

Spill-over unavoidable? Implications of the Ukraine Crisis on Baltic Sea cooperation and governance

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Setting for regional cooperation: main structures

- BSR a region of dense interaction and cooperation in various formats, for example:
- Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)
- Helsinki Commission (HELCOM)
- Northern Dimension of the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland
- EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)
- Nordic cooperation
- Various formats on trans-governmental and trans-national level.
- Informal bilateral and multilateral formats.

Current main challenges for the Baltic Sea Region

- Ukraine/Russia
- Keeping a minimum of cooperation up in order to tackle the various challenges jointly
- Governance
- The region's competitiveness in a European perspective
- Economic problems
- Environmental degradation
- Cross-border organised crime (trafficking etc.)

EUSBSR - Definition macro-regional strategies

- 1) Integrated framework relating to EU member states and third countries in the same geographical area;
- 2) Addresses common challenges;
- 3) Benefits from strengthened cooperation for economic, social and territorial cohesion.

EUSBSR - Principles

- The macro-regional approach offers an integrated framework for challenges too broad for the national level but too specific for the EU-28.
- Macro-regional strategies incorporate the principles of Integration, Coordination, Cooperation, Multi-level governance and Partnership.
- The “three No’s”: no new institutions, legislation or funding.

EUSBSR - Objectives

- To save the sea,
 - To connect the region,
 - and to increase prosperity.
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- → To be achieved in 17 priority areas and five so-called horizontal actions.

EUSBSR and Governance

- Complex system that involves many different layers and actors (as does general BSR cooperation).
- This offers chances as to comprehensiveness and division of labour but also creates problems: lack of coordination, lack of clear leadership and ownership, overlap, regional actors not fully involved.

EUSBSR and Governance – Improvements I

New proposals by the European Commission aiming at:

- creating stronger political leadership, decision-making and ownership,
 - coordination
 - and implementation
- leading to greater clarity in the overall organisation of work.

EUSBSR and Governance – Improvements II

- For example, countries and regions involved should take general strategic leadership at ministerial level (rotating leadership; special representative).
- Less advanced role for European Commission which, however, should continue to offer strategic support.
- → Pros and Cons.

The Ukraine crisis and the BSR

- The crisis changes the setting for regional cooperation and hampers it.
- Increasing difficulty to separate the regional arena from wider political developments.
- → Regional cooperation does not take place in isolation.
- One of the major goals of BSR cooperation, involving Russia through several institutional bridges, is now at stake → “watershed” for BSR cooperation?

First implications of the crisis on regional cooperation

- Increasing mistrust among the BSR countries and Russia.
- Renewed militarisation in and of the region.
- Differences (in political, (socio-)economic and financial respect) between Russia and other BSR countries become even more apparent now.
- Cancellation of Turku Baltic Sea States Summit → Political dialogue on ice.
- Talks between EU and Russia on linking regional strategies on hold → Russia's further involvement in EUUSBSR doubtful.

Consequences: Future BSR cooperation with Russia – Four scenarios

First Scenario:

- Nothing will change and the mainly functional regional cooperation with Russia continue.

Consequences: Future BSR cooperation with Russia – Four scenarios

Second Scenario:

- If the current situation continues, Baltic Sea cooperation, at least those parts that include Russia, will become obsolete.

Consequences: Future BSR cooperation with Russia – Four scenarios

Third scenario:

The regional functional cooperation with Russia will continue but will become more cumbersome and will be reduced to a rather small number of “soft” issues (projects).

Consequences: Future BSR cooperation with Russia – Four scenarios

Fourth Scenario: The crisis as a chance - renewed Baltic Sea cooperation:

- Political dialogue with Russia remains important;
- Pragmatic approach towards Russia needed more than ever;
- Attempt to bridge the cleavages;
- Inclusive approach.

Outlook and Conclusions I

- In the past, BSR has shown that common problems can be solved in pragmatic ways when there is a will to cooperate and to overcome historical cleavages, without forgetting the past.
- The BSR should retain its significance for Moscow as one of few places where Russia can directly interact with the EU. This necessitates an advanced regional EU-Russia dialogue and coordination of policies.

Outlook and Conclusions II

- Strengthening of formats in which just the EU members cooperate – EUSBSR – in order to keep at least some regional cooperation going when Russia's involvement is difficult.
- No overburdening of regional institutions.

Outlook and Conclusions III

- Keeping up a minimum of cooperation including Russia → “positive list” of issue/policy areas.
- Hope that the BSR’s soft power potential and economic capabilities can still spill-over to its neighbourhoods.