



Journal of Geography, Politics and Society

2020, 10(2), 16–25

<https://doi.org/10.26881/jpgs.2020.2.03>



THE INITIATIVE OF SOUTHERN BALTIC SEA REGIONAL PARLIAMENTS COOPERATION

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Citation

Astramowicz-Leyk T., 2020, The initiative of Southern Baltic Sea regional parliaments cooperation, *Journal of Geography, Politics and Society*, 10(2), 16–25.

Abstract

The research concerning cross-border cooperation initiative between regions presents international relations that are often formed upwards and have their roots in bilateral relations of the regions. A research hypothesis was positively verified on the basis of the conducted research, according to which the examined subject is a form of cross-border cooperation at the level of regional parliaments: German federal states, Kaliningrad District of the Russian Federation and selected Polish voivodships. Coherently with the purpose of the study, an institutional and legal analysis, analysis of source materials and a questionnaire were conducted. The paper contains an investigation of the genesis, objectives and the scope of substantive works concerning the cross-border cooperation formula within the regional parliaments of the South Baltic Region. A special nature of work within the Forum was also presented; the most important substantive issues introduced by the partners in resolutions adopted by acclamation are discussed, as well as the results of own research are presented.

Key words

Regional Parliamentary Forum, South Baltic, cross-border cooperation, region, international cooperation.

Received: 20 April 2020

Accepted: 19 June 2020

Published: 20 November 2020

1. Introduction

The initiative of international cooperation among regions in Germany, Poland and Russia, known as the Southern Baltic Sea Parliamentary Forum (Tomczyk, 2011; Haliżak, 2006) will be the subject of analysis in the present paper.

In this paper, the term of 'region' (which can be defined in numerous ways) has been specified as an area, land, a part of a larger area (from the Latin word *regio, regione*) and rule, manage, administer (Latin

rego, regere) (Kumaniecki, 2002; Wspólna deklaracja..., 2004). The term region in social sciences is understood as a territorial unit of state organizational structures, having their administration status with established borders and assigned tasks (Wspólna deklaracja..., 2004). On the other hand, according to the definition accepted on December 4th, 1996 by the *Assembly of European Regions AER* – a region is 'a unit of territorial administration one step below the level of state, with its own government executing its political power. It guarantees its autonomy,

identity, competences and organizational structure' (Deklaracja..., n.d.). In the following analysis, region is defined as an administrative unit of a state territory, with its elective government, specified borders, having its own policy, legal identity and own budget (Wspólna deklaracja..., 2004).

The term of 'international cooperation' is also ambiguous. For the sake of this paper, a liberal approach has been adopted; it claims that the state is not the only party in international relationships because out of state participants play an equally important role (Halizak, 2006). The term of international cooperation in this paper will mean all socio-economic activities in which border and cross-border location of territorial government units will play an important role in building the administrative potential capable of servicing international contacts (Młodzi o polityce..., 2009; Wspólna deklaracja..., 2004).

Due to decentralizing international cooperation, the number of participants in international relationships in the recent decades has grown (Buczowski, Żukowski, 2014; Zasada, 2018). The term cross-border cooperation also appears; it has been coined by the European Council on the 21st of May 1980 in *European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation between Territorial Communities or Authorities*, and therein it is defined as 'each action taken together in order to strengthen a further development of neighbour partnerships among communities and territorial authorities of two or more partners as well as concluding agreements and accepting the conditions to implement them. Cross-border cooperation is possible within the frames of communities and territorial authorities characteristics which are defined by inner regulations' (Europejska konwencja..., 1993).

In this paper, the term of cross-border cooperation is defined as related to keeping up mutual relationships between the units located near state borders (Wspólna deklaracja..., 2004).

The aim of the following analysis is to present an international policy initiative in a cross-border perspective, namely the Southern Baltic Sea Parliamentary Forum and the analysis of international cooperation within its framework.

The research referring to the international cooperation initiative, whose subjects are regional parliaments of the Southern Baltic Sea, is a vital voice in the discussion about forms, effects and barriers in international cooperation at the level of regions. Carrying out the aforementioned research is advisable not only due to theoretical reasons but also for the practicality of using hence resulting conclusions in political practice. They can prove useful in forming further relationships between members of

the Southern Baltic Sea Parliamentary Forum. In the analysis, the term the Southern Baltic Sea Regions Parliamentary Forum has been used instead of the Southern Baltic Sea Parliaments Forum, which was used in the first editions. The author believes that the original name might have suggested the cooperation of state parliaments of the analysed area.

The leading research methods applied in the following analysis include institutional-legal and questionnaires methods. The following research hypothesis was formulated: the Southern Baltic Sea Parliamentary Forum is a form of cross-border cooperation at the level of regional parliaments: German united countries (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein), Kaliningrad District of the Russian Federation, and Polish Pomeranian, Warmian-Masurian and West Pomeranian voivodships, based on common interests and priorities aiming at developing the regions of the Southern Baltic Sea and EU policy coherence in search for common identity and respect for differences (Grzelak, 2016).

The following basic research problems have been formulated: what were the aims of establishing the Southern Baltic Sea Parliamentary Forum? Who initiated it? What is the role of the Forum with reference to the EU policy? Are there any relationships between the Forums' meeting topics and the EU policy? What were the basic forms of cooperation? What kind of inner teams-subjects were created and what was their role in elaborating on the main effects of cooperation – the resolutions? What part did youth workshops play? Which forms of cooperation are worth continuing? What is the role of the regional parliament of Scania (Sweden) as a member – observer?

In order to prepare this paper, the author used key literature on the analysed topic, the main sources being Resolutions of Forums and questionnaire results.

2. The origin and subject matters at Forums

The Southern Baltic Sea Parliamentary Forum is an initiative of cross-border cooperation among regions, which resulted from bilateral contacts of German Lands of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania with Polish West Pomeranian voivodship and the Land of Schleswig-Holstein with Pomeranian voivodship. The initiative appeared just before 2004 – the year of expanding the European Union – the biggest one in history of the community.

On 26–27 April 2004, a meeting of representatives of the four above-mentioned parliaments was held in Gdańsk. A joint declaration on interregional

cooperation of parliaments was adopted on the second day, at the end of the meeting. This document assumes that the Southern Baltic Sea Forum is established as a result of numerous contacts of regional parliaments of the Baltic Sea, the cooperation in the framework of Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference¹ (25-å Parlamentskaâ..., 2016) since 1991, intergovernmental cooperation of the states of the Baltic Sea Region within the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)² (Śmigierska-Belczak, 2012; Makarychev, Sergunin, 2013), numerous significant initiatives of the Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation (BSSSC)³,

¹ The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) was established in 1991 as a forum for political dialogue between parliamentarians from the Baltic Sea Region. BSPC aims at raising awareness and opinion on issues of current political interest and relevance for the Baltic Sea Region. It promotes and drives various initiatives and efforts to support a sustainable environmental, social and economic development of the Baltic Sea Region. It strives at enhancing the visibility of the Baltic Sea Region and its issues in a wider European context. BSPC shall initiate and guide political activities in the region; support and strengthen democratic institutions in the participating states; improve dialogue between governments, parliaments and civil society; strengthen the common identity of the Baltic Sea Region by means of close co-operation between national and regional parliaments on the basis of equality; and initiate and guide political activities in the Baltic Sea Region, endowing them with additional democratic legitimacy and parliamentary authority (The Baltic Sea...).

² The Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) is an overall political forum for regional cooperation. Consisting of 11 Member States (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia & Sweden), as well as a representative of the European Union, it supports a global perspective on regional problems. These include politically and practically translating the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Climate Agreement, the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, the Palermo Protocol and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, into regional actions on the ground. In addition, the CBSS functions as a coordinator of a multitude of regional actors in the areas of its three long-term priorities: Regional Identity, Sustainable & Prosperous Region, Safe & Secure Region. Set up in 1992 to ease the transition to a new international landscape, the organisation today focuses on themes such as societal security, sustainability, research & innovation, as well as countering human trafficking (O Radzie Państw...; Council of the Baltic...).

³ Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation (BSSSC) was founded in Stavanger, Norway, in 1993. Its participants are regional authorities (level directly below the national level authorities) of the 10 Baltic Sea littoral states: Germany, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Russia. The BSSSC is a political network for decentralised authorities (subregions) in the Baltic Sea Region. The main BSSSC event is the annual conference held each year in early autumn (September – October). The BSSSC co-operates closely with other key Baltic Sea Region and European organ-

isations and institutions. The BSSSC has renewed its Declaration of Common Interest with the Committee of the Regions in 2012 and opens its network for other BSR organisations on local and regional level to become participants (Baltic Sea States...; Subregionalna Współpraca...; Baltic Sea States..., 2014).

the Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC)⁴ and the Association of Baltic Chambers of Commerce Association⁵, and with the aim of enlarging the European Union on May 1, 2004 (Wspólna deklaracja..., 2004). The Declaration set out the objectives of cooperation, i.e. a need to promote interregional and cross-border cooperation in accordance with the assumptions of the Northern Dimension of the European Union and the policy of sustainable socio-economic development, sharing common interests, strengthening the socio-economic cohesion of the Community by bringing the “old” and “new” EU members closer together and cultivating cultural identity respecting its diversity (Wspólna deklaracja..., 2004).

Representatives of the regional parliaments of the Southern Baltic Forum meet systematically since 2004 once a year in particular regions forming this cooperation initiative. In 2008, the Forum was joined – in full partnership – by Warmian-Masurian Regional Assembly and Kaliningrad District of the Russian Federation Duma, and in 2009 by the Parliament of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg. The Swedish region of Scania has been an observer of the Forum since 2004. The 16th Forum in Olsztyn hosted the Lithuanian region of Klaipeda as an observer – it did not participate in the next – 17th Forum in Schwerin.

⁴ Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) is the leading network of cities in the Baltic Sea Region with Member Cities from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia and Sweden. Founded in 1991 in Gdańsk, UBC is a voluntary, proactive network mobilizing the shared potential of its member cities. UBC works through seven Commissions: Cultural Cities, Inclusive and Healthy Cities, Planning Cities, Safe Cities, Smart and Prospering Cities, Sustainable Cities, and Youthful Cities (Związek Miast...; Union of the Baltic...).

⁵ The Baltic Sea Chambers of Commerce Association (BCCA) serves to unite the Chambers of Commerce of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia and Sweden. The BCCA was established in June 1992 in Rostock-Warnemünde, Germany, in order to give the business community of the region a united voice for common concerns. The BCCA represents more than 450,000 companies belonging to all sectors of the Northern and North-Eastern European markets. The threefold task of the BCCA is to protect and uphold the interests of private entrepreneurship by advising policy-makers in business related affairs, offering services to the business community and providing facilities for contacts, debates and meetings in the region (The Baltic Sea Chambers...).

The consecutive meetings of the Forums take place in various regions involved in the creation of the cross-border cooperation initiative; 17 Forums have taken place so far and the next one has been scheduled to take place in Gdańsk in 2020.

The leitmotif of each Forum is suggested by the region hosting the main conference. The first Forum (the founding one/26–27.04.2004 Gdańsk – Pomeranian voivodship) was devoted to passing a joint declaration of the Parliaments in the Southern Baltic Sea area (*Wspólna deklaracja...*, 2004). The main subjects so far have been: the Priorities in regional policy – structural, tourist and directed to youth (19–21.09.2004 – Międzyzdroje/West Pomeranian voivodship) (*Rezolucja II...*, 2004); Tourist, youth and integrated marine policies of the European Union (18–20.09.2005 – Binz/Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania) (*Rezolucja III...*, 2005); The input of the Southern Baltic Sea region into European marine policy (21–23.05.2006 – Köln/Schleswig-Holstein) (*Rezolucja IV...*, 2006); Tradition and innovativeness in the Baltic Sea region (20–22.05.2007 – Gdynia/Pomeranian voivodship) (*Rezolucja V...*, 2007); Scientific research as an integrating factor and a chance for economic development in the Southern Baltic Sea regions (18–20.05.2008 – Kołobrzeg/West Pomeranian voivodship) (*Rezolucja VI...*, 2008); Implementation of European strategies in the Southern Baltic Sea region (5–7.07.2009 – Schwerin/Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania) (*Rezolucja VII...*, 2009); Sustained development of the Southern Baltic Sea region (21–23.05.2010 – Elbląg/Warmian-Masurian voivodeship) (*Rezolucja VIII...*, 2010); Evaluation of the European Union Strategy and implementation for the Baltic Sea region, in particular in tourism, education and Multi Level Governance, policy of partnership and good neighbourhood practice (3–5.07.2011 – Gdańsk/Pomeranian voivodship) (*Rezolucja IX...*, 2011); Strategy of the development for 'Southern Baltic Region 2020' (11–13.03.2012 – Köln/Schleswig-Holstein) (*Rezolucja X...*, 2012); Renewable sources of energy and developing energy infrastructure (2–4.06.2013 – Schwerin/Schwerin/Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania) (*Rezolucja XI...*, 2013); Southern Baltic region – a new tourist centre of Europe (19–22.05.2014 – Kaliningrad/Kaliningrad district) (*Rezolucja XII...*, 2014); Cooperation of university level science representatives in the Baltic Sea region (19–21.04.2015 – Hamburg/Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg) (*Rezolucja XIII...*, 2015); Agricultural and marine economy – innovativeness and cooperation in the Southern Baltic Sea region (12–14.06.2016 – Köln/Schleswig-Holstein) (*Rezolucja XIV...*, 2016); European tracks of culture in the region of South Baltic Sea – development, creation

and promotion in Europe and worldwide; Stimulating entrepreneurship particularly among the youth (28–30.05.2017 – Szczecin/West Pomeranian voivodship) (*Rezolucja XV...*, 2017); Smart specialisations – Smart Regions – smart specialisations of regions, their input and role in creating a dynamic development of Southern Baltic Sea region (13–15.05.2018 – Siła near Olsztyn/Warmian-Masurian voivodship) (*Rezolucja XVI...*, 2018); Digitalisation of the Southern Baltic Sea region – threats and opportunities (23–25.06.2019 – Schwerin/Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania) (*Rezolucja XVII...*, 2019).

3. Procedures of passing Resolutions by the Regional Parliaments participating in the Southern Baltic Sea Regional Parliamentary Forum

In the Landtag of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (Germany) a project of a Resolution is discussed by the state government and boards/committees respectively associated with the subject matters (economy, agriculture, energy), which discuss motions referring to the contents of the resolution. Then the resolution is approved by the state parliament as a group motion and presented to the state government⁶. In Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, the priorities specified in resolutions are presented during the meetings of parliamentary committees, which debate upon and deliver particular recommendations. In order to introduce the decisions into life, the parliament of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania – in cooperation with all political options – votes on the matter of accepting the resolution, which shows that the resolutions of the Forum and work on them are of non-political nature. After having submitted the resolution to the state government, the latter regularly reports on the progress in its implementation to the parliament. All provisions regarding the Resolution are regularly passed on to the European institutions (European Parliament, European Council and European Committee), which inform Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania about the relevant matters. 'The proposals of the Parliamentary Forum, as opinions presented during consultation and conferences of stakeholders which were organised by the European Committee, were taken into consideration in Union strategies in the past; an example may be the strategy for the Baltic Sea. The matter refers mainly to tourist brand. Moreover, the resolutions were sent for the information of other gatherings associated with the Baltic Sea e.g. to Southern Baltic Sea

⁶ Straetker Georg – mail from 26.02.2018.

Parliamentary Conference and Council of the Baltic Sea States' (Schlupp, n.d.).

In the Landtag of Schleswig-Holstein, a resolution is signed by the Chairman of the Landtag or the Chairman of the representatives. After being signed, the Chairman of the Landtag passes the information to the public (Landtag members – the government). Then all groups (clubs) discuss the resolution during meetings, afterwards there is a following discussion on the resolution content during a plenary meeting – this ends with voting. After the resolution is passed (there was no case of not passing one), it is transferred to the government, which informs the Landtag about the consecutive decisions (which institutions got the resolutions, etc.)⁷.

In the Council of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg (Germany), a new project of a resolution discussed by representatives is voted upon as a joined motion of many parties in the parliament, and then it is accepted as a standpoint⁸.

In Pomeranian voivodship, the draft of a resolution is discussed at a meeting of the Committee for Interregional and Foreign Cooperation, and then it is passed on the Plenary Meeting of the Pomeranian Regional Assembly. All Assembly members get the draft of the resolution and information about the Forum and the content of the approved resolution⁹.

In West Pomeranian voivodship, the draft of the resolution is discussed at the meeting of the Committee for the Forum Issues, headed by the Chairman of the Assembly, and at the meeting of the Committee for Development and International Affairs. The Forum resolution is approved by the voivodship assembly in the form of acceptance¹⁰.

In Warmian-Masurian voivodship, a draft is discussed at meetings of the Committee for International Cooperation of the Assembly. The Head of the Committee takes part in the work of the editorial team at each Forum. The resolution is accepted by acclamation of the Committee for International Cooperation. Information about each Forum meeting and the resolution content are presented at the Assembly meeting – in the section of miscellaneous matters. Resolution of the Forum of 2010 organised by Warmian-Masurian Assembly was accepted at the meeting of this Assembly¹¹.

In the Kaliningrad District of the Russian Federation Duma, the draft of a resolution is discussed at the meeting of the Committee for International and Regional Cooperation of the District Duma. The motions for the Resolution, after being approved by the Head of Duma, are attached to the draft of the resolution; the representatives of District Duma have the authority to approve and vote on the resolution during the Plenary Meeting. The Resolution, as a document, is presented to the District Duma and the District Government to be implemented henceforth¹².

The Assembly of the Scania Region (Sweden), which has the status of a regional parliament observer, discusses a draft of resolution during a joined meeting of the Assembly and Management Leadership, then the resolution of the Forum with an included report from it, are discussed at the Assembly meeting¹³.

4. Youth participation in the work of the Southern Baltic Sea Parliamentary Forum

From the first Forum, youth participation in the work of the Southern Baltic Sea Parliamentary Forum has been a priority for the highest regional self-government authorities. Youth representatives, from the initial Forum in Gdańsk up to the 8th Forum in Schwerin, coming from the first four and then six partner regions, participated in interregional conferences. It is worth stressing that young people from the regions forming the Forum actively participated in the working groups, preparatory meetings and two youth projects "Youth, Region and Parliament" and "A step towards democracy" (Młodzi o polityce..., 2009). At the First Forum in Gdańsk, a decision was made to invite young people to the next Forum with youth policy as one of the leading topics during the meeting.

The cooperation with youth was established within the frames of workshops in Miedzyzdroje in 2004 with the participation of politicians from the four regions. Issues of establishing youth representations as well as areas and forms of interregional cooperation were discussed. Moreover, the draft project "Youth, Region and Parliament" was adopted, which was then implemented in 2005–2006 (Młodzi o polityce..., 2009)¹⁴. It included study visits

⁷ Phone conversation with a Landtag employee 16.03.2018.

⁸ Luenzmann Friederike – mail from 27.02.2018.

⁹ Phone conversation with the Head of Assembly Chancellery, Łukasz Grzędzicki, 26.02.2018.

¹⁰ Phone conversation with the Vice-Head of Assembly Chancellery, Beata Tokarzewska 26.02.2018.

¹¹ Phone conversation with the Head of Assembly Chancellery, Wiktor Marek Leyk 26.02.2018.

¹² Belkov Vladimir – Mail 27.02.2018.

¹³ Phone conversation with A.M. Myszk-Gustafsson 9.02.2018.

¹⁴ Young people from the partner regions of the Southern Baltic Sea Parliamentary Forum were involved in the project.

of young people to the parliaments of partner regions and their involvement in work related to the topics covered by the Forum (Grzelak, 2016). According to the final resolution, it is encouraged to (Rezolucja II..., 2004; Młodzi o polityce..., 2009) involve youth in political decision-making processes, make proposals concerning visits and youth exchange programs to German and Polish deputies in order to know the political procedures, extend partnership with schools as part of the parliaments' cooperation, overview the youth political activities under partnership agreements at the government level, invite young people to conferences within the Forum and take into account their position, promote a creation of regional youth councils in the South Baltic area and joint programs aimed at strengthening cooperation and cross-border exchange of young people.

In consistence with young people's interest in the subject of Forums, since 2007 (the 5th Forum) the way of youth participation has changed. While initially young people took part in special workshops, since 2007 (the Gdynia conference) they have been allowed to participate in discussions of parliamentarians and to meet with experts. Apart from this, youth representatives participated in two preparatory meetings of the 6th Forum with experts. Due to the costs of the event, young people from Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania had the opportunity to participate in the meeting of the "Energy" group in Schwerin, while young people from the West Pomeranian voivodship participated in the meeting in Szczecin. The self-government of the West Pomeranian voivodship, considering the will of the Forum participants to involve young people to the work of the Forum, has taken the initiative of submitting an application to the National Agency for International Programs for Youth in order to obtain financial support for youth activity within the Southern Baltic Parliaments (Młodzi o polityce..., 2009).

It aimed at promoting the participation of youth in political processes, developing a youth cooperation network, discovering their own region, as well as developing attitudes of better understanding and respect for people and cultures of neighbouring regions. Young people from Germany, Poland, Sweden and Russia (Kaliningrad District) took part in the project. The uniqueness of this project lies within its participants (in total 11 young people) who conducted study visits to their native regional parliaments in November 2005. During the visits, they became acquainted with parliamentarians' work and the functioning of the regional parliament. Then, in January-February 2006, 8–10 days' study visits of young people were organized in partner parliaments. Therefore, each participant could not only be acquainted with the work of their regional parliament, but also to compare the activity of the partner parliaments.

Youth workshops, despite their important role, were not organized during the editions of the Forum from 2011 until 2017. This practice was resumed in Szczecin in 2017 and since then the youth have been able to join the work of this important cross-border international cooperation.

5. The analysis of questionnaires results

For the sake of finding answers to research questions of this analysis, the author concentrated not only on the primary sources (resolutions of particular regional assembly's conferences formulating a discussed initiative) but also on the conducted questionnaires (Kotlega, n.d.; Musewicz, n.d.; Myszka-Gustafsson, n.d.; Pietrzak, n.d.; Schile, n.d.; Schlupp, n.d.; Tode, n.d.; Grzelak, 2016)¹⁵. The survey included seven questions. The answers were obtained from regional representatives – one person from each region – representing the Southern Baltic Sea Parliamentary Forum members.

The answer to the first question about the motivation behind creating the Forum and its initiator, all the respondents claimed that the origin of the Forum was preceded by a bilateral cooperation between the Parliament of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and the West-Pomeranian Voivodship Assembly; Schleswig-Holstein and the Pomeranian Voivodship Assembly. Sylvia Bretschneider – the President of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania Parliament was claimed to be the initiator of the Forum existence. Thereby a long history of bilateral contacts gave the foundation to transform them and give them a multilateral form.

The second question of the survey referred to the aims of creating the Forum and reasons for its foundation indicated by the respondents (regional representatives). It was stressed by Beate Schlupp from Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania that incorporating new member countries into the EU in 2004 (including Poland) not only influenced good relationships with the neighbouring countries of the Southern Baltic Sea area permanently but also was a strong stimulus for their development. In her opinion, the initiators of creating the Forum were focused on the idea of uniting inhabitants of border areas closer – in a time perspective. They also aimed at using the potential of the regions better by defining common goals as well as making the regions more prominent on the European arena. When the

¹⁵ The representative of the Pomeranian Assembly did not answer the question in person but authorised to use his analysis (Grzelak, 2016).

same question was asked of the representative of Schleswig-Holstein Landtag, he stressed the accuracy and validity of aims approved in the founding declaration from Gdańsk (2004), including the necessity to support interregional and cross-border cooperation coherent with the conditions sketched in the Northern Dimension Policy of the European Union and the policy of sustainable socio-economic growth, finding and associating mutual interests, enhancing socio-economic cohesion of the communities by uniting 'old' and 'new' members of the EU at the level of regions, cherishing cultural identity respecting its diversity. As stated by the representative of the Council of Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, this region joined the Forum with the aim of creating a stronger network of connections between already existing bilateral partnerships and other forms of mutual relations at the regional level. A similar response can be found in an already quoted text of Pomeranian voivodship representative Grzegorz Grzelak. Jerzy Kotłęga from West Pomeranian voivodship pointed out that finding common aims and priorities for the Southern Baltic Sea regions was the rationale behind creating the Forum. Zbigniew Pietrzak – the representative of the third of Polish member regions of the Forum believed that his region had the same rationale as the above-mentioned ones. He also stressed that the region has limited resources and possibilities of development, and integrating it with the neighbouring voivodships and other regions opens the options to have a common and coherent regional policy and better representation of opinions, necessities and interests. Russian Federation Kaliningrad District Duma (Assembly) saw the aim of joining the Forum as finding joined interests, businesses and priorities in the development of the Southern Baltic Sea region. Being totally separated from the Russian Federation by countries of the EU – Poland and Latvia – and by international marine areas, Kaliningrad Duma was interested in joining the Forum in order to cooperate in economic, humanitarian and cultural aspects and exchange information with the EU countries. One of the priority tasks for both Kaliningrad District and other representatives of the Forum was creating an option for a visa free travel between the Russian Federation and the European Union (Museum, n.d.). Anna Maria Myszka-Gustafsson believes that the aim of accessing Swedish Scania was the intention to create a strategy of innovative solutions for issues connected with cultural-economic development of this region, enhancing and directing international cooperation as the basis for a balanced development of Scania and neighbouring regions economy. In addition, a cooperation in the area of health prophylaxis

and a sustainable development of cities and urban areas were crucial (Myszka-Gustafsson, n.d.).

In the third question, the respondents were asked to evaluate the topics of the consecutive meetings of the Forum. All respondents evaluated their selection positively because it resulted from the needs and interests of their regions.

The fourth question asked about indicating which form of the hitherto cooperation (experts' meetings, youth workshops, procedure of accepting a resolution, plenary meeting) is the most effective and whether the forms of cooperation need any improvements. The questioned pointed out that the forms of cooperation had been created throughout the years of work for the Forum. Meeting with experts, however, enjoyed the greatest appreciation. Beate Schlupp emphasized it that a three-step form of work (hearing experts, editorial conference and annual conference of the Forum) meets the needs of the Forum participants. Only Sven Tode from Hamburg was doubtful if so many as three meetings are necessary. In his opinion, one devoted to the resolution and one devoted to the Forum itself would be enough.

The respondents stressed that youth workshops played an important role for the Forum and should become a permanent element of the Southern Baltic Sea Parliamentary Forum. The youth generate new impulses and strengthen the sense of unity and cooperation. The Forum enables young people to be acquainted with cross-border parliamentary work.

The next question asked what the most important achievement of the Forum for a given region and for partner regions was. In the provided answers, the respondents stressed that throughout the years of the Forum's existence the scope of its interest was broadened. This initiative slowly turned into the process of international cooperation, ability to search and formulate joined opinions on the most important issues and priorities of the region, including port infrastructure, cooperation in the matters of ecology and renewable energy, improving transport and logistics, cooperation in the area of tourist routes, youth exchange programmes, as well as medical, scientific and university education areas. Moreover, the Forum had its input into introducing local border traffic. An indisputable achievement of the Forum is the establishment and maintenance of good relations among member regions. The Forum creates opportunities of more effective representation of common interests among participating regions of Southern Baltic and presenting them to national governments and union institutions. Cross-border cooperation has also an input in maintaining

peace and unity among regions in the era of facing constantly new solutions.

When the respondents were asked the last question referring to the issue of what should be in the scope of interest of the Forum in the future, it was clear that apart from continuing the hitherto activity, the issue of immigrants admission, EU migration processes (inner migration and emigration) their causes and effects were seen as important. Moreover, joined youth policy, labour market, development of inhabitants' partnership, spatial development plan for the Baltic Sea, clearing the Baltic Sea bed from the post-war debris (metal waste, unexploded clusters, chemical waste), human resources and social infrastructure management, civil society including migration issues – with refugee problem among others – these were other crucial issues. From the respondents' perspective, the prospectively interesting issues would be rural development, food sector and strategic aims in youth policy in the Southern Baltic Sea region. In addition, the matters associated with the development of the EU and its institutions with reference to their decisive power and effectiveness were of interest. The topics associated with climate changes, health and health prophylaxis in member societies of the Forum found interest in the respondents' eyes.

6. Conclusions

As a result of the analysis, the research hypothesis has been verified positively. For the aim of the present paper and to answer the research questions, three tools were used – legal-institutional analysis, resource texts analysis and questionnaire research and survey methodology.

The main aims of the Southern Baltic Sea Parliamentary Forum were and still are supporting interregional and cross-border cooperation coherent with the EU policy, creating stronger bonds resulting from bilateral partnerships and transferring these into interregional reality.

The participants of the Forum stress that the aim of their partaking in it is the intention to institutionalise the cooperation, to search for common interests of the participant members in the context of expanding the European Union and the will to present the matters of the Southern Baltic regions to the EU.

The topics of subsequent conferences were strictly associated with the regions of the Southern Baltic Sea, which are part of the EU (besides the Russian Federation Kaliningrad District). The resolutions which were worked out and approved were addressed to the state authorities and other

organisations dealing with cooperation of countries in the Baltic Sea region and other institutions of the European Union. Common aims and objectives for all participating regions were sought – coherently with the policy and law of the EU. The subsidies of the EU financing youth cooperation programmes within the framework of the Forum.

The participants of the research project stressed that the youth must be included into work of the Forum. During the first – constituent – meeting, in Gdańsk in 2004 a decision to invite the youth to the next Forum was made. During the 2nd Forum in Binz the decision to invite the youth again was upheld. The respondents positively evaluated projects 'Youth, Region, Parliament' and 'A Step Towards Democracy' as well as the participation of youth in the preparation of final resolutions. In the years 2011–2016 youth workshops were not organised. In 2017, the West Pomeranian Assembly invited the youth again and organised the youth forum. In the years 2018 and 2019 young people participated in the Forum again.

The representative of Scania saw direct benefits for her region in strengthening and targeting international cooperation which creates the basis for sustainable development of Scania economy and economies of surrounding regions. Moreover, it is a fact that the cooperation within the framework of the Forum in both official and personal contexts adds to the development of democracy and guarantees peaceful solutions to problems.

The conducted research proves that there is a big interest of participating regions in the continuation of this type of cross-border cooperation. The list of formulated topics for the future that the members of the Southern Baltic Sea regional assemblies are planning to take up suggests that the Forum will remain a meeting spot for all participants to search for solutions to their problems and cater for their needs.

The research is worthwhile to be continued to verify if currently suggested directions for the Forum development will prove to be useful and meaningful in cross-border cooperation practice in the Southern Baltic Sea regions – from Hamburg to Klaipėda.

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