



## EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

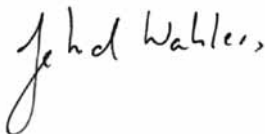
In a few weeks' time, Germany's presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) will draw to a close. On 1 July, at the conclusion of the country's twelve-month term of office, Germany's foreign minister, Guido Westerwelle, will pass the baton to his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, who will take over the rotating presidency on behalf of the Russian Federation. Twenty years after the Council was founded on the initiative of Danish and German foreign ministers Uffe Ellemann-Jensen and Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the German presidency has commemorated the anniversary under the banner: "20 years of the Council of the Baltic Sea States: pioneer of cooperation and symbol of regional identity". Originally set up as a platform to create a new, peaceful basis for cooperation in the Baltic region in light of the changing geopolitical situation after the end of the Cold War, the CBSS is now looking for new challenges since the expansion of the European Union into the north and east of the European continent.

Since Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania joined the EU in 2004, the Baltic Sea has become an inland sea within the EU, as all its bordering countries, with the exception of Russia, are members of the Union. In this way, the CBSS has achieved one of the main goals it set for itself upon its foundation in 1992: "to recreate a genuine democratic community around the Baltic Sea". The German presidency of the Council has largely been bound by the "Vision for the Baltic Sea region by 2020" that was adopted at the summit meeting in Vilnius, with the aim of expanding the capacity of the Baltic Council and its permanent secretariat to create and execute concrete projects.

To mark Germany's presidency of the Baltic Council, the May edition of *KAS International Reports* is dedicated to the Baltic region and its more northerly neighbours. Through the ongoing project work carried out by its offices in Central

and Eastern Europe, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung recognises changing political circumstances and promotes the development of democratic and constitutional structures. For the last ten years, the Stiftung has also been working with the Riga-based project "Baltic Sea Cooperation" in a targeted way to assist in the building of closer ties between leading politicians and in the establishment of think tanks and university institutions in the Baltic region. Parties affiliated with the European People's Party are either the ruling parties or are coalition partners in all of the EU member states that border the Baltic Sea (with the exception of Denmark). This helps to bring the partners closer together and to improve the coordination of the region's main objectives for the future.

Along with fostering dialogue with our partners around the Baltic Sea, it is also our goal to increase Germany's focus on the region. Particularly now, at a time when Europe is deep in a debt crisis, it is worth taking a closer look at our northern neighbours. The sound budgetary and financial policies followed by Sweden, Finland and Estonia can serve as good examples for other parts of Europe. The governments of Latvia and Lithuania have also introduced strong austerity measures in order to bring their countries back on an even keel once the financial and economic crises have passed. The Stiftung's forums for dialogue such as at the recent conference "Perspectives for a common stability culture in Europe" are increasingly drawing the Baltic countries into the debate in Germany, not least in order to benefit from the region's experiences and attempt to forge common solutions for Europe.



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