Conflict potential, conflict prophylaxis and conflicts in the extended Baltic Sea region

Imbi Sooman

Because of the collapse of the Soviet power, the Baltic Sea region, too, has become an undivided region. This results in the challenge of creating integration on a national, regional and European level. Thus, meetings and dialogues are necessary, in order to be able to work off common history – which is often hard, or at least complicated – and to shape common future consciously and – above all – peacefully. Since the end of the Cold War, the debate on the history of the 20th century increasingly has been characterized by three factors: the dealing with history memory, historical politics, and with looking for both transnational and comparative approaches towards primarily national-historically characterized perspectives. Here, too, people try to proceed in a contrastive and transnational manner, with special attention on historical politics. The EU hope for the Baltic Sea region. The transnational program Interreg IV B Baltic Sea (2007-2013) is supposed to turn the Baltic Sea region into “a better place for living, work and investment”. The program will affect all of Sweden, Denmark, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Finland, as well as parts of Northern Germany. Norway, Belarus and the north-western parts of Russia are also affected, although they are no EU-members. The great international research program BONUS focusses on environment and social development in the Baltic Sea region, again in the sense of the “northern dimension”, i.e. including Russia. These programs are important, because the West-East-Conflict, which did not exist in the 90ies as far as economy was concerned – Russia was de facto bankrupt, and only happy to be able to supply the Europeans with oil and gas, and, as a countermove, to get European investors into the country – has intensified on a European and global level, a process which had begun before the Ukraine-Crisis already. Thus, the EU is required to foster a revival of the northern dimension. One can only hope that the mentioned development and research programs will also bring about visa alleviations, so that more spontaneous and autonomic educational and cultural cooperation with Russia can be established. In this way, a new Russian middle class can be created, as a preparation for the integration of Europe-Russia. The more networked the world is, the more difficult it will be to play off the alliances against each other. In the long term, only abolishing global unequal opportunities can keep peace, thus replace military defence in the long run. Hopefully sometime we will be a greater and more democratic unity, and thus will be able to concentrate on the problems of surviving on our planet or somewhere else: sustenance and ecology. The military would have new challenges then. The Baltic Sea area would become a contact zone for diversity. The integration of this area has progressed so far that the prognosis for peaceful coexistence is very good, as long as we do not dispel Russia as a problem and stop striving for dialogue.