REGIONALISM

- REGIONS AND POLITICS
- REGIONAL SELF-IDENTIFICATION
- VISEGRAD FOUR AND THE BLACK SEA
Regionalism

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The membership of Russia in international organisations is one of its foreign policy priorities. The Russian Federation participates in numerous European organisations and initiatives: this, inter alia, goes in line with the EU strategy considering involving Russia as much as possible within various cooperation formats. The nature of Russian policy on participation in European regional organisations can be observed through the example of the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), and Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). These three organisations totally demonstrate the specifics of unions in Europe: by purpose, by geography, by influence on international policy and by Russian influence on such organisations.

The article is devoted to the analysis of participation of the Russian Federation in the European international organizations (OSCE, CBSS, and BSEC), its goals and the efficiency of use of multilateral platforms for the Russian international agenda. It considers the level of correspondence of Russian goals with the basic goals of the given international organizations and the influence of the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine on the policy within the organizations.

Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

OSCE is the most sizeable organisation in Europe. Considering its political influence, wide geographic representation and tools for activities, it is a focal area of Russian diplomatic actions in the continent.

In two latest foreign policy concepts of the Russian Federation as of 2008 and 2013, the definition of the main goal of Russian foreign policy within the European field remains constant: “establishing a really open and democratic system of the overall regional collective security”¹ that shall be implemented through “rendering legally mandatory political declarations on indivisibility of security regardless of affiliation of a state to any military-political alliances”². Thus, the goal of Russia is to erode the Euroatlantic security system and

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² Концепция внешнеї політики Російської Федерації Утвержденна Президентом Російской Федерации В.В.Путіным 12 февраля 2013 г. Web-ressource: http://www.pircenter.org/media/content/files/9/13617765900.pdf
make the idea of the common security space “from Vancouver to Vladivostok” come true by gaining an opportunity to influence the decisions of European countries and the EU, in particular, in the aspect of security policies. Russia has been striving to gain such rights through signing new binding international treaties, namely, by reforming OSCE and providing it with a legal standing.

In January 2004, the Russian Federation proposed to shape a common pan-European security space based on the OSCE; in 2008, drafting of a legally binding European Security Treaty was initiated. As a reaction to the Russian initiatives, Greece (chairing in the OSCE at that moment) launched a Corfu Process promoting a dialog on Euroatlantic and Eurasian security and the perspective of adoption of the OSCE statutes. The need of enhancing OSCE functioning was well-considered by all member countries, so the Corfu Process gained an overall approval. Meanwhile, member states of the EU and NATO were not considering as necessary to restructure the bases and tools of European security in a way as it had been proposed in the EST draft. Both ideas were actively discussed for a while; however, today, considering that European states have recognised Russia’s involvement in the conflict at the East of Ukraine, the authority of Russia as of a participant of shaping the common security area has significantly dropped down as well as its position in the context of the OSCE reforming, whereas the idea of EST absolutely disappeared from international agenda. Meanwhile, the issue of expanding the possibilities of the OSCE and gaining international legal standing of the OSCE is still up to date.

Despite internal disputes and crisis aspects in the OSCE, this organisation remains being an important tool of monitoring and collecting information from conflict zones, including the territory of war actions in Donbas. Nowadays it is the only international organisation able to inform the international community on the course of events at the East of Ukraine. Conversely, the presence of Russian representatives in the process of regulation and monitoring at Donbas is a risk factor. In theory, it is possible to push Russia, as an aggressor state, completely aside of OSCE activities on the Ukrainian territory and of making decisions on conflict resolution at Donbas. OSCE has a legal tool for this: so-called “consensus minus one” principle approved at the Prague meeting of the OSCE Council of Ministers in 1992, which was once applied to ex-Yugoslavia. However, such a decision is less probable in view of the Russian influence, consensus principle in the OSCE and the overall political and diplomatic situation with the Russian aggression against Ukraine (not even all the European states made the decision to join the EU sanctions against Russia).

Thus, membership and activities within the OSCE are important for the Russian politics in Europe. Due to the aggression against Ukraine, a “moral” influence of Russia in the OSCE has decreased. On the other hand, Russia keeps the necessary toolkit for influencing the organisation’s activities. Using the consensus principle, Russia allows OSCE taking only those decisions that do not impede Russian goals.

5 The procedures and mechanisms of the OSCE Web-ressource: http://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2006/2/16/32a78695-6b86-46d0-98cc-e6db63fd4037/publishable_en.pdf
The activity of Russia in minor European regional organisations might be studied through the example of cooperation within regions of Baltic and Black seas. Council of the Baltic Sea States and Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation have a lot of common: a union based on a joint economic interest, similar geographic particularities, the willingness of members to support the regional environment, etc. The membership in these organisations also looks similar: members are seaside states, some being members of the EU and NATO. Russia is the only country with a membership in both CBSS and BSEC. For the sake of cooperation with Russia, the EU adopted the Northern Dimension Strategy in the Baltic region and the Black Sea Synergy in the Black Sea region, involving not only Russia but all other states of the Black Sea region that are not members of EU (Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine). After Russia has launched its aggression against Ukraine, EU has amended both strategies, restricting cooperation with Russia by sanctions. Thus, in the Black Sea region, all the projects related to Crimea have been suspended except those directed at supporting civil society and human contacts. When comparing the Baltic and the Black sea regional cooperation, it may be affirmed that CBSS is a much more effective and functional organisation with higher region-consolidating potential that BSEC. This is mainly because most of the Baltic States are consolidated around the EU policy and due to a low Russian influence on the policy shaping in these countries, unlike a stronger position of Russia in the BSEC. It is worth to study these two organisations separately for better understanding of peculiarities of Russian activities in CBSS and BSEC.

When comparing the Baltic and the Black sea regional cooperation, it may be affirmed that CBSS is a much more effective and functional organisation with higher region-consolidating potential than BSEC.

Council of the Baltic Sea States is the biggest among regional cooperation structures in the Baltic Sea area. CBSS has 12 members (11 states + Eurocommission) and 10 observers. The organisation is a well structured institution with regular consultations at a high political level. Since the very beginning CBSS has two priorities: 1) to provide a common ground for development of regional cooperation between partners, having a common legal framework and ready to combine resources (Germany, the EU, Northern countries); 2) to involve Russia in the cooperation through numerous institutional relations, like connections between cities or participation of Russia in various regional projects.

Russian interests in the regional cooperation in the Baltic region in general and within CBSS in particular have consisted in involving financial resources for economic, infrastructural and educational projects, whereas CBSS itself has been considered by

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Russia rather as a platform for a diplomatic dialog. The notions of the region sustainable development including business and economic cooperation, implementation of joint actions on environment protection, development of energy and transport network, support of activities of democratic institutions, assistance in humanitarian contacts enlargement — all these have not been perceived as of interest by Moscow.

Differences in the definition of priority areas of the regional cooperation show the difference of approaches of Russia and other partners of the CBSS. This was especially well demonstrated in the program document of the Russia’s presidency in CBSS in 2013.8 Neither environment protection nor energy efficiency, so important for the region, are mentioned; two out of four Russian priorities concern the regional partnership in modernization and entrepreneurship, and two others, such as extremism prevention and visa-free regime promotion, are absolutely out of CBSS prerogative.

Interests of Russia might be observed through projects that were promoted during the Russian presidency: an agreement between Vneshtkombank and KfW German State Bank was signed on the joint loan program for the small and medium businesses in South-Western regions of Russia (with a $110 mln fund); work was conducted on creation of a touristic cluster at the border between Kaliningrad and Lithuania; the Baltic Artek project was launched, as well as the project of development of Eurofaculty in Pskov State University. However, the SEBA project (Partnership for modernisation on the South East of the Baltic Sea), aimed at the cooperation for boosting the development of Kaliningrad and surrounding districts, has demonstrated poor efficiency due to discrepancy of approaches of the partners to its implementation: Russians were ready to obtain funding from the European partners for the implementation of infrastructural projects, whereas those partners preconditioned such funding with ensuring reforming the legislation and State institutions, responsible for enhancing the investment climate in the region and for preventing corruption and abuses of office9.

In some areas, Baltic countries’ priorities are fully contradictory with the Russian strategy: first, it concerns the program of energy supply diversification, energy efficiency program and the program of implementation of innovative energy saving technologies. Instead of participating in the regional program on energy supply diversification and energy efficiency, Russia has been promoting Nord Stream, the bilateral project with Germany. Another example of divergence of the strategical development perception is that Russians consider the Internet as a field of battle for influence and as an area requiring state control and regulation unlike the European approach on accessibility of the Internet as a crucial human rights component.

However, even in the areas of its priority, Russia failed to benefit from all the opportunities of cooperation due to traditional obstacles, such as protectionism, absence of legal safeguards, corruption etc. This is why Russia was unable to fully profit from the institutional mechanisms of CBSS, preferring bilateral cooperation.

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When Russian aggression against Ukraine started, the Baltic regional partnership revealed to be in crisis: as a multilateral format, it was not suspended, yet the partnership with Russia was to be revised since EU policy on Russia had changed. Russian aggression and the following introduction of sanctions against Russia caused cancelling (for the first time in 22 years of organisation’s existence history) the 10th summit of CBSS planned for June 2014 at the level of Prime Ministers. This type of summits has not been resumed since then.

In this regional cooperation crisis, at least partial excluding of the aggressor state from the full CBSS working format is representative. The level of consolidation of other member states is high enough, and their position is clearly stated in two regional reports of 2014, economic and political ones. The first begins with the following words: “When the leaders of the Baltic region countries meet at the 16th summit of the Baltic Development Forum in Turku, a usual dialog on economic opportunities shall go along with a tough discussion of the political context. Russian actions against Ukraine and the consequences of such actions for relations between Western Europe and Russia influence the basic cooperation principles in the Baltic region. ... “As an appropriate reaction to the Russian actions against Ukraine, the region shall revise its economic cooperation and fields of development”. In the political report, it is stated as follows: “2014 cannot be a year of business as usual since Russia, one of the members of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, has annexed the part of the territory of the state observing the organisation”. It is also stated over there that the Russian economy “pays a price” for the Russian actions in Ukraine even though it is the whole region that suffers from losses.

Thus, the crisis of trust because of the Russian aggression against Ukraine caused the suspension of the political dialog in the Baltic region. The main indicator is the cancellation of CBSS summits and ministerial meetings since 2014. Cooperation with Russia is limited to the lower regional level and regular meetings of high CBSS officials. Meanwhile, Eurocommission and partners of Russia in the Baltic region show their interest in a wide involvement of Russia to regional projects: this is also demonstrated in the EU’s updated strategy of Northern Dimension. Nuclear technologies, the prevention of trafficking radioactive materials, strengthening readiness to emergency cases — those are traditional fields of cooperation of Russia in CBSS. Another Russian priority within regional cooperation is fight against organised crime. In 2015-2016 Russia was heading an appropriate Target group aiming at enhancing cooperation of police and prosecutor offices of the Baltic states...

in the prevention of illegal migration, human trafficking, and drug trafficking. Today, Russia basically has a possibility to cooperate within all Baltic initiatives related to environment protection, development of infrastructure capacity and humanitarian partnership. It is highly probable considering the applied sanctions that Russians now will pay more attention to all available opportunities they used to ignore before, bearing in mind obtaining additional financial aid and compensating their partial political isolation.

Ukraine is present in CBSS as an observer. This status provides the tools enabling monitoring how Russia attempts to overcome sanctions through participation in regional projects, and therefore, widely publicize such attempts, including informing the EU institutions. It is also worth to constantly bring to the attention of CBSS member states an inappropriate use of funds by the Russian part and emphasize the necessity of financial control and quality monitoring during the implementation of the project scope of work.

In the Baltic region, environment protection topic was also lobbied as an area of cooperation with Russia. Despite the fact that Russia itself did not set this topic as priority during its presidency in CBSS in 2013, Paavo Lipponen (Finnish Prime-Minister in 1995-2014, now Nord Stream independent consultant), one of Kremlin lobbyists, insists on keeping the ecological partnership with Russia within the frame of Northern Dimension and openly declares the sanctions impeding such cooperation shall be subject to be revised or cancelled (EBRD and EIB have blocked financing new projects). "And if the sanctions cannot be lifted then new mechanisms shall be developed for financing projects by EU."  

Within such a framework, Russia has a powerful leverage by sabotaging solving environmental issues under its competence. A bright example is ignoring the problem of Krasnyi Bor, an overloaded hazardous waste landfill in Leningrad region. The dumpsite already threatens the Gulf of Finland, creating a problem of international scale. Concerns have been expressed by Estonia, Sweden, Finland and Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission HELCOM.  

Ekokem, a Finnish company declared its determination to launch the decontamination of the waste at the landfill. The position of the Russian side is still unknown.

The regional cooperation in the Black Sea region, foremost, through the format of Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation includes more diverse actors, whereas the position of Russia is considerably stronger that other countries of the region. BSEC has 12 member states and a developed institutional structure including the highest political level of representation: Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. 

Unlike a tough and compelling stand of the Baltic region states, the Black Sea states continued to communicate as usual at the level of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. At the session in January, 2016, Ukrainian delegation demonstratively left the meeting to show their protest against Russia taking

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14 Мелиян Татьяна. Не НАТО угрожать. Как президенты России и Финляндии обменялись угрозами вместо любезностей. Web-ressource: https://lenta.ru/articles/2016/07/02/suomi/  
the presidency (from 1st January to 1st July 2016) and during the 6 months Ukrainian representatives did not participate in meetings held on the territory of Russia, including BSEC Parliamentary Assembly (28 June 2016) and Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (1st July 2016).

It is difficult for BSEC members to develop a consolidated stance due to a considerable divergence of their interests. The EU keeps being the most powerful integration project of the region, therefore, the majority of the BSEC projects will be most probably implemented within the Black Sea Synergy, the EU strategy for the region and in compliance with the EU regulations. Meanwhile, considering the growing interest of China to the Black Sea region and Chinese readiness to finance the projects interesting for them, additional cooperation opportunities are expected to be created within the BSEC. However, everything listed above still does not make BSEC an effective regional organisation since the member states do not have the political will to develop neither regional cooperation nor clearly stated mutual obligations and liabilities within the organisation. Thus, BSEC today is still more of a platform for a dialog.

BSEC is of Russia’s interest in two ways: 1) using organisation’s opportunities for attracting financial resources to implement Russian projects; 2) attempting to legalise Crimea through the involvement of Crimean players of economic, educational, civil society (mainly ecological) activities to international projects within the BSEC (this was almost clearly announced by Yevgeniy Stanislavov, the Director of Economic Cooperation Department of the Russian MFA on 22 January 2016 in Istanbul during representation of priorities of the Russian Presidency in BSEC).16 Among the Russian Presidency priorities, the following shall be mentioned:17

1. Expanding the use of warranty funds for simplifying the access of small and medium businesses to credit financial resources, as well as their perspectives of international expansion;

2. Implementing the Russian initiative on development of the multimodal freight and passenger ferry traffic in the region;

3. Implementing the project of the circular road around the Black Sea and development of maritime passages in the region;

4. Implementing the project of creating an Electric power belt around the Black Sea;

5. Shaping new and enhancing existing mechanisms of interaction of national emergency services;

6. Developing cooperation in the area of food security, involving investments into agricultural complex development in Russia and the BSEC countries;

7. Developing the common research environment through the creation of mechanisms of financing multilateral research projects; support of network cooperation of research and educational institutions, mainly within the network of Black Sea Universities (BSEC’s partner on sectoral dialog); joint use of the research infrastructure of BSEC countries.

Russia is very much interested in implementing infrastructure and transport projects in the Black Sea region, including as follows:18 1) construction of the new Taman

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17 Приоритеты российского председательства. Россияское Председательство в ЧЭС. Web-ressource: http://bsec.mid.ru/priorities

18 Россия развивает транспортную инфраструктуру в рамках ОЧЭС. Web-ressource: http://ac.gov.ru/events/08787.html
deep-water port (using the concession tool); 2) construction of the bridge through Kerch Strait; 3) extension of capacities of the Krasnodar railway junction.

Russia is also interested in developing bilateral business contacts. For this purpose, they use BSEC platforms, foremost, the Business Council. During the Russian Presidency in the Organisation, the activity of this Council was, in fact, continuing the activities of the Russian National Committee of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, and the Head of RNCBSEC was elected the Head of BSEC Business Council for the period of Russia's presidency. RNCBSEC declared the following priorities of its activities: 1) development of Situation Information Analysis Centre (preventive informing on probable technogenic accidents); 2) Black Sea Basin Ecological Monitoring project; 3) interaction of RNCBSEC and the delegation of the Stavropol Government to the Federal Russian Government. Meanwhile, activities of both RNCBSEC and BSEC Business Council in the first half of 2016 were in fact concentrated on organising and holding an international trade exhibition in Russia.

The main task of Ukraine in facing the Russian policy is monitoring and preventing the attempts of involving Crimean legal entities in international projects, the intentions of international partners to do business in Crimea, implementation of any infrastructure projects related to Crimea, as well as attempts of Russia to obtain international funding bypassing sanctions through participation in international projects. It is crucial for Ukrainian delegation to include an issue of condemning the annexation of Crimea and occupation of the part of Ukrainian territory to the agenda of every meeting of BSEC high bodies, and to insist on including such statements in the minutes and summaries of these meetings.

Conclusions

To summarize, we may state that participation and activity of Russia within the frame of regional European organisations is defined by its revisionism policy and striving for gaining the status of a regional and, in prospect, worldwide power. In no way Russia considered regional organisations as a region-consolidating tool through uniting the potential of member countries, but only through the prism of usefulness of organisations for gaining its primary goal of strengthening Russian influence and/or as an additional source of funding Russian business entities and local administrations.

- Through membership in the OSCE, Russia strives to reinforce its influence on decisions of European countries in the area of foreign relations and security. A useful tool for Russia in this case is lobbying acceptable decisions on European multistake platforms. Notably within the OSCE, Russia was trying to legalize its influence before 2013 via initiatives on signing legal binding international agreements, and after 2013 via the OSCE's bureaucracy and consensus principle for promoting Russian stance on current events of European security. For this purpose, Russians working in OSCE structures and missions, as well as foreign representatives engaged by Russia are used as influence tools.

- In European international organisation of the regional format (Council of the Baltic Sea States and Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation), Russia is concerned about involving
funding through the tools of the organisations, about lobbying its own infrastructure projects and conserving its own presence at regional negotiating platforms. In CBSS, Russia has been rendering from the full extent of cooperation at the highest level, and the implementation of joint projects has been revised in compliance with the sanctions imposed by EU. This was enabled by a consolidated stance of the Baltic region states on inadmissibility of the annexation of Crimea, occupation of the part of Ukrainian territory and continuance of aggressive actions at the East of Ukraine by Russia.

- Striving to overcome a partial obstruction on behalf of CBSS members and seeking for using tools of obtaining international funds through the programs of organisation, Russia increases its activities in the areas not interesting before: ecological, humanitarian, energy saving etc. In order to promote such cooperation, Kremlin will use both risk factors and lobbyists of Russian interests.

- In Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Russia has kept its position as the member of organisation. In the meantime, in compliance with the revised EU policy on the Black Sea region, all regional international projects related to Crimea have been suspended. The implementation of major infrastructure projects with Russia’s participation is also stopped. Most of economic activities of Russia within BSEC today concentrates on creating opportunities for bilateral contacts of Russian business representatives with possible international partners. Meanwhile, the main purpose of Russia is still trying to legalise the status of Crimea through involvement of Crimean entities of economic, educational, ecological and other activities in international projects within BSEC. Considering a growing interest of China to the Black Sea region, attempts of Russia are to be expected to participate in economic projects of China for Black Sea region for finding a possibility to bypass economic sanctions and legalise the status of Crimea.

- Russia was not interested in developing effective regional organisations neither before nor after 2014. This is confirmed by the absence of effective international projects initiated by Russia in both organisations, CBSS and BSEC. Projects being implemented with Russia’s participation are also estimated to be of low-level. However, considering EU striving to conserve the “policy of Russian involvement”, continuation of cooperation with Russia is to be expected within European formats of regional cooperation. Meanwhile, stricter control procedures of using project funding and of scope of work implementation can be predicted to be introduced by European countries.

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