

Small States Regional Cooperation

ESTONIA

Leno Saarniit

Ragnar Nurkse Department of Innovation and Governance

Tallinn University of Technology

Small States

Regional Cooperation - Introduction

- **Main areas of cooperation:**

- All main policy areas are covered with regional cooperation
- Main directions: EU, Nordic countries, Baltic countries

- **Examples:**

- Policy area not specified, priorities change over time: Council of the Baltic Sea States, Baltic Assembly, Nordic-Baltic cooperation (NB8), Three Seas Initiative (3SI), Nordic Dimension
- Defence policy: NATO
- Airspace: NEFAB (North-European Functional Airspace Block, part of Single European Sky initiative)
- Financial stability: Nordic-Baltic Stability Group, Nordic-Baltic Macprudential Forum
- Energy: cooperation on several levels (EU, Central- and Eastern European and Baltic countries)
- Education: Nordplus + general cooperation agreements
- Judicial cooperation: based on EU legislation and multiple bi-lateral agreements
- Environment: based on EU legislation, multilateral (international) agreements, bi-lateral agreements with all neighbouring countries
- Etc.

Introduction

- **History:**

- Regional cooperation with the other Baltic States started in the late 1980s (See: Example 1 Baltic Assembly)
- After regaining independence in 1991, EU and NATO accession were seen as the main goals > possibility for cooperation with EU, Nordic, Baltic and Central- and Eastern European countries
- Over the past 30 years, regional cooperation has strengthened and broadened to include all policy areas and multiple partners
- Clear prioritisation of EU, Nordic and Baltic cooperation

- **Reasons for regional cooperation:**

- Guarantee for security and economic development (EU, NATO)
- Growing economic interdependencies with the EU countries as well as regionally (e.g. main trade partners)
- Joint representation of common interests (Baltic states, Central- and Eastern European countries)
- Financial assistance (from EU, Nordic countries etc.)
- Exchange of information and expertise (e.g. OECD, policy specific organisations)
- Coordinated policy development (EU, NATO, Baltic countries)
- Estonia as a donor (e.g. cooperation with Georgia, Ukraine)

Example 1: Baltic Assembly - History

- See baltasamb.org for more information
- Cooperation with Latvia and Lithuania dates back to 1920-30s
- Systematic cooperation started in 1988-1991:
 - Reform movements, people's movements in Baltic countries with the aim to influence processes in Soviet Union
 - Representing Baltic interests, harmonizing policy positions
 - Establishing contacts with international organisations and Western European countries
 - Pragmatic approach combining limited financial and human resources
 - Main policy areas: sovereignty, demilitarisation, economy, foreign policy and trade



Example 1: Baltic Assembly - History

- 1992-1995 – main goals:
 - Strengthening independence; resolving political, social, environmental and economic problems
 - Promoting return to the international arena: EU and NATO accession as shared goals; cooperation agreement with the Nordic Council in 1992 and Benelux parliament in 1994
 - Improving security and defence of the Baltic states: withdrawal of Soviet / Russian troops
 - Shaping cooperation model:
 - 1990 Declaration of Unity and Cooperation
 - Institutional structures were established after regaining independence in 1991
 - 1994 Agreement on Baltic Parliamentary and Governmental Cooperation (+ supplement 2003)

Example 1: Baltic Assembly - History

- 1995-2004 European and transatlantic integration as priorities:
 - Regular dialogue between the states established + joint lobbying for Baltic interests in the international arena
 - Competition for the EU and NATO membership >
 - Doubts about Baltic solidarity and unity – cooperation viewed as a possible hindrance to accession
 - Competition as a driving force for successful integration
 - Cooperation and coordination in most policy areas (e.g. defence; borders and trade; education, culture and science; environment; organised crime and drug-trafficking etc.)
 - Formation of Relations with the Russian Federation: border treaties, clear distancing from Russia (alignment with EU/NATO)

Example 1: Baltic Assembly - History

- 2005-2007 institutional reforms:
 - Reorganising cooperation after the EU and NATO accession > what should be the main goals, formats, agenda? > Reforms
 - Main policy areas: education, research and culture, relations with international policy actors, environmental protection, development of information technologies, common labour market and migration etc.
 - Closer cooperation with the Nordic Council > socio-economic cooperation in the Baltic sea region
- Since 2008 „Renaissance“:
 - Global financial and economic crisis as the driving force
 - Main policy areas: energy, innovation, competitiveness, human safety, climate change, labour migration, demography, science and research > Clear mid- and long-term goals
 - Implementation of EU neighbourhood policies > cooperation with GUAM countries (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova)

Example 1: Baltic Assembly - Institutions

- Cooperation on the level of Governments, Parliaments and Presidents
 - Annual presidency (2019 Latvia, 2020 Estonia, 2021 Lithuania)
- Baltic Assembly – parliamentary cooperation:
 - 12-16 members from each country
 - Annual session (bi-annual until 2003), decision-making power, decisions adopted only if all delegations agree
 - Between sessions work coordinated by the Presidium; meetings at least 6 times per year
 - 6 standing committees
- Baltic Council of Ministers – governmental cooperation

Example 1: Baltic Assembly - Institutions

- Baltic Council of Ministers – governmental cooperation
 - Prime-ministers council: guidance for the intergovernmental co-operation of the Baltic states; annual meetings (+ usually one informal meeting)
 - 5 committees of senior officials (energy, transport, defence, environment, and internal issues), need-based meetings
 - Possibility to establish task-forces
 - Decision-making based on consensus between all three states; decisions are binding
- Presidents: annual meetings

Example 1: Baltic Assembly - Policies

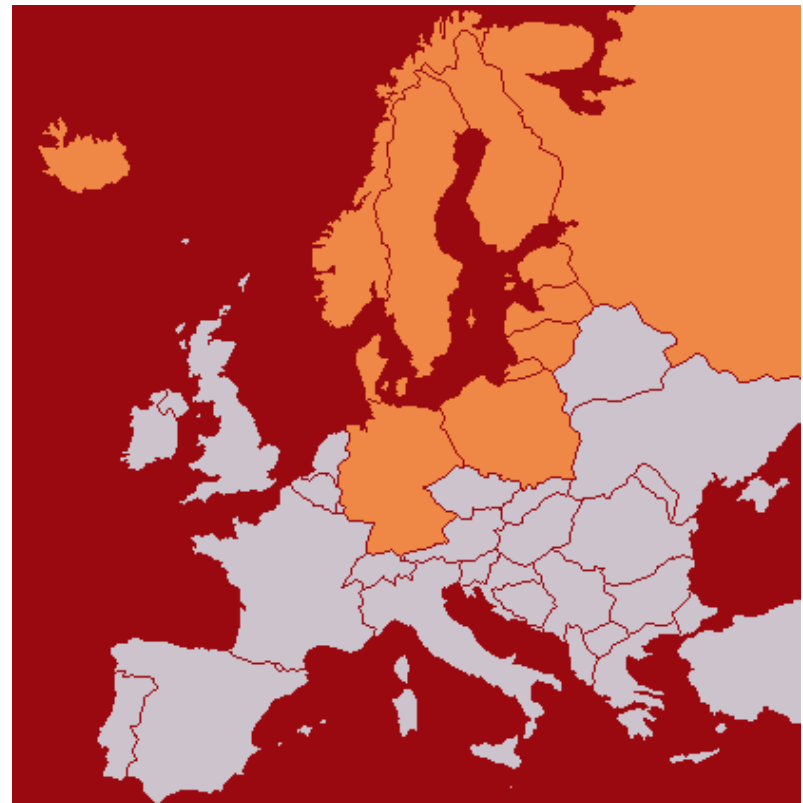
- Rail Baltica
 - 2005-2006 European Commission analysis on the need for better railway connections
 - 2006 agreement between Finland, Baltic states and Poland, joint memorandum 2010
 - On Baltic Assembly agenda since 2010; main issues:
 - 2010-2015: planning, design, environmental impact assessment, funding
 - 2015: adoption and implementation of relevant legislation, raising public awareness on the positive impact of the Project; cooperation with Finland and Poland; EU co-funding and inclusion in EU budget negotiations

Example 1: Baltic Assembly

- Conclusion:
 - Stable institutions, consistent cooperation, mainly consultative nature
 - Has provided a forum for exchanging viewpoints and expressing common positions
 - Offers a way for coordinating relevant policy areas and representing common national interests on the international level
 - Priorities and goals have changed considerably over time

Example 2: Council of Baltic Sea States - History

- Established in 1992 to strengthen and intensify political dialogue and intergovernmental co-operation among the Baltic Sea states
 - Members: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia, Sweden, and representative of the European Union
 - 11 countries with observer status + 17 strategic partners
 - Motive: Idea from Hans-Dietrich Genscher and Uffe Ellemann-Jensen - a response to the geopolitical changes that took place in the Baltic Sea region with the end of the Cold War



Example 2: Council of Baltic Sea States - History

- Constant broadening of cooperation partners and policy areas, as well as institutional reforms e.g.:
 - 1993 Barents Euro-Arctic Council, 1996 Arctic council, 1999 Northern Dimension (renewed 2006), 2009 EU strategy for Baltic Sea region, 2011 International Organisation for Migration etc.
 - 1996 Agenda 21 initiative, 2001 expert groups on nuclear and radiation safety and children at risk, 2006 task force on human trafficking, 2009 expert group on maritime policy, etc.
 - 1998 Secretariat established in Stockholm, 2008 project-based organisation, 2014 focus on 3 priorities, etc.
- Overlap with the EU membership has increased: 1992 only two members part of the EU (Germany, Denmark), currently only 3 members are not part of the EU (Iceland, Norway, Russia)

Example 2: Council of Baltic Sea States - Institutions

- Institutions:

- Council of Foreign Ministers (11 member states + plus the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs & Security Policy); the highest decision-making body of the CBSS,
 - Meets once every two years
 - Chairmanship of the council rotates annually
- Committee of Senior Officials: representatives from the Foreign Ministries of the CBSS member states; day-to-day decision-making
- 5 expert groups (Sustainable Development Goals, children's rights, human trafficking, nuclear & radiation safety and sustainable maritime economy) + networks (on cultural heritage, civil protection and border control)
- CBSS Secretariat: implementation of decisions; about 30 employees in Stockholm, led by the Director General; coordinates with the annual Presidency and the Committee.

Example 2: Council of Baltic Sea States - Policies

- Current policy priorities (renewed in 2014):
 - Regional identity: establishing a common identity through engagement, participation and multi-level governance
 - Policy areas and activities: informal education programmes, Baltic Sea Youth Dialogue, summer university, cultural cooperation
 - Sustainable and prosperous region: to tap the economic, technological, ecological and social innovation potential of the region in order to ensure its prosperity, environmental protection and social cohesion
 - Policy areas and activities: sustainable development, sustainable maritime economy, labour cooperation, science cooperation
 - Safe and secure region: protection from violence, accidents and emergencies, as well as harm caused by criminal exploitation and human trafficking.
 - Policy areas and activities : border control, civil protection, children at risk, human trafficking, organised crime

Example 2: Council of Baltic Sea States- Policies

- Children at risk:
 - Expert group consisting of national representatives (appointed by the ministries)
 - Activities: national developments, addressing gaps in services, expertise, and capacity; based on the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child as well as other International conventions and standards
 - Priorities:
 - Prevention, early intervention, parenting and family support
 - Child-friendly justice
 - The wellbeing and best interests of children in alternative care
 - Protecting children from sexual abuse and sexual exploitation
 - Preventing trafficking and exploitation of children
 - The best interests of children in migration

Conclusion

- Regional cooperation has been and will continue to be highly regarded
 - Guarantee for economic development as well as security > EU and NATO still remain priorities, dependence from international developments acutely recognised
 - Cooperation specific to different policy areas will continue to increase
 - Financial benefits will be less important
 - Complex societal issues will increase the demand for cross-border cooperation (e.g. migration, climate change, organised crime, etc.)
- Estonia's position has changed considerably:
 - 1990s: regaining independence – need for political support, financial aid as well as expertise in different policy areas
 - Currently: equal partner in networks, becoming a donor and provider of expertise (e.g. GUAM countries, in policy areas such as e-governance etc.)