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ROLE-PLAY. EUROPEAN INTEGRATION WITH A FOCUS ON THE BALTIC SEA REGION

The 30th anniversary celebration of the Council of the Baltic Sea States is an opportunity to strengthen the long-term priority topic Regional Identity. The Model Council of the Baltic Sea States (Model CBSS) can, as is here argued, offer graduate and post-graduate learning, upskilling, and networking opportunities.

On May 24–25, 2022, the 30th anniversary of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) was celebrated during the meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and other high-level representatives from the Baltic

Sea region (BSR) hosted by the Norwegian Presidency in Kristiansand, Norway.

CBSS is a forum for cooperation in the BSR formed after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The Council assembles Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Sweden, and the European Union (EU). In March 2022, Russia was suspended from the CBSS in response to its attack on Ukraine.¹ The Kristiansand meeting was the first CBSS meeting without Russian participation. The 19th Ministerial Session of the CBSS is its first ministerial

session in nine years. It occurred amidst an acknowledgement of unprecedented and multifaceted security pressures faced in Northern Europe and mitigatory measures taken by countries unilaterally or jointly within the existing multilateral and regional formats.

This commentary builds on the acknowledgement indicated in the Kristiansand Declaration and the prioritization of youth during the German CBSS Presidency 2022–2023.² The Model CBSS role-play is proposed as an additional learning event for graduate and post-

“THE BSR IS A PROMISING SPRINGBOARD FOR EXPLORING HOW INTERTWINED EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION IS WITH THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS AND OUTREACH OF VARIOUS DOMAIN-SPECIFIC EU POLICIES.”

graduate students interested in BSR affairs.

The recommendation to convene Model CBSS sessions is inspired by the achievements and learning outcomes identified after multiple simulations, games and role-plays construed following several international organizations, regional forums and other entities. The learning exercises focusing on the European Union (EU) decision-making modalities offer manifold insights into the specifics of the most advanced regional integration model. However, they may not always provide a clear picture of how closely the EU collaborates with other like-minded European countries on various issues of common interest. The CBSS format offers an excellent example for a hands-on exploration of these nuances. The BSR is a promising springboard for exploring how intertwined European external action is with the international dimensions and outreach of various domain-specific EU policies.

EU at the CBSS

The EU has a unique role in this constellation of Northern Europe. CBSS convenes so-called “old” and “new” EU member states, and non-EU states that share a considerable degree of like-mindedness with the EU on many portfolios of European external action. At high-level events and the Committee of Senior Officials, the EU is represented by the European External Action Service. The expert-level formats of the CBSS benefit from the engagement of the Directorates-General of the European Commission.

BSR developments have a notable role in grasping the potential, prospects, and niches for advancing an “ever closer [European] union”.³ Likewise, the BSR represents a noteworthy space for a better understanding of positive external differentiation. Differentiation studies explore how non-EU states, such as Nor-

way, are engaged in various formats and constellations in the overarching project of European integration. Differentiation is praised as a potentially promising tool for facilitating closer cooperation in foreign, security and defense policy matters among willing and able EU member countries and like-minded and highly integrated third countries.⁴

The Council’s work revolves around three long-term priorities – Regional Identity, Sustainable & Prosperous Region, and Safe & Secure Region.⁵ Regional Identity focuses on culture, higher education, and youth. It facilitates lasting region-building through continued exploration of the history, heritage, culture, and identity of the BSR. This joint exercise relies on the intellectual input and guidance issued by the expert circles convened in the form of working groups, (EU and otherwise funded) project consortiums, ad hoc conference panels, summer or winter schools for students, and summer camps for youth. Some specific collaborative examples aligned with the intergovernmental cultural ties are between the CBSS and *Ars Baltica*, the Baltic Region Heritage Committee, Policy Area Culture of the EU Strategy for the BSR, and the Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture.⁶

As Stefan Gänzle points out in his blog: “Since February 1992, the CBSS has regularly brought together the nine countries bordering the Baltic Sea as well as countries – such as Norway and Iceland (the latter since 1996) – that are part of the wider region.”⁷ I will here argue that the 30th anniversary of the Council is a perfect moment to think about new ways to promote diverse learning opportunities for young generations about the potential and value of the BSR governance constellation. The recent suspension of Russian participation attests that the BSR multi-lateral architecture is not static. It evolves and its shifting contours invite constant

reflection on how to foster peaceful co-existence.

The envisaged target group is young people who are either already contributing to BSR cooperation or are seeking avenues for finding a place that would resonate most with their values, academic profile, skill set and career aspirations. The recommendations articulated in this brief encourage tailoring future opportunities with a strong EU component to keep the CBSS space with the evolving character of this post-Westphalian entity. The graduate and post-graduate training should provide future professionals with an interactive platform for an in-depth intellectual exercise that would prepare them for their work with the BSR as a distinct and promising area of European affairs with a global scope, resonance, and outreach.

Existing Baltic Sea learning opportunities

The BSR has no shortage of learning and interaction opportunities offered to graduate and post-graduate students, and young professionals. The CBSS is only one among several facilitators of such activities. The Nordic Council of Ministers deserves to be mentioned as one of the most important players in this domain. Among the most recent and ongoing initiatives supported by the CBSS are the CBSS Summer Universities, which take place annually. These events, hosted by universities across the Baltic Sea area, offer graduate and post-graduate students an opportunity to discuss the state of the region with prominent thought leaders. The CBSS Summer Universities are a historical and enduring component of the overall grouping of initiatives organized to implement the Regional Identity long-term priority.

The Baltic Science Network Mobility Program for Research Internships (BARI) is part of the BSN Powerhouse project



PHOTO: CBSS ANNUAL REPORT 2021–22

Youth representatives attending the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference 2022 at the Riksdag (Swedish parliament).

that builds on the CBSS-endorsed Baltic Science Network. The Baltic Science Educational Academy (B-SEA) is a learning and networking event organized for young researchers and PhD students. B-SEA thematically tailored schools is a recent initiative. It was launched in 2021 in alignment with the CBSS Action Plan 2021–2025 *From Policy to Action!*. This Action Plan carves out a more detailed list of steps for implementing the Vilnius II Declaration. One of the planned actions of the Sustainable & Prosperous Region long-term priority within the framework of the CBSS Action Plan 2021–2025 is to promote cooperation in science, innovation, and academic mobility, especially among young researchers.

Among other more ad hoc initiatives is the Winter School on Baltictness convened in 2022 and hosted by the University of Gdańsk in Poland. It addressed various transnational identities, such as “Baltictness”, “Nordictness”, “Scandinavism”,

“Pan-Slavism” and “Hanseatic”. These and other terms developed, shape and are expected to continue forming the multi-faceted contours of region-building across the Baltic Sea area throughout decades and centuries.

The programs briefly described here lack a component of more applied learning about the routines of policymaking offered elsewhere through simulations, games, and role-plays. Model CBSS would help to bridge this gap. It would bring BSR-specific modalities into the existing provision of hands-on learning exercises convened in the CBSS member states.⁸ However, drawing from previous role-playing experience elsewhere, it should not be forgotten that neither Model CBSS nor the other learning examples outlined in the earlier paragraphs are replacements for routine academic reading, lectures, and seminars. These extra-curricular activities cannot replace the core elements of graduate and post-graduate

higher education programs.⁹ The CBSS-supported learning events are complementary enablers tailored to broaden the analytical process undergone by students. Additionally, Model CBSS would expand the learning opportunities for students and professionals of European Studies because the CBSS format helps (students) to look beyond the internal dynamics of the EU.

Model CBSS

The existing rich literature on simulation exercises¹⁰ of various forums proves the valuable learning curve that these events offer to students and young professionals who wish to get a more hands-on insight into how their acquired knowledge and skills can serve their career aspirations directed toward diplomacy and international affairs.

The dense layer of steering, consultative and collaborative frameworks developed across the Baltic Sea area



The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Youth Forum in Stockholm June 11–12, 2022, gathered youth representatives from all 10 CBSS member states.

requires not only mastery of numerous textbooks and academic analyses of the distinct traits and history of each of these formats. It should benefit from a preparatory phase offered to highly motivated graduates, post-graduate students, and young professionals to try out their capacity to master BSR affairs with a specific focus on one of the most enduring, most established, and advanced forums – the Committee of Senior Officials. This is the key format of the CBSS that convenes representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and the European External Action Service to solve decisive matters and craft future pathways for the Council.

Offering young generations a simulation exercise that would tackle some of the most important topics addressed by the contemporary routines of the CBSS would help them better grasp the complementarities between various instruments, initiatives and formats implemented throughout the Baltic Sea area. It would project through other methodological means the much-debated potential for more synergies, coordination and mutual learning across various expert circles and instruments.¹¹ Participants could identify where they see promising prospects to expand regional cooperation to better address some of the jointly faced challenges. It is one of the best ways to let young generations apprehend

how resource-intensive, intellectually demanding and professionally rewarding a well-concerted effort to jointly craft the future for this part of the world can be.

A simulation exercise would fill the gap in the existing panoply of learning opportunities facilitated by the CBSS. The main outcomes of the above-mentioned initiatives are made known to the public and conveyed to the Committee of Senior Officials by the CBSS staff members working for Regional Identity. Nevertheless, this is a consultative action. A simulation game offers a much more interactive format for learners who wish to get a more nuanced insight into the daily routines of policy-making and regional cooperation. Model CBSS would be an opportunity to try out responsibilities they might wish to fulfil during their career progression.

CBSS represents a region that seeks close interaction with other parts of the world and fosters fruitful ties with its Observer States, either through annual consultations or ad hoc engagements during projects or other initiatives. The CBSS Observer States are France, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. The engagement of an Observer State official during the debriefing session of the CBSS simulation game with a concise presentation on the country's ties to the CBSS and the Baltic Sea area would be a means to con-

textualize the decisions made by students during the simulation game.

A similar guest presentation made by an EU official responsible for a portfolio that matches the topic of the Model CBSS event but with a focus on a neighboring area of the BSR would be equally valuable. It would help Model CBSS participants draw parallels on how the EU helps to address some of the pressing issues in various parts of the world and what EU instruments are implemented to tailor efficient and context-sensitive support measures. These two guest contributions would help examine how the role-play's achievements are positioned in a broader picture stretching towards Central Europe, the Arctic or any other adjacent geographical area. The choice of the Observer State and EU official should be made depending on the specific topic chosen for each Model CBSS.

Analysis of the Model CBSS

The simulation game dedicated to the CBSS is an opportunity to expand the scholarly analysis of the CBSS and contribute to evidence-informed transnational policymaking for youth and capacity-building actions. The evaluation group would use various research designs and methods to explore the implemented simulation game and participants' experiences, either together or in several subgroups of researchers. This would help to gain a more thorough look at the role of Model CBSS in advancing region-building, tailored upskilling, and networking. Such an evaluation group should be formed by several universities or research institutes to foster collaborative research ties across the Baltic Sea area. This study group constellation would follow the tradition of CBSS-supported research-intensive projects, commissioned research, and assessments, to produce analyses based on pooling a unique mix of expertise and skills from two or more parts of the region.

Additionally, this recommendation to promote research output is inspired by the success of another sister format of the Four Councils of the North – the Arctic Council – to present thought-provoking

learning experiences to students.¹² The Four Councils of the North refers to an annual consultative meeting of the Arctic Council, Barents Euro-Arctic Council, Nordic Council of Ministers and the CBSS. All four regional forums play a crucial role in shaping the future of Northern Europe.¹³ Exploring these formats as notable sites of contemporary multi-track diplomacy practices should foster awareness-building among young generations about the importance of their work and routine errands. Furthermore, mutual learning across regional formats should not be restricted solely to the northern setting. It could be extended to various parts of Europe and beyond.

Conclusion

The Regional Identity long-term priority offers fascinating opportunities to equip the next generation of region-builders and future diplomats with expertise and skills. Model CBSS would help them bring the Baltic Sea cooperation to an even more advanced stage and develop the integrationist dynamics to be ever more responsive to the needs of the contemporary global context, and its specific reverberations across the Baltic Sea area. This simulation game would be a good complementary building block that would fill the present blank space in the CBSS provision crafted for graduate and post-graduate students keen on exploring BSR affairs. Model CBSS would help young people try out the working routines of a senior national policy maker and EU official. Following the Arctic example, such an interactive role-play would help students understand the decision-making episodes they encounter during their studies, from academic literature on the EU's external action and reflections shared by diplomats on various educational or networking occasions. It would help them to see in more specific terms how their talents and abilities could contribute to the aspirations of the CBSS in the future. ✖

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