

Anastasiia Tarasova

**THE STRATEGIC AND PROJECT LEVELS  
OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION  
BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE EUROPEAN  
UNION: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES**

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## ABSTRACT

Anastasiia Tarasova: The strategic and project levels of cross-border cooperation between Russia and the European Union: similarities and differences

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Cross-border cooperation remains a stable and mutually beneficial form of interaction between the EU and Russia in the last decades. Despite some political contradictions at the highest level and economic burden of sanctions, cross-border cooperation proves to be a crucial channel of interaction being an essential driver of economic and social progress in the Baltic Sea Region. This research aims at revealing the similarities and differences of strategic and project goals of cross-border cooperation between Russia and the EU based on the case of South-East Finland – Russia, Estonia – Russia, and Latvia – Russia CBC Programmes 2014-2020. The author focuses on the socio-economic sphere, thereby, socio-economic strategic goals and projects within programming Priority 1 “Business and SME development” were selected for the analysis. In the theoretical chapter, the author discusses the concept of “cross-border cooperation”, features of multi-level governance, and its applicability as a theoretical approach to cross-border cooperation analysis as well as a goal-setting process. In the methodological part, the rationale for data collection and the methodology are presented. In the empirical part, the author analyzes relevant for the study European, Russian, joint strategic documents and particular projects, on grounds of that strategic and project goals are determined and profoundly compared. The author concludes that the European and Russian strategic goals are proportionally reflected in the ENI CBC Programmes and focus on sustaining peaceful relations, developing border regions, and cross-border cooperation as such. However, challenges connected with borders could vary for the EU and Russia. Furthermore, the European and Russian perspectives on the degree of cooperation are different: the EU emphasizes the common space while the Russian side concentrates on good-neighbourliness in general. Despite these differences, there is a significant level of coherence between European, Russian goals and project goals. The objectives are primarily formulated in national concepts and European documents, then they come together in the joint programmes, and, finally, they are reflected in particular projects. The study shows that cross-border cooperation within the ENI CBC Programmes is based on top-down and bottom-up approaches simultaneously: the developers of joint programmes rely on the aspirations of public and private actors. This feature is determined by the appearance of a new system of multi-level connections in the region.

**Keywords:** Russia, European Union, Baltic Sea Region, cross-border cooperation, multi-level governance, ENI CBC Programmes, project activity

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin Originality Check service.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BSR	Baltic Sea Region
CBC	Cross-border cooperation
CIR	Common Implementing regulation
EC	European Commission
ENI CBC	European Neighbourhood Instrument for Cross-Border Cooperation
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
ENPI	European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
EU	European Union
EUSBSR	European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
JMC	Joint Monitoring Committee
JOP	Joint Operational Programme
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
MLG	Multi-level Governance
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
TACIS	Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States
TO	Thematical Objective

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Topicality

The context of the EU – Russian relations can be characterized as ambiguous. On the one hand, since the 2014 Ukrainian crisis, mutual wariness has been growing. Sanctions and counter-sanctions are weakening economic interaction; statistics show that the EU exports to Russia fell by 20.7 % annually in 2013-2016 (European Parliament report, 2017, p.6). On the other hand, Russian and European relations stay resilient despite some contradictions at the highest level. Both the EU and Russia cooperate intensively in the Arctic and Barents region through different regional institutions (as the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Arctic Council). Bilateral cooperation also is a durable channel of interaction that operates despite contemporary challenges. As it was stated in the EU-Russian review of cross-border cooperation (CBC), “The EU-Russia relationship is currently under strain, and CBC provides a valuable channel for cooperation between communities on both sides of the border during these challenging times as well as laying down the foundations for deeper regional cooperation in the future” (EEAS-DG NEAR, 2017, p. 6).

Furthermore, the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) is a place where project activities are becoming an increasingly popular tool for regional development: this sphere evolves rapidly, each year new elements of cooperative networks emerge. Following a tendency of carrying out more pragmatic foreign policy, the EU and Russia ceased to perceive common borders only as threats and started to see them as a potential for positive changes. Using realist terminology, we would say that interactions in the BSR became more of a cooperative game instead of a zero-sum one (Sologub, 2015). The foregoing explains the practical relevance of the topic.

From a theoretical perspective, the choice of the topic is determined by the growing popularity of IR studies concerning a whole complex of interactions in the Baltic Sea Region. We believe that the debates on forms of cross-border cooperation in the BSR are extensive and that creates a basis for new scientific inquiries. A lot of unique processes are going on there, and as Studzieniecki (2016) mentioned, the BSR is a testing ground for international cooperation and innovative forms of communication. The Baltic Sea Region is usually conceptualized in terms of dynamic, prosperous, full of potential, promising region. The formation of new cooperative institutions as the ENI CBC Programmes draws the attention of scholars who represent various IR traditions and directions (English school, Copenhagen school, constructivism, etc.). Particular programmes of CBC, barriers to such an interaction, perceptions of territoriality in CBC, functioning of Euroregions, institutional coordination dilemma and other become objects of study. Our research tests the multi-level governance theoretical approach that lets us capture the dynamics of multi-level connections in the region. We hope that our research aiming at the detection of

similarities and differences of strategic and project goals between Russia and the EU will bring new findings and enrich the modern debates on cross-border cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region.

## **1.1. Research background**

### **1.2.1. What is the Baltic Sea Region?**

“When we say “Baltic”, do we mean a place, a space, a bounded area of nation-states, a cluster of networks?” – asked rhetorically Ole Waever (1997). Jussi Jauhiainen (1999) had partly answered the question when he proposed to perceive the BSR as 1) a European mega-region, 2) a European subregion made of regions and state parts, 3) a net of various interest groups, or 4) a special community created by region-builders. Taking that into consideration, scholars come to the agreement upon the fact that the Baltic Sea Region is more than a physical territory, it is a political, socio-economic, and cultural concept (Katajala, 2013). However, the physical characteristics of the region are also important for researchers as this knowledge helps to limit the territory for the analysis. In our research, we will stick to the definition of the BSR that was formulated by Klemeshev et al. (2017). According to this approach, the BSR is set up by Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Baltic States, German lands of Mecklenburg Vorpommern, and Schleswig-Holstein; Polish lands of Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, Pomeranian Voivodeship, and West Pomeranian Voivodeship; some subjects of the Russian Federation –the city of St. Petersburg, Leningrad Oblast, Pskov Oblast, Novgorod Oblast, Kaliningrad Oblast, and the Republic of Karelia.

### **1.2.2. Historical perspective on cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region**

For a long time, the Baltic Sea Region remains a place of intensive cooperation: the Hanseatic League was a unique example of a commercial confederation of those times. However, during the Cold War, the Baltic Sea played a role as the barrier between two political blocks, and only after the dissolution of the USSR and following EU’s enlargements the idea of the BSR as an area of cooperation emerged (Reuter, 2010). Due to these changes, the region was conceptualized in terms of common identity rather than “hard politics”.

In the late 1980s, the Schleswig-Holstein Prime Minister Björn Engholm came up with the New Hansa initiative aiming at regional development based on an economic revitalization via creating a network of non-hierarchic business and civil society ties. The ideas were elaborated on by Scandinavian social scientists Pertti Joenniemi and Ole Wæver in the 1990s. The representatives of the Copenhagen school actively participate in ongoing debates on regionalization in the BSR. Applying a constructivist approach to region-building and linking up to Barry Buzan’s and Ole Wæver’s concepts of security community and securitization, the

Copenhagen school highlighted the post-modern features of the Baltic Sea regionalization process. The recent transitions in the BSR were mainly conceptualized by emphasizing the role of the non-hierarchical and grassroots-based features of cooperation (ibid.).

Many scholars started to view the Baltic Sea Region as an illustration of “new regionalism,” meaning a model of regional cooperation driving from below by informal interactions of non-governmental organizations and acknowledging that states cease to play the key role in integration processes (Wæver & Joenniemi, 1991; Lehti, 2009).

Relations between Russia and the EU in the BSR were developed in a distinct way. As we stated earlier, in the 1940s – 1980s, the BSR represented a border between the Western and Eastern blocks of countries. Since the late 1980s – 1990s, the relations between the EU and Russia began to improve. After the EU enlargement in 2004, the European authorities questioned how to build up relations with new neighbours. At that moment, European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) emerged to create a common economic, cultural, social space based on shared interests with partner countries of the East and South that would ensure stability in the region. Despite the EU’s intention to include Russia in ENP, Russia rejected that suggestion and insisted on strategic partnership. Therefore, Russia is only eligible for ENI cross-border cooperation programmes (European Neighbourhood Policy, EEAS website).

European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) came into force in 2007 substituting MEDA instrument, TACIS instrument for the Eastern neighbours, and other financial means of support. ENPI was a financial instrument for implementing the Action Plans which covered sixteen partner countries and Russia within Strategic Partnership in 2007-2013 (European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument, CES-MED website).

In year 2014, the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) has substituted the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI). The main principles remain the same: commitment to democracy, human rights, the rule of law, good governance, market economy principles and sustainable development based on political dialogue, trade-related issues, economic and social cooperation (ibid.).

### **1.3. Research purpose and question**

As stated above, cross-border cooperation is an important driver of economic and social progress in the Baltic Sea Region. In case when more mechanisms for such developments are available within the European community, cooperation between the EU and Russia is scarcer due to different institutional restrictions: different legal systems, different stages of economic development, different historical background, and especially the existence of the external border.



To overcome such obstacles, ENI CBC practices are implemented: CBC projects within the ENI CBC Programmes try to solve common issues. Nevertheless, this raises the question of whether these project local issues are relevant for general European and Russian spatial planning goals; do project goals correlate with European and Russian ones. Another question that puzzles us is whether Russian and European goals of cross-border cooperation correspond with each other since both parties can have a different perception of each other and, hence, a different understanding of cross-border cooperation goals. Therefore, **the purpose** of this research is to reveal the similarities and differences of strategic and project goals between Russia and the EU based on the case of certain ENI CBC Programmes.

Within the ENI CBC Programmes, we have chosen Priority 1 “Business and SME development” in order to focus on projects attempting to influence the socio-economic development of the region. Our decision to concentrate on the socio-economic sphere is based on the fact that economic ties have been damaged significantly by sanctions, coronavirus pandemic, and other challenges. Despite that, Russia remains an important trade partner for Finland and the Baltic States. Therefore, establishing business contacts and other activities within CBC projects could become new sources to support economic development.

Our selection of South-East Finland – Russia, Estonia – Russia, and Latvia – Russia CBC Programmes 2014-2020 programmes can be explained by the fact that other ENI CBC Programmes either do not fit exclusively to the territory of the BSR in a way we perceive it (Kolarctic and Karelia CBC Programmes), or do not include projects within Priority 1 “Business and SME development” (Lithuania – Russia and Poland – Russia CBC Programmes). The timeframe 2014-2020 was chosen because, firstly, it is the last finished programming period containing all reports and project information and, secondly, it helps to trace tendencies of cooperation that emerged after the 2014 Ukrainian crisis.

To tackle this issue, we formulate the main **research question** for our study as follows:

How the goals of “Business and SME development” Priority projects in the framework of South-East Finland – Russia, Estonia – Russia, and Latvia – Russia CBC Programmes 2014-2020 correspond with the socio-economic strategic goals of the EU and Russia?

To achieve the purpose of our research and answer the research question, we would like to formulate the following **aims** for the study:

1. To analyze relevant academic literature devoted to the cross-border cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region;

2. To identify and compare with each other the main European and Russian strategic goals of cross-border cooperation;

3. To identify and compare project goals within “Business and SME development” Priority in the framework of South-East Finland – Russia, Estonia – Russia, and Latvia – Russia CBC Programmes 2014-2020;

4. To determine the main similarities and differences between the European and Russian strategic goals of cross-border cooperation and cross-border project goals.

**The object** of our research is a cross-border cooperation between the EU and Russia within ENI CBC Programmes South-East Finland – Russia, Estonia – Russia, Latvia – Russia 2014-2020. **The subject** of the research is the similarities and differences of strategic and project goals between Russia and the EU within these ENI CBC Programmes.

The topic is studied within the theoretical framework of multi-level governance. This concept describes how power is spreading among vertical governmental entities and various horizontal non-governmental structures and actors. Since we study goals of cross-border cooperation on strategic and project levels, we should familiarize ourselves with main stakeholders who determine the objectives of CBC in the region. In the Baltic Sea Region, multi-level governance explains the dynamics of relations because a huge variety of actors are involved in policy-making processes. In addition, this tendency diffuses on the ENI CBC Programmes and the presence of business partners, civil societies, and other players explains how goals derive not only from national powers but also from local actors.

Speaking about **the novelty** of the work, we believe that for the first time, the research analyzes in complexity strategic and project levels of cross-border cooperation between Russia and the EU: our work includes a detailed description, analysis, and systematization of project goals of the ENI CBC Programmes. As a result, it will be possible to indicate similarities and differences of strategic and project levels of cross-border cooperation between Russia and the EU. Moreover, this thesis studies the European and Russian strategic documents goals not in a complexity of a whole document but as distinct units of analysis that is also considered a novelty of the work. Finally, we believe that for the first time, some new sources devoted to the project activities of the Baltic Sea region are included in the scientific circulation.

#### **1.4. Thesis structure**

The thesis is composed of an introduction, theoretical, methodological, empirical parts, and conclusions. In the theoretical chapter, we intend to overview different approaches to the definition of “cross-border cooperation” as it is a central concept of our study. As multi-level governance

(MLG) was chosen as the theoretical framework, it is next proceeds with the literature on MLG and an explanation of the rationale of such a theoretical choice. Moreover, a goal-setting process and its specifics for the ENI CBC are discussed. In the methodological part, we present data collection techniques and describe the methodology, in particular, previous studies relevant to our work and specific methods that help us to tackle the matter. The empirical part aims at comparing the goals of the EU's and Russian strategic documents and goals of the ENI CBC projects in order to reveal differences and similarities and try to explain them. The empirical part is divided into two chapters. The first one includes analysis of strategic documents of the EU and Russia: goals of CBC are to be determined and compared. The second one focuses on the project activity between Russia and the EU: we extract the main goals of projects and study them. Finally, based on the findings from both empirical chapters, we compare the main aims and objectives of the EU's and Russian documents with the aims and objectives of particular projects and formulate conclusions.

### 1.5. Literature review

As cross-border cooperation derives from an understanding of borders, we should say a few words about academic literature devoted to **border studies**. Border studies scholars are debating the questions of what a border is and what the role of borders and bordering regions in the contemporary world is. Borders are boundaries that delimit the territory of one state from another. Borders are not given; on the contrary, they emerge as a result of socio-political border-making or bordering (van Houtum & Naerssen, 2002; Scott, 2012). Within the border studies, scholars analyze borders not as fixed physical lines but as constantly evolving social construct.

Writing about the debate on region-building, we can identify two directions of bordering narrative. One group of scholars believes that the delimitation of social area is conducted step-by-step and caused by inner factors that forms a shared vision of community (Scott, 2007; Wallis, 2010). We consider that this approach is closer to our study, as it focuses on cooperation derived from a community sense. An alternative bordering narrative suggests that the delimitation of social area is characterized by adaptation to external challenges: borders exist mainly to regulate the territorial questions between global powers (Allen & Cochrane, 2007).

In respect to cross-border cooperation, Duchacek's (1986) and Soldatos's (1993) researches were the first works that described how territories achieved economic and political aims through international cooperation. Later on, the focus of research shifted to studying local and regional dimensions of cross-border activities. In the 1990s – 2000s, border studies in the EU drew attention to cross-border policy integration and started to perceive it through multi-level governance approach (Perkmann, 1999; Lepik, 2012). In contrast to general positioning CBC in a

context of constantly changing transnational networks, the European studies put emphasis on formal, structural understandings of transnational governance (Blatter, 2004). These practices had a spill-over effect, and CBC became not only a tool to create a strong community inside the EU but also an instrument to raise the EU's global significance and to detach the EU from others (Scott, 2011). CBC was seen as much broader than the only cost-effective solution for dealing with common problems: an important factor that caused this cooperation laid in willingness of the EU to play a stabilizing and at the same time transformative role in the post-Soviet countries.

Nowadays in modern Russian, Finnish and foreign literature, researches on **cross-border cooperation in the Baltic region** can be divided into three main thematic groups.

The first group of works examines the Baltic region and the peculiarities of interstate contacts within. Lehti (2009), Mezhevich (2009, 2011, 2013), Korneevets (2017) study the logic of the BSR development and analyze its specific features. A lot of valuable works were written by scholars of the Faculty of International Relations of St. Petersburg State University: Novikova (2014), Sergunin (2013), Khudolei, Lanko (2009), Mezhevich scrutinize particular interstate ties within the Baltic Sea Region. In the international scientific literature, the most famous works were written by Gönzle, Etzold, Kern (2011), Scott (2012, 2015), Hilmarsson (2019).

The second group of works focuses on cross-border cooperation as part of political and/or institutional cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region. For example, Scott (2013) writes about the role of the EU in promoting cross-border cooperation and including neighboring states in cooperation. Selected works concern regional institutions in the Baltic Sea Region (Aalto, Espiritu, Kilpeinen, Lanko, 2017) as well as the achievements and shortcomings of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (Studzieniecki, 2016; Zauha et al., 2020).

The third group includes works analyzing cross-border cooperation as a part of international cooperation. Researchers study interaction in the Baltic Sea Region through the concept of economies of scale and regional integration (Hilmarsson, 2019) and the concept of path dependence in the economy (Mezhevich, 2020).

Derived from mentioned above directions, some scholars concentrate specifically on MLG configurations within the ENI CBC framework. The studies of Khasson (2013) Faludi (2012) Celata and Coletti (2015), Koch (2017), Nadalutti (2013) are devoted to the ways of how the EU views neighborhood-based policies as well as its experience of conducting transnational relations. The vertical and horizontal actor relationships in ENI CBC are subjects to the system of the ENI CBC programmes, thereby, these special relations of actors determine the CBC practices (Koch,

2017). The works of Sebentsov (2020), Daume (2018), Fritsch (2015) develop these ideas by describing the configuration of actors involved and the features of ENI CBC deriving from that.

## **2. CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE**

In this chapter, first of all, we intend to overview up to day perceptions of the definition of “cross-border cooperation” (CBC) formulated in the academic works as well as in European and Russian legal documents. Secondly, we will discuss the applicability of the multi-level governance (MLG) approach to the configuration of cross-border relations in the region. Thirdly, we will scrutinize theoretical aspects of cross-border cooperation between Russia and the EU using the MLG approach. Fourthly, we will study goal-setting specifics on strategic and project levels with special attention to the ENI CBC Programmes. Finally, we will sum up our findings and formulate some preliminary conclusions.

### **2.1. Understanding cross-border cooperation**

Despite “cross-border cooperation”, “trans-border cooperation”, “trans-frontier cooperation” have synonymic meaning, in our research, we stick to the wording “cross-border cooperation”. Choice of “cross-border cooperation” is grounded in the fact that exactly this term is used in one of our major units of analysis – the ENI CBC Programmes (namely, in regulations and Joint Operational Programmes). Furthermore, Russian and European legal documents incorporate this notion in their texts as well.

In Russian Federal Law 179-FZ "On the Basics of Cross-Border Cooperation", cross-border cooperation is determined as:

*... a part of international relations of the Russian Federation, international and foreign economic relations of border regions of the Russian Federation and municipalities of border regions of the Russian Federation of border cooperation of neighboring states (Article 2, Federal Law N 179-FZ "On the Basics of Cross-Border Cooperation", 2017).*

Some Russian authors suggest understanding cross-border cooperation as coordinated actions of neighboring regions or states aiming at strengthening relations between neighboring regions under the jurisdiction of different states (Dubrovina & Plotnikova, 2016).

The European legal understanding of cross-border cooperation is reflected in Article 2.1 of the 1980 “Madrid Convention”, the document that establishes the legal framework of cross-border cooperation in Europe:

*Transfrontier co-operation is any concerted action designed to reinforce and foster neighbourly relations between territorial communities or authorities within the jurisdiction of two or more Contracting Parties and the conclusion of any agreement and arrangement necessary for this purpose. (Art. 2.1 of the 1980 'Madrid Convention').*

In a line with “Madrid Convention”, Luis De Sousa (2013) describes such cooperation as:

*...any type of concerted action between public and/or private institutions of the border regions of two (or more) states, driven by geographical, economic, cultural/identity, political/leadership factors, with the objective of reinforcing the (good) neighbourhood relations, solving common problems or managing jointly resources between communities through any co-operation mechanisms available. (Luis De Sousa, 2013, p. 673).*

Resonating with Russian researchers Dubrovina and Plotnikova (2016), De Sousa emphasizes the coordinative (concerted) nature of relationships between entities of bordering countries as well as considering reinforcement (strengthen) of relations to be an outcome of such an interaction.

Scott (2015, p. 8) proposes to view CBC through the development of various political projects implemented by the state, private, and non-governmental actors getting profit from joint activities in socio-economic, environmental, and political areas.

According to Mezhevich and Tarasov (2009), cross-border cooperation is a cooperation of local self-government bodies with local self-government bodies of neighboring states that is 1) allowed by states, and 2) provided that at least some of them are in direct contact across the state border. State “allowance” means that states can deliberately "close their eyes" to informal contacts in cases where it is beneficial as a such (ibid.). Burtceva (2014) also notes that such cooperation does not necessarily operate in the legal framework of international diplomacy and policies; the contacts can be established through unofficial channels of any type of communication between neighboring communities.

It is considered that cross-border cooperation appears if the following conditions are met: 1) mutual interest, 2) a common historical memory, 3) geographical or economical interconnectedness, 4) a political will for cooperation (Committee of the Regions, 2009, p. 3–4). A similar idea is shared by Boman and Berg (2007) who believe that shared values and identity as well as proximity and common interests are necessary principles for CBC to begin.

Comparing definitions of “cross-border cooperation” provided by scholars, we have noticed that there are some differences between Russian and European schools in the interpretation of this term. Speaking about entities involved in cross-border activities, Scott (2015) and De Sousa



(2013) mention public and *private* institutions, while Russian scholars (Mezhevich & Tarasov, 2009; Dubrovina & Plotnikova, 2016) name local self-governmental bodies or regions as such. For example, Yarovoy (2012) claims that regional authorities are the main powers, the most competent in solving shared problems, who attempt to flourish economic, social, security cooperation and developing of the trans-border region. However, it would be fair to mention that nowadays Russian academics acknowledge a tendency of non-state actors' involvement and their impact on the context of cooperation (Sebentsov, 2017). This difference can also be traced in legal documents. In Russian law, cross-border cooperation requires cooperation between municipalities of bordering regions (Federal Law N 179-FZ "On the Basics of Cross-Border Cooperation", 2017)., while in European law, emphasis is made on "relations between territorial communities or authorities" in general (Art. 2.1 of the 1980 Madrid Convention). Nevertheless, there are some similarities in the interpretation of CBC as well. As we said above, both Russian and European scholars agree upon the fact that coordinative (concerted) actions are a fundament for CBC. Besides, reinforcing (strengthening) relations is viewed as a major positive outcome of cross-border cooperation by both parties.

To summarize, cross-border cooperation is a part of international relations, it is a type of concerted action aiming at strengthening relations between neighboring regions. Cross-border relations usually imply the interaction of territorial communities in geographically adjacent areas aiming at solving common problems and enhance the potential of border regions. Currently, not only local and regional authorities but also private institutions become subjects of CBC and that determines the multi-level governance nature of such a cooperation.

## **2.2. Multi-level governance (MLG)**

As we learned from the previous analysis, cross-border cooperation is determined by the configuration of actors involved. The crucial role in cross-border cooperation is played by municipalities, non-governmental actors, businesses, academies (De Sousa, 2013). Therefore, multi-level governance, describing the interaction between vertical and horizontal actors, helps us to capture the dynamics of CBC in the BSR. To study strategic and project goals, we should, first of all, analyze the structure of partners involved in the CBC. By doing that, we will be able to find out which institutions influence goal-setting in a realm.

### **2.2.1. Origins and key features of multi-level governance**

Before analyzing the multi-level governance approach in CBC between Russia and the EU, we intend to look at the origins and key features of multi-level governance as such. Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks were the first political science researchers who introduced the term "multi-level

governance” (MLG) into International Relations in order to frame a newer theory of European integration. Until then, there were two main competing approaches in the integration theory: neo-functionalism and intergovernmentalism. Notwithstanding the multi-level governance has ties to the neofunctionalism (Mälly, 2018), to some extent, this theory is a counterpart to other integration theories which undermine the bunch of various actors from different levels of governance. According to Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, sovereignty has moved away from national powers to the supranational level and subnational levels such as local entities, regional assemblies, local powers in the last fifty years (Hooghe & Marks, 2001).

As it is stated above, originally, the MLG explained the European integration. Later, it became a universal approach describing “the capacity for collective action that involves a broad range of actors and institutions as well as informal and formal activities at different administrative levels” (Marks, 1993).

One can come across a slight confusion between “government” and “governance”. Government is a hierarchical, state-focused management model typical for the inner state organization, while governance is a more complex model, characterized by overlapping relations between various actors. In contrast to government, the important feature of governance is a situation when actors are ordered in a complex and contextually defined relationship and not only hierarchically (Peters and Pierre, 2004). The nature of governance is dynamic and characterized by “growing interdependence between governments and non-governmental actors at various territorial levels” (Bache & Flinders, 2004). However, even in the academic circles, there is no consensus about the difference between “government” and “governance”. Some scholars counterpoise governance to government, while others understand governance as a mix of traditional institutions (government) and new conditions (Geddes, 2007).

### **2.2.2. Multi-level governance in the Baltic Sea Region, in the EU, and Russia**

The Baltic Sea Region is a unique example of a place where thousands of formal and informal ties are braided together. According to Gebhard (2009), MLG can explain the specifics of relations in the Baltic Sea region as it structures policy at different levels, especially across various political action layers and structures.

The EU attempts to build relationships with neighboring countries based on the inclusion of different actors. The Union already has a positive experience in the creation of inner MLG structures and their translation to external borders. Therefore, the EU remains the main promoter of MLG practices to the BSR. One of the examples of such EU policy is the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR). Established in 2009 Strategy aims at developing cooperation in the Baltic



Sea Region. Being the first Macro-regional Strategy in Europe, nowadays, the initiative has three main goals: “to save the sea, to connect the region, and to increase prosperity” (European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, Action plan, 2017, EC, p.36-61).

When we speak about the Baltic Sea Region, we have to remember about the presence of non-EU members. Even though Norway or Iceland are non- EU members, they are incorporated in the work of many integrational institutions (Schengen agreement, etc.). A different actor is Russia with fewer ties to the European Union but remains involved in plenty of activities in the BSR. This phenomenon frames a unique case of MLG practices in the BSR that differ from the inner EU or any other.

The essence of MLG in the BSR is in large part determined by the MLG configurations in the domestic policy of the countries. The profound analysis of internal MLG practices is beyond our research interests; nevertheless, we are going to underline some key features of MLG in Russia, Finland, Estonia, and Latvia.

In the EU, there are member states with legislative powers on sub-national levels and without them. Estonia and Latvia have a two-layer government structure: the state level and the local level. In contrast to Estonia and Latvia, Finland has three levels of governance: central, regional and local. Local authorities are responsible for the execution of core public services to dwellers. They have solid self-government funded on local democracy and decision-making; therefore, they are mainly involved in the CBC within the ENI CBC Programmes.

On the European level, the European Committee of the Regions unites representatives of regional and local governments in order to share their opinions on the EU activities. The Committee of the Regions is considered to be the most visible institutional embodiment of the subnational level of power within the European multi-level governance system (Schönlau, 2010). Notwithstanding the rising role of subnational and local entities, we should note that all the powers of regional authorities derive from national constitutional acts, not integration ones. The regional decision-making level is still a part of the state vertical of power and not an independent one on the scale of integration. MLG recognizes all the recent changes in European politics and simultaneously confirms the significant status of national political bodies (Cherkasov, 2016).

Russia has a complicated patchwork of regional and local governments which exercise their powers over certain jurisdictions. MLG in Russia is not yet framed and settled as illustrated by Russian scientists and is of interest only to academics (Osipov, 2016; Bulatova, 2010; Andrichenko, 2013; Yusupov, 2019; Goptareva, 2007). The structure of government bodies is considered to be more linear-functional than multi-level and horizontal (Osipov, 2016; Bulatova,

2010). Municipalities participate actively in the CBC: they are empowered to hold meetings, conclude agreements, create or participate in cross-border cooperation organizations, participate in international organizations, or in the implementation of projects of international programmes of cross-border cooperation (the Federal Law No. 179-FZ "On the Basics of Cross-Border Cooperation", 2017). At the same time, they should report about their external activities to the regional and federal authorities and annually form a list of agreements on cross-border cooperation (ibid.).

To summarize, it seems that the scale of state involvement in external relations of subjects is higher in Russia than in the European Union: Russian municipalities need to coordinate their cross-border actions with higher authorities. Moreover, in the EU, the concept of multi-level governance is already integrated into legal documents and managerial practices (see, for example, the European Committee of the Regions), while in Russia MLG is conceptualized primarily by academics.

### **2.2.3. Cross-border cooperation between Russia and the EU: MLG perspective**

As we have said above, the EU applies MLG instruments not only for internal development but also for external borders. The European-Russian cross-border relations are also developed in the MLG context. Writing about cross-border cooperation, scholars describe the Russian-European type of CBC as one based on joint programmes implementation (Sebentsov, 2018; Koch, 2017). In 1995, the first programme was started between Russian and Finland in order to combat the negative impact of the peripheral character of a region. After entering the EU, the Baltic states and Poland joined the Russian-European programmes for 2004-2006. The main participators were regional authorities, local governments, government agencies, non-profit organizations. Partners on both sides of the border served general applications for financing joint projects. Unfortunately, existing of two different schemes of financing projects – TACIS funds and means of the Interreg program – hindered joint project management. According to Sebentsov (2018), Russian partners struggled with the language barrier, limited awareness in project activities, insufficient knowledge of the European institutions. That led to the dominant role of the EU in cooperation.

The new programming period for 2007–2013 brought some qualitative improvements of the cooperation programmes. New internal and external ways of financing for each of the countries emerged, programmes' partners started to use their own funds. A crucial step forward was made by the appearance of infrastructural projects with an investment component and more active participation of the Russian side in the development and financing of projects. Nevertheless, differences in institutions and legislation, lack of Russian NGOs, different distribution

competencies between municipalities, regions, and central authorities remained major problems (ibid.).

In 2014, new cooperation programmes until 2020 under the new European Neighborhood Instrument were issued. These programmes differ from the previous ones in terms of the emergence of greater Russian co-financing, narrower thematic focus, and the rise of the role of local actors (Sebentsov, 2020; Kuznetsov et al., 2019).

To sum up, serious changes have occurred in the programme implementation practices between Russia and the EU since 1995. Nowadays, the specific of cross-border relations is defined by relations of central governments, relations between border regions and centers, relations between local administrations of adjacent territories (Ignatiev, 2007). These relations create a multi-level network and, therefore, a unique multi-level governance structure.

### **2.3. Goal-setting in the cross-border cooperation**

Hence, we have identified how the Russian-European cross-border cooperation has recently developed, and to answer to our research question, we should proceed with understanding what a goal is and how they are formulated in cross-border strategies, ENI CBC programmes, and projects. In accordance with Oxford dictionaries, we refer to “goal” or “objective” as “the object of a person's ambition or effort; an aim or desired result” (Goal. Oxford dictionaries, no date).

#### **2.3.1. Strategic and project goal-setting**

Goal-setting is an important process, both for strategic documents and cross-border cooperation projects.

On the strategic level, cross-border cooperation is perceived as a practical tool to promote goals of strategies of regional development (Zhabrev & Kudryashova, 2019; Zhabrev et al., 2011). On this level, goal-setting is an important step because strategic goals should describe key orienteers for territorial development, they should correlate with official governmental priorities, and, at the same time, resonate with the expectations of private actors. However, the objectives stated in the strategies can be vague and more process-oriented than practical and goal-oriented (Windhoff-Heritier, 1987). These documents mainly contain a general vision of favorable developments in a region. Therefore, not by chance, there are hardly any examples of the application of impact evaluation in national development programmes (Kaul, 1977). Consequently, the outcome of a strategy provides a general improvement of an area (Sapryka, 2010).

In contrast, on the project level, the objectives should be clearly stated and the role of everyone involved should be determined (Boehringer, 1990). The operational objectives are to be derived from the program objectives (Rossi, 1988). However, these simple from the first sight rules cannot always be performed in reality: some new goals can emerge during the project implementation. Sometimes a goal can be vague, twofold, and be changed over time (Hellstern et al, 1984; Kantowsky, 1977). Moreover, project partners can pursue different goals. The border actors' perception towards their interests and values can vary significantly, thereby, their understanding of the border and discourse about that can compete with each other. As an example of such contradiction, Hataley and Leuprecht (2018) describe a situation when the border perception is different for state actors "whose prime goal may be territorial integrity as opposed to local stakeholders whose prime goal may be trade." Popescu (2012, p. 127–128) shares the same vision and argues that the governing purposes are "overwhelming" due to the great quantity of actors involved. Nevertheless, project goals tend to be measurable via specific indicators and are precise in contrast to strategic goals.

A goal analysis is an important instrument for evaluating a programme or a project in general (Scriven, 1972). By asking some specific questions, the objectives are operationalized and the programme or project is evaluated. These questions are:

- What is considered a goal?
- Whose goals are taken into account?
- Which goals are checked? (Frensch, 1995, p. 34).

### **2.3.2. Goal-setting in the ENI CBC Programmes**

Fritsch and others write in their article "Whose partnership? Regional participatory arrangements in CBC programming on the Finnish–Russian border" (2015) about the consensus in promoting regional development goals and harmonizing spatial processes in bordering regions. The CBC programmes' calls and priorities should correlate with wider regional development objectives in a certain zone to ensure the fulfillment of the aims of all local and regional stakeholders. In other words, the CBC is based on top-down and bottom-up approaches simultaneously. In one respect, the developers of the ENI Programmes rely on the needs and aspirations of local dwellers while identifying programmes' objectives. In another respect, the ENI Programmes are still tools of EU external policies and reflect the EU perceptions of border regions development; project partners anyway ought to follow these particular goals.

CBC initiatives attempt to make the cross-border region one single entity by the means of intensive engagement and interaction among broad set of actors of bordering regions in a given

area (ibid., p. 2590). That is an example of the partnership principle formulated in the European Code of Conduct on Partnership:

*Each Member State shall in accordance with its institutional and legal framework organise a partnership with the competent regional and local authorities. The partnership shall also include the following partners: competent urban and other public authorities, economic and social partners, and relevant bodies representing civil society, including environmental partners, non-governmental organisations, and bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, gender equality and non-discrimination. (EC, 2013, pp. 2–3).*

Speaking about the goals of CBC, Daume in her article “Cross-border cooperation in rural territories in the context of the EU funds: the case of Latvia-Estonia-Russia border area” (2018) points out that the EU funded CBC programmes not only in order to help to achieve an exact goal of a project, but also to increase economic benefits for society in general and to create and maintain international social ties and communication. These emerging social networks are sources for searching for new answers to old questions even beyond EU-funded projects and formulating additional common goals (ibid.).

Based on said above, we identify the following difficulties in CBC goals formulation:

1. Different actors chase different goals: even if partners try to solve common problems, inner discourses in each country can be controversial (Hataley & Leuprecht, 2018).
2. New goals can emerge during project implementation; that is why goals at the beginning of the project, aspirations in the middle of activities, and final results can vary a lot (Frensch, 1995).
3. Coordination between partners can be hard to achieve. As we wrote in the previous paragraph, the European states and Russia do not have a similar inner state multi-level structure, consequently, some procedures can be hampered due to these differences (Popescu, 2012).

#### **2.4. Conclusions**

- We perceive cross-border cooperation as a part of international relations, it is a type of concerted action aiming at strengthening relations between neighboring regions. In recent years not only local and regional authorities but also private institutions have become subjects of CBC, and that determines the multi-level nature of such a cooperation.
- MLG is a concept that describes the system of power spreading among vertical governmental entities and various horizontal non-governmental structures and actors. In the BSR, MLG can explain the dynamics of relations because a huge variety of actors are

involved in policy-making processes. The EU plays a prominent role in these interactions. Firstly, the EU is a pioneer in MLG, and it uses MLG instruments for the internal development of a Union. Secondly, the EU uses MLG as a way to build relations with neighboring non-EU states. For example, currently, the EU applies macroregional strategy and other MLG instruments in order to frame the durable framework of partners in the BSR.

- Speaking about internal governance structure, in Finland, Estonia, and Latvia, MLG is a more developed concept than in Russia. It is evidenced that the state involvement in external relations of subjects is higher in Russia than in the European Union. Furthermore, MLG is included in the European legal framework and European practices, while in Russia, MLG is not included in the legal sphere and is conceptualized primarily by scholars.
- The European – Russian cross-border relations are based on joint programmes which imply various actors' involvement. Since 1995 these programmes have gone through a significant transformation and now are mechanisms of equal partnership.
- Concerning goal-setting, in academic literature, we can trace a tendency to perceive goals as an instrument of project evaluation. Goals are formulated narrowly in projects. Moreover, they tend to be measurable via indicators, while goals of programmes or strategies are broad, aiming to improve the general regional context. Lack of shared values, bad coordination between actors involved, and the flexible nature of goals can hinder cooperation. In the ENI CBC Programmes, these difficulties are present as well, however, Programmes' developers attempt to mitigate them through combining top-down and bottom-up approaches and implementing the principle of partnership in order to hear all voices (Fritsch, 2015; Daume, 2018).

### **3. DATA COLLECTION AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

The empirical study aims at comparing the goals of the EU's and Russian strategic documents and goals of the ENI CBC projects to reveal differences and similarities and try to explain them. In order to conduct this research, we need to choose appropriate documents and justify our selection. In addition, in this section, we will describe the methodology, in particular, previous researches which are relevant to our work and scientific methods which help us to tackle a research question.

#### **3.1. Sources' review**

##### **3.1.1. The European and Russian documents**

For analysis of **European documents**, we will concentrate on regulations concerning external cooperation with non-EU states which establish and coordinate ENI activities. Major documents for our analysis will be the Regulation No 232/2014 establishing the European Neighbourhood Instrument and Programming of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) - 2014-2020 specifying the EU strategic view on cross-border cooperation on the external borders and refining previous regulation.

We do not include in our analysis other European legal acts concerning CBC under the ENI implementation (e.g., Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 966/2012 on the Financial Regulation; Common Implementing regulation (CIR) (Reg 236/2014); CBC Implementing Rules (Reg 897/2014)) because they focus on such narrow issues as financing methods, particular measures of programmes implementation, programmes' preparation, content, adoption, etc. which are beyond our research aims.

There is a set of **Russian documents** concerning CBC. The Concept for Cross-Border Cooperation of the Russian Federation, 2001, and Federal Law No. 179-FZ "On the Basics of Cross-Border Cooperation", 2017, are the main sources of the law establishing the rules of external activities for entities willing to conduct cross-border relations with neighbours. We will look at them precisely in terms of CBC goals formulation. It should be mentioned that in 2020, the new Concept for CBC was adopted in Russia that is a newer source of CBC practices. However, since the newer Concept does not fit into 2014-2020 timeframe and, subsequently, do not influence the project goals formation, it cannot be included in our analysis.

Additional but also important documents are the Strategy for the Social and Economic Development of the North-West Region of the Russian Federation until 2020 and the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (2013, 2016). The documents describe the general dynamics of international cooperation and spatial development.

Two Concepts of Foreign Policy (2013 and 2016) are relevant for our research as they fit into the 2014-2020 timeline. However, we will focus more on the 2013 Concept as it was a legal source at the beginning of the programming period in 2014. Besides, Joint Operational Programmes contain links to the 2013 Concept. Nevertheless, in terms of CBC, the content of the Concept 2013 and revised Concept of 2016 converge. In part about the implementation of foreign policy in both Concepts, CBC is called "an important source of bilateral relations with regions and states in the trade, economic, humanitarian and external fields" (Art, 101, V. Development and Implementation of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, 2013; Art. 106, V. Russia's Foreign Policy Formulation and Implementation, the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, 2016).



### 3.1.2. Joint Operational Programmes

There are seven CBC Programmes in the ENI framework for the programming period 2014-2020, which are implemented between the EU and Russia: Karelia, Kolarctic, Latvia – Russia, Lithuania – Russia, Poland – Russia, Estonia – Russia and South-East Finland – Russia. We have picked up three Programmes from this list: South-East Finland – Russia, Estonia – Russia, Latvia – Russia. Our selection is based on the fact that Kolarctic and Karelia CBC Programmes extend far beyond the Baltic Sea Region<sup>1</sup> and incorporate some Northern territories. CBC Programmes Lithuania – Russia and Poland – Russia do not include projects relating to “Business and SME development” Priority. Thus, our research opts to study South-East Finland – Russia, Estonia – Russia, Latvia – Russia CBC Programmes.

The timeframe 2014-2020 was chosen because, firstly, it is the last finished programming period containing all reports and project information and, secondly, it helps to trace tendencies of cooperation that emerged after the 2014 Ukrainian crisis.

The Joint Operational Programmes (JOPs) are the crucial sources for our empirical study because they create the main framework for particular projects which should follow the principles and goals of the JOPs. Studying goals from the top-down (European and Russian documents, then joint documents, then projects), we expect to capture the consistency of goals formation and distribution as well as the MLG features in the sphere of cross-border cooperation.

### 3.1.3. Projects

We will scrutinize particular projects from CBC Programmes and compare them with each other. We will thoroughly overview seventeen projects: seven between Finland and Russia, five between Estonia and Russia, five between Latvia and Russia. We attempt to overview at least a third part of the projects from each Programme which is why we include seven Russian – Finnish projects (out of twenty three) and five Russian – Estonian projects (out of twelve). We made an exception for the Russian – Latvian case because only five projects devoted to "Business and SME development" exist between these countries. In order to make a sample reliable, we opt to study all five initiatives.

While choosing projects for analysis, we applied Perkmann’s (2007) methodological approach based on further theoretical sampling. Although all projects belong to “Business and

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<sup>1</sup> As it was mentioned in the introduction, in our study we refer to the BSR as a region set up by Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Baltic States, German lands of Mecklenburg — Vorpommern and Schleswig-Holstein, Polish Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, Pomeranian Voivodeship and West Pomeranian Voivodeship, as well as the following subjects of the Russian Federation — the city of St. Petersburg, Leningrad Oblast, Pskov Oblast, Novgorod Oblast, Kaliningrad Oblast, and the Republic of Karelia.



SME development” thematic objective, we expect them to vary in terms of policy entrepreneurship structures. The cases also differ with respect to:

(a) type of authorities involved - local authorities and regional authorities;

(b) territorial organization of participating in CBC countries: federalist with medium municipal autonomy (Russian Federation) and unitary states with high municipal involvement due to developed MLG (Finland, Estonia, Latvia).

With previous in mind, we have elaborated further additional criteria for project selection:

1. Projects should be financed by CBC Programmes South-East Finland – Russia, Estonia – Russia, Latvia – Russia 2014-2020.

2. Projects should correspond to the thematic objective "Business and SME development".

3. The goals and aims of projects should be formulated on their websites or the website of a particular CBC Programme.

4. The project's description should demonstrate the structure of international partners involved in that project.

Name of the document	The purpose of the document	Definition of CBC	Goals of CBC
The Regulation (EU) No 232/2014, 2014	This Regulation defines ENI as vital “instrument providing direct support for the European Union's external policies”	-	“ENI aims to create “an area of shared prosperity and good neighbourliness” between EU countries and partner countries. Cross-border cooperation shall aim to be coherent with the objectives of existing and future macro-regional strategies”.
Programming of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), 2014	The document reflects the strategic view of the EU on cross-border cooperation on the external borders of the European Union, it states main priorities and thematical objectives for CBC	“CBC is an integral component of the EU’s European Neighbourhood Policy, and of EU-Russia co-operation”	“CBC contributes to the overall ENI objective of progress towards 'an area of shared prosperity and good neighbourliness' between EU Member States and their neighbours”

<p>The Concept of Cross-Border Cooperation of the Russian Federation, 2001</p>	<p>The Concept contains the goals, factors and directions of the activities of federal executive bodies, executive bodies of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation and local governments in the field of cross-border cooperation</p>	<p>“CBC is the concerted actions of federal executive bodies, executive bodies of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, local self-government bodies”</p>	<p>“strengthening the interaction of the Russian Federation and neighboring states in solving issues of sustainable development and improving the welfare of the population of the border territories, strengthening friendship and good-neighborliness with these states.</p> <p>+special issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- developing of ties between neighboring subjects,</li> <li>- promoting mutual understanding and friendship between peoples,</li> <li>- simplification of mutual communication between different stakeholders,</li> <li>- creation and development of economic and social infrastructure in the border areas,</li> <li>- joint solution of various problems in the border areas,</li> <li>- creating conditions for effective exchanging of goods,</li> <li>- improving the efficiency of using productive and the social base of the border areas,</li> <li>- improving practices of joint addressing of emergencies,</li> <li>- prevention of the population outflow and human resources development in border areas,</li> <li>- maintaining cooperation against illegal activities”</li> </ul>
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<p>The Strategy for the Social and Economic Development of the North-West Region of the Russian Federation until 2020, 2011</p>	<p>The strategy determines guidelines and directions for the development of the socio-economic sphere, describes opportunities and end results. The strategy characterizes the ways of developing infrastructure in the district and the conditions for the implementation of strategic projects</p>	<p>-</p>	<p>The same as in Concept of CBC + - “providing support to the state authorities of the district and local self-government of Russian organizations involved in the development of the border area, -implementation of a coordinated policy of spatial development in the border area” (paragraph 19)</p>
<p>The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, 2013  The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, 2016</p>	<p>The documents set up the main priorities of global and regional cooperation, depict arising challenges (terrorism, threat of nuclear war) and highlight major aspects of Russian foreign policy</p>	<p>“interregional and cross-border cooperation is an important reserve of bilateral relations with regions and states in the trade, economic, humanitarian and external fields”</p>	<p>-</p>
<p>Federal Law No. 179-FZ "On the Basics of Cross-Border Cooperation", 2017</p>	<p>The federal law regulates “relations arising in connection with the implementation of cross-border cooperation, defines the basic principles, tasks and directions of cross-border cooperation, as well as the powers of the subjects of cross-border cooperation of the Russian Federation”</p>	<p>CBC is “a part of the international relations of the Russian Federation, international and foreign economic relations of the border regions of the Russian Federation and municipalities of the border regions of the Russian Federation with the subjects of border cooperation of neighboring states”</p>	<p>“promoting social and economic development; improving the quality of life; improving the interaction of subjects of cross-border cooperation; creating an atmosphere of trust, mutual understanding and good neighborliness; creating conditions for joint activities”</p>
<p>Joint Operational Programme South-East Finland – Russia CBC Programme 2014-2020</p>	<p>The programmes establish regions involved, describe a general dynamic of their development, set up main priorities, depicts structures and functions</p>	<p>-</p>	<p>CBC within the ENI framework aims to:  “A) Promote economic and social development in regions on both sides of the common borders;</p>

Joint Operational Programme Estonia – Russia CBC Programme 2014-2020	of the authorities and implementation of the programmes (project selections procedures, control and evaluation systems, financial plans)		B) Address common challenges in environment, public health, safety and security; C) Promotion of better conditions and modalities for mobility of persons, goods and capital”
Joint Operational Programme Latvia – Russia CBC Programme 2014-2020			

*Table 1. Documents concerning cross-border cooperation: purpose, the definition of CBC, CBC's goals*

### **3.2. Methodology**

To begin with, we will scrutinize European and Russian strategic documents appealing to the research techniques based on documentary analysis. Some researchers (Sebentsov, 2020; Kuznetsov et al., 2019; Khasson, 2013) investigate ENI regulation documents and the ENI CBC programmes, define their main features, and underline current trends in CBC. The comparative dimension allows to capture a nuanced understanding and logic of each programme and enables a structural definition of the features central to the investigation. Profound analysis of the legal framework of ENPI programmes 2007-2013 was conducted by Burtceva (2014). In line with her methodology, we will use the method of comparison and qualitative analysis of documents to study three ENI programming documents.

A particular part of our analysis will be devoted to the project's study and especially the MLG practices that will be viewed through the analysis of main project partners. A similar methodological approach was used by Peric et al. (2020), Perckmann (2007), Nadalutti (2013). The most relevant for our study are works of Koch (2017), Laine (2016), and Khasson (2013), who overview cross-border EU – Russian cooperation through analysis of partners structure and their powers and roles within the CBC projects. Besides, in line with Sologub’s methodology (2015) – who discussed the role of project activities in the public and political design of the BSR– this paper categorizes partners of CBC projects (subjects) according to their legal form. Following Sologub’s typology, we divided project partners into universities, business, NGOs, municipalities, regional authorities, and budgetary institutions. The data on the projects will be analyzed through qualitative content analysis and systematized according to the following parameters: project participants by country of origin, project participants by legal form, the main activities within the framework of projects, and their goals and expected results. The collected material allows the

creation of the dataset of projects, the content of which will be systematized and presented in tables created by the author.

In the next part of our analysis, we will compare goals formulated in strategic documents and goals of particular projects. In our work, we will perceive a goal as an outcome of a project activity that is claimed by the project leaders. That means that we will analyze only these statements, which are identified as goals by project partners and which are written on programmes' or projects' websites. Goals that are contained in the strategic documents of Russia and the EU are also units of our analysis. We will compare European and Russian goals between each other and with project goals. At the same time, programmes or strategies usually have a low degree of concretization. The "soft" programmes do not allow data to be operationalized for the experimental set-up. Programmes tend to include diffuse objectives which are process-oriented. To study them, researchers mainly apply qualitative methods and take historical context into account (Windhoff-Heritier, 1987). For this reason, the outcome of our evaluation is findings of programme implementation processes.

When analyzing the goals of documents and projects, we refer to the methodology of Borowicz and Pachocka (2019) who studied INTERREG Cross-Border Cooperation projects implemented in the EU-15 in 2000-2020. The authors use thematic keywords describing the projects in order to explain the priorities of countries in project implementation. Resonating with this methodological approach, we identify keywords describing the essence and keywords of the project describing main goals in strategic documents. Then we reveal the most commonly used words, thanks to the quantitative content analysis, and compare them with one another. For example, the Russian – Finnish project Cata3Pult will contribute to "*economic and environmental development, enhance regional business competitiveness through cross-border Public-Private cooperation and catalyze green economy development in the Programme area*". The goal of economic development corresponds with the EU's goal of the increasing "...internal *economic, social and territorial cohesion*" (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1); and business competitiveness goal corresponds with the Russian aim at "creating favorable external conditions for sustainable growth and *increasing the competitiveness* of the Russian economy" (the Concept of Foreign Policy...2016).

In addition, research methods such as comparative analysis and content analysis are used in our work.

**Content analysis** is "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context" (Krippendorff, 1989, p. 403). Content analysis in the broad sense, can be seen as any method of working with text when the object of one's research is the reflection of

some ideas in certain texts. Content analysis in the narrow sense refers to the method of studying a set of texts when the researcher identifies how frequently some specific words are mentioned there. To conduct content analysis, we need to consider the research question, select material, decide on the nature of the context analysis, and determine the units of analysis (Hermann, 2008). Quantitative content analysis is determined by a positivist research tradition. This type of analysis has a deductive logic in the basis and allows one to formulate hypotheses and control them relying on related research and theory. Qualitative content analysis, in turn, reflects humanistic research approaches. In other words, that type of analysis requires text to play a slightly different role because the researcher starts with reading the materials and then identifies main concepts and patterns some of which may emerge during the analysis (White & Marsh, 2006). We are going to use both types of content analysis in our research. Like any research method, content analysis also has some limitations. For example, replicability requirements imply observer-independent categories. To some extent, it can be achieved via computer content analysis. However, it is impossible to fully overcome any features of subjectiveness.

**Comparative analysis** is a method of scientific inquiry in the field in humanitarian science that is based on the matching of empirical evidence collected from the recording and classification of political or social phenomena. Comparative analysts tend to integrate various elements of diverse research orientations that helps in theory formulation (Lichbach & Zuckerman, 1997). In our study, we base our assumptions on the multi-level governance approach while also including some aspects of regionalism. After applying a comparative methodology to collected data, one formulates hypotheses and then test them in an analytical study involving multiple cases (Caramani, 2017). We are going to use cross-case analysis that examines themes, similarities, and differences across cases and within-case analysis in which one can verify hypotheses based on multiple features of their cases. Since the main goal of the study is to compare the goals of documents, programmes, and projects, we believe that comparison is an adequate method for our research. However, we admit that this method has some limitations: the absence of sufficient number of independent, self-contained unites to be compared in order to extract causal features can be considered as disadvantage of this method.

#### **4. ANALYSIS OF STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS ON CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION (EUROPEAN, RUSSIAN, JOINT)**

The empirical study aims at comparing the goals of the EU's and Russian strategic documents and goals of the ENI CBC projects in order to reveal differences and similarities and try to explain them. First of all, we will elucidate the main features of strategic documents devoted

to the CBC and compare the main goals of CBC, which arise from relevant Russian, European and joint legal acts. Secondly, we will bring out the main characteristics of the CBC projects and compare them with one another. More specifically, we will use the MLG conceptual framework to illuminate the correspondence of some variables as the essence of initiatives and their correlation with the specifics of partners involved in order to identify the nature of project goals. Finally, we will compare the CBC goals written in strategic documents and specific goals of projects.

#### **4.1. The European and Russian strategic documents**

##### **4.1.1. The European documents**

Cross-border cooperation plays a crucial role in the EU's border politics: CBC helps to overcome barriers and intensify political and social integration, and, in addition, CBC serves to generate opportunities by exchanging of ideas and practices in order to enhance regional development. Scott (2015) believes that the EU's politics of borders can be described in both idealistic and practically oriented ways based on the comprehensive agendas of "Cohesion" and "Neighbourhood" which determine discourses on cross-border cooperation.

In general, the EU's legal framework aims at the harmonization of local and regional cooperation structures with wider regional development strategies through Euroregions or other institutional systems (ibid. p. 10-11). Speaking about the EU relations with Russia, it would be adequate to overview regulations concerning ENI as they illustrate the EU's understanding of CBC on external borders.

The Regulation No 232/2014, establishing the European Neighbourhood Instrument, ensures financing for all 16 partner countries within the European neighbourhood policy (ENP). The instrument attempts to support relations with main stakeholders via bilateral, multilateral cooperation, and CBC programmes. The Regulation sets up the objectives of ENI, indicative programming, funds allocation, cross-border cooperation. Russia is not a full-fledged partner of the ENI; however, this country is covered by ENI for regional cooperation programmes. The document provides the legal base for the ENI and acknowledges a special status of the Russian Federation. Moreover, it establishes rules for Joint Operational Programmes which are the main legal and conceptual sources for the CBC projects (CEC, 2014).

Programming of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) - 2014-2020 frames the EU mechanisms of supporting cross-border cooperation on the external borders of the European Union under ENI in accordance with Article 9, ENI Regulation. That document expands and refines the previous ones in terms of CBC. This programming document defines the CBC policy



of the European Union: establishes the main CBC objectives, overviews the European and partner countries' policy agendas. According to the response strategy (Chapter 5), three strategic objectives are set up and a system for focusing each programme on up to 4 thematic objectives is formulated. In this document, one could find information about the lists of CBC programmes which could be financed by the EU specifying their geographic eligibility and generally expected results. Finally, the total ENI amount of funding for the years 2014 - 2020 is estimated at 489,000,000 - 598,000,000 € (EC, 2014).

The Joint Operational Programmes refer to the programming document in order to highlight that the programmes will contribute to the achievement of established three strategic objectives (1. “promote economic and social development in regions on both sides of the common borders; 2. address common challenges in environment, public health, safety, and security; 3. promotion of better conditions and modalities for the mobility of persons, goods, and capital”) (JOP Estonia – Russia CBC 2014-2020, p. 12).

Concerning MLG, the EU has a strong tradition of including different actors in cross-border cooperation: Euroregions require the participation of partners on different scales, other mechanisms also encourage NGO, business, and civil society involvement.

#### **4.1.2. The Russian documents**

The Russian Federation has developed a system of legal regulation of the international activities of the constituent entities, including the Federal Law “On the basics of cross-border cooperation”, the Concept of Cross-Border Cooperation in the Russian Federation, Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, the Strategy for the Social and Economic Development of the North-West Region of the Russian Federation until 2020.

All these documents can be divided into:

- 1) international treaties, agreements, programmes, and concepts of cross-border cooperation;
- 2) federal documents regulating the implementation of cross-border cooperation;
- 3) laws, orders, programmes, and other legal acts issued by regional authorities (Yakovenko et al., 2012, p. 234-235).

The Concept of Cross-Border Cooperation of the Russian Federation, 2001, describes the main dynamics of CBC between Russia and its neighbours. The Concept defines CBC and underlines the general view on the goals of CBC and activities of multi-level executive bodies in the field of cross-border cooperation.



A special role in this block of documents plays the Federal Law “On the basics of cross-border cooperation ” (dated July 26, 2017, No. 179-FZ) which at the legislative level determines the main principles, tasks, and directions of cross-border cooperation as well as powers subjects of cross-border cooperation in this domain. From an institutional and legal point of view, the law should improve the mechanism of concluding agreements on cross-border cooperation at the regional level and consolidate a similar mechanism for municipal authorities (Sebentsov, 2018).

We suggest that the Concept of CBC of the Russian Federation and Federal Law No. 179-FZ "On the Basics of Cross-Border Cooperation" are two main sources of law that determine the Russian policy in CBC, therefore, the Joint Operational Programmes mostly rely on them from the Russian side.

The Strategy for the Social and Economic Development of the North-West Region of the Russian Federation until 2020 determines guidelines and directions for the socio-economic development of Northwest Russia, the territory that is the main participant in the ENI CBC Programmes from the Russian side. Therefore, existing infrastructure and potential prospects of the district help to capture the general context of the socio-economic situation.

The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (2013) shows the main priorities of global and regional cooperation, depicts arising challenges and highlights major aspects of Russian foreign policy. The document reflects the perception of Russian foreign policy on the state level. In terms of CBC, the content of the Concept 2013 and revised Concept of 2016 fully converge. In part about the implementation of foreign policy in both texts, CBC is called “an important source of bilateral relations with regions and states in the trade, economic, humanitarian and external fields” (Art, 101, V. Development and Implementation of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, 2013; Art. 106, V. Russia's Foreign Policy Formulation and Implementation, the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, 2016).

The Strategy for the Social and Economic Development of the North-West Region of the Russian Federation and the Concepts of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (2013, 2016) provide us with rather scarce information about CBC. At the same time, they are valuable documents because they not only describe the general dynamics of international cooperation but also set up some goals for Joint Operational Programmes (JOP). For example, in the JOP Latvia – Russia it is written that the realization of “Business and SME development” Priority continues the objectives of the Strategy of social and economic development of the North-West Region of Russia (JOP Latvia – Russia CBC 2014-2020, p. 25). Therefore, we could speak about the coherency of strategic documents of Russia and the EU and the joint programming documents.

In respect to the MLG, the Constitution of the Russian Federation does not provide the exclusive competence for the units of the Russian Federation. These competencies are determined based on the residual principle that gives the subjects of the Federation certain independence in solving these issues, which, in turn, transfer them for implementation to local governments (Bulatova, 2010). The local municipalities used to carry out fairly independent external relations until the adoption of Federal Law "On the Basics of Cross-Border Cooperation". Since the year 2017, local governments ought to coordinate their external missions tightly with the regional and federal government. For example, municipalities' authorities are obliged to inform the authorized regional executive body annually about the list of all cross-border agreements of municipalities and the results of such connections (Article 8 of Federal Law "On the Basics of Cross-Border Cooperation"). In other words, while municipalities (and, to some extent, regional powers) remain the main subjects of cross-border cooperation in Russia (Naryshkin, 2012; Laine, 2015), they should coordinate their activities with higher governmental structures. However, it should be mentioned that despite the main accent is made on the participation of regional and local state powers, the Concept of cross-border cooperation of the Russian Federation also acknowledges the involvement of other legal entities and individuals. (Article I, the Concept of cross-border cooperation...2001).

#### **4.1.3. The strategic documents of the EU and Russia: goals' analysis**

We will begin our analysis with Regulation No 232/2014 that establishes a European Neighbourhood Instrument (CEC, 2014, preamble 1). According to this document, ENI aims to create '*an area of shared prosperity and good neighbourliness*' between EU countries and partner countries by different methods as promoting human rights, sustainable growth and economic, social and territorial development, mobility, and people-to-people contacts, including student exchanges, and regional integration (EC, 2014, Article 1 no. 1). In our opinion, it is a broad formulated goal that describes the general dynamics of interaction, mentioning CBC only as a part of a whole partnership system. That is correlated with underlined in the theoretical chapter Windhoff-Heritier's (1987) and Sapryka's (2010) point of view that the strategic objectives are vague and process-oriented, they seek to achieve the overall positive change.

Nevertheless, the document contains some specific goals. We should mention those of them which can be relevant for our analysis as they are connected with socio-economic development and CBC:

“(c) creating conditions for the better organization of legal migration and the fostering of well-managed mobility of people, for the implementation of existing or future agreements, concluded in line with the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility, and for the promotion of

people-to-people contacts, in particular concerning cultural, educational, professional and sporting activities;

(d) supporting smart, sustainable, and inclusive development in all aspects; reducing poverty, including through private-sector development, and reducing social exclusion; promoting capacity-building in science, education and in particular higher education, technology, research and innovation; promoting internal economic, social and territorial cohesion; fostering rural development; promoting public health; and supporting environmental protection, climate action and disaster resilience;

(f) enhancing sub-regional, regional and European Neighbourhood-wide collaboration as well as cross-border cooperation” (ibid. Article 2 no.1).

In the Programming of the ENI, it is stated that CBC aims to contribute to the general ENI aim of progress towards “an area of shared prosperity and good neighbourliness” between the EU Member States and their neighbours (that repeats the one from the Regulation (EU) No 232/2014). Besides, three overarching strategic objectives are formulated:

- “- promote economic and social development in regions on both sides of common borders;
- address common challenges in the environment, public health, safety and security;
- promotion of better conditions and modalities for ensuring the mobility of persons, goods and capital” (EC, 2014, 1.2).

The authors of the ENI Programming hope that CBC programmes will result in added value of cross-border cooperation because they are jointly worked out for the mutual benefit both for the EU and Russia (ibid.).

Other important documents for our analysis are Russian legal acts. According to the Concept for Cross-Border Cooperation of the Russian Federation, CBC aims at “strengthening the interaction of the Russian Federation and neighboring states in solving issues of sustainable development and improving the welfare of the population of the border territories, strengthening friendship and good-neighbourliness with these state” (The Concept of cross-border cooperation...2001). In this document, as well as in European ones, we see the emphasis on effective interaction (“*solving issues of sustainable development*”, “*strengthening friendship and good-neighbourliness with these state*”). However, the main focus is made on the subjects of CBC in Russia and abroad, which means that for Russian internal discourse the CBC is mainly about the cooperation of neighboring entities (regions or municipalities); while for the EU CBC is about creating a certain zone, secure and prosperous, and integrated to some extent area of shared values.

That resonates with the difference in the Russian and European understanding of CBC, revealed in the theoretical chapter. As we mentioned before, some Russian authors suggest understanding cross-border cooperation as coordinated actions of neighboring regions of states (Dubrovina & Plotnikova, 2016), while European authors speak about cooperation between public and private structures in bordering regions (De Sousa, 2013) in order to create a common space (Scott, 2014).

Most notably, there is a list of particular goals of CBC in the Concept of CBC, for example:

- “developing of ties between neighboring subjects,
- promoting mutual understanding and friendship between peoples,
- simplification of mutual communication between different stakeholders,
- creation and development of economic and social infrastructure in the border areas,
- joint solution of various problems in the border areas,
- creating conditions for effective exchanging of goods,
- improving the efficiency of using productivity and the social base of the border areas,
- improving practices of joint addressing of emergencies,
- prevention of the population outflow and human resources development in border areas,
- maintaining cooperation against illegal activities” (ibid. p. 4-5).

We assume that such goals as (1) “creation and development of economic and social infrastructure”, (2) “improving the efficiency of using productivity and the social base”, (3) “prevention of the population outflow and human resources development”, are most relevant for our research as they aim at improving the socio-economic environment in bordering regions.

Besides, these goals of the Concept of CBC in Russia, in general, correspond with the three overarching strategic objectives of ENI. Nevertheless, we see opposing contexts while speaking about human mobility. In the EU's documents, the main goal is to create conditions and modalities for the mobility of persons to let them move freely. On the contrary, in the Russian documents, in addition, the main goal is to stop the population outflow from Russian bordering territories that illustrates one of the serious problems – resettling in centers and leaving border regions (see Mezhevich & Zhuk, 2013; Mikhel & Krutova, 2011).

Similar goals are determined in the Federal Law “On the Basics on Cross-border Cooperation”, they generally overlap with specific goals of the Concept of cross-border cooperation and with wider European goals. We could name the following main objectives of Federal Law:

- “promoting social and economic development;
- improving the quality of life;
- improving the interaction of subjects of cross-border cooperation;
- creating an atmosphere of trust, mutual understanding and good neighborliness;
- creating conditions for joint activities” (Federal Law N 179-FZ "On the Basics of Cross-Border Cooperation", 2017).

Another important legal act is the Strategy for the Social and Economic Development of the North-West Region of the Russian Federation until 2020. That document states that one of the main functions of Northwest territory is to maintain foreign economic relations between Russia and the European Union. The authors of the Strategy devoted a particular paragraph to CBC (the Strategy of Social and Economic Development... 2014, paragraph 1). The strategic goals for the development of cross-border cooperation in the Northwestern Federal District overall overlap with the specific goals from the Concept of CBC. However, here we see some additional objectives as:

- “providing support to the state authorities of the district and local self-government of Russian organizations involved in the development of the border area;

- implementation of a coordinated policy of spatial development in the border area” (ibid., paragraph 19).

These goals also attempt to influence the socio-economic development of the region. Some of the CBC projects, which we will analyze in the next chapter, contribute to spatial development goals. For example, some of them aim at developing non-motorized transport corridors (Greenways Riga – Pskov), and others attempt to create nature trails and historical water trail (RivTimes).

In the text of the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, we have not found any references to the goals of CBC. Only in the section on the implementation of foreign policy, we could see that “interregional and cross-border cooperation is an important source of bilateral relations with regions and states in the trade, economic, humanitarian and external fields” (the Concept of Foreign Policy...2013. Part V, no.101). It also should be noticed that some other goals of foreign policy can be relevant for our study, namely:

- “creating favorable external conditions for sustainable growth and increasing the competitiveness of the Russian economy,

- strengthening Russia's position in the system of world economic relations,

- formation of good-neighborly relations with neighboring states” (ibid., Part I).

These goals correspond with mentioned above Russian documents goals. Furthermore, the goals mentioned find reflection within the EU's goal “to create an area of shared prosperity and good neighbourliness” as well as in the narrower goal of promoting economic and social development in regions on both sides of common borders.

## **4.2. Joint strategic documents: the ENI CBC Programmes**

### **4.2.1. Documents’ analysis**

Within each ENI CBC Programme, the main document is Joint Operational Programme that is elaborated mutually with representatives from Russia and ones from Finland, Estonia, or Latvia. Then the ratification of Agreements on financing and implementation of Programme are taken part in legislative bodies of each country involved.

South-East Finland – Russia CBC Programme 2014-2020. The eligible territory consists of the core regions South Karelia, South-Savo, and Kymenlaakso in Finland and St. Petersburg and Leningrad region in Russia. There also are adjoining areas: Uusimaa, Päijät-Häme, North-Savo, North Karelia and Republic of Karelia, plus partners from Turku and Moscow may participate in the projects to a certain extent.

Estonia-Russia CBC Programme 2014-2020. The eligible territory consists of such Estonian regions as Kirde-Eesti, Lõuna-Eesti, Kesk-Eesti, and Russian regions as St Petersburg, Leningrad, and Pskov regions. Besides, the Programme area includes the Põhja-Eesti region with the capital city of Estonia, Tallinn, as an adjoining region.

Latvia-Russia CBC Programme 2014-2020. The Programme core area includes Vidzeme and Latgale regions in Latvia and Pskov region in Russia. The adjoining area of the Programme consists of Pieriga and Zemgale regions in Latvia and Leningrad regions in Russia.

All Joint Operational Programmes encourage joint initiatives towards solution of common challenges in cross-border areas. Three strategic objectives for CBC should be achieved:

- 1) “promotion of economic and social development in bordering regions,
- 2) addressing common challenges in the environment, public health, safety, and security,
- 3) promotion of better conditions for persons, goods, and capital mobility” (EC, 2014, 1.2).

The named strategic objectives are refined into thematic objectives. For South-East Finland – Russia and Estonia – Russia CBC Programmes these objectives are:

1. “Business and SME development,
2. Support of education, research, technological development, and innovation,

3. Environmental protection, climate change mitigation, and adaptation,
4. Promotion of border management and border security, mobility, and migration management” (JOP South-East Finland – Russia, p. 33, JOP Estonia – Russia, p. 12).

For Latvia – Russia CBC Programmes there are three following objectives (which are additionally subdivided into priorities):

1. “Business and SME development,
2. Environmental protection, climate change mitigation, and adaptation,
3. Promotion of border management and border security, mobility, and migration management” (JOP Latvia – Russia, p. 23).

All mentioned programmes are implemented in shared management and are co-financed by all countries involved. The Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) monitors and follows the programme implementation and progress. The implementation mechanisms are similar in each programme (JOPs of South-Finland – Russia, Estonia – Russia, and Latvia – Russia 2014-2020 CBC Programmes).

All three strategic objectives mentioned in the Joint Operational Programmes clearly correspond with the wider European goals, namely ENI objectives:

- The aim of “promotion of economic and social development in bordering regions” (JOPs) includes the idea of “supporting smart, sustainable and inclusive development in all aspects” (EC, 2014, Article 2 no.1).
- The aim of “addressing common challenges in environment, public health, safety and security” (JOPs) reflects the ENI objective of “enhancing sub-regional, regional and European Neighbourhood-wide collaboration as well as cross-border cooperation” (EC, 2014, Article 2 no.1).
- The aim of “promotion of better conditions for persons, goods and capital mobility” (JOPs) converges with ENI provision about “creating conditions for the better organisation of legal migration and the fostering of well-managed mobility of people” (EC, 2014, Article 2 no.1).

Furthermore, objectives mentioned in JOPs repeat strategic objectives stated in Regulation No 232/2014 about ENI implementation. That is due to the fact that each Programme ought to fulfill at least one of the strategic objectives. Therefore, usually, all three objectives are the cornerstones of each Programme. Plus, as a rule, Programme should concentrate on a maximum of four thematic objectives in order to perform effectively (JOP South-East Finland – Russia, p.



33-34). As we see from documents, there are four thematic objectives in South-East Finland – Russia and Estonia – Russia Programmes and three thematic objectives in Latvia-Russia Programme.

Comparison of the Programmes' goals and Russian strategic goals evidenced that objectives in Programmes are formulated in a broader way than Russian ones. However, they include all key Russian priorities. For example, Programmes' aim of promotion economic and social development in bordering regions (JOP of South-Finland – Russia 2014-2020, 2015, p. 33) extends the Russian will to create and develop “economic and social infrastructure in the border areas” (The Concept of cross-border cooperation...2017).

To summarize, the JOPs create the main framework for particular projects, which should be implemented in line with the principles and goals of the JOPs. Besides, JOPs reflect the shared vision on CBC of European and Russian partners and evidence about Russian-European consensus.

#### **4.2.2. MLG within the ENI CBC Programmes**

Continuing the internal traditions of multi-level governance, the EU via ENI promotes a “non-hierarchical governance structure that is supposed to ensure the equality of all cooperation actors” (Khasson, 2013). ENI, as an instrument of the EU, focuses on promoting European ideals of good governance and, more precisely, on enhancing the competencies of regional and local stakeholders. Therefore, the ENI tries to move from traditional state-centered geopolitics to a more actor-oriented one (Scott, 2015).

However, domination of multi-level governance can be also viewed as a weakness that warns about governmental structures losing their authority (Perry, 2017). Moreover, it can decrease the effectiveness of power relations and hamper implementation of decisions due to taking into account everyone's interests that implies long coordination chains. Moreover, Lavenex and Schimmelfenning (2009, p. 797) assume that “certain types of external governance come close to a hierarchical system and undermine important sections of third countries' autonomy over their legislations.” The arguments of Koch are resonating with previous authors' beliefs. Speaking about Russian – Finnish CBC, Koch claims that despite the multi-level governmental organization, the role of the state is still dominant (Koch, 2017, p. 11). At the same time, she is confident that ENI Programmes create “a novel form of multi-level and trans-territorial governance that utilized sub-national institutions” (ibid, p. 9).



Nevertheless, other scholars (Sebentsov, 2018; Scott, 2014) argue that this configuration was true for previous cooperation in the 2017-2013 programming period, but today we speak about more proportional practices of CBC involving a wide range of private bodies.

#### **4.2. Conclusions:**

- In European law, there are special regulations concerning CBC with Russia in terms of ENI programmes. Meanwhile, Russian legislation does not provide particular documents in describing the cooperation with the EU. That is due to the fact that the ENI CBC Programmes are, first of all, part of the EU mechanisms of cooperation on external borders. At the same time, the presence of joint documents (JOPs) is a significant feature of Russian-European consensus as they navigate cross-border activities and reflect a shared view on issues of bordering regions development.
- Broadly speaking, all general goals from strategic EU's and Russian texts can be divided into three parts. One part of the goals emphasizes friendship and peaceful communication (“formation of good-neighboring relations with neighboring states”, “an area of...good neighbourliness”). Another part highlights the aspirations for social-economic development of bordering regions (“to promote economic and social development”, “create an area of shared prosperity”, “creating favorable external conditions for sustainable growth”). The last part focuses on CBC as a priority as a such (“enhancing cross-border cooperation”, “cross-border cooperation is an important reserve of bilateral relations”).
- In both European and Russian documents, the goals of CBC seem to be formulated very broadly. As we said earlier, that is a general feature of goal-setting in strategic documents due to the fact that they underline the general positive dynamics of CBC outcomes.
- As for similarities, both Russian and European goals are connected with establishing good neighboring relations. European and Russian authorities are eager to increase the quality of life in bordering regions via economic, social, infrastructural development and solving common problems.
- There are some differences as well. Firstly, despite the common challenges that are postulated in the JOPs, some of them are controversial. For instance, the issue of human mobility is perceived differently. In the EU's documents, the main goal is to create conditions to sustain people’s free movement and to support the rotation of human capital, while in the Russian documents, the main goal is to stop the population outflow from Russian bordering territories.
- Secondly, while the European side emphasizes the will of creating a common space of prosperity and good neighbourliness, the Russian side focuses on ““strengthening

friendship and good-neighborliness” with a particular state in general. In other words, it seems that the EU authorities might have some aspirations to integrate and create a common zone. Meanwhile, for Russia it is crucial to maintain a high level of independence, for that reason Russian authorities are ready to speak about dialogue or cooperation but not about conceptions of space. Both examples prove the idea of Hataley and Leuprecht (2018) that inner discourses in each country can be controversial, plus, the economic, social, and political context can also be different that implies the existence of opposite challenges.

- These differences can also be linked to debates on types of sovereignty in European studies. It is considered that Moscow is guided by Westphalian notions of sovereignty and understands it in terms of the consolidation of the state. Consequently, in the EU – Russian relations, Russia is very sensitive about the EU’s possible attempts to encroach on its sovereignty (Haukkala, 2010). The EU focuses more on ‘shared’ sovereignty inside the Union (Wallace, 1999; Brack et al., 2019), while some scholars even speak about sovereignty that should be “vertically and horizontally dispersed between units below, across and above the state” (Bellamy, 2016); that returns us to multi-level essence of governance. An interesting observation was made by Russian scholar Medvedev (2008), who counterposes concepts of "Sovereignty" and "Europeanization" as two competing approaches for managing globalization. According to Medvedev, the first strategy aims at protecting the internal order, and the second aims at promoting its internal order outside the EU. Russia strengthens domestic statehood by conservative means, it concentrates on protecting borders from external threats, while the EU expands its internal structures to manage this uncertainty outside its territory (ibid.).
- As for MLG practices, our findings resonate with the assumption stated in the theoretical part that the EU is a leader of MLG, and it spreads these practices to neighbouring countries. It is proved by the fact that the European documents reflect a coherent structure of multi-level institutions responsible for CBC and involved in its implementation. The ENI CBC Programmes can be an example of such a tendency. Some scholars argue that ENI CBC is still hierarchical and is led by the EU (Koch, 2017; Lavenex & Schimmelfenning, 2009). However, based on JOPs analysis, we can claim that nowadays the European-Russian cross-border relations are more symmetrical than before: such mechanisms as co-financing and work of joint committee provide a possibility of equal partnership (Sebentsov, 2018).

## **5. ANALYSIS OF “BUSINESS AND SME DEVELOPMENT” PROJECTS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF SOUTH-EAST FINLAND – RUSSIA, ESTONIA – RUSSIA AND LATVIA – RUSSIA CBC PROGRAMMES 2014-2020**

Hence, we have already discussed strategic documents of the EU and Russia and clarified the main characteristics of them. In this chapter, we will focus on the project activity of cross-border cooperation between Russia and the EU. Firstly, we discuss the specifics of project activity in the Baltic Sea Region. Secondly, we scrutinize projects from CBC programmes between Russia and the EU. Then we analyze the structure of project partners applying a multi-level governance approach and discuss whether this approach is relevant for our case. Finally, based on the findings from both empirical chapters, we compare the main aims and objectives of the EU and Russian documents with the aims and objectives of particular projects.

### **5.1. Project activity in the Baltic Sea Region**

According to the Oxford dictionary definition, a project is “an individual or collaborative enterprise that is carefully planned to achieve a particular aim” (Project. Oxford dictionaries, no date). Projects usually focus on solving an acute issue and have a very precise impact.

A project activity can be described as an activity that implies specific and time-limited joint actions aimed at a certain beneficial-for-all result, while all the parties involved invest some resources in these actions (Sologub, 2015). Nowadays, project activity is a widespread instrument of many international organizations, and it is considered to be an efficient one. There are numerous examples of project activities in the Baltic Sea Region. For example, 184 Interreg projects unite 2115 partners. (Interreg. Project library, no date). Besides, more than 200 projects were implemented in the framework of the ENI CBC Programmes Russia – EU in 2007-2013 (Cross-border cooperation programmes Russia – EU. Official site of Ministry of Economic Development Russian Federation, no date).

Neumann (1994) claims that regions are created through political projects which tell stories about similarities, shared history, geography, external threats in order to build a common identity. Although, Neumann perceives projects more as fundamental endeavors creating a region as a such than just initiatives to overcome local problems, the role of CBC activities can’t be overestimated. In the Baltic Sea region, we might trace how CBC projects create discourse and agenda, supporting some non-state actors and not hindering others, including certain territories in the area of their activities and excluding others, and forms functional networks of interaction. These nets can be even described as a form of multi-level governance in the Baltic Sea region where there is a huge variety of different actors operating vertically and horizontally.

Weaver (1997) believes that even though projects seek to find new areas of cooperation, they often rely on history and common heritage. They are instruments of binding region in a whole by creating functional logic and uniting different actors. The author also claims that actors can have very different goals, have a different understanding of the region, but they all concurred regarding implementing initiatives together under the auspices of the Baltic Sea Region.

To sum up, project activity plays an important role in region construction. That is an efficient form of international cooperation as it helps to solve exact issues acute for all stakeholders.

## **5.2. Projects within the ENI CBC Programmes**

### **5.2.1. South-East Finland – Russia CBC Programme 2014-2020**

In total, there are twenty three projects in the thematic objective 1: Business and SME development.

In the group called lively, active and competitive economy (Priority 1), some projects aimed at developing the economic ties between Russian and Finnish partners, boosting the overall potential of business in the BSR as it is stated in the Joint Operational Programme. These project goals (for example, “bringing together the innovative, research, training and business capacity, resources, best practices and experiences”, “applying an innovative multi-level cross-border collaboration platform”, etc.) undoubtedly correspond with the title of the priority. However, some projects can also be attributed to the other Priorities. For instance, the project RivTimes, aiming at creating nature and historical trails to develop tourism destinations can also be in “attractive, clean environment and region” (Priority 3) or “well-connected region” (Priority 4). Project Twin campus, aiming at developing technology-based companies through commercialization of university-based innovations can also be a part of “innovative, skilled and well-educated area” (Priority 2) as one of its focuses is sharing best practices of scientific know-hows from universities (Funded projects. CBC 2014-2020 South-East Finland – Russia). To sum up, since the goals of some projects can be understood twofold, the more adequate and explicit justification why this project belongs to an exact Priority is needed in some cases.

Furthermore, we have identified that projects can be divided into categories such as:

1) local business support: for example, Green ReMark project aims at enlarging related market conditions in order to help small and medium entrepreneurs;

2) education and the start of a career: for example, Twin campus project attempts to facilitate the exchange of university-based technologies in order to promote universities to the global world;

3) nature and historical resources development (tourism): for example, RivTimes project seeks to develop new attractive tourism destinations by creating nature trails;

4) business contact development: for example, Bringing Together project unites entrepreneurs and helps them to enhance business capacity and share best practices and experiences.

In the following tables, we will summarize the main projects' characteristics: project name, partners, budget, timeframe, and objectives. We will use the following abbreviations for partner type identification:

U – university

B – business

NGO – non-governmental organization

BI – budgetary institution (school, hospital, etc.)

M - municipality

R – regional authority

We also will use further color-coding to identify partner belonging to Finland, Estonia, Latvia or Russia.

To indicate projects belonging to the categories discussed above we will use the following abbreviations in further tables:

LBS - Local business support

E - Education

T - Tourism

BC - Business contacts

Name of the project	Partners of the project	Budget €	Timeframe	The specific objective
Bringing Together  <a href="https://en.bringingtogether.ru/about/">https://en.bringingtogether.ru/about/</a>  BC	Saint-Petersburg Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NGO) Eurofacts Oy (B) Karelian Consulting Ltd. (B) Kouvola Innovation Oy (B) the Laboratory of Institutional Project Engineering Ltd. (B)	805 186	2020-2022	“to bringing together of the innovative, research, training and business capacity, resources, best practices and experiences for strengthening of investment and business processes in the border areas of Russia and Finland”

Startup Connect  <a href="http://startupconnect.info/index.php?option=com_jabuilder&amp;view=page&amp;id=4&amp;Itemid=110">http://startupconnect.info/index.php?option=com_jabuilder&amp;view=page&amp;id=4&amp;Itemid=110</a>  BC	Cursor - Kotka-Hamina Regional Development Company (B) ITMO University (U) XAMK - South-East Finland University of Applied Sciences (U) St. Petersburg Foundation for Small and Medium-sized Enterprise Development (NGO)	807 480	2018-2021	“to support start-up entrepreneurship and SME cooperation and form a community of active and motivated business leaders with ambitions and abilities for global success”
INCROBB "Inclusive cross-border business networking of tomorrow"  <a href="https://gifu.spbstu.ru/incrobb/">https://gifu.spbstu.ru/incrobb/</a>  LBS / BC	Lappeenranta – Lahti University of Technology, SaimaanVirta ry (U) Peter the Great Saint-Petersburg Polytechnic University (U) Saint Petersburg Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NGO) Etela-Karjalan Yrittaja ry (NGO)	425 917	2020-2022	“to develop and apply an innovative multi-level cross-border collaboration platform on sustainable SME business management and employment in the region”
Cata3Pult  <a href="https://www.ecoprofi.info/en/cata3pult">https://www.ecoprofi.info/en/cata3pult</a>  BC	City of Lappeenranta (M) St.Petersburg House Property Owners Association (NGO) Environmental Bureau KOSMOS (NGO,) Green Net Finland (NGO) Metropolia University of Applied Sciences (U)	852 466	2019-2022	“the project will contribute to economic and environmental development, enhance regional business competitiveness through cross-border Public-Private cooperation and catalyze green economy development in the Programme area”
Green ReMark  <a href="http://greenremark.com/">http://greenremark.com/</a>  LBS / BC	Mikkeli development Miksei Ltd (B) Neva Energy Ltd (B) South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences (U)	557 684	2018-2021	“opening new attractive opportunities for the growth of the green economy, enlarging related market conditions, and rising the openness of regional power grid for new consumers and producers”
Twin campus  <a href="http://www.twincampus.info/">http://www.twincampus.info/</a>  E / BC	ITMO University (U) Saint Petersburg Technopark (Technopark) Saint Petersburg Foundation for SME Development (NGO) South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences (U) Kotka-Hamina Regional Development Company, Cursor Ltd. (B)	806 196	2019-2021	“facilitating conditions for creating and relocating new technology-based companies. Project activities form ways to stimulate their modernization and internationalization as well as commercialization of university-based technologies”
RivTimes  T	Rautjärvi Municipality (M) South-Karelian Foundation for Recreation Areas (NGO) Directory of special protected natural territories of Leningrad region (BI) All-Russian society for the protection of nature (NGO) Tourist information center of the Republic of Karelia (NGO)	1 080 510	2021-2022	“developing new attractive tourism destinations by restoring an impressive natural rapid with living stock of endangered Ladoga Salmon. Creating nature trails and historical water trail as well as design for an industry historical place”

	State Budgetary Institution of Culture of the Leningrad Region House of Folk Art (BI)			
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Table 2. Projects within South-East Finland – Russia CBC Programme 2014-2020

### 5.2.2. Estonia – Russia CBC Programme 2014-2020

Analyzing all twelve projects, we have formulated four categories into which projects can be divided. The first one is about local business support. We can illustrate that category with FarmerCraft project that attempts “to improve specific skills and knowledge in artistic design, management, and marketing skills of handicraft and in agricultural SMEs” (specific objective 2). The second category unites projects in the sphere of education and the start of the career. For example, ESTRUS-preneurs helps to straighten students' connections and receive the first experience in the cross-border business initiative. The third category is devoted to the development of natural and historical resources; such projects usually focus on tourism. However, that category can be confused with the thematic objective 6 - environmental protection, if projects lack justification of economic potential of its activity. For instance, Narva-Slantsy Leisure Cluster aims to improve the riverside environment in Narva/Estonia and Slantsy/Russia. Simultaneously, one of the specific objectives of the project is the development of Narva- Slantsy Leisure Cluster “to ensure and promote business development in the CBC region”. That explains well why the project fits the “Business and SMEs development” Priority. The fourth category is about boosting business contacts and sharing technologies which has the clearest connection to the "Business and SME development". We can illustrate that category with the SME ACCESS project that tries to boost SME development and entrepreneurship in Setomaa and Pechory district and create an adequate business environment in the region.

Comparing the Estonia-Latvia case to South-Finland – Russia one, we have found out that the objectives of projects are formulated in a very precise manner. Overall objectives describe project aspirations in the broader sense (BioStyrene: “to support regional SME development by fostering cross-border business contacts and the development of new products”) while specific objectives describe detailed outcomes of projects (BioStyrene: “1) develop a process to replace fossil-based non-biodegradable styrene with biodegradable bio-based styrene. 2) form connections between private companies and universities as well as between Estonia and Russia”) (BioStyrene. Website of Estonia-Russia CBC Programme 2014-2020). As for common features, in both Programmes, we sometimes come across scarce justification about why some projects correspond exactly to the “Business and SME development”.



Name of the project	Partners of the project	Budget €	Timeframe	The specific objective
SME ACCESS  <a href="https://setomaa.kovtp.ee/sme-access">https://setomaa.kovtp.ee/sme-access</a>  BC	Setomaa Municipality Government (M) The Estonian Road Administration (governmental organization) Committee for economic development and investment policy of the Pskov region (R) Committee for transport and road administration of the Pskov region (R) Administration of the Pechorskiy area (M)	5 765 222	2019-2021	<b>“Overall objective:</b> Increased SME development in Setomaa and Pechory district, which will be achieved through traditional business promoting and improved infrastructure. <b>Specific objectives:</b> 1) Increased SME development and entrepreneurship in Setomaa and Pechory district through traditional business promoting and cross-border business contacts 2) Improved quality of business environment of border areas through better road infrastructure and traffic possibilities in Setomaa and Pechory district”
Narva-Slantsy Leisure Cluster  <a href="https://www.facebook.com/106930270912276/posts/184947306443905/">https://www.facebook.com/106930270912276/posts/184947306443905/</a>  T	Narva City Government (M) Department for City Development and Economy Narva (M) Administration of Municipal Formation Slantsy Municipal District of Leningrad region (M)	500 773,00	2019-2022	<b>“Overall Objective:</b> Integrated riversides areas development for business and visiting environment improvement in Narva/Estonia and Slantsy/Russia to ensure conversation of the CBC area into attractive place for business and living. <b>Specific objective:</b> 1. Reconstruction of Narva and Slantsy riversides areas to improve business and leisure/visiting environment in CBC region. 2. Development of Narva- Slantsy Leisure Cluster to ensure and promote business development in CBC region. 3. Strengthening of the capacity of CBC region and expanding cross-border cooperation”
BioStyrene  LBS / BC	University of Tartu (U) Saint Petersburg State Forest Technical University (U) TBD-Biodiscovery Ltd (B)  Research-and-production company «VAPA» Co Ltd (B) OJSC Plastpolymer (between B and NGO)	586 986,56	2019-2022	<b>“Overall objective:</b> to support regional SME development by fostering cross-border business contacts and the development of new products. <b>Specific objective:</b> 1) Develop a scalable process to replace fossil based non-biodegradable styrene with a biodegradable bio-based styrene counterpart from wood biomass. 2) Form connections between private companies and universities as well as between Estonia and Russia”
"ESTRUS-preneurs"  E	Narva Language Lyceum (BI) St. Petersburg State Budgetary Professional Educational Institution “Petrovsky College” (U)	55 000,00	2019-2021	<b>“Overall Objective:</b> The project main overall objective is promotion of entrepreneurship and proving the students of partner schools with the first experience in cross-border business initiative. The model tested in the project can be used by other educational institutions in the region. The students' ideas can become a start of their future business. <b>Specific objective:</b> Testing the model of students' cross-border mini-companies (the model, which was developed in the Project EU-preneurs will be tested in the context of Estonian-Russian cross-border initiatives and

				disseminated among secondary schools of the region for working with it and improvement of young people's entrepreneurial competences)"
FarmerCraft <a href="https://www.facebook.com/FarmerCraft-105061664912426/">https://www.facebook.com/FarmerCraft-105061664912426/</a> LBS / BC	Kohtla-Järve Town Government (M) Administration of municipal formation "Kingisepp municipal district" (M) Administration of Municipal Formation Slantsy Municipal District of Leningrad region (M) Edise Castle (BI) NGO Alguskeskus (NGO)	490 707,94	2020-2022	<b>“Overall objective:</b> increasing SME development and entrepreneurship by fostering cross-border business contacts and the development of services and products. <b>Specific objectives:</b> 1. to improve specific skills and knowledge in artistic design, management and marketing skills of handicraft and in agricultural SMEs; 2. to develop new marketing channels; 3. to strengthen training and marketing infrastructure for handicraft and agricultural SMEs”

*Table 3. Projects within Estonia – Russia CBC Programme 2014-2020*

### 5.2.3. Latvia – Russia CBC Programme 2014-2020

Regarding the projects' quantity, between Russia and Latvia, only five projects in "Business and SME development" are operated. That is the smallest number of projects comparing to the South-East Finland – Russia and Estonia – Russia CBC Programmes; it is twice less than in the Russian-Estonian Programme and four times fewer than in the Russian-Finnish Programme.

It is worth mentioning that the specific feature of this Programme is that the thematic objective "Business and SME development" is divided into:

- Priority 1.1. Promotion of and support of entrepreneurship;
- Priority 1.2. Development and promotion of new products and services based on local resources.

We consider such division to be beneficial for the Programme as it allows to formulate more precise goals of projects to be segregated in one or another Priority.

Analyzing the essences of projects, we found out that projects clearly fit to Priority 1.1. or Priority 1.2. The first one focuses on the strengthening of business contacts. To illustrate that group, we can mention “Entrepreneurship, women and advice” project aiming at unifying women in business or SMEPRO aiming at bringing together and offering “opportunities both to business support structures and actual entrepreneurs” (EWA. Website of Latvia – Russia CBC 2014-2020). The second one is tourism based on nature and historical resources. So, turning cross-border cultural and natural resources into joint sustainable tourism products, as it states in the project Greenways Riga-Pskov, would develop the attractiveness of the region (Greenways Riga-Pskov, *ibid.*).

Name of the project	Partners of the project	Budget €	Timeframe	The specific objective
Entrepreneurship, women and advice (EWA) BC	Proprietary Establishment of Supplementary Education "SPb social and economic institute" (U) Private educational institution INTELCAP (B) "Mentori" Business Women Association of Latgale (NGO) Zemgale Region Human Resource and Competences Development Centre (ZRKAC) (BI)	230 000	2019-2020	"to development of socio-economic potential of women constituting significant part of economically active population of the Programme regions"
From Hobby to Business BC	Valka Municipality Council (M) Baltinava Municipality Council (M) Cibla Municipality Council (M) Rugaji Municipality Council (M) Karsava Municipality Council (M) Euregio "Pskov, Livonia" (NGO) Zilupe Municipality Council (M) Administration of Pskovsky Area (M) Administration of the Pytalovsky District (M) Administration of Pechorskiy Area (M) Municipality "Novoedevyatkinskoe selskoe poselenie" (M) Administration of Porhovskiy Area (M) Ape Municipality Council (M) Fund of Guarantees and Development of Business of Pskov Region (NGO)	250 000	2019-2021	"to empower private subsidiary plots and craftsmen and to develop favorable conditions to market their goods and services on both sides of the border"
Greenways Riga-Pskov T	Vilaka Municipality Council (M) Vidzeme Tourism Association (NGO)	793 036	2019-2021	"turning cross-border cultural and natural resources (railway history, natural trails, nearby tourism natural and culture objects) into joint sustainable tourism products that give economic benefit to the whole"

	Pskov Region Committee for Tourism (R) Administration of the Pskovsky district (M) Administration of the Ostrovsky district (M) Administration of the Pytalovsky district (M) Balvi Municipality Council (M) Gulbene Municipality Council (M) Ērgļi Municipality Council (M) Ogre Municipality Council (M) Ropaži Municipality Council (M) Administration of the Palkinsky district (M)			region via developing Greenways – non-motorized transport corridors that are based on former railways, river, canals and forest paths – suitable for hikers and cyclists”
SMEPRO  BC	Zemgale Planning Region (R) Fund for guarantees and SME support of the Pskov region (NGO)	249 996	2019-2021	“to give a comprehensive impetus to cross-border business cooperation by education, bringing together and offering opportunities both to business support structures and actual entrepreneurs”
LV-RU HERITAGE  T	Daugavpils City Council (M) Cēsvalne County Council (M) Pskov City Administration (M) State Joint Stock Company «State Real Estate» (B)	3 466 666	2019-2021	“improvement of heritage tourism sector and buildup of common tourist identity in the cross-border area. It aims to increase domestic and international tourist flow by 19 thousand people in 2023 and to contribute to SME-friendly environment for local entrepreneurs”

*Table 4. Projects within Latvia – Russia CBC Programme 2014-2020*

#### 5.2.4. General findings

- **Financing.** The total budget of projects varies from 55 000 to 3 500 000 €. Usually, the program co-financing covers up most of all expenses (up to 80%), and some inputs are made by project partners (at least 20%). Our study shows that the projects which aim at improving material infrastructure receive more financing and the projects aiming at educating, bringing people together receive less financing. Since the costs for large-scale infrastructural projects are indeed higher than ones for, for instance, seminar organization, this gap in financing is reasonable. However, the difference between the “cheapest” and the “most expensive” projects is 2 450 000 € which seems to be surprisingly big.

- The analysis shows the existence of a prominent disproportion between the number of projects devoted to the “Business and SME development” Priority per country: there are twenty three projects between Russia and Finland, twelve between Russia and Estonia, and five between Russia and Latvia. It can be assumed that the Estonian and Latvian local governments are reluctant to cooperate with the Russian side because of political contradictions at the highest level. Another explanation, suggested by Latvian researcher Daume, is that for the Russian side still seeks for funding construction and renovation projects, while the EU countries have more developed economies and social infrastructure, thereby, they are more interested in "soft" projects, like seminars, meetings, conferences. (Daume, 2018). Nevertheless, that point cannot explain the great number of projects between Russia and Finland. Another explanation can be found in the fact that the scale of economic cooperation is larger between Russia and Finland than between Russia and the Baltic states. Statistics show that in 2020, trade between Russia and Finland amounted to \$10,003,550,095 while Russian trade with Estonia was \$ 3,076,580,989 and Russia’s trade with Latvia was \$ 3,682,760,366 (Trade between Russia, Finland, Estonia, and Latvia in 2020. Russian-trade.com). As evidenced from data, the overall turnover between Russia and Finland is almost two times bigger than the turnover from Russian trade with Estonia and Latvia taken together. Consequently, that can be a reason why a larger number of stakeholders from the Finnish side rather than Estonian or Latvian ones have incentives for participating in cross-border activities in order to develop business contacts.
- Despite all the projects belong to the “Business and SMEs development” Priority, they have some features which allow segregating projects to following categories: 1) local business support; 2) education and the start of a career; 3) nature and historical resources development (tourism); 4) business contact development. This pattern is typical for all projects of CBC Programmes EU – Russia 2014-2020.
- Project aims. During our research, we found out the following pattern of objectives. In the first group of projects, the word “to develop” became the most frequently used verb to describe the pursuit of project leaders (in 7 projects). For example, projects aim “to develop and apply an innovative multi-level cross-border collaboration platform” (RivTimes), “to develop the socio-economic potential of women” (EWA), “to develop an innovative multi-level cross-border collaboration platform” (INCROBB). In the second group of projects, we can observe the high usage of verbs “to increase”, “to enhance”, “to enlarge” etc., describing the will to raise some already existed positive aspects in the size, amount, or degree. For example, projects aim “to enhance regional business competitiveness” (Cata3Pult), “to increase domestic and international tourist flow” (LV-RU HERITAGE),

“to strengthen training and marketing infrastructure for handicraft and agricultural SMEs” (FarmerCraft). Projects from the third group tend to include verbs “to promote”, “to support”, “to contribute” while speaking about main objectives. It seems that these projects take on the role of a helper or guide for the region to develop existing predispositions for one or other activities. For example, such projects aim “to support regional SME development” (BioStyrene) or “to promote entrepreneurship” (ESTRUS-preneurs). Moreover, the qualitative technique of content analysis helps to identify the most widespread words in objectives description on projects or programmes website. Notably, the most commonly used words are “business” (18 times), “cross-border” (12), “region” (11), and “development” (11). Unexpectedly, the words “economy” (2 times) or “cooperation” (4) are rarely picked up for project description. These empirical pieces of evidence resonate with our previous assumptions of goal-setting. As it was said before, the objectives are clearly stated in project descriptions (Boehringer, 1990) and are entirely derived from the program objectives (Rossi, 1988). For example, the goal of LV-RU HERITAGE – to increase tourist flow by 19 thousand people in 2023 – is very exact and can be verified at the end of a project. However, it seems that not all project goals are measurable: many objectives imply improvements in a specific area (e.g. domestic agricultural market) but lack explicit results.

### 5.3. Applying multi-level governance approach: analysis of partners

	<b>Finland</b>	<b>Estonia</b>	<b>Latvia</b>	<b>Russia</b>	<b>In total</b>
<b>Municipalities</b>	2	4	15	12	33
<b>Universities</b>	2	1	-	5	8
<b>Business</b>	3	2	1	3	9
<b>NGOs</b>	5	1	3	9	18
<b>Budgetary institutions</b>	-	2	1	2	5
<b>Regional authorities</b>	-	-	-	5	5

*Table 5. Structure of partners involved in projects*

Our findings:

- We have distinguished the following most popular organizational forms of partners taking part in cross-border cooperation projects: universities, business, NGOs, municipalities, regional authorities, budgetary institutions according to Sologub’s classification (2015).

To understand to which organizational form a specific actor belongs, we were guided by statutes of organizations, forms of financing, main powers, and jurisdictions.

- We have traced the following structure of project partners by country. In Finland, the most widespread form is NGOs (5) and business (3). Estonia is represented mainly by municipal administrations (4), business (2), budgetary institutions (2). We can point out that cross-border activities between Russia and Estonia are characterized by a limited number of partners from both sides: from 3 to 5 organizations. In Latvia, as well as in Estonia, the majority are municipal authorities (15), which is the biggest number of municipalities involved in CBC among all studied countries. The composition of Russian partners is very diverse: municipalities (12), NGOs (9), and universities (5) become partners more frequently, but regional authorities and private companies also actively participate in many projects. Between Russia and Latvia, there is the biggest number of partners involved, while between Russia and Estonia, there is the least number of partners.
- Another observation is that some partners are involved simultaneously in many projects. For example, South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Science participates in three projects (“Startup Connect”, “Green ReMark”, “Twin Campus”), Kotka-Hamina Regional Development Company participates in “Twin Campus’ and “Startup Connect” projects. Some Russian municipalities take part in a couple of projects at the same time. Administrations of Pskovsky and Pytalovsky districts are involved in “From Hobby to business” and “Greenways Riga – Pskov” projects; municipality of Slantsy district is involved in “FarmerCraft” and “Narva – Slantsy Leisure Center” projects, ITMO University is a partner for “Startup Connect” and “Twin Campus” projects.
- Our findings demonstrate that some key partners are situated in regional centers while others are scattered all over bordering regions. As Sebentsov noticed, there used to be a high concentration of cooperation projects in main centers of border regions. For example, organizations from St. Petersburg were partners of more than 70% of all CBC projects of the South-East Finland - Russia Programme in previous years. However, since year 2007, Programmes focus more on border municipalities inclusion, and the leading role has transferred from cities to territories located near the border (Sebentsov, 2020). Nowadays more than ¼ of Russian partners are represented with organizations from St. Petersburg which are mainly universities as St. Petersburg remains the main educational center in the Northwest region. However, ¾ of actors from Russia are represented by actors which are located in regions, for example, in Leningrad district and Pskov district. The structure of Finnish, Estonian, and Latvian partners is even less homogeneous. We can find actors both from regional centers (Lappeenranta, Narva) as well as actors from smaller



places. In other words, we can observe a tendency of partners diversification: more and more new actors from both sides are being involved comparing to the previous programming period of 2007-2013 and especially comparing to programmes operated before year 2007 (ibid.).

- Another argument of Sebentsov is that the role of Russian participants has grown due to the increasing Russian federal financial input to the CBC programmes, the appearance of joint management structures, and thorough experience in practical cooperation. In 2014-2020 programming period, Russian actors initiated about half of the projects (ibid.). Our research proves that there is a parity in numbers between Russian and European partners; the objectives of projects seem to be mutually relevant. There is no official rule of having an equal number of partners from the Russian and European sides. However, since the main guiding principles are partnership, equality and mutual benefit, that becomes more overspread. Besides, since the principle of co-financing was introduced for the 2014-2020 programming period, joint committees are eager to include partners from both sides in a fair proportion.
- Notably, NGOs became the second most popular type of project partners after municipalities. In total, eighteen NGOs participate in projects, while nine of them are from Russia. This resonates with the beliefs of De Sousa (2013), Scott (2014), Sebentsov (2018, 2020), Koch (2017) that the cross-border cooperation (and especially the ENI CBC Programmes) tends to incorporate many features of MLG as horizontal ties formation and emergence of non-governmental actors.
- As proposed by Fritsch (2015), the evidence we found points that, despite there are plenty of social society organizations taking part in project activities, on the programming level, the dominant role is played by federal authorities who represent countries in the Joint Monitoring Committees (such as Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation, Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy). As mentioned in our analysis of programming documents, supported by Fritsch's arguments, these national institutions are mainly technocratic bodies, representing a “bureaucratic partnership” and active involvement of private institutions on programming level lacks.
- As we said in theoretical chapter, some scholars describe the relations between the EU and Russia within ENI as “the assistance-type cooperation” (Khasson, 2013) because the ENI CBC Programmes are first of all instrument of the EU while Russia is more of a recipient than a full-fledged partner (Koch, 2017; Laine, 2016). Others claims that due to the Russian co-funding for CBC programmes 2014-2020, ENI CBC could be seen more as joint actions rather than being “some external aid programme over which the participants have little

control” (Kuznetsov et al., 2019, p. 244). Unfortunately, our empirical data can neither support nor deny any of these assumptions. As for partners’ structure, actors from the Russian and European sides participate in similar proportions. It seems that described activities should contribute both to parts, the most of the financing comes from the joined Programmes resources.

#### 5.4. Strategic and project goals’ comparison

Project’s goal	EU’s strategic goals	Russian strategic goals
“bringing together the innovative, research, training and business capacity, resources, best practices and experiences for strengthening of investment and business processes in the border areas of Russia and Finland”	“(d)...internal economic, social and territorial cohesion (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)  (d)...private-sector development (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)  (c)...the promotion of people-to-people contacts (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)”	“simplification of mutual communication between different stakeholders” (The Concept of cross-border cooperation...2020, p. 4-5)  “creating favorable external conditions for sustainable growth and increasing the competitiveness of the Russian economy” (the Concept of Foreign Policy...2016)
to “support start-up entrepreneurship and SME cooperation and form a community of active and motivated business leaders with ambitions and abilities for global success”	“(c)...the promotion of people-to-people contacts (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)  (d)...private-sector development (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)”	“simplification of mutual communication between different stakeholders” (The Concept of cross-border cooperation...2020, p. 4-5)  “creating favorable external conditions for sustainable growth and increasing the competitiveness of the Russian economy” (the Concept of Foreign Policy...2016)
“to develop and apply an innovative multi-level cross-border collaboration platform on sustainable SME business management and employment in the region”	“(d)...private-sector development (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)”	“simplification of mutual communication between different stakeholders” (The Concept of cross-border cooperation...2020, p. 4-5)  “creation and development of economic and social infrastructure” (The Concept of cross-border cooperation...2020, p. 4-5)  “creating favorable external conditions for sustainable growth and increasing the competitiveness of the Russian economy” (the Concept of Foreign Policy...2016)
“project will contribute to economic and environmental development, enhance regional business competitiveness through cross-border Public-Private cooperation and catalyze	“(d)...internal economic, social and territorial cohesion (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)”	“creating favorable external conditions for sustainable growth and increasing the competitiveness of the Russian economy” (the Concept of Foreign Policy...2016)

green economy development in the Programme area”		
“opening new attractive opportunities for the growth of the green economy, enlarging related market conditions, and rising the openness of regional power grid for new consumers and producers”	“(d)...supporting environmental protection (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)”	“creating favorable external conditions for sustainable growth and increasing the competitiveness of the Russian economy” (the Concept of Foreign Policy...2016)
“facilitating conditions for creating and relocating new technology-based companies. Project activities form ways to stimulate their modernization and internationalization as well as commercialization of university-based technologies”	“(d)...promoting capacity-building in science, education, technology, research and innovation... (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)  (d)...private-sector development (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)”	“improving the efficiency of using productive and the social base of the border areas” (The Concept of cross-border cooperation...2020, p. 4-5)
“developing new attractive tourism destinations by restoring an impressive natural rapid with living stock of endangered Ladoga Salmon. Creating nature trails and historical water trail as well as design for an industry historical place”	“(d)...internal economic, social and territorial cohesion (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)  (d)...supporting environmental protection (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)”	“creation and development of economic and social infrastructure” (The Concept of cross-border cooperation...2020, p. 4-5)  “spatial development in the border area” (the Strategy for the Social and Economic Development... 2014)
“to increase SME development in Setomaa and Pechory district, which will be achieved through traditional business promoting and improved infrastructure”	“(d)...fostering rural development... (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1).  (d)...private-sector development (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)”	“creation and development of economic and social infrastructure” (The Concept of cross-border cooperation...2020, p. 4-5)  “creating favorable external conditions for sustainable growth and increasing the competitiveness of the Russian economy” (the Concept of Foreign Policy...2016)
“integrated riversides areas development for business and visiting environment improvement in Narva/Estonia and Slantsy/Russia to ensure conversation of the CBC area into attractive place for business and living”	“(d)...internal economic, social and territorial cohesion (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)  (d)...private-sector development (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)”	“creation and development of economic and social infrastructure” (The Concept of cross-border cooperation...2020, p. 4-5)  “creating favorable external conditions for sustainable growth and increasing the competitiveness of the Russian economy” (the Concept of Foreign Policy...2016)
“to support regional SME development by fostering cross-border business contacts and the development of new products”	“(d)...internal economic, social and territorial cohesion (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)  (c)...the promotion of people-to-people contacts (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)”	“simplification of mutual communication between different stakeholders” (The Concept of cross-border cooperation...2020, p. 4-5)  “creating favorable external conditions for sustainable growth and increasing the competitiveness of the Russian

		economy” (the Concept of Foreign Policy...2016)
“promotion of entrepreneurship and proving the students of partner schools with the first experience in cross-border business initiative”	“(d)...promoting capacity-building in science, education, technology, research and innovation... (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)  (c)...the promotion of people-to-people contacts (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)”	“simplification of mutual communication between different stakeholders” (The Concept of cross-border cooperation...2020, p. 4-5)  “human resources development” (The Concept of cross-border cooperation...2020, p. 4-5)
“increasing SME development and entrepreneurship by fostering cross-border business contacts and the development of services and products. (with special attention to handcraft and agricultural SMEs)”	“(d)...fostering rural development... (EC, 2014, Article 1 no. 2).  (d)...private-sector development (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)  (c)...the promotion of people-to-people contacts (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)”	“simplification of mutual communication between different stakeholders” (The Concept of cross-border cooperation...2020, p. 4-5)  “creating favorable external conditions for sustainable growth and increasing the competitiveness of the Russian economy” (the Concept of Foreign Policy...2016)
“to development of socio-economic potential of women constituting significant part of economically active population of the Programme regions”	“(d)...reducing social exclusion (EC, 2014, Article 1 no. 2).  (c)...the promotion of people-to-people contacts (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)”	“human resources development” (The Concept of cross-border cooperation...2020, p. 4-5)
“to empower private subsidiary plots and craftsmen and to develop favorable conditions to market their goods and services on both sides of the border”	“(d)...fostering rural development... (EC, 2014, Article 1 no. 2).  (d)...private-sector development (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)”	“improving the efficiency of using productive and the social base of the border areas” (The Concept of cross-border cooperation...2020, p. 4-5)  “creating favorable external conditions for sustainable growth and increasing the competitiveness of the Russian economy” (the Concept of Foreign Policy...2016)
“turning cross-border cultural and natural resources (railway history, natural trails, nearby tourism natural and culture objects) into joint sustainable tourism products that give economic benefit to the whole region via developing Greenways – non-motorized transport corridors that are based on former railways, river, canals and forest paths – suitable for hikers and cyclists”	“(d)...internal economic, social and territorial cohesion (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)  (d)...supporting environmental protection (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)”	“creation and development of economic and social infrastructure” (The Concept of cross-border cooperation...2020, p. 4-5)  “improving the efficiency of using productive and the social base of the border areas” (The Concept of cross-border cooperation...2020, p. 4-5)  “spatial development in the border area” (the Strategy for the Social and Economic Development... 2014)
“to give a comprehensive impetus to cross-border business cooperation by education, bringing together	“(d)...promoting capacity-building in science, education, technology, research and	“simplification of mutual communication between different stakeholders” (The Concept of cross-border cooperation...2020, p. 4-5)

and offering opportunities both to business support structures and actual entrepreneurs”	innovation... (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)  (c)...the promotion of people-to-people contacts (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)”	“improving the efficiency of using productive and the social base of the border areas” (The Concept of cross-border cooperation...2020, p. 4-5)  “creating favorable external conditions for sustainable growth and increasing the competitiveness of the Russian economy” (the Concept of Foreign Policy...2016)
“improvement of heritage tourism sector and buildup of common tourist identity in the cross-border area. It aims to increase domestic and international tourist flow by 19 thousand people in 2023 and to contribute to SME-friendly environment for local entrepreneurs”	“(c)...the promotion of people-to-people contacts (EC, 2014, Article 2 no. 1)”	“creation and development of economic and social infrastructure” (The Concept of cross-border cooperation...2020, p. 4-5)  “improving the efficiency of using productive and the social base of the border areas” (The Concept of cross-border cooperation...2020, p. 4-5)

*Table 6. Project and strategic goals*

Our findings:

- We have summarized goals of three types: strategic Russian and European goals, joint strategic goals, and project goals. However, almost all of them are general and not measurable. An exception can be found in some project goals aiming at building infrastructure (Narva-Slansy Leisure Center) or expecting to have quantitative outcomes (LV-RU Heritage).

- Results of our analysis revealed that all project goals correspond with at least some general strategic goals contained in Russian and European documents. Objectives of projects tend to be linked to the similar number of the EU and Russian strategic goals. On average, projects correspond to 2-3 European and 2-3 Russian goals. Since all projects relate to “Business and SME development” Priority, they aim to generally improve the social and economic environment in the bordering regions. Projects help to unite partners from both sides of the border, and that would cause a rise of mutual interest, maintaining a good neighborhood, and preserving a climate of trust.

- Taking into consideration the specific goals, we have noticed a connection between belonging of a project to a certain category (1. local business support; 2. education; 3. nature and historical resources development; 4. business contact development) and its correspondence to specific strategic goals. Projects aiming at developing local SMEs tend to meet the goals of fostering rural development, private-sector development, and improving the efficiency of using productive and the social base of the border areas (FarmerCraft, From Hobby to Business). Projects trying to promote education and the start of a career usually correspond to strategic goals of promoting capacity-building in science, education, technology, research, and innovation or human

resources development (ESTRUS-preneurs). Projects striving to develop natural and historical resources usually also act in a line with goals of developing internal economic, social, and territorial cohesion, spatial development in the border area, or supporting environmental protection (RivTimes, LV-RU HERITAGE). Projects intending to boost business contacts usually contribute to people-to-people connections and simplify mutual communication between different stakeholders (SME Access, SMEPRO).

### **5.5. Conclusions:**

- In this chapter we had a glance at project activity in the Baltic Sea Region. We have analyzed projects from the ENI CBC Programmes, identified the partner structure, and compared the goals of the EU and Russian documents with the goals of projects.
- The project activity plays a significant role in the region's construction as it helps to bind a region as a whole by creating functional logic and uniting different actors. That is highly acute for the BSR where we can observe the constant emergence of various international projects.
- Projects. The total budget of projects varies from 55 000 to 3 500 000 €. The greatest number of projects are implemented between Finland and Russia, while there are fewer activities between Russia, Estonia, and Latvia. That can be connected to some political contradictions between the Russian and Baltic states' authorities or with the structure of external trade, which is significantly bigger in Russian – Finnish than in Russian-Latvian / Russian-Estonian cases. Projects can be divided into the following categories: 1) local business support; 2) education and the start of a career; 3) nature and historical resources development (tourism); 4) business contact development. The main project aims are 1) to develop; 2) to increase/enlarge; 3) to support, which illustrate that various partners have different visions on priorities of the regional development.
- Structure of partners. We have distinguished six most popular organizational forms of partners: universities, business, NGOs, municipalities, regional authorities, budgetary institutions. In Finland, the most widespread form is business and NGOs, in Estonia, Latvia, and Russia, – municipalities. There is a growth in the numbers of local actors involved, comparing to the previous programming period for 2007-2013 years; the role of Russian participants increases (circa half of the projects were started by Russian side). However, some asymmetry in the EU – Russia relations remains. NGOs became the second most popular type of project partners, which is a positive sign for diversification of partner structure, involving civil society, and developing MLG.



Nevertheless, the role of federal institutions is still dominant as they participate in the managerial procedures of the CBC Programmes.

- Strategic and project goals. All general goals, as evidenced by strategic EU's and Russian texts, focus on 1) emphasizing friendship and peaceful communication; 2) highlighting social-economic development; 3) focusing on CBC as a priority. All project goals correspond with general strategic goals. There is a connection between the belonging of a project to a certain category and its correspondence to specific strategic goals. For example, when the project aims at developing local SMEs, it tends to meet the strategic goals of fostering rural development, private-sector development, and improving the efficiency of using productive and the social base and so on.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to reveal the similarities and differences of strategic and project goals between Russia and the EU based on the case of certain ENI CBC Programmes. To begin with, we studied the modern debates on the Baltic Sea Region building in general and cross-border cooperation between the EU and Russia with a special emphasis on goal-setting practices and the multi-level framework of ENI CBC cooperation. Based on that, we were able to formulate a general understanding of CBC: it is viewed as a part of international relations, a type of concerted action aiming at strengthening relations between neighboring regions. Meanwhile, Russian academics and legal tradition tend to view local self-governments as the main actors of CBC (Dubrovina & Plotnikova, 2016; Yarovoy, 2012); European scholars and policy-makers have a more flexible approach and not specify the type of players involved or point out the inclusion of non-state actors (De Sousa, 2013; Scott, 2015). However, nowadays, both Russian and European sides recognize the global tendency of actors' diversification (Sebentsov, 2018; Koch, 2017, Popescu, 2012). The MLG concept describing the system of power spreading among vertical governmental entities and various horizontal non-governmental structures and actors helps to better understand the strategic and project levels of cross-border cooperation between Russia and the EU. Being highly adequate for our theoretical research framework, MLG explains a pattern of the growing involvement of private institutions into CBC and framing a newer system of nets between different levels of power (Mälly, 2018; Gebhard, 2007). The EU is a driver of MLG promotion and that determines the special structure of the European – Russian cross-border relations based on joint programmes.



We studied the specifics of strategic and project levels via goals' analysis. Goal analysis helps to evaluate projects and strategic documents, point out their main characteristics, and, therefore, compare them.

### Strategic level

Similarities	Differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In both European and Russian documents, the goals of CBC are formulated broadly that can be explained by the wide applicability of national and regional strategies, concepts, and regulations.</li> <li>• Joint Operational Programmes are the main source of rules which project partners should follow in order to succeed in project implementation. JOPs' goals overlap with goals of ENI Regulation as well as correspond with a similar number of broader Russian and European strategic goals.</li> <li>• Analysis of the documents shows that all goals generally aim at (1) developing friendship and peaceful communication, (2) social-economic development of border regions, and (3) emphasizing CBC as a priority.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In European law, there are special regulations concerning CBC with Russia in terms of the ENI Programmes, while there are no such documents in Russia. Only Joint Operational Programmes are the main sources of law and procedures of cooperation within ENI CBC for both sides.</li> <li>• The common challenges may vary between the EU and Russia. For example, the issue of human mobility is perceived differently. For the EU, the goal is to sustain a free movement of people, while for Russia it is also important to stop the population outflow from Russian bordering territories.</li> <li>• The EU and Russia have different perspectives on the degree of cooperation. While the European side emphasizes the will of creating a common space of prosperity and good neighbourliness, the Russian side is ready to speak about "strengthening friendship and good-neighborliness" generally avoiding formulations concerning integration or commonalities as such. These differences can be explained by various discourses about the sovereignty concept which were</li> </ul>

	<p>developed in Russia and the EU: Moscow is guided by Westphalian notions of sovereignty and is very sensitive about the possibility of the EU encroaching on its sovereignty (Haukkala, 2010). Meanwhile, Brussel understands sovereignty in soft terms and aims at promoting its internal order outside the EU in order to overcome instability in a region (Medvedev, 2008).</p>
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### **Project level**

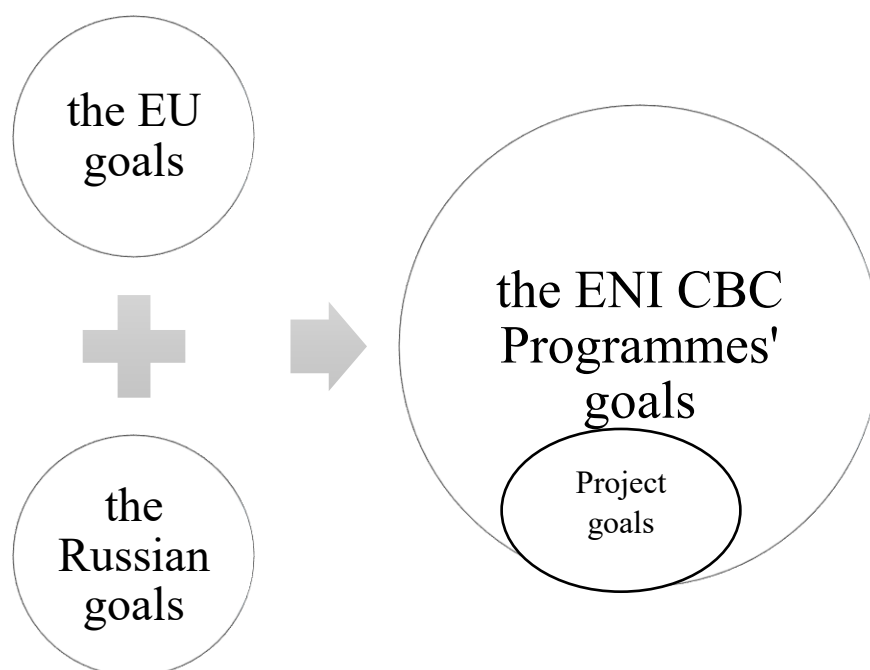
The project activity plays a significant role in the BSR as it helps to bind a region as a whole by creating functional logic and uniting different actors. The project analysis shows that there are more CBC projects devolved to business and SME development between Finland and Russia (23) than between Estonia and Russia (12) and Latvia and Russia (5). That can be explained by some political contradictions at the highest level between Russia and the Baltic states that influence CBC or by larger trade turnover between Finland and Russia (almost two times bigger than Russian-Estonian and Russian-Latvian ones taken together) that causes the need in establishing business contacts. Moreover, despite all projects operate within “Business and SME development” Priority, we could divide them into 1) local business support; 2) education and the start of career; 3) tourism based on local resources; 4) business contacts development. Speaking about partners, we could extract further forms of subjects involved: universities, business, NGOs, municipalities, regional authorities, budgetary institutions. The most popular forms are municipalities (33) and NGOs (18). The increasing involvement of the third sector demonstrates the growing incorporation of MLG features into CBC (Scott, 2015; Koch, 2017; Sebentsov, 2018, 2020). However, federal authorities still play an important role in CBC coordination via participating in monitoring institutions of the ENI CBC Programmes (Koch, 2017; Fritsch, 2015). Moreover, we believe that the European-Russian cross-border relations are more symmetrical than it was before: such mechanisms as co-financing and the work of joint committees provide a possibility for equal partnership (Sebentsov, 2018).

Our **research question** was:

How the goals of “Business and SME development” Priority projects in the framework of South-East Finland – Russia, Estonia – Russia, and Latvia – Russia CBC Programmes 2014-2020 correspond with the socio-economic strategic goals of the EU and Russia?

Answering the research question, we claim that all project goals correspond with general strategic goals. There is a connection between the belonging of a project to a certain category and its correspondence to specific strategic goals. Projects aiming to develop local SMEs tend to meet the goals of fostering rural development, private-sector development, and improving the efficiency of using productivity and the social base. Projects trying to promote education and the start of a career usually correspond with strategic goals of promoting capacity-building in science, education, technology, research, and innovation or human resources development. Projects striving to develop natural and historical resources usually also act in a line with the goals of developing internal economic, social, and territorial cohesion, spatial development, or supporting environmental protection. Projects intending to boost business contacts usually contribute to people-to-people connections and simplify mutual communication between different stakeholders.

Cross-border cooperation within ENI is based on top-down and bottom-up approaches simultaneously. On the one hand, the developers of the ENI Programmes rely on the needs and aspirations of local dwellers while identifying programmes’ objectives. Therefore, managers of the ENI CBC Programmes conduct public consultations, launch questionnaires, organize meetings with experts every time they elaborate on the new CBC Programme (News. South-East Finland – Russia CBC website). On the other hand, the ENI Programmes still are the instruments of the EU external policies, they reflect the EU perceptions of border regions development, and are based on European regulations. As our analysis shows, nowadays we can observe a significant level of coherence between European, Russian goals and project goals. We see how goals are primarily formulated in national concepts and European documents, then they come together in the joint programmes, and, finally, they are reflected in particular projects.



*Figure 1. The configuration of goals of cross-border cooperation between Russia and the EU*

Speaking about possible limitations, we acknowledge that the results of this research may be limited by the sample size and selected methods of study. Therefore, we also believe that there is room for further scientific inquiries in this direction.

Nevertheless, we claim that our research has **theoretical and social significance**. In the study, the theoretical concept of multi-level governance was summarized, supplemented, and further developed. We applied it specifically to the EU – Russian cross-border cooperation and that allowed us to identify the combination of bottom-up and top-down approaches while elaborating on strategic and project goals, and capture the dynamics of the appearance of new multi-level connections in the region. Speaking about social and practical value, the thesis could be of interest to the related organizations responsible for international cooperation. The findings of this research can be used in the work of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs or in the international organizations of the Baltic Sea Region. Regional and local authorities could also utilize the materials of our study in order to align their cross-border border activities in accordance with current goals. Furthermore, potential partners from business and civil society willing to participate in cross-border projects within the ENI CBC Programmes could appeal to our work in order to be oriented towards strategic European and Russian goals and, therefore, choose the desirable direction of a project and decide about their scale of involvement. Finally, the research results can be used in the educational process, in particular, in teaching courses on regional policy.

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