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ТРАНСГРАНИЧНЫЕ РЕГИОНЫ В УСЛОВИЯХ ГЛОБАЛЬНЫХ ИЗМЕНЕНИЙ: СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ВЫЗОВЫ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ РАЗВИТИЯ

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EU-Russia trans- and cross-border cooperation in the Arctic region¹

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Abstract. This study aims to examine the historical experience of EU-Russia trans- and cross-border cooperation in the Arctic in the post-Cold War era. Particularly, the role of the Northern Dimension and EU-Russia cross-border cooperation programs in maintaining and further developing the mechanism of EU-Russia interdependency is explored.

Keywords: EU, Russia, trans- and cross-border cooperation, Arctic, interdependency.

Introduction

Trans- and cross-border cooperation (TBC/CBC) has become a widespread phenomenon in Europe, including in Russia. In the post-Cold War period, TBC/CBC is developed not only by states/national governments but also increasingly by subnational/non-state actors such as regions, counties, cities, companies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

This process has been part of the growth of complex interdependence, involving different types of actors and policy sectors. Russian regional and local actors regard this type of external policy (labeled “paradiplomacy”, parallel to federal diplomacy) as a suitable and preferable response to numerous challenges (socioeconomic, environmental, ethnic, religious, cultural, etc.) that they face on a daily basis. It is viewed by many Russian regions and municipalities as an effective instrument not only for solving local problems but also for ensuring their sustainable development. These actors believe that border-related resources can be utilized more effectively with cooperation extended beyond national boundaries, although the effectiveness and scale of TBC/CBC projects vary considerably among Russia’s border regions and municipalities.

The research objective of this study is two-fold. First, it aims to examine the historical experience of EU-Russia TBC/CBC in the Arctic in the post-Cold War era. Second, the role of TBC/CBC in maintaining and further developing the mechanism of EU-Russia interdependency is studied.

The Northern Dimension (ND) partnerships and various EU-Russian CBC programs were the main forms of TBC/CBC between the EU and Russia in the High North in the last quarter of the century.

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Northern Dimension partnerships

Being launched in 2000 as a regional dimension of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy and reformatted in 2006 into four partnerships with Russia, Norway and Iceland, the ND in general and its 'Arctic window' aimed at supporting stability, well-being and sustainable development in the region by means of practical cooperation. It covered a wide range of sectors, such as the environment, nuclear safety, health, energy, transport, logistics, promotion of trade and investment, research, education and culture.

For example, the ND Environmental Partnership (NDEP) aimed to bring partners and initiatives together to facilitate fundraising for priority environmental projects, pooling the collective expertise and resources of the international financial institutions (IFIs) active in the region: European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), European Investment Bank (EIB), Nordic Investment Bank (NIB), Nordic Environment Finance Corporation and the World Bank. Each project was assigned an IFI that acted as Lead Implementing Agency to manage a project from inception to completion. Through their expertise the IFIs identified and developed new projects which, once approved by the NDEP contributors, followed an organized and transparent implementation program which adhere to the procurement rules of the lead IFI. For environmental projects, NDEP grants complemented loans provided by IFIs and these in turn could leverage further local and international funding. The NDEP grants offered an incentive for environmental projects that might not otherwise be financially viable or unable to achieve satisfactory environmental targets without additional assistance. For example, under the NDEP's auspices, wastewater treatment plants were built or rehabilitated in Arkhangelsk and Komi Republic.

The NDEP's nuclear "window" has become a major multilateral initiative in dealing with nuclear waste management in north-west Russia. Its focus was on the Kola Peninsula, Arkhangelsk and Murmansk regions, which constituted the largest repository of nuclear waste in the world. The NDEP coordinated its work with the Contact Expert Group of the International Atomic Energy Agency. NDEP nuclear safety projects included construction of spent nuclear fuel storage facilities, defueling of nuclear submarines, modernization of spent nuclear fuel transportation systems on the Kola Peninsula.

As for the ND on Transport and Logistics (NDPTL) it had a general aim to develop major transnational transport connections between the partner countries with the view of stimulating sustainable economic growth at the local/regional and global levels.

Prior to the Ukrainian crisis, the ND in Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS) worked according to the provisions spelled out in the Declaration concerning the establishment of a NDPHS (the Oslo Declaration of 2003), which stipulated that the partnership should promote cooperation and internationally coordinated actions in order to fulfill specific objectives within the following two priority areas: (1) reducing major communicable diseases and prevention of lifestyle related to non-communicable diseases; (2) enhancing and promoting healthy and socially rewarding lifestyles.

Established in 2010, the ND Partnership on Culture (NDPC) is the youngest of the four partnerships in the ND policy. From the very beginning, the aim of the NDPC was to contribute to the social and economic development in the region by focusing on culture-based creativity cooperation, promoting the operating conditions for cultural and creative industries, by bridging the gap between public and private funding and strengthening cooperation between the cultural and creative industries and the business community throughout the entire ND area. Furthermore, culture was seen as the driving force in regional and international development and an important part of cooperation in all other sectors across the ND area. Brussels funded four projects with Russia's participation in 2011-2014. These were all culturally-orientated and included a study on the Viking route heritage sites in Russia and a mapping study of music industry operators in North West Russia. The EU's total contribution was as little as EUR 572, 498 [3, p. 92].

In the post-Ukrainian crisis period ND partnerships developed rather sluggishly: some projects were cancelled or suspended; only projects approved in the pre-crisis period were continued

and no new projects were launched. For example, the NDEP did not initiate any new projects with Russia in the 2014-2020 EU budget cycle, but, at the same time, turned its attention to cooperation with Belarus. Some modest activities and progress can be observed in the cases of NDPHS and NDPC.

EU-Russia CBC programs

Along with the ND's "Arctic window", EU-Russia collaboration in the High North took place in the context of various EU-Russia CBC programs. The earlier EU-Russia CBC projects were executed under the Tacis, Phare and Interreg programs (1990-2000s). A new policy and implementation framework for CBC on the EU external borders was elaborated by the 2006 European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and further detailed in the 2007 Implementing Rules.

According to the above documents, CBC had (and still has) three main objectives: to promote economic and social development in border areas; address common challenges (environment, public health, safety and security); and establish better conditions for people, goods and capital mobility.

In 2007-2013, two EU-Russia CBC programs covered the Arctic area: the CBC Kolarctic and Karelia Programs. The Kolarctic Program covered several border regions from Russia (Murmansk and Arkhangelsk Regions, Nenets Autonomous District), Finland (Lapland), Norway (Finnmark, Troms, Nordland) and Sweden (Norrbotten). The so-called adjoining areas included Pohjois-Pohjanmaa (Finland), Västerbotten (Sweden), Republic of Karelia, Leningrad Region and St. Petersburg (Russia).

The CBC Karelia Program united several Finnish (Pohjois-Pohjanmaa (Northern Ostrobothnia), Pohjois-Karjala (North Karelia) and Kainuu) and Russian (Republic of Karelia) regions. The adjoining areas included Lapland and Pohjois-Savo (Finland), as well as the Murmansk, Arkhangelsk and Leningrad Regions and St. Petersburg (Russia). These programs had the following priorities: (1) sustainable economic and social development; (2) coping with common challenges (health, security, accidents, environmental risks, and management and border issues); (3) people-to-people cooperation and identity building.

The Ukrainian crisis, followed by the mutual EU and Russian sanctions, the Russian economic crisis of 2014-2016 and re-militarization of the North European region had a very negative impact on EU-Russia CBC. For example, investment risks rose for those European companies which planned participation in the CBC projects with Russia. The EIB and EBRD, which were involved in financing the EU-Russia CBC projects, had to cancel or seriously limit its activities in this field. EU sanctions targeting several Russian leading banks also complicated these financial institutions' participation in the CBC activities. In general, mutual mistrust and suspicion have rapidly increased in the EU-Russia relations, which resulted in cancelling or delaying many cooperative efforts in the border regions.

On the other hand, given tense relations between Brussels and Moscow, the EU leadership believed that shifting the focus of the EU-Russian bilateral cooperation from the national to regional and local levels would be a proper solution. For the 2014-2020 EU's budget cycle, which coincided with the post-Ukrainian crisis, a European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI) was adopted in March 2014. The rules established for the ENPI CBC have been simplified and adapted based on previous experience. As far as the ENI CBC program is concerned the 2017 mid-term review noted that most ENI CBC programs were at the inception stage (i.e. implementing the preparatory actions required to start the program). This can be explained by Brussels' hesitance about the future of the CBC programs in the context of EU-Russia tensions.



Map 2. Karelia CBC Programme 2014-2020 area.

The program is co-funded by the EU out of the ENI (EUR 10, 750 million) and ERDF (EUR 10, 750 million) allocations and by Russia (EUR 10, 750 million) and Finland (EUR 10.75 million) [1, p. 4]. 40 joint projects were selected for funding by the stakeholders.

Critical assessment of the ND and EU CBC programs

Despite the overall positive assessment of the EU-Russia ND partnerships and CBC programs, neither Brussels nor Moscow want to produce a rosy picture of their cooperation in the region and are quite self-critical in terms of their assessments of past experience with CBC activities. Four main types of problems associated with the implementation of the ND and CBC concepts can be identified. First is the partners' capacity and preparedness to enter into a program partnership. Second, there is the partners' willingness and capacity to manage the program and, notably, to establish a system of joint management responsibility. Third, potential obstacles came in the realm of partners' knowledge and capacity to develop and implement project proposals and, finally, support from the national level for the establishment and management of the program by local partners.

Notwithstanding these more practical issues, the ND and CBC experiences in the Arctic region show that the main hindrances came from political factors rather than from the technical inexperience of the participants. The implementation of ND and CBC programs in the North suffered from the spill-over of political conflicts between its participants, including but not limited to the 2008 Georgian-Russian armed conflict, tensions over the human rights situation in Russia, some Baltic Sea region countries' opposition to the construction of the Nord Stream gas pipeline, Ukrainian crisis, etc. As the "lesson" from the EU-Russia CBC programs in the North demonstrates, it is impossible to develop cooperation against the political will of participating countries. However, as evidenced by rather positive experiences of some NDEP, as well as the Kolarctic and Karelia programs, with a little political support or at least governmental neutrality, cooperative programs can be successfully implemented and have positive "confidence-building" effects and some useful practical results for participants.

Concluding remarks

Given Russia's and some other Arctic actors' reluctance to allow the EU to play a more significant role in the High North, it is safe to assume that ND partnerships and CBC programs will remain the main venues for EU-Russia cooperation in the Arctic. In general, the EU-Russia ND and CBC programs provide an effective instrument for the promotion of strategic cooperation between the partner countries in the High North. Relations between some EU member states and Russian institutions in the transport, border management, environment, health care, education and culture seem to be very strong and there is a great willingness to continue cooperation. These practical forms of cooperation appear to be strongly supported at high political levels in both the EU countries and Russia.

There are, however, a number of caveats regarding the role of the ND and CBC in developing EU-Russia Arctic cooperation. While relations between Europe's and Russia's northern sub-national authorities seem to be strongly supported by past and existing programs, the same impact is not so evident in relations between Brussels and Moscow. There are many complex geopolitical reasons which negatively affect EU-Russia relations, including the ND/CBC sphere. For this reason, the ND/CBC programs probably have the greatest strategic value at the regional and local/municipal levels rather than at the top tier. On the other hand, there is growing feeling in Brussels that the ND and CBC provide valuable forums for practical cooperation between the EU and Russia, which may eventually allow a broader political engagement. The European Council decision (taken in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis) to exclude CBC from restrictions cooperation with Russia confirms this trend.

On a practical note, better coordination and synergies could be sought between ENI CBC and other ENP instruments (bilateral, regional and neighborhood-wide assistance) and EU political initiatives, including the ND policy. It is especially important to establish a proper division of labor between ENI CBC programs, and the ND partnerships. Currently, there are some parallels and duplications in terms of specific projects, participants and funding schemes. The ND partnerships should be revived because they proved to be important cooperative instruments which complement and reinforce the ENI CBC programs.

To conclude, in spite of some negative factors, such as an unfavourable geopolitical environment, EU-Russian tensions and mutual sanctions, the lack of some stakeholders' commitment to specific ND/CBC projects, some partners' inexperience in managing international projects, numerous technical difficulties in project implementation, the ND and ENI CBC appear to be useful and effective instruments in building practical cooperation and trust at the transnational, national, regional and local levels which, in turn, result in the creation of a solid, sustainable interdependency mechanism between Europe and Russia.

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ТРАНС- И ПРИГРАНИЧНОЕ СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВО МЕЖДУ ЕС И РОССИЕЙ В АРКТИЧЕСКОМ РЕГИОНЕ

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Аннотация. Целью данного исследования является изучение исторического опыта транс- и приграничного сотрудничества между ЕС и Россией в Арктике в период после окончания «холодной войны». В частности, изучается роль различных программ по линии Северного измерения и приграничного сотрудничества ЕС-Россия в сохранении и развитии механизма взаимозависимости между ними.

Ключевые слова: ЕС, Россия, транс- и приграничное сотрудничество, Арктика, взаимозависимость.

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