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## SOCIETAL SECURITY IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION: THE RUSSIAN PERSPECTIVE

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*This study discusses whether the concept of societal security is embedded in the Russian formal and informal discourses as well as in the Russian strategic documents on national security and the Baltic Sea region. Particularly, the paper describes four paradigms of international relations (neorealism, neoliberalism, globalism and post-positivism) and theoretical approaches to the concept of societal security formulated in them. On a practical plane, Russia has managed to develop — together with other regional players — a common regional approach to understanding societal security threats and challenges in the Baltic Sea region. These challenges include uneven regional development, social and gender inequalities, unemployment, poverty, manifestations of intolerance, religious and political extremism, separatism, large-scale migration, climate change, natural and man-made catastrophes, transnational organized crime and cybercrime, international terrorism, so-called hybrid threats, disharmony between education systems, etc. In 2017, Russia and other Baltic countries agreed that the Council of the Baltic Sea States would be the regional institution to implement a common societal security strategy exemplified by the Baltic 2030 Agenda Action Plan.*

### **Keywords:**

societal security, Russia, Baltic Sea region, Council of the Baltic Sea States, Baltic 2030 Agenda Action Plan

### **Introduction**

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The concept of societal security is relatively new for the Russian political discourse and is still not embedded in Russian security thinking and national security policies. There is no adequate translation of the term into the Russian language. Some scholars translate it as “social/public security” (*obshchestvennaya bezopasnost*). Others prefer to use the phrase “security of the society” (*bezopasnost obshchestva*), which is closer to the original “societal security” concept coined by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver of the Copenhagen School (international relations). According to this tradition, societal security is about the survival of a community as a cohesive unit. Societal insecurities arise when

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“communities of whatever kind define a development or potentiality as a threat to their survival as a community” [1].

The understanding of the societal security concept has later been expanded by Buzan’s and Wæver’s followers and now covers not only existential threats to society but also soft security challenges, such as socioeconomic inequalities, social deprivation, lack of access to education, culture and telecommunications, environmental problems, food and water quality, etc. This study is based on such — enhanced — understanding of the societal security concept.

The post-Copenhagen School approaches that try to connect the notion of societal security to the concepts of human security, sustainability and resilience are slowly gaining momentum in the Russian political discourse; however, they are still not very popular in the academic community or among decision-makers. With very few exceptions, there is almost no research done on societal security in the Baltic Sea region (BSR) [2–4].

This study aims to examine how the societal security concept is perceived by both governmental actors and different Russian schools of international relations (IR). The paper also discusses whether this concept has become a part of the Russian discourse on the BSR. Moreover, Russia’s role in shaping the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) societal security agenda is studied.

## **Theoretical framework, data and methodology**

This study is based on two main theoretical approaches. As far as the Russian formal and informal discourses on the BSR societal security is concerned, the *sociology of knowledge approach to discourse* (SKAD) by Reiner Keller is used [5]. SKAD interprets any discourse as a practice of power/knowledge. It, therefore, claims to be more than text or language-in-use analysis: it considers the knowledge side and the power effects of discourses, the infrastructures of discourse production as well as the institutional effects and external impacts on practice emerging out of discourses meeting fields of practices. SKAD is based on the assumption that discourses do not speak for themselves but are rather brought to life in historically situated processes of interaction and institution-building by social actors, and their communication (inter-) acts within pre-existing social fields of practice and institutional structures. SKAD places various data types and interpretation steps in relation to one another, for example, more classical research strategies of individual case analysis or case studies combined with detailed close analyses of textual data. In contrast to other qualitative approaches in social sciences, SKAD is not interested in the consistency of meaning inherent to *one* particular document of discourse *per se* but rather assumes that such data articulates some elements of discourse or maybe appears as a crossing point of several discourses.

This study is also based on the so-called *liberal intergovernmental approach* (LIGA), or *liberal intergovernmentalism*. Based on the mix of various neoliberal theories by Putnam, Ruggie and Keohane it was designed as a coherent theory

by Andrew Moravcsik [6]. Among other things, the LIGA aims at explaining why states with diverging and even conflicting interests as well as with different systems of government and economies (Russia and other BSR countries) still can cooperate and integrate with each other. Russia's love-hate relations with its BSR neighbours represent an exemplary case from the LIGA point of view.

States' decisions to cooperate internationally are explained by the LIGA in a three-stage framework: states first define national preferences, then bargain to international agreements, and finally create or adjust institutions and regimes to secure those outcomes in the face of future uncertainty. The LIGA aims at examining what drives national preferences, bargaining strategies and the nature of international institutions and regimes that emerge as an outcome of such a multicausal process. Regional and global integration is understood by the LIGA as a series of rational choices by national leaders. These choices respond to constraints and opportunities stemming from the socio-economic, political and cultural interests of powerful domestic constituents, the relative power of states deriving from asymmetrical interdependence, and the role of institutions in supporting the credibility of interstate commitments.

This study demonstrates that there are powerful domestic and international incentives that encourage Russian political leadership to opt for a cooperative rather conflictual type of behaviour in the BSR and seek solutions to the regional societal problems *via* negotiations, compromises and strengthening governance mechanisms and institutions (for instance, CBSS).

The data for this research are drawn from various sources:

- Russian national security documents and official documents related to Moscow's policies in the BSR;
- CBSS documents;
- Scholarly works by Russian and international authors on societal security in general and in the BSR in particular;
- Media publications.

In dealing with various categories of sources, it is quite difficult to create a reliable database. Different sources can contradict each other and/or be fragmentary. Available statistics is sometimes misleading or incomplete. As far as academic works are concerned, their authors differ by their methods of assessment and interpretation of the empirical data. That is why it is important check and double-check available sources in terms of their reliability as well as to compare them with each other to exclude unreliable or erroneous data and biased judgements.

More specifically, I use three main principles to select and interpret empirical data:

1. Sources should be representative, i.e., they need to reflect typical rather than irregular developments in the Russian discourse on the BSR societal security;
2. Preferences are given to the data that provide valuable and timely information on Moscow's policies in the region;
3. Priority is also given to the sources that reflect original data as well as

fresh/non-traditional approaches both to the Russian BSR discourse and Moscow's policies within the CBSS.

With the help of these research tools, the above-mentioned shortcomings of my empirical base can be successfully overcome and a set of reliable data for this study can be effectively created.

## **The Russian discourse on societal security**

This discourse includes two levels. The first level is the official discourse shaped by various Russian doctrinal/conceptual documents. The second level is represented by expert and scholarly narratives on national and international security and includes views developed by different Russian IR schools.

### ***Official discourse***

Russia's national security documents do not contain the societal security concept as such but address the related soft security problems. For example, the Law on Security of the Russian Federation (1992) defines the very notion of security, "Security is freedom from internal and external threats to the vital interests of the individual, society and state."<sup>1</sup> In line with the Western political thought, the authors of the document singled out not only state and military security, but also the economic, social, information, and ecological aspects of it. In contrast to the Soviet legislation, which had focused on state or Communist party interests, this document stated — at least at the level of declaration — the priority of interests of the individual and society. It also established a national security system of the newly born Russian Federation. Along with the already existing bodies such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Security (later, Federal Security Service), Foreign Intelligence Service, Ministry of Environment, the Law recommended setting up a Security Council, Ministry of Defense, and several committees, including the Border Guards Committee, and so on.

However, this document was too abstract and vague to design a coherent national security strategy, including its societal component. It took several years to develop a special national security doctrine based on a complex approach to security, including its societal dimensions.

The first Russian national security concept, adopted in 1997, asserted that Russia faced no immediate danger of large-scale aggression, and that, because the country was beset with a myriad of debilitating domestic problems, the greatest threat to Russia's security was now an internal one.<sup>2</sup>

This was a distinct departure from previous doctrines. For example, the military

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<sup>1</sup> Yeltsin, B. 1992, The Law on Security of the Russian Federation, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 6 May, p. 5 (in Russ.).

<sup>2</sup> Yeltsin, B. 1997, The National Security Concept of the Russian Federation, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 26 December (in Russ.).

doctrine of 1993 was based on the assumption that the main threat to Russia's security was posed by external factors, such as local conflicts or territorial claims of foreign countries.

The 1997 concept clearly suggested that the current, relatively benign, international climate afforded Russia the opportunity to direct resources away from the defense sector and towards the rebuilding of the Russian economy.<sup>3</sup> In general, it placed this rebuilding effort in the context of continued democratization and market development. In particular, the document focused on the dangers posed by Russia's *economic* problems, which were described frankly and at length. The concept highlighted a number of major threats to economic security, such as a substantial drop of production and investments; destruction of the R&D capacity; disarray in the financial and monetary systems; shrinkage of the federal revenues; growing national debt; Russia's overdependence on the export of raw materials and import of equipment, consumer goods and foodstuff; brain drain, and uncontrolled flight of capital.

The document also pointed to internal social, political, ethnic and cultural tensions that threatened to undermine both the viability and the territorial integrity of the Russian state. Among these, it stressed social polarization, demographic problems (in particular, decline in birth rates, average life expectancy, and population), corruption, organized crime, drug trade, terrorism, virulent nationalism, separatism, deterioration of the health system, ecological catastrophes, and disintegration of the 'common spiritual space'. In fact, the 1997 doctrine identified Russia's societal security agenda without the use of the societal security concept itself.

The new version of the national security concept adopted by Vladimir Putin after his coming to power in 2000, in principle retained the focus on internal threats to Russia's national security and kept the description of societal security challenges similar to the those conceptualized in 1997, although some external threats, such as NATO's eastward enlargement and its aggressive behaviour on the Balkans were also identified. The 2000 doctrine linked the internal threat of terrorism and separatism (clearly with Chechnya in mind) to external threats: it argued that international terrorism involved efforts to undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Russia, with a possibility of direct military aggression. However, in dealing with these threats the document called for international cooperation.<sup>4</sup>

The novelty of the national security strategy (NSS) adopted by President Dmitry Medvedev in 2009, was its introduction of the system of indicators to characterize the state of affairs in the field of national security. This system of indicators included the following parameters: (a) level of unemployment; (b)

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<sup>3</sup> Yeltsin, B. 1997, The National Security Concept of the Russian Federation, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 26 December (in Russ.).

<sup>4</sup> Putin, V. 2000, The National Security Concept of the Russian Federation, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 14 January, p. 4 (in Russ.).

decile coefficient;<sup>5</sup> (c) consumer price increase rates; (d) external and national debt as a percentage of the GDP (%); (e) governmental spending on health care, culture, education and research as a percentage of the GDP; (f) rates of annual modernization of weapons, as well as military and special equipment; (g) supply rates for the country's demand for military and engineering personnel.<sup>6</sup>

Although these indicators were incomplete, the very idea of using them to monitor the national security system was innovative and relevant. The NSS-2009 anticipated the possibility of regular review and update of the indicator system.

On December 31, 2015, Russian President Vladimir Putin approved a new NSS. The doctrine paid considerable attention to the internal aspects of Russia's security. In particular, security threats such as terrorism, radical nationalism and religious fanaticism, separatism, organized crime and corruption were identified.

To mitigate the risks listed above, Russia should seek economic growth, development of the country's R&D capacity, "the preservation and augmentation of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values as the foundation of Russian society, and its education of children and young people in a civil spirit".<sup>7</sup> This included "the introduction of a system of spiritual-moral and patriotic education of citizens".

On July 21, 2020, President Putin signed a decree "On National Development Goals of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2030". Three of the five national goals are related to societal security: (a) taking care of the population, its health and well-being; (b) opportunities for self-realization and development of peoples' talents, and (c) comfortable and safe environment.

The 2020 decree introduced some specific indicators to evaluate progress in the implementation process. For example, the goal of a comfortable and safe environment included the following benchmarks:

- improving the living conditions of at least 5 million families annually and increasing the volume of housing construction to at least 120 million square meters per year;

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<sup>5</sup> The decile coefficient (DC) is a correlation between the incomes of 10% of the wealthiest and 10% of the poorest population. This coefficient reflects the level of income disparity and social differentiation. The DC varies from 5 to 15. Experts believe that if the country's DC is more than 10, there are grounds for social instability and even an uprising. According to the Russian Committee on Statistics, the Russian DC for 2010 was 14 (Distribution of total cash income, 2020, *Federal State Statistics Service*, available at: [http://www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/population/urov/urov\\_32kv.htm](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/population/urov/urov_32kv.htm) (accessed 05.05.2020) (in Russ.).

<sup>6</sup> Medvedev, D. 2009, National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation up to 2020, Security Council of the Russian Federation, 12 May, available at: <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/99.html> (accessed 05.05.2020) (in Russ.).

<sup>7</sup> Putin, V. 2015, On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation, *Security Council of the Russian Federation*, 31 December, available at: <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/1/133.html> (accessed 05.05.2020) (in Russ.).



- improving the quality of the urban environment by one and a half times;
- making sure that at least 85% of the road network in the largest urban agglomerations meets regulatory requirements;
- creating a sustainable solid municipal waste management system that ensures 100% waste sorting and reduces the volume of waste sent to landfills by half;
- reducing emissions of hazardous pollutants that have the greatest negative impact on the environment and human health by half;
- elimination of the most dangerous objects of accumulated environmental damage and cleaning of most important rivers and lakes, including, first and foremost, the Volga river and the Baikal and Teletskoye lakes.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the fact that some of these indicators look too technocratic and quite unachievable, the 2020 decree still sets the state authorities a strategic development vector that allows them to address and solve the most significant problems related to societal security.

On July 2, 2021, President Putin approved a new NSS that retained the 2020 decree's approach to the societal security agenda.<sup>9</sup> It is noteworthy that the new strategy, along with the national security concept, actively uses the *social/public* security concept although it is still different from the *societal* security concept. This document contains a detailed description of the threats and challenges to Russia's public security. In addition to the traditional threats and challenges, the NSS-2021 identifies such problems as the negative consequences of climate change for the Russian society and cyber threats occurring both from within Russia itself and from outside. Special attention is paid to the epidemiological safety of the population, which is, obviously, a reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic. A characteristic feature of the new strategy is its emphasis on external sources of threats and challenges to Russian national security. In contrast to the national security doctrines of 1997 and 2000, the NSS-2021 is based on the assumption that the socio-political and economic situation in Russia as a whole is stable, and destabilizing factors occur from outside.

To sum up, the societal security concept is still absent in Russian official documents, but, at the same time, the main problems related to the sphere of societal security are quite comprehensively addressed: the ways and means of coping with these threats and challenges are determined, including the efforts of both the state and public institutions.

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<sup>8</sup> Putin, V. 2020, Decree "On National Development Goals of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2030", 21 July, *President of Russia*, available at: [www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/63728](http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/63728) (accessed 05.05.2020) (in Russ.).

<sup>9</sup> Putin, V. 2021, Decree "On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation", 2021, 2 July, no. 400. <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/File/GetFile/0001202107030001?type=pdf> (accessed 05.05.2020) (in Russ.).



### ***Russian IR schools***

Russian IR schools significantly differ from each other by their perceptions/approaches to societal security.

The Russian neorealist school hardly acknowledges the very concept of societal security, preferring to use a relatively traditional notion of social/public security. This school tends to interpret social/public security as a component/level of national security which consists of individual, social, and state security. The neorealists identify the following threats to social/public security both in Russia and the BSR: socio-economic disparities/inequalities, poverty, low living standards, poor social security system, street violence and crime, corruption, alcoholism and drug addiction, inefficient health care, environment degradation, political, ethnic and religious extremism, separatism, threats to information security, cultural integrity and traditional moral and family values, etc. [7; 8; 9] As mentioned above, these concerns have been reflected in the Russian national security documents since the 1990s because they have been developed under the influence of the dominant neorealist school.

The Russian neoliberal IR paradigm has several sub-schools as regards the understanding of the societal security concept. One interpretation is based on the assumption that societal security is indebted to the human rights tradition (the ideas of natural law and natural rights). This approach uses the individual as the main referent and argues that a wide range of issues (i.e., civil rights, cultural identity, access to education and healthcare) are fundamental to human dignity. The liberals argue that the goal of societal security should be to build upon and strengthen the existing global human rights legal framework [10; 11; 12, p. 274—286; 13]. This sub-school focuses on ethnic, religious, cultural and sexual minority rights, believing that, in a healthy society, minorities should be protected and have a full freedom of expression. Neoliberals both nationally and globally heavily criticize the Russian government for its inability to effectively implement this concept. They also believe that the best safeguard against societal challenges and threats is a well-developed civil society and its institutions, which are currently lacking in present-day Russia.

Another branch of Russian neoliberalism views societal security as a synonym of community security. According to this sub-school, societal security means societal resilience, namely securing the key elements of a society — economic equality, reflexive cultural traditions and social justice — through robust civic engagement. The community's security agenda also includes migration, migrants' integration into society, multiculturalism, minority rights, social cohesion. This version of neoliberal thinking pays much attention to the security of the Russian ethnic communities in the Baltic States [14; 15]. On the other hand, this sub-school examines how resilient the ethnic minorities, such as the Ingrian Finns [16] and Setu [17], are in the Russian North-West.

Another neoliberal sub-school prefers a broader vision of societal security, trying to equalize it with the human security concept put forward by the UN [18]. They accept the UN Development Programme (1994) definition of *human security*, which includes seven components: economic security; food security; health security; environmental security; personal security; community security; and political security.<sup>10</sup>

According to this sub-school, the BSR has unique features, which are formed around its natural environment — the environment that is distinct from that of any other region. Neoliberals believe that the entire BSR community shares some norms and values, which provide them with the incentive for a cohesive society [19; 20]. However, society is affected both positively and negatively due to the ongoing and rapid changes, mainly resulting from the geopolitical, geoeconomic and ecological dynamics in the region and its neighbourhood. While some of the changes bring new opportunities for the BSR, others adversely affect the community as socio-environmental factors and cultural integrity forming the society is threatened.

According to this sub-school, societal challenges are widespread and cross-cutting, are shared to different extents by the entire population of the region across the borders that separate them in the states of the BSR. This situation, therefore, calls for a regional assessment of the specific and diverse needs and aspirations of the population beyond those of its respective government.

The Russian globalist school challenges both the narrow understanding of societal security as public security, suggested by neorealists and the neoliberal legalist and human rights approaches. At the same time, globalists agree with those neoliberal currents that prefer a broader understanding of societal security, particularly as human security.

On the other hand, this school tends to interpret societal security as a version of the sustainable development concept [21]. They argue that economic growth is insufficient to expand people's choice or capabilities; and that health, education, technology, the environment, and employment should not be neglected. At the same time, the lack of human security has adverse consequences on economic growth, and therefore development. Globalists underline that imbalanced development that involves horizontal inequalities is an important source of conflict. Therefore, vicious cycles where the lack of development leads to conflict and, subsequently, to the lack of development, can easily emerge. Likewise, virtuous cycles are also a possibility, with high levels of security leading to development, which promotes further security in return.

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<sup>10</sup> United Nations Development Program, 1994, *Human Development Report 1994: New Dimensions of Human Security*, Oxford University Press, New York, p. 24–33, available at: [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/255/hdr\\_1994\\_en\\_complete\\_nostats.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/255/hdr_1994_en_complete_nostats.pdf) (accessed 05.05.2020) (in Russ.).

However, over the last decade, the so-called *integrated approach* to sustainable development principles and strategies has gained momentum in the Russian academic community [22]. According to this approach, sustainable development is conceptually broken into three constituent parts: environmental, economic and social.

The Russian experts identify the following dimensions of Moscow's sustainable development strategy in the BSR:

- *Economic* dimension of sustainable development includes sustainable economic activity and increasing prosperity of the BSR communities; sustainable use of natural resources (including living resources); development of transport infrastructure (including aviation, marine and surface transport), information technologies and modern telecommunications.
- *Environmental* dimension has the following priorities: monitoring and assessment of the state of the environment in the BSR; prevention and elimination of environmental pollution in the region; the Baltic Sea marine environment protection; biodiversity conservation in the BSR; climate change impact assessment in the region; prevention and elimination of ecological emergencies in the BSR, including those relating to climate change.
- *Social* dimension includes the health of the people living and working in the BSR; education and cultural heritage; prosperity and capacity-building for children and the youth; gender equality; enhancing well-being, eradication of poverty among BSR people [23].

The Russian post-positivist school does not suggest a unified approach to societal security. For example, post-modernism, the most radical sub-school of post-positivism, heavily criticized the 'positivist' security concepts but did not develop any security concept of its own [24].

Russian social constructivism, another post-positivist sub-school, prefers to interpret societal security through the concept of *identity*. In line with the Copenhagen IR school, Russian constructivists believe that state security confronts societal security: state security has sovereignty as its ultimate criterion, and societal security has identity [25]. According to this sub-school, societal security, which is socially constructed, can only be ensured if actors' identities are formed in a non-confrontational way [26]. Otherwise, multiple identities clash with each other and do not favour a desirable level of societal security.

Constructivists call for a paradigmatic change of the Russian BSR discourse: instead of perceiving the region as a marginal and hostile source of security threats, the Russian state and society should see the BSR as a region having a considerable potential for cooperation [27; 28]. According to the Russian constructivists, the BSR should have a more positive and attractive image and be associated with the ideas of growth, prosperity and innovation. Moreover, Moscow should perceive the BSR as a region of peace and stability, where different identities can be reconciled and harmonized. At the same time, constructivists

continue to monitor some negative processes and factors that still generate imperialistic and nationalistic sentiments within the Russian society and elites and impede international cooperation in the BSR [29].

To conclude the discussion on the Russian societal security debate, it should be noted that there are serious problems with embedding the societal security concept in the Russian political discourse. These problems boil down to the following:

- The Russian national security thinking is hierarchical: individual, social and state/national security levels are identified where state security — in reality, not at declarative level — is still the most important.
- The Russian society is not an independent social actor. Civil society is still in an embryonic phase and for this reason, neither the society nor an individual can be real referent objects of security.
- The concept of identity is too vague for most of the Russian foreign policy schools and — except post-positivists — they are not ready to interpret societal security through this prism.
- Societal security does not necessarily matter to individuals whose personal security is much more important.
- Since anti-globalism and inward-looking sentiments are relatively strong in Russia, resistance rather than resilience prevails in the country's social/community psychology.
- Post-sovereign mentality and politics are still unpopular in Russia. Since both common people and the elites believe that Russia operates in a rather unfriendly or even hostile international environment, the theme of national sovereignty, which is closely related to state rather than societal security, is very important in the Russian political discourse.

At the same time, while not recognizing the societal security concept itself, the Russian IR schools, nevertheless, largely agreed in their views on the nature of the societal problems existing in the BSR.

### **Russia and the CBSS societal security agenda**

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Although many Russian BSR neighbours perceive Moscow as a source of security threat in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis, the Kremlin insists that it has no aggressive intentions in the region and prefers cooperation, not confrontation. From the theoretical point of view, the LIGA suggests a plausible explanation why Moscow prefers a cooperative, non-confrontational policy line in the BSR. In terms of national preference formation, it should be noted that the Kremlin has a rather busy domestic agenda which should be given priority over the international problems in the region.

As mentioned above, Russian leadership realizes that most of threats and challenges to its security originate from inside rather than outside the country. These problems are rooted in a confluence of factors, including the degradation of Soviet-made economic, transport and social infrastructure in the Russian north-western regions, the current resource-oriented model of the Russian economy, and the lack of funds and managerial skills in Russia to properly develop the Russian part of the BSR. It follows that Russia's current Baltic strategy is of an inward- and not an outward-looking nature. It aims to solve existing domestic problems rather than focus on external expansion. Moreover, in developing its north-western regions, Moscow seeks to demonstrate that it is open to international cooperation, to foreign investment and know-how.

It should be noted that Russian national preferences result in a quite pragmatic international strategy that aims at using the BSR cooperative programs and regional institutions for solving first and foremost Russia's own specific problems rather than addressing some abstract challenges.

The CBSS is seen by Russia as both a centrepiece and cornerstone of the regional governance system, a stance which is confirmed by the Russian strategic documents<sup>11</sup> and numerous statements of its leadership.<sup>12</sup> Compared to other regional and subregional organizations, forums and programs (such as the EU, Nordic institutions, Northern Dimension, etc.), the CBSS is viewed by the Kremlin as a more representative (in terms of its geographic scope), multidimensional (in terms of areas covered by its activities), research-based and efficient international entity [30; 31]. Despite the fact that ten other CBSS member-states belong to Western institutions that do not include Russia (NATO, EU, Nordic organizations), Moscow still feels comfortable in the Council because there it functions as an equal member and it can partake in the CBSS decision-making.

Moscow also sees the CBSS as an important tool for overcoming the political and diplomatic isolation that Western countries have tried to plunge it into. With the help of the CBSS, it retains its ability to influence regional socio-economic, political, environmental and humanitarian processes.

Despite the growing tensions between Russia and the rest of the BSR countries in the context of the Ukrainian crisis, Moscow has not abandoned multilat-

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<sup>11</sup> Putin, V. 2016, *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, 2016, 30 November, available at: <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201612010045?index=0&rangeSize=1> (accessed 05.05.2020) (in Russ.).

<sup>12</sup> Statement and responses to mass media by the Minister of Foreign Affairs S.V. Lavrov at the news conference on the results of the Council of the Baltic Sea States ministerial online meeting, Moscow, 19 May 2020, 2020, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, 2020, available at: [https://www.mid.ru/sovet-gosudarstv-baltijskogo-mora/-/asset\\_publisher/3qDBE0PYRt7R/content/id/4133375](https://www.mid.ru/sovet-gosudarstv-baltijskogo-mora/-/asset_publisher/3qDBE0PYRt7R/content/id/4133375) (accessed 05.05.2020) (in Russ.); Statement by the First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs V.G. Titov at the Council of the Baltic Sea States ministerial meeting, 20 June 2017, 2017, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, available at: [https://www.mid.ru/sovet-gosudarstv-baltijskogo-mora/-/asset\\_publisher/3qDBE0PYRt7R/content/id/2794141](https://www.mid.ru/sovet-gosudarstv-baltijskogo-mora/-/asset_publisher/3qDBE0PYRt7R/content/id/2794141) (accessed 05.05.2020) (in Russ.).

eral diplomacy in the region, including the CBSS. Russia played a crucial role in the reformulation of the CBSS long-term priorities, which took place amidst the Ukrainian crisis. In light of an evaluation and review of the CBSS five long-term priorities approved at the 7th Baltic Sea States Summit, held in Riga in 2008, the CBSS — under the Finnish presidency (2013—2014) — decided to mainstream three renewed long-term priorities: Regional Identity, Sustainable & Prosperous Region, and Safe & Secure Region.<sup>13</sup>

Russia actively contributed to and supported the CBSS Baltic 2030 Action Plan (June 2017)<sup>14</sup> which offers a framework to support macro-regional, national and sub-regional implementation of the sustainable development strategy for the BSR. The Baltic 2030 Action Plan includes six priority focus areas, representing a practical way to address the complexity of the 2030 Agenda in the BSR. The Focus Areas are deeply interconnected and reflect a holistic approach to achieving the 2015 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and, at the same time, the regional societal security agenda:

- Partnerships for sustainable development. Macro-regional, multi-stakeholder, inclusive partnerships are at the core of the Baltic 2030 Action Plan. According to this document, all stakeholders should take responsibility for increasing regional cooperation and achieving sustainable development. Existing and new partnerships in the BSR should focus on the exchange of knowledge and the development of innovative, concrete and practical solutions to common challenges.
- Transition to a sustainable economy. Transnational cooperation is crucial for successful transition to a sustainable economy. This focus area includes several interconnected challenges: to increase energy efficiency and provide affordable clean energy, reduce waste, manage resources wisely, adopt sustainable consumption and production practices and lifestyles, create sustainable agricultural systems, reduce water pollution and protect ecosystems, ensure productive employment and decent work for all, promote research and innovation, and support ‘silver’, ‘circular’, ‘blue’ and ‘green’ economies. Interestingly, Moscow, whom the Baltic states, Denmark and Poland often accuse of ‘energy imperialism’ has enthusiastically supported these initiatives.
- Climate action. Work on climate change should integrate both mitigation and adaptation, which requires enhanced regional cooperation. This focus area encompasses several related dimensions: emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction management related to climate and weather risks, monitoring emerging health risks, food security risks, responding to stresses in regional ecosystems, and other challenges. The goal in this area is to mainstream climate change ad-

<sup>13</sup> Annual Report for the Finnish Presidency 2013—2014, 2014, *CBSS*, p. 28, available at: [https://cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CBSS\\_AnnualReport\\_2013—14.pdf](https://cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CBSS_AnnualReport_2013—14.pdf) (accessed 05.05.2020).

<sup>14</sup> Realizing the Vision. The Baltic 2030 Action Plan, 2017, *CBSS*, June, available at: <http://www.cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Baltic-2030-Action-Plan-leafleteng.pdf> (accessed 05.05.2020).

aptation into all planning and sectoral development processes to strengthen the resilience of infrastructures and society and to support the implementation of the UN Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction in the region. Russian support for climate change mitigation strategies was in striking contrast with Donald Trump's stand on this issue and consonant with other BSR countries' positions.

- Equality and social well-being for all. The BSR includes countries that are rated amongst the world's most equal — but also some of the world's most rapidly changing societies, moving in the direction of rising inequality. Gender equality and the rights of children are given special priority in this focus area. It also supports cooperation in the shared demographic challenges: ageing population, migration, economic and social inequalities, health-related challenges, social inclusion; and addressing crime and violence and acts of discrimination, which people face in the BSR.

- Creating sustainable and resilient cities and communities. Populations, economic activities, social and cultural interactions, as well as environmental and humanitarian impacts, are increasingly concentrated in cities, and this poses massive sustainability challenges in terms of housing, infrastructure, basic services, food security, health, education, decent jobs, safety and natural resources, among others. At the same time, supporting positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas — by strengthening national, macro-regional, and sub-regional development planning — is crucial. Since 2013, Russia has been trying to introduce strategic planning principles to the urban sustainable development programs. In 2014, Moscow adopted a special law on strategic planning which obliged all three levels of power — federal, regional and municipal — to introduce development strategies that should be based on the sustainable development concept.<sup>15</sup> The Russian north-western municipalities draw heavily on the BSR countries' experiences in this area by implementing the concepts of 'smart' or 'green' cities [32].

- Quality education and lifelong learning for all. Rapid social and technological changes bring the need to develop an approach to quality education and lifelong learning throughout the BSR. This focus area includes a special emphasis on scientific literacy and research, STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education and innovation, which can support sustainable development from an economic, social, and cultural perspective. Professional associations such as, for example, the Baltic Sea Region University Network, where Russia closely cooperates with other BSR countries, are particularly useful in this regard.

The Baltic Agenda 2030 Action Plan provided an opportunity for harmonizing the CBSS policies and the EU Strategy for the BSR (EUSBSR) [33]. Moreover,

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<sup>15</sup> Putin, V. 2014, The Federal Law, 28 June 2014, no. 172-FL "On Strategic Planning in the Russian Federation", *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 28 June, available at: <https://rg.ru/2014/07/03/strategia-dok.html> (accessed 05.05.2020) (in Russ.).



this Action Plan represents not only a regional sustainable development strategy but also provides a useful and firm link between a regional organization and a global institution (UN). In other words, with the help of this Action Plan the CBSS is able to translate the UN global sustainability strategy to the regional one, which takes into account the local particularities, and better serves the BSR specific needs.

At their CBSS 25th anniversary meeting (Reykjavik, June 2017) the foreign ministers and high-level representatives highlighted further priorities for the Council's sustainability/societal security strategy.<sup>16</sup> They encouraged the CBSS to continue working actively to achieve tangible results within its above-mentioned three long-term priorities: regional identity; sustainable and prosperous region; and, safe and secure region. More specifically, they invited the CBSS to identify and launch new project activities, with a view to achieving concrete results within each of the following subject areas:

*Sustainable development.* The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change marked the beginning of a new era in global cooperation for sustainable development. The CBSS plays an important role in delivering regional responses to the global challenges outlined in the 2030 Agenda, including through increased cooperation on mitigation and adaptation to climate change. As mentioned above, the CBSS responded to this UN initiative by adopting the Baltic 2030 Action Plan to meet the global SDGs at the regional level.

*Youth.* The BSR countries believe their young people are the future of the region. Learning about, and from, each other contributes to strengthening regional identity. In this context, the Baltic Sea Youth Dialogue is an instrument for building transnational trust and mutual understanding, in particular in challenging times, and should provide the basis for sustainable BSR youth cooperation in media, education, science and the labour market.

*Human trafficking.* The CBSS task force against trafficking in human beings has been operating successfully with Russia's active participation since 2006 and has earned international acclaim. The current global migration reality has led to a significant rise in the number of refugees and displaced persons in Europe who are at risk of being exploited by traffickers. Against this background, it is important that the task force continues its endeavours to prevent trafficking in human beings. Referring to the successful CBSS conference of 2017 on societal security and migration, the CBSS was encouraged by the foreign ministers to further promote cooperation on this topical issue among the BSR countries. Although for Russia migration currently is not a serious challenge, Moscow, being in solidarity with its Baltic neighbours, actively supports their efforts in this area.

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<sup>16</sup> Declaration on the Occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, 2017, CBSS, 20 June, available at: <http://www.cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/The-Reykjavik-Declaration.pdf> (accessed 05.05.2020).

*Child protection.* Russia participates in the CBSS expert group on children at risk, which has been highlighting issues of regional concern since 2002, such as children in alternative care, promoting child-friendly justice, preventing trafficking and exploitation of children, as well as promoting the best interests of children in migration. Child protection issues are highlighted in the 2030 Agenda as an important priority of the societal security strategy. The CBSS expert group has extensive experience from its work on child protection and is in a strong position to follow up on the 2030 Agenda.

*Civil protection.* Since 2002, the CBSS Civil Protection Network has been developing activities to strengthen resilience to major emergencies and disasters in the region. Increases in the intensity and frequency of extreme weather conditions make it important to accelerate these efforts through enhanced cooperation at all levels of government and in line with the objectives of the UN Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Some experts believe that this dimension of the CBSS activities is the most important one and tend to equate the societal security concept with the ability to resist natural and technogenic catastrophes in the BSR [34, p. 109–115; 35]. Moscow believes that it can significantly contribute to civil protection in the region because Russia has both a solid material-technical base and practical experience in this sphere.

At the same 2017 anniversary meeting, the ministers invited the CBSS to appoint an independent group of advisors, including civil society representatives. The task of the independent group was to prepare a report with recommendations for a vision for the BSR beyond 2020, and on the future role of the CBSS and the means to expand its impact as a forum for political dialogue and practical cooperation in the region. The independent group (where the Russian participant played a prominent role) presented its report and recommendations to the CBSS for consideration in June 2018. The group recommended to further use and strengthen the CBSS as a key platform for regional cooperation and communication as well as confirming three current long-term priorities as strategic goals for the foreseeable future.<sup>17</sup>

Moscow actively partook in the discussion on the CBSS Reform Roadmap which was approved during the Latvian chairmanship in 2018–2019.<sup>18</sup> Russia also supported the Danish presidency in its efforts to adopt revised Terms of Reference of the CBSS and of the CBSS Secretariat. Moscow was also helpful in preparing a number of other important documents: Orientations for the CBSS role and engagement within the EUSBSR and the Northern Dimension, Operational Guidelines for CBSS Practical Cooperation, Guidelines for CBSS Fundraising,

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<sup>17</sup> Vision for the Baltic Sea Region beyond 2020. Report by the Council of the Baltic Sea States Vision Group, 2018, CBSS, June, available at: <https://cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Vision-Group-Report.pdf> (accessed 05.05.2020).

<sup>18</sup> Annual Report for the Latvian Presidency 2018–2019, 2019, CBSS, available at, <https://cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Annual-Report-Latvia-2018–2019.pdf> (accessed 05.05.2020).

renewed mandate and new regional strategy for the Expert Group on Children at Risk 2020—2025, and new terms of reference and strategy for the Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings 2020—2025.<sup>19</sup>

Even the COVID-19 pandemic was not a serious obstacle to the BSR countries' cooperation in the CBSS framework. Some important events at the end of the Danish chairmanship, including the final ministerial meeting, were held on-line but this did not prevent the ministers from evaluating the Danish presidency as one of the most effective. In addition to the adoption of the above-mentioned documents, under the Danish chairmanship, a new CBSS Director General for the Secretariat was appointed and the Council's Secretariat got new premises in Stockholm.

While continuing to work in the context of the pandemic, Russia supported the main priorities of the Lithuanian Presidency programme (2020—2021):

- sustainable development, especially in the field of developing green industry;
- green and maritime tourism as an important sector in reviving regional economy, increasing region's visibility, giving employment opportunities to young people;
- civil protection in the region, strengthening resilience in the region against major emergencies and disasters;
- fight against human trafficking for labour exploitation in the region, as well as prevention of violence against children.<sup>20</sup>

During the existence of the CBSS, Russia has always actively participated in various projects within the Council — environmental, infrastructural, educational (Eurofaculties in Kaliningrad and Pskov), youth, etc. Over the past three years, Russia has participated in 19 of the 46 projects initiated by the CBSS. Only three countries were ahead of Russia: Finland (23 projects), Sweden (23 projects) and Latvia (22 projects) (fig.).

Currently, Russia participates in four of the six ongoing projects:

- Baltic Sea Region Mobilities for Young Researchers;
- Young People Network for Balticness (YoPeNET);
- Youth Networking for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Baltic Sea Region;
- THALIA — Towards thoughtful, informed, and compassionate journalism in covering human trafficking.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Annual Report for the Danish Presidency 2019—2020, 2020, CBSS, available at: <https://cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Annual-Report-Denmark-2019—2020.pdf> (accessed 05.05.2020).

<sup>20</sup> Lithuanian Presidency Program 2020—2021, 2020, CBSS, available at: <https://cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Lithuanian-Presidency-Programme-2020—2021.pdf> (accessed 05.05.2020).

<sup>21</sup> Ongoing Projects — CBSS, 2021, CBSS, available at: <https://cbss.org/psf/ongoing-projects/> (accessed 05.05.2020).

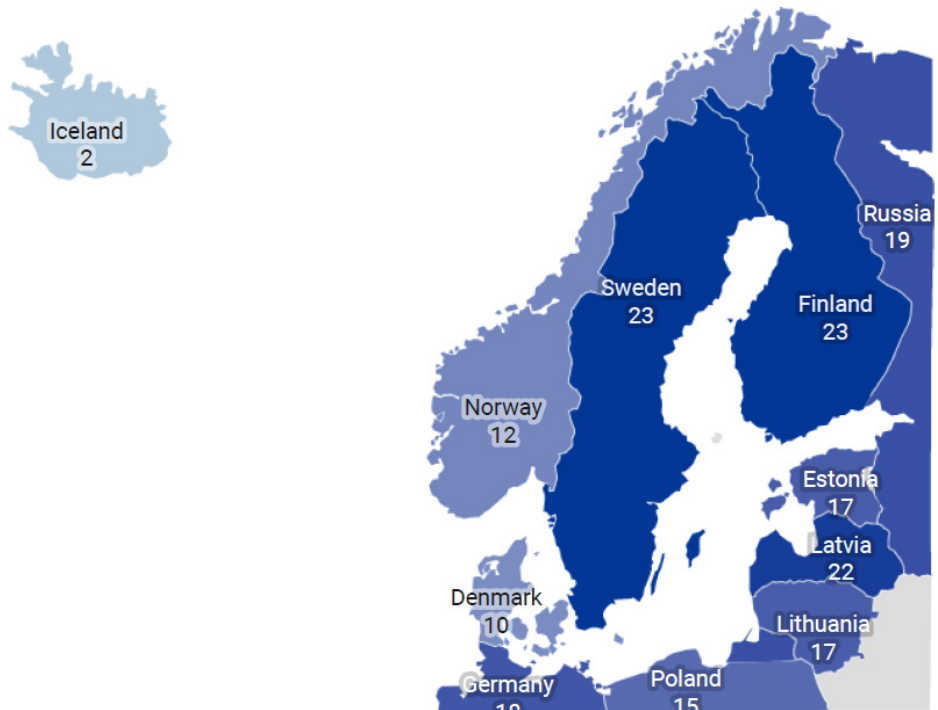


Fig. Member-state participation in the CBSS projects funded by the Project Support Facility

Source: Project Support Facility, 2021, *CBSS*, available at: <https://cbss.org/psf> (accessed 05.05.2020).

## Conclusions

Although societal security concept is virtually absent in Russian official documents and academic/expert discourse, the societal security problems — in various forms — are gradually gaining momentum, both at the level of practical policies and among scholars. The interpretation of the concept by different Russian schools ranges from the narrowest (communal security) to the broadest understanding (human security, sustainable development). This is natural for a polity in transition, where civil society is not mature enough, where a state-centric approach to national security still prevails and where the individual and society still cannot be referent objects for security.

Although the Russian discourse on societal security is mostly inward-looking and related to national security format, the (Baltic) regional dimension is slowly unfolding in the Russian academic and policy-making community.

Despite the ongoing tensions between Moscow and the West, which reached a critical stage in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis, the BSR countries, including Russia, identified an almost identical set of soft security threats and challenges,

both to the individual countries and to the region at large. These societal security threats include uneven regional development, social and gender inequalities, unemployment (especially among the youth), poverty, manifestations of intolerance, religious and political extremism, separatism, largescale migration, inconsistencies in education systems, climate change, natural and man-made catastrophes, transnational organized crime and cybercrime, international terrorism, the so-called hybrid threats, etc.

With Russia's participation, the BSR community has been able to develop common approaches for coping with societal security threats. They rely on the same arsenal of methods and tools for problem-solving, improving the situation domestically and regionally, as well as producing a forward-looking, long-term sustainable development strategy. The CBSS has been identified as the regional institution to implement a common societal security strategy as exemplified by the Baltic 2030 Agenda Action Plan. Although geopolitical tensions in the region remain strong and various countries differ in their interpretation of the societal security concept and sustainable development strategy, the general dynamic in the BSR is relatively positive and gives some grounds for cautious optimism.

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