

THE ROLE OF RUSSIA IN REGIONAL COUNCILS

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NEIGHBOURHOOD
COOPERATION IN THE BALTIC SEA AND
BARENTS EURO-ARCTIC REGIONS

INSTITUTE OF
INTERNATIONAL
AFFAIRS

—
THE CENTRE
FOR ARCTIC
POLICY STUDIES

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BY

INGMAR OLDBERG



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PREFACE

Russia's strategic ambitions have never ceased to be a matter of interest and concern in the West. They have also remained shrouded in a certain degree of mystery and misunderstanding. Part of the problem is that, even after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation is a giant country that is active on a number of strategic fronts. The neighbours, the challenges, and the governance practices that it faces in each direction are very diverse, and its own behaviour can be expected to vary accordingly.

Historically, neither the Western powers nor China and Japan have paid much attention to, or informed themselves deeply on, Russia's Northern front – its vast Siberian territory and its outlets to the North polar seas. That is changing as a result of the impact of climate change in the Arctic. Many of the seabed oil and gas reserves that could become accessible as a result of retreating ice lie in Russian waters, and fish stocks are expected to multiply faster than average there. The trans-Arctic shipping corridor currently showing the fastest rise in traffic is the Northern Sea Route over Siberia. As a founder member of the Arctic Council, and as one of four states currently making or preparing claims for an extension of their maritime jurisdiction in circumpolar waters, Russia has a strong voice in multilateral as well as national policy solutions for Arctic management and governance.

The present study by Ingmar Oldberg, a lifelong Russian expert and currently a Research Associate at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (www.ui.se), looks at a little-examined but highly relevant aspect of Russian experience. In the early 1990s, Nordic countries helped to create two 'neighbourhood' groupings of states for purposes of non-military cooperation in the Baltic Sea region and the far Northern part of Scandinavia (Barents region), respectively. Both the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) were designed to give Russia shared and equal ownership, thus strengthening friendly ties across the West-East strategic frontier in these regions – which moved further East with the process of NATO and EU enlargement. Both institutions are still flourishing today, and deal with topics ranging from economic development and environment protection to health, education, and civil emergency management.

This paper provides a uniquely detailed insight into Russia's behaviour in, and contributions to, both the CBSS and BEAC. It shows where shared progress has been greatest, and where it has been more difficult - as a result of Russia's internal arrangements as much as of its policies. The findings are directly relevant to the Arctic inasmuch as many of the same issues have to be addressed there, and the BEAC's activities affect land areas extending well above the Arctic Circle. Further, the CBSS and BEAC share many institutional characteristics – including their limitations of agenda and of power – with the Arctic Council, created

in 1996 to work on a similar set of topics. Looking at these Councils' experience sheds light both on the real factors of strength or weakness in groupings of this sort, and on the thesis that Russia may be more comfortable in them precisely because of their non-constraining, non-challenging nature.

This is the second full-length paper to be published by the Centre for Arctic Policy Studies since its inauguration in 2013. We thank Ingmar Oldberg for it and hope it will find an audience among those interested in Russian external policies and in the comparison of European regional institutions, as well as in the Arctic as a whole.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Russia is not only the world's biggest country by physical size, conducting a multi-lateral and multi-vector foreign policy all over the globe, but also a regional power (Legvold 2009, 21-22). It is primarily anxious to retain and increase its influence in the post-Soviet space, earlier called the 'near abroad', as shown by the Russian interventions in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014. In the 'far abroad', Russia has generally aimed for peaceful bilateral and multilateral relations with its West and North European neighbours, while its most important concerns and problems are located to the south of its borders. However, in recent years as global attention has been drawn to the Arctic by the prospect of ice melting and access to new areas and resources, and as Russia has made some high-profile plans and gestures of its own in that context, developments on Russia's Northern periphery have also begun to attract more interest (e.g. Wilson Rowe 2009a; Oldberg 2009).

This report deals with Russian policy in the Baltic Sea and Barents Euro-Arctic regions since 1992 as reflected in the activities of the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC, founded 1993). These organizations can be called 'neighbourhood groups' based on geographic proximity, as distinct from 'brotherhood groups' like the Nordic Council which is built upon long-standing cultural ties and shared values (Bailes 2013). There are several reasons for focusing on Russia's experience of, and role within, them. Russia is a full-fledged and founding member of both these Councils, which include both NATO members and Western non-allied states (Sweden and Finland). Being the principal "Other" in this company and also by far the largest state involved, Russia hence plays a unique role. Further, these two groups are the longest-standing cooperation frameworks designed specifically to engage with Russia in a Northern setting, and the BEAC in particular covers territories that are an integral part of the European Arctic. Exploring their experience may help both to understand facets of Russia's overall behaviour in this zone, and to interpret its role in the somewhat better-known and more often discussed Arctic Council.¹

The CBSS and BEAC differ from wider regional organisations such as NATO, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe OSCE) and the European Union (EU)² in that

¹ The Arctic Council was inaugurated as an institution in 1996 but emerged from an earlier, scientifically and environmentally focused grouping for High Northern cooperation that included Russia from the outset. On its relevance to the present study, see more below.

² Based on the UN definition of Europe as a region, Andrew Cottey and his colleagues call the

the former cover a wide variety of political, economic, environmental, cultural, social and “soft” (i.e. non-military or “civil”) security issues, but exclude military ones (defence policies, security guarantees, peacekeeping or arms control). They do not have legal personality or the ability directly to make legally binding regulations. Further, their central staffs and financial resources tend to be small; in the present context for example, the CBSS and BEAC are both clearly out-spent by the grouping of five Nordic states (Nordic Council and Nordic Council of Ministers) and the EU’s Northern Dimension programme.³

On the other hand, the neighbourhood groupings are often rich in committees, working groups, and other subordinate bodies that draw a wide range of local actors – municipalities, business players, universities, scientists and students – into their activities, thus helping to promote partnership and development from the bottom up. It has been argued (Cottey 1997 and 2009; University of Iceland 2008; Bailes 2013) that the very institutional “weaknesses” that apparently characterize these Councils vis-à-vis the larger European organisations may make it easier for large and small neighbours to coexist in them. Because the stakes are limited, the tensions are low, and their proceedings are little publicized, members of the regional Councils often succeed in sidelining and working their way around the higher political disputes and harsh strategic realities that might otherwise splinter their region.⁴ This study will offer a chance to assess how well these conditions have allowed CBSS and BEAC proceedings to mirror the various interests of Russia and its neighbours in the North, as well as their general foreign policy evolution, since the early 1990s. Has Russia “acted the great power” and tried to dominate the other members and the business of these Councils, or not? Which specific objectives and interests has it chosen to pursue by this particular route? If any contrasts are found between how Russia has acted in the regional Councils and in the larger international fora, or in its bilateral relations, respectively, what does that tell us about the specificities of regional groupings (as above), and/or the complexities of Russia’s external policy process?

These points are the more relevant because the areas covered by the Councils are not inherently low-key or of minor importance for Moscow. The Baltic Sea region is of key significance for Russia (and *vice versa*) for a number of reasons. Russia is the biggest Baltic Sea state by size and population, and second only to Germany in the economic sphere. The region is the only one where Russia has common borders with several NATO and EU countries, and through which most of Russian trade with the West passes. The Barents region covers the North-west corner of Russia and the Far Northern part of the Scandinavian peninsula, and includes Russia’s frontier with the NATO country Norway. In Cold War times the massive concentrations of Soviet forces in the Kola peninsula were a threat to the Nordic region and all Europe, and the seas to the North and North-west of the Barents zone were where the

former regional organizations and the latter, which cover smaller and contiguous geographical areas, sub-regional ones. Parts of countries, also often called regions, are named provinces (Cottey 1999: 5-7). Here the term regional is preferred, as the study’s perspective is limited to Northern Europe, and the Councils call themselves so.

³ Oran Young (2000: 6-7, 10) has suggested that these features, which are shared by the Arctic Council, mean that the latter is not an organization in the ordinary sense nor an established international regime (cf. the WTO), but rather should be called a forum or a mechanism intended to create a region-wide regime. Such a criticism seems excessively literalist and fails to capture the true strengths and weaknesses of this class of international groupings. It also ignores the existence of, and important security roles sometimes played by, similar regional bodies in Africa, the Caribbean, and elsewhere

⁴ This way of working has been dubbed ‘desecuritization’ by some Nordic analysts; see (Joenniemi 1997).

Soviet navy was expected to break out Westward in the event of hostilities. While Arctic waters remain an important strategic outlet for Russia, in the last decades the scope for positive Nordic-Russian partnership has become clearer and attracted more effort above all in relation to oil and gas development, but also to fisheries and development on land. The new Arctic dimension has raised the stakes but also heightened the potential for such cooperation, as the Barents route is the obvious one for any new shipping to take on its way Westward along Russia's Arctic coast and the region should be among leading candidates for siting new port and entrepôt facilities.

Against such a historical background, an underlying issue for any study of relationships in these regions is how to assess the evolving balance between threat and cooperation, potential conflict and peace. Beyond this, however, the Baltic and Barents spaces may also provide a good case-study in the shifting and varying definitions of security. A common contrast is made between "hard", i.e. military security – which the regional Councils here do not deal with – and "soft" security, including non-warlike and cooperative dimensions, in many of which they are active or at least influential. This particular distinction is however sometimes blurred (cf. Hubel 2001: 3 et seq.), and in order to capture the region's full security profile it may be useful to use other vocabularies such as those of "human" or "societal" security. Human security as defined in a development policy context in the 1990s (UNDP 1994) distinguishes between the functional themes of economic, environmental, food, and health security – all of which are highly relevant to the Baltic and Barents areas, and come within the scope of the two Councils plus their subordinate bodies. It also points to the importance of providing security at individual and community, as well as the larger political, level. Here we may note that the two Councils aim not only to bring benefits for the region's citizens and communities, but to engage such sub-state actors in various aspects of their work. While not directly addressing state-to-state "high politics", they may still play some part in improving understanding and in inter-state political relaxation. The concept of "societal" security, the official doctrine of Norway and Sweden, also has a strong focus on the wellbeing and resilience of communities (Bailes 2014). What it mainly adds to the security agenda is a preoccupation with civil emergencies arising from man-made accidents (but also terrorist action), infrastructure breakdowns and interruptions of supply, or natural disasters. In the societal perspective, handling such incidents and restoring normality can be achieved most effectively – while respecting democratic norms – by combining the efforts of civil and military, central and local, and public and private actors, but also of different provinces and states depending on the scale of the problem. We shall find that the CBSS and BEAC have engaged with several issues in this "civil security" field, aiming cooperatively to reduce risks as well as providing a framework for response to actual incidents.

A topical reason for analyzing the role of Russia in the CBSS is the fact that Russia took over the latter's presidency in July 2012, thus providing up-to-date material for judging how Moscow views and wishes to use the organisation. The BEAC also reached a historic turning-point, and had a new opportunity to make clear its goals and purposes, when it celebrated its ten years' anniversary in summer of 2013.

A more general rationale for this report is the waning attention paid to, and research published on, the CBSS and to some extent also to the BEAC in recent years, except in Norway. Further, while there are several important studies of Russia's policy vis-à-vis the Northern countries and the Arctic in general (e.g. Carlsson and Granholm 2013; Konyshov and Sergunin 2011; Wilson Rowe 2009a); on its role in broader organisations and its relations

with the European Union (Wilson Rowe and Torjesen 2009b; Aalto et al 2008); on the Arctic security policies of different states, and the effectiveness of Arctic institutions in solving different types of problems (Bailes and Heininen 2012; Schram Stokke and Hönneland 2009; Granholm 2009; Summers 2010; Young 2000) there are relatively few studies comparing the two North European Councils and Russia's role in them. (Some exceptions are Wilson Rowe 2009b; Etzold 2010, 2012; Bailes 2013; cf also Deriabin and Antiushina 2008.) A detailed analysis of Russian policy in the Councils may thus not only fill one gap, but also encourage others to be filled by inviting studies on the roles of other member states.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the Russian interests, aims and priorities in the two Councils and to what extent they have been met or opposed by the other members in common statements and documents. Activities in the councils are systematically compared so as to identify such similarities and differences and to arrive at more general conclusions on Russian policy in these regional organizations. The geographical, political and military context around the councils is presented to the degree necessary for a full understanding of the issues at hand. Since the Councils mainly operate in intergovernmental mode, the analysis focuses on the actions and views of top officials and their appointees, but when appropriate also other actors are taken into account.

The report has two main substantial sections, parts, dealing respectively with the CBSS and the Baltic Sea region, and with the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and its region. (This is also the order in which the Councils were created.) In each part, the general background is first sketched including the emergence of the Councils. Then the structures of the Councils are analysed and compared, including Russia's formal position in them, and their political and economic limitations are pointed out. After examining how Russian officials have evaluated the role of the respective Councils and what priorities they have formulated, the bulk of the investigation is devoted to comparisons of the joint decisions and activities of the respective Councils with the actual Russian policy line. This is done systematically within the Councils' most prominent fields of cooperation: for example economic cooperation and trade, border and visa issues, energy and environmental issues, democracy and culture, rescue and civil security. Conclusions are then framed concerning how far and in what way the Councils meet Russian interests, and differences and similarities regarding Russian policy in the two Councils are summarized. Finally the role of the Councils in overall Russian foreign policy is discussed. As a preliminary hypothesis, it will be suggested that they facilitate Russian political cooperation with the partners and contribute to solve some environmental, social and economic problems (which may also be considered "soft" components of security); but they do not meet Russia's key security and economic interests, while Russia's political system imposes clear limits to the cooperation.

As the Baltic Sea, the Barents and Arctic regions are overlapping and interconnected, so are the memberships of the respective Councils and the issues that come before them (Bailes and Ólafsson 2013). This study does not address the Arctic Council in the same manner as the other two, although the author has compared all three in another context (Oldberg 2014). For the sake of a wider perspective, however, some examples from the Arctic Council will be drawn in during this report's final sections where overall patterns of Russian behaviour are traced and evaluated.

The research material mainly consists of official material from the Councils – declarations, statutes and reports available on their websites - on the one hand, and Russian official statements to be found on the Foreign Ministry, governmental and presidential websites, on

the other hand. For context and evaluation, Western and Russian research reports, media reports and materials from other institutions have been used.⁵ For ease of handling, the list of sources at the back of the report is divided into categories reflecting these different origins.



<http://www.worldatlas.com/aatlas/infopage/balticsea.htm>

5 The author has also benefited from discussions and exchanges with the staff of the CBSS Secretariat, the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Swedish Institute of International Affairs. Concerning the conceptual framework I am especially indebted to Professor Alyson Bailes.

2. THE BALTIC SEA REGION AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE CBSS

While Russia's position in the Arctic region changed very little as a consequence of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, its position in the Baltic Sea region (and Eastern Europe) changed dramatically. During the 40-odd years of Cold War, the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies, Poland and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) held the southern and eastern shores of the Baltic Sea, and the Soviet navy had a dominant position over NATO fleets in the Baltic Sea. After the communists lost power in Central Europe in 1989, the Warsaw Pact was dissolved, Germany was reunited, and Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary were the first of the new democracies to join NATO. The three Baltic States regained their independence in 1991 when the Soviet Union fell apart, and also joined NATO and the EU in 2004. The Russian Kaliningrad region became an exposed exclave and the only remaining Russian foothold by the Baltic Sea, along with the inner part of the Gulf of Finland. Russia's military presence in the area was thus drastically reduced and it instead focused on new threats emerging in the south, especially the Caucasus region. In contrast to the Arctic, Russia has not promulgated any security strategy for the Baltic Sea region, either because it does not see any big problems there or because the region is viewed as part and parcel of its European/EU policy (Sutela 2011: 44).

At the same time the Baltic Sea region became important to Russia in other, soft-security oriented ways. Many persons in the political leadership team headed by Vladimir Putin came from St. Petersburg, which is Russia's second biggest city. The transition to a market economy and the persistent economic crisis in the 1990s made Russia more interested in trade with and investments from its European neighbours, especially Germany, but also the Nordic countries. When world market prices for energy rose after 1999, Russian exports to the West increased, a large part of which went through the Baltic Sea region. Ten percent of global oil cargo nowadays transits the Baltic Sea, while the volume of oil transport through the Gulf of Finland has risen by seven times since 1995. (Sutela 2011: 45). As the Russian economy recovered, it became dependent on the EU states as markets for its energy exports and as suppliers of modern technology and consumer goods; and at the same time, several EU states became heavily dependent on Russian energy. The Baltic Sea region thus became the most intensive area of interaction between Russia and the EU.

In line with this, the political and economic cooperation around the Baltic Sea developed beyond the already well-established Nordic organizations (e.g. the parliamentary Nordic Council, founded in 1952, comprising the five Nordic states and their dependencies, and the

Nordic Council of Ministers, founded in 1971, meeting in various formats with foreign or other specialized ministers). On the initiative of the Danish and German foreign ministers, the foreign ministers of all the littoral states plus a representative of the European Commission agreed at a conference in Copenhagen on 5-6 March 1992 to form a Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS). The declared aim of the CBSS was to serve as a political forum for regional intergovernmental cooperation, promoting political and economic stability as well as forming a regional identity (CBSS 5-6 March 1992, Etzold 2010). Hard security issues were to be avoided.

This was the first regional intergovernmental institution comprising both Russia, non-allied and NATO states. It was soon followed by the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, initiated by Norway (1993), and the Arctic Council which was created out of a previous cooperation network on Canada's initiative (1996). The CBSS started to cooperate with these Councils as well as with other more specialized economic, environmental and sub-regional bodies in the Baltic Sea area. Most important among these probably was the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM), a permanent body established in 1980 on the basis of the 1974 Convention on the Protection of the Baltic Sea Area, the main aim of which is to protect the Baltic Sea from pollution and to promote sustainable economic activities (HELCOM website). On the parliamentary level there were the annual Baltic Sea parliamentary conferences, which began already in 1991 (BSPC website). Business and investments were the focus of the Baltic Development Forum founded in 1999.

The role of the CBSS soon changed as first Sweden and Finland (1995), then Poland and the Baltic States joined the wider European Union. The EU, which already in 1991 had launched aid projects including Russia, for instance in Kaliningrad (Oldberg 2001: 37 et seq.), on Finnish initiative formulated the idea of a "Northern Dimension" (ND) programme in 1997, approved guidelines for it in 1998 and made it operative in 1999. The ND included the Baltic Sea region and had Norway and Iceland as well as Russia as partners, but was mainly intended to support and develop Russia's northwestern regions. The EU further deepened its partnership with Russia by creating four "common spaces" (economy; freedom, security and justice; external security; research and education). In 2006 the Northern Dimension was transformed into a policy framework with four formally equal members, namely the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland (Aalto et al: 7 et seq.). When Sweden held the EU chairmanship in 2009, the Union adopted a Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region with a broad agenda and vast resources. Russia did not co-own the strategy but was invited to cooperate in various projects.

In view of these changes the CBSS in 2008 decided to reform itself by becoming more project- and result-oriented and focusing on five long-term priorities: environment; economic development; energy; education and culture, and civil security and the human dimension. In their relevant declaration the heads of government drew attention to the importance of the CBSS as a participant in the ND. The issues of public health and social well-being were transferred to a Northern Dimension office, which however was co-located with the CBSS Secretariat. A vision for the region by 2020 was also adopted (CBSS 3, 4 June 2008, 2 June 2010; Gänzle 2012). Action under the various priorities will be analysed below.

The CBSS structure

The CBSS consists of the nine littoral Baltic Sea states plus the peripheral states of Norway

and (since 1995) Iceland, and the EU, originally represented by the European Commission and later by the European External Action Service. Russia thus cooperates with an overlapping number of NATO and EU states. The CBSS further includes ten observer states, as well as a number of organisations, mostly regional, with the status of “strategic partners”, who may take part in meetings and activities along with special guests (CBSS Cooperation, Principles).⁶ Russia long pushed for its close ally Belarus to be admitted as an observer (MID 8 June 2005) but this was resisted by the other full members because of its undemocratic regime. In June 2009 Belarus was finally accepted (along with Romania and Spain), in view of its rapprochement at that time with the EU and its inclusion in the EU Eastern Partnership programme (Embassy, Kötschau 2010: 16); but the ensuing crackdown on Belarus’s democratic opposition in late 2010 again made its presence at CBSS meetings difficult.

The CBSS Ministerial Council is composed of the foreign ministers of the member states and an EU Commissioner, with the chairmanship rotating every year between the foreign ministers. A troika of the former, current and future chairmanships meets separately to manage business and thus ensures continuity. Each country formulates its own priorities when taking over the chairmanship but is constrained by the statutes, former common decisions, and the troika set-up.

The incumbent chair coordinates CBSS activities and organizes and hosts the main high-level meetings. Since 1996 a summit meeting of CBSS heads of government and the President of the EU Commission has taken place every alternate year – giving overall political guidance - with meetings at foreign minister ministerial level in the years in between. Other ministers, for example for trade or energy, also hold CBSS meetings on an ad hoc basis. Below the ministerial level there is a Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) that serves as the main discussion and decision-making forum in between the ministerial meetings, and monitors the work of time-limited expert groups. To support the chairmanships and the working bodies the CBSS in 1998 established a permanent secretariat in Stockholm with a staff recruited from among the member states (CBSS Terms). Finally, the CBSS finally has several specialized structures under its umbrella, with different levels, degrees and natures of affiliation reflecting their particular needs and the effort to avoid duplication (Pursiainen 2009). Council meetings are conducted in English, German and Russian, but other meetings and CBSS documents are in English.

Russia has taken an active part in all that. The CBSS activities give Russian officials ample opportunities to meet their counterparts in the other member countries and the EU to discuss both bilateral and multilateral cooperation, thus serving to integrate Russia in European affairs (Hyde-Price 2002: 51). Russia was the last of the founder members to hold its initial chairmanship, in 2001-2002. To celebrating the CBSS’s tenth anniversary which fell within that period, Russia organized both a ministerial meeting in March 2002 and a summit in St. Petersburg in June of the same year. Prime Minister Kasyanov took part in both and President Putin opened the second. Russian premiers also participated in the subsequent summits, but at the summits in Riga in 2008 and Vilnius in 2010 when Putin was Prime Minister, he sent his first deputy Viktor Zubkov instead (CBSS, Annual report 2009-2010: 5). It may be noted that Putin did not visit the Baltic countries at all when he was President, which can be seen as a deliberately negative gesture since he visited many other small countries. At the CSO level Russia did not always send a high-level representative, but, *nota bene*,

6 Observers in 2011 were: Belarus, France, Italy, Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Ukraine, United Kingdom and the USA.

the Russian foreign minister participated in more ministerial meetings than most colleagues (Etzold 2010: 117).

CBSS limitations

One major limitation of the CBSS has been its relatively low level of institutionalization. It was founded by a ministerial declaration, not by an international-legal document that called for ratification. It lacks a system of sanctions and has a low level of obligations and commitments. Decisions are taken by consensus and only result in recommendations to be implemented by the respective governments (Gänzle and Hubel 2002: 397, 412; Etzold 2010: 134). The Council primarily serves as a forum for political dialogue, information and coordination of activities, but the latter must not infringe upon the responsibilities of other ministers (CBSS Terms: 1-2). At the same time the CBSS has a broad agenda with many simultaneous priorities.

Another major problem for the CBSS is its limited financial resources, which make it dependent on stronger organizations, particularly the EU in the form of its Northern Dimension and the new Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. There has been no CBSS general budget, or a project fund, until recently. Member states are responsible for funding common activities and/or seeking and coordinating financing from other sources. Relative to their size, the member states share the costs of the secretariat in Stockholm, whose duties include surveying possible funding sources, but as the host country Sweden has contributed more than its share.⁷ The chair country bears the costs of its meetings, though the participants cover their own travel and accommodation expenses. In 2012 the secretariat had a budget of 2.7 million euros and an employed staff of about 20 persons (CBSS, Annual report 2011-2012: 32-33).

However, the CBSS has more recently resolved to generate and implement its own projects, and intends to build up its own project fund and set aside resources in the form of seed money ("Summer night city": 11 et seq.). This means that the secretariat may come to play a greater role in the future. As will be shown below, Russia has regularly contributed to financing CBSS activities, but not all of them (Annual report 2009-2010: 89) and has repeatedly called for more resources to be diverted to CBSS activities. Before turning to the activities in question, however, the general Russian view of the EU needs to be presented.

Evolving Russian views of the CBSS and its relation to the EU

During the 1990s Russia kept a low profile in the CBSS, preoccupied as it was by domestic problems, but especially after holding its first chairmanship in 2001-2 it became more active. Russian officials have consistently been quite positive about the CBSS and its activities (Etzold 2010: 96, Yurgens 2001). When presenting the Russian chairmanship programme in 2001, Foreign Minister Ivanov stated that the Council had an enormous potential not only for the members but also for creating a united greater Europe, both as a coordinator and as a source of initiatives (Ivanov 2001: 1). On another occasion Ivanov stated that the CBSS helped stabilize the region and created conditions for its dynamic development and the pragmatic solution of all issues on the agenda. He said the Baltic region was in fact the most stable in Europe, maybe not only there, and one of the fastest developing regions (MID, 10 June

⁷ The small Baltic States and Iceland pay 4 per cent of the costs, the other "big" states pay 12 per cent each (CBSS Terms: 2).

2005). Similarly, President Putin when opening the 2002 summit in St. Petersburg held that the Council had become “a firm and authoritative” structure, which was “capable of becoming, and should, become an effective instrument in European policy in international security issues”. He expected it to remain a coordinator of versatile interaction, mainly focused on developing economic and human relations, deepening regional cooperation and developing the infrastructure. Russia’s CBSS chairmanship had played a positive role in choosing priorities of Russian foreign policy, Putin claimed (MID, 10 June 2002: 1, 3) Similar appreciation was expressed throughout the 2000s.

However, the enlargement of the EU to Poland and the Baltic states greatly affected the CBSS and this apparently worried the Russian leadership. Foreign Minister Ivanov did not want the CBSS to be only an umbrella for EU projects and wished that it should continue to develop as an important, largely unique element of the European security architecture. He hoped EU enlargement would help intensify the interaction, and not create new dividing lines (Ivanov 2001: 2; MID 11 June 2003). A Russian foreign ministry official in 2005 expressed worry about the dilution of the CBSS identity and about attempts by Baltic countries to transform it into, if not an appendix, merely an additional forum for dialogue (MID 8 June 2005). Expanding on these thoughts, the new foreign minister Sergei Lavrov said that making the CBSS an instrument of the EU would undermine its existence. The CBSS should seek a sensible balance of interests in its work. The EU should be useful for the CBSS activities, without duplicating the mechanisms of the new Northern Dimension. The CBSS had considerable practical experience, particularly in border and inter-regional cooperation, and it could even teach Brussels something, he argued (MID 10 June 2005). A foreign ministry spokesman in 2009 even opined that the CBSS remained the leading organization for inter-governmental cooperation in the region, and that as it reformed itself, its role as the main coordinator of intensive multidirectional cooperation would be solidified (MID 1 June 2009). Lavrov also thought that the forthcoming EU strategy for the Baltic Sea region should be adapted to the needs of the CBSS (MID 4 June 2009: 2).

On the other hand, Russia gave a certain priority to its own more direct and general agreement with the EU on the four common spaces (see above), and wanted the CBSS to concentrate on practical matters. Lavrov conceded that it was necessary to coordinate the regional organizations in Northern Europe. A division of labour was necessary and duplications should be avoided (MID 4 June 2009: 1-2). During the second Russian CBSS chairmanship in 2012-2013, Lavrov made clear that Russia could not be either a subject or an object in the EU’s Baltic Sea strategy, since the latter was designed according to EU rules and interests, and therefore Russia had elaborated its own strategy for its northwestern federal district up to 2020. Still, consultations were held with the European Commission on cooperation in the Baltic Sea region, a list of potential projects had been worked out, and a number of projects were already under way; but the platforms for the implementation of the projects had to be regional organizations such as the CBSS (Lavrov 2012: 6-11; “Baltic Forum”: 31 et seq.).

When Germany took over the chairmanship in 2011, to be followed by Russia, Lavrov announced that there was an understanding between them on harmonizing the chairmanships in developing “all-round” projects for the CBSS (MID 7 June 2011: 2). Indeed, Germany foresaw cooperation with the Russian chairmanship in the framework of a two-year programme aimed at modernizing the south-eastern Baltic Sea area (SEBA), particularly Kaliningrad and the surrounding area. On the other hand Germany declared that it would make use of the CBSS’s potential for implementing the EU strategy in the Baltic Sea region, and

would work closely with the EU and with Poland and Denmark, which would hold the EU Presidency during the German CBSS chairmanship (CBSS, 2011-2012). Nevertheless, when concluding the Russian chairmanship, Lavrov especially thanked Germany for having laid a very good foundation in the forms of practical projects (MID 6 June 2013).

In sum, Russia thus remained an ardent supporter of the CBSS throughout the 2000s, even when four of its members joined the EU. It resisted their attempts to subordinate the Council to the EU and even held that it was the EU that should adapt its Baltic Sea strategy to the needs of the CBSS. However, Russia realized that the Council had to be reformed and that it could still bring benefits for Russia, especially in cooperation with its most esteemed partner Germany. The CBSS remained a forum for regional cooperation with Western neighbours, where Russia was an equal and full partner. Indeed, Russia probably was the country most interested in the CBSS, whereas the Baltic States and Poland were more focused on integration into the EU. Russian experts gloomily commented that the main function of the CBSS had been to serve as a first step for such states to join the EU, whereas Russia was side-stepped (Deriabin and Antiushina 2008: 365). A fear of being isolated may thus have been a reason for Moscow's engaging more in CBSS activities (Etzold 2010: 96). Another reason was clearly that the Russian economy was developing and becoming more dependent on cooperation with Europe, and more involvement in the CBSS was no great burden anyway.

The second Russian chairmanship

By taking over the CBSS chairmanship in July 2012 Russia gained fresh opportunities to propagate its cause. However, its programme priorities were not published by the Russian foreign ministry until two months after taking over; they were less extensive than those of the preceding chairs, and the calendar of meetings came first (MID 2012-2013).⁸ This may be explained by the fact that the Foreign Ministry appointed a new team, together with the hierarchical decision-making process in Russia. Curiously, the programme when published started with quotes from Russian top officials about Russian intentions and the importance of the CBSS.

The priorities were enlarged upon in an exclusive interview given by Foreign Minister Lavrov to a glossy new journal called *Amber Bridge*, which was published by a Russian fund and presented as a general CBSS adjunct (Voropaev 29 June 2012, Smelov 2012). Who finances the journal has not been explained but its content has a very official, Foreign Ministry flavour.

In Lavrov's opinion, the CBSS during its twenty years of existence had helped erase the dividing lines in Europe and become a full-fledged cooperation forum creating a space of confidence, good-neighbourliness, stability and sustainable development. He now perceived a quality shift towards efficient coordination between countries in cross-border projects. The CBSS should actively cooperate with other regional councils and organizations but without any hierarchical ladders or integration schemes, all being equal, independent and mutually complementary.

The main task of the Russian chairmanship according to Lavrov was to "promote the CBSS role as the main coordinator of regional cooperation so that all important issues were

8 On the CBSS Council Presidency webpage, there were only three lines in bad English on what Russia was expected to prioritize (<http://www.cbss.org/CBSS-The-Council/council-presidency>).

resolved with due account of Russian national interests". The chairmanship would proceed under the slogan of continuity and modernization as a stage in reforming the Council towards project-oriented activities and innovative breakthroughs (Lavrov 2012: 6-13).

Before coming to the five long-term CBSS priorities (environment, economic development, energy, education and culture, civil security and the human dimension), the Russian chairmanship programme mentioned the following priority areas:

1. Development of cooperation in the field of modernization and innovation with a focus on clusters of growth,
2. Establishment of a network of public-private partnerships as a platform for sustainable growth and setting up a regional private equity fund,
3. Promotion of the traditions of tolerance as a means of combating tendencies of radicalism and extremism,
4. Promotion of people-to-people contacts, facilitating the visa regime.

As with the 2001 chairmanship programme, there was an emphasis on economic cooperation and issues developed under the previous German chair, but specific political issues dear to Russia were also advanced. In the next section, Russia's priorities will be analysed in the context of the CBSS's general fields of priority action as they have evolved since the 1990s.

Fields of cooperation

Economic development and trade promotion

Economic growth and trade promotion has been one of the most important topics in the CBSS since its inception. The founding declaration of 1992 aimed to promote the region as a new zone of growth and recognized the need for assistance in the transition from planned to market economies (CBSS 5-6 March 1992: 2). A special working group was created aiming to promote *inter alia* trade and investment, cross-border business cooperation and entrepreneurship. The ministers in 1995 adopted a complex plan, called Visions and Strategies around the Baltic Sea 2010 (VASAB), including infrastructure projects and spatial planning, which international financial institutions were invited to support (CBSS VASAB, CBSS 18-19 May 1995: 3; Deriabin and Antiushina: 358). In 2001 the CBSS decided to set up a Fund for Sub-regional Development, building on voluntary contributions from member states. The Council launched the so-called Moscow Action Plan aimed at making the region a common investment area, characterized by transparency, predictability and the rule of law, and combating corruption. Kaliningrad was to become an example of fruitful EU-Russia interaction (CBSS 7 June 2001: 1, Annex; 20 March 2002: 3; 10 June 2002: 2; The Baltic Sea 2008: 12).

True, the fund never started working, and the economic working group was abolished in 2009 in connection with the CBSS reform and was replaced by an expert group focused on maritime policy. Still, economic development was retained at that time as the second most important priority. The so-called Vilnius vision for the region until 2020 stressed the goals of creating investment-friendly economies, integrated maritime policy and transport networks (CBSS 3 June 2008: 2; 1-2 June 2010). In 2011 the CBSS initiated a two-year public-private partnership (PPP) cooperation network in order to strengthen competitiveness and regional

sustainability, and a decision was taken to promote the SEBA project focusing on modernizing the Kaliningrad region (CBSS P3CN). The German presidency in 2011-2012 put economic development first on its list, notably the SEBA project which gave priority to the issues of youth, sustainable development, tourism, public-private partnerships and university cooperation (CBSS 2011-2012: 2 f; CBSS SEBA). The 2012 summit in Germany decided to establish a Project Support Facility budget line at the CBSS secretariat for the years 2013-2015, in the first phase to be used for Kaliningrad; it would however only amount to one million euros over three years (CBSS 31 May 2013: 2; CBSS Annual Report 2011-2012: 8). The 2013 ministerial meeting decided to develop the SEBA initiative to embrace the Kaliningrad and Pskov regions as well as other Baltic Sea regions (CBSS 6 June 2013: 2).

The CBSS also wanted to contribute to the North-West Russia Socio-Economic Development Strategy starting in 2012. The CBSS Secretariat, the Russian foreign trade bank Vneshekonombank and the German State Bank KfW created a new Pilot Financial Initiative to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and PPPs in environmental protection, innovation, modernisation and energy efficiency. In November 2012 the KfW agreed to lend 110 million USD to Vneshekonombank, which through a network of banks should give credits at low rates to SMEs in northwestern Russia. The initiative would later be extended to other countries. Other financial institutions were invited to join, for example the Nordic Environmental Finance Corporation (NEFCO) and the Nordic Investment Bank (NIB) (MID 16, 22 Nov. 2013, Lakhonin, 2013; 38 et seq.).

Due to its economic crisis in the 1990s, Russia was of course very keen on promoting economic cooperation in the CBSS. It made this its first priority during its first chairmanship in 2001, and drew special attention to the socio-economic development of the Kaliningrad region. It praised the establishment of the fund for sub-regional development (Ivanov 2001: 2) and was probably disappointed when it failed to function. At the summit in St. Petersburg President Putin stressed that the CBSS could promote trade between Russia's northwestern regions and the Baltic States, and offered assurance that Russia was working on improving the judicial safeguards for foreign investments (MID 10 June 2002: 2). Foreign Minister Lavrov hoped that the "idea" of a special financing mechanism would facilitate investments in Russia, and when the Council was reformed in 2008, Russia opposed the elimination of the working group on economic development (MID 10 June 2005, CBSS, Annual report 2008-2009: 5). When President Medvedev then made modernization of the Russian economy a priority and concluded partnerships with Western states to promote this, Lavrov wanted Germany to make this a priority also in the CBSS when it took over the chairmanship, and so it did (MID 4 June 2009; 2; 7 June 2011: 1).

As mentioned, the Russian chairmanship programme of 2012 again gave priority to economic issues. Foreign Minister Lavrov lauded the decision to boost project financing with up to one million euros, which meant a seven-fold increase, and promised to continue the SEBA project, which would receive most of the funds. The project included a tourism centre, waterway tourism, PPP, the Baltic youth camp Artek and a European law institute (CBSS SEBA). Lavrov also praised the large-scale innovation fund for direct investments through public-private partnerships (Pilot Financial Initiative (PFI)). A portfolio of bids for over seven billion rubles had already been formed according to Lavrov, including a garbage recycling plant in St. Petersburg, then to be followed by nature protection and energy efficiency programmes in Kaliningrad (Lavrov 2012: 9-11). The Russian priority was clearly to attract investments and hi-tech know-how to Russia, whereas the European side had a more general vision of modern-

ization, including legal and socio-political reform. Also the Baltic States and Poland wanted to share in the PFI investments (Joenniemi and Sergunin 2012, 28). Further, Russia arranged a CBSS transport ministers conference for the first time since 2001. Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov commented that solving transportation issues would strengthen Russia's position in the Baltic region (CBSS 2012).

A major problem hampering economic cooperation and trade with Russia has for many years been its state protectionism, the lack of legal guarantees, weak or excessive bureaucracy, and corruption. Partly for these reasons Russia, unlike the other CBSS members, had to wait many years for membership of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Russia insisted on special conditions, and some WTO and CBSS members at various points also opposed Russian membership for political reasons. The CBSS repeatedly called on Russia to join the WTO as a way to improve the opportunities for expanded trade and investments (CBSS 7 June 2000: 3; 12-13 June 2007: 5). Finally, after 18 years of negotiations, Russia's entry to the organization was agreed in late 2011 (to take effect in August 2012). However, Russia received very long transitional arrangements, especially regarding agriculture, insurance and banking companies, and the car industry, and will be a full member only in 2020 (Himanen 2012). When Putin again became President in 2012, Medvedev's drive for modernization and reform was replaced by an emphasis on political stability and state control (Jonson and White 2012: 245-6). Already after a few months as a WTO member, Russia went back upon clear commitments or started to apply counter-measures, for example using an extensive government programme to protect Russian companies from foreign competition (Himanen 2012).

Border and visa issues

Already at the creation of the CBSS, the development of transport and communication was recognized as a crucial area for increased trade and cooperation. The Council backed EU efforts to upgrade border crossings - including those with Russia - and to develop transport networks, rail, roads, shipping and IT, and a corresponding working group was formed. (CBSS 5-6 March 1992: 2). The Via Baltica road project from Helsinki to Berlin was especially supported, but it bypassed Russian territory.

In 1995 a working group on customs cooperation was formed, *inter alia* aiming to focus on illegal traders and reducing the time for border crossings of goods to two hours. However, the latter proved to be a tough problem. In 2002 the Council again set the same goal (CBSS 7 June 2001: 3) and in 2004 a new working group for customs cooperation and border crossings was formed, later transformed into an expert group. It adopted Multi-Annual Action plans, including time measurement studies at border crossings, and tried to harmonize customs practices and promote common training. In 2011 this expert group was disbanded in its turn, on the grounds that the main aspects of its work had been taken over by an EU working group on customs border issues with Russia vested with stronger execution powers (CBSS Annual Report 2010-2011: 49-50).

The issues of foreign trade and transport across borders are intimately connected with the problem of visas. (For the security aspect of border crossings, see the section on civil security below.) When Poland and the Baltic States joined the EU in 2004, they also had to adopt the Schengen *acquis* on introducing visas for non-EU member states, thereby giving up various visa-free regimes with Russia. Russia criticized this establishment of a "Schengen

wall”, and instead advocated a visa-free regime with the EU (Oldberg 2004: 49 et seq.). This was especially a problem for the Russian exclave Kaliningrad, surrounded on land by Lithuania and Poland as it was and still is. Russian officials took up this issue not only in talks with the EU and the individual countries, but also at CBSS meetings. Significantly, Russia as chair chose to hold the CBSS 10th anniversary meeting in 2002 at Svetlogorsk in the Kaliningrad oblast, where Prime Minister Kasyanov took part and discussed the issue with EU commissioner for external affairs Chris Patten (MID 5 March 2002: 2). President Putin likewise took up the issue at the CBSS summit in St. Petersburg. He proposed rules of passage to Kaliningrad (across two countries) similar to those between West Berlin and the rest of Germany in the 1970s, arguing that a preferential visa regime only for Kaliningrad would break up Russia’s sovereign territory and that all Russians should have the same visa regime (MID 10 June 2002a: 1; 10 June 2002b: 2). Being no party to the issue, the CBSS summit could only plead for a mutually acceptable solution and that the region should become an example of fruitful EU-Russia interaction (CBSS 10 June 2002: 1). Poland and Lithuania, for their part, flatly rejected the idea of free Russian passage based on corridors as a violation of their territorial integrity.

In the end, Russia and the EU reached a compromise in November 2002, according to which so-called Facilitated Rail Transit Documents instead of visas were introduced, based on personal data submitted at the Russian train ticket offices (Oldberg 2004: 49-52). At the Council meeting in 2003, Foreign Minister Ivanov praised the “Kaliningrad transit” decision and hoped that Russia and the EU would solve other problems in the same spirit, avoiding a Schengen visa barrier between the countries. He noted that cooperation between the border and customs services was developing successfully, and mentioned Finland as a positive example (MID 11 June 2003).

Indeed, Finland in particular - with its long common border with Russia - went on to improve the transport routes and border stations and made a liberal interpretation of the Schengen visa rules, all of which led to vastly increased cross-border trade and travel. To various degrees, Norway (a non-EU nation but Schengen member), Sweden and Poland have done likewise and have continued to advocate visa-free travel for Russia (on which more in the BEAC section below) (Etzold and Haukkala 2011; CBSS 7 June 2011) At the CBSS ministerial meeting in 2009, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov praised the Lithuanian chairmanship for making border cooperation one of its priorities and said he relied upon the CBSS to help simplify EU visa rules, especially for the border regions. Abolition of visas would meet human and cultural needs and also have economic effects, he said (MID 4 June 2009). In fact, in 2011 an agreement was reached on simplified visa rules for residents of the Kaliningrad region and an equivalent Polish border zone. This deal was praised by the Kaliningrad governor as a step towards visa-free travel between Russia and the EU (Biriukov 2011:15; AA, 27 Aug. 2012: 3). The Russian CBSS chairmanship programme of 2012 also took up the issue of facilitating people-to-people contacts and easing the visa regime (MID 2012-2013, 1; Lavrov 2012: 11). At the concluding ministerial meeting Lavrov stated that total abolition of visa barriers was the end goal. He praised the visa agreement with Poland as a model for Lithuania - which however wanted an EU-Russian agreement first - and praised a recent agreement with Latvia (MID 6 June 2013a). Russia also unilaterally allowed visa-free tourist visits for 72 hours to St. Petersburg by boat, something which - for example - Sweden does not grant for its own part.

However, there were and remain some problems also on the Russian side. The EU has

complained about the technical quality of Russian passports, the inadequate control of southern borders, Russian issuance of passports for residents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the registration of residence, and so forth (Joenniemi and Sergunin: 31). Lavrov further conceded that there were long queues at the Kaliningrad-Polish border stations (MID 6 June 2013).

Thus the issues of transport, border passages and visa rules became a problem mainly in Russia's relations with the EU - with its vast economic resources and comprehensive legislation - as the Union enlarged in the Baltic Sea region; but Russia still used the CBSS as a forum for discussing the issues. The Kaliningrad exclave was a special case, which remains a problem for Russia and the CBSS in several respects.

Energy issues

Turning now to energy issues, the very first CBSS ministerial conference in 1992 identified cooperation in the field of energy as an integral part of efforts to improve the environment and ensure sustainable economic growth, while also stressing production efficiency and the high priority to be given to energy savings. In 1998 the ministers of energy of the member states and an EU Commission representative held their first meeting in Norway (which is a major producer) and set up the Baltic Sea Energy Cooperation (BASREC), both as part of the CBSS and as an instrument of the EU Northern Dimension. BASREC was to be backed by a group of senior officials, a secretariat and a separate budget, primarily financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers and the EU. The primary aims were – and still are – to secure energy supply, seen as “fundamental” for economic growth; to develop and integrate the energy infrastructure by creating efficient market competition and interconnecting with the European energy network; and to promote energy efficiency and savings, as well as the use of renewable sources, thus reducing dependency on imported fuels (CBSS BASREC, 30 Nov 1998: 1-2; 4 June 2008: 2; 17-18 Feb 2009). Studies were carried out on creating integrated natural gas grids and a Baltic Sea “electric” ring, which resulted in the formation of a special body (BALTREL) (Global Energy Network Institute).

After the CBSS reform in 2008, energy became the second long-term priority after economic development, and during the German chairmanship of 2011-2012 the foreign ministers adopted a declaration on energy security that *inter alia* stressed the importance of diversifying supply and demand, energy sources, and transportation routes as well as the need for transparency, competitiveness, respect for international law and common rules. Projects were launched with a budget of one million euros for 2009-2011 and the same for the following period (CBSS 2011-2012: 6; 5 Feb 2012: 1-2). A BASREC communiqué also mentioned that some states were interested in exploring domestic shale gas and oil as a means to increase energy security (CBSS 14-15 May 2012).

Russia is especially interested in energy cooperation in the CBSS, since it is a world power in producing and exporting oil, gas and nuclear power, and it has the biggest gas reserves in the world. Energy is also crucial for the Russian economy, as it accounts for a major share of its exports, and most of it goes to the EU. The state therefore keeps tight control over the sector, especially the gas sector where Gazprom has an export monopoly. Among the CBSS members the Baltic States, Poland and Finland have remained heavily dependent on Russian oil and gas since Soviet times, and western EU states like Germany have increased gas and oil imports from Russia since the 1990s, so that Russia now is the biggest energy supplier to the

whole Union (Oxenstierna 2009: 27-37, Malmlöf 2010: 63-87).

On the strength of this dependency Russia has reduced or stopped deliveries to the Baltic (and some CIS) countries on several occasions with various aims in view: for instance to take over companies, settle price and debt disputes, and in connection with political crises (Larsson 2006: 173 et seq.). Russia has at the same time built new export terminals at Primorsk and Ust-Luga in the Gulf of Finland. Gazprom has, mainly together with German companies, constructed the Nord Stream gas pipelines across the Baltic Sea directly to Germany – all in order to avoid or reduce its own dependence on transit countries such as Ukraine, Belarus, Poland and the Baltic States. The latter countries in their turn want to keep Russian transit across their countries as a source of income, but have at the same time striven to reduce their dependence on Russia by self-reliance, liberalization, energy savings and efficiency, and diversification of imports. Several littoral states are building terminals for receiving LNG (liquefied natural gas), for example from Norway.

The EU members also adhere to a common EU energy strategy, which includes an Energy Charter and the so-called Third Energy Packet. The latter aims *inter alia* at liberalizing energy trade by separating production, transport and distribution (Larsson 2007a: 20 et seq.). Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland and Sweden in particular raised environmental, economic and political objections to Nord Stream, while German companies were co-founders (Larsson 2007b: 50 et seq.).

The Russian interest in maintaining and expanding its influence in the energy sector is also mirrored in the CBSS framework. When Russia took over the chairmanship of the CBSS and BASREC in 2001, an official of the Ministry of Energy spoke about the prospect of growing needs for power and natural gas up to 2030, and expressed Russia's wish to keep a leading role in supplying the Baltic Sea countries with gas coupled with wider involvement by foreign investors in Russian gas production. As examples he mentioned pipelines and gas storage facilities, and praised the BALTREL project of creating a common power market in the region. Russia was interested in energy savings, he said, but admitted that it lacked skilled personnel to plan and implement the relevant measures; he appreciated that EU centres in Russian regions were spreading knowledge in the field (Rezinin 2001; Deriabin and Antishina 2008: 362).

At the 2006 CBSS summit Prime Minister Fradkov underlined that the gas pipeline across the Baltic Sea would solve many transport problems and enhance energy security in the region, and he wanted the littoral states to support the project (MID 6 June 2006: 2). Similarly, Foreign Minister Lavrov gave an assurance that the Nord Stream company, "in view of the vulnerability of the Baltic Sea" (as he put it), did not only focus on economic criteria but also on ecological ones, "the strictest in the world". He was surprised that some EU members made objections to the project even though it had been declared a priority by the EU Commission, and accused them of double ecological standards (MID 4 June 2009: 2-3). (In fact the EU was supporting other options besides this project, and its critics argued that a pipeline on land would be cheaper and more environmentally friendly (Larsson (2007b: 26 et seq.)) In the end, the Nordic countries in 2009 permitted Nord Stream to lay the pipeline across their economic zones, though the Baltic States and Poland remained largely critical for economic and political reasons. It should be added that Russia would probably not have applied such strict ecological standards in the Nord Stream project, had not the neighbouring states insisted on them.

With the Nord Stream project thus secured, Russia returned the attention of the CBSS to

the Baltic Energy Ring project. At the 2011 Council meeting Lavrov suggested that a nuclear power plant in the Kaliningrad region could be part of it, promising that the implementation would be flawless in terms of environmental safety standard (MID 7 June 2011: 2). This also was a contentious proposal. Lithuania had previously been forced by the EU to close down the Ignalina nuclear plant and first tried to build a new one together with Estonia, Latvia and Poland, then decided to do it alone. Poland and Belarus have also decided to construct their own nuclear power plants. By contrast, Germany in 2011 opted to close down all its nuclear power stations by 2022 under the influence of the Fukushima disaster. Russia used this opportunity to offer Germany and other EU states the chance to invest in the Kaliningrad nuclear power plant, which would be a first such case in the Russian nuclear sector (Solovev 2011:18-19; Pursiainen 2011: 20 et seq.; Oxenstierna 2010: 33-35). The Russian CBSS chairmanship programme of 2012 gave lip service to the CBSS emphasis on energy efficiency, renewable energy and market mechanisms, but also called for developing the power supply network. Similarly, Foreign Minister Lavrov underlined the importance of the second pipeline of the Nord Stream project and pleaded for the benefits of the Kaliningrad nuclear plant (MID 2012-2013: 2; Lavrov 2012: 9-10). However, the construction of that plant stopped in 2013, because no external financing appeared (Menkiszak 2013).

Joint CBSS declarations on energy security and on diversifying supply and demand thus concealed sharp internal differences. The Baltic States worked to connect their energy system to the Nordic system and the rest of the EU, and put more emphasis on security of supply and diversification of suppliers (“Russia in the Baltic”). Russia wanted to connect to the EU energy market, to safeguard the security of demand, and to diversify its own supply routes so as to avoid transit problems. Compared with other CBSS members, it was also more interested in increasing production (satisfying demand) than in energy savings and renewable energy. Consistently with this, Russia did not accept the EU’s Energy Charter and its Third Energy Package, which threatened to reduce Russian influence on EU markets. President Putin argued that the package could lead to higher prices by producing intermediaries who would try to profit from the supply (Sergeeva 2011: 8). As already noted, Russia in August 2012 joined the WTO, which could have given an opening to liberalize energy trade also among the CBSS members; but soon after this Putin issued a decree prohibiting Russian companies from providing information to agencies of foreign states which tried to build anti-trust cases without approval (Kramer 2012).

The CBSS thus provided a forum for Russia to pursue its interests and to voice its opinion on energy issues, but key decisions were made elsewhere, so few results were achieved. Also in energy terms Russia’s real opposite number throughout was either the EU - to which most CBSS countries belonged - by force of its economic resources and common regimes; or the region’s individual governments.

Environmental issues

As shown above, the CBSS founding declaration of 1992 linked energy cooperation to environmental protection and stressed the need for sustainable development and energy savings. The ministers expressed their “deep concern” about the pollution of the Baltic Sea and supported common efforts to enhance nuclear safety. With the Chernobyl disaster still in fresh memory, the CBSS initially turned most attention to the latter issue (see also the civil security section below).

The CBSS did not do much regarding other environmental problems until the Swedish chairmanship of 1996-1997, when the prime ministers initiated a working group on sustainable development – Baltic 21. An agenda was adopted to be implemented in cooperation with HELCOM, which focuses on the maritime environment. The working group aimed at integrating environmental concerns in many sectors, from agriculture and fishing to industry and tourism, and a number of so-called “lighthouse” projects were started which should serve as models. Financing was to be based on the “polluter pays” principle, and domestic efforts were seen as decisive. But since transition countries could not tackle all their own problems, external resources were offered for instance by the Nordic governments and the EU Phare and TACIS programmes (CBSS 20-21 Oct 2006: 3 et seq.).

In the 2000s environmental issues became increasingly prominent, including the growing recognition of climate change. The CBSS energy unit (BASREC) set up a testing-ground for flexible mechanisms under the Kyoto Protocol. A special declaration by the ministers of environment drew attention to the need to harmonize environmental legislation and norms between the EU and Russia and to use environmental assessments in decision-making on investments, and highlighted the threats to the Baltic Sea emanating from eutrophication and increased shipping, especially oil transports (CBSS 29 Aug 2003: 3-5).

One important reason for the latter problem was the steady growth of Russian oil exports in huge tankers, mainly from its new Primorsk terminal, and cargo transport from Ust-Luga, both situated in the Gulf of Finland (Mamlöf and Tejpar 2013: 19-28; Baltic Master 2006, Holma 2011: 52-53). The Baltic Sea is especially vulnerable due to its shallow, brackish and cool water, as well as its archipelagos and narrow straits, which make crossing traffic a particular risk. While major accidents like that of the *Prestige* carrying Russian oil off Galicia in 2002 have so far been avoided, minor accidents have occurred, for instance with the Chinese bulk carrier *Fu Shan Hai* off Bornholm in 2003, which have alarmed the Baltic littoral states (Baltic Master, Lägesrapport 2006: 37). The CBSS supported HELCOM measures to promote safety at sea and welcomed steps taken by the UN International Maritime Organisation (IMO) to accelerate the phasing out of single-hull tankers and a ban on transporting heavy grades of oil in such tankers at all Baltic Sea ports by 2005 (CBSS 7 June 2001: 4 f, Annex 2; 21 June 2004: 3. When the Council was reformed in 2008, the heads of governments expressed “profound concern” about the state of the terrestrial and marine environment in the region, and environment became the very first long-term priority for Baltic Sea cooperation. (CBSS 4 June 2008) In 2011 the Council’s ministerial meeting welcomed the fact that all the coastal states had prepared implementation plans in support of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (CBSS 7 June 2011: 3; 2011-201: 3). The Baltic 21 unit consists of an expert group that is now fully integrated into the CBSS structure. For the period 2010-2015 its work focuses on four strategic areas, namely climate change, sustainable urban and rural development, sustainable consumption and production, and innovations and education (CBSS Baltic 21; Crawford 2009: 9).

In 2009 a special expert group on maritime shipping was created aiming to reconcile economic, social and environmental interests (CBSS 2 June 2009). As a major seafaring nation, Norway in 2011 made this one of its chairmanship priorities and organized a conference recommending the use of LNG as a means to reduce emissions from ships, while Germany decided to follow this up during its chairmanship. In 2012 the CBSS foreign ministers also agreed to reduce ships’ sulphur emissions and to examine alternative fuels such as LNG. The background was that new restrictions on sulphur oxides from shipping were due to be

introduced in the Baltic Sea, which became a control area already in 1997 (“Are we” 2010: 18-19; “Summer” 2011: 12-13, “LNG” 2011: 18; CBSS 5 Feb 2012: 2). The CBSS ministers of transport meeting in Moscow agreed on the one hand to promote the development of shipping and innovation in ship-building, and on the other to facilitate the use of alternative fuels and LNG; They further recognized the need to monitor and possibly correct the handling of maritime traffic management, surveillance and oil spill response (CBSS 5 Dec 2012: 1-2). To complete the range of environmental activities, the SEBA project focusing on Kaliningrad and the Pilot Financial Initiative as described above were also clearly geared to solve environmental problems. During the Russian chairmanship the first agricultural conference was also held, with the aim of discussing the transfer of successful and climate-smart technology to Nord-West Russia (CBSS Annual Report: 15).

Turning now to Russia’s role in CBSS environmental cooperation: it played a passive role in the 1990s for well-known economic reasons, as already noted, and in the 2000s it still appeared rather reluctant and defensive. When presenting the priorities of the Russian 2001 chairmanship, Foreign Minister Ivanov conceded that environment should become an integral part of all future decisions on regional projects concerning energy, industry and transport. In practice, however, the issue landed in the middle of the Russian to-do list. On the questions of safe navigation and a cleaner marine environment, Russia intended to rely on HELCOM (Ivanov 2001: 1-3). Like its neighbours, Russia signed the 1991 Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, which called for assessment procedures at the early stages of siting industrial facilities, and abided by it in the case of the Nord Stream project; but like some others, it has hesitated in ratifying this or any similar legally-binding bilateral or multilateral agreement in the region (Peterson & Lahtvee 2007: 24 et seq.). Russian researchers have however recommended ratification of the Espoo convention and the ensuing protocol (Zagorski et al 2012: 14-15).

In 2005 Ivanov’s successor, Lavrov, declared that environment was a priority and that Russia naturally agreed that preserving the unique ecology of the Baltic Sea was a joint task. However, in his view, extreme positions should be avoided and the views of all countries must be considered. He doubted that any state would put environment ahead of everything and transform the Baltic Sea into a natural reserve without concern for development. Evidently in response to Lithuanian fears, Lavrov promised that Russia was adhering to the highest ecological standards in its oil fields off the Kaliningrad region, and was taking measures to reduce water pollution from factories in that area (MID 10 June 2005: 3-4). However, the latter issue remains a huge problem. In 2012 a Finnish researcher discovered that a single factory near the Gulf of Finland released more phosphates than Finland or Sweden. He was arrested, but measures to reduce the emissions were soon taken (Gunther Axelsson 2013).

Regarding the risk of oil spills from ships, Lavrov mentioned that no single-hull tankers were sailing under a Russian flag in the Baltic, and claimed that only ten per cent of water pollution in the Baltic derived from shipping while the rest came from land sources. He called for a resolute but balanced view on safety at sea on the basis of universal norms set by the IMO (MID 10 June 2005a: 1). It is worth remarking that at this time many tankers using the Baltic were flagged in third world countries, and that Russia itself was responsible for a large share of land-based pollution (HELCOM 2007).

A few years later, Lavrov again told his CBSS colleagues that Russia saw environment in the region, especially the Baltic Sea, as an “absolute priority”. He also, however, took the view that the main mechanism for ecological cooperation in the region was HELCOM, in

which Russia at the time held the chairmanship (MID 4 June 2009: 2;; 7 June 2011:2). Thus in February 2010 Prime Minister Putin participated in a HELCOM summit to discuss its Action Plan for the Baltic Sea 2010. Underlining that Russia submitted practically all large projects to strict ecological control and had improved its relevant legislation, Putin again voiced high praise for the Russian environmental standards followed in building the Nord Stream gas pipeline. He hailed the creation of a yet another national park in the Gulf of Finland, as well as the rapid reduction of air and water pollution by means such as building water purification plants in St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad. In the latter case he thanked Baltic Sea neighbours for assistance, while noting that Russia had also borne the necessary costs (Pravitelstvo 2010). The preference for HELCOM may help to account for the fact that Russia was alone in failing to pay its due share of financing for the Baltic 21 unit for several years, until the latter's funding was fully integrated into the main CBSS budget in 2010 (CBSS Annual Report 2001-2002: 30, 2005-2006: 37; 2009-2010: 89). Sweden was driven to pay extra contributions several times in order to strengthen Russian (and Belarusan and Ukrainian) participation in Baltic 21 "lighthouse" projects (CBSS Annual Reports 2009-2010: 89 and 2010-2011: 79).

As for maritime safety and environment, it should be noted that when the IMO in 2003 adopted a convention on phasing out tankers, several exceptions were made largely due to Russian resistance. Further, Russia refused to join with the other Baltic Sea countries in 2003 when they turned to the IMO with a proposal of declaring the Baltic a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA), which would allow protective measures such as traffic separation schemes (Knudsen 2010: 151 et seq.; Oldberg 2004: 11-12). The proposal was adopted, but excluding Russian waters, and further protective measures need to be adopted for its regime to be meaningful (Baltic Master Vision 21; WWF). Concerning eco-friendly shipping and LNG, Russia seems to be reluctant to comply with the restrictions on sulphur emissions (Toma 2011: 9) Russian resistance may explain why the CBSS ministers only agreed to *investigate* alternative fuels rather than recommending them. Russia has also been slow to build LNG terminals. In thus resisting environmental restrictions on its maritime shipping in the Baltic Sea, Russia has also stood in the way of one of HELCOM's vital aims (HELCOM "Summary": 2-3).

The Russian 2012 chairmanship programme indeed mentioned the topic of transition to environmentally friendly marine fuels, but in the context of developing the maritime infrastructure. The programme further dwelt on the issues of monitoring the radiation situation in the region, the safety of coastal areas and waters, construction of sewage treatment and waste recycling plants, and creating "recreational clusters" (MID 2012-2013: 1). The creation of a nature tourist zone at Lake Vyshtenetskoe near the Kaliningrad border on Poland and Lithuania became a showcase within the SEBA project (MID 6 June 2013; "Baltic Forum" 30). Foreign Minister Lavrov stressed the need for active interaction with other Councils and the HELCOM, and promised to implement the HELCOM Action Plan as well as to hold a high-level conference on protecting the Baltic Sea. This planned event was soon elevated to the level of heads of governments (Lavrov 2012: 6-7). It conference resulted in what was called the St. Petersburg Initiative, a regional network of business, scientists and NGOs to promote cross-border cooperation and environmental projects (CBSS 5-6 April 2013: 4). (German Chancellor Angela Merkel could not attend, allegedly because the invitation came too late.) Russia further showed goodwill by being among the first in the region to ratify the 2004 IMO convention for the control of ballast water on ships, and the expert group held a

session in Moscow on this subject (CBSS 28 Sept 2012: 8).

Thus in the field of environmental cooperation, Russia maintained formal agreement with the other CBSS members and willingly received all assistance it could get, while advertising its own environmental awareness and great efforts for the cause. In practice, however, Russia considered economic development more important and did not contribute much money to common CBSS efforts in this field, especially not outside its borders. It preferred HELCOM to CBSS cooperation in this field, whether because of its narrower agenda, its non-political character or its stronger legal status. Concerning climate, Russia signed the Kyoto Protocol - unlike the USA - but rarely took up related issues at CBSS meetings, and played a passive role in Baltic 21 activities. In contrast to other CBSS members, the Russian leadership has accused domestic environmental groups of serving Western economic interests, and keeps them under tight control (on which more below).

Democracy and human rights

After the Communist parties lost power in Russia, Poland and the freshly independent Baltic States, it was quite natural that assistance to new democratic institutions should become the first priority at the CBSS's inauguration in 1992. The founding document declared that "democracy is the political system most conducive to individual freedom, respect for human rights and economic growth". The Council professed commitment to the principles of the CSCE and promised to cooperate with its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Council of Europe (CBSS 5-6 March 1992: 1). A working group was established which launched an action plan and made recommendations with respect *inter alia* to the rule of law, civil society, transparency, access to information, and local democracy in the member states. In 1994 the position of a special Commissioner on Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, was added. The commissioner issued recommendations and produced a number of analytical surveys in various fields, and worked as a kind of regional Ombudsman to whom individual citizens of the member states could turn with complaints and requests for assistance. In 2000 the institution was renamed as the CBSS Commissioner for Democratic Development (CBSS Civil security). These activities were welcomed at the following Council meetings, for instance during the first German chairmanship in 2001 (CBSS 7 June 2001: 3).

However, the prominence of these issues within the CBSS's agenda was gradually reduced. In 2003 the Commissioner's position was eliminated, allegedly "in the light of the region's progress in the field of democratic development". When the Council was reformed in 2008 the related working group was dissolved, and its task of promoting tolerance was mentioned last under the Council's fifth priority as defined at that time, Civil Security and the Human Dimension (CBSS, 3 June 2008: 1 et seq.). Still, the 2010 Vilnius declaration on long-term goals called for respect for democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law. The 2012 summit made an unusually strong reference to these principles, defining active civil societies and a developed social dialogue and social cohesion as preconditions for progress (CBSS 2 June 2008: 1; 31 May 2012: 19). Cooperation among NGOs as one aspect of promoting democracy remained an important element of CBSS activities in various fields (CBSS Annual report 2009-2010: 75-76). When assuming the chairmanship in 2012, Germany concluded that the CBSS had achieved a great deal in "recreating a genuine democratic community" around the Baltic Sea (CBSS 2011-2012: 1), and made a special effort by

holding a “Baltic Sea Days” gathering in Berlin in April 2012 with over 1800 participants, including a first Baltic Sea Youth session. It was claimed that what made the CBSS so unique was its bottom-up approach (CBSS, 23-27 April 2012; AA 27 Aug 2012: 2). Since 2001 annual NGO forums have been held in the presiding countries, and at the one in 2013 a special Baltic Sea Youth Network was formed (Sokolov 2013: 36; CBSS 6 June 2013: 4).

Turning now to the Russian role, the main reason for the elimination of the working group for democratic institutions was clearly that its issues had become a bone of contention notably between Russia and the Baltic States. As in many other international forums, Russia at almost every CBSS meeting brought up the issue of the Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia and Latvia and claimed that they were subject to discrimination. While the intention may have been to improve their situation, this critique also served to undermine the legitimacy of the Baltic governments and sought to undermine their hopes of joining the European Union and NATO, where democracy was a condition for membership (Oldberg 2003: 37-43). Thus it was Russia who originally proposed the institution of a special Commissioner dealing with national minorities. Democratic development was one of the priorities when Russia held the CBSS chairmanship in 2001-2002, but in order to avoid confrontation it was stressed that human rights issues should be an area of cooperation. Russia initiated meetings between national and parliamentary ombudsmen in the region in 2002 (Ivanov 2001: 2 f). Before the CBSS foreign ministerial meeting in Svetlogorsk, a Russian spokesman more offensively claimed that the stability and security in the Baltic Sea region as well as the implementation of economic and social projects depended on the solution of the minority problems in Estonia and Latvia. It is easy to suspect Russian influence at work when the St. Petersburg CBSS summit proclaimed democracy and human rights, including national minorities, as well as combating all manifestations of racism and xenophobia to be an *integral* part of the Council’s activities, and stated that the CBSS Commissioner was of *particular* importance (CBSS 10 June 2002: 2).

While the concerned Baltic States rejected this criticism and won approval from the others for abolishing the Commissioner’s position, Russia naturally first defended the latter and then relied on the working group to take over his tasks (MID 10 June 2003: 3). When Sweden took over the chairmanship of the group, Foreign Minister Lavrov hoped it would do so in the spirit of its well-known allegiance to human rights values. At the 2006 summit Prime Minister Fradkov again expressed “serious worry” over the situation of national minorities in the region, while vowing to make uniform standards in the development of democracy one of Russia’s central themes (MID, 10 June 2005: 5-6; 8 June 2006: 1). In 2007 Lavrov took up the issue of the reburial of Soviet wartime soldiers in Tallinn at a CBSS meeting and called for such sensitive issues to be solved in accordance with international norms (MID 13 June 2007). After the working group on democracy and human rights was also scrapped in 2009, Lavrov insisted that problems such as the massive number of non-citizens remaining in the region (i.e., the Baltic States) should be solved according to the recommendations of the UN, OSCE and the Council of Europe. He proposed – in vain - creating a new expert group on education for tolerance in order to fight xenophobia, ethnic tension and intolerance. (MID, 5 June 2009: 3; cf Matvienko 2008: 4-5). However, when Poland in 2005 asked for Russian support in defending the Polish minority against repression in Belarus, whose application for observer status Russia favoured, Lavrov replied that the CBSS should focus on its member states and not rush into civilizational “missioning” (MID 11 June 2005).

This issue of democracy and human rights was a problem inside Russia too. During the

2000s, the other CBSS states in several forums increasingly chastized Russia for the deteriorating situation with regard to democratic principles, the rule of law and human rights, including national minorities, while Russia rejected this critique as unjustified hectoring. Even if not reflected in CBSS official documents, the issues were surely discussed off the record.⁹ A hint of this was an opinion contributed to the CBSS newsletter in 2006 by Daria Akhutina, Russian head of the “Norden” association in St. Petersburg, which coordinates Russian NGO contacts with Nordic states. Akhutina cautiously criticized the Russian law on NGOs signed in 2006, which forbids foreign citizens to be founders or members of Russian NGOs unless they have a legal presence there, for its vagueness. A round-table in St. Petersburg had decided to send complaints to the President’s advisory Council for such issues and to his human rights ombudsman (Akhutina, 2006: 8-9). After Putin again became President in 2012, new laws curtailing the scope for political opposition were adopted. NGOs receiving money from abroad and involved in what was seen as political activity had to re-register as “foreign agents” or be heavily fined (Nilsen 11 July 2012). In February 2013 mass inspections started all over Russia.

At the NGO forum in Berlin in April 2012 the above-mentioned Akhutina, now echoing the official view, proposed including NGOs in projects and programmes at all levels and joint financing of common actions by all member states. In her view, joint actions by the NGOs should be aimed at reducing the risk of conflict and tension and encouraging tolerance. The president of the Amber Bridge Fund, Yuri Sizov, argued that the task of public and non-governmental organizations was to overcome negative images of neighbours, and proposed that the efficiency of a range of dialogue and cooperation platforms in Northern Europe should be assessed - a proposal that, according to his journal, found support at the Berlin forum (Smelov 2012: 20 et seq.). He did not say who should carry out the assessment and according to which criteria.

These views were reflected in Russia’s CBSS chairmanship programme, which made the “promotion of the traditions of tolerance as a means of combating tendencies of radicalism and extremism” the third of its four priorities, but placed the topic under the heading of civil security and the human dimension as a target for NGO cooperation (MID 2012-2013: 1-2). Lavrov added xenophobia and nationalism to the list of problems. A large-scale NGO forum was held in St. Petersburg in April 2013 under the heading “Tolerance and Cultural Diversity”. Its final statement advocated more involvement of civil society organisations in the decision-making process concerning Baltic Sea cooperation and called for financial support for international NGO cooperation. On the other hand, it ignored calls by participants to voice concern over the ongoing mass inspections of Russian NGOs, which even hit some of them during the forum, and only adopted vague language on respect for democratic rule in all the Baltic Sea countries including the need for contributions from free, independent organisations (Association 2013: 2; Oldberg 2013). When summarizing the outcome of the Russian chairmanship, Foreign Minister Lavrov called the strengthening of ties with NGOs a notable area of progress and lauded the formation of a youth network, as well as parliamentary cooperation, as a way to build confidence and good neighbourliness (MID 6 June 2013).

In sum, the issues of democracy and human rights quickly became a bone of contention in the CBSS between Russia and the other members, and common statements became more

9 For comparison, the hard sentence inflicted on the Pussy Riot protest group in 2012 provoked a lively debate at a Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference in St. Petersburg (BDF 28-29 Aug 2012).

declaratory and long-term, while cooperation among the NGOs continued. Russia had to accept the scrapping of the CBSS working group on democracy and human rights but continued to push for its views in other ways. As for NGOs, Russia clearly wants them to conform with its official policy and be part of its public diplomacy for influencing other countries. According to a presidential decree, involvement of civil society in the foreign policy process is natural (*zakonomernyi*), and the foreign ministry counts on relevant Russian NGOs to “cooperate” with it on a number of issues including human rights and compatriots abroad (MID 3 March 2013). This approach, and the harassment of NGOs suspected of being foreign agents, are very different from practices in the other Baltic Sea states.

Culture and education

Already at the creation of the CBSS in 1992, cooperation in the field of culture and education became one of the priorities. The Council at ministerial level declared that the fundamental purpose here was to strengthen the idea of regional identity, claiming that a shared cultural heritage bound their countries together and formed a fertile ground for developing cultural ties. They stressed the value of youth exchanges and tourism, praised the *Ars Baltica* initiative taken by the ministers of culture in the previous year, and emphasized the importance of good education for the construction of democratic societies (CBSS 5-6 March 1992: 3). In 1993 the CBSS ministers of culture held their first meeting, and a EuroFaculty programme started at the universities in Tartu, Riga and Vilnius with the aim of assisting in transforming curricula and training academic staff in the subjects of economics, public administration, political science and law. In 2000 a EuroFaculty was opened also at the university in Kaliningrad, financed by six CBSS states with Denmark as the lead country, and geared to conform with the EU Bologna process on uniform educational standards (CBSS Education; 24-25 May 1994: 2; Tymma 2007: 4-6). In 2005 support for the EuroFaculties in the Baltic states was terminated, and in 2007 the one in Kaliningrad was succeeded by one in Pskov, led by Sweden, with a budget based mainly on financing by all the member states, and aiming at upgrading education in business economics at two institutes which then merged into a university. It was prolonged for three years from 2012 (CBSS EuroFaculty, 7 June 2011: 2).

In 1997 the CBSS ministers of education adopted an action plan for cooperation on cultural heritage preservation, and later agreed on an “Agenda 21” for education for sustainable development in the region (CBSS 23-24 March 2000: 1-4). The Latvian chairmanship made education one of its priorities and launched the *Balticness* project in order to promote a regional identity, and the CBSS journal was renamed accordingly in 2008 (CBSS 4 June 2008; cp “Summit week”: 8-9). When the CBSS was reformed, education and culture were retained as one of five priorities, and the German chairmanship mentioned education as a top priority, emphasizing meetings among young people, a network of 227 partner schools and a Baltic Sea history project as means to foster a shared identity (CBSS 2011-2012: 7-8). As on other issues, the CBSS mainly acted as an umbrella or coordinator for various quite independent projects in the cultural and educational sector.

Turning to the role of Russia, it of course participated in the aforementioned activities in the 1990s, and subscribed to the goal of a common identity when it assumed the CBSS chairmanship in 2001. However, culture and education were not mentioned among its many priorities at that time (Ivanov 2001: 1-2) and were placed far down the list of aims on later occasions, with one exception: Russia proposed the extension of the EuroFaculty to Kalinin-

grad and Pskov, and the faculty was described as one of the “clearly positive” examples of concrete projects characterizing the CBSS. Foreign Minister Lavrov called it a good investment in the future, and Russia accordingly decided to co-finance the extension to Pskov (MID 10 June 2005; Bötcher & Kugay 2009: 6-7). However, even though the Russian teachers in Pskov were found to be highly motivated, the CBSS expert group was concerned about a slow start and a complicated system of transferring funds to the faculty from the Ministry of Education (CBSS Annual report 2009-2010: 42-3).

In the context of sustainable development, Lavrov further stated that “such important components as culture and education should not be forgotten”, since regional projects in this sphere promoted human creativity and mutual cultural enrichment. He proposed a project on the Amber Road (stretching from the Baltic to the Adriatic) which could contribute to the “popular and economically favourable industry of cultural tourism”, as well as projects on underwater heritage and coastal culture (MID 5 June 2009: 3; “Baltic Sea Region”). The Russian chairmanship programme in 2012 reiterated support for the EuroFaculty concept as a form of increasing academic mobility among young people, as well as the value of preserving monuments of cultural heritage, and several cultural events in Russia were announced (MID 2012-2013). As a way to “develop the traditions of mutual understanding” Russia set out to develop the Artek project, an international youth camp, which in August gathered 300 people in Kaliningrad. In the SEBA framework it wanted to promote the idea of a networked “Baltic Institute” on the basis of the Kant federal university in Kaliningrad (CBSS, 31 May-1 June 2013; MID 2012-2013; “Baltic Forum” 2013: 31-32).

Summing up, the CBSS has retained culture and education as one of its priorities and maintained a broad range of activities (even without a dedicated expert group), and the EuroFaculties are considered as successes. Russia has clearly benefitted from and appreciated this, but has otherwise shown rather scant interest in promoting cooperation in culture and education in the CBSS framework so far, especially if it entails propagation of Western conceptions of democracy and human rights. Even though the CBSS since its inception has aimed at creating a common regional identity—an issue promoted by Latvia - it must be observed that there are formidable problems. Most people in the small Baltic States and Poland find it hard to accept the notion of a common identity with Russia and Germany for historical reasons, and the Nordic states have formed their own community (Retold 2010: 136 ff; Hackmann 2012). Russia itself is unlikely to adopt a common Baltic Sea identity, because of its size and its own still uncertain national identity. All states including Russia (until now), however, subscribe to the notion of an overarching European identity.

Civil security and social issues

Civil Security and the Human Dimension became one of the five CBSS priorities in 2008. It covers a wide range of “soft”, or societal, security issues as defined in the Introduction to this report. As mentioned, among these the CBSS initially paid most attention to the nuclear safety issue in the region, related specifically to the modernization of the Soviet-built reactors in Russia and Lithuania and the dismantlement of the nuclear submarine base at Paldiski in Estonia. The Council called for a regional agreement on early warning of nuclear accidents, and a working group on nuclear and radiation safety worked out an action plan that resulted in an international legally binding agreement on Exchange of Radiation Monitoring in 1994, the first ever of its kind (CBSS 5-6 March 2002: 2f; Etzold

2010: 101). Even if safety problems at the nuclear sites have been brought under control (in Estonia and Lithuania through closures), mainly with EU assistance, a CBSS expert group on nuclear and radiation safety still continues to work with monitoring and training (CBSS Expert group; CBSS 2-3 May 1996: 4; Pursiainen 2010: 9-10) As shown above, nuclear energy and safety remain hot issues in the region.

The CBSS in the 1990s also devoted attention to humanitarian and social problems arising among its eastern members, especially Russia, as a result of economic crisis and political instability, and the spread of organized crime and illegal migration across the opening borders to the west (CBSS 5-6 May 1992: 2; 24-25 May 1994: 4). At the first summit in Visby in 1996 the heads of government set up a Task Force on Organized Crime, supervising an operative committee (OPC that brings together their personal representatives from the police, customs, border guard and prosecution authorities. The task force cooperates with INTERPOL and EUROPOL which provide the overall operative framework, including cooperation with Russia, and a new agreement was negotiated in 2011 (Permanent mission; 1; Christensen 2006: 4-5). In this framework there is a Network of Public Prosecutors General; a Senior Officials Network on Tax Cooperation dealing with fraud and tax evasion; a Border Control Cooperation body combating illegal immigration, trafficking, terrorism etc. with an encrypted communication system (CoastNet): and a Civil Protection network, usually coordinated by the national rescue services and dealing with emergencies such as floods (CBSS Civil security; Pursiainen 2009: 8-11).

Concerning the social dimensions of security, a working group for Cooperation on Children at Risk was established in 2001 on Swedish and Norwegian initiative, which soon became integrated into the Secretariat and was retained as an expert group in 2008 (CBSS Working group: 1; CBSS Annual report 2001-2002: 5). Based on a Nordic core, the CBSS in 2006 also formed a Task Force against Trafficking focusing on adults, the only forum of its kind in Europe (CBSS 4 June 2009: 9 et seq.; Pursiainen 2009). The German CBSS chairmanship of 2011-2012 put the emphasis in this field on the protection of children, combating trafficking, youth affairs, and disaster control (CBSS 2011-2012: 9-10). The 2013 summit emphasized the importance of children's right to information in printed media and online, as well as of examining trafficking with regard to trade in human organs (CBSS 6 June 2013: 4).

Russia played a role also in these activities and decisions. When it first assumed the CBSS chair in 2001, civil security was not mentioned among the priorities, but Foreign Minister Ivanov stated that Russia was willing to participate actively in the development of cooperation among the law enforcement authorities of the Baltic Sea states. The Russian Ministry of Interior would invite the personal representatives of the heads of government on combating organized crime for an OPC meeting to deal with trafficking with illegal drugs and vehicles as well as money laundering and smuggling (Ivanov 2001: 2-3). The Ministry of Interior reported later that meetings on illegal migration and car thefts were held in Russian border regions, which was appreciated by foreign partners as a sign of growing interest in practical cooperation (MID 27 Jan 2004). This can be seen as an admission that Russia indeed had problems in these regards. True, Prime Minister Kasyanov at the CBSS summit in 2002 rejected the idea that the simplification of visa controls for the Kaliningrad region would unleash a wave of organized crime, claiming that the crime rate in that region was not higher than in many other neighbouring regions. But he added that the CBSS had acquired huge experience in fighting organized crime, which he saw as a fight for democracy (MID 10 June

2002: 1).

In this social context Russian leaders often raised the issue of international terrorism and sought to have it included in the CBSS agenda. In 2005, for instance, Foreign Minister Lavrov underlined the importance of providing maximum protection for ports and sea routes against terrorism and called on the CBSS task force on organized crime to take up the issue (MID 10 June 2005: 1). The background was the well-known fact that Russia was fighting a war at the time against separatists in Chechnya, and was hit by several serious terrorist attacks. While supporting the US war on terrorism in Afghanistan, Russia wanted support for its own war, including the extradition of suspected Chechen terrorists seeking refuge in Western states. At the CBSS summit in Russia in 2002, the prime ministers did agree to “deem terrorism one of the greatest threats to modern civilized societies” and to include it in the agenda of the task force (CBSS 10 June 2002: 4). This must be seen as a concession to Russia. However, Western democratic states in general criticized the Russian war in Chechnya and did not trust the Russian judiciary sufficiently to extradite Chechens. Terrorism did not become an important theme in the task force on organized crime, and the CBSS did not include it among its long-term priorities in 2008.

In recent years, Russian officials have commended civil security in all its aspects as one of the long-term CBSS priorities without directly raising the terrorism issue. The Russian chair’s programme of 2012 mentioned the need to monitor the radiation situation, make risk assessments, foster voluntary fire protection, and organize rescue services. The task of counteracting extremism in CBSS countries was to be carried out by promoting tolerance among young people (MID 2012-2013: 7).

Concerning the social issues and children at risk, Russia during its chairmanship in 2001-2002 became more active after President Putin (in a speech in January 2002) took up the issue of homeless children, which indeed is a huge problem in Russia, and had it inserted in the Summit declaration. Russia in January 2003 was estimated to have 1-4 million street children, among them 300 000 living in railway stations and basements (CBSS 27-29 April 2003: 9). Even so, the Russian Ministry of Education rarely participated in the meetings of the expert group on children at risk, and Russia for many years was the only country (sometimes joined by Latvia) not paying its voluntary contribution to the budget of the unit (CBSS Annual reports 2004-2005: 43, 2009-2010: 89). In 2009 a large-scale CBSS conference on child safety on the internet was held in Moscow, where the strong participation of regional Russian children’s ombudsmen and other officials was noted. However, the conference was organized by the CBSS secretariat with EU money and the need for closer contacts with Russian colleagues and participation in research projects was highlighted. An EU critique of pornographic servers based in Russia was met by Russian calls for closing down terrorist websites in the West (CBSS, Annual report 2009-2010: 69-70; Lööf, 2010: 5).

Nevertheless, when Russia took over the CBSS chairmanship in 2012 it agreed to pay its share to the expert group, and the President’s own Children’s Rights Commissioner, Pavel Astakhov, took over the leadership of the CBSS expert group. The chairmanship programme set the goal of combating human trafficking, with special attention to sexual and other exploitation of children including through internet channels, and advocated “protecting them from information harmful to health and socialization” (MID 2012-2013: 2).

In September 2012 a new federal law against such exploitation took effect that forbade providing such information as could encourage harm and suicide among children, the use of drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, denial of family values, justification of illegal behaviour, and foul

language. The right of the state to take action, including criminal prosecution, in such cases was codified (President of Russia 2013). This became a model for a CBSS conference in Moscow, which added mass media and mobile phones to the internet as sources of information. The organizers allowed no outside intervention in shaping the programme, which was totally dominated by Russian speakers. These endorsed the new Russian law asserting that other countries had similar ones. A Russian speaker even claimed that certain information could make children homosexual (CBSS 27 Febr 2013, Lööf 28 Febr 2013). Russian laws against hurting religious feelings, homosexual “propaganda” and foreign adoptions have also been enacted recently (Kniivilä 2012, Idov 2013). This reflects a moral-conservative trend linked with restrictions on free speech and information in Russia, which militates against democratic and human values as interpreted by the other CBSS states. Reflecting this difference of approach, issues like homosexuality and foreign adoption of orphans do not figure in CBSS cooperation.

Concerning human trafficking, a recent CBSS survey concluded that Russian legislation does not include provision for victim assistance and rehabilitation, and there is no national action plan against trafficking for labour exploitation. Cooperation between government agencies and NGOs takes place only informally, and trade unions and employers’ organisations are not involved (Rösner 2013: 88-91). This differs from practice in most other CBSS states.

To sum up: while the CBSS in the field of civil security has addressed a broad array of topics and activities, Russia for many years was chiefly interested in combating organized crime and advancing the terrorism issue. The former - like illegal immigration, drugs and trafficking – remains a growing problem where Russia and the other CBSS states have some common interests, but concerning the definition and handling of terrorism Russia and the others often have opposite views. Russia has shown a growing willingness to cooperate on some social issues, but its moral conservatism and keenness to restrict information in the internet may well hamper CBSS cooperation in this field.

Hard security

While the CBSS has specialized in a range of “soft” (environmental, human and civil) security issues, this does not exclude that hard security issues have been discussed off the record during its events. Indeed, within these same security dimensions civil-military cooperation is sometimes necessary - for example - in handling emergency situations, conducting search and rescue operations, cleaning up nuclear material and chemical weapons from the seabed, border control, etc. Thus the civil authorities are well informed about the use of radioactive sources and radiation protection measures undertaken by the military authorities. Monitoring and surveillance of air and sea traffic in the Baltic Sea region is something else that has military implications (CBSS Annual Reports 1997-1998: 8; 2004-2005: 25-26). A meeting in February 2012 in fact proclaimed that the CBSS was a forum where opinions on various foreign policy issues of common concern could be expressed and discussed (CBSS, 5 Feb 2012), although it can take no decisions on such matters.

Due to its general priorities Russia has been keener on including military issues in the CBSS framework than the other state. Thus when assuming the chairmanship in 2001, Russia – beyond its above-mentioned priorities – wanted to initiate a “constructive dialogue” on new fields of cooperation, in particular contacts between military authorities, arguing that

this constituted an important element of confidence-building (Ivanov 2001: 3). Later, Foreign Minister Ivanov conceded that military cooperation was not within the purview of the CBSS; thus the elimination of chemical weapons dumped in the Baltic Sea during or after the war had not been discussed in detail. However, the problems of ecological and radioactive security in the region were reportedly discussed extensively and the need for joint measures was underlined. Ivanov reminded partners that Russia just had signed an agreement on monitoring and information exchange concerning radioactive security (MID 11 March 2002: 4-5)

Similarly, President Putin at the 2002 summit ending the Russian chairmanship stated that in view of new global threats, the CBSS could and should be an effective instrument in European security policy. Exchange of information, coordination of military activity and military planning were a topic that should concern not only the defence ministers (MID, 10 June 2002a: 1). Russia is not on record as criticizing NATO enlargement - which was topical at the time - at CBSS meetings, but Putin's suggestions might be seen as a way at least to soften the effects of that enlargement in the Baltic Sea region. On later occasions Russia has criticized NATO missile defence deployment in Poland, threatening that it would be met by Russian missile deployment in the Kaliningrad region, but this was not put on the official CBSS record either.

In 2012 a German newspaper quoted Federal President Joachim Gauck as commending Russia at a CBSS meeting in Germany for again raising initiatives such as joint air surveillance and a "hot line" between its military command in Kaliningrad and the other littoral states (FAZ 25 April 2012). Considering its limited mandate, the CBSS could probably not be very helpful here. Needless to say, the Baltic States and Poland in particular were unwilling to discuss hard security in the CBSS framework, as they had recently become NATO members and relied on NATO for their security.

Concluding remarks on Russia in the CBSS

In conclusion, in terms of CBSS priorities, since the 2000s Russia has especially pushed for economic cooperation and foreign investments in Russia; liberalization of the visa regimes; energy demand security; and cooperation against organized crime including terrorism. A special case in several respects is the issue of Kaliningrad, where Russia places its main stake on cooperation with Germany. Russia has profited from CBSS support for environmental projects, Eurofaculties in Russia, social projects and scientific exchange.

However, in the case of visa issues the CBSS has not been of much use to Russia other than as a forum for advocacy, because the Schengen rules are decided by all EU members. Concerning energy cooperation in the CBSS zone, which is a vital concern for Russia, it has met resistance from the Baltic States and Poland who are striving to reduce their dependence on imports from Russia, while other states put more emphasis on energy efficiency and renewables than on production and distribution. The Western states have made the environment a top priority in the CBSS, which Russia has had to accept.

Russia also met resistance when it sought to use the CBSS as a means to help the Russian-speaking minorities and exercise pressure on the Estonian and Latvian governments, and when it raised the terrorism issue and made a brief attempt to include military contacts in the agenda. In short, Russia has shown a penchant for pushing state-controlled economic and security-related issues, while the mainstream CBSS agenda has a very broad, "soft" and

civil-security-oriented profile.

Despite these different priorities in the CBSS, however, Russia has participated in and contributed to decisions and action plans of all sorts, seeking consensus and avoiding conflicts. When making its own proposals, Russia also works within jointly agreed priorities, plans and programmes, and there is a high degree of continuity. In spite of being a big power, Russia has thus been able to cooperate on an equal basis with several quite different and small neighbours in the CBSS on a number of issues. If Russia were to stop playing by the rules and make serious efforts to impose its will, the other members would likely oppose it, lose interest in the forum and relinquish it in favour of the EU and more specialised regional organizations. Even if Russia in general may prefer bilateral meetings, where it generally is the stronger side, the multilateral meetings of the CBSS do not preclude but on the contrary provide opportunities for businesslike meetings and agreements on a bilateral basis with friendly nations such as Germany.

As mentioned, Russia has probably been the country most interested in maintaining and developing the CBSS both in its own right and as a link to Western Europe. The CBSS can be seen as a link for Russia to the EU along with the Northern Dimension and HELCOM. If Russia's political relations with the EU or NATO should worsen or if the cohesion of these organizations should weaken, Russia can be expected to engage even more in for example the CBSS, where it is a full member. If the Russian economy continues to grow, it would be in less need of assistance but also more able to contribute to CBSS cooperation projects.

3. RUSSIA IN THE BARENTS REGION

In contrast to the Baltic Sea, Russia has by far the longest coast-line on the Arctic Ocean including the Barents Sea. It also has the biggest Arctic population, especially in the Barents region, where Murmansk with about 300,000 inhabitants is the largest city north of the Arctic Circle. The Arctic region furthermore is of crucial importance to the Russian economy, because a major part of its oil, gas and other raw materials are extracted there (Carlsson and Granholm 2013: 19-21; Summers 2010: 2 et seq.). Oil and gas provide about 20 per cent of Russia's GDP, 55 per cent of its export income, and 40 per cent of its tax revenue. (Hönneland and Jörgensen 2006: 108). According to Russian sources, the Arctic contains most of the potential hydrocarbon resources of the world. The North-west Eurasian periphery and its hydrocarbon resources are already the most developed part of the Arctic, and some believe they may become one of the most promising regions of the whole planet (Golos Rossii, 30 Oct 2009: 15; Hönneland and Jörgensen 2006: 108). The most important gas fields are those on the Yamal peninsula in westernmost Siberia and in the Kara Sea which are already being exploited, plus the Shtokman deposits off the Kola peninsula whose exploitation is currently on hold. Climate change and ice melting is making these resources in principle more accessible (Øverland 2008: 131; Granholm and Kiesow 2010: 44 et seq.). The Northern Sea Route is vital for the provisioning of Russia's Arctic regions, and if it were to become an international traffic route it would shorten the distance between Europe and East Asia considerably. Due to receding ice, traffic along it has grown tenfold (but from a very low level in global comparative term) since 2011 (Bochkarev 2010; Pettersen 23 Nov 2012; Carlsson and Granholm 2013: 22-25).

Russia has taken international legal action to claim a further 1.2 million sq.km. of the continental shelf extending beyond its existing 200 nautical miles exclusive economic zone in the Arctic Ocean, following the procedures laid down in the United Nations Convention Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 1982 which Russia ratified in 1997. Russian expeditions are collecting geological samples from the Lomonosov and Mendeleev sea ridges up to the North Pole in hopes of underpinning the Russian submission to the Law of the Sea tribunal by showing that these are continuations of the Siberian continental shelf. In 2007 a Russian submersible placed a flag at the North Pole on the bottom of the ocean 4300 meters down, causing some alarm among certain other Arctic states keen to protect their own sovereign interests (Carlsson and Granholm 2013: 17-18; Oldberg 2008: 40-41). However, President Putin denied that this action constituted a legal claim and invited others to do the same "if they are able to" (Pravitelstvo 15 March 2010: 3). Curiously, during an Arctic expedition in

September 2012 the Russian Orthodox Church consecrated the North Pole, explaining that this symbolized Russia's efforts "on the return of the country's return to former positions in the region" (Staalesen 18 Sept 2012).

The Barents Sea segment of the Arctic region is also militarily important to Russia. The Northern Fleet is the biggest of the four Russian fleets and indeed is the only real naval power in the Arctic Ocean. The activities of Russian military and border troops increased in the 2000s, not least with reference to the alleged military ambitions of NATO states whose activities are closely watched from Moscow (Wezeman 2012: 8 et seq.; Carlsson and Granholm 2013: 26-30.).

Since the 2000s Russia has issued several policy documents with a bearing on its interests in the Barents region, the most extensive being President Medvedev's Fundamentals of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic in the Period up to 2020 and beyond (Bailes & Heininen 2012, 42 et seq.). This was followed by a strategy for developing the Russian Arctic adopted by President Putin in February 2013. According to the former, Russia's national interests are the following:

- To use and expand the resource base for Russia's socio-economic development
- To maintain peace and cooperation in the Arctic, including military security
- To safeguard the unique ecological systems
- To use and develop the Northern Sea Route

Through realising these aims Russia was expected to maintain itself as a "leading Arctic power" in the medium term (Sovet Bezopasnosti 2008: 1 et seq.). The 2013 strategy had the following order of priorities: social/economic development, development of science and technology, creation of a modern IT infrastructure, securing ecological security, international cooperation in the Arctic, securing military security and defending the state boundary (Pravitelstvo 2013: 3). In the following an attempt will be made to examine to what extent and how Russia has managed to satisfy these interests, as well as the more local concerns of its North-western periphery, through the BEAC as an institution covering at least one interesting section of the European Arctic zone.

The emergence of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council

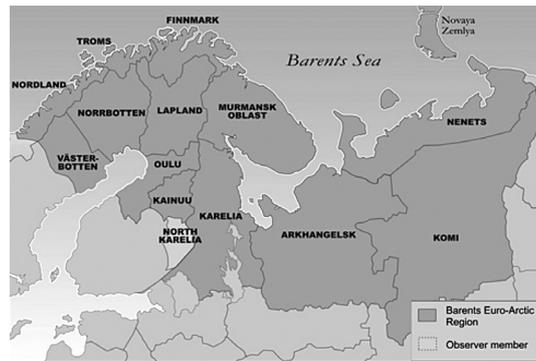
During the Cold War, as already noted, the North-western part of the Soviet Union became one of its most militarized regions since the strategic Northern Fleet - and significant land, air and nuclear forces - were based on the Kola peninsula. No foreigners were admitted, and regular contacts with the Nordic neighbours were negligible. A sign of thaw came when the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in October 1987 made his famous Murmansk speech calling for more multilateral cooperation and containing several proposals for a peaceful High Northern region (Scrivener 1989). The end of the Cold War and the emergence of a new Russian state aiming at democracy, market economy and cooperation with the West opened the door for the creation of the BEAC as a first major cooperative organisation in the Arctic area, including also Russia.

Following the example of Germany and Denmark in founding the Council of the Baltic Sea States, and seizing on the opportunity as a way to alleviate both old military fears and new fears such as an invasion of Russian social refugees, Norway took the initiative during 1992 to invite a number of foreign ministers for a meeting at Kirkenes in January 1993 where the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) was inaugurated. Similarly to the CBSS, the agreed general aim was to promote bi- and multilateral cooperation in many fields including environment, economy and technology, transport, tourism, culture and indigenous peoples. While military and other “hard” issues would not be directly addressed, the initiative clearly aimed to reduce mutual tensions and improve contact, understanding, and a sense of common interests across the Norwegian-Russian strategic frontier. A conscious appeal was made to older traditions of “Nordkalotten” trade and contact that might be claimed to lay foundations for a common sub-regional identity (Dellenbrant and Olsson 1994; Schram Stokke and Tunander 1994; Heininen and Langlais 1997). In practical terms, however, the BEAC addressed itself only to the land areas, not to the seas, of the region and hence did not address issues like fisheries (it is relevant that the Norwegian-Russian maritime demarcation line was not fully agreed at the time). The Kirkenes declaration further supported the reform process in Russia, and expressed the conviction that the new cooperation structure would contribute to peace and security in the area (BEAC 11 Jan 1993; Eriksson 1995: 259 et seq.).

The BEAC structure and Russia’s role in it

At inter-governmental level the BEAC’s membership has the same core as the CBSS (albeit minus Germany, Poland and the three Baltic States): i.e the Russian Federation and the five Nordic countries, among them three NATO members and three EU members, plus the EU Commission/External Action Service. There are also nine observer states, namely the United States, Canada, Germany, Poland, Italy, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Japan. Unlike the CBSS, the chairmanship here rotates every two years between Russia, Finland, Sweden and Norway, these being the states whose territories are directly affected by BEAC activities (and are represented in the Barents Regional Council, see below). Member countries are represented by the foreign ministers at high-level meetings, and senior officials of the foreign ministries hold meetings in between. Each BEAC chairmanship also organises a Barents parliamentary conference representing the national, regional and indigenous peoples’ assemblies (BEAC website).

Russia held the BEAC chairmanship in 1996, 2000-2001 and 2007-2009. At the summit in Luleå in 1998 Foreign Minister Yevgeni Primakov, soon to become Prime Minister, had the chance to meet both EU Foreign Commissioner Hans van den Broek, and deputy US Secretary of State Strobe Talbott (representing an observer country), and discuss general issues with them (Johannesson, 35-36). Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov attended the 10-year anniversary summit at Kirkenes in 2003 to meet his Nordic colleagues, and Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev attended the 20th anniversary, combining it with an official visit to Norway (Prime Minister of Norway 2002; BEAC 3-4 June 2013). Other ministers such as those of the environment, health, transport, and so on also meet in the BEAC framework. Like the CBSS, the BEAC thus offers Russia useful official contacts in several fields with the neighbouring states.



From the Barents International Secretariat

Besides this inter-governmental forum the BEAC, unlike the CBSS, operates at a sub-state level in the form of the Barents Regional Council (BRC), now consisting of 13 counties of the four main member states as represented by their highest elected leaders, plus representatives of three indigenous groups. Five of the counties are Russian, the first ones included being the Murmansk and Arkhangelsk subregions (*oblasti*), later joined by the republics of Karelia and Komi, and by the Nenets autonomous district (*okrug*) (which lies within the Arkhangelsk *oblast*) in its own right. Together these cover a larger area than the relevant provinces of other member states taken together. The whole space defined by the 13 counties, and within which the Barents cooperation operates, is often referred to as the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR). The BRC is chaired by one of the participating counties, separately from the BEAC chairmanship, and also for two years at a time. Both the BEAC and the BRC have committees that prepare their top-level meetings, and joint or separate working groups (17 altogether in 2012), which meet more often.

Like the Arctic Council but differently from the CBSS, the BEAC pays special attention to the indigenous peoples of its region and has a special working group which performs advisory services for both the inter-governmental level and the BRC. Russia here has representatives of the Saami, the Nenets and Vepsians and the group's office is located near Murmansk, while the Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish Saami representatives are elected by the common Saami Parliamentary Council. Russia thus has a relatively strong formal position in the organisation, but decisions must be taken by consensus.

Economic and political constraints

in the CBSS, a general problem with the BEAC is that it has few financial resources beyond the organisation itself. The ministerial and province-level working groups generally do not finance or administer the projects that they endorse, but only help to coordinate them. The concrete projects are mainly bilateral between Russia and one of the Nordic neighbours and financed by Nordic and EU programmes, though often called "Barents" activities afterwards (Schram Stokke et al. 2009: 86-88).

In the 1990s Russia was in deep economic crisis as a result of the transition to a market economy and the accompanying political turmoil. Consequently, Norway as the main initiator had to finance most BEAC activities in Russia on a bilateral basis. However, like the CBSS the Barents cooperation structure increasingly became involved with the EU and received an increasing flow of funding from its financial institutions, especially after Sweden and Fin-

land became EU members in 1995. As already noted, in 1997 the EU on Finnish initiative developed the Northern Dimension which supported aid projects in North-west Russia and could liaise with the BEAC when doing so. Russia's Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with the EU, which came into force in 1997, also facilitated the Barents cooperation.

In the 2000s the situation changed, as Russia started to show steady economic growth thanks to rising energy export income and political stability. After a BEAC *ad hoc* group on organisational changes in 2007 found that national financing of Barents cooperation was missing in Russia, Foreign Minister Lavrov promised more contributions to Barents projects (BO 10 June 2008). In early 2009, 40 per cent of the projects of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat were co-financed by Russian sources and Russia contributed as much to the International Barents Secretariat (see below) as did other member states, aside from Norway which paid half of its budget (Alnes 2010: 38-39; BEAC 13 May 2009: 19).

In 2008, relations between Russia and the EU became strained in connection with the Russian war in Georgia, and the conclusion of a new PCA was postponed for a number of reasons, which also hampered Barents cooperation. In 2009 Russia's five Barents counties could not join in applications for EU funds to implement the Barents five-year programme, since the European Commission and Russia could not agree on the financial terms. The BEAC took the side of the Russian counties (BEAC 13 May 2009: 19). Another problem complicating trade and investments in this region, as in the Baltic Sea region, was the fact that Russia - despite many years of negotiations - was not yet a member of the World Trade Organisation, and the Nordic BEAC members repeatedly called on Russia to join it (BEAC 14-15 Nov 2007: 2) As we have seen, Russia finally did so in 2012.

Russian officials long hoped that the world financial crisis starting in 2008 would not affect the Barents cooperation, but they soon had to change their mind (Vasiliev 13 May 2009a, 29 May 2009: 2). As in the CBSS, Russia brought up the idea of establishing a BEAC bank or fund at the 2009 summit in Murmansk to support the regional projects with state money, and welcomed a Swedish and Finnish proposal to organize a first meeting of BEAC economy ministers to promote the maintenance and expansion of the Barents cooperation. Russia wanted the benefits of cooperation not only to benefit the border regions, but also the more distant Komi and Nenets region (BEAC 15 Oct 2009: 5). In 2013 the BEAC summit accepted the Russian proposal to investigate the possibility of creating a financial mechanism to support project activities and help realize the region's investment potential (BEAC 3-4 June 2013: 5). The BEAC here seemed to be following along the same path as the CBSS.

Besides economic constraints, some political and administrative constraints also impinge on the Barents cooperation. While the Russian constituent (republics, oblasti, okrugi) in the 1990s gained more autonomy and were relatively free to have foreign relations, this changed when Putin in 2000 strengthened the federal power and its control of outlying provinces by creating for instance a North-western Federal District, based in St. Petersburg, under the Presidency. The provinces became more economically dependent on the federal budget and the President was empowered to appoint and fire regional governors/presidents. In Murmansk, Governor Yevdokimov was fired in 2009, accused of wanting to detach the region and give it to the Scandinavians and Americans who were interested in the Shtokman gas field (sic!) (Staalesen 2010: 18-19). In 2012 the law was changed so that the governors were to be elected by the people again, but the Kremlin retained other means of federal control (Petrov 2012).

Another problem with the BRC in the 2000s was that only a few of its working groups

were active and the sessions were attended by a limited number of people. In 2007 a Murmansk foreign policy document did not even mention the Barents cooperation (Staalesen 2010: 18-19). The *ad hoc* group on organisational changes established in 2007 found that for some Russian regions, the Barents programmes mostly consisted of an image with no or few practical outcomes. Projects were mainly of a bilateral character (Murmansk-Finnmark, Karelia-Västerbotten, etc.) while the main added value of Barents cooperation was supposedly to promote multilateral cooperation as well. Another problem was the lack of information among the regions about each other, which sometimes made it difficult to reach joint conclusions on concrete issues. On the Russian side this was partly due to the fact that the people involved in the Barents cooperation were civil servants who also had other responsibilities. The 2007 group therefore recommended the creation of a national Russian secretariat, but was pessimistic about how to finance it. Since it was also both time-consuming and very expensive to keep the working groups running, the group also proposed *ad hoc* meetings and the use of joint BEAC and BRC working groups, which then were created (BEAC 14 May 2007: 23-24). Naturally, Russian attendance increased when Russia or a Russian region held the chairmanship and organised meetings in Russia. Apparently to promote Russian participation, the BRC in 2012 decided that when meetings were held in Nordic regions, they would forthwith pay the accommodation costs of the Russian participants (BEAC 14 Nov 2012: 7). A Russian (Communist) member of the Murmansk Duma has further proposed to include parliamentarians in the BRC, since the meetings are becoming more and more rare, and the governors increasingly let others represent their regions (Nilsen 13 March 2013).

Although the BRC in 2007 called for a permanent Barents secretariat in every country, Russia still did not have one at that time (BEAC 15 Nov 2007: 1). In order to mitigate information problems, an International Barents Secretariat (IBS) was opened during the Russian chairmanship in 2008 according to a previous intergovernmental agreement, which Russia claimed to have initiated (BEAC, 15 Oct 2009: 17). At the end of the Russian chairmanship, Foreign Minister Lavrov emphatically thanked the IBS for its services. The IBS had a Russian head until 2012, and another Russian then became executive officer (BEAC IBS). The IBS has however remained very small (five employees) and shares offices with the Norwegian Barents Secretariat in Kirkenes. The latter has established information offices in three Russian regions with Russian personnel, tasked to follow up projects and inform about financing (BEAC Norwegian). Overall, Russia clearly appreciated the economic support it received from Barents cooperation, but did not contribute as much as for example Norway, especially in terms of administrative resources.

The Russian view of the BEAC

Being a co-founder of the Barents Council, Russia has consistently been positive about its aims and activities. Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev in 1993 hoped that the BEAC would become a prototype for a system of cooperation zones stretching down to southern Europe. He declared that the Arctic would cease to be a theatre of military competition and that it was time to open up the Russian North for equitable international contacts (Sergounin 1999: 27).

President Medvedev's new Foreign Policy Concept of 2008 expressed appreciation for practical cooperation with Northern Europe, including the implementation of joint projects in multilateral structures in the Barents and Arctic region, not least with respect to indige-

nous peoples (President 12 July 2008: 11). At an OSCE meeting in Madrid in 2008, Foreign Minister Lavrov praised the BEAC for building an area of stability, trust and sustainable development. When visiting the BEAC offices in Kirkenes he called the cooperation unique and innovative, adding that “the further north, the closer the relations between East and West” (Staalesen 2010: 10). Opening the 2009 ministerial meeting in Murmansk at the end of the Russian chairmanship, he explained that the success of the BEAC lay in concrete action in many small joint projects for the benefit of the local people (BEAC 15 Oct 2009: 2). The Russian CSO chairman Vasiliev stressed the importance of cooperation with the ND and the Arctic Council, but warned that the BEAC should not let itself be diluted by other organisations, since it had a clear regional identity and good perspectives in its field.

Vasiliev further regarded the BEAC as a model and (together with the Arctic Council) a key organisation in the Arctic, capable of solving all issues. The cooperation between the BEAC and its Regional Council in his view created a synergy that was a major factor of their success (Vasiliev 13 May 2009: 1-5). In 2011 Foreign Minister Lavrov again called BEAC a “unique organisation generating a unifying agenda at both the municipal and macro-regional level”, able to convert political will into concrete actions to improve the welfare of people in the region (BEAC 12 Oct 2011: 9-11).

This evaluation of Barents cooperation should be seen in the context of Russian conflicts with other neighbours at the time, such as Georgia, Ukraine and Belarus, and the growing competition over energy resources in the Arctic. Medvedev’s National Security Doctrine of 2009 warned that competition over energy resources in the Arctic could lead to armed conflicts (Sovet Bezopasnosti 2010: 1-2; Slizhevskii 26 March 2010). Cooperation with the Northern neighbours and the BEAC is seen as an alternative that is also welcomed by the Russian military. Thus Russia has intensified military contacts with Norway in the Far North, and the formerly closed Russian border regions have opened up to foreign visitors. When Commander of the Northern Fleet Admiral Nikolai Makarov visited Norwegian military bases in 2009, he also paid a visit to the Norwegian Barents Secretariat in Kirkenes. There he stated that the High North is more peaceful than other regions and promised that the Russian Northern Fleet would always be ready to support such institutions in securing stability in the area (Pettersen 2010: 68 ff). This relaxed view of conditions in the BEAC zone clearly paved the way for the Russian-Norwegian sea border settlement in 2010, which in turn further improved the atmosphere in the Barents cooperation structure as noted by Lavrov. In the Russian view the BEAC’s security functionality thus has many similarities with the CBSS, and is perhaps more straightforward given that Germany, Poland and the Baltic States with their varying agendas are not present (other than as observers).

Fields of cooperation

Economic cooperation, trade and investments

Now to the aims and priorities of the BEAC in different fields, economic cooperation, trade and investments have always had a central role, as they do in the CBSS. The Kirkenes Declaration supported the reform process in Russia and expressed the conviction that the cooperation would contribute to peace and security in the area (BEAC 11 Jan 1993). The main goal in practice was to help develop Northwest Russia. The 2003 anniversary declaration confirmed the commitment to a balanced approach to economic and social development and en-

vironmental protection (BEAC 11 Jan 2003). The summit declaration at the 20th anniversary “strongly supported” continued economic development in all fields, with the well-being of the people in the region as the overriding goal, and believed the region had the potential to become an innovative example for other regions in Europe. The potential was seen as encompassing not only oil and gas but also other mineral resources, fish and other seafood, and skilled personnel (BEAC 3-4 June 2013: 2).

The priority of the Russian BEAC chairmanship in 2007-2009 was also to “ensure sustainable development with an emphasis on social and economic factors, linking it closely to ... environmental requirements and also to support for indigenous peoples”. In the economic sphere it wanted to pay special attention to trade liberalisation, including elimination of administrative and technical barriers, support of small and medium enterprises, promotion of innovation and information exchange networks, and to create a favourable investment climate (BEAC 15 Nov 2007). Simultaneously with the Murmansk ministerial meeting in 2009 an international economic forum was held in Murmansk with about 500 participants, including major energy companies and Russian banks. Foreign Minister Lavrov wanted this to become a permanent regional platform for business contacts (BEAC 15 Oct 2009: 3-4). At the next 2011 ministerial session Lavrov emphasised the need to develop the human potential by establishing hi-tech industries and innovation centres in the region (“growth clusters”), and called for closer synergy between border regions. Russia also became chair of the Barents forest sector task force (BEAC 12 Oct 2011b: 9-10). Lavrov’s priorities reflected President Medvedev’s general call for the modernization of Russia through cooperation with Western states. In 2009 Russia also proposed to create a common fund or bank to support project activities and facilitate investments, and in 2013 the BEAC summit agreed to investigate the matter, thus following the CBSS example (BEAC 3-4 June 2013).

However, already at the end of the first Russian chairmanship in 1995-1996, the BEAC meeting openly admitted that financing was a major problem and that there were obstacles to large-scale projects in Russia and to trade and business, including customs and transit procedures (see below) (BEAC 5-6 Nov 1996: 2-3). In several cases the Russian partners squeezed the Westerners out when their joint company started to run a profit. Thus business cooperation in the BEAC drew lower priority from the late 1990s, and more stress was put on health issues and people-to-people contacts (Hønneland 2009: 37). At a Barents Industrial Partnership meeting in 2004, forest industry representatives fretted that investors were seriously deterred by prolific and complicated registration procedures, frequent inspections, and tough fines for minor errors (BEAC 5 Oct 2004: 2). These problems were and are closely connected to the widespread corruption in Russia. A poll of local business people in 2012 ranked the newly appointed governor of Murmansk oblast, Marina Kovtun, as the most unfriendly of all Russia’s 83 governors (Nilsen 10 Dec 2012). It was partly reasons like these that so long delayed Russia’s entry to the WTO, in turn hampering economic cooperation with all neighbouring regions.

Economic cooperation was further affected by security concerns on the Russian side. President Medvedev in 2011 signed a new decree forbidding foreigners to own land in Russian border areas, including almost the whole Kola peninsula, the cities of Arkhangelsk, Severodvinsk, Naryan-Mar (the Nenets ‘capital’) and Novaya Zemlya (Pettersen 10 Jan 2011). Even if this only codified former practice, it could not help but complicate foreign investments in these zones. Thus even though Russia and the Nordic states agreed on promoting mutual trade and economic cooperation, practical project work by the BEAC and

BRC in the participating Russian counties was and is hampered by endemic factors such as centralised decision-making, security concerns, bureaucracy and corruption.

Transport, border and visa issues

The issues of transport and border infrastructure are intimately connected with trade and investments. In the 1990s several BEAC projects in this field were devoted to the (re) construction of Russian ports on the Arctic, railways and roads leading to Norway and Finland, and the international airports in the Russian Barents region (BEAC 9-10 Oct 1995: 2-3). A steering committee for the Barents Euro-Arctic Transport Area (BEATA) was set up in 1998, which drew up five-year action plans for multimodal integration (BEAC 2009 BEATA: 3-7). BEATA was introduced into the EU transport cooperation as one of four pan-European transport areas, partly profiting from INTERREG funds. The BEAC 2003 anniversary declaration made special mention of the need to facilitate transport and travel in both easterly and westerly directions (BEAC 11 Jan 2003: 1). The 2013 summit declaration also stressed the need to improve the east-west transport network as a key factor for also developing business and tourism, especially in terms of air services, and called for the drawing up of a Joint Barents Transport Plan covering all transport modes, including ports and terminals (BEAC 3-4 June 2013: 4-5).

In line with its national priorities, Russia especially stressed the importance of the Northern Sea Route (NSR) in the BEAC framework. A Russian BEAC official stressed the need to complement Russian plans to make Murmansk a regional transport hub by improving the transit facilities in northern Norway (Vasiliev 13 May 2009: 4-5). Lavrov in 2011 told the BEAC that as the ice melted, the sea route would not only facilitate access to natural resources but also open up the shortest trade route to the Asia-Pacific region (BEAC 12 Oct 2011b: 9-10). Russia's partners in the BEAC also saw the connection and a special regional working group was formed (BEAC 14-15 March 2001: 4). The 2013 summit pointed out that the demand for service facilities and emergency preparedness along the NSR would provide business opportunities in all the Barents states (BEAC 3-4 June 2013). However, there remain serious problems with the infrastructure and navigation safety along the long sea route, and prospects are complicated by the fact that here also, the Russian military and security agencies insist on strict control.

Along with the NSR, Russia's BRC counties have called for support for a federal programme to build a railway connecting Arkhangelsk with the Komi region and South Urals (Belkomur) (BEAC 13-15 Sept 2004: 2). The Russian transport strategy of 2005 also gave priority to projects such as building a pipeline system from Siberia, as well as modernizing railways and north-south road connections between Murmansk and St. Petersburg (BEAC BEATA 2009: 6). Since these internal projects obviously require substantial financial backing, the Nordic BEAC members have not showed much interest in contributing to them, except on a commercial basis..

Turning now to the related border issues with Russia, Norway and especially Finland have contributed to modernizing their respective border stations. As a result of this and of economic growth, the number of border passages each year has increased tremendously: for example at the Norwegian border it rose from about 3000 in the 1990s to 100,000 in 2010 and 250,000 in 2012. This in turn has created many business and private ties across the borders and often been hailed as one of the successes of Barents cooperation (Nilsen 4 June

2013). However, there are some problems. The queues are often very long, especially in southern Finland, due to slow and inefficient customs procedures on the Russian side (Nilsen 2010: 53-55). The BEAC prime ministers vowed in their 2003 Kirkenes declaration that goods should pass the border in no more than two hours, but still the situation did not improve (BEAC 11 Jan 2003: 1). In 2007 the Russian BEAC chairmanship again promised to simplify customs procedures. A Russian BEATA representative has said that “single window” controls are under consideration and that road charges will not be imposed on certain EU states (BEAC 9 June 2009: 11). At the 2009 summit, the Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre called for a mechanism to address bottlenecks caused for example by customs and bureaucracy (BEAC 15 Oct 2009a: 7; BO 4 Feb 2011). In 2011 the BEAC summit again stressed the need to simplify customs procedures as a precondition for reducing waiting times and boosting trade. (BEAC 12 Oct 2011a: 4).

A closely related issue is that of visas (Salminen and Moshes 2009). Russians have complained about high fees and asked for visa exemption at BEAC meetings. At the 2009 top-level meeting Foreign Minister Lavrov declared that Russia was interested in the greatest possible simplification of procedures, particularly in the border zones, and announced that some settlements had been exempted from the previously declared security zone on the Russian side. Regional parliamentarians have also stressed the visa issue (MID 15 Oct 2009; Komiinform 27 May 2009). Lavrov at the 2011 ministerial meeting called for visa liberalisation on a regional scale, and set the ideal goal of abolishing the visa regime between all the BEAC countries and between Russia and the EU. At the 2013 summit Prime Minister Medvedev specifically proposed a Barents visa-free zone (BEAC 12 Oct 2011b:12; Staalesen 4 June 2013).

In fact, the other BEAC members also recognize the visa issue as a problem and have welcomed every step towards relaxation. Participants at the 2013 summit accepted the common goal of visa-free, short-term travel for all their citizens (BEAC 3-4 June 2013: 4). Despite the Schengen restrictions, some progress has been made in the BEAC zone in the same way as in the Baltic Sea region. While Norway as well as Sweden and Finland adopted the EU’s Schengen regime in 1996, they have taken steps to open consulates in Russia on a bilateral basis and liberalised their visa regimes. Finland, which conducts more trade than the others with Russia, has pushed for abolishing the visa regime between the EU and Russia and granted the highest number of Schengen visas to Russians in the EU, 80 per cent of them multi-entry. Finland stands for a third of all Schengen visas issued in Russia¹⁰ Norway, which has less trade with Russia, issued so-called Pomor visas to Russians living in the Murmansk and Arkhangelsk regions, allowing multiple entries without invitations. Its visa centre in Murmansk boasted of reducing waiting time for applications to 20 seconds on average in early 2013, and the number of applications rose by 40 per cent over the same period in 2012 (BO 4 Feb 2011; Nilsen 14 March 2013).

On the other hand, there are several obstacles on the Russian side. The Finnish and Norwegian foreign ministers have pointed out that Russian passports do not meet the EU’s technical standards and that there is a complex registration system for foreigners visiting or working in Russia, which the Nordics do not impose to the same extent. Russia also maintains a 20 km security zone along the borders, under FSB control and with ever-changing

10 Over 700 000 Finnish visas have been issued every year since 2008, most of them in St. Petersburg, where a new application centre, located in a major shopping mall, was opened in February 2011 (BO 21 Sept 2009, 17 Jan 2010; 8 Feb 2011, 12 March 2013; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland 2010).

rules. Several cases of security-related arrests and refusals of visas have occurred in the past. Partly as a result of all this, far more Russians visit the Nordic countries than vice versa (Visa House 2011; BO 15 Oct 2009, 8 March 2013).

This brings us to the related issue of tourism, which was already mentioned in the 1993 Kirkenes Declaration. During its chairmanship in 2007-2009, Russia took the initiative to set up a new BEAC working group to promote tourism in the region (BEAC 15 Oct 2009a). A Russian senior official in 2009 hoped that the financial crisis could boost tourism in the region, since people would find this less expensive than for instance Thailand and the Seychelles (Vasiliev 13 May 2009: 4). However, little came out of these plans, and there are great problems to overcome on the Russian side, for example lack of infrastructure and language difficulties (Konovalenko 2002: 13 et seq.).

Summing up, one may conclude that Russia has profited from BEAC cooperation with regard to the border infrastructure, with most of the financing coming from the Finnish and Norwegian governments and EU funds. Even if the introduction of Schengen rules has complicated the visa issue, the Nordic countries have made efforts to facilitate cross-border travel on a bilateral basis. Russia has invited tourism and called for visa freedom at the BEAC meetings, but the Russian system poses other problems that still deter Nordic tourists.

Energy cooperation

Concerning energy cooperation, the BEAC founding declaration made a fundamental link between energy, environment and economic development, referring to the European Energy Charter. Ever since 1993 the Council has underlined the importance of energy savings and efficiency and renewable energy sources in its cooperation with Russia. The first aim of the related working group is to promote four energy efficiency centres in the parts of the region (BEAC 12 Oct 2011: 3; BEAC Energy). The Russian chairmanship in its 2007 programme supported this project as did regional officials in the BEAC working group (BEAC 15 Nov: 2; 24 Sept 2009, 2-3). At a working group meeting in Arkhangelsk, the Russian co-chair acknowledged that there was a significant potential for increased energy efficiency in Russian cities and municipalities, in public buildings and apartments as well as boiler plants, which could reduce costs and reduce emissions. There was also large potential in bio-energy and wind power, but local awareness and skills were lacking. A spokesman of the Russian Ministry of Energy referred to new legislation aiming at improving energy efficiency by 40 per cent in 2020, and voiced interest in new technology and international cooperation (BEAC 12 May 2011).

At the same time a foreign ministry spokesman in 2007 declared that energy was a central issue that could function as a platform for joint action in the Barents region (BO 15 Nov 2007). At the BEAC ministerial meeting in Murmansk, Lavrov stressed that developing the hydrocarbon resources of the Barents Sea continental shelf would strengthen regional cooperation and that the role of the BEAC in the world would grow (BEAC 15 Oct 2009a). At the linked Murmansk economic forum dedicated to “conquering the Arctic”, Murmansk governor Dmitry Dmitrienko said that Barents cooperation could be seen as a preparation for the Shtokman project, and federal ministers and representatives of large companies such as Gazprom and Total participated in the forum (Novosti 2009). A Duma deputy also stressed the importance for the Barents region of the Nord Stream project, which would diversify gas import routes to Western Europe (BEAC 15 Oct 2009a: 20-21).

However, even though energy exploration and production are vital to the Russian economy – including in the North-west - and Russia has used the Barents forum to push for them, the BEAC has so far not been an operative player in this sphere. The big energy companies are not formally involved in the BEAC framework, and the matter is handled in bilateral negotiations between the states.

Concerning the related issue of defining the maritime borders in the Arctic Ocean, which contains rich energy resources, Lavrov noted in 2009 that it was not being discussed in the BEAC but bilaterally (MID 15 Oct 2009: 2). This was not surprising given that the BEAR was never intended to include sea areas. One year later when Russia and Norway signed an agreement on the borderline between their economic zones in the Barents Sea (a bone of contention since the 1970s), the agreement included plans for cooperation in energy projects across the sea border (President of Russia 15 Sept 2010). This line of action also bypassed BEAC, much as major energy issues in the Baltic were decided outside the CBSS.

Environment and climate

As in the CBSS, environmental issues have played a central role in Barents cooperation since the very beginning. Nuclear safety and pollution had long been a concern in the region due both to military-related risks (e.g. the dumping of used nuclear reactors at sea, pollution risks from decommissioned nuclear vessels and submarines) and problems of safety and waste disposal associated with the civilian industry. The threat was not only to the habitat and human life but also to the quality of commercial fisheries in the surrounding seas. The Kirkenes Declaration of 1993 especially noted the safety of nuclear facilities, radioactive waste, and nickel production on the Kola peninsula as special problems that also threatened the Nordic neighbours. During the 1990s much effort was devoted to boosting the safety of the Kola plant and handling radioactive waste from military and civilian activities, including nuclear submarines and ships, in cooperation with a US-sponsored Arctic military environment cooperation programme (AMEC), and in the context of broader international “Cooperative Threat Reduction” efforts that also included Japan (BEAC 5-6 Nov 1996: 3; Sawhill and Jørgensen 2001; Pursiainen 2005, 278-298).

The BEAC’s Ten-Year Anniversary Declaration in 2003 also noted with concern the impact of climate change in the Barents region. In 2009 the BEAC ministerial session devoted much attention to environmental issues, stressing i.a. the urgent need to pay attention to environmental vulnerability in economic activities. It recognized climate change as a major concern and hoped for a successful agreement at the UN climate conference in Copenhagen. However, the Nordic governments later expressed some disappointment with the results of the conference. At a BEAC meeting at Tromsø in February 2010, the environment ministers called for an action plan concerning climate change and for work to be focussed on pollution “hot spots” in the Russian member counties. A special sub-group was formed for this purpose (BEAC 17 Feb 2010: 2-3; 25 May 2012). The 2011 ministerial communiqué took note of the need for “green” and responsible growth, called for research and investment to that end as well as concerted action to eliminate the hot spots, and pleaded for better water management. Similarly to Sweden in 2009-2011, the Norwegian BEAC presidency in 2011-13 made sustainable development and knowledge-based environment and climate policy its first two priorities. The emissions from nickel production in the Murmansk oblast topped the list of pollution “hot spots” to be eliminated in the period 2009-2013 (BEAC 2009; 12 Oct 2011a:

2-4). This issue of the Russian metallurgical industry complex centred on the plant at Nikel has probably been, overall, the most controversial environmental issue between Norway and Russia in the North. In 2013 the Norwegian foreign minister noted that it had been a cause for concern for several decades already, and urged the Russian owners and authorities to give greater priority to health and environment (Barth Eide 2013). Various ways have been explored to deal with it also through bilateral (Norway/Russia, Finland/Russia) environmental cooperation programmes, ranging from shared monitoring of emissions to plans for modifying the smelters themselves.

The BEAC's 20th anniversary summit also underlined the need for sustainable development, the use of the best available technology and know-how, and the importance of oil and gas activities meeting the highest environmental standards. It also expressed "deep concern" over global warming in the region, vowed to strive for limiting the increase to below two degrees over pre-industrial levels, and looked forward to a BEAC action plan in the field (BEAC 3-4 June 2013).

Russia, especially its scientists, has indeed also recognized the existence of environmental problems, and willingly received assistance in this field. Russian President Medvedev in a joint declaration with Norway in 2010 conceded that the local industrial emissions were a cause for concern and promised to take the necessary steps to reduce them (Nilsen 18 Sept 2012). Contrary to the USA, Russia did ratify the Kyoto Protocol, which was duly welcomed in the BEAC (BEAC Oct 2004, 2). In 2009 Russia adopted a climate security doctrine. Medvedev instructed his government to implement it by drafting the necessary laws and regulations, warning of the impending problems and the lack of a clear organisational system for climate research (President, 17 March 2010). At the BEAC summit in 2011, Foreign Minister Lavrov called climate change one of the region's most pressing concerns, which also affected the traditional life of northern indigenous peoples, and welcomed the BEAC action plan in the field. A BEAC communiqué further praised Russia for ratifying a convention on persistent organic pollutants (BEAC 12 Oct 2011a: 11; Oct 2011b: 3).

However, as in the CBSS, Russia had its own priorities in the environmental sphere, not least due to its economic crises throughout the 1990s. As a result, President Putin on his accession to power in 2000 reduced the influence of environmental agencies in Russia and suppressed the environmental groups, accusing them of serving foreign interests (Hønneland 2009: 45). On assuming the BEAC chairmanship in 2007, Russia's order of priorities began with sustainable development with the emphasis on social and economic factors, while "linking it closely" to environmental requirements. Among environmental tasks the programme defined the priorities as eliminating environmental "hot spots" (numbering nearly 50); working to mitigate climate change and adapt to its negative effects; and preserving biodiversity and protected areas, clean water resources, and forests. When summing up the Russian chairmanship in 2009 Foreign Minister Lavrov - unlike other colleagues - hardly mentioned environmental issues, though he praised an inter-sectoral conference on climate change just held in Vadsø, Norway (BEAC 15 Nov 2007: 2-3; 15 Oct 2009a: 3 et seq.).

Reflecting different tones in Russian policy, President Medvedev in 2010 openly complained of the "carbon protectionism" of developed countries, which could limit Russian export opportunities regarding oil and gas. He finished by saying that as for the consequences of climate change, the situation was not at all always as clear as the environmentalists might think (President 17 March 2010). In practice, little progress has been made on the issue of emissions from Nikel. A Russian deputy minister retorted to Western criticisms that

the emissions did not exceed the Russian norms; and Russian environmental groups are not involved despite Norwegian urgings (Nilsen 18 Sept 2012). Climate issues were hardly mentioned in Putin's Arctic development strategy of 2013 (Pravitelstvo 2013: 7 et seq.).

In conclusion: following the Cold War Russia showed increasing concern over environmental problems and climate change in the Barents region, which is still more vulnerable than the Baltic Sea region, and appreciated the relevant BEAC assistance which mainly went to Russia. However, as in the CBSS, Russia gave first priority to economic development. While its Western neighbours may also have pressed ahead with "sustainable" plans for economic gain, the Russian authorities also stood out - in this region as elsewhere - by their harsh attitude to domestic and foreign environmental pressure groups.

Health issues

Due to the economic and political turmoil of the 1990s, the health situation in Russia and not least in the North-west became alarming during that time. Fearing that infectious diseases would spread, the Nordic governments and international agencies started several medical aid projects in Russia. However, the health issue was not mentioned in the Kirkenes Declaration of 1993, and even though a conference of the Barents ministers of health took place in 1994, it did not become a priority until 1998 when a Health Cooperation Program focussing on HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis (TB) - based on bilateral and international funding but without multilateral Barents structures - was launched (Wilson Rowe and Hønneland: 53 et seq.). Under Russian chairmanship the BEAC praised the serious efforts made to combat TB but expressed deep concern about the increase of HIV/AIDS and infectious diseases in the prisons (BEAC 14-15 March 2001: 9). The 2003 Kirkenes Declaration urged the national authorities to gain full control of the spread of TB in the region "within ten years". The 2011 Council communiqué launched a new cooperation programme for 2012-2015, particularly urging authorities to gain full control of the spread of TB in the region, and welcomed close coordination with the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health (BEAC 11 Jan 2003; 12 Oct 2011a: 5-6). Many other health projects in the region depended on support from Nordic governments, the Nordic Council of Ministers, and the WHO. The BEAC 2013 summit called for special attention to emergency preparedness, prevention and control of communicable and other diseases (BEAC 2009; 3-4 June 2013: 6).

The Russian health authorities at first resisted the WHO-sponsored DOTS tuberculosis strategy based on sputum smear microscopy on self-reporting patients, referring to the Soviet tradition of mass screening, surgery and hospitalization; but regional authorities soon accepted the DOTS, since it was backed by substantial funding while the central authorities provided little (Wilson Rowe and Hønneland 2009: 60-70). The Russian chairmanship in 2007 mentioned public health first on its agenda, focussing on promoting a healthy life style, prevention of alcohol, smoking and drug abuse, increasing availability of medication, and prevention of non-infectious diseases as well as socially significant ones like HIV/AIDS (BEAC 15 Nov 2007: 2). A sub-programme on Children and Youth at Risk was launched, recalling a similar group in the CBSS (BEAC 2011). At the end of the Russian chairmanship, Foreign Minister Lavrov said that the BEAC-backed programme to fight infectious diseases had brought considerable practical benefits to all (!) participants (BEAC 15 Oct 2009a: 4). Even so, a working group meeting in Petrozavodsk noted that the goal of full control over TB in 2013 had not yet been reached (BEAC 15 Oct 2009: 4; BRC 2012: 14). One may conclude

that the health problems in Russia, not least in the Barents region, remain formidable, and that the other BEAC members are motivated to provide help, which Russia also appreciates.

Indigenous peoples

The BEAC is much more engaged than the CBSS with problems of indigenous peoples, for the obvious reason that the latter are more present, active and visible in the BEAR. The Saami are spread through the region, while groups such as the Vepsians, Nenets and Komi have a recognized existence on the Russian side. Their place in the Barents cooperation was especially noted in the 1993 Kirkenes Declaration, and a permanent working group including representatives of the Saami, Vepsians and Nenets was established in 1995. Today, following the latest update to its terms of reference in 2010, the chairman of this six-person group has an advisory role both to the ministerial BEAC and the BRC, and one representative attends meetings of the latter (BEAC Working Group). The 2009 foreign ministers meeting welcomed the decision that the working group should be represented at all meetings of the senior officials and other BEAC working groups (BEAC 15 Oct 2009b: 4). The indigenous working group produces action plans, and has organised separate Barents Indigenous Peoples congresses every second year in Kirkenes since 2010 to allow them claim their rights (BEAC 10 Feb 2012). The administrative burden is shared by a separate Barents Indigenous Peoples' Office (BIPO) situated in Murmansk. The 2013 summit acknowledged the obligation to ensure full respect for and implementation of the rights of the indigenous peoples to pursue their traditional livelihoods, including hunting, fishing and herding, as well as their right to participate in decision-making in matters affecting them (BEAC 3-4 June 2013). It thus came as a surprise when one day later, the BEAC/BRC working group halted its activities because Russia was not providing any funding, and Sweden and Finland only sporadically. Only 52 000 euros were said to be needed each year (Nilsen 6 June 2013).

The programme of the Russian chairmanship in 2007 promised support to the indigenous peoples as its fourth point. It vowed to devote special attention to their involvement with regard to education, health, tradition and economic activity, and to use the BIPO in Murmansk to these ends (BEAC 21 Jan 2009: 12). At the summit in 2009 the Russian chairman suggested that *all* the peoples should be represented in the working group, notably the Nenets and the Komi. Prime Minister Medvedev at the 2013 summit mentioned a Russian plan for rendering economic and humanitarian support for small indigenous peoples, but also praised international cooperation for their benefit (Pravitelstvo 4 June 2013: 4).

In reality there are several problems with Russia's indigenous peoples. The reason why the Komi (and Karelians) are not included as indigenous peoples in the regional working group may be that they are not classified under that name in Russian legislation, because their communities exceed 50,000 persons each and thus have their own republics. The Nenets are however members of the working group even though they also have sub-republican status (*okrug*) and are represented in the Regional Council (BEAC 15 Oct 2009: 22).

The Russian indigenous peoples in the Barents area have also suffered from the centralisation of power, and Russian legislation on indigenous peoples does not fully comply with the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples (which Russia has not signed). The Second Indigenous Peoples Congress of 2012 urged Russia to make a comprehensive review of its laws and policies, to grant these peoples representation at the federal and regional levels, and to establish indigenous councils able to participate in decision-making. It

also called on the federal government to encourage civil society organisations and the Murmansk government to support the Saami parliament of the region (BEAC 9-10 Feb 2012: 4).

It should also be remembered that the indigenous peoples in Russia's Barents area are relatively few, poor and much more exposed than their Nordic brethren.¹¹ The expanding industrial sector, mostly connected with mining and energy extraction, encroaches on the rights of the indigenous peoples engaged in traditional herding and fishing - as was hinted at during the 2009 BEAC ministerial meeting (Wilson Rowe and Øverland 2009: 36-37). Most of the projects involving these peoples have in practice been financed by Norway and handled by its Barents Secretariat on a bilateral basis. The Russian Saami in particular have profited from the economic and political support of their brethren on the Nordic side of the region. However, funds have also been misspent in projects involving the Saami and the Nenets and have fomented local conflicts. The Saami community is divided and one part of it has problems with the Murmansk governor (Henriksen 2010: 95 et seq.; Øverland and Berg 2012: 100 et seq.). The indigenous peoples totally depend on the authorities to make possible their participation in BEAC cooperation. Russian officials have called for more funding so that indigenous representatives can participate in the working group activities - yet as noted above, Russia itself has not been paying its share of funding for the indigenous peoples' working group.

Further, although (or because) the Russian indigenous peoples within the BEAR have benefited from BEAC cooperation, they have also come in for suspicion from the federal powers that foreigners may be fomenting political opposition among them. After Putin instituted a law obliging Russian NGOs considered to be engaged in political activity and receiving money from abroad to register as foreign agents in November 2012, RAIPON - an NGO comprising over 40 small indigenous peoples in Russia, including those in the BEAR - was suspended by the Ministry of Justice. Even if the impact was mainly seen in the Arctic Council where RAIPON was one of six indigenous peoples' groups holding the status of permanent participant, people in BEAC circles also protested (Staalesen 19 Nov 2012: Digges 2012). But after RAIPON amended its statutes and elected an ethnic Russian as chairman, it was allowed to resume its activities. Even its activist ex-chairman was allowed to participate at the BEAC summit in June 2013 (Staalesen 15 March 2013; BEAC Summit 2013).

Democracy and human rights

Unlike the CBSS, the BEAC has not made democracy and human rights an explicit priority and the issue has hardly been mentioned in official records. However, the Council's emphasis on cooperation among regions and indigenous peoples can be seen as partially addressing this issue, and - similarly to the Baltic Sea cooperation - the rotating BEAC chairmanship holds conferences of parliamentarians every second year.

As noted, the BEAC at its foundation did express support for the reform process in Russia, which was said to aim "inter alia at strengthening democracy, market reform and local institutions, and which is therefore important for closer regional cooperation". The BEAC also considered efforts to promote activities giving women more opportunities for cooperation. In recent years, the issue has appeared again. The communiqué of the 2009 summit

11 According to the BEAC homepage the Saami in Russia number about 2000, in Norway 50,000-60,000, in Sweden some 20,000, and in Finland some 7,000. The Nenets are about 7,000, and the Vepsians in Karelia about 6,000 (although lower estimates are found elsewhere for the latter, eg 3,500).

contained a pledge to improve the well-being and living standards of all peoples in the region “based on common democratic values”, and called for more cooperation with the non-governmental sector, thus furthering contacts people-to-people and among the mass media. This pledge was repeated in the 2011 communiqué (BEAC 15 Oct 2009b: 4; 12 Oct 2012: 2). A stronger statement was made in the new terms of reference of the Barents Regional Council adopted in 2012, which declared that the cooperation was

“founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities and physically handicapped persons... These values are common to all the participating regions in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity, and equality between women and men prevail”.

The participating regions also pledged to strive for an equal gender representation when appointing representatives, and to encourage young people to participate as widely as possible (BEAC 14 Nov 2012: 3). Likewise, the 2013 summit declaration defined a wish to promote tolerance and combat radicalism, xenophobia, and violent extremism in words that were strikingly reminiscent of Russia’s CBSS chairmanship programme, but also underlined the role of civil society in this endeavour, and encouraged links between NGOs - including youth organisations and mass media - in the Barents region (BEAC 3-4 June 2013: 4-6).

As in the CBSS’s case, these solemn declarations should be seen against the background of the democratic backslide in Russia since Putin became President in 2000. As mentioned above, political opposition and freedom of speech and meeting have been restricted and political power has been centralised in Moscow. As of 2012, politically active NGOs receiving funds from abroad have to register as foreign agents, and foreign criticism of the Russian political system is rejected. As one consequence, the Norwegian Barents Secretariat has since 2008 only given grants to the Norwegian partners in cooperation projects with Russia, and is careful not to support projects deemed as sensitive by the Russian side (Alnes 2010: 39). The records of the BEAC do not contain any criticism of Russian democracy and human rights. Russian officials have accordingly praised the BEAC for not politicizing the cooperation, but focussing on practical issues (BEAC 15 Oct 2009: 2; MID 2007).

Concerning the Barents parliamentary conferences, Russia organised one in Syktyvkar, Komi, in 2009 with many representatives from the Komi republic, but also civil servants and foreign ministry officials. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov praised this event as an important feed-back channel that helped to bring decision makers in touch with the northerners’ everyday needs and expectations. A Russian official labelled the parliamentarians as ‘grass-roots’ (BEAC 12 May; 15 Oct 2009a: 4). However, the Russian delegation was dominated by the ruling party in the Duma and naturally backed the official line.

Obviously, as in the CBSS, there is a wide gap between Russia and the other member states in how democracy is defined and practised. This sets limits also to the Barents cooperation, particularly to its impacts in the human field, and to the real meaning of any claims to a cross-border common “identity” (Hønneland 1998).

Culture, education and science

Similarly to the CBSS, the BEAC organises cooperation in the fields of culture, education and science. The Kirkenes Declaration emphasised the importance of promoting Barents cooperation in the fields of science and education, culture and human contacts in general.

Ten years later, in 2003, the prime ministers commended cooperation in education, encouraged youth mobility, called for cooperation among cultural stakeholders and stressed the need to strengthen the Barents cultural identity (BEAC 11 Jan 2003). Working groups for culture and for education and research were formed in 2001, and many projects were initiated and international meetings held. All this was facilitated by faster border passages and communications as described above. The indigenous peoples were part and parcel of the same process. A third cultural cooperation programme started in 2011 with the aim of promoting cultural diversity, multicultural dialogue and new cultural meeting places, including sports. Meetings of BEAC ministers of culture reaffirmed the importance of strengthening the common cultural identity (BEAC 12 Oct 2011: 6; May 2011: 3). The 20th anniversary summit expressed strong support for cooperation in the fields of education, research and innovation, emphasizing that equal opportunities, including gender equality, in education and work were the key to economic growth. It also stressed the value of culture in bringing people together, which promoted diversity and multicultural dialogue (BEAC 3-4 June 2013). The joint working group on education and research has held several international forums bringing together the regional universities. For example in November 2013 it held a meeting in Brussels with 13 universities and institutes, geared to developing joint project proposals for an EU funded programme. A special event was devoted to discussing the need to make the Arctic a research field of its own and include Arctic issues in the EU's research calls, and to debating how the small Barents region universities could contribute. (BEAC: 31 Jan 2014)

Russia has played an active role in this field. In 2007 the Russian chairmanship sought to promote the mutual study of national cultures, i.a. by supporting the indigenous cultures and holding festivals of culture and films, folklore and music. It duly gathered the ministers of culture and other representatives for an international forum in Arkhangelsk (BEAC June 2008). As for cooperation in the field of education and research, Russia set out to intensify it for instance by developing academic and scientific mobility. After the Petrozavodsk University held an international education and science conference in 2008, it was entrusted with leading a new BEAC joint working group on this (Vasiliev 13 May 2009a: 2). The Northern Arctic Federal University of Arkhangelsk held the chair in 2011-2013, with Tromsø University as co-chair, and when Arkhangelsk took over the BRC chair, its university retained the chair of the joint working group with the University of Lapland in Rovaniemi as co-chair (BEAC 31 Jan 2014: 1, 10).

Also here there are some restricting factors. BEAC cultural and educational cooperation that includes Russia depends to a large extent on funding from the Nordic states and the EU, respectively through the Nordic Council of Ministers and the EU Northern Dimension which has a new Partnership for Culture. The education and research working group also suffers from low or absent funding (BEAC 31 Jan 2014: 10). Another factor is the Russian fear of Western politicization of such exchanges. Still, cultural, educational and scientific cooperation can in several ways be seen as a substitute for overt cooperation on democratic and human rights issues.

Rescue operations

Even though military issues are not in the purview of the BEAC, a new related topic for BEAC cooperation in the last decade has been civil-military rescue operations, the importance of which was actualized by the accident with the Russian nuclear submarine Kursk in the

Barents Sea in August 2000. Barents Rescue exercises have been held biannually in Norway, Sweden and Finland since 2001, with a view to effective joint response to natural disasters and accidents (BO, 8, 12 Sept 2009; 19 June 2011). In 2008 an intergovernmental agreement on emergency prevention, preparedness and response was signed. The 2011 summit welcomed this and referred also to the agreement on aeronautical and maritime search and rescue adopted by the member states of the Arctic Council in 2011. The 2013 Kirkenes Declaration also supported initiatives to improve nuclear emergency response measures (BEAC 12 Oct 2011a: 7).

Russia hailed the 2008 rescue agreement as a success for its chairmanship and soon ratified it (MID 15 Oct 2009). It increasingly participated in both bilateral exercises with the Nordic neighbours and in multilateral Barents rescue exercises. In 2008 Russia held an international oil spill response exercise and in 2009 it hosted a Barents rescue exercise for the first time. The latter was led by a Russian minister and included both military and Security Service units, among the former a heavy amphibious aircraft (Beriev Be-200 Altair) which is a Russian specialty (BO 8, 12 Sept 2008). In conjunction with a BEAC summit in Kirkenes, a bilateral Norwegian-Russian exercise was held with the attendance of both prime ministers. In the joint BEAC working group on rescue cooperation, a Russian official emphasized the need for improving the system of notification and coordination. However, these exercises have run into some problems with border crossings, especially for ambulances, and rescue teams have had to pay customs duties and taxes in Russia contrary to the 2008 agreement (Karlsbakk 2013; BEAC 21-22 June 2011). Norway was not informed about an accident on a Russian nuclear submarine near Murmansk in 2011, apparently because military accidents were not included in the bilateral agreement, and took up the issue at the 2013 BEAC summit – without result. It should be observed that most nuclear installations on the Kola peninsula are military (Nilsen 29 May 2013).

In sum, in a similar way to the CBSS in the Baltic Sea and the Arctic Council in its larger sphere, the BEAC has been expanding its cooperation regarding civil protection against accidents and disasters, and has practised joint civil-military rescue operations. Russia is increasingly closely involved in this activity, but remains unwilling to provide information concerning military accidents.

Which Russian interests does the BEAC meet in the High North?

If the details of BEAC and BRC work given above are compared with the goals of the Russian Arctic policy paper presented earlier, it would seem that the BEAC has been of limited value for the first-mentioned and presumably most important national interest: namely to use and expand the resource base for Russia's socio-economic development, primarily by means of energy resources. Russian officials have tried to forward their interest in energy production inside the BEAC (and Arctic Council), but the other members have generally been more interested in using these organisations – as in the CBSS - to promote energy saving and to protect the environment from the risks of energy exploration and production. In general, Russia and its major companies have thus pursued their energy interests mainly in bilateral relations with other countries and their companies, notably in Norway.

Concerning the wider Russian priority of promoting socio-economic development, this is also a stated goal of the BEAC, so that Russia has met with some understanding and sup-

port and been able to exercise some influence there. BEAC projects in health care, especially in fighting infectious diseases, have for instance been praised by Russian officials. However, Russia has been less successful in using the BEAC for promoting trade and investments, partly because of its own trade restrictions and corruption. Here other forums may be more suitable, such as the economic partnership with the EU and the Northern Dimension programme.

Intimately connected with expanding the resource base is the Russian aim to have the extension of its continental shelf and the ensuing rights legally recognized. While the BEAC has no competence to address the issue, Russia has discussed it with the other Arctic littoral states and for example was party to a joint declaration at Ilulissat in 2008, where the five littoral neighbours pledged themselves to lawful and peaceful solutions. The sea border delimitation agreement with Norway was however a bilateral affair and, as we have seen, may have been helped at least atmospherically by the history of Barents cooperation..

Concerning the development of the Northern Sea Route, which was specifically mentioned as the fourth national interest in the 'Fundamentals of State Policy in the Arctic' due to its importance for the Arctic infrastructure and its potential for international trade, Russia has tried to advance it in both the BEAC and the AC. The AC agreements on search and rescue and on rapid response to oil spills satisfy both Russian and Western interests in making the Northern Sea Route more secure, which is also important for the safety and developmental needs of the BEAR. However, aside from climate, Russian security concerns and high costs may retard the development of true cooperative measures in this field.

Along with the Northern Sea Route, Russia has called for broad cooperation in developing its transport infrastructure and communications with the West. This has been an important issue in the Barents cooperation, and here Russia has met a good response from its Nordic neighbours. A number of projects have been carried out, especially regarding the border stations, so that cross-border trade with especially Norway and Finland has increased tremendously since Soviet times. However, cross-border trade and travel are still to some extent hampered by the EU Schengen rules on the Nordic side, and bureaucracy and security restrictions on the Russian side.

The Russian Arctic policy paper further mentioned the protection of ecological systems as the third among its national priorities. Indeed, environment protection has been a key aim of both the BEAC and the AC, embraced by all the other partners, and most projects and research activities have been developed in this field. However, as already noted, economic development has remained Russia's primary interest, and Moscow has not shown much interest in climate-related issues which have emerged as a top concern in the other countries. Russia has shown itself wary of international restrictions on its local oil, gas and nickel production.

Even though the indigenous peoples were not mentioned as a fundamental national interest in Russia's 'Arctic doctrine', their welfare was one of ten 'strategic priorities'. Here the Western democracies, especially Canada and Norway, have been more engaged than Russia and their support to the small indigenous organisations in Russia has actually gone beyond what the Russian authorities wanted, given the risks the latter see of Western political influence.

The second most important national interest mentioned in the Arctic policy paper, maintaining the Arctic as a zone of peace and cooperation, was also a primary underlying aim for other neighbouring states when the BEAC was created and developed. Russian officials have

often praised this and the other neighbourhood Councils for building stability and trust through practical cooperation, and have indeed offered them as models for East-West cooperation. Clearly, the BEAC is not directly relevant to any participating state's military security, and all sides realize that trying to tackle such divisive issues (other than perhaps in the corridors) would negate the forum's special atmosphere and usefulness. However, when the BEAC (like the AC) began to focus on the issues of search and rescue and oil spill preparedness, and carried out practical exercises requiring civil-military cooperation, Russia also willingly participated.

One may conclude that the BEAC does not and cannot do much to meet Russian "hard" security concerns in the High North, such as keeping NATO forces out or countering the US missile defence programme; nor can it address key Russian interests such as defining sea borders and developing energy resources in the Arctic. However, the Barents cooperation enables practical, non-zero-sum cooperation with the Nordic neighbours, as the Arctic Council does also with the United States and Canada. Both serve to build confidence, and help to alleviate severe economic, social and environmental problems in the vast Russian Arctic.

4. COMPARING RUSSIAN POLICIES IN THE CBSS AND THE BEAC

The structures

As repeatedly noted above, there are several similarities between Russian policy and participation in the CBSS and the BEAC/BRC, which partly has to do with the similar structures of the Councils. They are advisory bodies, which issue recommendations to the respective governments and other institutions, and have no legal personality or system of sanctions. Russia has an equal voice and position with other members in the Councils, and since all decisions have to be taken by consensus, they are the results of compromises representing the lowest common denominator. This implies that Russia has backed or at least accepted all decisions concerning the structure, reforms, priorities, projects and activities of the Councils, as they have developed, and by the same token has never questioned or taken serious action to undermine their existence. In spite of its claims to great power status, Russia has also shown itself willing and able to cooperate with several big and small neighbours on an equal basis. It has been especially keen on underpinning decisions with intergovernmental agreements, notably when they impinged on security issues, and more anxious than the others about filling legal voids and formalising decisions. (Wilson Rowe 2009: 17). The Councils have all moved in that direction, and in recent years this has been seen especially clearly in the Arctic Council.

While the Councils overlap both in nature and agenda, each has its own particular (geo) political rationale (Bailes and Ólafsson 2013) and there are several differences due to memberships and geography that affect the corresponding Russian policies. The CBSS was founded first and in some respects it became a model for the BEAC and the AC. It was thus ahead of the other two in terms of institutionalization and structural development, for example acquiring a permanent secretariat since 1998; it has also undertaken more reforms flowing directly from EU enlargement (though the latter was not without implications for Arctic cooperation either – Palosaari 2004). In all the Councils, Russia has consistently called for more practical cooperation and common projects.

Concerning membership, the CBSS includes the three Baltic States and Poland, which long have been *de facto* part of or dominated by the Soviet Union. Their striving to reduce dependence on Russia and integrate with Western structures has led to sharper tensions with Russia in the CBSS than have occurred in the other Councils. On the other hand, the CBSS also contains the economic giant Germany, Russia's most important trading partner in Europe and its best friend in the CBSS along with Finland. Like Russia, both Germany and Poland are also continental powers with interests in several directions.

The BEAC by contrast comprises only Russia and the five Nordic states, and is the only

Council also to have a regional level of governance consisting of 13 Arctic counties, among them five Russian ones. The AC, which covers the whole circumpolar area, encompasses the same Nordic members but also the United States, which Russia still sees as its main political opponent, and its close NATO ally Canada. The European Commission/External Action Service is a member of both the CBSS and the BEAC, without the right to take a turn as chair, but in the AC it has thus far not even been admitted as a permanent observer, mainly thanks to Canadian opposition (MID 15 May 2013a; Boyd 2013).

Concerning the political dynamics and balance within the Councils, the Nordic and the Baltic States (increasingly called the NB8) are each others' natural best friends in the CBSS. In the BEAC Russia, Finland, Sweden and Norway are the ones most concerned in cooperation on the ground and consequently the chairmanship rotates only among them.

Both the CBSS and the BEAC support cooperation with the national and international NGOs in their respective regions and engage them as observers. All the Councils also have parliamentary assemblies with regular meetings. Russian NGOs are of course involved but are under stricter political control than the others, and the main Russian indigenous organization, RAIPON, was suspended in 2012 evoking protests from partners as we have seen. In all the Councils the Foreign Ministry is the dominating actor on the Russian side, which sets the priorities top-down, whereas in the other states the flow comes more from below or from expert figures in the various fields.

In the 1990s Russia played a rather passive role in the Councils and could not contribute much to the common activities due to its persistent economic crises and political turmoil. When President Putin strengthened central political control and the economy recovered in the 2000s, Russia became more active and started to contribute more to common projects on Russian soil. It has been quite active in suggesting plans and projects, but less able to implement them and to provide its share of resources, leaving a gap between words and deeds.

Since the regional Councils (like similar bodies elsewhere in Europe) have partly overlapping agendas and limited resources, they all emphasize the importance of cooperation and coordination among themselves and – besides smaller partners – with other organisations and programmes such as the EU Northern Dimension, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, HELCOM, the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM), and the UN. To varying extents they also depend on financing from the individual governments and banks as shown above. For instance the German CBSS chairmanship in 2011-2012 made it one of its priorities to foster a coherent framework of cooperation in the Baltic Sea region (Etzold 2012). In a similar vein, the Russian BEAC chairmanship in 2007 set out to enhance the effectiveness of the whole architecture of multilateral cooperation in the North and to promote the division of labour, synchronization and coordination of activities and avoidance of duplication of efforts (BEAC 15 Nov 2007: 3). To these ends Russia initiated the first joint meeting between representatives of four organisations – the AC, NCM, CBSS and ND - on the level of deputy foreign ministers in St. Petersburg. The 2009 BEAC summit agreed on the need for closer coordination, while recognising the growing role of the Arctic Council as the main vehicle for circumpolar cooperation (BEAC 15 Oct 2009a: 5; 2009b: 73). The 2013 CBSS summit underlined the need to avoid duplication and overlaps, and recognized the key role of HELCOM for implementing the ecosystem approach. Since 2009 inter-organisational coordination meetings have taken place regularly both at the political and senior official levels (CBSS 6 June 2013: 1-3).

Hard and soft security

Turning now to the various issues, there are several overlaps in the activities of the councils, but also some specifics. They all focus on so-called “soft” security and other civilian fields of cooperation, while military issues are more or less explicitly excluded. True, Russian leaders proposed to include military contacts and coordination of military planning on the CBSS agenda in 2001, when the Baltic states were about to be admitted into NATO, but the issue does not appear in the record after that.

Further, Russia has been involved when the Councils have dealt with issues where cooperation between military and security authorities was necessary, for instance concerning search and rescue operations, handling of radioactive waste from military and civilian activities in the Baltic and Barents Seas, or border surveillance. In the CBSS Russia raised the issue of fighting international terrorism in the early 2000s, though without much success. In the Arctic Council, the process eventually leading to the Search and Rescue agreement of 2011 began when Russia agreed to form a task force together with the USA.

While the “soft” security focus of the Councils excludes them from a role in resolving some of Russia’s most existential concerns, it also ensures that their agendas are less contentious; that they pose only limited and manageable (given the consensus principle) challenges for Moscow’s interests; and that their tangible successes can equally or even disproportionately benefit Russia. The avoidance of “hard” issues and – for the most part – of questions of political principle also limits the chances of Western participants “ganging up” against Russia. This helps explain why Moscow has consistently praised the Councils as contributing to stability, cooperation and development and as good models for other regions of the world.

Economic development and energy

Russia’s first priority in the Councils has been economic cooperation to promote its development through foreign investments, trade and aid. In the CBSS Russia thus welcomed the German initiative to create a project support facility, focusing on the Kaliningrad exclave, and a Pilot Financial Initiative to promote small and medium enterprises, mainly funded by a German state bank. Trade in the region was also facilitated by Russia’s accession to the World Trade Organisation. The CBSS also enjoyed support from cooperation with the EU Baltic Sea Region strategy and the Northern Dimension.

As a function of climate and population, there has thus far been less economic activity in the Barents region than in the Baltic Sea region, and the EU is not so much engaged there. Still, Russia has profited from many BEAC projects sponsored by the Nordic countries, especially Norway and Finland. Also here Russia has proposed a joint bank or fund to support the projects, while stressing the needs of distant Arctic regions. The 2013 BEAC summit agreed to consider creating a financial mechanism for project support. In the AC context, Russia has been similarly active in a working group on sustainable development (Wilson Rowe 2009: 13-14). In 2011 Russia contributed more than the other states to creating a new AC Project Support Instrument, and was pleased that Canada, when taking over the chairmanship in 2013, put increased emphasis on economic development “for the people” (AC 4 Oct 2011; MID 15 May 2013b).

A complicating factor for economic cooperation is the issue of borders and visas, which became urgent for Russia, especially regarding Kaliningrad, when the Baltic countries and Poland joined the EU Schengen zone. Russia naturally took this up primarily in the CBSS framework, but also in the BEAC it pleaded for visa exemption vis-à-vis the Nordic neighbours. Both Councils recognized the issue was as a problem, and several states like Finland; Norway and Poland on a bilateral basis made liberal interpretations of the Schengen visa rules and improved facilities at border crossings, so that border trade grew quickly. Russia also relaxed its visa rules on a bilateral basis, but retained a complicated system of registering visits and special border regimes.

Being a leading energy producer in the world, Russia deemed energy cooperation its most important economic issue, which it actively pursued in both Councils and their working groups (as well as the AC). In the CBSS Russia wanted to be the leading supplier to the other states (except Norway); it pleaded for a common electricity market around the Baltic and praised the Nord Stream Gas pipeline linking Russia directly with Germany. However, the CBSS was divided on energy strategy as the Baltic States and Poland were striving to reduce their dependence on Russia and to link up with the EU network, and among the members only Germany joined the Nord Stream project.

In the BEAC (as in the AC) Russia instead pushed for cooperation in developing the rich hydrocarbon resources on the Russian continental shelf, especially in relation to the Shtokman and Yamal gas fields. The Arctic Council became the main forum for discussing the limits of the continental shelf including resources. In both Councils Russia had an interested partner in Norway. However, neither the BEAC nor the AC was prepared to get involved in production issues. As for economic zones, Russia and Norway reached a bilateral agreement on their maritime border and joint exploitation. A problem for Russia in all the Councils was that the other members to varying extents were more interested in energy conservation, efficiency, renewable energy, i.e. the environmental risks, than in energy output for its own sake.

Environmental protection

In all the Councils Russia had to accept the priority given by the majority of members to environmental protection. In the CBSS Russian officials claimed that Russia adhered to the highest standards in protecting the Sea from pollution, for example in the Nord Stream project. In the AC Russia presented a national plan to protect the Arctic Ocean from land-based pollution, which was hailed by the Council. Unlike the USA, Russia has ratified the Kyoto Protocol and adopted a climate security doctrine. It took part in all the Councils' environmental working groups and welcomed all assistance on its soil through each funding mechanism, be it purification plants in the Baltic Sea region or projects for handling radioactive waste and eliminating "hot spots" in the Barents region. However, concerning climate policy Russia has been rather inconsistent and passive (Istomin 2010: 1 et seq.).

At the same time, Russian officials wanted to avoid "extreme positions" concerning the environment and stressed the importance of development for the socio-economic needs of its poor peoples in the North. In the Baltic region they viewed HELCOM, which administered a UN convention, as the main mechanism for ecological cooperation rather than the CBSS. In the interest of its intense tanker traffic across the Baltic Russia resisted the idea of declaring the Baltic Sea a particularly sensitive sea area, and did not ratify the Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment concerning industrial projects. In the Barents and Arctic Councils Russia has pushed for the extensive development of the Northern Sea Route to the Pacific in line with its Arctic policy declarations. Putin has criticized Russian environmental groups for serving western economic interests, while President Medvedev has fretted about the "carbon protectionism" of the developed countries, which could limit Russian opportunities in oil and gas exports. However, when the majority of the Councils' members persisted in channeling resources to environmental schemes as a high priority, Russia appreciated the fact that most of the related projects were funded on its own soil.

Ever since the 1990s the CBSS and BEAC have been much concerned about the environmental effects and risks of Russian nuclear power plants and the decommissioning of nuclear-powered vessels and submarines in the respective regions. However, the bulk of Western assistance in the field comes from the EU and individual states (Pursiainen 2005, 278-298). The CBSS still maintains a working group on nuclear and radiation safety, while in the BEAC these issues are handled mainly by the environmental working groups. Russia has willingly accepted Western assistance in boosting the safety of its nuclear plants at Sosnovyi Bor near St. Petersburg and Poliarnye Zori on the Kola peninsula, but – in contrast to its partners – sees improved safety as an argument for prolonging their lifetime and expanding the production. Assistance concerning military pollution in the Barents Sea region is circumscribed by growing Russian security concerns.

Democracy and indigenous peoples

The CBSS is the only Council to have put democracy and human rights on its agenda, and on Russian initiative also created the post of a commissioner to safeguard the rights of national minorities. However, the issue became a bone of contention in the CBSS when Russia accused Estonia and Latvia of discrimination against their Russian-spoken populations, while rejecting Western criticism of the state of democracy and human rights in its homeland. As we have seen, the post and the corresponding working group were abolished, but the CBSS still makes a point of upholding democratic principles. When Russia in 2012 passed new

laws preventing NGOs from receiving financial support from the West, this evoked protests from the other members.

Where the CBSS has openly addressed themes of democratic governance, the BEAC and the Arctic Council have indigenous peoples on their agendas. In the BEAC these have a special working group with an advisory role both in the ministerial council and the Regional Council, including three ethnic groups from Russia; while in the AC six indigenous peoples, four of them partly living in Russia, are permanent participants (but without voting rights) alongside the member states. In the BEAC Russia has promised special support for the indigenous peoples and called for two more ethnic groups (Nenets and Komi) to be represented in the working group. In the AC framework Russia has worked energetically to get economic support for its many Arctic peoples. Other member states have been willing to provide resources for the purpose; but unlike the partner countries, Russia's many small indigenous peoples remain tightly controlled by the central authorities and are often hard pressed by the big energy and mining companies. In 2012 the main indigenous organization from Russia in the AC, RAIPON, was suspended for political reasons.

Culture, education, science

In the fields of culture and education, both the CBSS and the BEAC have long promoted cooperation by setting up working groups, encouraging youth exchanges and aiming to form "common identities" in their regions. Russia has supported these aims. In the CBSS it joined the move to form EuroFaculties designed to upgrade university education to EU standards, first in Kaliningrad, then in Pskov. In the BEAC, Russia in 2007 made education one of its priorities with a special focus on the indigenous peoples, and Petrozavodsk University became the leader of a new joint working group for education and science. Again the lion's share of the projects in this field was financed by the Nordic states and EU funds.

Finally, concerning social issues and health, the CBSS when it was reformed in 2008 transferred most such issues to the EU Northern Dimension. Nevertheless, civil security and the human dimension remains one of the CBSS's five priorities, including issues such as human trafficking and protecting children from sexual exploitation. The 2012 CBSS summit paid attention to demographic problems and retired people, and there is collaboration with organizations dealing with migration, youth issues and the labour market. The BEAC has been more concerned than the other Councils with health issues, in particular launching projects to fight the rapid spread of infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS and TB in northern Russia, while the AC focuses on research regarding the spread of pesticides, dioxin release and mercury, which ultimately affect people's health and living conditions in the whole Arctic. Even if Russia did not contribute much to the CBSS work concerning trafficking, it appreciated it - as well as the BEAC projects on infectious diseases and AC research - since most of these activities were financed by the partners, the EU and other organisations. Concerning the protection of children at risk in the CBSS framework, Russia in recent years has campaigned for restricting the information flow aimed at children in line with its own new legislation, whereas the Western partners are wary of encroaching on democratic rights.

5. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

On the whole, Russia has participated actively as an equal partner in the Councils' various fields of cooperation, prioritizing economic cooperation, but also falling in with majority views and generally paying its dues. It has probably benefitted more than the other Council members from a great number of aid projects and research reports. This is quite natural since Russia is a vast country and its problems in most cases are more severe than its neighbours'. The other states are concerned about this, partly because environmental and social problems tend to spread and may affect also them and ultimately the whole world. This is especially evident in the BEAC, where the small Nordic countries have done a lot to support the neighbouring Russian regions. Further, the financial burden of regional projects is not very heavy and is often transferred (through the available funding mechanisms) to the EU, international organizations and financial institutions.

The Nordic states, in particular, are also keen on maintaining good relations with Russia through the CBSS and the BEAC as means to integrate Russia into Europe and improve its ties with the European Union, which most of them belong to. The Arctic Council meanwhile serves among other things to integrate Russia in the practical investigation and solution of global environmental problems, without infringing on its geopolitical great power ambitions. The primary aim of the Councils, to promote dialogue and cooperation on many levels, benefits all the members.

The Russian interest in the three Councils is thus to a great extent motivated by economic, social and environmental gains, even if the resources are limited and the needs endless. But Russia also has tangible political motives as shown above. Its engagement in these regional forums is intermingled with its bilateral relations with the member states and with wider organisations such as the EU and the UN, which have greater political weight and economic resources. Multilateral activity in the CBSS and BEAC, and also the AC, provides low-key and non-threatening channels for Russia's bilateral contacts on many levels with important neighbouring states like Germany and Norway, and in the AC also with the USA. At the same time, good bilateral relations underpin multilateral cooperation. Even if Russia may prefer bilateral relations, where it has more influence due to its size, there is no real contradiction between the two.

Turning to the wider context, cooperation in the three Councils has undoubtedly helped to preserve stability and build confidence in this quiet part of the world during the rapid changes and recurring tensions of the post-Cold War period. It is noteworthy that the rhythm of the Councils' work was never interrupted during the periods of most difficult

Russia-West relations, for instance when Russia suspended cooperation with NATO in 1994, or when the major NATO/EU enlargement decisions were taken. This has, among other things, made it easier for Russia to concentrate on more threatening and urgent problems along its periphery, for instance in the Caucasus and Central Asia. (Russia accepts that outside countries in Europe and Asia show an interest in the Baltic and High Northern Councils, but only as observers.)

The idea was raised in the Introduction to this report that the very limitations of the Councils in question in terms of staff, finance and ambitions may actually be their strength. Not only do they cover fields that other institutions do not reach - in the spirit of subsidiarity - but their “soft” security approach makes them comfortable for Russia and preserves it from any feeling of confrontation or encirclement in their meetings (Bailes 2011). The Councils can thus be seen as complementary to NATO, the EU, the OSCE and the Council of Europe, where issues like military security, economic development, democracy and human rights are more directly addressed, but which face the consequences in terms of more strained and sometimes interrupted cooperation with Moscow.

By the same token, there are also clear limits to what cooperation in the Councils can achieve. Moscow’s policy in these groupings is shaped not only by their intrinsic value and its own, objective developmental and “soft” security needs. As illustrated above, Russia is a more authoritarian society than its Baltic and High Northern neighbours, reflecting its own distinct traditions. Its conception of the rule of law, democracy and human rights, and its emphasis on security and political control, have at times hampered its cooperation in these regional Councils just as in other international organisations. Moscow during Putin’s third presidency seems again to be placing more emphasis on “hard” security, restrictions on political opposition, and increased control of civil society groups, backed by talk of Western interference and arrogance. In combination with forceful external actions like those of 2014 in Ukraine, this cannot fail to have repercussions for cooperation with the country’s closest democratic neighbours, as well as with the West in general. The role of Russia (and the other states) in the two North European Councils is thus not set in stone, and remains a worthy research topic for the future.

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For ease of handling these are divided into three sections: institutional documents, Russian official sources and statements, and literature references and media reports

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