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# Consolidation or Disintegration?

*Security policy cooperation  
in the Baltic Sea sub-region*

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MAREK A. CICHOCKI, OLAF OSICA

Translated from Polish by Michał Nawrot

NUMER SPECJALNY 2009

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# Consolidation or Disintegration?

## *Security policy cooperation in the Baltic Sea sub-region*

### ABSTRACT

**T**HE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION PROCESS AND SECURITY POLICY building on the continent are subject to increasing fragmentation. This is a consequence of changes occurring on the international arena on the one hand and of the enlargement of western structures on the other. Geopolitically, both the EU and NATO are above all forums where national security and foreign policies co-exist; they are not a vehicle for building political unity in the West. This fragmentation of policies and structures therefore may, in the long run, set in motion processes leading to European disintegration. However, if such disintegration takes shape of regionalization – meaning closer regional cooperation within the framework of existing institutions – this could bring about favorable results.

In our analysis, we treat the Baltic Sea region as a sub-region of the EU. Its political potential should be exploited – in a positive sense – by Poland. Accomplishing this would require Poland's active participation promoting the sub-region's development, for example by means of involvement with the EU's strategy for the Baltic Sea.

It would appear that close multilateral political dialogue between the countries of the region is critical to the sub-region's

continuous development. Such dialogue would need to respect each country's individual security concerns and would have to involve Russia, the region's most important power, with the understanding that no one country can consider the sub-region its sphere of dominance or merely use it as a transportation corridor.

The fundamental goal of this cooperation must be to promote mutual security and tighten the sub-regional integration. This would mean a greater than heretofore involvement in environmental protection as well as in building a balanced transportation infrastructure, which would serve as one of the main factors of permanent regional rapprochement.

The security and stability of the southeastern flank of the sub-region – the Baltic states – is a separate issue which is all the more relevant in the context of the recent conflict in the Caucasus in August 2008 and the current economic crisis. This matter should be viewed as part of the sub-region's interests and as such be subject to coordinated action – more so than in the past – involving all countries of the region.

Today, the Baltic sub-region is characterized by opposing geopolitical dynamics between north and south, which could bring about its disintegration. The north will play an increasingly important role as an area of new polarity where the influences and interests of the enlarged West will clash against those of Russia. The south risks being marginalized, subjected to “external colonization”.

The Baltic sub-region security consolidation is becoming more and more of a necessity. Weakening the tendency of individual countries to pursue their own narrowly defined interests and tightening political cooperation will result in greater security in the region as a whole. The “soft underbelly” in the southeast of the sub-region will always be a burden for the countries of the “tough” north. It will engage the north's resources and attention, which today are focused on cooperation projects in the far north.

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Natolin, March 2009

## I. INTRODUCTION

### *1. New context of European security*

The 1990s were a period of great change on the stage of European security. After a slow and difficult enlargement process of the Western institutions and policies lasting two decades, Europe became more stable and secure, interconnected by a dense network of ties and intense cooperation. Behind the scenes, however, other changes, going against the dominant trends and weakening the success of NATO and EU enlargement, were taking place. On the one hand, the nature of transatlantic relations became transformed and this was demonstrated by the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent military intervention in Iraq. On the other, there was the diminishing integration momentum in Europe accompanied by a simultaneous increase in the role of national interests of member states. The identity crisis experienced by NATO and the marginalization of the European Commission are a consequence of these phenomena.

The intensified political rivalry between the western countries is accompanied by competition for resources without which the economies of today's industrial powers cannot operate. The desire for access to oil, natural gas and other resources was the driving force behind the increase in importance of the resource rich countries. Thanks to a steady flow of petrodollars Russia was able to rise from economic collapse and return to the forefront of world politics. The long range goal of Russia's strategy is the reversal or at the very least obstruction of the geopolitical processes taking place in the security arena in Europe after 1989. Symbolically, this strategy was exemplified by the war with Georgia in August 2008. It remains to be seen whether the present economic crisis makes Russia abandon or accelerate its activities aimed at weakening European security.

The increased competition between nations, coupled with the diminishing role of international organizations toward the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, encourage a renaissance of strategic thinking. It is also a time when western dominance in world politics is in its twilight,

giving way to a multi-polar era. Even assuming Europe and America are unanimous and cooperative in resolving issues relating to global security, they will no longer be able to unilaterally solve problems to favor their own interests.

Europe remains an area of stability free of existential conflicts, where military strength is not a determinant of any nation's prominence. The end of ideological monopoly however, and the increasing rivalry between countries breed greater uncertainty and compel all to modify many assumptions contrived after the Cold War. In hindsight, these assumptions seem to rely on a vision of security that is all but too optimistic. Thus, European countries are faced with the need to rethink the foundations of their security and defenses so as to better adapt them to the new geopolitical context.

## *2. Security dynamics in the Baltic Sea basin*

One of the regions in Europe where the formation of a new security context together with all its implications can be observed is the Baltic Sea sub-region. The dual enlargements of NATO and the EU are typically viewed as the end of regional integration and stabilization processes begun in the early 1990s. In reality, though, these enlargements were merely one stage of a much broader phenomenon. Despite the success of both of these projects, the region's geo-strategic position at the easternmost political boundaries of Europe means that security remains one of the key issues, requiring further consolidation.

What we are facing in the Baltic Sea sub-region then is a slowly changing security paradigm. This change process is demonstrated by the quest for a new definition of regional cooperation, such as to enable the countries of the sub-region to effectively pursue and protect their common interests consistent with the new geo-political context. For confronting extensive political change on the international and European level is a traditional catalyst of new regional initiatives in northern Europe.<sup>1</sup>

The list of countries comprising the Baltic Sea sub-region includes Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland,



Germany, Russia and – in a broader sense – Iceland. All of these nations benefited politically, strategically and economically from the end of the Cold War. Now, as a result of a reevaluation of NATO and EU policies and increasing Russian assertiveness the sub-region is becoming a scene of interesting strategic change, with underlying rivalries for access to resources, transmission and transportation infrastructure and influence on EU and NATO policy.

**The authors believe that active participation in the process of building mutual ties in the sub-region is in the best interest of Poland, particularly where its security is concerned. However, apart from political initiatives, this requires a fresh evaluation of the situation in the sub-region from the perspective of Polish interests.** That said, the purpose of this report is to provide an answer to the question exploring the different manners in which the countries of the Baltic Sea sub-region react to the new European security context. In particular, we are interested in determining whether the various national approaches converge on a sub-regional level and whether they translate into a readiness to tighten the regional cooperation on broadly defined issues of security within the EU and NATO frameworks.

### *3. Theoretical perspective*

The manner in which one depicts reality is a consequence of his perception. Therefore, in social studies – which contemplate international relations – we are confronted with multiple competing theories and concepts, each of which aspires to become the “universal lens“ for researchers. In contrast to a scientist however, an analyst must frequently resort to generalizations and thus adopt a specific theoretical premise not based on its scientific value per se but rather its relevance to the subject of analysis at hand.

Given a choice of several major complementary research perspectives, including (1) the institutional approach perspective which concentrates on the analysis of national and international institutions’ influence on how the national interest is defined; (2) the sociological (constructivist) perspective which analyzes the language of discourse and national identity; and,

(3) the neorealist perspective which accentuates each nation's autonomy in maximizing its benefits and minimizing its limitations, we chose this last perspective. This is not to say that we are ignoring the significance of the institutional context – both national and international – or that we are disregarding the issue of national identity and its influence on any given nation's determination in upholding its strategic decisions. However, the emphasis here is on the analysis of national policies of each country in the sub-region from the perspective of the traditional roles of the state, which include the defense of its political and economic interests, the protection of political and territorial sovereignty, and engaging in endeavors aiming at increasing its influence on the policy of the other nations. This premise is dictated by the interpretation of the security situation in Europe as described in the introduction. After a period of seeking ways to overcome the Cold War dichotomy with regional initiatives designed to create a common European identity, the trend to redefine the dividing lines, mark own spheres of influence and keep potential competitors at a distance is becoming significantly more pronounced.

For even if the Baltic sub-region geopolitics is unlike the “tough” Anglo-Saxon variety – which emphasizes military strength necessary to prevail in confrontations – it is nonetheless aimed at preventing domination. As the “geopolitics of the weak” it is conciliatory in nature, uniting an analysis of the balance of powers in the sub-region with attempts to constrain the freedom of the main regional powers (being the USA/NATO, EU/Germany and Russia) by imposing own concepts for the sub-region.<sup>2</sup>

#### *4. Report Structure*

The focus of this report is the issue of security in the Baltic Sea sub-region. The authors' aim is to illustrate the broad context of challenges to the security and cooperation in the sub-region. We define the Baltic Sea sub-region in the first section of the report. The second section explores the security concepts for the sub-region as seen from a historical and theoretical perspective. The third section is devoted to the dynamics of cooperation in the areas of security

and defense in the sub-region and the resulting geopolitical consequences. This cooperation is considered from three different angles: the Nordic cooperation between the Scandinavian countries; the cooperation between the three Baltic states; and the cooperation between the former and the latter. In closing, we formulate our conclusions and recommendations.

## II. THE BALTIC SUB-REGION

### *1. Sub-region definition and characteristics*

In international relations theory the concept of a region relates to larger geographical structures exhibiting a certain degree of uniformity and cohesion. Taken together, these structures constitute the global order. Thus viewed, the European Union can be considered as a separate region in the global system, a *sui generis*, a distinct political structure.<sup>3</sup> The global order is therefore composed of different international regions. Properly defining these various regions is a pre-condition of an effective foreign policy.

From this perspective, the Baltic Sea basin should be treated as a sub-region within the European region. What are the factors, however, which enable one to treat this area as a distinct entity? The Baltic Sea sub-region definition is not merely a reflection of the natural and geographic conditions, which are not on their own sufficient to create sub-regions in the political sense of the word. The importance and role of the Baltic sub-region is determined by the momentous historical processes, such as the end of the Cold War, European integration and globalization. The period after 1989 witnessed a clear “revitalization” of the Baltic sub-region as a result of the eradication of continental divisions imposed by the Cold War. Sweden’s and Finland’s entry into the EU in 1995 provided a further significant revival impulse, enabling the inclusion of the Baltic Sea sub-region in the planning processes of the European Union. Another important factor was the entry of the Baltic states into EU and NATO structures in 2004. We can therefore currently consider the Baltic Sea basin as an internal sub-region of the EU.



Baltic Sea basin (source: <http://maps.grida.no/baltic/>)

In the security policy context the Baltic Sea sub-region becomes significant for several reasons: ecological issues, transmission and transportation infrastructure as well as the economic, military and political presence of Russia.

Three separate areas can be identified within the sub-region: the southern (continental) area constituted by Germany and Poland; the northern (Nordic) area which includes the Scandinavian countries; and the eastern (Baltic) area comprised of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia as well as Russia (Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg Oblasts).<sup>4</sup> The sub-region is therefore made up of a group of countries possessing very strong national identities, which in the realm of foreign and security policies oftentimes prove stronger (and thus mutually exclusive) than the belief in the common threats and interests facing the region as a whole.

This is primarily a heritage of historical processes. The present political configuration of the sub-region is the result of gradual disintegration at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Denmark lost its dominion over Iceland, Sweden renounced its claim to Norway, and Russia lost control of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in 1918 and later relinquished Finland. It is difficult to speak of some form of common sub-regional identity then; instead, there is a common Nordic or Scandinavian identity (both these terms are interchangeable herein), a Baltic identity and some local similarities along the southern shore of the Baltic Sea. The cultural, lingual and religious differences overpower the geographical proximity, the historical ties and the economic cooperation. Mere similarities, such as they are, do not therefore constitute a sufficiently compelling reason for closer political and military cooperation. Neither can they serve as a driver behind decisions to seek membership in international organizations. Depending on one's perspective, the Baltic Sea basin is a sub-region of the EU, to which belongs neither Norway nor Iceland, or of NATO which does not count Sweden and Finland among its members. Either of these interpretations is not without its reservations. Norway's cooperation with the EU is increasingly reminiscent of integration without membership. A similar phenomenon can likewise be observed in the relationships of Sweden and Finland with NATO, especially since both of these countries' military compatibility with the Alliance is greater than that of many full-fledged members. Denmark, in turn, remains outside of the European security and defense policy and,

like Sweden, declined its participation in the eurozone, while Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are preparing to adopt the single currency.

Climatic change, which is exerting unrelenting pressure on the Far North, infrastructural projects in the Baltic Sea and Russia's increasing assertiveness, coupled with the recent economic crisis seem to favor the emergence of a new political dynamic in the sub-region. Prompted by the events of the second half of 2008 (i.e. the war in Georgia and the economic collapse of Iceland), there arose voices advocating Sweden's and Finland's membership in NATO on the one hand, and Iceland's membership in the EU on the other. Meanwhile, Denmark is mulling over a referendum on abandoning its self-imposed exclusion from the EU foreign and security policies and the question of adopting the single currency by both Denmark and Sweden to cushion the effects of the financial crisis remains open.

The criteria employed to define regions and their composition are therefore always a function of the reasons why regions are drawn up in the first place. A region can be formed based on cultural, economic or geographic criteria (*inside-out*), or on a balance of powers, geopolitical changes or membership in international institutions (*outside-in*).<sup>5</sup> This analysis focuses on the external aspects of sub-region creation as seen from the Polish perspective. The goal here is to present opportunities and limitations to overcoming the existing divisions between the Nordic and the Baltic cooperation, which encourage fragmentation and in effect undermine security in the Baltic sub-region as a whole. The Baltic sub-region is viewed here as a security complex, or "a group of states whose primary security concerns link them together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another".<sup>6</sup>

**For the above reasons, our report omits Russia, Germany and Poland, focusing instead on the Baltic and Scandinavian countries (excluding Iceland). The rationale behind leaving Russia out of the analysis is that one of our premises herein is to define the Baltic sub-region as an area within the EU and NATO. This is naturally not to deny that Russia's influence has been, is and will remain crucial to the security in the sub-**

**region. Excluding Poland and Germany is dictated by our belief that the policies of both of these countries are above all continental in character, meaning that neither nation is a Baltic country in the geopolitical sense. Accordingly, the Baltic sub-region is not a main reference point for either of them as far as their national and security interests are concerned.**

## *2. Regionalization perspectives*

One of the chief objectives of the Euro-Atlantic cooperation is the maximization of cohesion between member nations. This refers to both the political and economic integration within the EU framework as well the convergence of strategic perspectives, capabilities and resources within NATO. At the same time, both the EU and the Alliance are increasingly becoming more dynamic and internally diverse, even if the character of their respective internal differences is in each case obviously unique.

In the EU, this is primarily a result of the overlap of political integration and enlargement processes. The emergence of a strategic perspective in the politics of the enlarged EU as a whole in conjunction with substantial polarization of the individual member states' security perspectives on the American and Russian policies brought the accelerated integration processes to a halt while contributing to an increase in the importance of the intergovernmental component in the shaping of EU policy. Consequently, one can presume that regionalization will play a greater than heretofore role in defining EU policies, especially in their external dimension. The fact that the EU now encompasses the majority of the continent is even more conducive to this phenomenon.

The divergence of strategic perspectives within the North Atlantic Alliance is in turn primarily the result of the lack of a common threat, and thus implicitly the absence of a common vision and policy. This is coupled with inadequate militaries of many NATO members for whom the burden of transforming their armed forces is financially excessive or, worse still, whose domestic strategic culture is in and of itself the obstacle to reform. The regionalization of strategic perspectives within NATO

is therefore an upshot of individual members' diverging perceptions of own security as well as a consequence of the quest for expense reduction evidenced by the many bilateral and multilateral projects based on cooperation between neighbors and within sub-regions.

Accordingly, going forward the phenomenon of regionalism will assume many more different faces than before. This will be an ever-greater challenge to the European Commission and to the progress of further unification, especially if one views regionalization within the EU as a vehicle for fragmentation. A similar process could intensify within NATO, which is increasingly divided between advocates of three opposing strategies revolving around common defense, expeditionary missions and Alliance enlargement. Both within the EU and NATO geography and national interests seem to prevail over the idea of a common strategy.

Recognizing that the regionalization processes within the EU and, to a lesser extent, within NATO are inevitable, this analysis nonetheless views the responsibility to preserve the unity of both organizations as imperative. From that perspective, regionalization should not lead to fragmentation weakening the activities of both organizations or become an impulse to disintegration, but rather be perceived as a supplementary and fundamental instrument enabling its member states to more effectively manage their internal and external initiatives as warranted by the unique characteristics of the various areas within the EU and NATO. **Consequently, regionalization is an effective political consolidation tool whereby each organization converges closer together not through common political or institutional integration projects but thanks to a broader identification of the member states with the EU and NATO initiatives.**

### III. SECURITY CONCEPTS IN THE BALTIC SUB-REGION

#### *1. Historical perspective on the security policy in the sub-region*

The political relations between the Baltic Sea basin nations of Denmark, Norway and Sweden took on the form of the Kalmar Union, ratified at the



end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Sweden withdrew from the Union in 1523, while Norway became increasingly dependent on Denmark. In the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, Norway was ceded to Sweden to compensate it for the loss of Finland to Russia. Meanwhile, the Baltic states (as well as Finland) were the traditional objects of rivalries in the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries between the great imperial powers – Russia, Germany and Sweden.

This situation changed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1905, Norway peacefully separates from Sweden and so becomes independent, while 13 years later Latvia, Estonia, Poland and (in 1919) Finland win their sovereignty in the wake of Wilsonian Idealism and his principle of self-determination. Only at that stage one can realistically begin to view the Baltic Sea basin as a European sub-region defined by the politics of autonomous states, and not merely as an arena of imperial rivalries, territorial bargaining or intra-European colonization.

From the perspective of European security, in the **interwar period** the Baltic region seemed a natural barrier to the growing ambitions of Germany and Russia. However, this was not a perspective shared by the countries in the region itself, whose policy was to stay out of military and political alliances. The idea of closer cooperation with the aim of consolidating a block of Baltic nations to counterbalance the growing rivalry between Germany and Russia did not meet with the approval of Denmark, Norway or Finland. The belief that it was not only necessary but also rightful to stay away from continental Europe's problems so as to avoid being drawn into war was a dominant feature of the Baltic countries' foreign policies. Considering this, it is interesting to note the efforts on the part of Polish diplomacy to create lasting political and military cooperation encompassing the Baltic Sea sub-region along with eastern and central Europe. These initiatives can be divided in two periods: first, between 1919 and 1922, when Polish foreign policy sought to establish the "Baltic-Scandinavian Partnership", ultimately culminating in the act of signing a treaty between Poland, Latvia, Estonia and Finland in Warsaw. In the 1930s, cooperation with Scandinavian and Baltic countries became increasingly important in line with the diplomatic

concept of “Third Europe” promoted by Jozef Beck, the Polish minister of foreign affairs. This concept advanced cooperation between the Baltic Sea region and eastern, central and southern European countries. In the end, neither of these initiatives amounted to anything worthwhile. Poland was restricted in its pursuit of an active policy in the Baltic sub-region by the reluctance of the great European powers, Great Britain and Germany, apparent indifference on the part of Scandinavian countries and its conflict with Lithuania.

During **World War II** the Scandinavian and Baltic region was once again reduced to an area of intra-European colonization. In 1939 Poland was attacked by both Germany and Russia, with the latter attempting to also recapture Finland later that year and in 1940. Also in 1940 Hitler attacked Norway, while the Baltic states lost their sovereignty as a result of the provisions of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. The war provoked a significant re-evaluation of the ideas on security in the sub-region. The unique experiences of the Scandinavian and Baltic countries under Nazi and Soviet occupations left deep scars on their identities differentiating their approaches to the issues of national security and independence.

After the German aggression on Poland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden proclaimed neutrality. When on November 30, 1939 Soviet Russia attacked Finland, Sweden did not again proclaim neutrality but it did refuse to lend Finland direct support offering instead economic and weapons assistance. A similar scenario repeated itself after the German invasion of Denmark and Norway in April 1940, except this time Sweden proclaimed neutrality while refusing any assistance to Norway, instead interning and disarming Norwegian troops crossing into Sweden. In the end, Sweden was to be one of only two countries in the sub-region able to avert occupation by Nazi Germany, the other being Iceland which remained in a personal union with Denmark and was occupied by the British armed forces.

The **Cold War** brought another breakthrough, both in the way the region was perceived externally and in its self-identification. The Baltic sub-region ceased to exist as an area of political, economic and cultural

cooperation in the wake of the annexation of the Baltic states by the USSR, the division of Germany and the inclusion of Poland in the Soviet sphere of influence. Political and economic communication between the Baltic states and the Scandinavian nations was ruptured and the Baltic region became strategically frozen.

The Scandinavian countries reacted to this new reality with the policy of national adaptation. Denmark and Norway were among the founding members of NATO, although not without some self-imposed limitations to their membership in the Alliance, namely that their territories were off limits to Allied armed forces and maneuvers. Sweden – although in reality acting as a “silent” member of NATO – remained faithful to its policy of neutrality, partly out of concern that joining the Alliance could be construed as a pretext for Russia to occupy Finland. Meanwhile, Finland was able to safeguard its internal political sovereignty at the cost of foregoing a fully independent foreign policy in an effort to avert a Soviet reaction.

The Cold War era also spawned the concept of the “Nordic balance”. Although its very existence and effectiveness are a subject of controversy it is nonetheless assumed that it became an effective tool for the Nordic countries to maintain equal distance between the US and the USSR, thereby upholding the geopolitical status quo in Scandinavia.

**The period after the Cold War** precipitated another profound re-evaluation. First and foremost, the Baltic sub-region regained a critical share of its geopolitical autonomy. The dissolution of Comecon and the Warsaw Pact and the subsequent break-up of the Soviet Union opened the doors to the cooperation between the Nordic and the Baltic states and the inclusion of the region in the Euro-Atlantic zone. The last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a witness to two momentous projects of great geopolitical consequence: the enlargement of the EU and NATO. Both of these projects defined the political and institutional scope for promoting cooperation in the Baltic region, and served as a tool for European integration.

At the same time, the end of the Cold War induced a re-evaluation of the national policies in the sub-region. As a result of the unification of

Germany, Denmark moved westward, gaining a very secure geo-strategic position in the process. On the other hand, the demise of bipolarity meant that Norway and Iceland became marginalized; their domain over the Far North territories and the strategic sea corridor providing America access to the Soviet Union while guarding the USA against the Soviet submarine penetration ceased to matter. Sweden and Finland turned southward toward the EU, which made them well-positioned to cooperate with both the Baltic states and Russia and thereby affirmed their belief that remaining outside of military alliances is the right thing to do. Meanwhile, the Baltic states became wholly engaged in the process of simultaneous systemic transformation, reconstruction of their statehood and the entry into the Euro-Atlantic structures. Especially the last two projects automatically put Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia on a collision course with Russia.

## *2. Sub-region security concepts*

There are three basic concepts that shape the security of the sub-region: collective security, the Nordic balance and the defense alliance. All three concepts overlap, reflecting profound differences in the strategic cultures of the sub-region and creating an interesting political dynamic in what is one of the most stable and secure areas in the world. Although all countries in the sub-region share the common goal of political stability, they have different views on how to achieve that goal.

**The concept of “collective security”** is premised on a bottom-up process of building ties among countries, the establishment of a dense network of cooperation and subsequent integration so that resorting to force in solving mutual disputes is ultimately renounced.<sup>7</sup> It is commonly accepted that the Nordic region is a prime example of such a community, which can be described as an informal (i.e. void of legal and institutional framework) collective security system. The contemporary definition of collective security is therefore based on the principle of harmony between nations, whose political goal is the minimization and subsequent elimination of the threat of the use of force in international relations. As such, this modern approach

de-emphasizes the existence of permanent, insurmountable strategic rivalry between countries and attests that the dangers to security stem from diverse national identities, the modification of which requires new means of building trust, control and cooperation. The international arena is a sphere of activity of institutions and societies, and not of unitary government actors. Seen from this perspective, Russia is not treated as a strategic rival but as a profoundly diverse entity whose parts can be engaged in European cooperation through the establishment of contacts between neighbors on both sides of the border, regional projects, people-to-people and cultural exchange and the development of mutual economic inter-dependencies.

The central theme behind **the concept of the “Nordic balance”** is the “mutuality of security policies” of the Nordic nations and their relations with the great powers. This concept is based on the unanimity of beliefs among the region’s countries as far as maintaining their distance from the great powers is concerned.<sup>8</sup> The concurrence of opinions is not a result of a common plan or close cooperation among the countries (Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland never set up a defense alliance), but it does have an implied character meaning each nation conducts its policies so as not to damage the common interest, being the maintenance of strategic equilibrium in the region. Although there is no mention of an alliance, or even a concerted effort to coordinate security policies, the result of the “Nordic balance” is a sort of a doctrine of containment. The Nordic balance is therefore akin to the traditional view of international relations as an area of politics of nations which are rational players attempting to broaden or defend their sovereignty.

**The concept of the “defense alliance”** revolves around an idea of a common threat in the face of which a group of countries builds an alliance so as to deter that threat or provide mutual support in the event of a crisis. The existence of an alliance naturally requires a common definition of the threats and a strategic plan stipulating the ways and the means necessary to achieve the goal being the deterrence of potential aggressors. Defense alliances are primarily entered into by big and small countries, where the

former assume the role of political leaders and the latter provide capacity thus lowering alliance operating costs in return for security guarantees.

The various fortunes and experiences of the Nordic and the Baltic states are reflected in the differing views on the security in the region. Although all the countries in the sub-region, with the exception of Sweden, have experienced the loss of sovereignty and have at one point or another been compelled to function within the spheres of influence of other nations, the unique character and duration of time they remained under dependence from superpowers influenced their definition of and perspectives on security in the sub-region in different ways.

Despite pronounced differences between individual Nordic countries, the region does possess a strong political identity constructed around the history of cooperation and the idea of containing the domination of either the USA or the USSR after 1945. As such, the attitudes of the Nordic countries are characterized by a firm belief in sovereignty and whereby every nation in the region enjoys an instrumental role in international politics.

For the Baltic states, the key experience forming a common identity was the loss of statehood and subsequent subjugation to foreign control for a sixty-year period. As a result, the Baltic states have been able to begin shaping their sovereignty only in 1990 and this process has not been concluded yet. The local political elites are aware of the fact that their countries have not yet attained peer status with their European counterparts.

As a consequence of divergent historical experience which shaped unique security concepts in the sub-region, its countries represent differing strategic cultures, best demonstrated by their reactions to the Iraqi crisis. In the opinion of Hans Mouritzen of the Danish Institute of International Studies<sup>9</sup> based in Copenhagen, the countries of the sub-region reacted to the problem of intervention in Iraq in accordance with their traditional political beliefs and previous experience. Based on their reactions and the author's findings, we can identify the following four attitudes to foreign policy and security in the sub-region:

1. Counterbalancing the proximity of one superpower with ties with a distant superpower (transatlantic relations as a counterbalance to the proximity of Russia and France/Germany):  
Denmark, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland
2. Acting in conformity with a previously validated strategy (i.e. the stance of maintaining neutrality or distance):  
Sweden and Finland
3. Maintaining relations with superpowers to enhance own position:  
Norway
4. Fear of a recurrence of past threats:  
Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland

When planning common activities or long-term projects in the Baltic Sea sub-region, one must consider the above differences in the security culture of the different countries therein.

#### IV. SECURITY POLICY COOPERATION DYNAMICS

##### *1. Nordic states*

Despite a rich tradition of political and economic cooperation, their geographic proximity and operating in the common context of security, the cooperation between Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland (as well as Iceland, which is outside of the scope of this analysis) hasn't spawned a common project in the realm of security and defense policy. The Nordic collective security built from the bottom up over a span of several decades – but without common institutions as the foundation – succeeded in a lasting elimination of the risk of military conflict between the countries involved. As such, the strategic dynamic in Scandinavia became frozen, with the universally accepted *status quo* serving as its support. The strength of the Nordic collective security was evidenced by the process whereby Iceland and Norway first gained autonomy and then independence. Today, it is symbolized by the emancipation of Greenland.

The internal stability was not synonymous with lack of external threats. In the 1940s the idea for the establishment of a regional defense alliance was hotly debated. Denmark and Norway were the primary proponents of this project. However, Sweden's indecision and Finland's unwavering commitment to maintaining neutrality, combined with the creation of the North Atlantic Alliance sealed the fate of the regional alliance. In effect, the Nordic countries made their own decisions as far as their national security policies were concerned but were nonetheless ultimately able to collectively form the concept of the "Nordic balance".

In the 1990s, the Nordic security cooperation was pursued on two levels. The most important initiative was to assist the Baltic states in the process of creating their own defense installations, armed forces and achieving compliance with NATO standards. This stage culminated in the entry of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia into NATO. Today, the main purpose of the cooperation with the Baltic states is to assist with the transformation of their armed forces and to enhance their integration with NATO. Because both Denmark and Norway are examples of small countries which were able to adapt their militaries to the new security context in an extremely effective manner, their assistance seems to best suit the needs of the Baltic states. In turn Sweden and Finland, both possessing highly advanced military technologies, are partners in infrastructural security and defense projects involving Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

Such assistance, which in the 1990s was extended to the Baltic states, is now being provided to the Ukraine and the so-called Western Balkans: Albania, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia. To this end, the Nordic Initiative for Regional Defense Cooperation, which also includes Iceland, was appointed.

The second major area of cooperation between the Nordic countries was in a sense imposed on them by the changing security situation in Europe, as exemplified by the war in the former Yugoslavia. The peace operations under the auspices of the UN, then NATO and finally of the EU became a kind of a testing ground for the Nordic military cooperation. In 1993, the



Nordic countries formed a common battalion for the purposes of the UN operation in Macedonia. Then in 1996, a multinational brigade – to which Poland also contributed troops – was called up; this force was to serve as part of IFOR, and later SFOR in Bosnia. The result of this cooperation was the 1997 formation by the defense ministers of Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland of the Nordic Coordinated Arrangement for Military Peace Support (NORDCAPS). In 2000, the NORDCAPS framework was expanded to include a common planning element and in 2001 the decision was made to form a multinational ground force component. In 2002, a “memorandum of understanding” was signed, with the intent to further tighten the cooperation within NORDCAPS. However, the memorandum only concerned Peace Support Operations and did not provide for the formation of permanent command structures (other than the above-mentioned planning element), or of common military units. NORDCAPS is today also responsible for the implementation of projects within the framework of the Nordic Initiative for Regional Defense Cooperation which the Baltic states have been invited to join.

From the political view, NORDCAPS is above all an instrument enhancing the Nordic countries’ profile in international politics. For the armed forces, in turn, it is a testing ground, and also a way to more effectively manage the military capabilities and capacity. From the perspective of the Nordic countries’ security, NORDCAPS has an indirect significance: as a tool used to carry out peace operations, it contributes to overall stabilization and promotes conflict containment, thus minimizing the number of countries affected and the inevitable human migrations.

The project which more directly concerns the security and defense of the Nordic countries is known as the Nordic Supportive Defense Structures (NORDSUP). This arrangement, which was the initiative of the chiefs of staff of Norway, Sweden and Finland, was set up in 2007. A 150-page-long progress report discussing its activities was published in June 2008. In November 2008 Denmark and Iceland joined NORDSUP. The main idea behind this initiative is a partial integration of military structures

and capacities of the Nordic countries, the implementation of common research projects and coordination of the armed forces development so as to simultaneously boost their operational and cost effectiveness. Although NORDSUP is a reflection of a very pragmatic and practical approach to military cooperation, there is no question that the chief strategic motive behind its creation is the changing security dynamic in the Far North region, i.e. Russia's increased presence and natural resource rivalry. NORDSUP can therefore be seen as a root of allied cooperation built from the bottom up, stemming from military cooperation, designed to protect the political and economic interest of the Nordic nations and to consolidate their military capabilities in accordance with the traditional sense of security. The political dimension of NORDSUP remains open.

In February 2009, a report containing proposals to tighten Nordic cooperation on foreign and security policy was released.<sup>10</sup> The report was written by Thorvald Stoltenberg, a former foreign affairs minister of Norway, in participation with officials from Denmark, Iceland, Finland and Sweden, whose ministries of foreign affairs designated two representatives each. It was presented to the extraordinary meeting of Nordic foreign ministers on February 9, 2009 and was warmly received. The report consists of 13 specific proposals aimed at expense reduction and boosting operational effectiveness, in particular concerning the control of Iceland's airspace (by means of permanent presence at the Kefavlik airbase), monitoring and satellite reconnaissance of the Arctic seas, enhancing military and civilian capabilities to participate in peace missions and counteracting cyber attacks. The report also touches upon the issue of cooperation between diplomatic missions and the creation of shared agencies in the countries where the Nordic nations do not have permanent diplomatic representation. This last proposal might be interpreted in the context of the External Action Service of the EU.

A proposal of exceptional interest is the mutual declaration of solidarity, in which the Nordic governments "commit themselves to clarifying how they would respond if a Nordic country were subject to

external attack or undue pressure.”<sup>11</sup> In Stoltenberg’s opinion, the need for such a declaration is a consequence of a proposal advocating the creation of mutually compatible military capabilities by the Nordic nations, so that each individual country would concentrate on the development of certain capabilities while consciously foregoing the development of others. Because such an approach would result in mutual military dependence of the interested parties, it would become necessary to provide guarantees to each individual party ensuring their access to the military capabilities of the other parties. The declaration of solidarity is therefore not synonymous with the creation of an alliance, but rather a pre-condition of the decision to integrate military potentials. “Clarifying in binding terms” the stance countries would take in time of a crisis would then not only provide an answer to the question of how deep and extensive the integration of capabilities should be, but especially whether it is even desirable.

In the area of soft security the most important project of the Nordic countries is the Northern Dimension, an initiative first proposed by Finland in 1999. The Northern Dimension initiative is intended to enhance the quality of life and promote business activity in the region. The issues of hard security are all but outside of the scope of the project. Northern Dimension has always been viewed by both Finland and Sweden as the main instrument of EU influence in the Baltic sub-region, especially as concerns Russia. It is also a platform of cooperation with other countries of the sub-region, i.e. Norway and Iceland. As a trust-building tool in relations with Russia and by engaging it in improving so-called soft security, the Northern Dimension has always had critical political and economic importance for the Baltic states as well. It is also a crucial project from the perspective of Norway’s European policy because it attracts EU attention to the problems of the Far North.

From Finland’s point of view, the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region would provide internal European political support for the Northern Dimension. Both instruments would then constitute an interesting association between internal and external aspects in the Baltic sub-region,

which appeared to be especially promising in the relations with Russia. That was the original intention of the report authored by Alexander Stubb, Finnish Minister for Foreign Affairs, and adopted by the European Parliament in 2006.<sup>12</sup> However, the development of the EU Baltic Sea Strategy did not ultimately follow along the lines Stubb proposed. It will be more of a coordination formula for the already existing EU instruments in the sub-region than a new EU policy toward one of its external regions.

Within Finland itself there is no consensus on the extent of Finnish political involvement in the Baltic sub-region. From the perspective of strictly Finnish interests, instead of becoming increasingly involved in the Baltic sub-region, it might well be more important to concentrate on the Arctic and Far North region, which is of greater consequence to security because of its natural resource reserves and alternative transportation routes.

In the concept of the so-called “new” Northern Dimension prepared by Finland, there is now greater than heretofore emphasis on Russia’s financial participation in the projects pursued; the inclusion of Belarus in the initiative is also contemplated, especially as concerns ecology and health issues. Also under development is a sector-by-sector approach (community, health, ecology, transportation) to the Dimension as an instrument of EU policy in the region. Russia, Norway and Iceland remain the external partners of the Dimension.

The logic and aims of the Northern Dimension are nonetheless different from those behind the Eastern Partnership. As such, there arises the problem of coexistence between these two mechanisms. This problem could in the future breed tensions between countries of the Baltic sub-region, especially in the context of the intensifying reforms of the European Neighborhood Policy’s eastern aspect. For this reason, one must view both projects as complementary and test the possibilities for joint cooperation efforts in certain sectors with countries within the frameworks of both the Northern Dimension and the Eastern Partnership, such as Belarus.

Sweden, which is the link between the Nordic and Baltic perspectives as well as the country with the most mature strategic outlook, traditionally

plays the key role in the Nordic region. Norway and Finland are Sweden's natural partners; all three share the same security ideas but the former two lack the broad security perspective of the latter. This is augmented by a certain mistrust of the government in Stockholm, which has always favored its own interests and security over the interests of the region. Even now, in the context of the military cooperation within NORDSUP there arise opinions that the primary motive behind Swedish involvement is the desire to push sales of its own military equipment to aid its arms industry in the face of the current economic crisis.

Meanwhile, Norway is above all interested in the issues concerning the Far North and in its security policy relies mostly on the USA and Great Britain as its allies who understand the strategic importance of the Far North region. From Oslo's perspective, the Baltic Sea problems present potential competition to its interests, which in turn results in a lack of enthusiasm for a broader involvement in political projects in the south of the sub-region.

Finland is almost entirely absorbed by issues relating to Russia as well as maintaining the predominance of the Northern Dimension in EU Baltic Sea Region policy. The Eastern Partnership project is thus a serious problem for Finland, and a test of its cooperation with Sweden.

For its part, Denmark's involvement with the security policy projects in the Baltic sub-region is today motivated more by the fear of marginalization in the Nordic-Baltic cooperation – especially considering the active participation of both Norway and Sweden – than by any material strategic needs. Thus, Denmark was initially critical of the establishment of NORDSUP without it and Iceland participating. Denmark is also unhappy about the way Norway defines the Far North territory, which it believes marginalizes its own (i.e. Greenland's) role as well as that of Iceland.

These differences overlap with the uncertainty on the part of many observers as to the reasons and motives behind the increased cooperation between Sweden, Norway and Finland. The question which frequently surfaces in conversations is, to what degree is the increased activity merely the result of the personalities of the foreign ministers of those three countries,

and to what degree does it actually reflect internal changes in thinking on the role of the sub-region and the cooperation of its countries in Europe.

## *2. Baltic states*

The notion of the Baltic states is a generally recognized term to describe Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia and is implicative of their proximity. In reality, this proximity has more to do with geography than anything else. Related with the history of the last several decades, the perception of common threat embodied by the USSR/Russia is the strongest, and perhaps the only bond that ties the security policies of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

The national security of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia can be considered on two levels: political-military and economic, social and environmental.<sup>13</sup>

This first level, symbolizing hard security, is paramount and all countries share a similar viewpoint on this matter: they see their security as intrinsically connected with the Atlantic cooperation and the concept of collective defense represented by NATO. For the Baltic states the experience forming their common identity was the loss of statehood and forced integration into the Russian sphere of influence. The resultant sense of a lack of political autonomy in international relations gave rise to a very strong attachment to sovereignty in the traditional sense of the word. Although there are no references to the Russian threat anywhere in any public documents pertaining to the security of the Baltic states, Russia is definitely present in their strategic thinking as a country with a huge potential for instability and an interest to weaken the security and independence of the Baltic trio.

Viewing Russia as a potential threat is a result of not only historical experience but also an upshot of analysis of the Russian policy toward the Baltic states in the last two decades. For the goal of Russian policy was, first and foremost, the prevention of NATO and EU enlargement and then the weakening of its geopolitical effect. Whereas Russia was unable to achieve its first goal, it was successful in a partial accomplishment of the second goal. This is borne out not only by the lack of any significant NATO

military infrastructure in the region, but also by the marginalization of the Baltic states' problems with Russia on the EU forum. Border disputes and the lack of treaties regulating legal border status are among such problems. Lithuania was only able to resolve its border issues in 2002, during a course of a discussion on the topic of Russian citizens' transit from Kaliningrad, which forced the EU to support Lithuanian demands so as to preserve the integrity of the Schengen zone. Latvia and Estonia were not so lucky. Russia withdrew its signature under a border treaty signed with Estonia in 2005 as a result of a decision taken by the Estonian parliament which in the ratification process chose to invoke the continuity of Estonia's statehood thereby, in Russia's eyes, opening the gates to indemnification claims against Moscow. Latvia avoided a similar scenario by giving up its claims to the small Abrene district, which was transferred to Russia based on a request of the Latvian SSR in 1944. Both countries signed a formal border treaty in March 2007.

At the level of the so-called soft threats related to public security as well as the political aspects of economic cooperation the Baltic states do not represent a common approach. On the one hand this has to do with the presence of significant Russophone minorities in Latvia and Estonia, which constitute respectively 35% and 29% of their populations (per the 2004 census).<sup>14</sup> Mistrust of the Estonian and Latvian governments toward these minority groups induced the authorities to take actions which in effect stripped the Russophone community of some of its political rights. Despite a subsequent change of this attitude – under pressure from international organizations – the issue continues to be treated as an integral element of security because of Russia's stance, which is to treat the Russophone minorities as part of its foreign policy game with Latvia and Estonia. As proof that Russia's intentions are less than honorable one can cite the Russian reaction to the riots following the relocation of the "Bronze Soldier" monument from downtown Tallinn in May 2007, the implementation of visa-free travel to Russia for non-citizens of Latvia and Estonia, as well as the activities of the "Night Guard" organization,

established in Estonia in 2006, which was responsible for the riots that ensued in the wake of the “Bronze Soldier” monument relocation. In a survey they prepared in November 2008, activists belonging to this organization included a question concerning the Russophones’ attitudes to the creation of a Russian territorial autonomy within Estonia’s borders. The problem of Russophone population does not carry such importance in Lithuania because of the limited size of the Russophone community there.

There are strong indications that the financial crisis, which hit the Baltic states’ economies particularly hard – especially those of Latvia and Lithuania – may prove to be a breakthrough moment for their policies and identity. First, the crisis brings discredit to their image as economic tigers. Second, it exposes them to potential takeover bids from Russian companies. For Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, the economic cooperation with Russia is on the one hand a source of significant revenues from the transit of goods and raw materials to the West, but on the flip side it entails potentially surrendering control to the Russian private-public entities. Withstanding possible economic offers advanced by Russia – especially those concerning the post-Soviet infrastructure in the Baltic states – will have critical influence on the future of Lithuania, Estonia and, especially, Latvia. On the other hand, it will also be a test of the cooperation with the Nordic countries, which are extensively involved in the financial and construction industries in the Baltic states.

Finally, the financial crisis can intensify the national identity crisis experienced by the citizens of the Baltic states, especially those belonging to the younger generation, who have long been searching for job prospects outside of Latvia or Estonia, a phenomenon that is deeply destabilizing to the population balance in these countries. In the face of the crisis and the recession, the drain of young, talented individuals could become an even greater challenge. The crisis is also affecting the Russophone communities, whose loyalty to the Baltic states stemmed in part from the high – relative to Russia’s – standard of living they enjoyed.



After achieving their strategic aim of NATO and EU membership, the cooperation between the Baltic states, as well as the cooperation in the Baltic sub-region as a whole, is at a turning point. The Alliance and the EU are no longer political aims or points of reference to define own interests, but rather vehicles to attain such interests. The lack of a “great project” serving as a guide and dictating the need for close cooperation determines the degree of the political integrity exhibited by the Baltic states.

As concerns the matters of “hard” security, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia continue to be interested in presenting a common perspective to their NATO allies. Their modest military potential centered above all on expeditionary operations and limited military infrastructure combined with the Baltic states’ geographic proximity to Russia are the determining factors behind the natural tendency to view selves as a “community”. It is also a result of the consistent approach exhibited by the Alliance which – unlike in the case of Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary – viewed the Baltic states as a political whole during the enlargement process.

From the moment they joined the Alliance in 2004, NATO has been conducting the Baltic Air Policing mission, whose aim is to patrol and guard the Baltic states’ airspace. The mission is based out of the Lithuanian installations in Siauliai. In May 2008 a memorandum was signed with the intent to create in Tallinn the Cooperative Cyber Defence Center of Excellence, operating under the aegis of NATO. In turn Riga plays the role of a center of NATO debate, hosting the 2006 NATO summit and organizing cyclical Atlantic conferences.

The support of the Nordic countries, especially Denmark and Norway, which were involved in the process of bringing the Baltic states’ armed forces and their military facilities up to NATO standards, was also fundamental. An institutional effect of this cooperation is the Baltic Defence College located in Tartu in Estonia.

The NATO strategy of „imposed conformity“ brought measurable results, epitomized by common projects such as BALTBAT or BALTBAT 2 (infantry battalion), which is to be on call within the NATO Response

Force throughout 2010. Another project is BALTRON – a naval squadron that includes support and command units, charged with the task of mine detection – or BALTNET, an airspace control network. Although from the military standpoint these are not large projects, they do create a political context for cooperation in the matters of „hard“ security.

Participation in the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) is treated by the Baltic states as a way to enhance military capabilities and interoperability on the one hand, and as an element of policy within the EU framework on the other. The ESDP, however, is not seen as a project that is directly relevant to national security or even as an alternative in case the Atlantic cooperation were to collapse. The inability of the EU to sustain an effective strategic dialogue with Russia (“the policy of the least common denominator”), viewing Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian border disputes merely as bilateral problems of these countries, as well as the conviction that the concepts of “traditional borders and their defense belong in the past and are not worth investing in”<sup>15</sup> explain why, from among all the new members, the primacy of NATO is most evident in the policies of the Baltic states.

The sense of community in the matters of “hard” security and NATO policy contrasts sharply with the attitudes to the matters of “soft” security. Here, the internal and economic policy questions prevail over the strategic aspects. An example of this is the issue of energy security. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia all firmly believe that Russia treats trade in energy as a foreign policy tool. The circumstances whereby the Baltic states are dependent on Russian natural gas and oil – their transmission grids inextricably linked with Russian infrastructure – and the necessity to decommission old power plants should bring about the realization of shared projects. In practice it is not so, the Ignalina-2 project serving as a prime example.

Impelled by the EU, the decision to shutter the Ignalina nuclear power plant in Lithuania by 2010 created an opportunity for a joint Polish-Baltic nuclear power plant construction project. As a result of the actions undertaken by Lithuania, as well as different approaches espoused on the one hand by Poland and Lithuania, both of which preferred building reactors augmented

by an energy bridge and, on the other hand, by Latvia and Estonia, who were above all interested in turning a profit on this venture, the Ignalina-2 project lost its initial significance as a regional political project and became first and foremost a Lithuanian commercial undertaking. Meanwhile, construction delays paved the path for other projects. In April 2008, the Estonian media reported that the Nordic Investment Bank offered Estonia a loan to build its own nuclear power plant. Latvia, in turn, is gearing up to build – along with Gazprom – a natural gas-fired power plant. The rivalry extends to energy bridge construction as well. Estonia is building its own energy link with Finland (Estlink), while Latvia and Lithuania are competing to lay a power cable to Sweden.

There are also differences as far as the views on Russia's relations with the EU are concerned. In one popular analysis Latvia and Estonia have been called by the name of "cold pragmatics" who in their relations with Russia put the development of their economic interests above the political aims of the EU.<sup>16</sup> This is unlike the situation in Lithuania, whose economic cooperation with Russia does not overly influence its foreign policy attitudes. Lithuania thus gained the title of the "cold war warrior" who prioritizes its political rather than economic interests and as such is prepared to block EU cooperation with Russia.

The Baltic states are doing their best to simultaneously keep distance from Russia as regards security matters while maintaining interest – despite their lack of trust – in close economic cooperation, including cooperation on infrastructural projects. The contrast between these contradictory approaches to Russia is a characteristic of the policy of the Baltic states, and especially Latvia. It is an attempt to synthesize the "super-Atlantic" policy approach toward Russia with the pragmatic one, aimed at economic results and inspired by the Nordic "small countries realism".

The analysis of the Baltic states' position on security issues demonstrates that between the two domains of security – being the external domain, dealing with the "hard" aspect of security and the internal domain handling its "soft" counterpart – there is a growing opposition symbolized by the

contrary attitudes toward Russia. Meanwhile, it is the latter, internal, domain that appears to have critical importance to the geopolitical consolidation of the Baltic states and which bears decisive influence on their sovereignty and national security.

In the longer perspective, the Baltic states political dynamic can thus lead to the adoption of a variant of the “Nordic realism” – a stance distinguished by pragmatic cooperation with Russia within defined boundaries and while maintaining distance, the result being enhanced sovereignty for Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. The inability to achieve such form of cooperation could in turn lead to the strengthening of the “east European syndrome”, which would amplify the sensation of threat and mistrust toward Russia.

In the eyes of both NATO and the EU, the Nordic variant is the most desirable policy because it eases the dilemmas faced by the Baltic states without the need for either NATO or the EU to become involved. The “Nordic realism” does however require the Baltic states to possess appropriate instruments to maintain control over the cooperation process with Russia and demands that they be seen by Russia as full-fledged, although comparatively unequal, political partners.

Failure to achieve a variant of the “Nordic realism” would force the Baltic states’ partners, both those in the sub-region as well as those in the broader context of the Atlantic relations, to undertake protective measures. Absent that, the effect of the dual NATO and EU enlargements would be significantly weakened.

Publicly known political scandals in Latvia (i.e. Widawa mayor’s arrest), the Estonia spy scandal, as well as the activities of populist groups in Lithuania or anti-state ones such as “Night Guard” in Estonia demonstrate that the process of coming out of the USSR’s shadow and surmounting the post-Soviet heritage in internal politics still has not been brought to completion. There is also no clarity as to the Russian strategy toward the Baltic states. The observed change of attitude toward Latvia after signing the border treaty, the refusal to ratify the border treaty with Estonia and maintaining tensions in the relations with Lithuania regarding the issue of

oil deliveries via the Druzhba pipeline to the refinery in Mazeikiai suggest that Russia is interested in creating discord between the Baltic states only to exploit it to its own advantage. This does not preclude the desire to normalize relations with the Baltic trio in the future, but even so any such normalization would certainly be on Russia's terms. Significant potential for instability in Russia and the unpredictable nature of its actions can bring about many a change in this regard.

Another matter that requires close examination by the Baltic states' elites is the global character of American policy which compels America to make strategic choices that are not always to the liking of all its allies. A reality check is needed above all as regards the optimistic assumptions – formulated in the wake of “new Atlanticism” from the period of the second NATO enlargement and the war in Iraq – concerning the future of cooperation of the Baltic states with the US under bilateral principles or within the framework of the enhanced Partnership for Northern Europe (e-PINE). Because of the sheer scale of the challenges facing the new American administration and the possibility of a new opening in Euro-American relations, the time of “new Europe” is over.

In the face of EU weakness as regards conducting a strategic dialogue with Russia, the protracting NATO identity crisis will leave its mark on the discussion about Baltic states security. The increasing uncertainty will encourage political divisions and attempts to independently find own place in the sub-region and in relations with Russia. The economic and political rivalry – unavoidable to an extent – can become structural in nature and thereby strengthen the disintegration processes plaguing cooperation between the Baltic states. Lithuania could increasingly turn toward Poland, counting on thus becoming a closer US ally within the framework of the Polish-American cooperation on the missile defense system. Estonia could ultimately bid farewell to the Baltic cooperation relying instead on development of relations with Finland. With no alternative strategic choices other than a sort of “Finlandization” within the EU and NATO, Latvia would find itself in the worst situation.

### *3. Consolidation or disintegration?*

The change of the security context in the Baltic Sea sub-region resulting from Russia's new stance, natural resource rivalry and climatic change on the one hand and the effect of EU and NATO enlargements to include the Baltic states on the other brought about a new political dynamic. Concerned about their own economic and security interests and guarding against their marginalization within the EU and NATO frameworks, the Nordic countries are intensifying mutual cooperation. Because of significant differences in historical experience and interests, and notwithstanding the political rivalry between the Nordic states, this cooperation is above all practical in nature, aimed at pursuing specific projects but without the need to build a common political dimension. Its long-term goal is the preparation for new security challenges in the Far North region.

Meanwhile, in the south of the sub-region there is an apparent impulse "softening" the security on the territories of the Baltic states. Rivalry and the subsequent economic crisis, along with the fact that the problems of the region hardly register on the political agendas of the EU and NATO undermine the achievement of the stabilization and integration processes of the 1990s. Although the Baltic states' security problems are not significant and do not require great resources or effort to address, the geographic vicinity of Russia renders them inconvenient and as such they are pushed off the agenda so as not to risk a clash with Russia. In this manner Russia is enabled to engage in "soft destabilization" of the Baltic states and consequently stands to regain material influence over the southern Baltic coast, which slipped out of its control as a result of the collapse of the USSR and the EU and NATO enlargements.

**The Baltic sub-region is thus characterized by an opposing north-south geopolitical dynamic, which could trigger the process of disintegration. The North will play an increasingly important role as an area of the new bipolarity, where the influences and interests of the enlarged West and Russia will clash. The South—meaning Estonia, Latvia**

**and Lithuania – is meanwhile faced with the threat of marginalization, whereby the logic of “external colonization” and dividing the area into spheres of influence may again prevail.**

The geopolitical position of the Baltic states seems today a function of the processes taking place mainly on the level of infrastructural projects in energy, transportation as well as political and economic cooperation. It therefore becomes more the domain of EU rather than NATO policies. Only the break down of the processes enhancing Baltic states sovereignty could reverse this trend, while raising questions about the credibility of NATO security guarantees.

It is necessary then to weaken the tendency of the North – being the Scandinavian states – and the South – i.e. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – to go down their separate paths so as to tighten the political cooperation ties between them and in effect consolidate the security of the sub-region as a whole. The “soft” underbelly in the south of the sub-region will always be a burden for the countries of the “hard” Nordic north. It will engage their resources and attention which today is directed toward political and defense cooperation projects in the Far North region.

This consolidation requires generating a strong political impulse and the creation of a foundation for a common strategic vision which would engender an increased coordination of infrastructural projects and foreign policies. A strategic dialogue between the countries of the sub-region – set within the EU and NATO frameworks – must be at the source of such a consolidation. Strengthening the sub-regional dimension requires however that the institutional cohesion of NATO and the EU be maintained (particularly through the involvement of the European Commission).

Another instrument of consolidation driving the rise in the sense of security in the Baltic sub-region is the increase of NATO and EU political presence and the military visibility of the Alliance. For the Nordic countries it is a factor that lends support to their regional efforts as well as to building stronger political ties with continental Europe. For the Baltic

states on the other hand it is above all an agent stabilizing their relations with Russia, as well as a way to maintain a common security perspective.

At the urging of their allies, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia made a tremendous effort to create armed forces suitable most especially for expeditionary operations. Today, when the geostrategic situation deteriorated and the disenchantment with the American policy in Iraq enhanced the value of NATO as a treaty institution<sup>17</sup>, the Alliance should review its involvement in the Baltic sub-region. Investments in infrastructure, the continuation of the Air Policing mission, the development of the Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence in Estonia and, in the future, extending accreditation to the center for energy security issues – a Lithuanian initiative – could all be perceived as elements enhancing the security of the Baltic states. The impact of these projects on the internal consolidation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia and – in the longer run – on their geopolitical position is nonetheless limited.

Without a doubt, the greatest impulse to security consolidation in the sub-region would be Sweden's and Finland's accession to the North Atlantic Alliance. After the war in Georgia there were voices opining that the membership of both of these countries is a realistic perspective. This would however require the governments in Stockholm and Helsinki to overcome not only the tradition of neutrality and military self-sufficiency but also, as discussed below, changing their attitudes to the question of security and defense of the Baltic states. Today, the case is stronger for Finland and Sweden to remain faithful to their current strategic choices while possibly turning toward regional defense cooperation, as proposed in Stoltenberg's report cited above.

Involvement of the Nordic partners in "hard" security of the Baltic states is strongly conditional on their own historical experience and the consequent strategic cultures. Indeed, the Nordic states maintain considerable distance from the problems of their southern neighbors deeming them too emotional and therefore apt to act in an irrational manner, ignoring the tough realities of international politics. In the 1990s



the obstacle to treating the Baltic states as natural partners for the Nordic cooperation was, among others, the problem of their attitudes toward the Russophone population. The confrontational posture of Latvian politicians was the determining factor behind the unwillingness to include the Baltic states in the Nordic Council.<sup>18</sup> Another cause pushing apart the Nordic and the Baltic states is also the strong pro-American sentiment prevalent in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. For the attitudes toward the United States – including the perception of the American policy and the American social-economic model – more so than toward Russia are the strongest source of divisions between the Nordic and the Baltic states. The exception here is the “super-Atlantic” Denmark which, however – because of its geopolitical position – does not consider the traditional security problems of the sub-region as material. For Sweden, and also Finland, the scenario of having to directly engage in defending the Baltic states is a nightmare which must be suppressed. This stance is not unlike that espoused by Norway, which blends its membership in the Alliance with the Nordic tradition of non-involvement. It therefore treats the guarantees inherent in NATO membership more as an element of the national policy of deterrence rather than as an automatic commitment to get involved with the problems of others. The attitude of the Nordic states to the security of their Baltic neighbors can then be described as “involvement without commitment”: providing any help necessary for the Baltic states to develop own expertise (“recipes for survival”), skills (“instruments of action”) and economic and political assistance, while maintaining room for manoeuvre in crisis situations.

The approach of the Nordic countries to their Baltic partners – being a consequence of the disparate political identities – does not make matters easy for NATO, which embodies the main security guarantees for all the Baltic states. Although there is no reason to question NATO security guarantees, while keeping in mind the debate within the Alliance over the future direction of its involvement and its capacities for political mediation in disputes with Russia, one must consider the question of Baltic states’

security within the broader, changing context of Euro-Atlantic relations rather than simply from the perspective of assistance in case of aggression.

An excellent tool for counteracting the risk of fragmentation in the sub-region could be the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. A comprehensive outline of such a strategy was created in 2006 by the Baltic Strategy Working Group comprising Members of the European Parliament.<sup>19</sup> Also in 2006, the EP adopted “A Baltic Sea Strategy for the Northern Dimension”, a resolution which was intended to be a complementary project strengthening the Baltic aspects of the Northern Dimension.<sup>20</sup> Subsequently, in December 2007 the European Council created a mandate for the European Commission to initiate work on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, which is scheduled to be announced in the spring of 2009.

Will the Strategy become a breakthrough moment for the cooperation in the sub-region? That depends on whether its creation and implementation is accompanied by an emerging consensus on the issues which constitute the root of disputes and tensions in the region, or whether the difficult issues are omitted to maintain an illusion of unity necessary so that it can appear on the EU project map. At best then, the Strategy can be an instrument supporting the consolidation process in the sub-region, but in no event can it be a replacement for such a process.

For the goal behind the Strategy is to coordinate the already existing projects and initiatives, not to lay the foundation for a comprehensive strategy for the Baltic sub-region. It is intended to play the role of a framework for projects more so than to create a new political value. As such, the Strategy runs the risk of becoming washed out, as well as the subject of rivalry with other projects aimed at the sub-region – in particular the Northern Dimension, backed by Finland – or other regional projects sponsored by the EU, especially the Polish-Swedish Eastern Partnership. Despite their declared complementary nature, these projects are in fact addressed to broadly similar groups of the same countries (Russia, Belarus, Ukraine) or they compete for European Commission attention and funds.

Furthermore, the Strategy defines the Baltic Sea as internal to the EU, which from the institutional perspective is indeed a true contention. However, defining the Baltic Sea from the actual political and dynamic angle and taking into account its security situation reveals it is an area where the Euro-Atlantic and Russian influences clash. Russia is still a material factor; it affects the situation in the Baltic sub-region to a much greater degree than the EU as the embodiment of the common European interest.

On the one hand, Russia exerts influence directly, via Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg Oblasts. Both of these are political-military centers whose significant presence cannot be ignored when planning infrastructure development or engaging in projects dealing with security in the sub-region. On the other hand, Russia's influence on the Baltic Sea sub-region can be felt indirectly by way of the effect it has on the stance of the countries in the sub-region. This policy is evident when one considers the Baltic gas pipeline project, the plans to erect a nuclear power plant in Kaliningrad, or the offers to participate in bilateral energy and power transmission projects (such as the construction of a natural gas-fired power plant in Latvia or the use of Baltic ports to export Russian oil).

The contention that the Strategy is internal to the EU does not purport to further the political consolidation of the sub-region, but rather is dictated by the desire to bypass the most sensitive contentious issues which have long-term implications to the region's security and stabilization and which involve Russia.

## V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Baltic Sea region should be treated as a sub-region of the EU. Considering the phenomenon whereby European integration is becoming regionalized – which has only grown stronger after the 2004 EU enlargement – and the regional specialization within NATO framework, the Baltic sub-region should be considered as one of the most important areas to the security and cooperation in Europe.

As far as either strictly political or security issues are concerned, there is however no such thing as a common or even similar Baltic identity. Amongst the Baltic Sea nations only Sweden, Finland, Estonia and Latvia manifest a clear Baltic identity. For Norway, the priority remains the Far North region. Lithuania seeks “continental” integration by turning toward Poland and Germany. Denmark has also chosen the continental and trans-Atlantic path. For Germany, its Baltic identity is limited to the interests represented by its northern states, close political cooperation with Finland and the relations with Russia. Poland’s presence in the sub-region remains most subdued of all. The weakness of the sub-region has not so far been bolstered by the fact that the Baltic Sea has almost become internal to the EU. As of yet, the officials in Brussels have not drawn up a meaningful concept of cohesive development in the sub-region. The Strategy for the Baltic Sea which is currently being readied is only a first step in that direction, and a modest one at that.

From the perspective of cohesive political and economic development of the sub-region as well as its security consolidation the following issues are significant:

- Overcoming mutual mistrust and bias between the countries of the sub-region;
- Strengthening EU and NATO activity in the sub-region;
- Creating a common strategy to deal with ecological threats in the Baltic Sea region;
- Creating a common strategy for infrastructure development in the Baltic region (especially as concerns transport) that promotes regional economic growth;
- Developing coordinated political dialogue in matters concerning relations with Russia and the post-Soviet territories;
- Ensuring common participation in civil and military technology projects involving situation monitoring and maintaining strategic control in the sub-region.

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This report was based on the analysis of documents, publications and studies on the subject of security in the Baltic Sea basin.

All documents relating to the cooperation in the Baltic Sea sub-region, including national concepts and projects are available for perusal on the websites of government agencies and ministries (such as the ministry of foreign affairs, ministry of defense) as well as chancelleries of the prime ministers and presidents of the respective countries.

A priceless source of information on current issues relating to the Nordic and Baltic cooperation is the official website of the Nordic Council ([www.norden.org](http://www.norden.org)) as well as the webpage [www.balticsea.net](http://www.balticsea.net). The EU and NATO websites are a separate source of information, as is the webpage of the Council of the Baltic Sea States ([www.cbss.st](http://www.cbss.st)). Further relevant material can be found on the Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review's website ([www.lfpr.lt](http://www.lfpr.lt)), the Estonian Foreign Policy Institute's website ([www.evi.ee](http://www.evi.ee)), as well as on the web portals of the following Latvian research institutes: the Latvian Institute for Foreign Affairs ([www.lai.lv](http://www.lai.lv)), the Latvian Transatlantic Organization ([www.lato.lv](http://www.lato.lv)), and the Advanced Social and Political Research Institute ([www.lu.lv/szf/sppi](http://www.lu.lv/szf/sppi)).

Our main Polish language source were the weekly reports and analyses compiled by the Center for Eastern Studies ([www.osw.waw.pl](http://www.osw.waw.pl)). Confidential interviews with experts and government officials in Oslo, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Helsinki, Vilnius and Riga provided further material, as did our discussions at the Office of External Relations of the European Parliament, in particular with MEPs involved with the "Baltic Group" taskforce.

Documents relating to the Baltic Sea Strategy can be found on dedicated web pages of the Office of the Committee for European Integration ([www.strategia-baltyk.ukie.gov.pl](http://www.strategia-baltyk.ukie.gov.pl)).

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