European Security

Experimenting in the northern laboratory: the emergence of an EU approach to security governance in the north and its broader significance

Christopher S. Browning[a]

[a] Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK

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Routledge
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Experimenting in the northern laboratory: the emergence of an EU approach to security governance in the north and its broader significance

Christopher S. Browning*

Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK

This article explores the changing nature of security governance in Northern Europe since the end of the Cold War. Prior to enlargement in 2004 European Union (EU) involvement in the region was limited and cautious, with security governance driven predominantly by regional actors. At the same time, the connection between 'security' and projects of 'regional cooperation' was complex and largely interdependent. Since 2004 the EU has become more engaged in the region, most recently through its new Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region via which the north is conceptualised as a possible test case for broader conceptions of regional governance in Europe. The article argues that such developments raise significant questions, not only for the future and nature of regional security conceptions in the north, but also in respect of how the EU conceptualises itself in relation to security more generally.

Keywords: European Union; Northern Europe; security; northern dimension; Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

For anyone interested in regional security governance, on the face of it Northern Europe provides an excellent focus for analysis. Since the end of the cold war regional and cross-border cooperation projects have proliferated, with the region frequently heralded as the most regionalised in Europe and as a veritable laboratory of regional innovation. Institutionally speaking, the key regional projects have been those of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) and the Northern Dimension (ND). To this we can now add the European Union's (EU) nascent 'EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region'. However, alongside these, one can also identify a wealth of other projects, initiatives, Euro-regions, twinning arrangements, cross-border business and thematically related links, as well as more informal civil society led endeavours.

Two things are worth highlighting about this state of affairs. First, it is important to remember that such developments were far from inevitable as the cold war drew to a close and the Soviet Union unravelled; indeed it is a remarkable achievement, not least because the idea that this part of the world constituted a clearly defined region with common interests, culture or identity was far from evident. During the cold war, the Baltic Sea was constituted as a dividing line separating the communist south and east from the capitalist west and north in the form of Germany and the Nordic states. Finnish national identity during the cold war, for example, was to a considerable

*Email: c.s.browning@warwick.ac.uk

extent premised on emphasising that it was not to be considered a part of the Baltic heritage, but was rather a traditional Nordic neutral (Browning 2008, pp. 194–202).

Yet, in the space of a few years in the early 1990s a sense of regional interests and even identity was clearly beginning to emerge. In certain respects this was obviously partly the result of the sense of enthusiasm engendered by the end of the cold war. Ideas of a new beginning and of breaking down former divides, of encountering the other only to discover they were not so different from us after all, were a common theme throughout Europe. One manifestation of this in Northern Europe was an emerging view that the previous dominant regional formation in the area, the Nordic region, was destined to fade away, understood by some as being an inherently modern project of statist bordering and one premised on the cold war and as such a relic of history. Instead, the future seemed to lie in challenging the previous geopolitical imagination and envisioning new possibilities (Wæver 1992).

From a scholarly point of view, one of the interesting elements of this process was the fact that some of the credit for subsequent achievements of region building actually lay with fellow academics, a number of whom took it upon themselves to put their constructivist impulses into practice and set about narrating these new regional formations into existence – often with the explicit support of the states of the area. The institutional developments creating the CBSS and BEAC were therefore supported by significant processes of myth making in which history was reclaimed in order to provide justification for the new regional formations in the making. In particular, the history of Hanseatic trade was used to provide support to claims seeking to 'naturalise' the idea of a Baltic Sea Region, while Pomor trade was invoked as a supporting claim behind the Barents process (Neumann 1994, p. 67, Christiansen and Joenniemi 1999, pp. 97–98, Browning 2003b, pp. 46–47, 52–53).

The second important thing to highlight, and a central focus of this article, concerns the role of the EU in promoting regional security governance in the north. As the article makes clear, EU involvement in Northern Europe throughout the 1990s and through the turn of the century was relatively passive or reactive at best. For the most part the outburst of regional cooperation following the end of the cold war was the product of initiatives taken within the region, outside the support of the EU (Schymik and Krumrey 2009, p. 5). Thus, the CBSS and BEAC were intra-regional initiatives with the EU only participating in an observer capacity. The incorporation of Finland and Sweden in the EU in 1995 did, of course, create a new northern geopolitical reality for the EU, with Finland's membership most notably providing the EU with a 1300 km long physical border with Russia (Haukkala 2008, pp. 218–219). Finland's proposal in 1997 of the ND for the EU was as such designed to provide the EU with a regional policy framework, in particular, in terms of dealing with its relations with Russia in the region (Lipponen 1997), yet as we will see the EU's approach through to the 2004 enlargement incorporating the Baltic States and Poland in the EU was cautious to such regional initiatives at best. In other words, the evolution of regional security governance through to 2004 was one where the EU was largely distant, and indeed, might even be characterised as somewhat suspicious of such a regional dimension. Post-2004, however, the EU has become more engaged, increasingly viewing the north as an opportunity, and even an experimental space for regional security governance, and raising the obvious question of what accounts for this new involvement and what its implications are.

Taken together, what these two broad introductory comments indicate, therefore, is the contingent nature of regional developments in the north. Things could easily have turned out differently. At the same time, the process of region building and the role of security in this have not been linear. In this respect, this article seeks to highlight a number of key dynamics that are important for understanding the nature of regional cooperation in the north and its relationship to security. In the first instance, the key dynamic highlighted is that while regional cooperation has clearly been important in terms of the very provision of security governance, at the same time – and prior to 2004 at least – security has stood as a constitutive argument driving processes of regionalisation in the first place. Put differently, regional cooperation has needed security just as much as security provision may have been enhanced by a regional focus. At a general level, therefore, this article is concerned with the rationales that have underlain regional cooperation and security governance in the north.

At the same time, a number of supplementary issues in turn flow from this primary consideration. These require investigating how security has been defined at different times by different actors. This is important since if claims to security are understood as important for how regional cooperation and regional security governance have unfolded then we need to know how security has been variously understood. Likewise, the article also focuses on how identities have been constituted in the region, paying particular attention to the role of otherness and difference in the region's identity politics. Finally, this in turn raises questions for the broader construction of European identities, and more specifically, the type of security actor which a now much more regionally engaged EU might be transforming into. In this respect, the north is potentially very important in so far as the EU's new strategy paper for the region conceptualises it as a model for future EU governance practices more generally.

In order to discuss these issues, the article is organised into five parts, each of which highlights different sets of discursive structures, which although interlinked, have played important and different (sometimes contending) roles in how regional cooperation and security governance have unfolded in the north.

The enduring salience of east–west frames

To understand the nature of regional cooperation and security governance in Northern Europe following the end of the cold war it is first important to note that the ideological and geopolitical conflict over east–west discursive frameworks did not disappear, but continued to play very important constitutive roles.

For example, projects such as that of the CBSS and BEAC, and later the Finnish sponsored ND initiative, which was subsequently adopted by the EU, and America's Northern European Initiative (NEI), were in part all premised on trying to transcend the east–west divide once and for all and to escape past divisions (see Browning 2001, 2003a). At the same time, there was also a desire – most clearly articulated in respect of the NEI – to send a message to Russia that the newly independent states were not to be understood as a part of its sphere of influence (Asmus and Nurick 1996). In other words, an image of a potentially revanchist Russia continued to lurk in the background, and in this context western sponsored regional cooperation in the north was part of a broader desire not to leave the Baltic States and Poland isolated in a new grey zone between east and west. Regional cooperation was therefore concerned

with securing the transition of these states from east to west. The east–west frame therefore remained in the background as a legitimising argument for adopting measures to either overcome it, or to ensure that as many states as possible were able to make the leap into the western camp should Russian domestic politics take a turn less favourable to the west.

At the state level, this east–west discursive structure most obviously continued to play a constitutive role in Finland, the Baltic States and Poland, in turn providing a rationale for regional cooperation. For these states, the notion of coming home or returning to Europe was palpable and in all cases westernness was conflated with membership in the key western institutions of the EU and NATO. The Finns accomplished the transition from a dominant cold war identity narrative of being between east and west to a new national hegemonic script of Finland as a western nation relatively easily with their membership in the EU in 1995 (Arter 1995, Jakobson 1998, p. 111, Browning 2002, Kuisma 2003, pp. 209–210). For the Baltic States and Poland the process of escaping the east took longer, and it was only in 2004 that membership of the EU and NATO was secured (though Poland was accepted into NATO already in 1999). For them returning to Europe was not only premised on leaving the past behind, but also on making a definitive break from Russia that confined Russia to an often radicalised easterness. In other words, processes of east–west bordering remained highly pertinent (Jæger 1997, Feldman 2000, pp. 415–416, Kuus 2002b, 2003, pp. 14–17, Miniotaite 2003). One consequence of this was that initially they viewed the various projects of regional cooperation with caution, concerned that the aim was to divert their attention from pursuing EU and NATO membership, and rather to confine them to the grey zone between east and west (van Ham 1998, pp. 224, 229–230). In time, though, active participation in regional cooperation became reconceptualised as a training ground of the transition process, a process by which they could demonstrate their adherence to European norms and values, and therefore their acceptability for future membership.

In part, therefore, regional cooperation and security governance were driven by fears of the past and the desire to escape history and to some extent geography. Regional cooperation itself was viewed as Janus faced. On one hand, the Balts in particular worried that it carried notions of being left behind, a fear exacerbated by their exclusion from the first round of NATO enlargement. Later, however, regional cooperation was viewed in terms of the transition from east to west and as a dynamic process of movement in respect of geopolitical imaginaries. At the same time, others believed that regional cooperation was not just about shifting the border between east and west further east, but held out the hope that it was in the north that east–west divides could be overcome once and for all. Ideas of the north as a test case and laboratory for exploring a new politics of inclusion with Russia were enthusiastically championed by regional supporters of the ND, and not least by the USA in respect of the NEI (Browning 2001, 2003a). In other words, a politics of normalisation, of escaping the Schmittian tendency towards constituting identity through radicalised othering, was what was on offer.

Securitisation and desecuritisation

Second, it is important to explore in more detail the different ways in which security has been conceptualised to provide a legitimising argument for regional cooperation

in the north – in other words, to deconstruct the different ways in which security was deployed in the approaches to regional cooperation outlined above. In this respect, two quite different security discourses can be identified as having provided the motivating force for regional cooperation in the north in the post-cold war period – a *realist* and *liberal* security discourse.[1]

Realist security cooperation

In realist security discourses cooperation between states is usually understood as a matter of alliance building against potential military threats posed by other states perceived as having revisionist intentions. When premised on realist concerns with matters of hard security regional cooperation is liable to be impregnated with practices of othering and exclusion, and so while the identification of the threatening other can provide a justification for cooperation with some states, in turn it obviously creates significant barriers to cooperation with all members of the relevant regional security complex, i.e. with those identified as the security threat (Browning and Joenniemi 2004, p. 236).

As indicated above, such concerns have been clearly relevant in the Baltic Sea Region. For the Baltic States and Poland, but also in the case of Finland at least until 1995, regional cooperation was clearly conceptualised in terms of asserting a definitive sense of difference from the other and attaining western security guarantees at the same time. The Finnish case is interesting in this respect, since although Finland has so far continued its policy of remaining outside NATO, debates around EU membership were frequently cast in terms of the extent to which joining the EU meant joining at least a tacit military alliance, in so far as it was asserted that other EU states simply could not sit by if one of their number was attacked (Hagglund cited in Johansson 1995, p. 42). Likewise, the NATO question has never disappeared from the political agenda, with one of the benefits of NATO membership clearly seen in terms of its bolstering of Finnish deterrence capabilities in the face of a potentially revanchist Russia (Browning 2008, pp. 243–244, 265–267).

The interesting point here is that irrespective of the widespread debates within NATO of its adaptation into a security community of values (Williams and Neumann 2000) and of the need to look beyond narrow territorial defence to adopt a much more global role, at the end of the day the Balts and Poland (and many in Finland) have remained firmly wedded to the idea that above all else NATO is a military alliance whose primary goal is the defence of Europe (Archer and Jones 1999). For them it has been the 'old NATO' of military security guarantees that has been prioritised, not the 'new NATO' of comprehensive security, norm exportation and counter-terror operations. In this framework, then, regional cooperation has been framed in terms of constructing a barrier against the threatening Russian East (Kuus 2002a, pp. 97–98).

Liberal security cooperation

Sitting alongside this realist security discourse, however, has also been a liberal security discourse which has provided a very different rationale to regional cooperation. While realist understandings of security have been preoccupied with issues of state sovereignty and military threats, liberal security discourses perceive a

much broader security environment. In particular, liberal security discourse has paid much more attention to so-called 'soft security' issues, where the threat is seen as coming from a range of inherently transnational problems that are beyond the capacity of states to deal with individually, and which therefore require significant levels of regional and international cooperation if they are to be addressed. Soft security issues refer to things such as global and regional environmental problems, economic performance, issues of public health, migration and welfare more generally. Because these threats are not specifically state centric, discussions surrounding the soft security agenda tend to shift the referent object of security away from issues of preserving state territorial sovereignty, to a focus on the security of society and humans in general (Browning and Joenniemi 2004, p. 238).

What is interesting about Northern Europe in this respect concerns the motivations for the rise of the soft security discourse throughout the 1990s, to the extent that it rather quickly became the dominant frame of reference – even if realist security concerns have continued to lurk in the background. On one hand, this has clearly been a case of the benefits of regional security governance in response to a number of problems which became increasingly evident in the region over the period. For example, issues of environmental pollution (especially of the Baltic Sea), concerns over infectious diseases and the desire to tackle economic imbalances all had clear regional dimensions to them requiring regional responses. Thus, the programmes of the ND, CBSS and BEAC have all had soft security issues as their primary areas of activity – and continue to do so.

However, there was also a much more strategic motivation underlying this emphasis on soft security issues. In this respect, there was also a clear sense in which the securitisation of soft security issues in the region was seen as a way of indirectly tackling the hard security issues of the realist agenda and ultimately desecuritising this agenda (Browning and Joenniemi 2004, p. 239). The point is that the securitisation of environmental, economic and health issues, etc. provided a rationale for engaging in significant processes of border transcending cooperation, which it was hoped would foster trust and rapprochement across the region and in turn support the goal of transcending east–west divides once and for all (on environmental cooperation, see Tassinari and Williams 2003). The notable point here is that while regional cooperation motivated through a realist security frame continued to be premised on the exclusion and othering of Russia, regional cooperation motivated in line with more liberal discourses became an argument for uniting 'all' in the region and overcoming questions of otherness.

At a practical level, the key actors here were the western partners of Germany and the Nordic States who each set about exporting concepts like those of comprehensive, civic and cooperative security to the Baltic States, Russia and Poland (Archer and Jones 1999, pp. 173–175). As noted these ideas became central to the CBSS, BEAC and ND, with the core focus being on trying to prevent the re-emergence of past conflicts. In this respect, the threat posed by Russia in this discourse was also significantly reframed. No longer was the concern framed as the vision of a future rejuvenated Russia seeking to re-conquer its former imperial lands, but rather the threat was that a destabilised and weak Russia may actually implode with this in turn creating a host of problems including environmental pollution, the mass outbreak of infectious disease, a fertile environment for transnational organised crime and mass migration (Herolf 2002, p. 235). Such issues, for example, became central to regional

concerns over Kaliningrad, or 'Russia's Hell-Hole Enclave' in the words of the then European Commissioner, Chris Patten (Archer and Etzold 2010, p. 331), and which resulted in Kaliningrad being highlighted as an area of special concern in the second ND Action plan (Commission of the European Communities 2003).

Moreover, although more will be noted about the EU's approach to the region during this period below, the key point is that to the extent to which it was involved it was either through a functional approach to dealing with a number of legacies of the Soviet era (e.g. nuclear reactors) or through the initiatives of particular Member States (which were in turn sometimes supported by the various investment facilities of the Nordic Investment Bank, the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development or the EU's structural funds of Interreg and Tacis). This is to say that the EU's presence as a coherent collective security actor was lacking. However, while a coherent EU narrative on the region was largely absent, it did as such provide an influential and broader framework for thinking about collective security. For example, this can be seen in how Finland's ND initiative was clearly designed to appeal to key concerns of the EU. At the most grandiose end, the Finnish Prime Minister claimed it would enhance the EU's ability to be an effective global actor (Haukkala 2008, p. 219). However, beyond outlining a series of regional soft security issues it also invoked the EU's energy security needs by honing in on the vast resources of north-west Russia, while finally deliberately appealing to the EU's own emphasis on exporting its values east in order to support Russia's integration with Europe through the transference of more 'post-sovereign' forms of governance (Haukkala 2008, pp. 219–220).

In summary, then, as dominant conceptions of security transformed through the downgrading of realist hard security issues and the prioritisation of a liberal soft security discourse, so too did the emphasis in region building. However, as noted, regional cooperation framed around the governance of a range of transnational security issues and premised on the inclusion of all and an ongoing process of mutual dialogue, was also understood as a way of tackling hard security issues by default. What this discussion therefore indicates is the close link in the north between conceptualisations of security and forms of regional cooperation since the end of the cold war and at least through to the enlargements of 2004.

Beyond security?

It was this link which the dual enlargement in 2004 threatened to undermine. In the period immediately around the dual enlargement a considerable amount of navel gazing took place. Throughout the 1990s the region had been imbued with significant project like features and a shared sense of mission(s) – of overcoming previous divides, of constructing common interests and a common regional identity, of integrating the Baltic States and Poland institutionally into Europe and the west. With enlargement the enthusiasm for visionary politics, for myth making, for viewing the region as somehow exceptional and as an example of how to manage post-cold war reconciliation and transition, seemed to wane. This was evident in two respects.

First, at the ideational level the considerable efforts of the 1990s focused around the romanticisation of a common regional identity(ies) became notable by their absence. One explanation may of course be that by this point such narratives had

been successful and were no longer needed. Another explanation might be that with a sense of regional identity and destiny in place it was felt that efforts were now best directed at the practical level of dealing with common regional problems. So, while myth making may have been important in creating a sense of common purpose and motivation for common action in the first place, such myths themselves were not terribly useful when trying to workout the policy details of tackling issues such as the eutrophication of extensive parts of the Baltic Sea. Second, waning enthusiasm was also present at the material level. Sweden, for example, set about cutting back its 'Baltic Sea Billions' Fund, which since 1996 had been a major anchor of regional cooperation initiatives. Likewise, the CBSS terminated its post of the Commissioner for Democratic Development and cutback the number of its summit meetings (Browning and Joenniemi 2004, p. 243), while concerns about the more general purpose of the CBSS were also raised (e.g. Dauchert 2004). Meanwhile, the US-scaled back its NEI with its repackaging in 2003 as the Enhanced Partnership in Northern Europe (e-PINE).

What such a process seems to indicate is the extent to which regional cooperation until 2004 had become subsumed in the view that it was simply part of the transition process of integrating the Baltic States and Poland into the EU/NATO. EU/NATO membership in a sense indicated the process had succeeded (Schymik and Krumrey 2009, p. 1), or as a recent 'wise men' report commissioned by the Latvian and Danish governments put it, 'the sense of common focus or objectives somewhat faded' (Birkavs and Gade 2010, p. 1). In this respect, a case might therefore be made for arguing that at root it was the hard security realist considerations of preserving the sovereignty of the Baltic States and keeping a lid on possible revanchist ambitions in Russia that ultimately was the real driving force of regional cooperation until this point. While this is probably to over-interpret the evidence, what was clear in 2004 was that many people began asking the 'what now' question: where should regional cooperation be directed in the future, and for what purpose? And is it even needed at all? Put slightly differently, if regional cooperation had previously been embraced at least in part because participation in it was seen as supporting claims to western identity (for the Balts and Poland) and as a training ground for full participation in the EU and NATO, then it was perhaps natural that interest tapered once this was achieved.

Locating the European Union in the north

The question of 'what direction now for regional cooperation', which arose following the 2004 enlargements, is a good starting point for an analysis of EU approaches to the region. This is largely because the enlargement was something of a formative moment for the EU as it resulted in the almost complete incorporation of the Baltic Sea into the EU's geographical space.

As noted above, prior to 2004 the EU's engagement in the region was limited to preparing the Baltic States for membership and providing largely functional assistance for a range of issues of broader regional concern. In this respect, the EU's approach was largely reactive. However, it is important to highlight two things about the EU's engagement in the region during this period. First, it is apparent that the EU viewed the rampant regionalisation and debordering taking place in the region with a certain amount of caution. In this respect it has been argued that the

EU viewed other regional organisations like the CBSS and BEAC in somewhat competitive terms and tried to assert its dominant position over them in the European hierarchy. This was achieved by downgrading the role accorded to these organisations in the ND's first Action Plan in order to try and centre decision-making with the EU Council and the Commission (Catellani 2001, pp. 58, 65–66). Thus, while Finland's proposal for the ND had emphasised relations of partnership with the various sub-regional councils, but also with Russia, the European Commission sought to instead place the emphasis on an EU policy which would be subcontracted out to other bodies (Haukkala 2008, pp. 220–221). Indeed, the first ND Action Plan for the Years 2000–2003 has been criticised as failing 'to provide any meaningful consultative role for the partner countries in the process' (Haukkala 2008, p. 222).

More specifically, it seems that the EU became somewhat troubled by the heterogeneity baked into the project, with the concern being that the EU might lose control of the integration process. Indeed, initial EU ambivalence to the ND might be accounted for by the fact that frequent regional protestations about the north as a testing ground for a new type of politics obviously rubbed up against the EU's own proclamations as having broken new ground and as a model of governance for export (see Prodi quoted in van Ham 2001, p. 397). Thus, from this perspective it was European integration via the EU, rather than regional cooperation in the north, which should be the focus of attention from an EU perspective, while some of the more ambitious 'postmodern inspired' proclamations for neomedieval style border transcending regional governance in the north also posed significant challenges to the organisation of space and borders in the EU context. In other words, to some extent there was a sense in which northern developments might actually impinge on and potentially undermine the processes and bounds of European integration as envisioned in the EU, not least in terms of challenging the EU's approach of drawing clear borders between inside and outside through the institution of the Schengen visa regime (Browning 2003b, pp. 37–38, 2005).

This sense of competition between regional cooperation and European integration arguably became clearest in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) which, as many commentators have noted, attempted to bring a certain amount of standardisation and homogenisation to the ways in which the EU deals with its neighbours and which in the first instance sought to incorporate the ND within this framework. Russia's rejection of the ENP in favour of a strategic partnership emphasising Russia's equal standing in their relations with the EU put paid to this move, but it was indicative nonetheless. What the ENP has also been indicative of, however, is the way in which through the policy the EU draws conceptual distinctions between the security of the EU and the security of outsiders (see Pardo 2004, p. 735, Del Sarto and Schumacher 2005, pp. 25–26, Jeandesboz 2005). This stands in stark contrast with the soft security agenda in the north and where regional cooperation has been premised on equality and inclusion from the start. In other words, the ENP has entailed a geopolitical logic which continues to insist on drawing boundaries between inside and outside, in contrast to some of the more idealised or adventurous goals outlined in regional cooperation discourses in the north which have attempted to overcome east–west divides once and for all.[2]

Likewise, as Tassinari (2005, pp. 16–17) notes this hierarchical element to the ENP is also evident in the way in which the ENP links cooperation to integration.

In this vein, cooperation with the neighbours is premised on the extent to which they reform themselves in line with EU norms and values. What such a manoeuvre does, however, is to tie security to the ability of the EU to reproduce itself on its outside. In other words, understood as a process/policy of norm export EU threat perceptions in relation to the ENP partners are arguably increasingly being framed around the extent to which the partners adopt, or alternatively reject, EU norms. Put simply, the failure of outsiders to become 'like us' becomes viewed as a source of suspicion and insecurity for an EU which is increasingly identifying its regional role in terms of its ability to promote transformation beyond its borders (Browning and Joenniemi 2008, p. 545).

Obviously, the EU has not been alone in this. As captured most clearly by Fukuyama (1992), the end of the ideological conflict established a sense of western normative superiority, and a sense that western models of development had triumphed. Underlying regional cooperation projects in Northern Europe throughout the 1990s it is not hard to find sentiments of a hierarchy, where the western partners (Germany and the Nordics) were adopting the role of teachers of democracy, civil society and economic development to their partners in the east and south of the region – including Russia (see Archer 1999, Browning 2003b, pp. 57–59). Likewise, expressions of frustration and annoyance on the part of their 'students' at the patronising nature of some of the discourses that surrounded regional cooperation initiatives are also not difficult to find.

In respect of Russia, however, in recent years a notable transformation has taken place. The flip side of ambitions at transforming Russia in line with liberal democratic practices and values was that when this did not happen, or when transformation appeared to be progressing too slowly, it easily elicited feelings of frustration. In turn this also fed into a discourse by the end of the 1990s of Russia's inherent difference to Europe – a discourse with a notable heritage in European identity debates (Neumann 1999, chap. 3, e.g. see Kangaspuro 2000).[3] One response to this, of course, would have been to cast Russia adrift. In contrast, however, it appears that especially since 2004 a much more pragmatic approach to dealing with Russia has been adopted in the region. So, whereas previously – and in line with ENP aspirations in the east and south – the goal had been one of normative transformation in line with European norms of liberal democracy, the emphasis in the north has instead shifted to creating spaces for interaction over common interests. Evidence of this can be seen in debates from 2005 concerning the need to reshape the ND on its renewal in 2007, with the emphasis being on turning the ND away from being simply an EU-owned policy, into a genuinely 'common regional policy' where the EU Commission's position was downgraded to that of an equal party along with Russia, Iceland and Norway (Browning and Joenniemi 2008, pp. 543–545, Archer and Etzold 2010, p. 340). A deliberate effort was therefore made to respond to Russian concerns that it should have a genuinely equal and constitutive voice in framing ND priorities. Conditionality, therefore, is no longer part of the agenda in the north as it is in the ENP, and hence Russia's failure to transform to become 'like us' is therefore not de facto to be treated as a potential security threat. In other words, a security discourse of norm export has been replaced by one of common security focusing on areas of common interest (Haukkala 2008, pp. 227–228).

The European Union strategy for the Baltic Sea region

This growing presence of the EU in the region means it is also important to spend some time reflecting on the EU's most recent intervention in the north, its nascent 'European Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region', a Commission communication which was issued in June 2009, but which is the result of a series of debates which began following the 2004 enlargement and the growing sense that the EU needs to adopt a clearer perspective of the region and its role in European security governance. The strategy is very much in its infancy and as such speculating about its meaning and possible impact needs to be done with care. For example, the strategy has already been criticised as simply a practice of re-labelling without in and of itself adding anything new (Joenniemi 2009, p. 4). Likewise, others argue that the extensive consultations that were carried out in the formulation of the policy have meant that it lacks coherence and direction (Schymik and Krumrey 2009, p. 3). However, arguably a certain amount of innovation is evident in the strategy communication that does justify a certain amount of speculation.

As is to be expected much of the strategy document and associated Action Plan is of a technical nature, concerned with the need to develop further cooperation in the areas of the environment, economy, transport and energy and security. In the first instance, it is important to note that security is here defined in terms of cross-border crime and crisis management and as such remains firmly entrenched in a liberal security discourse. Beyond the technicalities, though, two things stand out. First, is that the initiative and origins for the strategy seem to lie in the European Parliament, and more specifically among an informal group of mainly regionally affiliated MEPs (Joenniemi 2009, p. 2). In other words, as with Finland's influence over the ND, the origins of the strategy also raise the question of who speaks for the EU and the extent to which the strategy should be seen as a bottom-up regional sponsored policy pushed onto the EU agenda as opposed to a top-down EU/Commission inspired one.

More significantly, though, it is the rhetorical packaging of the strategy that particularly stands out for the purposes of this article. Most notably the strategy identifies the north as a 'macro-region' and a space in which lessons for a potential broader macro-regional approach to European governance might be learnt and tested out. As the strategy document puts it: 'In these circumstances, the area could be a model of regional cooperation where new ideas and approaches can be tested and developed over time as best practice examples' (Commission of the European Communities 2009, p. 2).

This emphasis on the macro-regional approach is notable, with the document noting that 'Other areas of the European Union are beginning to self-identify as macro-regions' as well (Commission of the European Communities 2009, p. 5). As Joenniemi (2009, p. 5) notes, this appears to signify a notable break from the EU's previous view of macro-regions as formations that need to be controlled as a result of fears that they may introduce too much diversity into the Union – with this being what the ENP was designed to counteract and control, at least in its initial phases. Now, however, macro-regions are presented as 'enhancing its ability to achieve common objectives' (Joenniemi 2009, p. 5). Pluralism within the EU is therefore being embraced. This reflects a point made by Ciuta who has noted that in recent years regionalisation processes have been championed precisely as a way of asserting and being European (Bialasiewicz *et al.* 2009, p. 82).

At its broadest level, therefore, regional cooperation in the north might be seen as offering a vision of the future of European geopolitics and security governance in general. As Joenniemi (2009, p. 4) puts it:

> The strategy is, in this sense, not just about the Baltic Sea Region per se but about EU related developments in general. And in this broader perspective, macro-regions are not merely depicted as something that the Commission has to relate to and digest because of bottom-up pressure from within such regions themselves: they are instead put forward as an integral essence of the Union. This is indeed a matter of strategy.

Regionalisation, it appears, has turned from a potential threat to a security goal of the EU and in this reading European space is no longer best conceptualised in terms of narrow centre-periphery dynamics, but rather as comprised of a web of interlinking regional formations, where at times one's position at the edge might become viewed as a significant resource. In this respect, the strategy paper notably singles out the north as Europe's 'gateway to Asia', indicating a particular future strategic role for the region (Commission of the European Communities 2009, p. 8).

At the same time, the strategy's enthusiastic tones concerning the region's possible role as a testing ground and innovative space clearly resonate with similar rhetoric that emanated from the region in the late 1990s. However, it is also important to note a significant difference in this respect. The intra-regional discourses of the late-1990s depicted the north as a laboratory for testing out new forms of governance in east–west relations. What was on offer was a move towards a postmodern politics of debordering that offered the potential of overcoming us–them dynamics and fully integrating Russia into European space. In this respect, the north of the ND was depicted on maps as a region fully encompassing Northern Russia. Through asserting a transcendent northernness, east–west frames were to be downgraded and confined to history.

In this respect, the innovative language of the strategy document has a different target. The strategy departs from the notion that, for the most part, the region is internal to the EU and what is required is developing cooperation amongst the eight member states of the region. In contrast, Russia is depicted as a 'third country', an outsider, with whom relations 'should be conducted primarily through the ND' (Commission of the European Communities 2009, p. 11). In other words, for the EU it appears the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is one that in some sense draws a distinction between internal processes of regional cooperation and those that may involve outsiders like Russia. Russia's otherness is therefore once more being affirmed. Of course, to a considerable degree this also corresponds with Russia's own identity politics of recent years, and its desire to be treated as an equal strategic partner alongside the EU rather than being subsumed within it, however, irrespective of this it still speaks for a downgrading of the ND in the EU's geopolitical imagination.

Conclusion

It is interesting to reflect more broadly on what this reading of developments in Northern Europe since the end of the cold war may tell us about EU approaches to security governance more generally and some of the tensions that the EU faces.

At a general level one of the interesting things to note about the above account is that it raises questions as to who the agents and authors of European security governance are. As noted, until the 2004 enlargement as an institution the EU was largely silent on regional security issues in the north. This silence itself is of course interesting, perhaps telling us something about the extent of EU ambitions in the security field at this time. However, it might also be indicative of nervousness about how engagement might problematise the EU's relations with Russia, or alternatively it might signal the lack of priority attached to the region throughout this period. Instead, the question of regional security governance was tackled primarily at a regional level through a concerted emphasis on regional cooperation and identity building, with the EU ultimately being dragged into the process through Finland's promotion of the ND. At the same time, though, it also appears that tackling regional security concerns through regional cooperation was in turn underlain by deeper aspirations for EU and NATO enlargement on the part of the Baltic and Nordic countries.

Another point worth reaffirming concerns the way in which the Baltic Sea Region became constituted as a suitable spatial scale of security governance in the first place – not least through the very process of 'naming' the Baltic Sea Region as such and providing it with a mythologised supporting narrative to establish a nascent 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) – but how with the EU's new strategy paper the region is being conceptualised in less inclusive terms. This therefore appears to tell us something about the desired bounds of regional security governance from an EU perspective. In the 1990s, security governance was conceptualised primarily in terms of promoting the transition and transformation of the east and south in accordance with 'European values'. The region's boundaries were depicted as open and inclusive of Russia, reflecting confidence that following the end of the cold war transformation to become like 'us' was what the other desired. Russia's failure to transform, however, has put paid to this notion and in the new rendering of the region Russia is excluded from EU space, to be dealt with instead as a third party through a redesignated ND – as too, of course, are Norway and Iceland (Schymik and Krumrey 2009, p. 12). In the EU's new articulation the region is therefore becoming less inclusive and is characterised by implicit moves of bordering reaffirming the line between the EU's inside and outside. At the same time, at least in respect of relations with Russia, the meaning of governance is also changing, being less concerned with promoting normative transformation as with focusing on cooperation over common interests. In other words, not only is the regional spatial imagination challenged in the EU's new strategy paper, so too is the transformative yet inclusive security logic that underlay regional cooperation previously.

The desire to exclude Russia is problematic, however. Russia's very presence, size, policies, attitudes, interests, identity provide it with a liminal status such that Russia cannot be kept out and simply dealt with as a third party. Consultation documents submitted to the EU with regard to the strategy paper make this clear, with the vast majority noting that cooperation with Russia on a host of issues is either desirable or necessary, while 'all relevant institutions of the Baltic Sea cooperation already involve Russia' in any case (Schymik and Krumrey 2009, p. 13, 16).

As such, one might actually question whether the new EU strategy actually represents a rejection of a regional approach to security governance *tout court*. The

exclusion of Russia from the region in the strategy paper in this respect arguably entails an attempt to exclude some of the major security tensions from regional arrangements and to instead focus them at the EU level. There appear to be two aspects to this. In the first instance, whereas previously the 'security argument' (whether in a liberal or realist mode) played a constitutive role in promoting regional cooperation, by excluding Russia securitising moves appear notably absent in terms of trying to tackle issues of the environment, transportation, economic development, etc. that the strategy focuses on. In their analysis of the EU's strategy paper, Schymik and Krumrey (2009, p. 16) raise the interesting question therefore of what the strategy is designed to accomplish: 'Is it to bring as much of the Baltic Sea cooperation as possible under the umbrella, and control, of the EU? Or is it to provide new impetus to a European macro-region that continues to regard itself a distinctive area of transnational cooperation in its own right'? Arguably, the apparent attempt to 'forget' Russia points in the direction of the first answer as it entails a preference for 'domesticating/disciplining' regional cooperation and making it 'safe' for the EU by attempting to exclude issues that transcend its borders and remind it of the uncomfortable presence of the outside. In this respect, the affirmation of the region as a possible test case of regional cooperation is one where security concerns relating to Russia are now to be excluded at a regional level, while 'internal' regional security concerns are seen as having been solved by integration into the EU and replaced by 'normal' politics. Likewise, the promotion of European 'macro-regions' in turn becomes one that is not seen to challenge the subjectivity of the EU as such.

To be fair, this is not simply something being imposed by the EU on the region, but is also reflective of the fact that the Baltic States in particular have always been concerned to avoid security issues relating to their relations with Russia being confined to a regional arrangement – hence, their view that regional cooperation in the 1990s should be understood as part of a process of transition to EU and NATO membership. This prioritisation of European integration as the basis of security has continued, with these states all avid promoters of the ENP and the further enlargement of the EU into the post-soviet space (Lamoreaux and Galbreath 2008). On one hand, activism in respect of the neighbours is a way in which the Baltic States seek to assert their position as 'normal' and 'equal' Europeans through casting off their previous 'student' status and assuming the mantle of 'teachers' as a result of their expertise in managing the transition process (Jakniunaite 2009). However, this is also perceived as a policy of building solidarity for their position with their fellow travellers in the EU and NATO and putting further distance between themselves and Russia. In this respect, then, for them sovereignty-related security questions remain about broader processes of European integration, not regional cooperation, therefore further indicating a shift away from a regional to a European focused approach to security governance in which that which is to be governed is understood as security concerns emanating from outside EU/NATO borders. Whether such an approach is the most efficacious is, however, open to question. European solidarity behind the Baltic States and to the region more broadly has in recent years been tested by Russia. This has been evident, for example, over Estonia's dispute with Russia in respect of its removal of the statue of the Bronze Soldier from the centre of Tallinn. In this instance institutional solidarity with Estonia held (see Haukkala 2009). In contrast, the contentious Nord Stream gas transportation project, which

will provide a direct energy link between Russia and Germany with the laying of a pipeline along the sea bed of the Baltic, has been characterised by much less solidarity and has rather seen the Commission supporting the energy security concerns of a big member state (Germany) at the expense of its smaller members (see Karm 2008, Larsson 2008). What this indicates is the difficulty in identifying common European security positions and the tensions that can exist between choosing to tackle security issues at either a regional or a broader European level. Whether the shifting of security governance up to the European level via a prioritisation and reliance on the presumed continued deterrence effects of integration and EU/NATO membership will continue to hold is therefore open to question.

Notes

1. This section draws on arguments made in Browning and Joenniemi (2004, pp. 236–239).
2. For an analysis comparing how the ENP plays out in the south, east and north, see Browning and Joenniemi (2008).
3. It should be noted that following initial enthusiasm regarding its promised 'partner status' in the ND, which signalled Russia would no longer be treated as a de facto outsider, when this failed to sufficiently materialise as a result of EU attempts to discipline the ND and assert the Commission's superiority over the other partners, Russia adopted a policy of 'passive resistance' towards it (Haukkala 2008, pp. 220–224).

Notes on contributor

Christopher S. Browning is Associate Professor in International Security at the University of Warwick. His research interests are in the areas of critical security studies and identity politics, with a specific focus on the idea of the west and European geopolitics. His most recent publication is: *The struggle for the west: a divided and contested legacy,* edited with Marko Lehti (Routledge 2010).

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