

# **Challenges of Transnational Regional Democracy: Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, 1991–2015**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Der 1991 gegründeten Ostseeparlamentarierkonferenz (BSPC) wurde eine wichtige Rolle für die Demokratisierung transnationaler Entscheidungsprozesse im Ostseeraum zugeschrieben. Erwartet wurde, dass sie zur Herausbildung einer regionalen Zivilgesellschaft und politischen Öffentlichkeit beitragen könne. Der Autor untersucht die Arbeit der BSPC in Hinblick auf erfüllte und unerfüllte Erwartungen. Die Theorien der transnationalen Demokratie fanden in diesem Fall keine Bestätigung, da die BSPC-Mitglieder die Interessen ihrer nationalen Wahlkreise in den Vordergrund stellten. Auch in dieser Institution konnte demnach das nationalstaatliche Paradigma nicht zugunsten einer politisch integrierten „Ostseeregion“ überwunden werden. Angesichts der Spannungen mit dem mittlerweile einzigen Nicht-EU-Mitglied der BSPC, Russland, kann die Parlamentarierkonferenz jedoch im Rahmen herkömmlicher zwischenstaatlicher Kooperation zu Frieden und Sicherheit in der Region beitragen.

The collapse of the communist Soviet Bloc and the simultaneously emerging notion of an epochal change known as globalization<sup>1</sup> directed our attention to two features of democracy that have sometimes been viewed as mutually supportive, but that also can be seen as contradicting each other to some degree. On the one hand, the political changes the end of the Cold War brought about have made it necessary to deal with questions regarding the transition to and consolidation of democracy within national borders; on the other hand, there has been an increased interest in democracy that would take place

1 See P. James and M.B. Steger, A Genealogy of “Globalization”: The Career of a Concept, in: *Globalizations* 11 (2014) 4, pp. 417–434.

beyond the nation-state.<sup>2</sup> According to David Held, “democracy must be thought of as a ‘double-sided process,’” which means that we should be occupied not only with “the deepening of democracy within a national community,” but also with “the extension of democratic processes across territorial borders.” Being one of the foremost advocates of global democracy, he called for “cosmopolitan citizens” with “multiple citizenships” to be involved in the transformation of democracy.<sup>3</sup>

While Held’s account has been criticized for being too much based on the idea of the nation state sovereignty,<sup>4</sup> some political theorists have indicated that the national side of this “double-sided process” must be taken care of before it is possible to advance democracy beyond the nation state. For example, Michael Saward noted that “instituting and deepening democracy in existing national political communities may be the primary appropriate response to demands and issues which cannot by their nature be readily dealt with within one country.”<sup>5</sup> It has also been argued that “strengthening the existing political communities in the name of political freedom, participation, responsibility and solidarity is more promising than politically imitating the logic of globalization.”<sup>6</sup>

The double-edged request for democracy is notably present in region-building approaches, many of which took place in the 1990s. It has been held that the global era was, in fact, the age of regions or “the regional momentum.”<sup>7</sup> In order to mark the novelty of the situation, regions were often discussed under the label “new regionalism.”<sup>8</sup> Regions became “spaces of expectations,” to rephrase Reinhart Koselleck.<sup>9</sup> Regions fitted well in the ideas of de-territorialization, rescaling, cross-border cooperation, integration, and so forth. The regional framework was also elevated in the discourse of multilevel governance, often presented as an antidote to the democratic deficit the European political integration entailed, and thought of as being able to combine the local, national, and supra-national spheres of democracy.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, regionalization and multilevel governance have been described – welcomingly and critically – as a postmodern or a neoliberal version of the political organization of Medieval Europe with its system of non-hierarchi-

2 For examples of the respective brands of research, see J.J. Linz & A. Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Baltimore 1996; D. Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance*, Stanford, CA 1995.

3 D. Held, *The Changing Contours of Political Community: Rethinking Democracy in the Context of Globalization*, in: B. Holden (ed.), *Global Democracy. Key Debates*, London 2000, pp. 17–31, at 30.

4 See, e.g., J. Hoffman, *Sovereignty*, Buckingham 1998, pp. 61–64.

5 M. Saward, *A Critique of Held*, in: B. Holden (ed.), *Global Democracy*, pp. 32–46, at 35.

6 W. Thaa, “Lean Citizenship: The Fading Away of the Political in Transnational Democracy,” in: *European Journal of International Relations* 7 (2001) 4, pp. 503–523, at 520.

7 R. Fawn, “Regions” and Their Study: Wherefrom, What For and Whereto? In: *Review of International Studies* 35 (2009), pp. 5–34, at 6; L. Fawcett, *Exploring Regional Domains: A Comparative History of Regionalism*, *International Affairs* 80 (2004) 3, pp. 426–446, at 431.

8 See, e.g., T.M. Shaw and F. Soderbaum (eds.), *Theories of New Regionalism*, Basingstoke 2003.

9 R. Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*, Frankfurt am Main 1979, pp. 349–375.

10 See, e.g., F. Scharpf, *Community and Autonomy: Multi-Level Policy-Making in the European Union*, in: *Journal of European Public Policy* 1 (1994) 2, pp. 219–242; L. Hooge and G. Marks, *Multi-Level Governance and European Integration*, Lanham 2001; A. Hurrelmann and J. Debardeleben, *Democratic Dilemmas in EU Multilevel Governance: Untangling the Gordian Knot*, in: *European Political Science Review* 1 (2009) 2, pp. 229–247.

cal, integrated networks structure in which political authority shifted depending on the nature of the question.<sup>11</sup>

Accordingly, regional parliamentary assemblies have been pointed out as a remedy for the democratic deficit that the alleged erosion of the national framework of democracy has caused. While Held envisioned effective transnational legislative and executive parliaments alongside a reformed UN General Assembly in his cosmopolitan model,<sup>12</sup> many scholars have discussed the possibilities of the existing inter-parliamentary institutions (IPIs) to bring about democratic legitimacy and transparency to global governance.<sup>13</sup>

This article examines the promotion of transnational regional democracy by analysing how the inter-parliamentary Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) has presented its role as the source of democracy between 1991 and 2015.<sup>14</sup> Previous research has shown that the formal capacities and working methods of the BSPC do not support the idea of the parliamentary conference being a democratic assembly in any higher standards, such as direct elections, legislation, or party groups,<sup>15</sup> confirming a general picture of most IPIs.<sup>16</sup> Rather than aiming to prove the contrary, this study is interested in the articulation of the idea of transnational regional democracy. Therefore, it focuses on the

11 For an approving comment, see P. Joenniemi and O. Wæver, *Regionalization around the Baltic Rim* – Background Report to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Parliamentary Conference on Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Area, Oslo, 22<sup>nd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> April 1992, *Nordiske Seminar- og Arbeidsrapporter* 1992:521, Stockholm 1992, p. 34; Held, *The Changing Contours of Political Community*, 27; for critical accounts, see B. Stråth, *The Baltic as Image and Illusion: The Construction of a Region between Europe and the Nation*, in: B. Stråth (ed.), *Myth and Memory in the Construction of Community: Historical Patterns in Europe and Beyond*, Brussels 2000, pp. 199–214, 202–203; J. Anderson, *Questions of Democracy, Territoriality and Globalisation*, in: James Anderson (ed.), *Transnational Democracy: Political Spaces and Border Crossings*, London 2002, pp. 6–38, at 14.

12 Held, *Democracy and the Global Order*, pp. 272–273.

13 See, e.g., C. Kraft-Kasack, *Transnational Parliamentary Assemblies: A Remedy for the Democratic Deficit of International Governance?* in: *West European Politics* 31 (2008) 3, pp. 534–557; C. Kissling, *Die Interparlamentarische Union im Wandel: Rechtspolitische Ansätze einer repräsentativ-parlamentarischen Gestaltung der Weltpolitik*, Frankfurt am Main 2005, pp. 373–375, 454–466, 655–656; S. Marschall, *Transnationale Repräsentation in Parlamentarischen Versammlungen: Demokratie und Parlamentarismus jenseits des Nationalstaates*, Baden-Baden 2005, pp. 15–21, 308; Z. Šabič, *Building Democratic and Responsible Global Governance: The Role of International Parliamentary Institutions*, in: *Parliamentary Affairs* 61 (2008) 2, pp. 255–271; O. Costa, C. Dri, Stelios Stavridis (eds.), *Parliamentary Dimensions of Regionalization and Globalization: The Role of Inter-Parliamentary Institutions*, Basingstoke 2013.

14 The member states include the Baltic Sea littoral states Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, and Sweden, as well as the Nordic countries Iceland and Norway. The member parliaments include also the parliamentary assemblies of the sub-state regions or autonomous areas of Åland Islands, Faeroe Islands, Greenland, Free and Hanse City of Bremen, Free and Hanse City of Hamburg, Kaliningrad Region, Karelian Republic, Leningrad Region, City of St. Petersburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and Schleswig-Holstein. Moreover, the BSPC includes other regional parliamentary institutions, such as Nordic Council, Baltic Assembly, and European Parliament, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The observers include intergovernmental institutions, the Council of the Baltic Sea States being the reference institution and thus the most important of them. It is characteristic for the BSPC that it is also a forum for NGOs and other stakeholders.

15 The BSPC does not make any binding decisions but makes recommendations in the form of resolutions, which are formed on the basis of the consensus principle. The members of the BSPC are not elected in any general election or through a vote in a national parliament. The members of the conference usually do not have any commonly shared fixed period of their mandate. See C. Kasack, *Interaction of Inter-parliamentary with Intergovernmental Bodies: The Example of the Baltic Sea Region*, in: *The Estonian Foreign Policy Yearbook*, 2005, pp. 135–153, at 137–138; Kraft-Kasack, *Transnational Parliamentary Assemblies*, pp. 545–554.

16 A.–M. Slaughter, *A New World Order*, Princeton, NJ 2004, p. 106.

ways in which the BSPC has viewed its role as a democratic forum, paying attention to the aforementioned national, transnational, and multilevel emphases of democracy. The analysis is based on the conference resolutions, reports, and a selection of speeches disseminated by the BSPC.<sup>17</sup>

The period under examination covers the time during which the Soviet Union still existed, EU policies were directed to the region, and all member countries except for Russia became members of the EU or NATO, or both. When the political crisis and military tensions between the West and Russia rose dramatically in 2014, the regional approach around the Baltic Sea came to a crisis, not quite dissimilar from the one that had prevailed when it all began in the early 1990s. The case analysed in this article points out the prevalence of national and political power interests in region-building and highlights the difference between the “real-life” rhetoric of transnational democracy and the theoretical accounts of global democracy. These often take legislation and the so-called all-affected principle – all who are affected by political decisions should be included in the democratic community – as the point of departure.<sup>18</sup> It also shows that theoretical ideas of post-sovereignty<sup>19</sup> and the decline of the relevance of the nation state in globalized politics should be critically re-evaluated.

## 1. Conflict and Democracy Promotion: The Early Years of the BSPC

The Parliamentary Conference on Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Area, held on 7–9 January 1991 in Helsinki, is today regarded as the founding moment of the BSPC. It was convened by the speaker of the Finnish Parliament Kalevi Sorsa, a Social Democrat and the former Prime Minister.<sup>20</sup> The purpose of the conference bears witness to a highly volatile and unpredictable political situation around the Baltic Sea. On the one hand, it was part of an on-going regional orientation with ambitious aims at furthering a new Europe based on regions. On the other hand, it was a practical context-bound attempt to bring

17 The study focuses on the arguments dealing explicitly with democracy and the role of the BSPC, leaving many politically relevant questions out of scope, such as the issues on environment, maritime safety, and social well-being in the region.

18 For a critical discussion of the all-affected principle in democratic theory, see H. Agné, *A Dogma of Democratic Theory and Globalization: Why Politics Need Not Include Everyone it Affects*, in: *European Journal of International Relations* 12 (2006) 3, pp. 433–458; S. Näsström, *The Challenge of the All-Affected Principle*, in: *Political Studies* 59 (2011), pp. 116–134; J. Karlsson Schaffer, *The Boundaries of Transnational Democracy: Alternatives to the All-Affected Principle*, in: *Review of International Studies* 38 (2012), pp. 321–342.

19 See, e.g., Anderson, *Questions of Democracy, Territoriality and Democratisation*, pp. 8, 29–30.

20 The conference was attended by parliamentary delegations from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the autonomous Faeroe Island, Greenland, and Åland Islands, as well as Poland, the German states of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Schleswig-Holstein and the Free and Hanse Town Hamburg, the Soviet Union, Russian Federation, the Autonomous Soviet Republic of Karelia, and the Soviet Republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The observers included the Council of Europe, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, European Free Trade Association (EFTA), Helsinki Committee (HELCOM), Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), and Nordic Council. See P. Väänänen and M. Boedeker (eds.), *Parliamentary Conference on Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Area, Helsinki, 1991*, pp. 261–266.

about a channel of political communication across the Cold War division that prevailed in the European North, as the Soviet Union still existed and the Baltic countries were not yet independent. The event was aimed at finding a dialogue, but it was characterized by conflict. At the same time as the parliamentary delegations were meeting, the Soviet minister of defence ordered the conscription by sending special Soviet forces to the Baltic republics. This alarmed the conference members from the Baltic countries. The conflict marked many of the speeches given at the conference with the representatives of the Nordic countries (except Finland) and Poland giving their support to the independence of the Baltic countries. The Finnish representatives avoided the issue of independence.<sup>21</sup> Less than a week after the conference, the Soviet military attacked civilians who were protecting the TV tower in Vilnius. Fourteen people were killed.<sup>22</sup>

Granted, no far-reaching ideas of a transnational democratic Baltic Sea region were spelled out at the conference. When a regional framework for democracy was implied, it dealt with the notion of the democratic tradition in the Nordic countries<sup>23</sup> and with an indication of a European sphere of democracy when the representative of the Parliament of the EFTA countries pointed out regional parliamentary organs as a remedy against a democratic deficit in Europe.<sup>24</sup> The rhetoric of democracy dealt mainly with democracy promotion at the nation-state level in the Baltic countries and, more generally, in the post-communist countries.<sup>25</sup> It was mentioned in one of the speeches that re-establishing the independence of the Baltic countries would help democratize the Soviet Union.<sup>26</sup> The representatives of the Russian Federation and the delegation of the Soviet Union had a slightly different tone with regard to the Baltic situation, the former being more understanding,<sup>27</sup> but they did not employ any language of democracy in spite of their vision of a Europe of regions.<sup>28</sup>

When the second parliamentary conference was held at the Norwegian parliament in 1992, the political situation was quite different. The independence of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania had been reinstated and the Soviet Union had disintegrated. The resolution stated that the conference supported “newly emerging and re-established democracies in the Baltic Sea Region for the strengthening of freedom, democracy and representative institutions.” A sign of optimism, the resolution also called for the governments to take into account the recommendations and proposals of the conference and the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) to report on its activities.<sup>29</sup> The idea of an intergovern-

21 See Väänänen and Boedeker (eds.), *Parliamentary Conference on Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Area*, pp. 6–16, 118–136, 147–258.

22 K. Gerner and S. Hedlund, *The Baltic States and the End of the Soviet Empire*, London 1993, p. 150.

23 Väänänen and Boedeker (eds.), *Parliamentary Conference on Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Area*, pp. 28, 32, 186, 239.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 243.

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 179, 205, 210.

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 106, 247.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 147, 212.

28 *Ibid.*, pp. 34–35, 186, 235.

29 *Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Area: The Second Parliamentary Conference on Co-operation in the Baltic Sea*

mental Baltic Sea council had been circulating among some prominent politicians for a number of years before the formal step was taken in March 1992, when the CBSS was founded after the initiative by the German and the Danish Foreign Ministers Hans-Dieter Genscher and Uffe Elleman-Jensen. The countries participating in the initial phase were Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Germany, Norway, Poland, Russia, and Sweden.<sup>30</sup>

Many of the arguments regarding democracy and the role of the parliamentary conference that came to characterize the BSPC in the following years were already voiced in 1992. They seem contradictory in many ways. On the one hand, it was held that the conference was a moment in which a regional parliament was formed.<sup>31</sup> It was viewed as an instrument that would aim at turning the democratic deficit in the EC to a democratic surplus in a new Europe of regions.<sup>32</sup> It was also argued that the parliamentarians should become “the basis of the democratic international order.”<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, it was maintained that the conference should not become an institution with formal characteristics, but a forum for different opinions and new ideas. Sometimes both arguments were made in one speech. For example, the Speaker of the Norwegian parliament said that the Baltic parliamentary conference should be a platform and not an opposition to the CBSS, but at the same time she held that the conference should “formulate the demands of the people” to “our governments” and be a “democratic assembly” and create “a normal interaction between the legislative and executive power.”<sup>34</sup>

This kind of confusion with regard to what a regional parliamentary forum should and could accomplish is not surprising. Some political scientists who were crucially involved in region-building downplayed the role of parliament in a manner that was certainly confusing for professional parliamentarians. The Danish political scientist Ole Wæver spoke for the network-like regions and held that the BSPC should not be of a political character in a traditional sense. He did not believe that setting up a Baltic Sea parliament would add to democracy in Europe. The role of the parliamentarians was to further regional processes but not to do so much themselves.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, Wæver and the Finnish peace researcher Pertti Joenniemi argued in a background report for the conference that many of the old state-centric perspectives were insufficient in the new regionalism, including parliamentary democracy.<sup>36</sup> Their point was that representative democracy had been born and developed in the context of the nation-state. As they put it, “[t]he overall

Area. Report from a Conference arranged by the Nordic Council at Stortinget, Oslo, Norway, 22–24 April 1992, Stockholm 1992, pp. 101–102.

30 L.-K. Williams, *Zur Konstruktion einer Region: Die Entstehung der Ostseekooperation zwischen 1988 und 1992*, Berlin 2007), pp. 199–203; N. Götz, *Spatial Politics and Fuzzy Regionalism: The Case of the Baltic Sea Area*, in: *Baltic Worlds* 9 (2016) 3, pp. 55–67, 59–60.

31 *Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Area*, 10.

32 *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 48.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 99.

35 *Ibid.*, pp. 16–21.

36 Joenniemi and Wæver, *Regionalization around the Baltic Rim*, 24.

solution can hardly consist of extending parliamentary representation to cover yet another level, and to instigate a separate parliamentary body for the Baltic Sea region.”<sup>37</sup> Instead, the role of the parliamentarians was agenda-setting and guidance as they made the link between the nation state and the society.<sup>38</sup> In their approach regions not only filled the gap between nation-states and the integrating of Europe, but regions also made a new kind of politics possible. These scholars were constructivists taking the role of constructors.<sup>39</sup> As one of the scholars affiliated with the same “Copenhagen school” of International Relations (IR) noted, “[o]nce regions became understood as discursively constructed it followed that they could also be deconstructed and re-made and new regions altogether actively created.”<sup>40</sup>

## 2. The Model Region and Its Representative Body

The mid-1990s have been described as the golden years of the Baltic Sea region-building.<sup>41</sup> Despite its difficult point of departure, the region-building approach was in many ways an immediate success. An institutional framework, including a number of NGOs, was established within a couple of years. The Nordic countries provided both administrative support and the model institutions.<sup>42</sup> The 1994 BSPC resolution included formulations that indicated a gradual change in the ways in which democracy promotion was understood by the parliamentary conference. Besides establishing democratic institutions in national contexts, it also expressed a “strong desire to establish a genuine democratic community around the Baltic Sea.”<sup>43</sup> In 1995, the CBSS Commissioner for Democracy and Human Rights, Ole Espersen (Denmark), maintained that the region’s parliamentarians were “the basis of democracy,”<sup>44</sup> whereas the 1998 resolution described

37 Ibid., p. 36.

38 Ibid., pp. 24, 36.

39 P. Joenniemi, *Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region: Needs and Prospects*, Tampere Peace Research Institute Research Report No. 42, Tampere 1991; O. Wæver, *Nordic Nostalgia: Northern Europe and the Cold War*, *International Affairs* 68 (1992) 1, 77–102; see also I.B. Neumann, *A Region-Building Approach to Northern Europe*, in: *Review of International Studies* 20 (1994) 1, pp. 53–74. For a critical remark, see Götz, *Spatial Politics and Fuzzy Regionalism*, p. 56.

40 C.S. Browning, *The Region-Building Approach Revisited: The Continued Othering of Russia in Discourses of Region-Building in the European North*, in: *Geopolitics* 8 (2003) 1, pp. 45–71, at 46.

41 M. Lehti, *The Future of the Lost Future? The Baltic Sea Area after the Transition Era*, in: *NORDEUROPAforum: Zeitschrift für Politik, Wirtschaft und Kultur* 1 (2003), pp. 43–53; P. Aalto, *European Integration and the Declining Project of Building a Baltic Sea Region*, in: J. H. Stampehl, A. Bannwart, D. Brekenfeld and U. Palth (eds.), *Perceptions of Loss, Decline and Doom in the Baltic Sea Region*, Berlin 2004.

42 See, e.g., C. Archer, *Nordic Swans and Baltic Cygnets*, in: *Cooperation and Conflict* 34 (1999) 1, pp. 47–71; K. Musiał, *Reconstructing Nordic Significance in Europe on the Threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, in: *Scandinavian Journal of History* 34 (2009) 3, pp. 286–306.

43 The BSPC Resolution 1994, [www.bspsc.net](http://www.bspsc.net) (accessed 15 December 2015).

44 *Towards a Baltic Sea Region*, p. 32.

the BSPC as “a representative body” in the region, guiding governmental activities and “endowing them with additional democratic legitimacy.”<sup>45</sup>

The increased self-esteem of the BSPC was partly a consequence of the enlargement process of the EU. In 1995, Finland and Sweden became EU member states. In the mid-1990s, even Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland began to orientate towards EU membership. While the enlargement was viewed as a possibility to establish cooperation between the EU and Russia within the framework of the Baltic Sea region, it also caused some discrepancy between the EU member or applicant states and Russia. After the enlargement in 2004, it has been common to view the Baltic Sea as the EU internal sea, albeit with a notion of the Russian enclaves. In order to compensate the marginalization of Russia, the EU developed in the late 1990s a new regional policy orientation, Northern Dimension (ND), which was to manage cooperation and interaction cross the EU border with other countries in the North, including Russia.<sup>46</sup>

Some Norwegian visions of parliamentary cooperation suggest that the Baltic Sea parliamentary cooperation was also viewed as a compensatory solution for the country that had opted out of EU membership. In 1995, the President of the Nordic Council proposed the creation of a “Euro-region” in the greater Baltic Sea area, which would be a political body that would take over some of the tasks dealt with by the Nordic Council, the Baltic Assembly, and the European Parliament. This kind of “Baltic Sea Forum” could, according to him, set a pattern for cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>47</sup> Along the same lines, when the enlargement of the EU was again at hand in 2004, the speaker of the Norwegian parliament proposed a particular parliamentary partnership for Northern Europe, which would function as a driving force vis-à-vis the governments in the region as well as the EU Commission.<sup>48</sup> It would send “the message to the rest of Europe” on “good democratic governance and environmental protection.”<sup>49</sup> However, the problem was, as he admitted, that the national parliaments involved should have similar views on the need for parliamentary cooperation in Northern Europe.<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps the most far-reaching idea was presented in 2006 by the President of the Nordic Council Ole Stavad, who pictured a future in the region in which the governments were turning to the parliamentarians in asking for cooperation. He anticipated an “unlimited” power for parliamentarians, once the BSPC was formed by party groups.<sup>51</sup> However, a German representative held that “it is unfeasible for governments to seek assistance

45 The BSPC Resolution 1998, [www.bspc.net](http://www.bspc.net) (accessed 15 December 2015).

46 See, e.g., D. Wallis and S. Arnold, *Governing Common Seas: From a Baltic Strategy to an Arctic Policy*, in: *Journal of Baltic Studies* 42 (2011) 1, pp. 103–107; Götz, *Spatial Politics and Fuzzy Regionalism*, 61.

47 *Towards a Baltic Sea Region: Final report from the Fourth Parliamentary Conference on Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Area* held in Rønne from 12–13 September 1995, Stockholm 1995, pp. 11–12.

48 *Sustainable Development – Shared Concerns and Responsibilities in the Baltic Sea Region: 13<sup>th</sup> Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference*, Bergen 29–31 August 2004, pp. 22–23. [www.bspc.net](http://www.bspc.net) (accessed 15 December 2015).

49 *Ibid.*

50 *Ibid.*

51 *Northern Dimension & the Oceans and Seas: The 15<sup>th</sup> Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference*, Reykjavik 4–5 September, 2006, p. 8. [www.bspc.net](http://www.bspc.net) (accessed 16 December 2015).

from parliamentarians,”<sup>52</sup> and a Russian representative stated bluntly that “the BSPC has already shown how active it is in the Region and that the whole process of co-operation has already happened.”<sup>53</sup> Stavad himself admitted that there was a “reduction of the level of priority given to the Baltic Sea co-operation on the part of many governments in the Region,” pointing out that “a close and strong participation on the part of Russia” was necessary.<sup>54</sup>

Although the possibilities of an inter-parliamentary institution to influence the decision-making on the intergovernmental level have been limited,<sup>55</sup> they have sometimes been able to develop a substantial political link to an intergovernmental organization (IGO). It seems that even IGOs have shown an increased interest in elevating their democratic legitimacy by creating a relationship with parliamentarians.<sup>56</sup> This was the case with the relationship between the BSPC and the CBSS to a certain degree. We have seen that the BSPC sometimes saw its role not only as a parliamentary dimension of the regional governance, but also as being based on the principle of parliamentary government.<sup>57</sup> However, while commenting on recurring request at the BSPC in 2009, the Lithuanian chairman of the CBSS held that the CBSS will continue to be constructive in its relationship to parliamentarians and that the exchange of information is most important, but she also maintained that the BSPC was not “in a position to exert formal parliamentary influence on CBSS activities.”<sup>58</sup>

Rather than in terms of parliamentary government transplanted in regional politics, the regional parliament was viewed in the framework of multilevel governance. After the launching of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) in 2009, the link between the regional approach and democracy was made, for example, in the White Paper on Multilevel Governance of the EU Committee of the Regions.<sup>59</sup> It was held that multilevel governance “reinforces the democratic dimension of the European Union,” and is “based on democratic values and principles,” and strengthens “the representation and influence of local and regional authorities” in decision-making.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, inter-parliamentary cooperation was seen as a vital component of democratic

52 Ibid., p. 9.

53 Ibid., p. 10.

54 Ibid., p. 8.

55 Šabič, *Building Democratic and Responsible Global Governance*, p. 256; Kraft-Kasack, *Transnational Parliamentary Assemblies*, p. 552.

56 See Marschall, *Transnationale Repräsentation*, p. 309; S. Marschall, *European Parliaments in Transnational Organizations: Parliamentary Cooperation beyond the European Union*, Paper prepared for the Conference “Fifty Years of Interparliamentary Cooperation,” 13 June 2007, Bundesrat, Berlin, organised by Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, pp. 2–3, 10–11. [https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/projekt\\_papiere/070829marschall.ks.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/projekt_papiere/070829marschall.ks.pdf) (accessed 19 December 2016).

57 See also Kasack, *Interaction of Inter-parliamentary with Inter-governmental bodies*, pp. 140–141.

58 *New Security Challenges: The 18th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference*, Nyborg, Denmark, 31 August – 1 September 2009, p. 15. [www.bspc.net](http://www.bspc.net) (accessed 16 December 2015).

59 *The Committee of the Regions’ White Paper on Multilevel Governance (CONST-IV-020)*, Brussels 2009, p. 30.

60 Ibid., pp. 4, 7, 9.

legitimacy, at the same time as the regional approach and “participatory democracy” were deemed important for the European neighbourhood policy.<sup>61</sup>

The idea of multilevel governance was by no means new to the BSPC. Of particular interest is the way in which the CBSS Commissioner on Democratic Development Helle Degn (Denmark) saw the BSPC in the framework of multilevel governance and how she linked it with the question of the relationship between the parliamentary forum and the governmental level, when in 2003 she urged the BSPC to become a “watch-dog and counterpart to the governments” in order to counteract the democratic deficit, which, she held, was visible also in the CBSS.<sup>62</sup> According to her, democracy was “at a crossroads” and was “power in transition,” which marked the beginning of a new era of “global and regional democratic governing.”<sup>63</sup> She held that the growing participation of nation-states in binding international regimes has produced notable democratic deficits, as an increasing number of decisions were taken on an international level without passing the normal national procedures of legislative work.<sup>64</sup> Speaking shortly before the Baltic states and Poland were to become member states of the EU, Degn saw the situation as particularly challenging for the Baltic Sea region. According to her, the enlargement of the EU called for “multilevel aspects of co-operation that ignore state boundaries and that transcend the traditional territorial unit of democratic-based governance.”<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the parliaments and governments of the region needed to strengthen the ties between “the executive and the legislative branch.” In practice, this meant that the parliaments in the region should have access to “all relevant information” and that parliaments were given the freedom to formulate their own positions and these positions would be taken into account by the respective governments.<sup>66</sup> It is noteworthy that Degn was, in fact, speaking about national parliaments and national governments rather than the BSPC and the CBSS. Despite the language of multilevel governance, the argument was about democracy in the states within the region. This is also why it was possible for her to maintain that “democratic parliamentarism” had been developed in the Baltic Sea region in various ways.<sup>67</sup>

### 3. Parliament of Expectations (Lost?)

The rhetoric used at the BSPC suggests that it is an institution that has lived on expectations rather than on influence. Although many of the supporting comments regarding its democratic credentials have been made by representatives of intergovernmental or-

61 Ibid., pp. 11–15.

62 The Baltic Sea Region – An Area of Knowledge: The 12<sup>th</sup> Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, Oulu, September 8–9, 2003, pp. 60–61. [www.bspc.net](http://www.bspc.net) (accessed 16 December 2015).

63 Ibid., p. 30.

64 Ibid., p. 31.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid., p. 32. See also H. Degn, *Power in Transition: The Legislative and Executive Branches of Power at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Survey with Recommendations*. Second updated and expanded edition, Copenhagen 2003, p. 5.

organisations, it does not alter the fact that the role of the BSPC has been overshadowed by intergovernmental actors in transnational politics. Moreover, the fact that the BSPC does not make any decisions based on votes, but instead generates consensus-based resolutions, has led to formulations in which expectations take a central role and in which the political status of the conference has been described as being more influential than what it was, in order to improve the very same status. This kind of rhetoric has also been a way to circumvent political differences in the conference. The major problem was a constant distrust between the Russian and the Baltic participants, in particular. Although the initial crisis was relaxed during the 1990s and in the early 2000s, a number of issues have turned out to be controversial over the years. There is no doubt that the enlargement of the EU and, in particular, NATO in 2004 was a sore point in this respect.

In 1992, Joenniemi and Wæver had mentioned in their report to the conference that there may be classical security problems in the former Soviet area, but they nevertheless held that in an integrated Europe there was no longer any security divisions across the Baltic Sea area.<sup>68</sup> This was in contradiction to what the representatives of the Baltic states felt at the time. A critical mention of the ex-Soviet troops still remaining in their national territory was made in every account of the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian representatives at the conference.<sup>69</sup> In fact, the issue of security and national sovereignty led to the apparent suspicion of the whole regional approach among the representatives of the Baltic states as they saw national sovereignty as more important than regional cooperation.<sup>70</sup> In 1995, to take another early example, the Russian deputy minister of foreign affairs, while supporting the parliamentary dimension of Baltic cooperation at the conference, gave an interview in which he threatened to stop the NATO enlargement. It provoked the Baltic and Polish members of the conference.<sup>71</sup> Another controversial topic that has been recurring at the BSPC since the EU enlargement has been in process is the Russian demand for a visa-free access between mainland Russia and the Kaliningrad Oblast.<sup>72</sup> The main issue, however, has been the question on Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia and Latvia. It was raised already in 1992, as the Russian representatives replied to security issues pointed out by the Baltic members of the conference.<sup>73</sup> In the rhetoric of the Russian participants of the BSPC it has been presented as a question of Human Rights and the rights of minorities, to which the BSPC has been adaptive at the level of its resolutions, though without mentioning the Baltic states.<sup>74</sup>

68 Joenniemi and Wæver, *Regionalization around the Baltic Rim*, p. 19.

69 *Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Area*, pp. 28, 36, 86, 95.

70 *Ibid.*, pp. 29, 36, 41, 85–86, 92, 95.

71 *Towards a Baltic Sea Region*, pp. 29, 107.

72 See, e.g., *Baltic Sea – Ways of Integration and Co-operation: The 11<sup>th</sup> Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference*, St. Petersburg, September 30 – October 1, 2002, pp. 11, 13–14; *New Security Challenges, The 18<sup>th</sup> Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference*, Nyborg, Denmark, 31 August – 1 September 2009, p. 20. [www.bspc.net](http://www.bspc.net) (accessed 16 December 2015).

73 *Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Area*, pp. 23–24, 32, 44.

74 See, e.g., *Resolution in 1997, 2000, 2001, 2012*. [www.bspc.net](http://www.bspc.net) (accessed 15 December 2015).

Although the Russian view of region-building has been positive on a sub-national level in the Russian northwest, the federal foreign and security policy towards the Baltic Sea region, and especially towards the Baltic states, has been lukewarm or confrontational.<sup>75</sup> Despite the EU-neighbourhood policy in the framework of the Northern Dimension, the Russian participants of the BSPC have felt that their country was sidestepped in regional cooperation. The Baltic states and Poland, in turn, have been more interested in nation-building and the Western orientation than region-building.<sup>76</sup> It seems also that the Baltic Sea orientation has lost much of its momentum in the Nordic countries after the Baltic states became integrated into the EU.<sup>77</sup>

Moreover, it has been obvious that democratic development in Russia had not been as successful as what was anticipated in the 1990s. For example, Degn pointed out in 2003 that the case of Russia was different from the rest of the countries in the region with regard to democratic reforms. According to her, the situation in the Russian Federation was “for the most part” incomparable with other states in the region, and Russia thus constituted “a very unique case.” Despite a number of democratic reforms after the collapse of the Soviet Union, “the imperial past and tradition, the complex and problematic relationship between the centre and the regions and, not least, the size of the country, have all significantly affected the performance of the democratization process.”<sup>78</sup>

In 2014, the meeting of the Foreign Ministers at the CBSS was cancelled due to the EU sanctions against Russia following the Russian annexation of the Ukrainian Crimean peninsula, but the BSPC did convene as planned. In its resolution, the conference held that it was “deeply concerned over the crisis in Ukraine” and that it welcomed “all steps that could contribute to a peaceful solution of the crisis.”<sup>79</sup> While a Latvian MP wanted to have a condemning statement in the resolution,<sup>80</sup> a Finnish MP held that “it is more important than ever before to build up democracy, dialogue and cooperation between all the actors in the region.”<sup>81</sup> In the conference report, the tone was moderating rather than conflictual. It was held, for example, that there was a “rich cultural heritage” in the region that was “associated with variety.”<sup>82</sup>

A year later, “strength in diversity” was one of the phrases that aimed at keeping the BSPC and the regional approach alive.<sup>83</sup> While the incoming chair of the intergovern-

75 F. Tassinari, *The European Sea: Lessons from the Baltic Sea Region for Security and Cooperation in the European Neighborhood*, in: *Journal of Baltic Studies* 36 (2005) 4, pp. 387–407, at 392.

76 M. Jurkynas, *Back to the Baltic Sea Region?* in: *Lithuanian Political Science Yearbook*, 1 (2008), pp. 183–207, 194.

77 See, e.g., Götz, *Spatial Politics and Fuzzy Regionalism*, 63.

78 *The Baltic Sea Region – An Area of Knowledge*, 32.

79 *Baltic Sea: Quest for Harmony*, The 23<sup>rd</sup> Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, Olsztyn, Poland, 24 – 26 August 2014, p. 69. [www.bspsc.net](http://www.bspsc.net) (accessed 17 December 2015).

80 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

82 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

83 *Baltic Sea Region – A Role Model for Innovation in Social- and Healthcare*. 24<sup>th</sup> Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, Rostock, 30 August 2015 – 1 September 2015, Schwerin 2015, p. 17. [www.bspsc.net](http://www.bspsc.net) (accessed 17 December 2015).

mental CBSS praised the BSPC as “the *vox populi* of the region,”<sup>84</sup> there was not any mention of regional democracy, democracy promotion or the democratic virtues of multilevel governance in the conference report. Symptomatically, though, one speaker asked “all states to respect democratic rule and development.”<sup>85</sup> The resolution emphasized the need for “cooperation and good, peaceful neighbourliness” as well as “the opportunities for parliamentary, governmental and social exchange and dialogue.”<sup>86</sup>

#### 4. Concluding Remarks:

##### The Rhetoric of Democracy and Parliamentary Diplomacy

Despite the formulations in which the BSPC was described as “democratic assembly” and “a representative body” or in which the desire of establishing “a genuine democratic community” was spelled out, it is difficult to see them in the light of a *regional demos*, as indicated in cosmopolitan theories of transnational democracy. There were no initiatives presented at the BSPC that would have suggested regional democratic elections or even initiatives that would have stipulated on region-wide legislation. Neither has the idea of a regional referendum surfaced in the investigated sources. A transnational representation is representation without the people.<sup>87</sup>

Nevertheless, the attempts to make the political link between the BSPC and the CBSS, as well as occasionally expressed willingness to bring party-political mandates to the BSPC<sup>88</sup> suggest that there have been ambitions to forge a political representation that would be analogical to the one that can be found at the level of nation states. However, such ideas have also been regarded as unfeasible. Moreover, political scientists actively engaged with region-building have ruled out the analogy between national representation and the regional forum of parliamentarians. Although the idea of a common regional identity has been a crucial part of region-building, and although the idea of a common Baltic Sea civil society has been one of the key objectives of the region-building, the research on the topic has been quite cautious about the realization of either of them.<sup>89</sup> The case of the BSPC shows that there is more nation-state logic in regional democracy than what the theories of regionalism and transnational democracy usually recognize.

Second, transnational democracy can also be understood as being based on networks and different civil society actors operating together with parliamentarians and (inter)governmental actors in a landscape of changing centres of power, in which case we would deal with a *sphere of multilevel governance*. The idea is obviously less demanding

84 Ibid., p. 16.

85 Ibid., p. 26.

86 Ibid., p. 95.

87 Marschall, *Transnationale Repräsentation in Parlamentarischen Versammlungen*, p. 324.

88 See, e.g., *Sustainable Development – Shared Concerns and Responsibilities in the Baltic Sea Region*, p. 23.

89 See, e.g., M. Reuter, *Networking a Region into Existence? Dynamics of Civil Society Regionalization in the Baltic Sea Area*, Berlin 2007, pp. 253–276.

when put in an empirical test case, as there is no need to ask, as Peter J. Taylor has done, “Who ever voted for a governance?”<sup>90</sup> The rhetoric of multilevel governance at the BSPC has been the most enduring theme in the rhetoric of democracy. It was hinted at already in 1991, when regional parliamentary organs were viewed as a remedy against democracy deficit; it can be found in the idea of the BSPC being a platform combining civil society actors, the nation state, and globalized politics; it was explicitly pointed out as the Northern parliamentary cooperation was praised for its good democratic governance, and when the BSPC was seen as an example of multilevel cooperation that transcended the traditional territorial unit of democratic governance. However, it is often difficult to see whether the main actor and the sphere of democracy in question is a transnational regional one with the regional parliament as the main actor or whether it, in fact, deals with the EU together with nation state political institutions.

Third, perhaps less conventionally, transnational regional democracy can also be viewed as a being composed of national democracies within a region, in which case we could view it as *an international sphere of democracy*. We have seen that the objective of democratic transition and consolidation was the main goal in the early years of the BSPC. This objective has been successfully accomplished with the exception of Russia, although we always have good reasons to discuss the definitions of what counts as a democratic regime. It seems that after Poland and the Baltic states became member states of the EU, the question of national democracy was taken as solved for their part. The regional approach had become, to a crucial degree, a matter of EU regional policy, which made the case of Russia less of an internal problem, but rather something that had to be tolerated and domesticated, in order to keep the BSPC as effective as possible in fields other than democracy promotion.

It has been noted that the advancement of transnational parliamentary democracy has not necessarily been the leitmotif of the grounding of regional parliamentary institutions, but the exchange of information, peaceful settlement of disputes as well as regional cooperation in economic and environmental issues.<sup>91</sup> It may thus be better to view the BSPC as a forum for parliamentary diplomacy rather than transnational democracy, a forum in which the delegates represent their respective national parliaments in a congress-like situation in order to further the possibilities for peace and wellbeing of a region.<sup>92</sup> While the weak parliamentary character of the BSPC and its lack of control over the executive branch are problematic in terms of the theory of parliamentary democracy, the same elements may have some diplomatic advantages for forums like the BSPC. For example, the conflict between Ukraine and Russia might have paralysed the region-building process

90 P.J. Taylor, *Relocating the Demos?* in: J. Anderson (ed.), *Transnational Democracy: Political Spaces and Border Crossings*, pp. 236–244, at 236.

91 L.M. de Puig, *International Parliamentarism: An Introduction to its History*, in: *Parliaments, Estates and Representation* 24 (2004) 1, pp. 13–62, at 14.

92 For parliamentary diplomacy in a historical perspective, see N. Götz, *On the Origins of “Parliamentary Diplomacy”: Scandinavian “Bloc Politics” and Delegation Policy in the League of Nations*, in: *Cooperation and Conflict* 40 (2005) 3, pp. 263–279, at 263–265.

even more than what we see today, if the BSPC had been a democratic forum with great publicity and substantial political powers.