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Exporting Idealism? The Prospects of Baltic Sea Region Cooperation after Enlargement

With the dual enlargement of NATO and the EU to the Baltic States in 2004 the post-Cold War transition process in the Baltic Sea Region has begun to draw to a close. The article argues that this is posing questions for, and is likely to change, the character of cooperation within the region. During the 1990s it is argued regional cooperation was driven primarily by motivations of idealism and security, with one of the central elements of regional cooperation being its conceptualisation as a project of identity and subjectivity creation. With the transition process completed the key motivations behind this political project are becoming less important, with the result being that this idealistic element to regional cooperation is being replaced by more pragmatic, functionalist and self-interested aspects. However, whilst internally idealism, solidarity and internationalism are on the wane, it is argued these elements have not disappeared altogether but are increasingly becoming an accepted part of the international profile and identity of the region.

Introduction

The recent dual enlargement of the EU and NATO to states of the former Eastern bloc has been accompanied by considerable reflection. Although visually less dramatic and euphoric than the tearing down of the Berlin Wall over a decade ago the sense of 'endism' has been tangible. Indeed, although it is normal to proclaim 1989-1991 as the period when the Cold War ended a case can also be made that it was only in 2004 that this geopolitical transition really happened. Such a sentiment has been apparent amongst the new members for some time with 2004 standing out as the year when the 'return to Europe/the West' finally culminated. This has now presented the new members with a considerable challenge. With policies of the last 10-15 years driven by the desire of joining western institutions and returning 'home', the new members are now faced with a quite different question of what policies and goals to follow now they have arrived.

Interpreted as a geopolitical transition and the final end of the Cold War what is significant about the dual enlargement is that framing politics primarily in East-West terms will make increasingly less sense whilst new frameworks are instead needed for the future. The events of 2001 and the subsequent War on Terror have also

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contributed to this erosion of the East-West framework as the defining script of international and European politics. On the one hand, the geopolitical landscape of security threats has been dramatically transformed, with former enemies now crucial allies in combating new threats. On the other hand, the unity of the West has itself been challenged with the emergence of significant tensions within the transatlantic alliance as well as between what is now frequently termed the states of New and Old Europe.

This sense of geopolitical transition and endism is arguably also apparent in the Baltic Sea Region. Looking back over the last decade the achievements of the region have been considerable. Despite early fears that the region might disintegrate into a 'northern Balkans', political stability has not only been preserved but has increasingly become taken for granted. This has been achieved through a series of confidence building measures which are most apparent in the proliferation of regional contacts and institutions within the region. Not least, however, has been a clear political project of providing the Baltic Sea Region with a common and positive regional identity and to some extent to even provide the region with a certain amount of subjectivity. In this respect regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea area has exhibited clear project-like features. Today, however, and as elsewhere, in light of the Baltic States' membership of the EU and NATO the trajectory, purpose and future of the region, and not least of regional cooperation, appears much less clear. This article is concerned with this sense of endism in the Baltic Sea Region. If the original project is over what, if anything, will replace it? Is the ideal of constructing a common identity and regional political subjectivity now over?

The article is divided into three parts. First the article examines the purposes of regional cooperation throughout the 1990s and argues that regional cooperation was primarily underlain by dimensions of *idealism* and of *security*. Second, the article examines the challenges that the dual enlargement has posed for the region. In particular, it argues that much of the endism and crisis of purpose regarding regional cooperation results from the fact that with the original security imperatives largely resolved motivation for regional cooperation has been undermined. In turn this has seen the idealism of the pre-enlargement period replaced with a sense of *pragmatism* which undermines previous emphases on self-sacrifice. One result of this is that the previous idealised political project of creating a regional subjectivity has largely come unstuck. Finally, the article ends on a more positive note arguing that despite the sense of endism, and despite the problems with the identity-building project, common norms have emerged in the region largely based around ideas of solidarity and internationalism. In this respect, the idea of the Baltic Sea Region as a 'region for export' is emerging. In certain respects this represents the externalisation of the idealism of internal regional cooperation prior to the dual enlargement.

1. Regional Cooperation after the Cold War

As noted, a good argument can be made that much of the regional cooperation that emerged in the Baltic Sea area after the end of the Cold War was driven primarily by elements of idealism and of security, which although analytically distinct, in practice were also intricately connected.

1.1. Idealism

During the Cold War regional cooperation along both East-West and North-South axes in northern Europe was very limited. Psychologically the Baltic Sea assumed oceanic proportions that seemed to exacerbate distances and dividing lines. The sea was conceptualised as a buffer and obstacle to cooperation, not a facilitator of it. As we know, when the Cold War ended all this changed. The Sea was re-conceptualised as a meeting point and a symbol of commonality, and instead of being an ocean it turned out to be not so big after all.

Accompanying the euphoria of the end of the Cold War there emerged a 'Baltic feeling' throughout the region with the end of the Cold War being seen as a chance to transcend the conflicts of the past in favour of a new commonness and unity. The idealism of this 'Baltic feeling' was encapsulated in a series of new and evocative metaphors that served to naturalise the transformations underway and became prevalent in debates and policy-making language. These included concepts such as Baltic Europe, *Mare Balticum*, Region North and *Ostseeraum*¹. Similarly 'historical' metaphors, such as that of the old *Hanseatic* trading links, were also utilised to add depth to emerging feelings of a sense of 'we-ness' transcending the Baltic. In doing so Cold War divisions were presented as an historical parenthesis that now over would enable the region to return to its former prosperity, peacefulness and unity. To quote Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari in 1999: "we need not look very far back through the window of time to find all around the Baltic thriving, multicultural Hanseatic cities that flourished thanks to trade and business"². Or as the Finnish Ambassador, René Nyberg put it, the re-establishment of ties with those on the opposite coast of the Baltic is 'natural' and "represents a return to *normality* after the success of efforts to overcome the *abnormal* state of affairs *wrongly* considered 'normal' for so long" (emphases added)³.

To an important degree this Baltic feeling emerged rather spontaneously with the idealism inherent within it itself becoming a reason for developing cross-regional links. As Stålvant has pointed out, an entrepreneurial spirit was apparent that resulted in citizens taking it upon themselves to establish links with each other, especially between the Nordic and Baltic states. This has been particularly evident in the proliferation of twinning arrangements, which on the part of the Nordic partners often moved beyond simply cultural exchanges to exhibit clear idealised notions of self-sacrifice for the benefit of poorer Baltic cousins. Thus, twinning arrangements also became a channel for humanitarian aid and technical development assistance in fields including that of transportation, environment, water treatment and energy supply⁴.

¹ Christiansen T & Joenniemi P., "Politics on the Edge: On the Restructuring of Borders in the North of Europe" in Eskelinen H, Liikanen I & Oksa J., eds., *Curtains of Iron and Gold: Reconstructing Borders and Scales of Interaction*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999, p. 92.

² Ahtisaari M., speech delivered at the Karelian Summer Festival, Vaasa, 19 June 1999. Available at <http://www.tpk.fi/puheet-1999/P990619.karen.html>

³ Nyberg R., "The Dynamic Baltic Sea Region: What Belongs Together is Now Growing Together", speech at Greifswald, 30 March 2000. Available at <http://virtual.finland.fi/news/showarticle>.

⁴ Stålvant C E., "Trans-national Forces and the Role of Local Actors" in Browning C., ed., *Remaking Europe in the Margins: Northern Europe after the Enlargements*, Aldershot: Ashgate, Forthcoming 2005. Also see Bergman A., "Nordic Integration Assistance: The Case of the Baltic States", paper presented at "The Baltic States: New or Old?" conference, University of Glasgow, 22-23 January 2004.

At the same time, however, and as Neumann has clearly demonstrated, the academic and foreign policy intellectual elite also played an important role in framing and directing much of what was initiated in the early 1990s⁵. These 'region-builders', Neumann argues, developed a clear political project for the region, providing the historical and geographical knowledge and vision to support various regional cooperation projects with the goal being to help foster a clear sense of shared identity throughout the Baltic region. Beyond this, however, through promoting the institutionalisation of this cooperation in institutions such as the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS – 1992) and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC – 1993) there was also an implicit agenda of fostering a political subjectivity for the region.

There was however a further more particularly Nordic element to the idealism that underlay regional cooperation after the end of the Cold War. As Wæver noted at the time, in the immediate aftermath of the end of the Cold War a certain amount of questioning regarding Nordic cooperation became apparent, with 'old' statist Norden being compared unfavourably to the dynamism behind the European project that was clearly apparent in the run-up to the Maastricht Treaty⁶. Whereas throughout the Cold War the Nordics had fostered a progressivist image based on their solidarity with the Third World, their internationalism, environmentalism and the egalitarian welfare oriented nature of their societies⁷, following the fall of the Berlin Wall the Nordic model no longer appeared so distinctive. In particular, questions were raised about just what it meant to be Nordic in the new unfolding order and what type of international role the Nordic countries might be able to play.

In re-orienting themselves to the post-Cold War world the Nordic States have actually re-asserted their internationalist credentials by continuing to focus on solidarity with those perceived to be less fortunate than themselves. This has taken various forms. For example, it can be seen in the strong desire to maintain a mediating role in global conflicts (such as Norway's close engagement with the Middle East peace process). It can also be seen in Finland's and Sweden's sponsorship of the Petersburg Tasks as a part of the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty of the EU that ensured they could take part in EU peacekeeping operations even though, as non-aligned countries, they were not members of the Western European Union (WEU). And not least, of course, it can also be seen in the fact that the Nordic countries remain in the top ranks of nations when it comes to the percentage of GDP devoted to development aid⁸.

Most conspicuous and closest to home, however, Nordic internationalism was refocused on the Baltic Sea Region and more particularly on helping the Baltic States in the transition process, whilst at the same time trying to prevent a new normative and economic divide opening with Russia. Within this context previous elements of

⁵ Neumann I. B., "A Region-Building Approach to Northern Europe", *Review of International Studies* 20, 1994, pp. 53-74.

⁶ Wæver O., "Nordic Nostalgia: Northern Europe after the Cold War", *International Affairs* 68 (1), 1992.

⁷ Mouritzen H., "The Nordic Model as a Foreign Policy Instrument: Its Rise and Fall", *Journal of Peace Research* 32 (1), 1995, pp. 10-11.

⁸ Bergman A., "Post-Cold War Shifts in Swedish and Finnish Security Policies: The Compatibility of Non-Alignment and Participation in EU Led Conflict Prevention", paper presented at the ECPR conference, University of Uppsala, 13-18 April 2004.

Nordic superiority have remained apparent and not least in the clear desire to spread 'Nordic' norms to their southern neighbours. As Archer notes, drawing on Cold War benevolent self-identifications the Nordics have engaged with almost missionary zeal, seeing the reproduction of Nordic values, particularly of security, as the ultimate goal⁹. Seeing the Baltic States as the focus of a new Nordic mission to imbue the Balts with responsibility in international affairs, the Nordics constructed a discourse in which they were the authoritative teachers of knowledge, the Balts students. Thus, it was not surprising that in 1998 then Foreign Minister Tarja Halonen felt able to depict Finland as Estonia's "godmother" when it came to the development of Estonian-Russian relations¹⁰. More particularly, however, the fact that when it has come to providing the Baltic States with defence support the Nordic countries have been keen supporters of the development of a Baltic Peacekeeping Battalion (BALTBAT) can at least in part be explained by their desire to spread their internationalist values to their Baltic neighbours¹¹.

1.2. Security

At least as important as these various strands of idealism behind regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region since the end of the Cold War have been security considerations. Indeed, security and cooperation have become so tightly linked in the region that it has become difficult to think of them separately. However, security as a driving force of cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region has two distinct elements to it with cooperation being driven by both *realist* and *liberalist* discourses of security. Although generally complementary in the case of the Baltic Sea Region clear differences also exist between them, particularly in terms of what the referent object of security is assumed to be, how threats are identified, and the character of cooperation that becomes possible as a result¹².

For example, *realist* approaches to international politics tend to focus on issues of hard military security, reflecting a view of the international system as an anarchic Hobbesian realm of all against all. With such a pessimistic and conflict-laden view of international politics realist understandings of security are usually understood to entail specific implications and limitations for international cooperation. In particular, cooperation between states is generally understood in terms of alliance building and balancing (or bandwagoning) against other states viewed as threatening one's security and independence¹³. From a realist perspective, therefore, states are taken to be the referent object of security (the thing that has to be secured and protected), whilst the principal threats to the state are understood to come from other states. Consequently, regional cooperation becomes driven by a logic of othering and exclu-

⁹ Archer C., "Nordic Swans and Baltic Cygnets", *Cooperation and Conflict* 34 (1), 1999, p. 62.

¹⁰ *Kansan Uutiset* 16 December 1998, cited at <http://virtual.finland.fi/news/>.

¹¹ Bergman, (note 8).

¹² For a full elaboration of the following argument see, Browning C & Joenniemi P., "Regionality Beyond Security? The Baltic Sea Region after Enlargement", *Cooperation and Conflict* 39 (3), 2004, pp. 233-253.

¹³ Walt S., *The Origins of Alliances*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987.

sion and remains limited as states build alliances with some states in the face of the perceived aggressive intentions of other states.

In the post-Cold War period cooperation driven by realist security discourses has been most clearly apparent on the part of the Baltic States and Poland for whom engaging in cooperation with their western and northern neighbours has been a central strategy in escaping the Russian sphere of influence and gaining Western security guarantees¹⁴. Thus, it has been argued that even if in recent years the Baltic States have adopted the language of cooperative security and have expressed their desire for NATO membership by drawing on notions of a 'new NATO', it remains clear these aspirations mask a desire for hard military security guarantees *vis-à-vis* Russia¹⁵. Likewise the emphasis on EU and NATO membership in the discourses of 'returning to Europe' of the Baltic States and Poland (but also of Finland) in constructing their post-Cold War identities have also exhibited a certain realist security element. Whilst in these discourses membership is equated with international acceptance of their desired identities, the discourse only makes sense to the extent that 'West' is constructed in opposition to a negatively depicted 'Russian East', which they are leaving behind¹⁶. In other words, in this context, integration and regional cooperation have been understood as enhancing state security *vis-à-vis* another state (Russia) considered potentially threatening.

In contrast to the exclusionary elements of realist security-driven regional cooperation, however, *liberalist* discourses of security have also been important and have promoted regional cooperation in slightly different ways. In contrast to realist understandings of security, which focus on state sovereignty and military issues, liberalist discourses of security utilise a much broader agenda. The key focus of liberalist discourses is therefore on 'soft' security issues like global warming, environmental problems, economic performance and issues of public health, migration and welfare more generally. In other words, to the military dimension is also added environmental, societal and economic elements. As a result, the liberalist focus on soft security issues can also have the effect of undermining the state as the 'natural' referent object of security. Instead, within liberalist understandings of security states are usually redefined as simply means to supporting the needs of other security referents, whether they be individual people, societal groups or even the environment¹⁷.

¹⁴ Archer C & Jones C., "The Security Policies and Concepts of the Baltic States - Learning from their Nordic Neighbours?" in Knudsen O. F., ed., *Stability and Security in the Baltic Sea Region: Russian, Nordic and European Aspects*, London: Frank Cass, 1999, pp. 168-169.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 171.

¹⁶ For examples of such exclusionary discourses see the following: Browning C., "Coming Home or Moving Home? 'Westernizing' Narratives in Finnish Foreign Policy and the Reinterpretation of Past Identities", *Cooperation and Conflict* 37 (1), 2002, pp. 47-72; Feldman G., "Shifting the Perspective on Identity Discourse in Estonia", *Journal of Baltic Studies* 31 (4), 2000, pp. 415-416; Jæger O., *Securitising Russia: Discursive Practices of the Baltic States*, Copenhagen: Copenhagen Peace Research Institute, 1997 (Working Paper No 10); Kuus M., "From threats to risks: The Reconfiguration of Security Debates in the Context of Regional Co-operation", in Kasekamp A., ed., *The Estonian Foreign Policy Yearbook 2003*, Tallinn: The Estonian Foreign Policy Institute, 2003, pp. 14-17; Lauristin M, Vihalemm P, Rosengren K & Weibull L., eds., *Return to the Western World: Cultural and Political Perspectives on the Estonian Post-Communist Transition*, Tartu: Tartu University Press, 1997.

¹⁷ For an overview of some of the debates entailed here see: Terriff T, Croft S, James L & Morgan P., *Security Studies Today*, Gateshead: Polity, 1999, Chapters 6+7; Buzan B, Wæver O & de Wilde J., *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, London: Lynne Rienner, 1998; Booth K., "Security and Emancipation", *Review of International Studies*.

¹⁷ (4), 1991, pp. 313-326.

Also important is that soft security threats are usually seen as trans-national in nature and therefore beyond the ability of any one state to tackle them on its own. Soft security threats usually have cross-border, regional and even global dimensions and therefore require cooperation between different states and societies if they are to be resolved. More particularly, and again unlike realist perspectives on security, soft security threats are not other states, but such things as pollution, trans-national crime or communicable diseases. Although within the security studies community there has been much debate about whether broadening the security agenda to include such issues is sensible¹⁸, as Wæver argues presenting social, economic and environmental issues as ‘security’ matters has been important in building motivation for action. Presenting something as a security issue, *securitising* it in Wæver’s terms, can raise it to a matter of urgency and focus minds, and in doing so motivate people to action¹⁹.

In the Baltic Sea Region the *securitisation* of ‘soft’ issues has been important in providing a rationale for breaking with ordinary territorial constraints and promoting regional cooperation. The crucial difference with realist discourses, however, is that although regional cooperation remains driven by a security threat, it is no longer premised on the othering of Russia by moves of strict bordering. Instead, ‘security’ has become an argument uniting *all* in the region. In contrast to realism’s ‘cooperation by othering’, this is ‘cooperation by inclusion’. Such liberalist discourses are clearly apparent, for example, in the agendas of the Northern Dimension Initiative, the CBSS and the BEAC. Particularly notable about the Northern Dimension, however, is its explicit reference to treating Russia as an equal partner with a say in policy formulation and implementation, even if in practice the rhetoric of equality has not always been put into practice²⁰. On the whole it has been the Nordic States and Germany that have led the way in promoting liberalist concepts of security as a way to bolster regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea area, with the Nordic states in particular seeing part of their post-Cold War role as being to export concepts such as comprehensive, civic and cooperative security to the Baltic States and Russia²¹.

Finally, though, although the focus of liberalist security driven cooperation differs from realist driven cooperation, in the Baltic Sea Region they have actually been closely linked. For the liberalist agenda to gain ground it has been necessary to convince key state actors that pursuing such a course would also positively affect the realist agenda. Therefore, focusing on soft security issues has been understood as a way to moderate inter-state relations and in particular to build trust between Russia and the Baltic States and Poland through mutually beneficial projects of cooperation. Put otherwise, the securitisation of ‘soft’ issues has become a way to overcome other-

¹⁸ For example see, Møller B., *The Concept of Security: The Pros and Cons of Expansion and Contraction*, Copenhagen: Copenhagen Peace Research Institute, 2000 (Working Paper No 26); Deudney D., “The Case Against Linking Environmental Degradation and National Security”, *Millennium* 19, 1990, pp. 461-476.

¹⁹ Wæver O., “Securitization and Desecuritization” in Lipshultz R., ed., *On Security*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, pp. 46-86.

²⁰ Browning C., “The Region-Building Approach Revisited: The Continued Othering of Russia in Discourses of Region-Building in the European North”, *Geopolitics* 8 (1), 2003, pp. 45-71.

²¹ Archer & Jones, (note 14) pp. 173-175.

ness in the region, to say we are all in this together. Moreover, this idea of moving beyond traditional realpolitik calculations and of overcoming otherness in the region also clearly resonates with the idealism evident in the region noted above. As such, the Northern Dimension, the BEAC and the CBSS have been driven by the desire to avoid the divisions and conflicts of the past re-emerging. In respect of Russia, therefore, the threat is no longer considered to be Russia's reconstitution as a revanchist power, but rather that it might disintegrate into a chaotic and disordered entity, which will make environmental problems, organised crime and migration flows difficult to control²².

2. The Challenge of Enlargement

However, if regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region since the end of the Cold War has been driven largely by motivations of idealism and security, then the argument of this article is that with the dual enlargement of NATO and the EU to the Baltic States and Poland whether regional cooperation will continue in the same manner or with the same enthusiasm is open to question. The key issue here relates to the fact that with the dual enlargement the region's key security issue, the Baltic States' desire to join Western security institutions, has been achieved. Moreover, not only has it been achieved, but it has been achieved relatively amicably with Russian acceptance, if not outright endorsement. The result is that there are now far fewer grounds for comprehending the Baltic Sea Region as a potential trouble spot.

Moreover, with the War on Terror Russia is also increasingly included as a fundamental partner of the transatlantic security community. Indeed, following 9/11 a new security agenda has emerged as a result of which the region's key hard security questions are no longer so territorially fixed or dominated by Russia's relations with the Baltic States. Instead, global concerns of counter-terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction have become more important, with security no longer figured in a purely regional context anymore. A global dimension has emerged that arguably undermines the security driven cooperation that has been central to the region previously.

This is important since to a considerable degree regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea area has had very clear project-like features and has been largely understood as aiding in the post-Cold War transition process of building security and stabilising the region. Arguably, this period of transition and *stabilisation* is now over and is likely to be replaced by one emphasising *normalisation* where traditional realist security calculations are largely off the agenda. The question that arises from this sense of 'endism' is what will drive regional cooperation now that the key realist security issues (which have also formed the foundation of much of the liberalist-driven cooperation in the region) are less obvious?

To make the point more clearly at least two issues can be identified here. The first is that this is not to suggest that everyday regional contacts will cease, as they will not. The issue is rather whether regional cooperation as a political project of identity creation and of trying to provide the region with a distinctive subjectivity will have any future in a context in which the original goals underlying such ambitions have

²² Herolf G., "Attitudes and Policies of Sweden in the Baltic Sea Region" in Hubel H., ed., *EU Enlargement and Beyond: The Baltic States and Russia*, Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 2002, p. 235.

now been achieved. This links to a second issue of motivation. As Stålvant has indicated, if we are moving from a period of stabilisation to one of normalisation then we may also be shifting from one of *idealism* to one dominated more by issues of *pragmatism* and *self-interest*. As he puts it, incentive schemes for regional cooperation are likely to change as the Baltic Sea Region shifts increasingly to a period of normalisation. Instead of self-sacrifice and solidarity being a motivation for action, increasingly he argues materialist cost-benefit calculations will come to the fore. The result, he suggests, is that some cross-region linkages will no longer continue to function²³.

Evidence to suggest that some of the more ambitious and idealistic elements of Baltic Sea regional cooperation are beginning to stall is apparent. Notable, for example, is that the Nordic states have begun to cut back on investment in Baltic Sea regional cooperation projects. Perhaps most notable here is the running down of Sweden's flagship 'Baltic Sea Billions' Fund, which was launched in 1996 and which perhaps supports Stålvant's view that in future ideals of self-sacrifice will be less prominent²⁴. Likewise, it is also notable that the CBSS has now abolished the post of its former Commissioner for Democratic Development and is also in the process of reducing the frequency of its summit meetings. One interpretation is that with the transition period over and a new European order emerging it appears that the states of the Baltic Sea Region no longer see the CBSS as such an important instrument²⁵. Or as Atis Lejins has put it, the CBSS has lost its initial meaning and is clearly in need of a new mission²⁶. Whether it will get one, however, is another matter.

Another important example, however, is how American engagement and funding towards the region through its Enhanced Partnership in Northern Europe (e-PINE) seems to be being cut back. It is notable, for example, that at the time when America's former Northern European Initiative (NEI) was being repackaged into the e-PINE in 2003, US officials connected to the policy framework were concerned that the initiative might be scrapped altogether on the basis that with the Baltic States' NATO membership assured there was no longer any need for such a regional policy promoting cooperation²⁷. Although the NEI in the end was repackaged the resources devoted to it are notably limited²⁸.

However, beyond the notion that the transition process is coming to an end several other reasons closely linked to this may also be identified to explain the apparent under-

²³ Stålvant, (note 4).

²⁴ See the web site of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs on this. <http://www.utrikes.regeringen.se/inenglish/policy/balticbillion/>

²⁵ Dauchert H., "No Future for the Council of Baltic Sea States? The Implications of Baltic State's EU and NATO Membership for the CBSS", paper presented given at the BaltSeaNet conference in Tallinn, 5-8 February 2004.

²⁶ Lejins A., "The EU and NATO on the Shores of the Baltic Sea", *NATO Enlargement Daily Brief*, 23 December 2003. The article was originally published in the Latvian newspaper *Diena* on 20 December 2003.

²⁷ See Conference-Workshop on the Northern European Initiative, 17-18 January 2003, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey. Available at <http://www.ciaonet.org/>; Larrabee F. S., "The Baltic States and NATO Membership", testimony presented to the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on 3 April 2003. Available at <http://www.rand.org>.

²⁸ For example, note that in the following introductory speech on the e-PINE no mention of new financing is made. Conley H., "Building on Success: The Enhanced Partnership in Northern Europe", Remarks to the School for Advanced International Studies, Washington, DC, 15 October 2003. Available at <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2003/25286pf.htm> (Downloaded 27/11/2003).

mining of regional cooperation as a political project of identity and subjectivity building. Perhaps first to note is what might be termed the existence of a *fear of marginalisation* throughout the region. In this respect, it should be noted that in the early/mid-1990s the Baltic States were not always that convinced about the benefits of Baltic Sea regional cooperation, fearing that it was being presented as a substitute for EU and NATO membership. This was clearly apparent, for example, in initial Baltic suspicions regarding the US-Baltic Charter of Partnership of 1998, which was seen by some in the Baltic States as a way to delay the question of NATO enlargement and instead to confine the Baltic States to a grey zone between NATO and Russia²⁹. In the end, of course, regional cooperation precisely became seen as a route and training ground for future membership in the EU and NATO and as a symbolic support of their Western identity, which today is no longer needed. Likewise, given that regional cooperation has been seen as an instrument of claiming a position of centrality and of escaping what has been perceived to be a vulnerable position on the edge, for what do the Baltic States need the key regional institutions in the future? The issue, it seems, is whether in future they will prefer to focus directly on the EU and NATO rather than on the regional dimension that might re-enforce the very marginal position they have been so keen to escape.

Similar concerns about being marginalised and left on the fringes of Europe can also be identified in the Nordic States and increasingly form a key background to debates on the EU and NATO. A standard argument here is that increasingly states need to be active at the table where the key decisions are made. Rightly or wrongly increasingly those tables are seen to be in Brussels, not in the Baltic Sea Region.

A second reason to explain the downgrading of regional cooperation may be that despite goals of creating a common identity and subjectivity, with the transition process over it appears that a lack of common interests exists in the region. Although specific regional issues of transportation, trade, pollution and so forth are of course still apparent and will be tackled at the regional level, at least in the context of EU politics it is unclear as to where the common interests and positions will be found. On the one hand, it should be noted that with EU enlargement attempts have been made to promote Nordic-Baltic co-ordination within the Union. A 3+3 model has emerged by which the three Baltic prime ministers and the prime ministers of the three Nordic EU members will meet twice a year shortly before meetings of the European Council. The first such meeting was in Stockholm in June 2003³⁰. Likewise, Lithuania has initiated the creation of what has been termed the 'Northern Baltic 8' (NB-8) whereby parliamentary leaders of the Nordic and Baltic countries (but notably not of Poland and Germany) will meet to harmonise positions, with the goal being to strengthen the role of the group's parliamentarians in the expanding EU. Similarly, Lithuania has also initiated the creation of a "Baltic Group" in the European Parliament³¹.

²⁹ van Ham P., "US Policy Toward the Baltic States: An Ambiguous Commitment" in Jopp M & Arnswald S., eds., *The European Union and the Baltic States: Visions, Interests and Strategies for the Baltic Sea Region*, Helsinki: Ulkopoliittinen instituutti & Institut für Europäische Politik, 1998, pp. 223-224.

³⁰ Lejins, (note 26).

³¹ Miniotaite G., "Lithuania's New Neighbours Policy in the Framework of the EU's "Wider Europe-Neighbourhood" Initiative", Vilnius, March 2004 (Unpublished research report).

However, despite these moves it is unclear whether articulating common interests and positions will actually be that straightforward. As has sometimes been noted about the Nordic States following the previous enlargement in 1995, and in view of concerns that this would result in a Nordic bloc within the EU, in practice the different Nordic countries have often found more in common with other EU members than they have with each other. Moreover, the fact that the Nordic and Baltic States subscribe to rather different socio-economic developmental models may also indicate that regional bonds may not be as strong as with other EU states. Indeed, as Ojanen has indicated, even when common goals may be identified it is probable that disagreement will often remain over which are the right policies to pursue those goals. Similarly, in the enlarged EU it should not be forgotten that the Nordic and Baltic states will not just be potential partners, but also potential competitors, especially when it comes to influencing the EU's Russia policy³². Finally, the lack of common positions has already been apparent in the recent dispute in transatlantic relations regarding the war in Iraq. Notably the region split rather markedly into the camps of New and Old Europe, with Denmark, Poland and the Baltic States being rather supportive of the US, with Finland, Germany, Norway and Sweden rather more reticent regarding US actions and policy.

In other words, it seems that with the transition process over the idealism and security concerns that previously had bound the region together and made it relevant to talk of regional cooperation as a process of identity construction and subjectivity building has begun to come unstuck. The result is that it is unclear whether regional cooperation understood in these project-like terms has much future in the north. From aspiring to be an 'identity region' it rather seems that more functionalist, pragmatic and self-interested elements will come to dominate. Importantly, although some may lament this development and wish to rejuvenate the identity project, it should also be noted that this very development is itself indicative of the great successes of regional cooperation and the region building project of the 1990s.

Conclusion: Region-Building for Export

In conclusion, however, all this is not to say that notions of solidarity and idealism have simply disappeared. Instead, it appears that with the end of the transition process idealism and solidarity have rather been refocused beyond the region. To some extent it appears that the Baltic States have been inculcated with Nordic internationalist progressivist values. Increasingly the experience of region-building in the Baltic Sea area, and perhaps more particularly the Baltic States' experience of transition, is being seen as something that can be exported to other neighbouring regions. On the one hand, this perhaps reflects a desire to carve out an international role in the post-enlargement context. On the other hand, however, it also reflects normative and ethical notions of the duty these states feel to help those less fortunate than them. This element can be seen, for example, in the following statement by the Antanas Valionis, the Lithuanian Foreign Minister, in January 2004: „EU and NATO membership will

³² Ojanen H., "Enlargement: A Permanent Threat for the EU, and a Policy Problem for Finland?" *Northern Dimensions Yearbook 2001*, Helsinki: Finnish Institute for International Affairs, 2001, p. 29.

encourage us to emulate our democratic experience. We shall work to make sure that the seeds of democracy take firm root east of us. We shall offer our help to countries which seek to embrace the values of democracy and freedom to pursue their internal reforms, by encouraging their integration towards Western institutions. Looking outward, Lithuania can best contribute to broader security by continuing to assume a role of leadership in regional cooperation, by sharing the experience of building democracy and free market economy with countries who remain outside the EU and NATO enlargement area³³.

Such comments have also been echoed by the former Estonian Foreign Minister, Toomas Hendrik Ilves who has argued that the Baltic States possess particular expertise in helping former communist societies in the transition process. Moreover, not only do they possess expertise, but having gone through the process themselves, he argues, they also possess much more credibility when offering advice and assistance than states like France, Germany, the UK and, of course, also the Nordic countries³⁴.

Such rhetoric has also been backed up with practice. In particular the Baltic States and Poland have begun to focus their efforts on helping their near neighbours, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, especially in areas of promoting democracy, rule of law and strengthening civil society. This has included, for example, training seminars for journalists and parliamentarians³⁵. Similarly Poland has also sought to play a key role in framing EU policy towards these countries with its Eastern Dimension proposal³⁶. However, increasingly contacts are also being made with the three Caucasus states, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. For example, Lithuania has proposed an ongoing dialogue between the Baltic States and the three Caucasian republics, with Lithuania presenting itself as a bridge for these states to the EU and NATO³⁷. The similarities with Nordic-Baltic relations in the 1990s seem clear. Also similar is that the Baltic States have begun to offer defence assistance in terms of re-organising these states' militaries in line with NATO standards and providing a certain amount of training by paying for officers to attend the Baltic Defense College in Estonia³⁸.

Similarly, it should also be noted that even if the idealism that underlay much of the Nordic States' activity in the Baltic Sea Region in the 1990s is on the wane, it too has not disappeared but is being refocused, with development assistance, for example, expected to be refocused on Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and the Caucasian

³³ Quoted in Miniotaite, (note 31).

³⁴ Ilves T. H., "The Grand Enlargement and the Great Wall of Europe" in Kasekamp A., ed., *The Estonian Foreign Policy Yearbook 2003*, Tallinn: The Estonian Foreign Policy Institute, 2003 p. 197.

³⁵ Carlsen P., "From the Baltic States to the Caucasus: Regional Cooperation after the Enlargements", *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review* 1 (9), 2002, p. 28.

³⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Republic of Poland, 2003. 'Non-paper with Polish proposals concerning policy towards new Eastern neighbours after EU enlargement', Warsaw: January 2003. Available at <http://www.msz.gov.pl>.

³⁷ Miniotaite, (note 31).

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

republics³⁹. In other words, it appears that as the Baltic Sea Region has moved from a period of *stabilisation* to one of *normalisation*, Baltic Sea idealism has been externalised onto the next region to the East in need of *stabilisation*. Perhaps one open question here, however, is whether, lacking popular common historical narratives such as that of the Hanseatic League, levels of solidarity *vis-à-vis* these countries will be the same and as enduring as between the Nordic and Baltic States?

More generally, however, Nordic notions of internationalism are now also broadly accepted throughout the Baltic Sea Region, will the Baltic and Nordic states all re-organising their military structures to enable them to play key roles in international peacekeeping and peace-building operations. Indeed, at a time when idealised notions of cooperation within the Baltic Sea Region are increasingly being questioned, it is notable that cooperation regarding external matters of humanitarian assistance and peace support are forging ahead. Thus, it seems that whilst internally a strong sense of subjectivity and identity may be lacking in the Baltic Sea Region, one thing that regional cooperation of the 1990s does appear to have done is to provide a basis for a somewhat idealised regional approach to international affairs based on ideals of internationalism and solidarity.

³⁹ Stålvant, (note 4). For example, in May 2004 the Finnish Ministry of Defence co-sponsored with the NATO Defence College a four day seminar in Finland under the title, "South Caucasus – Promoting Values through Co-operation", see <http://www.defmin.fi>. Similarly, in June 2004 Sweden announced that it would raise its development assistance to Georgia to SEK 54 million a year from 2004-2006. See 'Sweden to contribute SEK 54 million to Georgia', Press Release of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 16 June 2004, <http://www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/4001/a/25810>. In July it also announced it would increase funding directed towards training Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian and Moldovan economists. See 'Sweden to contribute SEK 10 million towards education of economists in Ukraine and Russia', 2 July 2004, <http://www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/4166/a/27093>.