

REVIEWS



FROM COMMON INTERESTS TO A COMMON POLICY

**Kulik S. A. *Russia in the Baltic labyrinth: A monograph*
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Today the Baltic region is one of the most rapidly developing innovative regions in the world. Due to historical reasons, the lives of the peoples inhabiting its territory are closely intertwined, and the events of the past have a profound effect on the development of intergovernmental relations. Despite the great significance of the Baltic region for the Russian Federation, Russia's current Baltic policy often leaves the impression of inconsistency, equivocation, and temporariness. It is evident not only in the mistakes of politicians and diplomats, but also in a lack of serious studies of the strategies implemented by the Russian Federation and the European Union for the Baltic region. That is why S. A. Kulik set a complicated but very relevant task to carry out a comparative analysis of regional cooperation between two major players in the Baltic region — the Russian Federation and the European Union.

In the first chapter entitled “From the Kremlin Heights”, S. A. Kulik uses a solid documentary base to answer the question as to why the Kremlin has not developed a coherent and open strategy for the Baltic Sea region and whether there is a need for one (page 6). The author believes that the development of a single strategy for the Baltic Sea region (further referred to as BSR) will be counterproductive in view of the region's political diversity (page 24). Russia's relations with the BSR differ in the level of interaction and understanding. Therefore, according to S. A. Kulik, there is a need for a new Russia-EU framework agreement concerning the region (page 39). Moreover, the author is right to stress that the 2013 Concept for foreign policy of the Russian Federation defines cooperation with the EU through the “creation of a common economic and humanitarian space from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean”, which may also include the Baltic region (page 32).

S. A. Kulik analyses in detail the evolution of EU-BSR relations. When studying the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea region, he comes to a conclusion about the dual nature of the European politicians' attitude to cooperation in Russia within the BSR (pages 42—43). Thoroughly analysing the course of preparation and adoption of the Strategy, the author emphasises that Russia did not participate in the development of the document: “of course, it is an internal document; however, as a rule, it is sensible to keep the doors widely open for consultations with the obvious partners” (page 71).

The second chapter, entitled “Mechanisms of Cooperation”, describes the goal, objectives, and activities of regional international organisations. It

focuses on the role of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) as a “key coordinator of the regional cooperation development” (page 86). S. A. Kulik pays special attention to that the EU member states foregrounded the CNSS as a toll of the EU Strategy implementation. Thus, Russia should strengthen cooperation with the EU in the framework of the Northern Dimension and transboundary cooperation.

The third chapter, entitled “Harmonising the Attitudes”, focuses on the role of the Northwestern federal district of the Russian Federation in the development of cooperation in the BSR. The author convincingly shows that the NWFD can play a significant role in cooperation in the BSR.

The fourth chapter, entitled “Aligning the Priorities: Transport and Innovations”, includes the analysis of the key forms of Russia-EU cooperation in the Baltic region. S. A. Kulik is right to pinpoint that the topic of transport cooperation has been considered by the Russian party exclusively in the framework of cooperation in Latvia and Estonia, where political interests often outweigh economic ones (pages 149—152). Russia still does not have a comprehensive vision of the transport policy in the region. However, in 2005, the Russian government adopted a transport strategy until 2020, which describes measures for the modernisation and construction of transport systems, for example, in the NWFD, the author identifies the obstacle to the strategy implementation. One cannot but agree that Russia and the EU must take into account the interests of the other party when developing transport system concepts.

According to S. A. Kulik, the innovative component of Russia-EU cooperation in the BSR is associated with a number of problems. Despite that the Russian party is ready and open for international cooperation in this field (page 181), the European Union is not inclined to involve Russia into the innovative development of the BSR. Relying on statistical data, the author demonstrates that Russia’s innovation potential in the Region is rather considerable (pages 184—186). The author sees the future of the BSR in creating clusters, however, he emphasizes on the current low level of the development of these structures in Russia (page 199).

On the whole, S. A. Kulik’s monograph focuses on the most relevant issues of the Baltic policy of the RF and EU and provides a rich and diverse empirical basis for further research. The author identifies the key common points in Russia’s and the EU’s policies in the Baltic region and describes the possible ways Russian diplomacy can use in order to influence the development of a common policy in the BSR. One of the obvious attractions of the monograph is its lively and expressive literary language, as well as the author’s ability to describe complex phenomena and processes nicely and vividly. S. A. Kulik’s book captures the reader’s attention from page one and doesn’t let go until the very last one. No doubt, the monograph will be useful for both specialists and a wider audience interested in the current processes undergoing in the Baltic Sea region.

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