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## SPOTLIGHT

# Poland Assumes Presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States

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On 1 July, Poland took over the presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS). Its priorities are focused on security issues and herald a continuation of the initiatives undertaken last year by Estonia, with which Poland shares a common perception of threats. The Polish presidency of the CBSS can play an important role in reforming the Council, aimed at strengthening the political mandate of this organisation, which is becoming increasingly important for the security of the region.

### **In what circumstances did Poland take over the presidency and what are its priorities?**

The dramatic change in the security architecture in the Baltic Sea region in 2022 amidst Russia's heightened aggression against Ukraine has made strengthening this dimension of cooperation a strategic goal for Poland. The security situation shaped Poland's involvement in the beginning presidency of the CBSS, which also falls at a critical moment when the members of the Council support the idea of reform of the organisation in a situation of growing threat in the Baltic Sea region.

Due to Russia's increased military and hybrid activity, such as increasingly frequent violations of territorial waters and airspace, Poland is focusing first on combating the Russian "shadow fleet" used to transport not only oil but also other sensitive cargo. Second, Poland announced the continuation of Estonian initiatives to counteract hybrid threats in the region, especially concerning the protection of critical infrastructure, including strengthening the legal framework securing its underwater elements—pipelines, power connections, and telecommunications cables. Another priority is to strengthen cybersecurity (including to minimise attempts to jam radar signals). At the same time, Poland wants to work towards strengthening cooperation between the CBSS and Ukraine (which has observer status), especially in the area of building resilience. Ukraine's greater

involvement in the CBSS activities is supported by constant support from the countries of the region.

### **What changes have occurred in the Council since 2022?**

The CBSS was one of the first organisations in the region to react to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and to call for a break in cooperation with the aggressor. This resulted in a limitation of its work in the first months of 2022 when Russia was suspended from membership, and then when it submitted an application to withdraw from the CBSS. Although there was consensus in the Council, in the short term Russia's withdrawal posed an organisational challenge. Ultimately, it gave rise to the initiative to review the Council's activities with the intention of reforming it via a review of activities, which was heard during a ministerial session in Parvoo (Finland) in 2023.

The initiative resulted in a special report on the "Future of the Council" published in May this year, containing recommendations for the further activity of the CBSS as a forum of growing political importance, including performing consultative functions towards the EU and NATO (Vihula Declaration, 16 May 2025). The Council would serve crisis-management to a greater extent (e.g., within expert groups), mainly to counter hybrid threats, and would strive to develop rapid response protocols and strengthen resilience. This would mean that the Council would address the issue of regional security, which has so far remained

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outside the scope of its activities, but has gained support and set the direction in which the CBSS will evolve.

### **What are the most important challenges for regional cooperation in the Baltic?**

Strengthening the impact of the CBSS as a regional organisation requires, on the one hand, developing a formula that is adequate to the current goals of the Council and the will to give it strategic importance in the field of security in the Baltic Sea, which is associated with increasing the strength of the political mandate. On the other hand, the desired move beyond the reactive actions of the BSR states means the need for efficient cooperation, often ad hoc, and coordination of activities already at the working level.

The Council has a chance, by expanding its competences and scope of activity, for example, within the ministerial groups for security or energy, to become a more effective format in the region (also in cooperation with the EU and NATO). This would also serve to strengthen Poland's cooperation with the Nordic and Baltic countries. At the same time, the previous issues remain relevant—the need to take care of the biodiversity of the Baltic waters (with the rising water temperature), preventing ecological disasters (the Baltic is one of the most congested water bodies, with over 2,000 vessels passing through daily) or the need to clean up and take care of the seabed (e.g., numerous unexploded bombs from World War II are still present there).