely on the Council as a platform only for communicating with individual member-states and other subregional multilateral institutions.

Since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis, Russia has repeatedly found itself in the minority – even semi-isolated in the CBSS. A number of projects with its participation were suspended, and its initiatives were not supported by other CBSS member-states. Moscow had to spend a lot of effort to restore its reputation in the Council and return regional cooperation to previous levels.

On the other hand, there is a growing feeling among BSR countries that further regional development cannot be successful without Russia and that there should be an effective interface between the EUSBSR and Russia that is lacking for the time being. Despite its inability to fully use the CBSS and other BSR institutions for the effective promotion of its interests in the region, Russia is not completely disappointed with multilateral diplomacy and institutions. As Moscow's support for the CBSS Baltic 2030 Action Plan, BSR Vision beyond 2020, Vilnius Declaration II, and the Council's reform demonstrates, Russia is ready to contribute to the regional cooperative process in a constructive way.

An intensive, multilevel, and open dialogue between the main BSR players is needed to restore trust between them and unravel numerous regional puzzles. A chance to make the CBSS (and the BSR at large) a platform for cooperation rather than confrontation is still available.

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