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Poland's Presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States

On 1 July 2025, Poland assumed its fourth annual presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS). The Polish chairmanship, which was taken over from Estonia, will last until 30 June 2026 and will be determined by the evolution of the CBSS's role in addressing fundamental security challenges in the Baltic Sea Region, resulting from Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the increase in hybrid threats. Poland's key intention is to continue practical cooperation within the framework of the three long-term objectives of the CBSS, whilst simultaneously significantly strengthening the political and security dimensions of the organisation.

Transformation of the CBSS's role after 2022. The Council of the Baltic Sea States underwent a fundamental transformation following the suspension of cooperation with Russia in March 2022, after its invasion of Ukraine (see ["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 561](#)), and subsequently Russia's withdrawal from the organisation in May 2022 (see ["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 616](#)).

Firstly, there has been a transition from cooperation that included all Baltic Sea Region (BSR) states to values-based regional cooperation. Consequently, the CBSS departed from its original model of pan-Baltic dialogue amongst Nordic and Baltic states, Poland, Germany, and the Russian Federation in favour of cooperation based strictly on democratic values and respect for international law, transforming from an organisation that facilitated regional cooperation into an institution focused on solidarity (including with observer status states such as Ukraine). Secondly, the security dimension has been strengthened. Whilst the CBSS traditionally concentrated on political, socio-cultural, economic, and environmental cooperation, it now increasingly addresses matters of broadly understood security. This is particularly relevant to hybrid threats, critical infrastructure protection, and undertaking numerous initiatives aimed at building regional resilience (see ["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 1187](#)).

Thirdly, the CBSS is once again in its history (see [IEŚ Policy Paper, No. 11/2021](#)), undergoing institutional reform aimed at adapting to changes in the international environment. The organisation's reform aims to maintain the significance of the regional structure without the aggressor state – Russia – but simultaneously signifies a gradual and fundamental transformation of regional identity and strategy towards Russia (see ["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 875](#)). Member states are concentrating on deepening functional cooperation amongst themselves whilst simultaneously seeking new areas of regional cooperation that are consistent with current security imperatives. Changes in regional structures are part of a broader process, also encompassing the strategic shift in the security policies of Nordic states, specifically Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO, and the redefinition of Denmark's position on European defence integration. Furthermore, on the socio-cultural domain, traumatic experiences from the Second World War and subsequent Soviet domination have gained new relevance as a foundation for the region's resolute policy towards Russia. This phenomenon is particularly visible in Finland, the Baltic states, and Poland, where historical memory becomes an instrument for legitimising contemporary geopolitical choices (see ["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 1058](#)).

Regional security as a priority of Poland's CBSS presidency. Poland plans both to strengthen the political pillar of the CBSS (including emphasis on security) and to continue the practical cooperation developed by previous presidencies. According to the document presented on 18 July 2025, Poland perceives strengthening the security dimension as its most important priority during the chairmanship¹. The key context is constituted by growing

¹ *Presidency of the Republic of Poland in the Council of the Baltic Sea States 2025-2026 Priorities*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/presidency-of-the-republic-of-poland-in-the-council-of-the-baltic-sea-states-20252026-priorities> [25.08.2025].



hybrid threats (see [“IEŚ Commentaries”, No. 1043](#)), Russia’s war against Ukraine (see [IEŚ Policy Paper, No. 11/2022](#)), and disinformation activities. These issues require an urgent regional response that extends beyond existing cooperation within the organisation. Therefore, during its chairmanship, Poland plans to utilise CBSS structures to coordinate actions in the area of critical infrastructure protection in the region, countering the so-called Russian shadow fleet and increasing resilience to GPS signal jamming attempts (see [“IEŚ Commentaries”, No. 1267](#)). In this regard, it intends to coordinate CBSS activities in three key dimensions. The first concerns tightening mandatory reporting requirements regarding insurance held by vessels sailing in the Baltic Sea. The second dimension encompasses imposing restrictive measures (economic sanctions, port access restrictions for vessels of uncertain legal status) on the entire shadow fleet environment. The third aspect focuses on intensifying diplomatic contacts with flag states.

During its chairmanship, Poland will continue the process of adapting the CBSS to the new geopolitical situation, utilising in this discussion the main findings and recommendations contained in the May 2025 report on the future of the CBSS, prepared by the so-called High-Level Group of Eminent Persons (established in accordance with the Porvoo Declaration of 14 June 2024): former Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves and former Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis². Given that all CBSS states are now NATO members, Poland proposes utilising the Council complementarily to NATO structures – as a space for discussion of urgent regional security matters (see [“IEŚ Commentaries”, No. 1377](#)). The convergence of BSR states’ interests will also facilitate coordination of their actions to secure EU funding for strategic projects, such as the Baltic Defence Line or the East Shield (see [“IEŚ Commentaries”, No. 1023](#)).

Among other activities, plans have been announced to establish within the CBSS a new expert group on security (in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding on the Protection of Critical Undersea Infrastructure in the Baltic Sea from May 2025) and to introduce consultations between the political directors from ministries of Foreign Affairs and officials responsible for security policy in member states. Strengthening cooperation between BSR states and Ukraine constitutes a key element of the new security architecture. Poland intends to continue activities to support Ukraine (an observer state in the CBSS) and increase its engagement in cooperation within the Council.

Priorities within the framework of CBSS long-term objectives. In the security dimension, the plans are complemented by numerous activities undertaken by CBSS structures in the “Safe and Secure Region”. Within the Civil Protection Network (CPN), the priority is building resilience to various types of threats through a comprehensive approach that includes different actors (governmental and non-governmental) in international cooperation, focusing on strengthening risk awareness among the population and building a sense of integrity and trust in the BSR. The Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings (TF-THB) will prioritise undertaking activities at the individual state level in the field of detecting and preventing forced labour. Furthermore, cooperation between TF-THB and the Expert Group on Children at Risk, initiated during the Finnish presidency, will be continued, focusing on combating online child trafficking and raising awareness amongst children and professionals working with them. Recognising the key significance of the Baltic Sea for the region’s energy security, during its presidency, Poland will support cooperation in new energy technologies within the framework of the “Sustainable and Prosperous Region” objective. The Expert Group on Sustainable Maritime Economy (EGSME) will continue the work of previous presidencies, focusing on green shipping corridors, with the aim of enhancing information exchange and improving best practice sharing in this regard. Poland will also support discussion on unexploded ordnance submerged in the Baltic Sea (see [“IEŚ Commentaries”, No. 343](#)).

Within the framework of the last long-term objective, “Regional identity”, Poland will work to improve cultural heritage management in the BSR, with planned activities including, inter alia, supporting maritime heritage protection, promoting shared heritage, and initiatives that strengthen regional identity. The presidency also

² Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Gabrielius Landsbergis, *The Future of the Council of the Baltic Sea States*, May 2025, https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2025/05/Report_The_Future_of_the_Council_of_the_Baltic_Sea_States_Ilves_Landsbergis_May_2025.pdf#page=18.05 [25.08.2025].



supports active participation of young people in strategic debates (Baltic Sea Region Youth Forum). Additionally, in this area, security will be strengthened through supporting cooperation in spatial planning and territorial development within the VASAB network, with a focus on enhancing the territorial resilience of the BSR.

Conclusions

- Processes occurring within the CBSS demonstrate the Baltic Sea Region's transition from an inclusive cooperation model, including Russia, to a model based on shared democratic values and alliance commitments, which ultimately leads to the region's consolidation as an integral part of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture.
- In the current geostrategic situation, security is the main priority of BSR states, which undertake activities on this plane not only within larger international organisations, such as NATO and the EU, but also within regional structures. The CBSS is evolving from traditional areas of cooperation (politics, economy, culture, and environment) towards a comprehensive approach to security, encompassing hybrid threats and the protection of critical infrastructure.
- Poland's presidency of the CBSS focuses on improving regional security and transforming the organisation in response to current threats. Key priorities include strengthening the political pillar of the CBSS by establishing an expert group on security and conducting consultations between political directors of foreign ministries. Additionally, these priorities include coordinating actions against the shadow fleet, building resilience to hybrid threats, and protecting critical infrastructure in accordance with the Vihula Declaration. The convening of a Baltic Sea states summit, announced by Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk (for the first time since 2012), aims to coordinate the actions of CBSS states regarding the protection of energy investments from hybrid threats. This decision demonstrates that Poland assesses the current security situation in the region as exceptionally serious, requiring the highest level of political engagement. Organising the summit will also legitimise the organisation's transformation towards a structure more focused on security. The initiative to convene the summit aligns with Poland's Northern policy, positioning it as a coordinator of the Nordic and Baltic states' actions on security matters (see ["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 1255](#)).