



Study on Citizens' Participation in the Baltic Sea region

by the CBSS Working Group on Democratic Institutions
under the Swedish Chairmanship 2005-2006

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Foreword by the Chair of the Working Group

In the years 2005-2006, Sweden held the Chairmanship of the CBSS Working Group on Democratic Institutions (WGDI). In the beginning of the Swedish Chairmanship it was decided that the WGDI should carry out a small comparative study in the Baltic Sea States focusing on democratic values and principles in the region and include good examples of concrete projects in the field of citizen participation, civil society, local democracy and fundamental rights. The content of the study has been discussed in workshops and further elaborated during the WGDI meetings throughout the year, based on the drafts that were sent out continuously.

The author of the study is Ms. Johanne Thorhauge from the CBSS Secretariat, who drafted it under the guidance of Ms. Martina Holmgren from Swedish Ministry of Justice, and under the commission of the WGDI.

As a WGDI Chair, I would like to thank Ms. Johanne Thorhauge for her commitment and impressive work that she has done, as well as Ms. Martina Holmgren for her involvement and guidance, and all WGDI members for their contribution and ideas.

Katarina Sundberg
Deputy Director, Ministry of Justice
WGDI Chair

30 May 2006, Stockholm

Preface

The societies in the Baltic Sea region share a long history. Even before the Hanseatic Order tied the region together through trade in the 14th and 15th centuries, a region-wide exchange of goods existed. The countries in the region also have a long history of changed borders and of sometime having belonged to each other. This has, over time, created a vast exchange of culture and traditions.

Such a long history of regional activities has indeed created many bridges and increased understanding between the Baltic Sea societies. Today, all of the countries in the region are independent constitutional democracies. Their common values include tolerance, openness and democratic principles, upon which their societies are built.

Yet, the CBSS Member States also have their differences. During part of the 20th century they were divided into different political ideological structures. This period has therefore had a significant impact on the traditions found within the different societies and has also affected one of the main pillars of democracy – that is, *citizens' participation*.

The character of the citizens' participation in the West Germany and the Nordic countries¹ has changed according to their overall societal transformations. This change has consisted of a move from strong collective mobilisation to a higher degree of individualism.² Notably, the development has also been influenced by the rapid process of globalisation as well as the growing role of information technology.

The Russian, Polish and three Baltic civil societies have over many years taken shape in political systems that were not conducive to fostering bottom-up participatory initiatives.³ This period has had an impact on the development of their respective traditions of citizen participation. During the last decade-and-a-half, these societies have found themselves in the midst of a transition to democratic political structures. In many aspects, these transitions are now complete. However, citizens' participation in the democratic processes may still face challenges.

The issue of citizens' participation in the region is interesting to follow. All together, the differences and similarities make the Baltic Sea region an attractive area for the investigation of democracy and democratic values. Today, each country in the region is a democracy with its political power vested in its citizens. Subsequently, there is reason to stress the importance of engaging people in democratic processes in all the states. This is because democracies derive their strength from the involvement of their citizens. For democracies to be broadly consolidated, citizens must take part in the decision-making concerning how their country is ruled. Therefore, challenges related to insufficient levels of participation in political life are relevant to all the democracies around the Baltic shore⁴.

¹ Throughout this study, the term "Nordic countries" refers to Finland, Iceland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, whereas the term "Scandinavian countries" refers to Denmark, Norway and Sweden only.

² Togeby et al. 2003b: 18

³ Howard 2003: 26-28

⁴ CBSS Commissioner's Final report 2003: 16

Chapter 1: Introduction to the study and to the CBSS Member States

1.0 Aim of the study

The overall objective of this study is to provide knowledge about citizens' participation in the CBSS Member States. The Member States have both common and different traditions and also face different challenges. The aim of this study is therefore to serve as source for the exchange of knowledge, to promote mutual understanding and to take note of the lessons learned throughout the region.

Taking a comparative approach to conducting a study is sometimes a very sensitive process. It should therefore be emphasised that the comparative character of citizens' participation here should be understood in a broader context, in which the differences in political structures and historical and political backgrounds play a significant role in shaping participation. The key to understanding even simple indicators for various levels of participation, such as voter turnout, can be found by appreciating the differences between electoral systems, national histories, cultures and practices, which all have an impact on the statistical tendencies mentioned in this study. At the same time, when this broader evaluation is applied, it can also make a comparative study all the more comprehensive and interesting. By gathering information concerning the same fields within different countries, both useful and illuminating comparisons are provided.

The goal of carrying out this comparative study is first of all to gain insight about the state of citizens' participation within countries of the Baltic Sea region. A goal following of this is to identify issues that could potentially be addressed by the CBSS Working Group on Democratic Institutions (WGDI) in the future. The scope of the study consists of a fixed amount of topical or issue-based areas. Therefore, when certain relevant issues are beyond the scope of this study, such issues will only be briefly mentioned, with a view to identifying them as potential future areas for the WGDI to focus on.

This study is not a political paper in the sense that it reflects the views of the CBSS Member States or their respective governments. It is rather a study that the WGDI has commissioned the CBSS Secretariat to develop, under its guidance and consultation. While the WGDI expresses full ownership of this document, neither the WGDI, nor the CBSS Member States are responsible for the information contained herein.

1.1 Democracies in the Baltic Sea region.

Over the course of recent history, the overall changes within the West German and Nordic democracies have entailed their transformations from industrialist to information societies. In the 1960's, these societies enjoyed a high degree of political equality among citizens as well as a high level of citizen's participation. Strong political organisations strengthened and mobilised weak groups within the societies. Through the mass mobilisation of collective organisations, a stable and high level of

support for political parties emerged.⁵ The basis for such an active role of organisations within these societies dates back to the late 19th century, when trade unions and political movements appeared. Accordingly, these movements provided the platform upon which democracy prospered.

During the past few decades, collective organisations have weakened. Rapid technological developments and the ever-increasing education levels among citizens have been some of the reasons for the emergence of more individualistic decision-making processes. Political activities have in turn become more individualised, while individual resources play a greater role in citizens' levels of participation.⁶ This transformation has been characterised as a development from collective mobilisation to cognitive mobilisation.⁷ Today, citizens' involvement is to a greater degree rooted in individual and local needs and resources. Following this development, political activity has also become more targeted towards single-issue areas, as opposed to long-term perspectives held by organisations and political parties. The channels, through which citizens receive information and make use of their ability to influence decision-making processes, have likewise taken other forms. Among these are the role of the modern media and new forms of technological communication. In particular, media have moved away from being political parties' traditional tool for communicating their politics to acting instead as the mouthpiece for the citizens. Consequently, this move from political parties functioning as primates for political and societal influence may have changed the pattern of citizens' participation. However, the tradition of their engagement in democratic process has remained strong.

Parallel to these developments, the internationalisation of societies and political agendas has taken place. Many political decisions are taken within the European Union (EU) framework, while an increasing number of issues forming political agendas are determined by global processes.⁸ These developments are decisive, for all of the CBSS Member States when it comes to how citizens relate to their respective political arena. However, at the same time, many differences can be found in the development of their respective civil societies.

The political structures of the Baltic countries, Poland and Russia are to a large extent stabilised. Their overall political transitions have, although, only had a relatively limited amount of time to settle. The manifestations of democracy, in terms of the development of voluntary participatory skills – similar to that which is found in many Western democracies – have in that respect recently begun to take shape.

One of the tasks of these democracies has therefore been to develop active civil societies, within a framework that upholds democratic principles. During the communist/socialist period, these societies were for decades prevented from operating in organisations created as a result of civic activity. Those organisations, which existed, were primarily created from above and maintained by authorities.⁹

Hence, during the communist/socialist period, the existence of a highly politicised and controlled public space meant that citizens' private activities and networks developed outside the state's domain. Families, friends and networks placed themselves outside of the realm and often in opposition to the socialist state.

⁵ Togeby et al. 2003a: 53

⁶ Togeby et al. 2003b: 18

⁷ Norden 2005: 15

⁸ Norden 2005: 16

⁹ Howard 2003: 26-28

Accordingly, civil society came to be defined in terms of with a certain ability and freedom to live parallel to the political structures, while not becoming integrated in it. This 'parallel society',¹⁰ as such, was rooted in an 'anti-political' approach to the system in place and was driven by an 'us-versus-them' attitude, where civil society took the higher moral ground.

The anti-political attitudes held by civil society in these countries manifested in different ways, and were influenced by a number of factors. Civil society in Poland was – due to the low collectivisation of agriculture and the influence of the relatively independent Catholic Church – less restricted in terms of organising itself than were its neighbours. A certain, but limited degree of pluralism was accepted by the state. It therefore came to be perceived as one of the most organised civil societies in Central- and Eastern Europe during the time of socialist rule.¹¹ Notably, this strong organisation was constituted in opposition to the political structure in place.

In Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, civil society did not organise itself to the same extent as Polish civil society did. The everyday consolidation of networks that were in opposition to the state, as well as the production of samizdat did not exist.¹² However, environmental organisations did begin to appear in the 1980's, and citizens' participation in waves of demonstrations took place during the years leading up to independence.

For Russia, there has been an ongoing dispute as to whether or not a civil society existed at all. Those stating that it did not exist have pointed at the paternalistic state-dominating history of the country and the state's control over its citizens. Others, who believe that it did exist, have argued that a 'civil society in embryo' was present since the time of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's reforms.¹³

Following the transition to democracy, the principal role of civil society changed. Anti-political attitudes are not credible tools within democratic systems, which strengths are to be found in civil engagement and participation, and not in its resistance.

1.2 Structure of the study

This comparative study calls into question the factors that characterise the Baltic Sea societies and what the structural preconditions for citizens' participation are. Participation depends not only on cultural backgrounds, but also on present-day political structures. These structures differ from state to state. Therefore, chapter two presents the political structures of the respective CBSS Member States. This chapter is important because it highlights the potential influence that political structures play in terms of citizens' access to participatory outlets as well as their motivations to participate as such.

In chapter three, attention is placed on the actual participation of citizens in the democratic processes in the region. Here, the aim is to shed light on both conventional and less conventional forms of participation. This means that voter

¹⁰ The concept 'parallel society' directly refers to the former Czechoslovakian dissident Václav Benda's concept of 'parallel polis'. Benda's concept covers the appearance of civil parallel structures to the official system and has become synonymous to the construction of an independent society (Falk 2003: 247-248)

¹¹ Linz & Stepan 1990: 255-261

¹² Samizdat was, by definition, prohibited underground literature and other media (including their distributional networks) that were forbidden by the governments of the Soviet block countries.

¹³ Pursiainen 2005: 2

turnout, membership in political parties, citizens' involvement in political and social organisations, as well as demonstrations and other forms of engagement will be examined.

Chapter four serves to widen the aim of the study in terms of sharing experiences and lessons learned. In this chapter, projects promoting citizens' participation in the respective CBSS Member States are presented with the intention to share experiences in this field.

Chapter five features an elaboration on findings in citizens' participation. The elaboration has been developed to identify potential patterns, including common regional strengths and potential challenges ahead. This chapter therefore also serves as the conclusion to the study.

1.3 Collection of material

The information collected on citizens' participation in the CBSS Member States is based entirely on already existing knowledge from and work in the respective countries. Therefore, no new survey or series of surveys were carried out for this particular study (which is in line with efforts to prevent the duplication of already existing work). The concept is inspired by the comparative survey "Democracy in the Nordic Countries" (Demokrati i Norden), which was carried out within the framework of Nordic Council of Ministers. This study was likewise based on already existing work and has subsequently served to broaden the already existing knowledge in the field of citizens' participation.

Reliability, relevance and validity

Material was collected with a view to upholding the three standards of reliability, relevance and validity at two levels: 1) the single empirical unit was evaluated according to these standards in order to ensure the inclusion of reliable, relevant and valid data and 2) the data collection process was carried out to provide a solid database upon which to draw reliable, relevant and valid conclusions.

The information sources for the study have included:

- Reports from the Council of Europe;
- Previous work of the CBSS Commissioner;
- Democracy in the Nordic Countries (Demokrati i Norden, the comparative study of the Nordic Countries which has served as an inspiration for the study. Demokrati i Norden is published by the Nordic Council of Ministers);
- Statistics and other material provided by national statistical banks, Eurostat Data, European Social Survey, World Value Survey and the Euro barometer;
- Research carried out by universities and other research institutions;
- Research and reports on governments' initiatives;
- Constitutions of the respective CBSS Member States;
- Information made available on the websites of the Committees and Ministries responsible for elections and electoral laws.

Where material was not accessible, the members of the CBSS WGDI assisted in providing the information needed.

Basing a comparative study on already existing surveys, reports, papers etc. almost certainly calls into question the reliability of its comparisons. Inevitably comparisons

will appear on material, which is based on different empirical foundations. Where possible, the data has been collected from cross-national comparative surveys already in existence. This is the case where presentations on participation in different areas draw upon results from the institutions providing reliable comparative studies, such as the World Value Survey, the European Social Survey, Eurobarometer and Eurostat. However, as the aim of the study is to exchange existing knowledge in the respective CBSS Member States, surveys and studies carried out in the individual states in the Baltic Sea region are of great value to this study. When comparing different data, attention is constantly paid to the individual states, independent of potential differences in background sources, so as not to fall victim to arbitrary results and conclusions.

Given the dilemma in comparing existing sources of knowledge, it needs to be underlined that this study does not claim to be representative or scientific. Rather, this study points to tendencies only, with the aim of providing broader knowledge and identifying potential areas where focus for the WGDI could be of relevance in the future.

Chapter 2: The Political Structures in the CBSS Member States

2.0 Introduction

Democratic societies ensure that their citizens have a real say in how their societies are set up. In this context, participation is essentially about the inclusion of different views and voices in public decision-making processes, such as decisions about who holds political power and represents the population. At the most concrete level, the electoral system acts as the primary channel for such participation to take place, and is therefore one of the axes around which democracies are built.

This chapter provides a comparison of the political structures in the Baltic Sea countries. Focus is placed on electoral systems and other parameters that indicate the level of transparency found in the various structures. A more general description of the respective CBSS Member States is available in Annex 1. Where nothing else is indicated, this chapter is based on information from CBSS Member States' constitutions, electoral laws, the Commissioner's survey 'Power in Transition,' as well as information provided by the relevant ministries and Central Electoral Committees.

2.1 National level

2.1.0 Constitutional settings

The constitutional models around the Baltic rim include 3 monarchies, 2 federal republics and 6 republics. Notably, the rights and power of the people are guaranteed by the constitutions of all the CBSS Member States. Table 2.1.0 below provides an overview of the overall constitutional settings found in these Member States.

Figure 1 - 2.1.0 Constitutional settings and distribution of power

	By Constitution	Head of State	Legislative Power(s)	Executive Power(s)
Denmark	Parliamentary Monarchy	The Monarch	Parliament	Government
Norway	Parliamentary Monarchy	The Monarch	Parliament	Government
Sweden	Parliamentary Monarchy	The Monarch	Parliament	Government
Iceland	Parliamentary Republic	The President	Parliament	Government
Estonia	Parliamentary Republic	The President	Parliament	Government
Latvia	Parliamentary Republic	The President	Parliament	Government
Lithuania	Parliamentary Republic	The President	Parliament	Government/President
Finland	Parliamentary Republic	The president	Parliament	Government/President
Poland	Parliamentary Republic	The President	Parliament	Government/President
Russia	Parliamentary Federal republic	The President	Parliament/President	Government/President
Germany	Parliamentary Federal republic	The President	Parliament	Government

* The Constitution grants the President of Iceland a rather prominent position, however in practice, the President's role is more representative.

As the table above illustrates, all CBSS Member States are parliamentary democracies in which the representative body, namely, the parliament, constitutes

the legislative authority, while the executive function belongs to the governments (and in some countries shared with the President).

In all CBSS Member States, with the exception of the three formal monarchies, the President acts as Head of State. The monarchical status for Denmark, Norway and Sweden differ in political importance between the three countries. It is, however, common for them all that the Monarchs hold only formal power. All political decisions are made within the framework of the representative system, that is, within the parliament.

Iceland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland and Poland are all republics in which the people elect representatives and the Heads of State are either directly or indirectly elected. Russia and Germany are also republics, but with federal structures, and with extensive independence given to the federal states. In practice, the political structures diverge widely between these two federal republics. Political power is more centralised in the Russian Federation, and the Russian President holds a much more powerful position than the German President whose power is fairly restricted.

The constitutions of the non-monarchical CBSS Member States grant very different levels of power to their respective Presidents. It is beyond the scope of this study to conduct a thorough comparison of the Presidents' role, for which reason only very general similarities and differences in these countries will be highlighted.

In Germany, Estonia, Latvia and Iceland, the power of the President is limited to consist of almost only formal importance, whereas in Finland, the President is granted a somewhat influential role towards the parliament. In Lithuania and Poland, the President holds a more powerful position. In Lithuania, the President plays an important role in conducting foreign policy, has significant powers in domestic policy, and is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. In Poland, the President is the guarantor of the continuity of the government, and also has the authority to call for elections to the parliament in extraordinary situations as well as to shorten its term. Furthermore, the Polish President can influence the legislative process in the sense that he can bring the proposed law to the Constitutional Tribunal before signing it into force – this power is meant to ensure that proposed laws are in accordance with the Constitution. The President can also veto the law. To override the President's veto, the Parliament must once again vote for the law to be passed by an even larger majority. Still, the President of Poland does not have real legislative powers, when compared to the powers of the President of Russia.

In Russia, the President unquestionably possesses the most powerful position in the Federation. He is the guarantor of the Constitution and human rights, and can only be removed from his position in case of crime or high treason. The President defines the principal lines in interior and foreign policy, appoints the Prime Minister, and can dissolve the government and, under special circumstances, also the Duma. He also has the mandate to suggest legislation and influence the legislative process, as well as to appoint the gubernators, which are the heads of the 88 Federal Subjects.

2.1.1 Presidential elections

The role of the President varies within the CBSS Member States, both in terms of the electoral procedure and in terms of the constitutional division of power. In table 2.1.1 below an overview of how Presidents are elected in the different countries is given.

Figure 2 - 2.1.1 Presidential elections

No President	President elected indirectly	President elected directly
Denmark	Estonia 5 years term	Finland 6 years term
Norway	Germany 5 years term	Iceland 4 years term
Sweden	Latvia 4 years term	Lithuania 5 years term
		Poland 5 years term
		Russia 4 years term

In Estonia and Latvia, the President is elected by the parliament, while in Germany a specially convened body named the Federal Convention elects the President. In Finland, Iceland, Lithuania, Poland and Russia the President is elected directly by the citizens through a secret ballot voting procedure during elections. As indicated above (2.1.0 Constitutional settings), none of the indirectly elected Presidents enjoy more than formal power. The same is the case for the directly elected Icelandic President. Slightly more power is in the hands of the Finnish President, whereas even more constitutional power is granted to the Lithuanian and Polish Presidents, and especially to the President of Russia.

2.1.2 Parliamentary elections

National parliamentary elections are conducted every fourth year in all the CBSS Members States. These elections take place at different times and through different electoral systems. A basic overview of the various electoral systems is given in table 2.1.2 on next page.

Figure 3 - 2.1.2 Parliamentary elections

	Electoral systems	Composition of the Parliament	Threshold to enter the parliament
Finland	List PR*	Unicameral assembly	No threshold
Norway	List PR	Unicameral assembly	No threshold
Denmark	List PR	Unicameral assembly	2%
Sweden	List PR	Unicameral assembly	4%
Iceland	List PR	Unicameral assembly	5%
Latvia	List PR	Unicameral assembly	5%
Estonia	List PR	Unicameral assembly	5%
Poland	Mixed	Bicameral assembly	5%
Germany	MM Mixed*	Bicameral assembly	5%
Russia	Parallel Mixed	Bicameral assembly	5%
Lithuania	Mixed	Unicameral assembly	5% (coalitions 7%)

*List PR = List Proportional Representation

*MM Mixed = Mixed Member Proportional

As it appears from the table above, most of the CBSS Member States base their allocation of seats in their respective parliaments on the principle of *List of Proportional Representation*. Only Poland, Germany, Russia and Lithuania base their electoral systems on other principles. Germany is the only country using a *Mixed Member Proportional* system, whereas Russia employs a *Parallel Mixed* system.

Lithuania and all other countries basing their electoral systems on List of Proportional Representation elect their representatives to unicameral assembly parliaments. Only Poland, Germany and Russia divide their legislative bodies into two houses. In Germany, the Parliament is divided into the House of Representatives and the Federal Council. Members in the Federal Council are not directly elected, but are instead representatives from the 16 states' governments. Members in the House of Representatives are partly elected by single-seat constituencies and also partly via a statewide party list. The same principle is applied in the Russian bicameral parliament. Russia's Federal Council is comprised of two representatives from each of the governments of the 88 subjects of the Federation, while the State Duma is elected according to a mix of single-seat constituencies and through a proportional party list system.

Summary of the national level

The democracies of the Baltic Sea region include republics, federal republics and monarchies. Common for all these countries is that on the national level, political power is vested in the people and represented by the parliaments – and in some countries together with the President. In all countries except for the Scandinavian ones, the President is the Head of State. The importance of the role of the President varies from a rather limited position of power in Iceland, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Germany, to more prominent position of power in Lithuania and Poland, and

especially in Russia. Parliaments are elected every four years in all CBSS Member States and are conducted through different electoral systems. However, for the majority of Member States' parliaments, the allocation of seats is based on List Proportional Representation.

2.2 Local and regional levels

Direct comparisons of local government are complicated to undertake. In most states, local governments consist of tiers of different administrative levels.¹⁴ In Finland, Iceland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, elections to local government offices are held only at the local level. Political administrative levels exist between the local and the national levels in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. These middle-tier administrations are not directly elected by the people, but are the regional districts, which are appointed by the elected bodies. The procedure of how and from which political level they are appointed differs from country to country. In the table below, the administrative authorities at the regional level are described as administrative districts. In the countries where elections take place at regional levels, electoral and administrative districts are identical (as indicated by the table).

In the Scandinavian countries and Poland, local governments consist of (as indicated by the table) two- and three-tier structures. Here, elections are conducted at both regional and local levels every fourth year. Germany and Russia are, due to their federal structures, difficult to place in the same categories. The elections to the state/subject government are neither national nor local, but constitute an extra tier.

Figure 4 - 2.2 Electoral & administrative subdivisions in CBSS countries local governments

	Local level:	Regional level:		State level
	Municipal elections	Adm. Districts	Electoral Districts	
Iceland	104			
Finland	432			
Estonia	227	15		
Latvia	530	33		
Lithuania	60	10		
Norway	433	19	19	
Denmark	98	5	5	
Sweden	290	21 *	20	
Poland	2489		373 & 16**	
Germany	13.912	439	439	16
Russia	-	-	-	88

*Sweden is divided into both 20 electoral regional districts and 21 administrative districts, which are not directly elected.

** Poland is divided into 16 larger regions and 373 counties, which constitute the intermediate level between the smallest and highest level of local government. Elections take place on all levels and on the same day.

Common within all CBSS Member States is that municipalities function as the smallest administrative and electoral units. The administrative authorities in local government are in most places elected by direct, equal voting, which are carried out through a secret ballots procedure every four years. They vary in size and capacity throughout the region, but by definition cover both small rural communities and big

¹⁴ The part on local government is built on information from Law on Local Government in the respective member states supplemented by information from the description of regions on the website for the Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation; www.bsssc.com

cities. Therefore, areas of responsibility and financial capacity of the municipalities differ from country to country, as do the electoral and administrative systems according to which they function.

The typical fields of administrative responsibility for municipalities are those close to citizens' everyday lives. They usually include issues of local culture and the environment, pre-, compulsory, primary, and secondary schools, social services, health care, local transport, roads and planning. In most countries, local governments may levy taxes to finance their activities. The right to do so strengthens local governments' ability to act independently of the state. Still, the legal frameworks within which local governments function are designed by higher political levels.

2.3 European Union level

Eight out of the eleven CBSS Member States are members of the European Union. They elect their national representatives to the European Parliament (EP) on a common date every fifth year in direct, equal elections. The table below show the number of representatives elected from the respective CBSS Member States to the European Parliament.

Figure 5 - 2.3 Number of representatives elected to the European Parliament

Denmark	Estonia	Finland	Germany	Latvia	Lithuania	Poland	Sweden
14	6	14	99	9	13	54	19

The European Parliament is a single chamber assembly. The 732 members are elected in the 25 national contexts. However, once selected, they are organised by transnational parties. The distribution of seats within the EP rests on a principle that favours (through overrepresentation) smaller EU countries. In practice, this means that for every German representative there are more than 600.000 thousand electors, while for smaller countries like Estonia and Latvia, every EP representative represents less than 100.000 voters.¹⁵

To sum up the electoral structures in the CBSS Member States, the next table provides an overview of the electoral levels in the respective countries. The overview highlights that elections for national parliaments and elections for local governments (referring to municipality level) take place in all countries. However, the levels in between local and national differ considerably. Also, five countries elect their Presidents in separate elections.

¹⁵ IDEA 2004: 7 & 10-11
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Figure 6 - 2.3.0 Overview of elections

	Local	County/regional	State	National/Federal	Presidential	EP*
Denmark	X	X		X		X
Estonia	X			X		X
Finland	X			X	X	X
Germany	X	X	X	X		X
Iceland	X			X	X	
Latvia	X			X		X
Lithuania	X			X	X	X
Norway	X	X		X		
Poland	X	X		X	X	X
Russia	X	X	X	X	X	
Sweden	X	X		X		X

*EP= European Parliament

2.4 The Sami Parliament

In the northern part of the European mainland, the indigenous people of the region, the Sami, lived before any Nordic national boundaries were drawn. Today, the Sami people live across four countries: the northern part of Sweden, Norway and Finland and on the Kola Peninsula in Russia. Sweden, Norway and Finland all have a Sami Parliament, to increase Sami participation and influence in the democratic processes. The Sami Parliament was founded in Finland in 1973¹⁶, in Norway in 1989 and in Sweden in 1993. The plenary assemblies consist of 21, 39 and 31 members respectively, and are elected through general elections.

The three parliaments function within their respective country and enjoy different levels of independence from the national parliaments.¹⁷ However, as the Sami parliaments represent the Sami people over a wide geographical area, in 1997 an agreement regarding cooperation through a transnational Parliamentary Assembly was made. Likewise, a historic Sami Parliamentarian Conference was held in 2005 with representatives from the three parliaments and representatives of the Sami in Russia, thus indicating that the Sami are one people united by history and culture.

With variations from county to country, the main areas of authority for the Sami parliaments are in the fields of language, social and cultural affairs, education and traditional Sami industry.¹⁸

2.5 Self-governed areas

The political structures in Denmark and Finland also include self-governed areas. Greenland and the Faeroe Islands are part of the Danish Kingdom, but enjoy extensive self-government. They both share foreign and defence policies as well as a few other policy fields with Denmark, while the Danish Queen is their Head of State. However, according to the Act on Home Rule, Greenland and the Faeroe Islands enjoy extensive independence and are self-governed when it comes to most

¹⁶ The original official was "The Delegation of Sami Affairs," and consisted of a permanent committee elected by the people. In 1996, the delegation was reorganized as a Sami Parliament.

¹⁷ The Sami Parliament in Finland is for example not an authority under the government or a part of the public administration. In this sense, it is more independent than the Sami Parliament in Sweden (Samtinget, Sweden).

¹⁸ Sami parliament homepage

domestic issues.¹⁹ Furthermore, the two areas differ from the rest of Denmark with respect to the EU, as neither of them are members.

The impact of these political structural divisions is that Greenland and the Faeroe Islands elect their own parliaments and municipal representatives. The voters in each area also elect two members to the Danish Parliament. The Greenlandic Parliament (Landstinget) consists of 31 members who are elected every four years. The Parliament elects the Government (Landsstyre), which administers the self-governed area. On the Faeroe Islands, the Parliament (Lagtinget) comprises 32 members who are also elected every four years.²⁰

Similarly, the area of Åland is under Finnish sovereignty, but enjoys extensive independence. The impact of this structural division is that the population in Åland votes in general elections for Parliament and the President as well as in European Parliamentary elections. Yet, as in the case of the self-governed areas of Greenland and the Faeroe Islands, Åland also has its own political structure. This consists of the Lagtinget, which is the legislative assembly, and municipalities. Its form of self-governance is spelled out in a separate law on local government.

2.6 Voting rights

The question of who has a voice in how societies in the region are administered, points to the issue of voting rights. As a general guideline, citizens of the respective countries who have reached the age of eighteen are entitled to vote in elections at all levels in their countries. This right can, however, be suspended by a court or other institutions in most countries.

For national parliamentary elections, the right to vote is limited to the citizens of that country. For local government elections all countries, except Latvia and Poland, also grant voting rights to persons who have resided in the electoral area for a specified length of time. Germany, however, limits the extension of its voting rights to citizens of EU member states. For countries, which are members of the EU, citizens from any EU-country can take part in EP elections.

2.7 Political parties

Democratic structures are not defined only by their citizens' ability to elect their representatives. Transparency in political structures is vital for ensuring trust in political institutions. Legislation on the financing of political parties' activities and legislation concerning founding of political parties is critical ensuring a healthy level of transparency. Legislation and dynamics in the political party arena can also be said to mirror the level of maturity of political structure in question. This means that the dynamics of the Baltic, Polish and Russian structures differ from the party dynamics found in the other CBSS Member States.²¹

¹⁹ The Faeroe Islands were granted extensive independence in 1948, and Greenland in 1979

²⁰ The Faeroese Parliament is one of the oldest parliaments in Europe

²¹ Information provided by the IDEA (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance) databases and the EPIC-project (Election Process Information Collection), which is a joint endeavour by IDEA, UNDP and IFES. Both sources are founded on comprehensive questionnaires answered by the key institutions in the countries included.

2.7.0 Financing of political parties

All countries in the Baltic Sea region, with the exception of Latvia, support political parties through direct state financial support. They thereby secure a certain level of equal opportunity for parties to act and uphold their activities. The level and purpose of this support, however, differs between countries. Some countries do not earmark support at all. This is the case for Iceland, Germany and Estonia. The rest of the countries supply a mixture of financial support for electoral campaigns, party administration and non- earmarked donations.

Yet, state support does not solely consist of direct donations. It also includes legislation on taxation and more indirect means, such as access to media. Likewise, restrictions on financing parties are relevant indicators of the level of transparency of the political structure. This concerns, for example, the amount of financial resources that parties are allowed to raise. It also concerns potential restrictions on who is allowed to give donations and on the size of those donations coming from private funds. The legislation on direct and indirect state support and restrictions regarding political parties appears in table 2.7.0 below.

Figure 7 – 2.7.0 Financing of political parties

	Direct Public Funding (financial)	Indirect Public Funding: Taxation Status	Indirect Public Funding: Media Access	Bans on Sources of Income	Ceilings on Income
Denmark	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Finland	Yes	No	No	No	No
Sweden	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Norway	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Germany	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Iceland	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Lithuania	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Estonia	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Poland	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Russia	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Latvia	No	No	Yes	Yes	No

Source: IDEA – Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

Some patterns of political party financing are relatively easy to identify. Most countries do not grant indirect funding through special taxation status for political parties or their donors. Exceptions to this pattern are Germany, Iceland and Lithuania. In Germany, donors receive tax credits and reductions, depending on the size of their donations. In Iceland, both parties and donors enjoy a special tax status, whereas in Lithuania, political parties are entitled to special taxation status. As the table also shows, all CBSS Member States, with the exceptions of Finland and Iceland, support political parties through securing media access for them. The principle for the allocation of airtime differs between the countries.

When it comes to sources of income, patterns tend to move in a different direction. The Scandinavian countries and Finland place no bans on sources of income at all. The rest of the countries all have some kind of limitation on the sources of income for political parties. Typically, bans are placed on donations coming from charity organisations, government organisations, anonymous donations, or the like, which can challenge the transparency of the system.

Bans on donations must be seen in the light of the development of the political structure. In most of the countries, which place bans on donations, the political party structure might not be completely settled yet. The political scene faces a wide scope of new parties at every election, whereas the Nordic countries are settled with fewer more traditional parties. With such relatively young structural conditions, bans on, for example anonymous donations, can be a tool to prevent corruption from arising in the political arena.

No CBSS Member State places ceilings on how much money political parties can raise. In Latvia, however, there are limits on parties' spending during pre-election time and campaigns, in order to ensure fair and equal competition. Furthermore, all of the Baltic countries, Poland and Russia limit the level of donations granted by single donors. With reference to the issue presented above, bans on large donations can also be a tool to prevent a few rich donors from disproportionately influencing the political party programme. They can, therefore, also be a tool to secure transparency in a political structure.

2.7.1 Founding of political parties

Comparisons of a citizen's possibility to found a political party are, due to different practices and legislation, more difficult to illustrate in a table here. For this reason, information is provided in a table in Annex 2.

A few legislative requirements are similar in all CBSS Member States. Notably, both age and citizenship are influential. As a general guideline for all the countries, citizens who have reached the age of eighteen, and thereby have the right to vote, may also be members and founders of political parties. To found a political party or to qualify as candidate for elections, citizenship acts as a general requirement.

At the local level, all citizens with the right to vote can stand as a candidate in elections, whereas for national elections, some different practices appear as concerning the issue of age. In the Nordic countries, the right to stand as a candidate in a national election follows the right to participate in elections by voting. In Russia, Poland, Estonia and Latvia, the minimum age is 21²² and in Lithuania and Germany the minimum is 25.

A final similarity throughout the region is the general requirement that political parties register to be legally founded in the first place. Sweden is the only country where the registration of political parties is not a requirement. It is, however, possible to register voluntarily in Sweden to protect the party's name from being used improperly.

The remaining CBSS Member States all require that political parties within their respective structures register. The requirements to complete this process, however, differ. Most countries require a certain number of signatures from citizens who support the party. The most common method to estimate this is through a fixed number of signatures, which in extremely broad terms, reflects the size of the voter population. Thus, the fixed requirement varies from 200.000 signatures in Russia (of which a maximum of 14.000 can be collected from a single region), to 5000 signatures in Norway, Finland and Poland, and 300 in Iceland. In Denmark, the number of signatures required is not completely fixed but must reflect 1/175 part of all valid votes cast in the latest general election.

²² In Poland a minimum of 30 years of age is required for the second chamber.

In Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Russia political parties must also meet the requirement of a minimum number of members to the party in order to be registered. With 200 members required in Latvia, and 1000 Lithuania and Estonia, the number of members does not reflect the sizes of the voting population, but is rather a number that is politically decided upon. In Russia, 10.000 citizens must be members of the party and it must also have branches in at least half of the regions in the Federation.

Another prerequisite for party registration in these four countries – which diverges from the rest of the CBSS Member States – is not associated with the founding of parties, but instead concerns the party's financial capacity to survive in the political arena. All parties that apply to run for election must pay a fixed amount to the electoral committee. In most cases, the deposit is returned if the party succeeds in passing the necessary threshold to enter the parliament. These laws have, however, been criticised for diminishing the ability of new parties to establish themselves.

Summary on funding and founding of political parties

Some equality in political parties' abilities to uphold their activities is secured in the CBSS Member States. The financing of political parties is supported in all countries except for Latvia, and media access is secured for all parties except for those in Finland and Iceland. None of the countries place a ceiling on the level of parties' incomes. However, a number of countries set restrictions as to who can donate money to political parties, as well as the level of donations granted by a single donor.

To found a political party or to qualify as candidate for elections, citizenship is required in all Baltic Sea countries. Also, all countries, except for Sweden, require that political parties are registered. To complete the registration process, most countries require a certain number of signatures from citizens who support the party. In Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Russia a minimum number of party members are also required, while parties applying to run for election must pay a fixed amount of money to the electoral committee.

Chapter 3: Presentation of Political & Social Engagement in CBSS Member States

3.0 Introduction

Democracy revolves around the idea of political participation. For democracy to develop and flourish, the involvement of civil society in political processes is vital. Participation at *different levels of society* is the key to build a dynamic democracy. As such, political participation can be categorised as either conventional or unconventional. Ordinarily, the conventional channels of participation include the act of voting as well as playing an active role in a political party. Citizens' involvement in voluntary organisations such as NGOs and various associations are also considered to be forms of conventional participation. With regard to unconventional participation, examples include citizens' involvement in demonstrations and boycotts, just to name a few. In this chapter, the actual participation of citizens in democratic processes within the CBSS Member States is examined.

3.1 Electoral participation

One of the more traditional ways of scrutinising the degree of citizen participation in democracies is to look at their levels of voter turnout at elections. Elections provide citizens with the foremost opportunity to influence their representatives at different levels of governance, in terms of both political values and development. Voter participation is therefore an essential prerequisite to achieving a successful and viable democracy. Thus, a comparative examination of electoral participation in the CBSS Member States is an obvious focus for the present study, which aims to providing insight on the extent of participation at different levels of the political structure as well as within different groups. This is considered to be a first step towards identifying areas that are in need of more focused efforts and pro-active measures. It will, therefore, also provide a basis for further fields of WGDI activity to be explored.

3.1.0 Parliamentary elections

General elections are described in the constitutions of the CBSS Member States as upholding the democratic power of the people. As such, parliamentary elections are of particular importance when it comes to the question of democracy. Participation in general parliamentary elections varies a great deal between the CBSS Member States. As both the table and graph on the next page illustrate, the levels of voter turnout in these elections within the region vary from approximately 50% to almost 90%. Despite these differences, what all countries have in common is a situation in which parliamentary elections attract more voters to the ballot box than do elections at either the local or EU levels. This corresponds to the general view held by most citizens that national level politics catch their interest the most.

Figure 8 - 3.1.0 Parliamentary elections in CBSS Member States 1990-2005

	1990-1991	1992-1994	1995-1997	1998-2000	2001-2003	2004-2005
Denmark	82,8	84,3	—	85,9	87,1	84,4
Estonia	78,2	67,8	68,9	57,4	58,2	—
Germany	77,8	79	—	82,2	79,1	77,7
Finland	68,4	—	68,6	65,3	69,5	—
Iceland	87,6	—	87,4	84,1	87,7	—
Latvia	81,2	89,9	71,9	71,9	71,2	—
Lithuania	—	75,2	52,9	58,2	—	46,08
Norway	—	75,8	78	—	75	77,4
Poland	43,2	52,1	47,9	—	46,2	40,57
Russia	—	50	64,7	60,5	—	—
Sweden	86,7	88,1	—	81,4	80,1	—

Source: IDEA: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. Supplements which concern the latest elections held are based on data from respective member states electoral committee information.

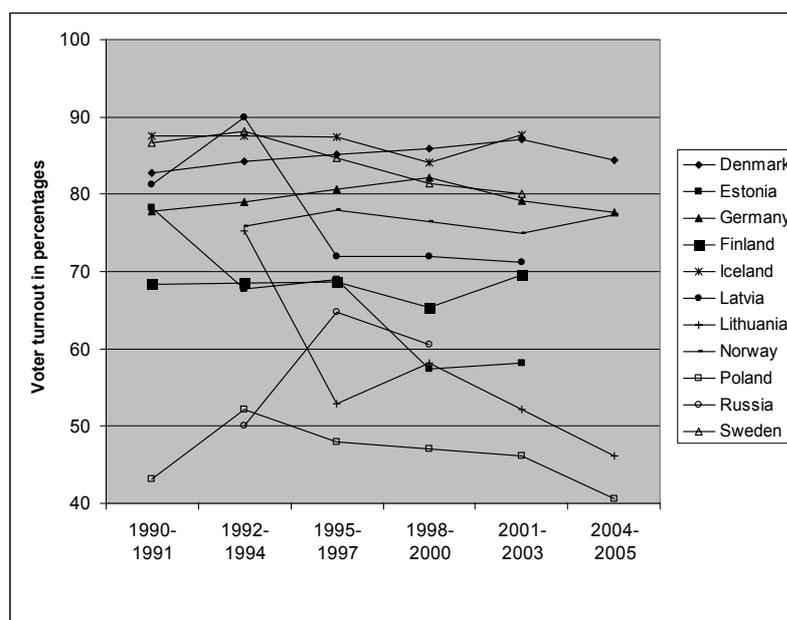


Figure 9 - 3.1.0 Graphic of the data from figure 8

Tendencies worth noting here include the indication that the often compared Nordic countries all display relatively *stable* turnouts during the period. However, the *equal* level of participation, which sometimes characterises comparisons of the Nordic countries is not particularly equal in this case. Whereas Iceland has enjoyed a relatively stable voter turnout of over 85%,

Finland has throughout the decade oscillated just below a level of 70%. The three Scandinavian countries, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, often seen as relatively similar, also display some differences in this case. While both Denmark and Sweden have maintained a voter turnout level of over 80%, turnout in Norway has remained just below this level. The same has also been the case for Germany. However, the level of voter turnout displayed above is relatively high, when compared to the average level of participation in national elections in countries belonging to the European Union.²³

The overall tendency in Iceland, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway and Sweden indicates that voter turnout has been relatively stable during the 15-year period mentioned above. In Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Russia, voter turnout

²³ The average voter turnout from the elections to national parliaments in European Union member states (15) has decreased from 87,5% in 1993 to 72,5% in 2004 (Eurostat Data). The member states, which joined the European Union on 1 May 2004 are not included in this comparison.

levels have, at times, displayed other tendencies. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania each experienced fairly high voter turnout levels in the first parliamentary elections after regaining their independence. In Latvia, the level of voter turnout even reached 89.9% in 1993, which was the highest in the region during the entire decade. Since that point in time, voter turnout in Latvia has decreased to a more moderate level. Still, Latvia has maintained a turnout of just above 70%, while turnout in both Estonia and Lithuania hovers just below 60% for the moment. Poland stands apart from the tendency, as it has experienced the lowest level of voter turnout throughout the whole period. The level of electoral participation in Poland has, with just one exception, been below 50%. Additionally, Russia has experienced a level of voter turnout that is lower than the CBSS average, but not particularly low when compared with Estonia, Lithuania and Poland. In contrast to these countries, voter turnout in Russia has not decreased, but rather increased over time.

Voter turnout is closely linked to institutional and political climates, as well as the political and social resources of the individual citizens. For this reason, voter turnout cannot be evaluated without also examining political structures in place, as well as historical experiences, political cultures, and sociological differences found in civil societies. When looking at the issue of political structure as one of the explanatory factors in voter turnout tendencies, it appears that the presence of either stability or instability in voter turnout found in the CBSS Member States is by no means incidental. That is, the countries displaying a fairly stable turnout (i.e. the Nordic countries and Germany) all have very settled political structures and party systems in place. A relatively limited number of political parties are represented in parliament, while at the same time, the majority of them are well-established, with long histories and traditions. One of the impacts on potential voters is that they become quick to decide upon what they believe they can expect from the dominant parties in parliament, both in terms of their values and political leanings. The downside of such seemingly predictable and often consensus-seeking political set-ups (in which no real divisive or dividing issues come to the political forefront) includes the possibility that citizens may see very little reason to vote. Conversely, heated political debates are likely to spark a certain level of interest in elections, and can therefore play a decisive role in attracting voters' attention, and ultimately a higher level of voter engagement. Since the prevalence of controversial political issues tends to vary from election to election, it can serve as an explanatory factor for certain levels of voter participation. For example, the absence of real political confrontation, as well as the persistence of broad coalitions and somewhat weak party profiles, has been one of the explanations posed for the relatively lower voter turnout experienced in Finland.²⁴ Also, the decline voter turnout in Sweden through the 1990s has been linked to a high level of predictability in election results.²⁵

When presenting trends in stable versus unstable turnouts, it is also important to point out that the time frame reflected by the graph is very limited. The Nordic countries and Germany may indeed enjoy a stable voter turnout rate when compared to those found in neighbouring countries; however, when their own historical trends are taken into account (i.e. the level of voter turnout in the 1960s and 1970s) a number of them have also faced a decrease in voter turnout.²⁶

The political structures and party systems found in the Baltic countries, Poland and Russia have still only had a limited amount of time to become settled. Needless to

²⁴ Sami Borg 2005: 90

²⁵ Holmberg & Oscarsson 2004: 28

²⁶ Official Statistical databases

say this does not point to a potential risk of a relapse to authoritarianism. It should also be underlined that the development of democratic political structures in these countries has been significantly different, and in many respects, not comparable. In Russia, the centralised power set-up and predominant role of the President have made the development of the country's political structure and citizens' engagement different from that which has been the case in other countries. Therefore, when Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Russia are categorised in a single group, as concerns the maturity of their respective political structures, the intention is not to indicate that those are identical.

The notion of settlement, or rather the lack thereof, refers to the absence of long-term political continuity, which Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Russia have all been faced with. One consequence of this situation is that citizens tend to be more uncertain about what they believe they can expect from political parties (as opposed to the situation in the Nordic countries). Political parties in this case have not enjoyed long and therefore settled traditions, and a number of new parties appear at every election. The result is limited continuity in political agendas and alliances. For example, there have been only three political parties present in the Russian parliament since the 1993 election, while a wide number of parties have risen and fallen during the period.²⁷

The New Europe Barometer 2004 found that the level of citizens' identification with specific parties in these countries varies from 22% in Estonia to only 7% in Russia. Whether it is the shifting political party supply that limits party attachment, or the low level of attachment that demands a frequent change of political parties in the parliament, is an ongoing debate. In any case, the positive correlation between party attachment and the tendency to vote is underlined by several researches.²⁸ A low level of party attachment, combined with immature political structures, can therefore also be one of the reasons for unstable and relatively lower turnout.

On the other hand, the process of forming and building up political structures has caused heated and ongoing political debates during – and especially in the beginning of – the transition period. Issues are likely to have been influential in the voters' engagement in the national elections during this time. Other decisive factors in the extent of participation are linked to the cultural background and the heritage of societies, as well as individual factors such as political and social resources. These factors will be later discussed in part 3.2 of this study: Factors influencing on participation (starts at page 28).

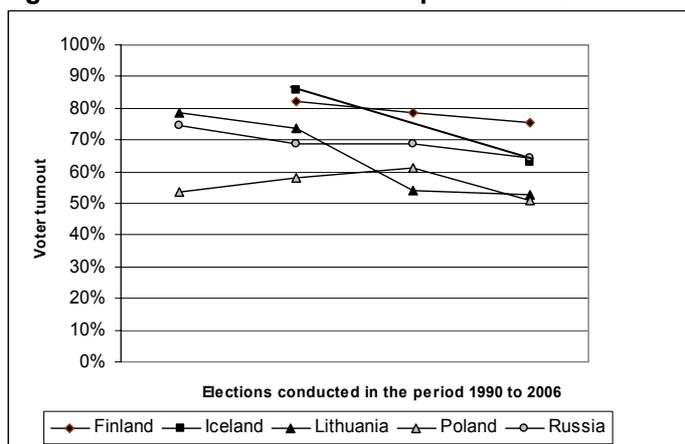
3.1.1 Presidential elections

The following five countries hold presidential elections: Finland, Iceland, Lithuania, Poland and Russia. The table below illustrates the level of participation in their respective presidential elections from the 1990s to present day.

²⁷ Teorell and Bäck 2005: 15

²⁸ Teorell & Bäck 2005: 1

Figure 10 - 3.1.1 Voter turnout at presidential elections in the Baltic Sea region since 1990²⁹



At least two trends are worth mentioning here. The first is that there is a general downward slope to these figures, indicating a general decline in voter turnouts in presidential elections. In particular, Lithuania has experienced a decrease of almost 25% in the year 2002. The second tendency relates to the fact that while voter turnout may be decreasing, it is still generally higher than levels experienced in parliamentary

elections. In some countries, this is a clear phenomenon. In Russia, the margin between voter turnout levels in these two types of elections is almost 10%, and in Poland it is as much as almost 15%. Poland also constitutes an exception to the general downward slope by – with the exception of the latest presidential election – having experienced a noteworthy increase in voter turnout at presidential elections during certain points in time throughout the 1990s.

This noteworthy tendency may again stem from a mixture of the political structure, culture and amount of trust in place. As described in chapter two (pages 8 and 9), the President of Russia plays the prevailing role in the country's constitutional setting. Also, in Poland, and to some degree in Lithuania, the President enjoys a relatively high level of power, as compared to the President of Finland and especially Iceland, where the president plays a more symbolic role.³⁰ The paternalistic political culture found in Russia is, in principle, favourable towards strong leaders and institutions. Political cultures in Poland and Lithuania are not comparable to Russia in this regard. Yet, it is common in each of these countries that voters trust the President more than any other political figure or state institution.³¹ The popularity of presidential elections in these countries may very well be rooted in such prevailing political conditions.

3.1.2 Local elections

Whereas parliamentary elections are important - in terms of the power held by the people represented in parliament - local elections are decisive for a number of reasons. Local political authorities are responsible for a wide range of issues that are closely connected to citizens' everyday life in the social, economic, environmental and political realms. Furthermore, local democracy is an important field for citizens to become involved in, so as to influence day-to-day political agendas.

Voter turnouts in local elections are, however, often below the level of participation experienced at national level. As table 3.1.2 below illustrates, the level of voter turnout from the latest local elections in CBSS Member States³² are on average between 5 to 20 percentage points below the level for parliamentary elections.

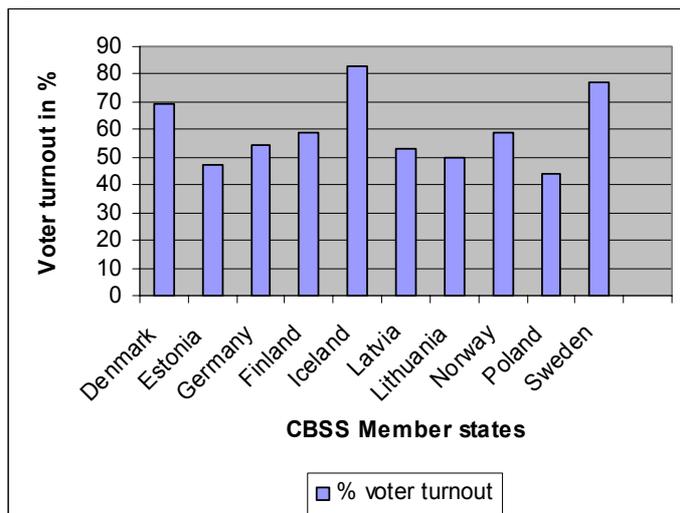
²⁹ Source: IDEA, *Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance*. For the latest presidential election in Poland; the Central Electoral Committee. The result is the average of the two rounds of elections

³⁰ For a comparison of the countries see chapter 2: Political Structure in the CBSS Member States. For descriptions of the respective Member States political structures, see annex 1.

³¹ New Europe Barometer 2004

³² The data in this table are taken from the websites of the respective countries' institutions responsible for elections. The only exception is Denmark, where the results from the latest election are not yet available on the Study on Citizens' Participation in the Baltic Sea region page 26 of 76

Figure 11 - 3.1.2 Voter turnout at the last local elections in CBSS Member States³³



Exceptions to the above mentioned trend in local election voter turnout are found in Iceland and Sweden. In Sweden, local elections are held back-to-back with parliamentary elections. Combined with a general tradition of voting (as seen in graph 3.1.0 (page 18) on voter turnout at parliamentary elections), this can partly explain the relatively higher level of voter turnout in this context. One of the explanations for the high level of participation in Iceland is that

elections always take place on Saturdays. In this respect, Iceland does not necessarily differ from other CBSS Member States, as Estonia, Latvia, Finland, and Lithuania also conduct their local elections during in the weekend. Nevertheless, this practice serves as one explanatory factor in understanding political participation in Iceland.

Except for Iceland, Sweden and Denmark, none of the countries in the region experienced a voter turnout higher than 60% during their most recent local election. This lower level of participation in local elections has been directly linked to a generally lower interest in local politics among the population. This propensity is in line with the perception that the most crucial political discussions and decisions are often taking place at the national level, whereas local politics are instead mainly concentrating on the practical administration of social services and education, etc. The issues dealt with at the local level are thus, although closest to the citizens' lives, often principally debated and decided in other fora. The most politically salient and divisive issues – which also tend to spark citizens' interest in parliamentary elections and provide each parliamentary election a specific character – are therefore often absent in local elections.

Researchers have linked this with the lack of a local public sphere, which consequently has diminished citizens' interest in this area of politics.³⁴ If more salient political issues could be dealt with on the local level, it is likely that more citizens would seek to influence the course of local politics. Another explanatory factor for the lower level of citizens' interest in local elections relates to a number of the issues discussed above as well. At the national level, some voters are motivated to participate, not because they are particularly in favour of a certain political party, but rather their vote is intended to prevent another party from gaining too much power. In such a case, voting is more an issue of securing a victory for the 'lesser evil.' In Russia, the possibility to simply vote 'against all' also exists. In the Russian parliamentary election in 2003, 4,7% of citizens' votes were cast 'against all'.³⁵

website of the Danish Ministry of Interior. The reader should be aware that elections have been held at different times as well as that the electoral models are different. While voter turnouts are based on official data, the figures are influenced by different structures.

³³ Source: Official statistics from the CBSS Member States.

³⁴ Elklit et al 200: 15

³⁵ Central Electoral Committee in www.russiavotes.org

The variables which compel some citizens' to vote a certain way – for instance because they are sceptical towards a certain political persuasion or towards a specific political figure or group – are less likely to be present at the local level, if local politicians do not possess a significant amount of political power. The lower level of citizens' interest in becoming involved in local elections can therefore also stem from these conditions.

Taking into consideration the many tasks administered by the local authorities, it is however noteworthy that at least 4 out of 10 voters do not consider it worthwhile to cast their vote. If the generally lower level of interest in local government is linked to a relatively low level of political decision-making power and political public space, what will then result from local government reform? Such reforms have been carried out in Denmark, Poland and Lithuania and are up for discussion in other countries as well. The important question to pose here is whether the extended competences given to local and regional³⁶ units will lead to a political climate that will, in turn, attract a higher level of interest on the part of citizens.

A final issue that deserves attention is the comparative character of this document. This comparative character, as such, relates to certain differences in the practice of carrying out local elections. Lower voter participation in local elections can be rooted in technical and practical details, which are found in individual countries, and are therefore important to take into account when comparing various levels of participation. For example, in Latvia, voters are required to be physically present in their voting districts in order to participate in local elections. However, this requirement is not a case during national elections in Latvia. Still, as many people live outside the election district where they have officially registered and therefore are granted the right to participate in elections, such a predicament acts as an obstacle to participation. The same requirement exists in Poland, whereas, for example, in Estonia, Finland, Denmark, Sweden and Germany the possibility of absentee voting (i.e. in advance and by mail) exists.³⁷ In Estonia and parts of Germany, the possibility of e-voting was even explored during the latest local elections.

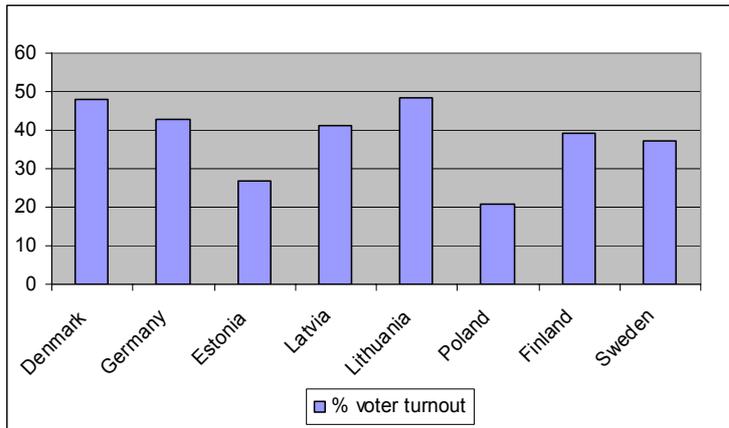
3.1.3 European Parliamentary elections

In terms of voter turnout, politics at the European level seem to attract even less voter-interest in the CBSS Member States than does local politics. CBSS Member States, which are also EU Member States, voted in the European Parliamentary election in 2004. The outcome of participation in this election is presented in figure 3.1.3 below.

³⁶ Local government in several of the CBSS Member States relates to both municipal and county level elections. The figure above shows voter turnout in the municipal elections. For a description of the different local governments systems, see annex 1

³⁷ *EPIC-project*: Election Process Information Collection (joint endeavour IDEA, UNDP and IFES)
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Figure 12 - 3.1.3 European Parliamentary elections 2004 voters turnout in CBSS countries³⁸



Not one of the CBSS EU Member States displayed an electoral participation level exceeding 50%. Lithuania is, with the highest turnout among these states, at 48.4%, just on the threshold of half the population participating in the 2004 election. The Lithuanian turnout was not only rooted in a greater interest in EU politics – the impeachment of the Lithuanian President resulted

in the scheduling of the election for the new President to be held on the same day as the European Parliamentary election.³⁹ Some positive effects of holding two elections back-to-back with each other were also seen in the case of Swedish local elections. As the graph above illustrates, Denmark follows Lithuania closely with 47.9%, while none of the remaining countries display a turnout that is over 45%. The Polish and Estonian voting populations place themselves lowest on the interest scale for the EU political arena, with a turnout of just 20.9% and 27% respectively.

In addition to the fact that voter turnout was low for the European Parliament elections in 2004, the development has also been one of gradual decrease in the countries that have been EU members over a longer period of time. More specifically, this development has been from an average turnout at 65,9% in 1979 to 52,4% in 1999.⁴⁰ In 2004, the average turnout was down to 45,5%. This turnout was equal to the average between the significant differences in the Member States. Whereas compulsory voting in Belgium and Luxemburg raised the average with turnout figures of around 90%, some of the new EU Member States displayed very moderate participation levels that came in contrast to the high numbers. Even when excluding the countries with either very high or notably low turnout, the downward slope has continued.

Different lines of reasoning have been given to explain the low interest in EU level politics. One of the explanations frequently used links the low interest to the distance between citizens and EU institutions. With the expansion of the EU in May 2004, it came to encompass more than 340 million voters who found themselves represented by a European Parliament of 732 members. First of all, this means that decision-makers are rather far away from potential voters. Moreover, due to the distribution of seats favouring smaller countries, the distance between voters and their representatives in the bigger countries seems enormous.⁴¹ On the other hand, in terms of actual representation, smaller countries have little weight in the European

³⁸ Source: Eurostat Data

³⁹ IDEA 2004: 5. A similar experience can be found in UK where local elections were conducted on the same day in some areas.

⁴⁰ Sinnott in Agne et al. 1999:59. The voter turnout is an average of all EU Member States and thus reflects a general tendency, not solely the tendency for countries in the CBSS.

⁴¹ In chapter 2 "Political Structures in the CBSS Member States," the principle of seat distribution was described. For example Germany has one representative in the EP per 600.000 citizens, whereas some smaller Member States have less than 100.000.

Parliament. With only 6 representatives, as is the case for Estonia, it is likely that voters feel invisible in the 732-member European Parliament (EP).

The low interest can appear to be paradoxical when taking into account the increasingly influential role those EU institutions play in respect to EU citizens' lives. The link between voters and EP representatives is closely related to the political issues on the agenda. The issues dealt with at EU level seem far away from the everyday life of most people. If the politicians do not manage to communicate with citizens and convince them that they can influence decision-making process in Brussels, EU institutions will suffer from a gap between themselves and European citizens in general. Here, the consequence is that the link between those who make the decisions and the citizens has been weakened.⁴²

Among a number of relevant factors, at least one more must be taken into account – that is, the political process for conducting European Parliamentary elections is in the hands of 25 different parliaments, party systems and sets of electors. This means that the national conditions for voters' trust in politicians and traditions in voting, etc., will unavoidably be reflected at EU level.⁴³ In the Baltic Sea region, as will be touched upon in parts 3.2.1 and 3.2.6, the traditions in voting as well as the level of trust in political institutions differ between the CBSS Member States. With the exception of Lithuania, where the EP election was combined with presidential elections, there is a positive correlation between trust versus distrust towards national institutions and the voter turnout for elections to the European Parliament.

Summary of voter turnout

The voter turnout for parliamentary elections in the Baltic Sea region has, during the latest decade-and-a-half, reflected a notable gap between the most to the least active voter nations. There is a tendency for the Nordic Countries and Germany to have kept a relatively stable turnout during the period, whereas the Baltic countries have had a period beginning with high turnout followed by decrease. In Poland, turnout has been the lowest in the region throughout the whole period, whereas in Russia, turnout has oscillated in between the levels found in Poland and the Baltic countries.

Voter turnout at presidential elections is generally higher than turnout at parliamentary elections, although the trend is in decline. The tendency towards more active involvement in presidential elections can be explained partly by somewhat predominant role of the president in the countries concerned. The level of trust in the president compared to other state institutions is another factor of relevance. Voter turnout at both local elections and elections to the European Parliament is lower than turnout at national parliamentary elections. The lower interest in the local and European political levels has different explanations. Local elections face lower turnout partly due to fact that local politics often deal more with administrative issues than political principles, which occupy voters' minds. The EU, on the other hand, is seen as too far away from the citizens' everyday lives.

Voter turnout in CBSS Member States has been related to different – and interrelated – factors. One of these has been the different timeframe for political settlement in the respective political structures and party systems. In the Nordic Countries and Germany, where the political structures have been settled for a long time, political parties are also more deeply rooted – citizens therefore know what they are voting

⁴² CBSS Commissioner's Final report 2003: 6

⁴³ IDEA 2004: 5 and 7

for. In the less settled political structures, the frequent overturn of parties has been followed by limited party attachment.

3.2 Factors influencing participation

Voter turnout and citizens' participation in broader terms are, of course, not merely influenced by political structures. Structural factors relating to norms in the respective societies, as well as to the status of the individual and his or her resources – taking account of the aspects of gender, age and socio-economic and political status – influence participation.

3.2.0 Norms for participating in elections

Developments in the Nordic countries and Western Germany have moved away from outspoken collective mobilisation in political organisations. Mass mobility had previously been concentrated around political parties and organisations. This tradition was typically mirrored in support for those parties in general elections, which secured a high level of voter turnout. The move towards more individualistic societies has affected political engagement in many of the traditional spheres of participation. However, when it comes to voting, there are still strong traditions for participation in elections.

Different explanations have been given to shed light on the latter tendency. One widely accepted explanation refers to the concept of 'civic duty' or 'moral duty'. It is a generally held view among people that it is one's duty as a citizen living in a democracy to uphold and support it by participating in the electoral process.⁴⁴ Combined with the fact that voting is an activity that demands relatively few resources from the individual citizen, these circumstances have some degree of explanatory power when attempting to understand and explain fairly high voter turnouts.⁴⁵

In the Baltic countries, Poland and Russia, possibilities to develop individualistic civil societies were limited until the collapse of the Soviet Union. The political inheritance in these countries therefore diverges from this development, insofar as their development has not been characterised by decades of mass mobilisation moving towards more individualistic societies. Rather, the development has entailed very rapid transition processes from socialist/communist to democratic systems.

To understand the fairly moderate voter turnout in, for example, Poland, it is helpful to remember that Poland was perceived as one of the countries in the former Socialist block with the strongest civil society. Yet, it was also a civil society that found its strength outside – to some extent in opposition to – the existing political system and authorities.⁴⁶ Such features of society adhere to different time frames than do processes related to changing political institutions, and therefore, these features potentially remain within the political cultures of civil society.⁴⁷ They are therefore also significant tools for understanding the reluctance of citizens to cast their vote at the ballot box, and thus support the political structure.

⁴⁴ Strømsnes 2003: 162

⁴⁵ Elklit et al 2000: 8

⁴⁶ See Chapter 1, page 4

⁴⁷ Howard 2003: 27-28

3.2.1 Gender differences

Most democratic countries experienced a disproportionate male engagement in the political decision-making processes during the 20th century. Nevertheless, this pattern has changed during the last decades in most of the Baltic Sea countries. The gap between genders has, especially with regard to electoral participation, diminished over the years. Only a few countries provide statistical data on voter participation categorized by gender, age and socio-economic and political status. The comparison must therefore be more general and based on fewer countries' data as indicators of a broader trend.

A comparative view of this trend from IDEA⁴⁸ shows a change in overall gender-voting patterns since the 1945 as moving in the direction of more balanced participation. Notably, in several of the Nordic countries, this development has even gone beyond a simple balance, with the slim majority voters being women.⁴⁹ An explanatory hypothesis on this development is that voting equalisation has appeared along with the integration of women into the education system and the labour market.⁵⁰ It is reasonable to assume that the same principle applies in democracies, which have experienced a parallel development – statistics from Sweden, Iceland, Norway and Finland support this pattern.⁵¹ Also, in Germany, the development of gender participation is compatible with the overall trend, as the gap between male and female voters has diminished from 3.1 % in 1953 to 0.5% in 2002.⁵²

The hypothesis concerning the equalisation of gender participation as stemming from the integration of women into traditionally male spheres of society, however partly loses its explanatory power when it is applied to the Baltic countries, Poland and Russia. Women were not to the same extent excluded from political processes or educational systems in the former communist/socialist system. Yet, the pattern of gender voting is today more distinctive than in the Nordic countries and Germany. Poland reported a lower level of voting among women than men with a margin of 4%.⁵³ Likewise, the voting pattern in Russia is still comprised of more men, where only 46% of those who did not vote in the latest parliamentary elections were men, while 53,4% were women.⁵⁴

The conclusion that IDEA has drawn from these findings is that the tendency for women to vote less diminishes as democracies become more established. From this perspective, the decade- and-a-half that the Baltic, Polish and Russian democracies have had to settle has not been a very long time in terms of being able to change traditions and tendencies.

3.2.2 Age differences

The youngest category of voters in the Baltic Sea region generally tends to be less active in elections than the voting population at large. In all Nordic Countries and Germany, young citizens vote about 10% less often than citizens between the ages of 40-70.⁵⁵ In Finland, the gap between the most and the least active groups of citizens in terms of voting was for example 32% in the parliamentary election in 1999.

⁴⁸ IDEA: Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

⁴⁹ Norden 2005: 76

⁵⁰ Goul Andersen 2004: 194-196

⁵¹ Official Statistics

⁵² Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung 2005

⁵³ IDEA 2005: 99-101

⁵⁴ The Levada Center: www.russiavotes.org

⁵⁵ Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, Goul-Andersen 2003: 85, Strømsnes 2003: 97

This divide was between citizens between the ages of 22-24 years, with a turnout of 49%, and those between 56-70 years old, with a turnout of 81%.⁵⁶ On the Eastern shore of the Baltic Sea, the citizens between the ages of 18-24 in Russia voted less than older citizens. However, already from the age of 25 years and up, the difference more or less disappears.⁵⁷

An exception to this tendency is seen in Estonia. The development of young citizens' participation followed the general drop in voter participation in the country that declined from 58% in national parliament elections to 27% in the election for the European parliament. However, the decline in the group of young voters was only from 60% to 37% for the two elections.⁵⁸ In contrast to the above-mentioned countries, the young citizens in Estonia thus seem to be more active in elections than the average citizen.

While Estonia is an exception, the rule is still that the youngest generation eligible to vote tends to exercise this right less frequently than the older generations. There is a generally known correlation between age and voter participation. The curve starts out lowest with the youngest voters and increases until around the age of 50, after which it begins to decline.⁵⁹ The question of whether the lower voter participation rate of younger generations is a problem for democracy depends on whether this group's interest and participation in voting processes increases over time. Experience, however, points to the fact that first-time voters have always voted less and that the gap diminishes by the time of the second election. The explanation provided is that people 'grow' into politics slowly. As individuals become older and more integrated in society, they begin to realise the extent to which politics impact their lives. This works to encourage them to become more engaged in political processes, and is reflected in the level of overall voter turnout.⁶⁰ If this is the case, it is not necessarily a problem of democracy, but rather, it is a problem of the role of young citizens in the initial phase of political life.

Following this, the gap between first-time voters and the older generation that appeared for example in Norway during the 1990s, has not in itself been a reason for major concern. In hindsight, there were no indications that this gap was greater then, as compared to previous times.⁶¹ In Sweden, however, the lower turnout among younger generations has generated more concern. This is not because the gap in Sweden was larger than Norway's, but rather because the fall in the voter turnout among younger citizens in the 2002 election was considerably greater than the turnout decline in general.⁶²

3.2.3 Socio political differences

The socio-economic and political status of the individual citizen influences the tendency of voters to participate in politics, both during elections and in between elections. Here, the notion of socio-economic and political status refers to the level of a citizen's educational qualifications, working position and level of income. These factors are interrelated in the sense that highly educated citizens typically have higher positions in the labour market and earn higher incomes. The reason behind

⁵⁶ Martikainen, Tuomo and Hanna Wass: 2002

⁵⁷ The Levada Center: www.russiavotes.org

⁵⁸ Taru 2005: 12

⁵⁹ Holmberg & Oscarsson 2004: 36-37

⁶⁰ Engelstad & Ødegård 2003: 160

⁶¹ Engelstad & Ødegård 2003: 164-165

⁶² Regeringens skrivelse (Skr 2003/04:110): 5.3.1

focusing on these specific characteristics is that citizens on the high end of the spectrum in these categories are perceived to have a greater level of civic resources. Overall, the tendency is that these persons are also more likely to vote. This is not a phenomenon related solely to the CBSS Member States, but is more or less worldwide tendency.

In those CBSS Member States where information is directly available, this general tendency described above can be confirmed. Groups with a higher level of civic resources also have the highest proportion of voters in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Russia and Germany. Yet, if the variables within the category of socio-economic and political status are examined in isolation, it appears that some of the resource-indicators are more influential than others. If looking for example at Norway and Sweden, the gap in voter turnout between citizens with the lowest and the highest level of education is 4% and 9,6% respectively, whereas in Norway, the differences in voter participation is 11% when the level of income is the indicator in question⁶³. In Sweden, Russia and Denmark, clear correlations between income and voter participation are also found. Russia is, however, difficult to compare in absolute percentages due to the different presentation of estimated data.

Also, in the case of Germany, it has been pointed out that if the focus is merely on electoral participation, which requires relatively little effort from the individual voter, one should be careful not to overemphasize the resource dimension's influence on participation without distinguishing between the different variables. While the educational levels in Germany also work as an isolated resource indicator with a clear effect, the tendency is (in line with the above mentioned countries) less eye-catching than when looking at income levels in isolation. According to investigations that compare the Eastern and Western parts of Germany, it is apparent that socio-economic variables are less influential in terms of individuals' participation in elections in the East than in the West. The explanation offered is that the opposition to hierarchical structures in the societies under socialist and communist rule has institutionalised certain voting norms that can still be traced, even though the societies have become more hierarchical in their structure since the end of the communist period.⁶⁴

3.2.4 Minorities

As in the case of gender, age and socio-economic and political status, some countries lack statistical data on minorities' participation. This shortcoming is partly due to the protection of personal data in some of the countries. Comparison on this issue would therefore also be based solely on surveys carried out in the respective CBSS Member States. It is, however a complex field to compare from survey-based information. The definition of minorities varies hugely in the information materials from the CBSS Member States.

Sometimes information materials refer to immigrants from non-Western countries. This is often the case in the Scandinavian countries and Germany. This classification is at times in itself difficult to compare, as some material only includes first-generation immigrants, while other materials take a broader view, including third-generation immigrants. Sometimes minorities refer to national minorities such as the Sami people in Lapland in the Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish and Russian border-area.

⁶³ Strømsnes 2003: 98-104 and Departementets Skrivelse (DS 2003:54): 22-23. Please note that the numbers for Sweden are for local elections. Therefore, the differences are given as an indicator of the level of influence, rather than as an absolute number.

⁶⁴ Van Deth 2003: 322-323

Sometimes the terminology refers to minorities from neighbouring countries within the Baltic Sea region that are residing in the country, but are without the national status of ethnic nationals.

The question of citizenship also confuses an examination of the participation of minorities. It was described in chapter 2.6 (page 14) that some countries grant non-citizens, who reside permanently in the electoral area, the right to participate in local elections, whereas some countries do not. It makes any comparison of minorities' participation difficult. Even if the criteria of minority status were defined by the status of citizenship, the comparison would be arbitrary, because of the different practices for rights to participate throughout the region.

Due to this complex character, the issue of minorities is not included in a comparative light as such. It is, however, underlined that the issue of minority status, minorities' access to participate politically as well as minorities' actual participation is certainly a relevant field to examine. When looking at the level of participation of minorities in very general terms, the tendency to participate both in elections and in between elections is lower than for the population as a whole. This is true for almost every country in the Baltic Sea region⁶⁵. At the same time, the real reason for the lower participation among minorities is to be based on variables covering social marginalisation as well as income and education levels, and not merely in the issue of minority status itself.⁶⁶

3.2.5 Trust in political institutions

Electoral participation is also linked to citizens' level of trust in political institutions. Confidence in political parties is generally lower in the Baltic countries, Poland and Russia, than it is in the Nordic countries and Germany. Following the New Europe Barometer, 10% of the citizens in Latvia, Lithuania and Russia, 7% in Estonia and only 3% in Poland trust political parties.⁶⁷ This level of trust is, however, rising and is generally much higher when state institutions or persons representing the government such as the president are in focus. New opinion polls from, for example, Estonia show significantly different graphs for the Estonian state institutions in which the parliament enjoys trust from 48% of the population, while the government enjoys 51%.⁶⁸ Also, in the Nordic countries and Germany, political parties are less trusted than other institutions. Yet, compared to the above-mentioned countries, the level of citizens' trust is generally higher. For example, in Finland 37% of the population have trust in political parties.

Differences are however also noticeable among Nordic countries.⁶⁹ In Denmark, the development has been towards greater trust in political institutions and authorities in general,⁷⁰ while the tendency to trust political institutions and authorities in Sweden decreased slightly during the 1990s. In Sweden, the level of trust in national political institutions has decreased 8% over just one year. Currently 46% of Swedes have trust in their parliament, while 33% expressed their trust in the government.⁷¹ In a

⁶⁵ Regeringens skrivelse (Skr 2003/04:110): 5.4, Ozolina 2001: 9-10, Karklans & Zepa 2001: 342

⁶⁶ Departementets Skrivelse (Ds 2003:54): 53

⁶⁷ New Europe Barometer 2004

⁶⁸ Saar Poll: http://www.saarpoll.ee/riik_ja_rahvas/kevad2004graafik1.gif,

⁶⁹ Goul-Andersen 2003: 249-256. Goul-Andersen refers to international investigations (CID and ESS)

⁷⁰ Togeby 2003b: 19

⁷¹ Euro barometer 2005

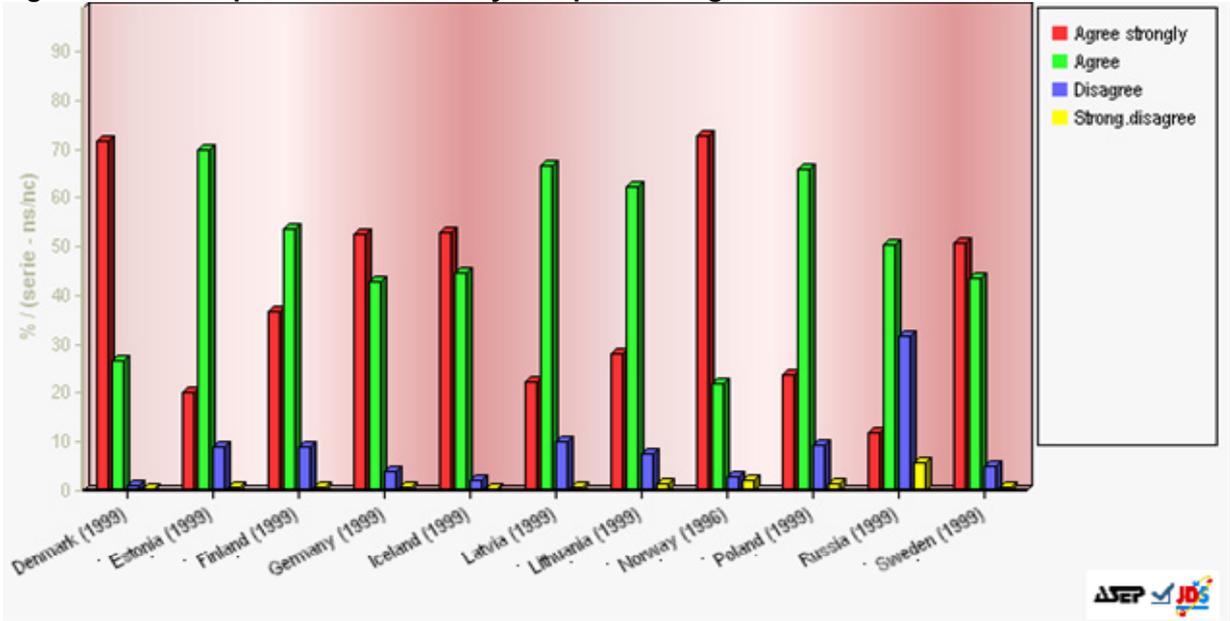
comparative light, the level of trust in the two institutions in Finland is 67% and 68% correspondingly.⁷²

The lack of citizens' trust in the Baltic, Russian and Polish societies towards political parties is most likely stemming from a mix of reasons. One reason could be a general scepticism towards the political system, due to the historical experiences outlined in the introductory chapter. Another factor could be scepticism related to the unpredictability of the party system, in relation to voter turnout and alienation from politics.

However, indicators of either trust or distrust do not mirror the level of support for the principle of the political (democratic) system as such. In Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, support for the political system is strong, and there is a generally positive outlook for the future development of the political system. In Lithuania, where a more critical attitude towards the present system is apparent (as compared to Estonia and Latvia), the extent of trust and type of outlook differ. Still, a positive attitude towards the future is evident.⁷³

In spite of different levels of citizens' trust towards state institutions around the region, there is overall support for the democratic system in principle. The last round of the World Value Survey in 1999 addressed citizens' opinions about democracy. Citizens were asked to state their agreement or disagreement to the question: "Democracy may have its problems, but it is better than any other regime." The outcome is illustrated in figure 3.2.0 on next page.

Figure 13 - 3.2.0 Opinion on Democracy as a political regime



Source: World Value Survey 1999

In the Baltic Sea region the weight of agreement or strong agreement is obvious from the figure above. Almost every country is in favour of democracy by overwhelming majorities. Russia appears to be the only outlier in regards to this tendency. While most Russians surveyed did agree with the statement, a significant proportion of the respondents were in disagreement. Again, history and culture cannot be neglected when either explaining or understanding this tendency. Russia is the only member of CBSS that has no 'living memory' of democracy. As long as any Russian citizen can

⁷² Euro barometer 2005

⁷³ Zepa 2001: 8

remember, a single party has dominated the political structure, and as a result, a democratic history to build on which can be referred to is missing. It is therefore more interesting than surprising that the idea of democracy as “being better than any other regime” is most questioned in Russia.

While Russia is a striking exception, it is, however, still notable that among the countries expressing the most scepticism towards the statement, almost all are former socialist societies. This tendency is likely to be rooted in their citizens' disappointment over the lack of increased living standards during the initial years of political restructuring.

Summary of factors influencing participation

Voter turnout at elections depends on both institutional and personal conditions. Institutionally, it is closely associated with the issue of party attachment and trust in political institutions, as well as with the extent to which citizens are influenced by certain established voting norms. The overall pattern in this context is that citizens in the Nordic countries tend to carry a strong norm of ‘civic duties’ and a trust in political institutions that exceeds the level found in the Baltic countries, Poland and Russia. Trust or distrust notwithstanding, support for democracy in principle is strong throughout the region.

The level of turnout also depends on the social and political resources of the individual. Gender, age and socio-economic and political resources play a role in influencing participation. The gender-gap has, notably in the Nordic countries and Germany, become a case of slightly more female voters than male voters, whereas indicators from Poland and Russia point to the still slightly dominant role of male participation. Young citizens tend to be remarkably less active in elections than those of the older generations. An exception to this trend is found in Estonia, where the youngest citizens eligible to vote actually display a higher level of voter participation than do their older counterparts. Finally, cultural and historical heritage – based on historical experience – have impacted the trend of voter participation.

3.3 Associational involvement

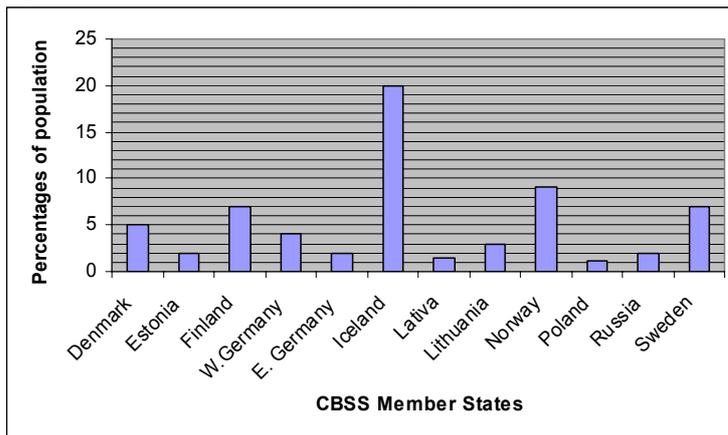
Participation in democratic processes does not only take place when elections are being conducted. Rather, on a daily basis, involvement in associations and unconventional forms of political participation are also popular methods of influencing processes within society.

3.3.0 Membership in political parties

Political parties are rooted in civil society, in the sense that they are interest-based voluntary organisations. At the same time, they are directly linked to the political arena and form, by tradition, the conventional way to exert direct influence. As mentioned previously, political parties have, however, lost their position in the Nordic and Western-German democracies' citizens as the primary vehicle for projecting influence.⁷⁴ Today, fewer citizens seek to exert influence through political parties or political organisations. Also, the Baltic countries, Poland and Russia face low rates of party membership.

⁷⁴ Germany is being examined with a view to both the Western and Eastern parts in the following. Here, the intention is to identify whether differences between the formerly divided societies are still visible or to which extent the gaps have been narrowed.

Figure 14 - 3.3.0 Membership in political parties⁷⁵



As appears in the figure, Iceland can, as the only country, display a level of party membership exceeding 10 % of the population. With 20% of the population holding membership a political party, the level in Iceland is even twice as high as in Norway, which is the country that has the second highest level of party membership.

Although the level of party membership is generally low, there are still small-scale tendencies to identify. The Nordic countries all have a few more percentage points in their levels of membership than do the Baltic countries, Poland and Russia. Noting this, one should also recognise that the gap in membership levels between the Nordic countries is relatively considerable. The gap between political party membership in Norway and Denmark is, for example, larger than the gap between Denmark and Lithuania.

Political party membership in Germany falls somewhere in between. When looking at the Eastern and Western parts of the country separately, a gap between these areas still exists. Taking history and cultural heritage into account, the reasons for these differences are not so different from those identified when examining electoral participation. What is also interesting is that Eastern Germany, after reunification, in many ways has adjusted to the pattern of political behaviour of Western Germany.⁷⁶

The present day level of party membership in the Nordic countries is striking when compared to previous levels. The decline in party membership for some time gave rise to the concern that it was a symptom of a more general decline in citizens' political interest and engagement. In Denmark, political parties mobilised more than 25% of the voting population in the 1950s and 1960s. The same development took place in Sweden and Norway during the 1990's, where membership is somewhat higher than in Denmark.⁷⁷

These concerns have, however, decreased, and it is now widely recognised that the development, as such, does not necessarily reflect a general decline in levels of citizens' political interest. It is rather linked to a trend in which citizens make use – to a higher degree – of other fora and methods to influence decision-making processes. People are today oriented more towards single issue debates, whereas political parties previously represented the overall set of values for large groups in society.

For the Baltic countries, Poland and Russia as well as Eastern Germany, the tendency towards political party membership generally declined following their respective political transitions. These societies can be compared to the Nordic and

⁷⁵ Sources: For, Norway, Germany and Iceland the European Social Survey. For Finland Sami Borg, for Denmark the CID Project, for Sweden Regeringens skrivelse (Skr. 2003/04: 110), for Latvia and Poland: Rosenwald, for Estonia. Lithuania and Russia: World Value Survey

⁷⁶ CED: Center for the Study of Democracy: 10. The tendency is also mirrored in Eastern German voter participation, which is a number of percentages points higher than the turnout in its Eastern neighbor-countries (van. Deth 2003: 317).

⁷⁷ Togeby 2003a: 178-170

Western German democracies, insofar as all the societies are functioning in a globalised world and in an era of high technology. Individuals orient themselves towards a variety of informational sources in order to increase their capacity to exercise influence. Political parties are not the only – in some cases maybe not even the primary – actors that define the political agenda anymore.⁷⁸ Their ability to attract citizens' interest has in that sense diminished due to various factors.

At the same time, a number of less visible explanatory factors also exist. The Baltic countries, Poland and Russia faced major decreases in their respective levels of party membership in more recent years. This partly took place in the years leading up to the collapse of the Soviet Union, and partly in the aftermath thereof. Citizens' withdrawal from the political arena has been linked to a particular desire to detach themselves from the political system, after decades of a living under a dominant political structure where party membership was fairly, although perhaps only formally, widespread.⁷⁹ This appears to be the case in Poland, where the high level of mobilisation in the 1980s (in the process of a breakaway from the socialist structure) did not 'turn' after the political and economic transformation in Poland into a high level of citizens' involvement in the country's political democratic structure or other political activities.⁸⁰

Whereas the gender gap has diminished in the area of voter participation over the years, the same trend has not been the case when it comes to the composition of membership in political parties. Generally, women tend to be less engaged in political parties than men.⁸¹ This trend, however, varies between countries. In Sweden, for example, there is only a very small gap in gender representation within political parties.

Also, young citizens' are underrepresented in comparison to other age groups in Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Germany. Here, the tendency is that only half as many young adults are active in political parties than are citizens around the age of 50. This age-gap is less outspoken around the Eastern shore of the Baltic Sea. In Estonia, for example, approximately 1,8% of the country's youth reported to surveys that they are members of a political party.⁸² Compared to a national average of 2% membership in political parties, the age-gap is not particularly visible. Also, when compared to the remaining CBSS Member States – and in light of the assumption that young citizens tend to be the least politically active group in society – Estonian youth must be considered as quite engaged in political party membership.

As with the case of voter turnout, the situation of a lower level of young citizens' participation is not in itself a threat to the society, insofar as the scope of passivity does not widen and as long as young people 'grow into' more political activity at a later stage. Yet in Sweden, the continual decrease of participation, especially among young men, in political parties has become a cause for concern.⁸³

⁷⁸ Riishøj 2006 part II: 1

⁷⁹ The factual level of membership in political parties in the countries before 1989 is a bit unclear. Statistical evidence that at the time indicates a very high level of involvement is often regarded as not reflecting the actual level, but rather showing an overly favourable but unrealistic picture. However, there is no doubt that the level of partisanship was higher in the pre-1989 period.

⁸⁰ Siemienska, Renata 2002: 12

⁸¹ Strømsnes 2003: 97, Goul-Andersen 2004: 90

⁸² Taru 2005: 17

⁸³ Regeringens skrivelse (Skr. 2003/4: 110): 5.3

Summary on membership in political parties

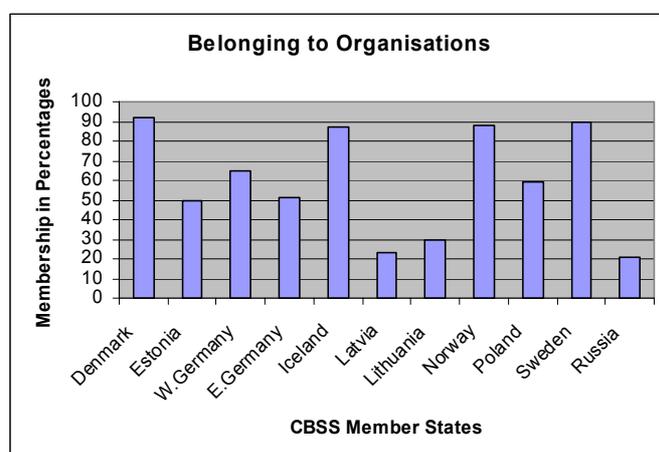
The level of membership in political parties has declined in all CBSS Member States over time. The Icelandic example of 20% of the voting population being members of a political party is a clear exception. The rest of the CBSS Member States all display a level below 10%, and over half of the countries a level below 5%. The reason for this general decline is partly to be found in the societal transformations of the countries. The essence of such transformations differs between the countries, due to the different political histories of the present-day democracies. One common denominator is, however, that political parties in a globalised context only account for one of several channels for seeking influence. In view of the generally low level of party membership, there is a tendency for the Baltic countries, Poland and Russia as well as for Eastern Germany to have a lower level than the remaining countries in the region.

3.3.1 Membership in other forms of organizations and associations

Social political engagement can take various forms. Membership in NGOs, trade unions and other types of associations and organisations are also expressions of active citizen participation.

Many different forms of activities can fall under this expansive umbrella called 'participation in organizations.' Membership can be passive in nature, but score high statistically. Active participation can be targeted towards both common societal goods and individual goals. Table 3.3.1 below illustrates (the number of persons out of 100), who, by mere membership, support any form of voluntary organisation or association around the Baltic Sea region.

Figure 15 - 3.3.1 Belonging to any organisation⁸⁴



In a comparative light, a clear pattern in the level of membership to an organisation in the region becomes visible. The Scandinavian countries and Iceland range high on the scale, with membership levels circulating around 90%. Western Germany places itself somewhat lower at a level of 65%, closely followed by Poland, Eastern Germany and Estonia. The lowest level of associational membership is to be found in Latvia, Lithuania and

Russia. The higher electoral participation found in Latvia is thus not mirrored in its civic involvement more generally. This pattern is not so unexpected taking into account the different political and cultural histories previously described. In the Scandinavian countries, the tradition for associational life has remained strong since the transition of participation in political organisations in the 1960s, to social movements in the 1980s, and then to more single-issue activity in grass-root movements today.⁸⁵ In that sense civil society has remained active. The lower level

⁸⁴ Sources: For Denmark, Norway and Germany: the CID Project, for Sweden: Regeringens skrivelse (Skr. 2003/04: 110), Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Russia: the New Europe Barometer 2004

⁸⁵ Togeby et al 2003a: 191.

of associational memberships in a number of Russian, Polish and Baltic societies does not automatically refer to an unfavourable attitude towards networks and social activities. The strong network of near relatives that developed in parallel/opposition to the political structure in the pre-1989 period persists as an underlying structure in these countries. Combined with the experience of organisations previously being very politicised and controlled, the citizens in these countries have not turned to organisational activity to the same extent as found in other CBSS Member States. The option of free choice when it comes to involvement has, so to say, been associated by increased passivity and withdrawal from the public sphere.⁸⁶

Development is, however, very evident. Take for example the three Baltic countries. Here, significant mobilisation in grass roots movements that characterised the late 1980s on the threshold to independence⁸⁷ was not maintained to the same extent during the following decade. Having noted this, it would be unfair to not also highlight significant developments that have taken shape during the time of independence. In 1997, 30% Estonians and 15% of Lithuanians declared themselves as members of organisations.⁸⁸ Compared to the numbers in *figure 3.3.1*, where they reported 50% and 30% respectively, both countries have experienced a remarkable increase in this field.

As mentioned introductory, associational memberships can be very passive in nature. The type of membership contingent upon payment has become more visible over the years. If a given level of membership is compared to the level of actual active participation within an organisation, the participatory level declines somewhat. The Scandinavian countries still display a pattern of high activity, with levels of actively involved members up to 60% to 70%. Germany stands at about 50%⁸⁹ and Iceland at 49%⁹⁰. Whereas 30% of the Estonians in 1997 reported to have membership in an organization or association, 27% reported more recently to be active members. The slump was more significant in Latvia, where 14% expressed active participation in organisations, up against 22% having passive membership. In Lithuania 11% of citizens reported themselves active members.⁹¹

Regardless of whether the focus is on passive or active membership, the same tendency found in the field of voter participation occurs in this case. On average, the socio-economic status of people who are engaged in associations is higher throughout the region than for people who do not participate. They are more highly educated, have higher incomes and are employed in positions that require a higher level of qualifications.⁹²

Number and types of associations

The gap in associational memberships between CBSS Member States becomes even more visible when the average number of organisations per person is looked into. For readers' ease of reference, the table below illustrates this gap.

⁸⁶ Howard 2003: 27-28

⁸⁷ Karklins & Sebra 2001: 335

⁸⁸ Ozolina 2001: 8-9

⁸⁹ Goul-Andersen 2004: 99

⁹⁰ Einar Mar Pordarson, European Social Survey 2005

⁹¹ The reader should note that active membership dates back to 1997. Data on how the level of active membership has developed following the passive increase in membership in 2004 has not been found.

⁹² Baltic Data House 1998: 15, Goul-Andersen 2003: 108-109, CESSI 2003: 14, Ozolina 2001: 10

Figure 16 - 3.3.0 Average number of associational membership per person⁹³

Denmark	3.25
Sweden	3.00
Norway	2.82
Finland	2.48
West Germany	1.34
East Germany	0.86
Latvia	0.70
Russia	0.65
Estonia	0.64
Lithuania	0.46

As clearly appears, the average number of memberships per citizen is highest in the Nordic countries. An important explanatory factor here is the role of trade unions in these countries. Trade unions have a strong position in the political arena and still mobilise a large number of citizens in the Nordic countries. They deal with social security in case of unemployment, and for a wide range of work places, membership in trade unions is a mandatory. The level of memberships in trade unions therefore by itself provides the Nordic countries with high figures. However, as the table also clearly indicates, the Nordic citizens are widely involved outside of trade unions as well.

Although on a smaller scale, trade unions also remain the most often cited membership organisation in the Baltic countries – between one and two thirds of memberships are in trade unions. This is the case even as membership in trade unions has declined in these countries since 1991.⁹⁴

Except for the relatively high level of membership in trade unions, other tendencies and counter-tendencies are to be seen in associational memberships in the region. Organisations in the fields of religion, sports, entertainment and art are among the organisations attracting the highest levels of membership in the Baltic countries.⁹⁵ In Latvia, organisations related to sports and culture, religion, and to a minor extent, youth, are enjoying a growing level of public participation. On the other hand, trade unions, environmental organisations, community activities, and social associations are not experiencing an increase in their levels of membership.⁹⁶ In Russia, environmental and social public issues are likewise only supported by 2-3% in terms of public participation, whereas youth and sport clubs capture citizens' primary interest. Different from the trend found in the Baltic countries is, however, the low interest citizens have in participating in religious activities.⁹⁷

The tendency to involve ones' self in organisations that meet one's personal interests whether in the form of sport, religion, entertainment or the like, is not a reality isolated to the just-mentioned countries. In the Scandinavian countries, a large proportion of the citizens' membership is related to personal needs and interests. In Denmark, 71% are members of an organisation that looks after their primary economic interests. On the other hand, and in contrast to the trends found in the Baltic countries and Russia, almost half of the Scandinavian population is involved in political or humanitarian organisations.⁹⁸

Summary of associational membership

The level of associational membership varies a great deal between countries in the region – that is, from about 20% in Russia to about 90% in Denmark and Sweden. The gap in voluntary involvement is perhaps not unforeseen in the light of the societal transitions and political histories that characterise region. The development

⁹³ Sources: Denmark, Eastern & Western Germany, Finland, Norway and Sweden: The CID project, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia: World Value Survey

⁹⁴ Ozolina 2001: 9

⁹⁵ Ozolina 2001: 9

⁹⁶ Rosenwald 2005: 152-153

⁹⁷ www.democracy.ru

⁹⁸ Goul-Andersen 2004: 106

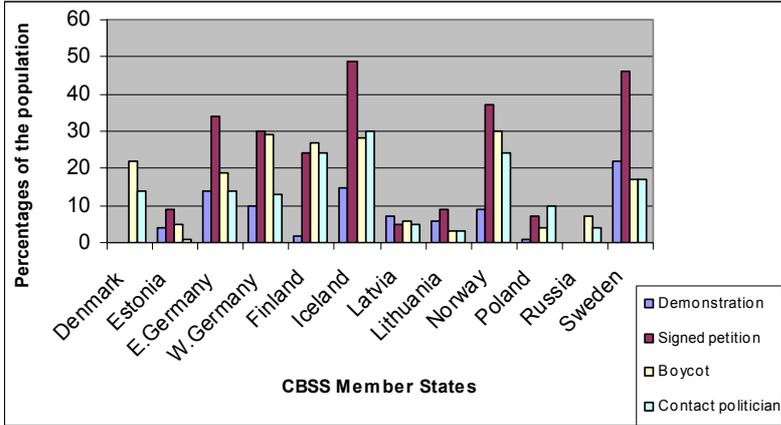
towards greater levels in citizen engagement is also visible. In a number of countries, the participatory level falls when citizens' engagement is measured in terms of active engagement, and not solely as membership.

Trade unions constitute a major share of citizens' memberships in associations or organisations, followed by other memberships that relate to individual needs and interests. This is the case when speaking about membership in sports and culture clubs, as well as associations that work to protect private economic interests.

3.3.2 Other forms of participation

Participation takes many forms. Demonstrations, signing petitions, boycotting goods, and contacting politicians are among the more unconventional forms. These unconventional forms of participation often take place on an ad hoc basis and are engaged by citizens in the Baltic Sea region who aim to make a statement about some political issue. What is also interesting about these forms of participation is that they change, to some degree, the pattern of participation, which was found in the previous categories.

Figure 17 - 3.3.2 Unconventional forms of political engagement ⁹⁹



The overall pattern illustrated by this figure is that the Nordic countries and Germany are still fairly active when it comes to less conventional channels of political participation. Compared to the Baltic countries, Poland and Russia, the differences are clear – especially when it comes to the signing of petitions and contacting

politicians, the Nordic and German countries are at the forefront. The percentage level of citizens who sign petitions is especially remarkable in Sweden and Iceland. Iceland also has the region's highest level of citizens who make an effort to contact politicians. Because of the comparatively small size of Icelandic society, the distance or gap between citizens and politicians is naturally very limited. The channels that must be activated in order to get in touch with politicians may for the same reason also be more informal than what is found in larger countries. Given Iceland's strong tradition for citizen participation in general – as was seen in the case of Icelandic citizens' level of membership in both political parties and other organisations – this may partly explain the high level of unconventional participation. It is also useful to bear in mind that in a small community such as Iceland, 300 signatures on a petition would easily in this area be visible statistically, whereas in Poland and Germany, this would not be the case. These proportionalities are vital to consider when comparing percentages.

A development that stands out from the general picture is that participation in Eastern Germany has caught up with its Western counterpart, with regard to these more

⁹⁹ Sources: For Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania: Ozolina, for Denmark, Norway: CID, for Germany, Finland and Poland: ESS, for Sweden: Regeringens skrivelse (Skr2003/04:110), for Russia: CESSI institute

unconventional forms of participation. In terms of petition signing, levels are even higher than those, which are found in Western Germany and Finland. In terms of contacting politicians, Eastern Germany is at the same level as Western Germany and Denmark, and almost reaches the same level as Sweden.

Another tendency that distinguishes this form of participation from more conventional ones is somewhat in line with the Eastern German example. A gap in participation does indeed exist in absolute numbers, but the extent of differences between the Nordic countries and the Baltic countries is relatively smaller than when they are compared in other categories. Where the Scandinavian countries and Iceland displayed a level of organisational membership ranging close to or over 90%, the tendency to make use of the more unconventional means of participation is generally a lot lower. In particular, the level is beneath 30%, with the exception of the category on signing petitions.

Citizens in the Baltic countries, Poland and Russia also make less use of the unconventional means in general. However, the difference in participation (from membership in organisations), is not as strong as it is in the Nordic countries. In this sense, the CBSS Member States move closer to each other in terms of participation when it comes to, for example, demonstrations. One explanatory factor for this could once again include the impact of societal transformations. Additionally, and as touched upon several times, the Nordic countries are by tradition organisation-minded. Influence and interests have been represented through participation in organisations and associations to a relatively satisfactory extent.

In the Baltic countries, Poland and Russia, where the tendency to become involved in organisations is not yet a main interest or influential channel for most people, unconventional means of participating can be a way to make a statement here and now. This is also related to the character of the participation required. To sign a petition and take part in a demonstration requires one's participation during the exact minutes or the hour the activity is carried out. Of course, it can be rooted in a deeper involvement, but the act in itself is not long-term or binding. Likewise, boycotting certain goods is an activity that is carried out in one's private sphere. Making use of unconventional means of participation thus indicates that the lower level of participation in organisations in some countries does not reflect, per se, an attitude of indifference.

Another interesting dimension is, of course, the question of who actually chooses unconventional channels of influence. One assumption could be that youth, which for the most part proved to be the least active group in organisations and political parties, is more active when it comes to unconventional political participation. This is the case in Sweden, and to some extent in Finland and Estonia, however there is no real pattern, which can be identified in this field. In Finland, young citizens almost 10% more often than the average population sign petitions.¹⁰⁰ This is also the case in Germany,¹⁰¹ and to some degree in Estonia, where young people use this channel more than the average population.¹⁰² Also, with regard to boycotts, demonstrations and contacts with politicians, Finnish and Estonian youth are either on the same level as the average population or more active. German and Danish youth do not follow this trend, but tend to be a little less active than the average population. The Danish youth is especially reserved when it comes to contacting politicians. The average of

¹⁰⁰ Paakkanainen 2005: 21

¹⁰¹ Wächter 2005: 21

¹⁰² Taru 2004: 15

14% hides the age gap that only 6% of people under the age of 30 have used this channel of influence, in contrast to 23% in the age group of 40-49.¹⁰³

Gender differences within the youth category display no general tendencies in the region. In Finland, there exists a wide gender-gap from 39,2% to 27,6%, in favour of women in the area of signing petitions.¹⁰⁴ The situation is similar in Germany, where the gap is 47,2% to 36,1%.¹⁰⁵ The pattern is the opposite in Sweden and Estonia, where young men are more likely to contact representatives than young women are.¹⁰⁶ Young Swedish women, on the other hand, exceed their male counterparts in the area of demonstration-based activity.¹⁰⁷

Summary of unconventional participation

The Nordic countries and Germany are still fairly active as compared to the Baltic countries, Poland and Russia, when it comes to less conventional channels. However, this gap is relatively smaller than in the previous categories. Eastern Germany has caught up with its Western counterpart, as well as some of the Nordic countries, in these forms of participation. There is no real pattern to identify as regards the youth participation. In Finland and Estonia, and in some cases Germany, youth exceeds the participatory level of the average population, whereas in Denmark, young people display a notably lower level of participation.

¹⁰³ Goul-Andersen 2004: 200

¹⁰⁴ Paakkanainen 2005: 21

¹⁰⁵ Wächter 2005: 22

¹⁰⁶ Taru 2004: 15

¹⁰⁷ Regeringens skrivelse (Skr. 2003/04:110): 5.3.1

Chapter 4: Initiatives and experiences in the CBSS Member States

4.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, comparisons of citizens' participation at different levels of decisions-making processes in the Baltic Sea region were provided. This was done with the overall objective to provide insight about the different levels of participation, including where similarities and differences between the CBSS Member States exist. Given that this study is meant to serve as a basis for the exchange of knowledge, the promotion of mutual understanding, and to also take note of the lessons learned in the region, one other angle in examining citizens' participation is, however, also relevant to take. This angle is the extent to which political initiatives are taken to enhance citizens' participation and the lessons learned within the scope of politically initiated programmes, projects and other democratic innovations.

Most present-day democracies aim to enhance citizens' participation. The language of policy documents reflects this by frequently referring to concepts like 'active citizenship', 'partnership', 'democratic engagement' and so on. In Baltic Sea countries, political priorities meant to enhance citizens' participation follow this tendency. Some countries, for example, Sweden and to some extent Finland, have formulated entire policies that are directly targeted towards securing and deepening citizens' involvement in political decision-making processes. These policies entail numerous concrete projects and programmes. Other countries, like Latvia, have adopted strategies for developing civil society. Also, CBSS Member States that have not adopted overall policies or strategies, have specific projects and programmes, which concretely aim to increase and deepen citizens' participation or simply increase awareness of political processes and encourage participation in public life.

This chapter presents some of the different efforts, which are being undertaken in CBSS Member States. The presentation is carried out with a view to provide a picture of the different democratic innovations taking place in the region. In this way, it is consistent with the general aim of the study, which is to provide knowledge and take note of lessons learned. This chapter is based on contributions provided by the members of the CBSS Working Group on Democratic Institutions. It strives only to present examples, and therefore, does not claim to cover the vast territory of democratic innovations in the region. On the other hand, the chapter aims to include examples from as many different angles as possible. This also implies that the examples contained herein are very different in character, as some are portrayed more generally, while others are described in more detail. They are not meant to be examined in a comparative fashion as the findings in the previous chapter. Accordingly, the chapter is structured around the following categories:

- **1. Projects/experiments initiated by the government with the view to improve participation**
- **2. Initiatives to increase awareness of political processes and encourage participation in public life.**
- **3. Improving representative structures to increase and invite higher levels of participation.**
- **4. Programmes initiated to address the issue of more participation in between elections.**

These categories are all relatively broad and most of them can be approached from different angles. Since most democratic innovations are targeted towards several goals, many of the programmes and experiments presented from the region are also covering more than one of the above categories. For example, the policies which aim to secure and deepen citizens' involvement in the political decision-making processes naturally include concrete projects, improvements to the structure of representation, and an attempt to increase participation in between elections. The categories are therefore meant to guide the chapter's structure, rather than limit and divide the democratic innovations into a fixed framework.

1. Projects/experiments initiated by the government with the view to improve participation

These innovations aim to increase participation both at elections and in-between elections through concrete measures or strategies. The tools and approaches employed to achieve these goals can be very different.

4.1 Estonia

Innovations to engage citizens in the decision-making process through the use of information technology have proved to be successful in Estonian society. Especially the experiences with the Estonian initiative TOM (Today I Decide) have gained great interest not only in Estonia but also internationally. In short, TOM is an electronic tool for public participation.

This Estonian government's e-democracy portal was launched 5 years ago, in June, 2001, by the Estonian Prime Minister at that time. The political will to "make it happen" was important in overcoming the only major obstacle to TOM - scepticism about whether it was worth trying.

The goal of the Today I Decide system is to increase public involvement or public participation in the state's decision-making processes. It is possible to submit ideas, guidelines and thoughts, and to comment on the submission of others, as well as on the draft Acts elaborated in Ministries.

Since its launching in 2001, TOM has been used actively by people to submit their ideas and raise different issues. Today, TOM has more than 6500 users and approximately 5-10 ideas are submitted to the portal every month.

Which possibilities does TOM offer?

It is possible to submit ideas, guidelines and thoughts, and to comment on the submission of others, as well as on the draft Acts elaborated in Ministries during their drafting stage. In broad terms, the process may be divided into different stages – from the submission of an idea during an on-line debate, to voting and its implementation.

After voting, the idea/proposal moves to an appropriate governmental institution for proceedings, meaning that the proposal is directed to the ministry dealing with the area it is relevant to. According to the Public Information Act, the state agency has one month to submit a reasoned answer. Afterwards, the answers are published in the portal.

TOM is run by the Estonian government. The agency maintaining it is the State Chancellery, which is a department encompassing the Prime Minister's Office and is not under the control of any ministry. One of the responsibilities of the State Chancellery is to coordinate cooperation between ministries and to keep the public informed about the activities of the government. This organisational setup meant that it was logical to place TOM under the control of the State Chancellery, as the ideas sent to the portal need to be forwarded to different ministries and government departments.

New central public participation website

Though TOM is currently under improvement, a long-term perspective is to merge TOM with a new central public participation website. The State Chancellery is already making efforts to outline the specification of the technical solution, with a view to publicising the site during the year 2006. The purpose of this central participation website is to assemble all information about public participation in Estonia available from different sources, so that interested parties will be able to find information from a single source base.

Concerning future development, the State Chancellery would like to offer the possibility to, for example, ministries that do not have their own e-participation environments to conduct online consultations (e-consultations) through new central public participation site. Similarly, the Chancellery could offer the possibility for NGOs to raise, for example, an expert discussion on some topic through the use of the same site. Likewise, the State Chancellery would like to see this website as a central e-tool and information source for NGOs as well as for the government and certainly for individual citizens.

4.2 Latvia

A different approach to government-initiated programmes that are intended to improve citizens' participation has been taken by Latvia. In this case, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted a government programme aiming to improve citizens' participation in various fields in March 2005. This programme, "*Strengthening of civic society, 2005 – 2009*", reflects the state's overall policy in the field of civil society. One of the sub-goals of this programme is to promote the participation of inhabitants in decision-making processes at regional, national and EU levels.

Representatives of NGOs participate in the meetings of State Secretaries, which respectively ensure NGOs' involvement in the process of law elaboration and approval. The State Chancellery has published a handbook for NGOs on society's

participation-related opportunities. In summer of 2005, the Cabinet of Ministers signed a cooperation memorandum with NGOs, wherein the principles of mutual cooperation were defined. It is also planned to sign a similar memorandum between the parliament and NGOs. Moreover, in 2004 the Latvian Civic Alliance (www.nvo.lv) was established and works to unite Latvian NGOs, represent their interests, and also provide educational, informative, judicial and, to a certain level, also financial support for NGOs.

The Latvian strategy to strengthen civil society also in some ways covers the third category of democratic innovations in that a part of the programme aims to improve the representative structures and thereby encourage more participation. In 2002, the Secretariat of Special Assignments Minister for Social Integration (www.integracija.gov.lv) was established, and is the leading institution in the implementation of the programme “*Strengthening of civic society 2005 – 2009*”. In order to monitor the implementation process of the programme, there the Council of the Civic society was also created, which consists of representatives of governmental institutions (50%) and NGO (50%).

As an essential financial tool in the field of social integration, civil society and NGO operations, the Latvian Social Integration Fund was set up. This Fund provides both national and EU funding, in order to help promote civil participation and societal integration.

2. Initiatives to increase awareness of political processes and encourage participation in public life.

These efforts can be targeted towards any political and societal level where political processes take place, and are therefore also open to very different forms of initiatives.

4.3 Lithuania

In Lithuania, different approaches have been applied through both government- and NGO-based initiatives. One government initiative is exemplified by the publication “*Decide Yourself*”. By implementing the Public Administration Development Strategy 2005-2010 (approved through Resolution No. 197 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania of 21 February 2005) the Ministry of the Interior has published the edition “*Spręskite patys*” (meaning “*Decide Yourself*”). This publication contains comprehensive information about the rights, modes and the possibilities of participating in decision-making processes at the local level. The main task of this edition is to raise awareness within local communities and increase their levels of participation and involvement in local decision-making policy.

Another government-based initiative is the Education programme “*Civic Education*”. In June 2004, the Minister of Education and Science approved this consolidated programme on “*Civic Education*” for secondary schools. The aim of this programme is to provide basic knowledge about: civil society and its function; democratic statehood; human rights and freedoms; the relation between state and individual; the principles of rule of law; to promote tolerance and raise awareness; as well as to help citizens to understand the political and administrative processes.

An example of a non-governmental initiative in Lithuania is the project “*Nebijok politikos*”, which means, “*Don't be afraid of politics*”. The main task of this project is to

promote civic participation among youth and children by providing them with opportunities to be heard, and also by encouraging them to actively participate in state, public and political life. The core of this project is the Internet website www.nebijokpolitikos.lt, where all children can express their opinions, engage in discussions within different forums, and submit inquiries to politicians about issues of concern. This site also provides information about the right to participate in public life, thus raising awareness of the political, administrative processes in the country. Presently, more than 400 pupils have already registered in this website. The project is sponsored by the EU Commission and is implemented by the NGO "Save the Children Lithuania".

3. Improving representative structures to increase and invite for higher levels of participation.

One way of improving representative structures is to initiate a project that moves the structure in a direction that is more inviting to citizens' involvement. This was for example one part of the Latvian strategy to strengthen civic society. This effect is also inherent in the Swedish and Finnish policies and programmes, which will be presented later in this chapter. Another approach includes efforts to improve citizens' involvement during the time that structural changes are being initiated.

4.4 Denmark

In Denmark, the recently initiated local government reform presents a fundamental change to the entire political structure on the local level. One of the objectives of the new structure is to fundamentally improve citizens' access to channels that enable them to influence the local democratic process. On 1 January 2007, the new local government/structural reform in Denmark will enter into force. The purpose of the reform is to maintain and develop a democratically governed public sector with a sound basis for the continued development of the Danish welfare society.¹⁰⁸ In praxis, with the reform, the 271 municipalities will be reduced to 98. Thirteen county districts will be abolished and 5 regions will be created. Furthermore, a new distribution of tasks between municipalities, regions and the state shall be implemented.

Based on the goal of securing future welfare for society, the aim here has been to construct a decentralised public sector, which can meet the future requirements and will have the clear responsibility for providing welfare services to the Danish population. The larger municipalities have therefore been granted a wider range of responsibilities.

Alongside the aim of securing future welfare, one of the other central goals of local government reform, is the strengthening of local democracy. This reasoning is based on the belief that larger municipalities can provide the basis for an improved capacity framework, where more welfare tasks are solved locally and democracy will be strengthened as more political decisions are made locally.¹⁰⁹ Following the reform, a set of local democratic principles and objectives to expand the scope of areas where citizens are politically involved have therefore been formulated as the following:

"Democracy will be strengthened as more political decisions are made locally. Efforts should be made to expand democracy so that the citizens can be more actively

¹⁰⁸ The Local Government Reform – in brief, Chapter 1. Ministry of Interior

¹⁰⁹ The Local Government Reform – in brief, Chapter 5. Ministry of Interior

involved in the decisions. The municipalities of the future should find new ways to involve citizens and users in local decisions."¹¹⁰

Another element of the local government reform, which may contribute to strengthening local democracy, is the clearer distribution of responsibility. In this way, one of the objectives of the local government reform is to create clarity and certainty as to who is responsible for what tasks. The present structure suffers from some grey areas, where the division of responsibility is unclear – especially between municipalities and counties. According to the Commission on Administrative Structure, the new division of responsibilities can to a large extent eliminate this. Accordingly, the reform will increase transparency and thereby citizens' ability to hold the politicians accountable for their actions, which is in itself an integral part of citizens' involvement in local democracy.

Finally, in exploring how the reform can contribute to enhance local democracy, a think tank was appointed in 2005 with broad representation from associations in Denmark. Later the same year, this think tank submitted its recommendation as to which issues encourage municipalities to formulate clear visions and rules for local democracy, as well as to establish proper frameworks and ensure follow-ups on citizen participation.

4.5 Germany

Germany is another example of how the changing of structures can be a tool for increasing citizens' participation. In 1999, the Federal Government of Germany adopted the comprehensive programme 'Modern State - Modern Administration'. This programme aimed to achieve greater levels of participation and social responsibility among citizens through the modernisation of public administration, by, for example, enhancing transparency and cost-efficiency. Various projects have been initiated under the umbrella programme to reform the administration and increase citizens' involvement and in achieving a continuous dialogue between the administration and society.

In this process, the distance between the state, its administration and the citizen has been reduced, in particular by using modern information and communication technologies.¹¹¹ One of the means to achieve increased dialogue has been the introduction of e-democracy initiatives, such as on-line chats between political authorities and citizens. These chats allow citizens to pose questions on a topic on-line, and all questions and answers are made available for all participants to see. Other websites, for example the Federal Parliament's website, offer similar chat sessions.

The way has also been paved for more direct on-line involvement in opinion-forming and decision-making in terms of both the political and the administrative legislative processes. As an example, draft bills are made public online at a stage in which they would, in previous years, still be treated as confidential. Through discussion-based fora, chaired on-line chats, or by commenting in e-mails, citizens are able to make individual or organised statements about planned draft bills. As a result, many suggestions can be and are taken into account during the drafting stage. Thus, more than 400 comments were received on the Draft Act on the Freedom of Information,

¹¹⁰ Agreement on a Structural Reform made by the government and the Danish People's Party

¹¹¹ Modern State – Modern Administration. Progress Report 2002: 3

when it was posted on the internet at an early stage of the process. Because of positive experience with substantive participation, the publication of draft bills on the Internet was recommended as one of several information possibilities in the new Joint Rules of Procedure of Federal Ministries.¹¹²

The government's policy practices also cover the national network for social involvement (Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement – BBE). This network was established because of the need for an accessible state that assures the required conditions for the development of a sustainable democracy. In this context, a democracy is characterised by social cohesion and citizens' involvement at all levels of society and in the public arena. The network therefore aims to promote civil society and social involvement through the joint effort of the government, social organisations and companies.¹¹³

4. Programmes initiated to address the issue of more participation in between elections

Some of the initiatives cover more or all of the categories. This is the case for Sweden, and to some extent Finland, where comprehensive initiatives cover general principles as well as ambitious programmes and more specific projects. Both countries' contributions are placed here, under the fourth category, which highlights programmes that are initiated to address the need for more citizen participation in between elections. The respective scopes of these initiatives do, however, go beyond this definition due to their comprehensive nature and focus on the improvement of participation both during elections as well as in between elections.

4.6 Sweden

Sweden has since 2002 employed a special Democracy Policy with the overall goal of safeguarding and deepening democracy. This policy entails initiatives for greater, more equal citizen participation as well as initiatives to promote human rights. In light of the challenges posed to democracy in terms of declining voter turnout, in 1998 Sweden introduced a systematic effort to undertake various national initiatives to promote democratic development.

The first measure to safeguard and enhance democracy was initiated in the spring of 2000 and consisted of a two-year development programme entitled *Time for Democracy*. The aim of this programme was to enhance citizens' awareness of the democratic process and therefore promote their participation, particularly at election time. One concrete aspect of this initiative was the provision of financial support in the form of grants for democracy development. Close to 142 projects were granted support. These projects were, for example, concerned with: finding new ways to increase the knowledge about and understanding of Swedish democracy; the use of Internet as a means to increase participation; as well as new forums for debates and discussions between politicians, citizens and citizen-based organisations. Additionally, the democracy campaign for the 2004 European Parliamentary elections was launched in an effort to increase participation in European politics and to stimulate a higher voter turnout as such. The democracy campaign was divided into two main activities: 1) a metropolitan campaign and 2) a youth campaign. As both of

¹¹² Modern State – Modern Administration. Progress Report 2002: 66

¹¹³ Eva Wisse: Promoting democracy – An international exploration of policy and implementation practice: 36. Published by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, Department of Constitutional Matters and Legislation.

these initiatives were evaluated, the outcome indicated that, among other things, the initiatives indeed created better possibilities and an increased interest and engagement in issues of democracy among the participants.

A new phase of the government's long-term effort to enhance Swedish democracy was launched on 8 February 2006. This entailed a programme called *Participating Sweden*, which is focused on fighting marginalisation and promoting civic participation. The programme duration is from 2006 to 2009. Experiences and evaluations from the previous programmes have been implemented in this program, with a view to assuring both improvements and continuity. *Participating Sweden* is comprised of different activities, with the overall aim of strengthening political participation, fighting discrimination, and collecting knowledge about obstacles as well as possibilities to participate in every day life. The programme thus includes activities related to the fields of human rights and national minorities.

Evaluation, research and statistical analysis have been essential for the continued development of democracy in Sweden. This is also the case for *Participating Sweden*, as in the framework of the project, different evaluations of the activities will be carried out. Primary attention will be given *inter alia* to methods of working.

Some of the actions in *Participating Sweden* are:

More equal opportunities for participation

During the period of 2006-2008, five municipalities have been granted money to develop and experiment with different methods of involving those who do not usually participate in the political process between elections.

Elected representatives

A network with newly elected representatives having foreign backgrounds, and established elected representatives with both foreign and Swedish backgrounds will be set up later in 2006. The aim of the activity is to improve the working conditions of elected representatives that have foreign backgrounds.

Election information

The aim of this activity is to raise the awareness of up-coming elections as well as the political system in Sweden in general. Twelve communities (all with a low turnout in the latest election) have been granted money for taking part in this activity. The work is to be carried out in cooperation with local NGO's.

Deliberation conferences

The aim of the deliberation conferences is to find out what makes people participate or not participate in society, especially in the political process.

Another special measure undertaken to create greater opportunities for influence between elections in Sweden was the introduction of the initiative *Citizens' proposals*. Since 1 July 2002, municipal assemblies have been free to introduce so-called citizens' proposals schemes, i.e. the right of residents registered in a municipality or county municipality to raise matters in the municipal assembly. Children and young people will also have the right to submit citizens' proposals, as will foreign citizens who do not yet have the right to vote in local government elections. The amendment is one of the reforms proposed in the Swedish democracy bill. In 2003 the reform was evaluated and showed that between 1 July 2002 and December 2003, 125 municipal councils had introduced or had decided to introduce a citizens' proposal

scheme. In addition, the matter brought to the fora was either being considered or had arisen in just under 100 municipalities. A total of 981 citizens' proposals were tabled in the municipal and county councils covered by the study between 1 July 2002 and 31 December 2003. The subject matter of the proposals raised varied widely. The majority were more or less concerned with service related issues. The evaluation showed that citizens' proposals were handled in the same way as ordinary motions and did not entail appreciably heavier workloads in most cases. Some 10% of the 296 proposals handled by council assemblies have been approved.

Overall, the evaluation indicates, in the Government's view, that the right of citizens to table proposals in municipal assemblies is perceived as a favourable democratic reform. However, more time will be needed to properly assess its effects.

4.7 Finland

In Finland, a similarly ambitious initiative to improve citizens' participation is being undertaken. It differs from the Swedish initiative in that it is a programme per definition, whereas Sweden adopted an entire democracy policy. However, like the Swedish policy the Finnish programme covers a broad spectrum of projects.

The Citizen Participation Policy Programme was presented in 2003. This Programme is included in the Government Programme of the Government headed by Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen. The Programme aims to reinforce the functioning of representative democracy and to encourage citizen participation. The objective is to improve electoral participation and to provide opportunities for active citizen participation between elections. The programme places a particular emphasis on those groups whose participation and influence have remained low in the past. In this context, the Programme includes several projects, which cover various branches of the administration. Ongoing projects deal with, among other issues, electoral systems and voting, developing the public sector electronic feedback system, education for active citizenship in schools and organisations, citizen participation in teacher training and development of municipal democracy.

Of the finalised projects, it can be mentioned that a Government proposal on electronic voting has already been submitted to the Parliament and that this proposal is at the moment in parliamentary proceedings. The proposal suggests that electronic voting is introduced in Finnish elections. Several researches and studies have also been published within the Policy Programme. Studies have been published, for instance, on the democracy projects of the other Nordic countries, on the development possibilities of referendums in Finland, as well as on several issues within the field of education and media. More information on the Policy Programme can be found on the website at <http://www.om.fi/29396.htm>.

The findings in chapter 3 on political participation described many different patterns of citizens' participation, some more encouraging than others. In spite of the different figures for voter turnout for the respective CBSS Member States, voter turnout appears to be a common challenge in the region. Challenges to more participation in between elections, in terms of active membership in voluntary organisations, are also a reality in a number of countries. Moreover, in most countries the tendency to, for example, make contact with politicians is not alarmingly high.

The above presented examples, however, indicate that CBSS Members States in general are aware of the importance of safeguarding citizens' participation in political processes. The challenges described in chapter 3 are met by a number of different initiatives. Political and administrative structures are made more accessible for citizens, programmes are initiated to address the threat of decreasing voter turnout, technological methods of increasing participation are investigated, and efforts to make citizens' generally more aware of political processes and to encourage them to undertake initiatives to establish new political processes are made.

As mentioned in the introductory, the outlined programmes and projects etc., constitute only examples of the initiatives undertaken in an attempt to improve and deepen citizens' political participation. However, given the very different approaches to enhancing citizens' involvement in democratic processes – such as through strategies, projects, publications and overarching policies – the various experiences stemming from different approaches are valuable tools to share and take note of. As some of the initiatives mentioned above are fairly new and thus difficult to evaluate at this stage, their descriptions have been primarily based on their intent.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study has evaluated citizens' participation in the CBSS Member States with regard to voter participation at most electoral levels. It has examined political party membership, participation in other voluntary organisations as well as involvement in unconventional politically-oriented activities. To this end, the study has strived to not merely present factual data. Rather, in order to facilitate an understanding of the findings, the characteristics of the present political structures as well as the political and cultural backgrounds for the individual CBSS Member States have also been described. Insofar as available data has allowed, individual preconditions for participation related to gender, age and socio-economic and political resources have also been included.

In addition to the actual findings on citizens' participation, different initiatives to increase and deepen levels of participation have been outlined. The purpose of this approach has been to widen the scope and enhance the value of this study by highlighting some concrete measures being taken in the region – CBSS Members States can gain knowledge and insight from these shared initiatives and lessons learned.

The findings in chapter 3 suggest that citizens' participation in the Baltic Sea region shows clear tendencies as well as counter-tendencies and outstanding exceptions. The examination of parliamentary elections reflects a relatively huge difference in voter turnout from the most to the least active voting nation. During the period in question, there is a tendency towards relatively stable voter turnout with only minor declines in the Nordic countries and Germany, whereas the Baltic countries began with a high turnout followed by remarkable decreases. In Poland, voter turnout was the lowest in the region throughout the entire period. Except from the stability versus instability postulation, the findings on voter turnout provide few reasons to suggest that there is a clear division of the region into two major blocs consisting of the Nordic countries and Germany on the one hand and the Baltic countries, Poland and Russia on the other. However a certain minor division does to some extent exist because of the decrease in voter turnout during the latest general elections in the Baltic countries. Still, that is simplifying the picture and an alternative division of voter turnout tendencies into three groups, with Latvia, Finland and Germany, as a middle group is conceivable. Common for all countries in the region is that they face a general challenge in securing future voter participation.

Voter turnout during presidential elections is generally higher than in parliamentary elections. Also in this category, the trend has a downward slope. A clear pattern appears that a higher turnout is seen in countries where the president has a more influential position in the political structure, than in countries where the president has more limited or only symbolic powers. The same countries display a higher level of trust in the presidential institution than in the parliament – and especially higher than in the political parties. The assumption that voter turnout is associated with trust in specific institutions is confirmed in this context. Another possible explanation – which is linked to both the issues of trust and to the background for setting up constitutions that grant power to the president in the first place – is the tradition of strong centralised leadership, especially in Russia.

It seems that both local elections and elections to the European Parliament are perceived to be less important by the citizens of the CBSS Member States. Here, this tendency throughout the region is clear, while only very few exceptions break the pattern. In Sweden, local elections are held back-to-back with national elections, and in Lithuania, the European Parliamentary elections took place on the same day as the first round of the presidential election. These election overlaps are a part, but only a part, of the reason for higher turnout in those countries in the two elections.

Except from these two examples, lower interest in elections at local and EU levels can be explained in different ways. Local elections face lower turnout partly due to fact that local politics often deal more with administrative issues than with political principles that occupy the voters' minds. The EU, on the other hand, is perceived as being too far away from citizens' everyday lives.

Voter turnout in the CBSS Member States has been influenced by different factors. These factors have included the institutional environment, with a focus on the maturity of political structures, as well as party systems. The issue of party attachment, trust in political institutions and the extent to which citizens are surrounded by a norm of voting have also been included.

In the Nordic countries and Germany, where political structures have been long settled, political parties are more established and citizens are well aware of what particular parties stand for. In the Baltic States, Poland and Russia, the overturn of parties has been frequent and party attachment among these countries' citizens tends to be more limited. This has been viewed as one among many of the explanations behind the patterns of voter turnout.

The overall pattern in the contexts of *norms* and *trust* is that citizens in the Nordic countries tend to uphold a strong norm of 'civic duty' and a level of trust in political parties that exceeds the level found in the Baltic countries, Poland and Russia (primarily as this trust relates to political parties, however for political institutions in more general terms, the picture is not so clear). The findings also pointed to the cultural and historical heritages in the different countries as other factors that appear to influence on citizens' voter participation.

Yet a clear tendency that runs parallel to the widespread level of trust in the region is that – despite different political or cultural preconditions – support for democracy in principle is strong throughout the region.

In the context of these findings, it was also seen from the initiatives and experiences outlined in chapter 4, that some challenges are followed with a certain level of awareness from the political side. This was the case for example with Latvia's programme to strengthen civic society. One of the sub-goals in the programme is to promote citizens' participation on all electoral levels. Under the same programme, the relation between the civil and the political arena has been tied together by a memorandum of mutual cooperation between the government and the NGOs, and NGO' are also attending meetings of State Secretaries.

The level of turnout also depends on the social and political resources of the individuals. Gender, age and socioeconomic and political resources influence participation. The gender-gap has in the Nordic countries and Germany moved in a direction in favour of women, whereas indicators from Poland and Russia point to greater male participation. Young voters tend to be remarkably less active in

elections than the older generations. An exception to this trend is found in Estonia, where the youngest voters actually show a higher turnout than their older counterparts. A common trend is also that people with higher income, higher educational qualifications and higher positions in the labour market are more likely to vote than persons with the opposite attributes.

When looking at organisational membership, the overall trend shows a decline in the level of membership in political parties in all CBSS Member States. The Icelandic example with 20% of citizens being members of a political party is a clear exception. The rest of the CBSS Member States all display a level below 10%, and for over half of the countries, even below 5%. The reason for this general decline is partly to be found in the societal transformations of the countries. The essence of these transformations differs between the countries, due to the different political histories of the present-day democracies. One common challenge for all countries is, however, that political parties in the globalised world only represent one of several channels through which influence can be projected. Their ability to attract members has, in the light of this, been weakened. In the Baltic, Polish and Russian democracies, as well as in Eastern Germany, there has even been a lower level of party membership, than in the rest of the region.

In terms of associational membership, levels found in the region vary from about 20% in Russia to about 90% in Denmark and Sweden. The overall pattern shows generally higher organisational involvement in the Nordic countries and Germany, than in the Baltic countries and, especially, in Russia. As with voter turnout, explanations for these patterns are based on the different societal transitions and political histories that the countries in the region have undergone. However, developments towards a higher level of citizens' engagement in the Baltic countries are also apparent.

Trade unions constitute a major share of associational memberships, followed by other organisations that address individual needs and interests. Such organizations tend to be in the field of sports and culture clubs, as well as those related to private economic interest. Associational involvement in the region shows that, with the exception of the dominating role of trade unions, the majority of citizens choose to involve themselves in organisations that relate to their private interests or leisure activities. The individualisation of societies has, in this sense, also impacted citizens' choices concerning which types of organisations they decide to become involved in. Previously, citizens tended to involve themselves to a larger extent in organisations that were targeted towards upholding the common good. This tendency was also mirrored in the move away from engagement in political parties. However, it is not a sign of less engagement in the society as such. With widespread activity in sport clubs and religious communities, networks and social engagement is indeed secured. Yet the tendency to become involved in political organisations is still of value to the democracies, in view of the importance of including different views and voices in decision-making processes.

Unconventional ways of seeking influence are generally less popular than having associational membership. On the other hand, they are more popular than involvement in political parties. Interestingly, the gap identified between the countries within other fields of participation closes when it comes to signing petitions, contacting politicians, boycotting goods and participating in demonstrations. There is no general pattern in the region as regards young citizens' unconventional activities. Whereas the Finnish, Estonian and German youth tend to be more active than the

average population, the Danish youth display an activity level far below the national average.

The study has aimed to cover wide range of issues. For this reason, it can only point out the tendencies, make fairly general conclusions, draw attention to certain areas that may be interesting for more specific studies to focus on, and areas where WGDI's attention is needed. Based on the findings, some future areas of interest for the WGDI are as follows:

1. One of the interesting findings has been to see which level of politics and which areas citizens are mostly drawn to. Apparently, national politics catch more citizens' interest than do local or EU politics. One explanation for the lower level of interest in local politics is that the more salient political discussions are mostly taken on the national level, whereas local politics are geared more towards the practical administration of social services, education, and so forth. Also, the local level has less decision-making power. In view of this, a potential area for future WGDI focus could be to look into the role and development of local governance in the region. Local government reforms have been carried out in a number of countries in the region in recent years and Denmark is just in the process of implementing a new structural reform (in which one of the objectives is to make the new structure more inviting to citizens' involvement). Through these reforms, municipalities have become larger and have also taken on more areas of responsibility. With new issues within their domain, more political power has been moved to the local level. The potential influence this development can have on citizens' interest and motivation to become involved in local politics could therefore be relevant for the WGDI to follow.

2. Another finding is linked to the question of minorities. The issue of minorities is not included in the study as such, due to the different categorisation in the background material available. However, it was stated as an overall tendency that minorities are less likely to participate than the average population. Since one of the goals of achieving insight in the region is to map future areas for the WGDI, the finding that this issue is beyond the scope for this study is relevant in itself.

Minorities have for several reasons deserved attention from bodies dealing with democratic institutions in the Baltic Sea region. For this reason, it has been a focus area for the CBSS Commissioner in the past and is currently for the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). All Members of the CBSS, to a larger or smaller extent have minority groups. Minority groups, like guest workers, sexual minorities, people with different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, etc., are experiencing increasing intolerance and hostility. Thus, Member States of the CBSS are faced with the challenge of how to increase the level of integration and participation of these groups so that it is more equal to the average participation level. Minority rights and statuses are linked to democratic institutions. Since institutions are under constant development, these issues remain relevant. Any potential future focus on minorities in the region should avoid duplication and be closely linked to the above-mentioned organisations, which also focus on this issue.

3. There is an interesting finding on political participation among youth, which is that it is generally less likely to participate in political life in the region than the average citizen. In terms of voter participation, this pattern is most clear. However in terms of membership in organisations, youth also tends to be the least active group. Exceptions are apparent - Estonia constitutes an interesting example that stands out

from the rest of the countries. In Estonia, youth is more engaged than the average population both in terms of conventional and less conventional forms of political participation. With inspiration from these findings, youth participation, and the exchange of experiences in this field could potentially contribute to the future agenda of the WGDI. During a time when all democracies are challenged by decreasing levels of voter participation, and young citizens tend to be even less active, all countries would gain from exchanging innovative experiences on encouraging young people to take part in these processes. Based on the findings of this study, a focus on praxis's and experiences of youth participation in the region would therefore be an interesting future activity.

The findings are not least interesting in view of the approach that the Estonian government has taken in its attempt to increase citizens' participation – that is, the TOM portal described in chapter four on CBSS Member States' experiences. In the light of the Estonian example, it could be of relevance to look at the relation between youth participation and the use of information technology as a democratic tool.

4. The finding on organisational involvement is also interesting and possibly requires future attention. Except for trade unions, which account for a substantial share of membership, the most popular organisations in the region today focus on sports, religion and culture, and other issues related to individual interests and needs. Having this tendency in mind, more attention on how to approach these individual interest-oriented NGOs and how to tie them closer to the overall societal institutions, could help to increase citizens' involvement in public life. This could therefore be a relevant and interesting area for the WGDI to look into – i.e. the interaction of NGOs and the political structures in the Baltic Sea region.

The question of improving communication with citizens is also high on the EU agenda. The issue is of great importance and needs to be addressed within all CBSS Member States. There is an interest from the WGDI to continue its focus on civil society. The representative of NGO sector in each Member State could be invited to participate in the Working Group (without having a vote). There are strong signals from NGO Forum that they are very interested in the continuation of the WGDI's work, which they find most relevant. NGOs would like to have closer cooperation with the WGDI. Including NGOs in the work of the Group would be welcomed by the non-governmental sector, as cooperation with them could lead to tangible results.

Annex 1: Political Structures in the CBSS Member States

Denmark

Denmark is a Constitutional Monarchy. According to the Danish constitution (Grundloven), legislative power is held by the Monarch and the Parliament, while the Monarch through the ministers holds the executive power. Elections are conducted at the national, the regional and the local levels every fourth year. Moreover, Denmark is member of the European Union and has fourteen representatives in the European Parliament who are elected for a five-year period.

The self-governed areas of Greenland and the Faeroe Islands are under Danish sovereignty but enjoy extensive independence according to the Act on Home Rule.

National level

On the national level, the Parliament (Folketinget) is elected by free, general elections. The Parliament is a unicameral assembly composed of 179 members in an electoral system that is based on proportional representation. Of the 179 representatives in the Parliament, 2 members are elected in each of the self-governed areas of Greenland and the Faeroe Islands. The threshold for parties to be represented in the Parliament is 2 %. Elections are held at least every fourth year, and the Prime Minister can call for new elections as can the Parliament if the proportional majority votes to do so.

Regional level

On the regional level, Denmark has been divided into 13 counties (Amter) which are responsible for areas related to health, high school education, environmental cooperation, planning and day institutions. County elections are held every fourth year, back-to-back with local elections. In accordance with the structural reform, which will enter into force on 1 January 2007, the number of counties will be reduced to five larger regions with hospital and health co-operation as their primary responsibilities. A noteworthy part of the tasks previously administered by the county councils will be moved to the local and the national levels. Elections are still held for the larger regions, but the regions no longer have the mandate to collect taxes. Their activity will therefore in the future be financed by fixed state and municipal subsidies.

Local level

On the local level, the representative body, the municipal council, is elected every fourth year in general and direct elections. The planned structural reform also influences the number of municipalities (Kommuner), as the number will be reduced from 271 to 98 larger and more sustainable and capacitive units. Responsibilities in the fields of social issues and environment hitherto administered by counties will be transferred to the larger municipalities in order to move more of the political decisions closer to the citizens. Municipal activities are financed by local taxes regulated through the law on local government.

Estonia

Estonia is a Parliamentary Republic. In accordance with the Constitution (Põhiseadus) Chapter 1, § 1 Estonia is an independent and sovereign democratic Republic wherein the supreme power of the state is vested in the people. The legislative power is vested in the Estonian Parliament (Riigikogu) and the executive

power in the Government. Elections are conducted at the national and local levels every fourth year. Additionally, Estonia is member of the European Union to which parliament six Estonian representatives are elected for a five-year period.

National level

On the national level, the legislative power is vested in the unicameral Parliament (Riigikogu), composed of 101 members who are elected for four-year terms through general, uniform and direct elections. The electoral system is based on the principle of proportional representation and with a 5% threshold for parties to achieve representation in the Parliament.

According to the Constitution, the President is the Head of State and is elected by the parliament by secret ballot, based on the principle that the elected candidate must receive two thirds of the votes cast. In case no candidate receives the required majority of votes, an electoral body is convened. The electoral body consists of members of the Riigikogu and representatives of local government councils. In addition the Parliament authorizes the, by the President designated, Prime Minister to form a Government. The executive power of the Republic rests with the Government including the Prime Minister and up to 15 ministers.

Regional level

On the regional level, Estonia is divided into 15 counties (Maakond). Elections do not take place on the regional level. Each county is governed by a county governor who is appointed by the state Government for terms of five years and represents the state at the county level.

Local level

On the local level, Estonia is divided into 227 local authorities – 33 towns and 194 rural municipalities. According to the Constitution Chapter XIV on Local Government, “all local issues shall be resolved and managed by local governments, which shall operate independently pursuant to law”. The representative bodies of a local government are the councils, and elected in general, uniform and direct elections for a term of three years. The main areas of responsibility for the local government administrations are: education, cultural activities, health care, social services, transport, environmental protection and the maintenance of public facilities. Rural municipalities and city activities are financed by their independent budgets pursuant to Local Government Organisation Act and legislation concerning budgets and taxation. Councils have the right to impose taxes and duties pursuant to law.

Finland

Finland is a Parliamentary Republic. According to the Finnish Constitution as of 2000, the legislative political body consists of the Parliament (Eduskunta), through which the power of the people is vested on the national level. The Government and the President hold executive powers.

The political structure in Finland is divided into two levels: the national, represented by the Parliament and the President, and the local, represented by municipality commissions. Elections are conducted on both levels. Moreover, Finland is member of the European Union and has 14 members elected to the European Parliament for five-year term.

The area of Åland is under Finnish sovereignty but enjoys extensive independence. The impact of this structural division is that the population of Åland votes at general elections for the Parliament and President as well during European Parliamentary elections. Yet Åland also has its own political structure composed of Lagtinget, which is the legislative assembly, and the municipalities. Due to the fact that Åland is self-governed, it is also governed by its own law on local government.

National level

On the national level, the Parliament holds the legislative power and the Government, together with the President, holds the executive power. The Parliament is a unicameral assembly comprised of 200 representatives elected for four-year term in multi-member districts. The elections are carried out through a system of direct and equal elections, based on proportional representation without any threshold. However, the President may dissolve the Parliament and call for new election on initiative by the Prime Minister and through consultations with the Parliament.

The Finnish President is elected by direct election for a term of six years. The President needs at least 50% of the votes to be lawfully elected, which means that the two candidates with the highest amount of votes will go through a second election round if needed.

Local level

From 2005, the local political level consists of 432 municipalities (Kunta), of which 16 belong to the province of Åland. On this level, people are represented by the elected council, which has a size that is proportional to the number of inhabitants. Municipal elections are held every fourth year.

The main areas of responsibility for municipalities are community services, primary and advanced education, health care, and water supply. Municipalities have the right to levy taxes. The municipalities are gathered in administrative co-operational sub-regions, in order to be able to properly address their areas of responsibility. The people does not elect the administering bodies.

Germany

Germany is a Parliamentary Federation, which since the reunification in 1990 consists of 16 states. The Federal Republic rests on the Basic Law (Bonner Grundgesetz) that entered into force in May 1949 and was last amended in 1992. The Basic Law secures the fundamental right of the citizens and states that the Federal Republic of Germany is a democratic and federal state, where the power of the people is exercised through the elected political bodies.

Elections are conducted at the federal level, the federal state level, and the district/local level. Moreover, Germany is member and one of the founders of the European Union and has ninety-nine representatives in the European Parliament who are elected for a period of five years.

National level

On the federal level, the people are represented by the Parliament, which constitutes the legislative body of Germany. The Parliament has a bicameral assembly consisting of the Federal Diet/House of Representatives (*Bundestag*) and the Federal Council/Senate (*Bundesrat*).

Der Bundestag is elected by direct elections and its members elect the federal chancellor (Kansler), who forms the executive Government. Der Bundestag nominally has 598 members, elected for a term of four years. It is based on a mixed system of representation in which 299 members are elected in single-seat constituencies, while a further 299 members are allocated from state-wide party lists to achieve a proportional distribution in the legislature. This system means that voters in fact have two votes. The first vote is for a candidate in their respective state. The second vote is for a party list in the individual state. The threshold for a party to enter the chamber is either 5% or three mandates.

The Federal Council (Bundesrat) is not elected through direct elections, but composed of 69 members representing the Government of the Federal States (Länder). Legislation proposed by the Bundestag, which has a special effect on the states, has to be accepted by the Bundesrat. The President of federal republic is not directly elected but appointed by the Bundestag for a term of five years.

State level

The political system consists of a federal structure with 16 relatively independent states of which 13 are territorial states and 3 are city states (Hamburg, Brehmen and Berlin). The respective states have their own constitutions and to some extent individual electoral systems. The state Parliament, der Landtag, is a representative organ of the 16 States (Länder) and is elected for a four-year term through universal direct suffrage. The states are extensively self-governed and hold the legislative authority on issues related to culture, education, health system, police and legislation in local areas.

Regional/local level

Every state, except for the city states (Hamburg, Brehmen and Berlin), consists of rural- and urban districts. All together, the states are sub-divided into 439 districts (Kreise) which constitute the districts' authorities and in which local elections take place every fourth year. An elected council administers each district. The council appoints the executive branch on the district level, whose duty it is to supervise the local governmental administration. Primary administrative functions cover the areas of highways, hospitals and public utilities, social welfare, youth welfare and secondary schools.

On the local level, the smallest administrative unit of Germany is governed by the municipalities of which there are 13.912 in the entire Federation. The mayor of a municipality is elected through direct elections. He or she functions under 'constituencies' set up in the states, and therefore, all mayors' tasks are not identical. Overall, areas of responsibility for municipalities are typically the administration of programmes related to youth, schools, public transport and public health, and are drawn up by the state Government.

Iceland

Iceland is a Parliamentary Republic based on the Constitution as of 6 June 1944 (last amended on 24 June 1999). According to Iceland's Constitution, the Government is divided into 3 branches - the legislative, judicial, and the executive. The Parliament (Althingi), where laws are made and amended, is the legislative branch. Executive branches, such as the Ministries, Directorates and various other government agencies, carry out laws. Judicial power lies with the Supreme Court and the district courts.

The President is elected through a system of direct popular vote for a term of 4 years, with no term limit. The President's role is mostly ceremonial.

The political system in Iceland is divided into two levels – the national and the local – and elections are held on both levels every fourth year.

National level

On the national level, the power is exercised, according to the Constitution Act 1, Article 2, jointly by the Parliament and the President. The 63-member unicameral Parliament is elected every fourth year through free, general elections in a system based on a form of proportional representation. For parties to enter the Parliament, they are required to earn at least 5% of the votes. After every election, the President gives one of the parliamentary leaders of the political parties the authority to form a Cabinet, usually beginning with the leader of the largest party. If he or she is not successful, the President will ask another political party to form a Government.

A Cabinet of Ministers' remains in power until the next general election or a new Government is formed. There are currently 11 ministers and 1 Prime Minister. The ministers sit in Althingi, but if they have not been elected, they do not have the right to vote in Parliament.

Local level

On the local level, Iceland is composed of two administrative units – towns and rural districts. The local council is elected for a term of four years. In the more densely populated localities this is done through a system of a limited proportionality. In addition to these units, there are 23 regional districts or counties, and legalised associations of the rural districts forming a tier that partly provides services comparable to those which towns are also responsible for. The local councils manage the affairs of the localities and have the power to decide upon the extent to which local sources of income are used, and the discharge of local functions (insofar as they are not regulated by statutes).

Latvia

Latvia is a Parliamentary Republic. According to the Constitution (Satversme), Latvia is an independent democratic Republic in which the power is vested in the people represented on the national level by the Parliament.

The electoral system in Latvia consists of two levels – the national state government and the system of local government, which is divided into cities, regional and rural areas. Latvia is also a member of the European Union and has 9 representatives in the European Parliament who are elected for a five-year period.

National level

On the national level, the people are represented by the unicameral Parliament (Saeima), which is the legislative body comprised of 100 members who are elected by five constituencies. The Parliament is elected every four years through universal, equal, direct and secret-ballot elections, in a system based on proportional representation and with a 5% threshold for party representation in the assembly. The President of Latvia is elected by the Parliament. The Prime Minister and his Government constitute the executive branch, supported by a vote of confidence from the Parliament.

Local level

Local government in Latvia refers to a two-tier territorial division. The middle-tier government level consists of 33 municipalities, of which 26 are counties or amalgamated territories and 7 are republic cities. The county councils are not elected directly, but are formed by delegated representatives of the local governments. Among the main areas of responsibility for the middle-tier (regional government) are public transportation, health care, education, residential facilities, retirement homes and culture.

On the local level, Latvia is divided into 530 municipalities – 7 republican cities, 53 towns, 444 parishes and 26 amalgamated local municipalities. Local city, district and pagasts representative bodies are, in accordance with “The Election Law On City, District and Pagasts Councils” (adopted on January 25, 1994 with amendments passed on November 25, 2004), elected through a system of equal, direct, secret-ballot and proportional elections for four-year terms. Local representatives are responsible for electing the councils.

Among the main areas of responsibility for the local governments are water and energy services, infrastructure, pre-, compulsory and secondary education, culture, health care, social care, and the maintenance of public order. Activities on both local government levels are financed by taxes transferred to the local level from the state.

Lithuania

Lithuania is a Parliamentary Republic. The Constitution approved through a referendum in 1992, states that the power and sovereignty of the people shall be represented by the legislative body, which is the Parliament (Seimas), on the national level. Executive power is held by the Government and the President. Elections are conducted every fourth year at both national and the local levels. Lithuania is member of the European Union and has 13 representatives in the European Parliament who are elected for five-year period.

National level

On the national level, the people are represented by a unicameral Parliament (Seimas), which by its 141 members, constitute the legislative branch. The Parliament is elected on the basis of four-year term through a system of direct, equal and universal elections. Seventy of the members are elected from nation-wide party lists and allocated in accordance with the principle of proportional representation, and the remaining 71 are candidates in single constituencies. Five percent of the votes are required for parties, and 7% for party coalitions, to obtain representation in the Parliament.

The President is elected in separate direct, equal and secret-ballot elections for a term of five years. He appoints the Prime Minister, who after being accepted by the Parliament appoints the Government. The President determines the basic guidelines for conducting domestic and foreign policy and is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

Regional level

Lithuania is regionally divided into 10 counties (Apskritis) which are part of the state Government on a lower level. Each county has a Head Officer who is appointed by the Government. There is no political power within this level of the system and no elections are held.

Local level

On the local level, Lithuania is divided into 60 municipalities, each of which elects their own government through a system of universal and equal elections taking place every four years. The municipality council elects the mayor of the municipality. Among the main areas of responsibility for the local governments are police services, pre- compulsory and secondary education, health service, spatial planning, public transport, energy and environmental protection.

Norway

Norway is formally a Constitutional Monarchy. The people through their representatives in the Parliament exercise the legislative power, and executive power is held by the Government. Elections are conducted at the national, the regional and the local levels every fourth year.

National level

On the national level, the people are represented by the Parliament (Storting), which consists of 169 members. The Storting settles most matters in unicameral plenary sessions. Only when voting on laws the Parliament is divided into two houses. In these cases, 127 members are positioned in the lower house (Odselsting) while 42 members constitute the upper house (Lagting). The Parliament is elected - and cannot be dissolved - in the 19 regional constituencies by universal direct elections taking place every four years, according to a system of proportional representation. The 19 constituencies have different numbers of seats in the Storting, which correspond to their size and population. Each constituency has a reserved "additional seat". The additional seats are assigned to even-out discrepancies between the number of votes received and the number of seats in the Storting. There is no threshold requirement to achieve representation in the parliament.

Regional level

The intermediate administration between the local and the national levels is governed by 19 regional counties (fylker). Elections of representatives to the county councils take place every four years, back-to-back with the municipal elections. The most important tasks carried out by councils include those, which relate to education and roads on the regional level.

Local level

On the local level, Norway is divided into 433 municipalities, which elect their representative councils for four-year terms and through direct, equal elections. The main tasks of the municipalities are related to administering primary schools, care for the elderly, local planning and traffic issues.

Poland

Poland is a Parliamentary Republic. According to the Constitution, the supreme power is vested in the nation and shall be exercised directly or through their representatives. On the national level, representative bodies include the legislative Parliament and the President, while executive powers are vested in the Government and the President.

The political system of Poland is divided into national and the local levels, where elections are held every fourth year. Poland is member of the European Union and has 54 representatives in the European Parliament elected for five-year term.

National level

On the national level, the Parliament represents the people and constitutes the main legislative body. The bicameral Parliament is elected for four-year terms and is comprised of a lower house (Sejm) containing 460 seats, and the upper house (Senate) containing 100 seats. The President of Poland is elected through direct, general elections for a five-year term. In accordance with the Constitution, he is the Head of State, the supreme representative of the country and guarantor of the continuity of the government. The President also has the mandate to call for elections to the Parliament in extraordinary situations and to shorten its term.

Regional and local level

Local government in Poland refers to a three-tier division of government, combined with 16 administrative regions (Voivodeships), an intermediate level called Powiat (county) and the local level municipalities (Gmina). The basic political and electoral units consist of the municipalities. In accordance with the constitutional act on local self-government, elections for the legislative and controlling body - the municipal councils - are held every four years and are direct and equal. The council then elects council boards through a system of indirect elections. The local elected government operates on all three levels and appoints and dismisses executive bodies. There are currently 16 voivodeships, 373 counties (308 land counties and 65 city-counties) and 2489 municipalities in Poland.

Russian Federation

The Constitution of the Russian Federation that was ratified and approved through a referendum and entered into force in 1993, rests on the division of constitutional powers into the legislative, executive and juridical branches. The political system is divided into the federal level, the state/subject level, and the local level, with elections taking place on all levels.

Federal / national level

The legislative branch on the national level consists of the bicameral Federal Assembly, which includes the upper house (the Federation Council) and the lower house (the State Duma). The Federation Council is composed of 176 members who are appointed in the 88 Federal units according to the principle that each unit appoints one representative from the legislative branch and one representative from the executive branch. The State Duma is comprised of 450 members who are elected for four-year term and based on a mixed system of representation. Half of the members are elected in single-seat constituencies throughout the country, while the other half are elected through the proportional party list system. The threshold for a party to achieve representation in the Duma is 5%.

The President is the Head of State and unquestionably possesses the most powerful position in the Federation. According to the Constitution, article 81, the President is elected for a term of four years in general elections through a system of equal, direct and secret-ballot voting. The President is the guarantor of the Constitution and human rights and he can only be removed from his position in the case of having committed a crime or high treason. The President holds a large number of responsibilities, defines the course of domestic policy, appoints the country's Prime

Minister, and can dissolve the Government and under special circumstances also the Duma. The President also has the mandate to suggest legislation and influence the legislative process.

Federal state level

On the federal or state level, Russia is divided into 88 federal subjects, 49 oblasts (provinces), 21 republics, 10 autonomous okrugs, 6 krais (provinces), 2 federal cities (Moscow and St. Petersburg) and one autonomous oblast. The federal subjects are formally and legally equal, regardless of their various differences in terms of either territorial size or population.

In spite of the large extent of central power in the Russian Federation the federal subjects have their own constitutions or charters and legislation. They enjoy independence in conducting their internal and external policies, as long as they fulfil all necessary conditions and do not contradict the overall policy of the Federation. The electoral systems as well as the dates for elections to legislative bodies, and the sizes and powers of the Parliaments vary between the federal subjects. However, they all have their own legislative Parliaments that are elected by the people through elections taking place every four years. This assembly elects the Government, which constitutes the executive branch of the state.

Previously, the people also elected a governor (or president) to the federal unit through direct elections. Since 2004, local elections for this position have been removed and the governor is presently appointed by the President and subsequently approved by the local Parliament.

Local level

Rajon

There are two levels of municipal or local administrative units. The Rajon is the higher level and constitutes the municipal districts, whereas municipalities are the lowest administrative unit of local government. According to the Federal Law, local government election shall be conducted no less frequently than every five years. In practice, municipal council elections are held every four years in most regions according to the principle of majority electoral system. According to the new law, local elections are to be conducted either on the second Sunday in March or the second Sunday in October. Legislation on local elections is, except from this, widely regulated within the legislative framework of the respective federal units. Composition of local governments is therefore regulated locally.

The areas of responsibility for the Rajons include budgeting and taxation, public transport, environmental protection, control of municipal properties, land planning and libraries.

Municipalities

The municipalities (positioned at the lowest local level) are responsible for local taxation and budgeting, health care, local security, street lightening, housing, public utilities, local public transport, environment protection etc.

Due to the differences in the municipal capacities, the local governments are allowed to limit service facilities to the level enjoyed by the social infrastructure facilities of that individual municipality. Responsibility for expenditures of the regional and local governments depends on the delineation of property between these two government levels.

Sweden

Sweden is by Constitution a Parliamentary Democratic Monarchy. Power is vested in the people and represented by the legislative parliament (Riksdagen). The King is the Head of State, but enjoys no formal powers. The Government holds executive powers, which is accountable to the Parliament.

The political structure of Sweden is divided into the national, the regional and the local levels. Elections are conducted at all levels every four years. Sweden is member of the European Union and has 19 representatives elected to the European Parliament for five- year term.

National level

On the national level, the legislative Parliament is elected for four-year term through free, general and equal elections. The Parliament is a unicameral assembly composed of 349 members, and with seat allocation based on proportional representation. The threshold for parties' representation in the Parliament is 4% of all votes or a minimum of 12% of the votes in a constituency.

Regional level

On the regional level, Sweden is divided into 20 counties (Landsting), in which elections are held every four years. The elected councils represent the people on regional level and appoint the agencies that coordinate work. The main areas of responsibility for the elected counties include health and medical care as well as regional development and culture. These activities are financed by state subsidies and county taxes, which are regulated by the law on local government.

Sweden is also regionally divided into 21 counties (Län), the representatives of which are not directly elected but appointed by the state. These county administrative boards act as state representatives on the county level and work to ensure that national goals in different policy areas are articulated at the county level. Within the scope of their responsibilities, administrative boards address social issues and regional planning.

Local level

On the local level, Sweden is divided into 290 municipalities in which elections are conducted every four years back-to-back with both national and regional elections. The local government's areas of responsibility include pre-, compulsory and upper and secondary education, care for the elderly, energy and planning, and building. The Constitution gives the local authorities the right to levy taxes in order to finance the tasks carried out at their level.

Annex 2: Legislation and praxis on founding of political parties

	Where and when to register	General requirements for registration of a political party:	Documents required for registration of a political party:	Who can found a political party Anyone who is:	Age required qualifying as candidate for parliament at local and national level:
Denmark	Ministry of Interior. At the latest, 15 days prior to election.	Signatures from min. 1/175 of all valid votes cast in latest general election.		18 years of age and has citizenship.	Local and national level: 18 years of age.
Estonia	Central Election Commission	1000 members	A signed platform	18 years of age and has citizenship.	Local level: 18 years of age. National level: 21 years of age
Finland	Ministry of Justice. At the latest, 40 days prior to election.	Signatures from 5000	Party program incl. goals and activities	18 years of age and has citizenship.	Local and national level: 18 years of age.
Germany	Registration required			18 years of age and has citizenship.	Local level: 18 years of age National level: 25 years of age
Iceland	Ministry of Justice	Signatures from 300 supporters		18 years of age and has citizenship.	Local and national level: 18 years of age.
Latvia	Central Election Commission	200 members	Electoral deposit, returned if parliament threshold is passed	18 years of age and has citizenship.	Local level: 18 years of age. National level: 21 years of age
Lithuania	Register of Legal Persons, within 6 months of the adoption of the charter. The Ministry of Justice confirms the validity of presented documents and the consistency of the political party's charter and programme with the laws of the Republic of Lithuania.	1000 members Consistency with the laws.	Charter, programme, minutes from the constitutive meeting, the list of the founders, samples of the party's symbols, flags, certificate regarding the grant of the place for party's residence and other information.	18 years of age and has citizenship.	Local level: 18 years of age. National level: 25 years of age.
Norway	Register of Political Parties	5000 signatures		18 years of age, and has citizenship or min 10 years of residence in the country.	Local and national level: 18 years of age.
Poland	Registration required	Chamber 1: 5000 signatures of voters permanently residing on the territory of a constituency for a constituency list of candidates Chamber 2: 3.000 signatures for each candidate submitted by an election committee of a party or of voters.		21 years of age and has citizenship.	National level: Chamber one: 21 years of age. Chamber 2: 30 years of age. Local level: 18 years of age.
Russia	Ministry of Justice	Chamber 1: 200000 signatures max 14.000 per subject, 10.000 members. Chamber 2: Members are appointed by each subject.	Electoral deposit. Regional branches in minimum half of the 88 subjects.	18 years and has citizenship.	Local level: 18 years of age. National level: 21 years of age.
Sweden	No registration is required. Possible to register voluntarily to protect the party's name from improper use.			18 years of age and has citizenship.	Local and national and local level: 18 years of age.

Sources: The information for this table is found partly in the EPIC-project: Election Process Information Collection, which is a joint endeavour IDEA, UNDP and IFES and partly from national electoral laws and constitutions.

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