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*How to Deal With the Rotten Apple in the Basket?*  
Exploring Membership Suspension in Regional Councils of the  
Baltic Sea and the Arctics

MA Thesis

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## **Declaration of Authorship**

I, Willi Stieger, Personal Code: 39702030062, confirm that I wrote the paper independently. There is no plagiarism in the paper, and every external source and idea used in this paper is appropriately referenced.

The volume of the paper is 97 pages, including the title page, table of contents, abstract, main part of the paper, and references. The word count of the main part of the paper is 26,144 words.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Stieger', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Willi Stieger 15.05.2023

## **Abstract**

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Regional Councils (RCs) in the Baltic Sea, Barents Sea, and Arctic region suspended Russia's membership. These are only three instances of an overall increasing use of membership suspension as a means of dealing with non-compliance among member states in International Organisations (IOs). Given their relatively high costs and the lack of scholarly evidence indicating that suspensions have an accountability impact, this growing application is puzzling, posing the central research question of why the member states of the three RCs suspended Russia. To answer the question, the thesis adopts an exploratory approach to identify factors determining the decision to suspend. This is done by conducting empirical research on membership suspension in the context of three regional soft law organisations — the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, and the Arctic Council. Conceptually, the study relies on existing literature on membership suspension. For theoretical guidance, the state's decision to suspend is assumed to follow a logic of appropriateness or consequences. Drawing on empirical data from 12 expert interviews, the presence or absence of one or the other logic will be analysed along indicators, reflecting factors and considerations that motivate states to suspend. Since the research goal is to come up with more general explanations as to why IO member states suspend a non-compliant, the results have been compared across the three cases to ensure more generalisable findings. The thesis finds that the logic of appropriateness prevails in the RC member states' decision to suspend. Furthermore, three explanatory indicators, namely cohesive identity, international symbolism and severity, have been explored, which deliver more widely applicable explanations of why IO members suspend. These findings bring more clarity to why states suspend and to understand the ongoing developments in the three RCs.

**Keywords:** Regional Organisations, Non-Compliance, Sanctions, Suspension, Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), Arctic Council (AC), Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC)

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## Abbreviations

AC	Arctic Council
AMAP	Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AU	African Union
BEAC	Barents Euro-Arctic Council
BRC	Barents Regional Council
BSPC	Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference
BSSSC	Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Co-operation
CBSS	Council of the Baltic Sea States
CoE	Council of Europe
CSO	Committee of Senior Officials
EUSBSR	EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
HELCOM	Helsinki Commission
HoO	Head of Organisation
EC	European Commission
IO	International Organisation
LAS	League of Arab States
NCM	Nordic Council of Ministers
RAIPON	Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North
RC	Regional Council
UBC	Union of the Baltic Cities

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*How to Deal With the Rotten Apple in the Basket?*

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**Exploring Membership Suspension in Regional Councils of the  
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## **Introduction: About the Rotten Apple in the Basket**

In recent years, International Organisations (IOs) have increasingly faced the challenge of dealing with non-compliance among their member states. This trend has been particularly evident since the 2000s, as organisations such as the African Union (AU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the League of Arab States (LAS), or the EU have searched for effective sanctioning instruments to ensure compliance to their organisational norms and principles (Hardt&Sasley, 2018: 160; Schembera, 2021: 531). However, while various methods have been proposed to encourage compliance and deal with *the rotten apple in the basket*, membership suspension is one instrument that receives increasing attention.

Suspension of non-compliant members as a mode of IO sanctioning is a recent phenomenon, and research on it remains limited. Publications primarily focus on the relationship between suspension and compliance (see Sohn, 1964) as well as different forms and designs of suspension rules in international law (see Magliveras, 1999; Hardt&Sasley, 2014). Others focus on their effectiveness (see Steininger, 2021) or compare suspension applications in different IOs (see Osieke, 1979; Hellquist, 2014; Dzehtsiarou&Coffey, 2019; Schembera, 2021). However, there are only a few in-depth analyses of specific cases examining the objectives and motivations behind suspending a non-compliant (see Hardt&Sasley, 2018; Borzyskowski&Vabulas, 2019). This leaves room for improvement and offers a chance to depict and evaluate the phenomenon in the present-day context.

Indeed, membership suspension as a means of punishment has become more prevalent in practical applications only in recent times. For example, cases of applied use are Syria's suspension from the LAS in 2011 and the AU against Egypt in 2013. However, the most prominent example is the Council of Europe's (CoE) sanctions against Russia after violating international law by annexing the Crimean peninsula in 2014 (Dzehtsiarou&Coffey, 2019). These practical examples show that membership sanctions are an increasingly important mode of sanctioning that deserves further investigation.

Moreover, the topic has been brought back to the forefront of the policy agenda after Russia's violation of the basic principles of international law through its unprovoked and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine in February 2022. IOs that Russia is or was a member of have responded differently to the norm break. This illustrates that the use of membership sanctions

as a means of ensuring accountability varies significantly. To illustrate, while the OSCE did not respond, the CoE excluded (CoE, 2022), the UN rhetorically condemned (UN, 2022a), and its Human Rights Council suspended Russia as a member state (UN, 2022b).

Comparable dynamics and reactions can also be seen at a more restricted regional level in cooperation structures, including Russia. The scientific literature on comparative regionalism highlights the region as an essential level of analysis next to the international and national perspective (Börzel&van Hüllen, 2015; Hellquist&Palestini, 2021: 439). Moreover, the region represents a new field for the application of sanctions, in which regional organisations play a crucial role, “transforming the international playing field of sanctions in ways that require systematic analysis“ (Hellquist, 2014: 7). Examining suspension in this environment allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. Furthermore, by comparing regions and their characteristics and dynamics, it is possible to identify commonalities and differences in the factors determining the decision to suspend.

Therefore, this research contributes to debates within research on IO sanctioning and comparative regionalism. It adds three case studies and a comparative regionalist perspective of the Baltic-, Barents Sea, and Arctic regions to the research on membership suspension. Three primary intergovernmental institutions in these regions are the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), and the Arctic Council (AC). They are regional soft law organisations established based on the principle of international law (Koivurova&Rosas, 2018). With its invasion of Ukraine, Russia has violated these fundamental principles, which is why the states decided to suspend the non-compliant.

However, the increasing use of membership suspension within IOs is puzzling regarding two aspects: On the one hand, scholarly literature does not identify an apparent effect of this policy instrument, meaning that “there is a lack of evidence indicating whether suspensions have a true accountability impact“ (Hardt&Sasley, 2018: 330). On the other hand, scholars agree that although the political costs of implementing membership sanctions are lower than those of military or economic ones, they remain considerably high, making this vague undertaking also costly (Steininger, 2021: 540). Thus, the decision of whether to keep the *rotten apple* inside or suspend is not a simple one, which raises the central research question:

*Why did the three RCs suspend the Russian Federation?*

To answer the research question, the thesis adopts an exploratory and case-based research approach. Three cases of regional soft law organisations are studied, providing an opportunity to gather original empirical insights into the member states' reasoning behind membership suspension. As the first piece of scientific literature examining the RCs regarding membership suspension, the thesis adds original data to the databases of post-Cold War incidences of suspension (Hardt&Sasley, 2018; Borzykowski&Vabulas, 2019).

The research objective is to find out why IO member states suspend non-compliant members. Therefore, it is theoretically assumed that the state's decision to suspend follows a logic of appropriateness or rational choice. To each logic, theory-based indicators are applied. They reflect factors influencing the state's assessment of what is deemed "appropriate", such as identity, legitimacy and symbolism, or "rational", such as geopolitical considerations and cooperation gains and losses. Empirical data is gathered by conducting in-depth expert interviews with key decision-makers across the three Councils to explore which indicators are present and which logic of action is at play. In a subsequent step, the results will be compared across the cases to produce more generalisable findings.

The thesis finds that the logic of appropriateness prevails in the states' decision to suspend. The members of all three RCs took a moral stance and considered it "appropriate" to stop cooperation with Russia. Three explanatory indicators have been explored, which deliver more widely applicable explanations of why IO member states suspend. In light of the research results, states suspend if a cohesive identity is at stake, they want to express symbolic international disapproval, and the background condition that the norm break is perceived as "severe" is given. Additionally, the thesis finds that differences in the Councils' concrete application of "suspension of membership" can be explained by varying cost-benefit calculations.

The thesis proceeds as follows. It starts by defining the primary concepts of the research before utilising existing research and theory to propose theoretical assumptions on why IO member states suspend. Afterwards, the methodological choices will be discussed and justified. The third chapter will apply the theoretical and methodological frameworks to investigate the reasoning behind membership suspension. Therefore, three within-case analyses will be conducted before adding a comparative perspective. Eventually, a conclusion will be drawn, the research questions will be answered, and an outlook will be given.

# **1. Theoretical Framework: IOs Sanctioning of Norm-Violation**

This chapter will set out the primary theoretical concepts of the study, which are located in the broader field of IO sanctioning. The first part will investigate how the concept of suspension of membership from IO relates to and distinguishes from other related concepts, such as expulsion or shaming techniques and how it has been applied so far. Afterwards, a theoretical framework is developed to identify explanations of why IOs sanction non-compliant behaviour and what logic and factors drive their decision. Thus, theoretical assumptions and arguments that may answer the thesis' research question are developed, eventually leading to an expected outcome of the research.

## **1.1 Conceptualisation: Suspension of Membership as a Tool to Sanction Norm-Violating Behaviour**

The issue of finding appropriate responses to state misbehaviour poses a complex challenge in the realm of international relations. Given the anarchic nature of the global system, responding to state non-compliance and violations of international law and multilateral obligations is often limited. However, one option that got considerable attention are *sanction measures*. In their various enforcement forms, from economic sanctions to more targeted ones (Meissner, 2022: 66), sanctions can be considered as a possible response to misbehaviour, offering an alternative or even substitute to military and legal measures (Baldwin, 1999: 83). The UN Security Council, for example, has established 30 sanction regimes in different forms since 1966 “to support peaceful transitions, deter non-constitutional changes, constrain terrorism, protect human rights and promote non-proliferation“ (UN, 2023). Currently, the EU even has more than forty different sanctions regimes in place, some authorised by the UN Security Council while others not (EC, 2023a). Given the “variance of sanctions“ (Giumelli, 2011: 23) and their diverse range of applications, it is essential to establish a shared understanding of its conceptual framework within this thesis' context.

To start with, *sanctions* are widely used foreign policy tools in world politics employed by states and IOs to respond to perceived wrongdoings of other states or international actors (Meissner, 2022: 61). IR scholars have noted that they are often used as a way to signal disapproval of specific actions but also to encourage the targeted state or actor to change their

behaviour (see, e.g., Nossal, 1989: 303; Hufbauer et al., 1990: 7-8; Pape, 1997: 91). Following this line of thought, this thesis adopts a classical understanding of sanctions proposed by scholars such as Baldwin (1985) and Nossal (1989), but also by more recent ones such as Hellquist and Palestini, who define the term as “institutionalised reactions to norm violations“ (2021: 440). Furthermore, they are understood as restrictive measures against misbehaviour that “coerce, constrain, and signal“ (Giumelli, 2016: 40) to make a state comply with the norms and principles it violated (Galtung, 1967).

More specifically, this thesis examines the use of sanctions within IOs. The study is mainly concerned with *regional organisations*, which, despite their global membership, are confined to a specific geopolitical border (Sohn, 1964: 1416). In these institutions, the issue of dealing with non-compliant members and their unconstitutional behaviours remains complex and has been a challenge for international law for some time now (see Osieke, 1979; Steininger, 2021). Since sanctions are “relational measures“ (Hellquist& Palestini, 2021: 441), sanction mechanisms within IOs, in which states are in a special membership relationship, have some particular features. For example, in regional organisations, neighbouring states that are geographically close to each other cooperate, avoiding sanctions as much as possible (Hellquist&Palestini, 2021: 441). Moreover, there is evidence that compared to IOs, regional organisations are more likely to prioritise the “like-mindedness of their members“ (Sohn, 1964: 1416), which has also shown to facilitate more effective cooperation between them (Kelley, 2013; Schembera, 2021).

Sanctions within IOs refer to a member state’s misbehaviour against organisational norms and principles. When states of a particular region decide to cooperate and found an institution, they collectively establish a shared set of values and standards of appropriate behaviour (Rittberger&Zangl, 2003: 45). These principles are usually more or less concrete laid down in founding acts and outline the foundation for cooperation on equal terms (Kelley, 2013; Kubas, 2020). Moreover, these are the norms and principles to which sanctions within IOs refer. Therefore, as a policy tool, sanctions function as “normative signifiers“ (Hellquist, 2014: 8), highlighting norm violations and communicating the member states’ disapproval of non-compliance. Furthermore, by joining an IO, all member states accept these agreed norms and obligations, which “make it harder for targets [of sanctions] to successfully delegitimise the sender“ (Hellquist&Palestini, 2021: 441).

To secure adherence to these institutional norms, member states in IOs consider diverse options of sanctioning. These options depend on the specific outlook of the organisation and can include economic sanctions (Nossal, 1989) or more targeted measures such as asset freezes or embargoes (Bierstekker et al., 2016; Meissner, 2022). However, another mode of sanctioning norm-violating behaviour stands out as particularly intriguing for this thesis: *membership sanctions*. They are understood as an international punishment of non-compliance, “which regulate the participation of state parties in international institutions“ (Steininger, 2021: 534). Therefore, they are distinct from economic sanctions by falling within the realm of “targeted multilateral diplomatic sanctions“ (Borzyskowski&Vabulas, 2019: 140), which are principally available to every IO but also exclusive to them. Furthermore, other than mere naming and shaming tactics, membership sanctions do not simply articulate disapproval but employ formal measures to address non-compliance (Pawson, 2002). This is why membership sanctions are classified as “hard proactive instruments“ and not “soft“ ones, such as communication and judicial diplomacy (Steininger, 2021: 543).

Membership sanctions are used for various purposes. They are punitive in intent because they suspend, restrict, or terminate the state’s participation and are usually used in severe forms of non-compliance (Nossal, 1989). By drawing this clear deterring line, the functionality of the organisation (Steininger, 2021: 537) and its credibility shall be ensured (Dzehtsiarou&Coffey, 2019: 446). Furthermore, the assumption is that by interrupting diplomatic relations, which undermines a country’s international reputation (Szacawa, 2022), and by losing the benefits of cooperation, such as access to funds, the reluctant country will reconsider its political decision and possibly relent (Pevehouse, 2005: 38; Borzyskowski& Vabulas, 2019: 140-141).

The discussion about membership sanctions has a long history. This is no wonder because regulating who is a member and who not is fundamental to every IO, defining its geographic scope, principles and values (Steininger, 2021: 535). The Covenant of the League of Nations has already included a paragraph on expulsion (Sohn, 1964: 1382). However, this possibility was only used once at the end of its existence (League of Nations, 1939). Also, its successor, the UN, included the possibility of suspension in its founding documents (see Article 5). Even though this instrument has never been put into practice, many IOs, such as the LAS and CoE, followed this example and included membership sanctions in their founding documents to ensure compliance (Hardt&Sasley, 2014: 2).

However, the application of membership sanctions is a relatively new phenomenon. For example, between 1980 and 2010, Borzyskowski and Vabulas found that membership sanctions were only applied in one out of 19 instances (2019: 140-141). An example is the suspension of Greece (1967) and Turkey (1981) from the Parliamentary Assembly in the CoE because of military coups. Nevertheless, more and more IOs are resorting to membership sanctions in recent years to hold member states accountable for their commitments (see Schembera, 2021; Hellquist&Palestini, 2021; Steininger, 2021). A prominent example is again the CoE and its sanctions against Russia after the country annexed Crimea (Dzehtsiarou&Coffey, 2019) and its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 (CoE, 2022). However, also other organisations, such as the AU against Egypt in 2013 because the military overthrew the elected President Mursi, the MERCOSUR against Venezuela in 2017 because of President Maduro's repressions, and the LAS against Syria in 2011 for violence against citizens, use membership sanctions as an accountability mechanism (Hellquist&Palestini, 2021: 438). These practical examples show that membership sanctions are an increasingly important mode of sanctioning, and their increased use also reflects the growing role IOs play in international relations and sanctioning (Hardt&Sasley, 2014: 4; Hellquist&Palestini, 2021: 437).

These applications generally follow two options of membership sanctions available to IOs: expulsion and suspension (Dzehtsiarou&Coffey, 2019: 443; Steininger, 2021: 539). And there are significant overlaps between the two instruments, making a clear distinction and conceptualisation essential. On the one hand, *expulsion* refers to the permanent removal of a member state or entity from an IO and is referred to as the "most drastic [membership] sanction" (Schermers&Blokker, 2011: 932). This is because, in the case of expulsion, the non-compliant state is stripped of all rights and privileges associated with being a member, not only temporarily but for an unspecified time (Steininger, 2021: 539). In practice, this harsh form of membership sanction has rarely been used (Hardt&Sasley, 2014: 2).

On the other hand, in contrast to expulsion, *membership suspension* can be seen as a milder form of diplomatic punishment. Three criteria are important for "suspension": (1) When suspending, the non-compliant state formally remains a member of the organisation, (2) the measure is temporary, and (3) it either describes the blocking of the state's full membership rights or only individual rights and activities of it, such as the right to attend meetings, vote, or other privileges (Steininger, 2021: 539). Occasionally, the blocking of only specific rights

or activities is also known as “suspension of activities“. However, in line with other scholars (see Magliveras, 1999: 31ff.; Borzyskowski&Vabulas, 2019: 140; Steininger, 2021: 539), this thesis considers it as part of the broader concept of “suspension of membership“.

There is a fundamental legal difference between suspension and expulsion. In the case of expulsion, the membership rights and privileges are not simply terminated — as in the case of a suspension — but a whole new admission procedure is required once the non-compliant state is ready and willing to rejoin the organisation (Steininger, 2021: 539). Furthermore, a suspended member officially and legally remains subject to the organisation’s obligations, which is not the case for an expelled one. Therefore, membership suspension can be understood as the first step towards expulsion (Magliveras, 2011: 95), aiming to keep the door for a limited period open in case the non-compliant member changes its behaviour. That is why member states are more likely to answer non-compliance with suspension, which, according to Steininger, is “the most frequently employed sanctioning instrument today“ because, in the best case, it is “gradual, transparent, and accountable“ (2021: 548).

However, there are significant differences in the exact application of membership suspension. The concept does not have a legal definition and is used flexibly and voluntarily by different organisations. Moreover, most organisations do not have “mandatory or automatic procedures for the initiation of sanctions following a particular state action“ (Steininger, 2021: 540). Therefore, suspension is exercised flexibly and also voluntarily in different organisations, making the analysis of different “improvised ways“ (Hardt& Sasley, 2014: 2) in particular concrete cases essential (Kubas, 2020: 377).

In this context, it is essential to mention that this thesis deals with the specific type of informal or “*soft law*“ organisations, which are subjects with particular considerations with an even higher degree of “improvisation“. This is because the concept of a “soft“ organisation is “difficult to classify according to a comprehensive and coherent terminology, as they display a variety of institutional features“ (Koivurova&Rosas, 2018: 212). In general, they regulate international behaviour not through formal treaties but declarations, principles or memoranda, which are not legally binding (ECCHR, 2023). Additionally, these founding documents considerably differ in detail from more institutionalised ones to loose networks of collaboration (Koivurova&Rosas, 2018: 212). Since soft law refers to non-binding agreements lacking sovereignty, their enforcement mechanisms are limited (Abbott&Snidal, 2000: 439).



For membership suspension, the soft-law character of the three RCs implies a lack of an official sanction policy. However, informality and soft lawmaking do not prevent these organisations from facing non-compliant behaviour. Also informal organisational rules specify a certain expected behaviour, norms and principles, and breaking these expectations can have consequences (Szacawa, 2022). In the context of the three regional soft-law organisations, this means that the member states have to deal with the complicated question of whether and how sanctions can be imposed without a constitutional basis and an official institutional sanction mechanism. Therefore, the RCs provide special insight into member states' motivations for suspending a non-compliant, an issue that will be further explored in the next section.

## **1.2 Theoretical Assumptions: Explaining Membership Suspension**

This chapter investigates the motivations and reasons behind membership suspension from an IR theory perspective. At first, the more general imposition of membership sanctions can be approached by examining the *objectives* they serve. Suspension being one specific type of IO sanctioning, the thesis will draw from the broader international sanctions literature to discuss the objectives that sanctions generally serve. The underlying objectives have been a vital study area in the scholarly literature on international sanctions (Peksen, 2019: 636). This literature presents that the objectives for which sanctions are imposed are complex and can be influenced by diverse factors. For example, Barber (1979) and Lindsay (1986) analyse concrete cases and categorise policy goals from them. The former differentiates between primary objectives (focused on the target state, e.g., stopping the Russian aggression), secondary objectives (focused on the imposing countries, e.g., gaining domestic support for helping Ukraine), and tertiary objectives (focused on the international system, e.g., strengthening the role of international law and the UN), the weight and influence of each can vary over time (Barber, 1979: 370-372). Lindsay gets more concrete by differentiating between a broader set of five goals: compliance, subversion, deterrence, domestic symbolism, and international symbolism (1986: 153-154). However, this literature primarily focuses on economic sanctions and is not fully applicable to membership suspension because the two sanction types have different dynamics and effects. Nevertheless, more recent literature has added new cases and conclusions

on why states sanction from a membership sanctions point of view (see, e.g., Hardt&Sasley, 2018; Borzyskowski&Vabulas, 2019), which this thesis builds on.

Second, with these objectives focusing only on single aspects and leaving out the larger context of membership suspensions in IOs, a more comprehensive approach and *theoretical framework* to the reasons behind sanctioning is needed. In IR, numerous theories explore the potential for states to work together and the importance of IOs in facilitating such collaboration (Etzold, 2010: 7). Besides similarities, each theory has its assumptions and explanations regarding the reasons behind cooperation. However, this thesis will focus on two: Neo-institutionalism and Social Constructivism. Neo-realism is not considered because it does not assign a significant role to IOs in states' interactions (Waltz, 1979: 104-107). Moreover, it has struggled to explain and provide substantial insights into institutionalised cooperation in post-Cold War Europe (Etzold, 2010: 19). In contrast, the state-interest-focused perspective of Neo-liberal Institutionalism and the society-focused one of Social Constructivism offer a more comprehensive explanation of international cooperation as they acknowledge that states tend to benefit from cooperating. Furthermore, both theories allow us to develop two different assumptions on why member states of IOs sanction non-compliance.

This is because institutionalists' and constructivists' assumptions are based on two different underlying logics of action, through which the behaviour of individualistic actors is interpreted: the *logic of consequences* and the *logic of appropriateness* (March&Olsen, 1998: 949). Moreover, these different logics are also leading to different political implications. Therefore, the following two subchapters will introduce and compare both theories, examine their underlying logic, and explain *why* IO member states suspend norm-breakers. It will then expand the perspective by incorporating the broader literature on membership suspension and how it relates to the proposed theoretical explanations.

### **1.2.1 Rational Choice: Membership Suspension and the Logic of Consequences**

*Neo-liberal Institutionalism* is based on a commitment to rationalism. Like Neo-Realism, it assumes that self-interested states are the primary actors in the international arena (Waltz, 1959; Grieco, 1988; Keohane, 1984). Furthermore, these states are unitary and rational agents that pursue their interests (Keohane, 1984: 110ff.). Institutionalists are based on the assump-

tion that the international system in which these states operate is characterised by anarchy (Keohane, 1984). This is because of the absence of international sovereignty, or “common government to enforce rules“ (Axelrod&Keohane, 1985: 226). Rational states strive for relative gains in this “self-help system“ (Jervis, 1988: 322). Moreover, this competitive environment, characterised by mutual exploitation, makes international cooperation rather challenging to achieve (Jervis, 1988: 322; Axelrod&Keohane, 1985: 226).

Nevertheless, unlike realists, institutionalists recognise other independent actors in the international system besides states and emphasise the significant role played by international institutions. Furthermore, they highlight that states are increasingly interdependent in various ways, creating a shared rational interest in cooperation (Keohane, 1986: 1-2). Thus, states are more likely to cooperate when it is rational and beneficial, for example, through shared interests in specific issues, and when the systemic conditions permit such cooperation (Keohane, 1984: 97). If these issues are part of “low“, such as environmental policy, and not “high“ politics, cooperation is even more likely (Keohane&Nye, 1997: 19). However, the actual payoff from collaboration depends on the specific context and the level of uncertainty associated with the cooperative action (Axelrod&Keohane, 1985: 228; Jervis, 1988: 320).

Regarding this, *international institutions* fulfil two essential roles: avoiding cheating and ensuring cooperation gains. Institutionalists believe that international cooperation can be facilitated by international institutions, which are defined as “enduring patterns of shared expectations of behaviour that have received some degree of formal assent“ (Jervis, 1999: 53). Keohane proposed a similar well-known definition that defines institutions as “persistent and connected sets of rules (formal and informal) that prescribe behavioural roles, constrain activity, and shape expectation“ (1989: 3). Based on both definitions, states treat IOs as instruments of shared interest to overcome cooperation obstacles, such as the fear to be cheated, and to ensure beneficial collaboration. By facilitating discussions, sharing information, and creating common standards on which mutual expectations can be developed, uncertainties of the anarchic system are lowered (Keohane, 1989: 97; Jervis, 1999: 53). Like this, international institutions realise rational cooperation gains, and, according to institutionalist thinking, an IO is as long valid as it provides these mutual benefits and relative gains.

Since these cooperation gains depend on other members adequately sticking to the agreements, enforcement mechanisms are needed to ensure compliance. Membership sanctions are

one way of enforcement, preventing cheating and ensuring the mutual gains from cooperation by holding member states responsible for their behaviour. Thus, if one member state breaks the institutional rules, it jeopardises the gains from cooperation for the others. The compliant members, therefore, react with sanctions, such as suspension, to restore the benefits.

According to proponents of rationalism, such a decision and action to enforce or suspend cooperation follows a “logic of anticipated consequences and prior preferences“ (March&Olsen, 1998: 949), further referred to as *logic of consequences*. This model of human decision-making is also known as rational choice theory, and according to it, rational and self-interested actors calculate costs and benefits to determine which decision they take (March&Olsen, 1998: 949). In other words, they anticipate the consequences of one or the other alternative course of action for their interests (Keohane, 1984; 99). Accordingly, in the international “self-help“ system, self-interested states will make decisions that maximise their relative gains and power (Wendt, 1992: 392). As a result, interests are objective, and there is a logical decision-making process since preferences are given, and consequences are more or less pre-determined by structure (Jervis, 1988: 324). However, Game Theory shows that although all states would profit from cooperation, they are often unable to do so (Jervis, 1988).

The logic of consequences is reflected in the *strategic nature of sanctioning*. If institutional rules are violated, the members of an IO enact sanctions against the non-compliant (Keohane, 1984: 98-100). The decision to suspend and in what form is then based on a cost-benefit calculation of each state’s interest in sustaining or interrupting cooperation with the non-compliant. In that sense, on the one hand, suspension serves the purpose of restoring the other member states’ “[m]yopic self-interest“ (Keohane, 1984: 99) from the organisation’s functioning. Therefore, the non-compliant jeopardising the cooperation will be suspended because without the noncompliant cooperation functions better, which ensures the gains.

On the other hand, the member states only suspend if these relative benefits are higher than the costs of not cooperating. These costs are heavily influenced by the non-compliant’s weight for the cooperation and the cooperation’s objectives. According to rational choice, it is rather unlikely that member states, for example, suspend an influential member with a significant role in achieving the organisation’s goals. In this logic, the impact on the functioning of the broader international system, which goes beyond regional cooperation, and the broader global and systemic consequences of not cooperating must also be considered.

In the broader literature and research on membership sanctions, the logic of consequences is reflected in the strategic nature of sanctioning. The primary goal of member states behind suspension is to ensure their benefits from cooperation. This can be reached in two ways: First, by changing the target state's behaviour or, second, by suspending and thus ensuring mutually beneficial cooperation between the compliant members. As mentioned above, and following Barber (1979) and Lindsay (1986), different categories of objectives have been built to structure the discussion on decision-influencing factors outlined by the existing literature: target state-, domestic politics-, and systemic-focused objectives. In addition, the focus on IO membership suspension also allows for an internal organisation-focused objective, considering organisational particularities and the IO's functionality. These four categories are used as structuring devices for the subsequent discussion of existing literature.

First, suspension aims to change the behaviour of the *target state*. According to rational choice theory, they must be materially costly for the non-compliant state. These costs can be political because of the interruption of diplomatic relations and the state losing influence and reputation, but also monetary because the state loses access to funds and other benefits of the cooperation (Pevehouse, 2005: 38; Borzyskowski&Vabulas, 2019: 140-141). The objective is that the non-compliant member will change its behaviour and relent because it values the cooperation gains (Barber, 1979: 368). Furthermore, having a formal power to expel or suspend defines the *deterrent nature* of IOs, making them "the most effective vehicles for commitment, since violating the commitment comes at a high cost" (Borzyskowski&Vabulas, 2019: 140). Furthermore, the suspension serves as a deterrent signal to the other member states to follow the organisational rules and principles to avoid a similar faith.

Second, suspension achieves *organisational objectives*. Non-compliance can weaken the effectiveness and legitimacy of IOs, making it difficult or even impossible to achieve their objectives and maintain the support of their members (Tallberg&Zürn, 2019: 582). Therefore, by suspending a non-compliant, the member states aim to restore the organisation's functioning and ensure cooperation gains (Steininger, 2021: 537). However, for organisations focused on environmental and soft security issues, such as the three RCs, suspending cooperation means that environmental goals can only be reached to a limited extent and that the (soft) security structure in the respective region is at risk. Therefore, while suspension can ensure organisational functionality, states are reluctant to suspend if it is not in their rational interest.

This cost-benefit calculation, and thus the decision to suspend, can, among others, be influenced by *institutional features and particularities*. This means that suspension can be costly because of administrative resources needed to suspend a state from the organisational settings (Borzyskowski&Vabulas, 2019: 142). Borzyskowski and Vabulas highlight that suspension is, for example, more likely if an IO has suspension clauses, a low voting threshold and is of moderate size, making the suspension less costly (2019: 144). To illustrate, the soft-law nature of the three RCs implies no official sanction policy. Furthermore, since all organisational decisions in the RCs must be consensus-based, the remaining members have no other option but to respond collectively to the norm break, which poses a high threshold for implementing sanctions (Steininger, 2021: 540). Nevertheless, at the same time, their informal framework makes suspension less expensive due to the absence of bureaucracy (Hardt&Sasley, 2018: 191), and their moderate size makes an agreement easier achievable.

Third, membership suspension can follow *domestic aims*. Particularly for democratic states, it is necessary to keep the audience costs at home relatively low because otherwise, the current decision-makers could lose their power during the next elections. This is why Hardt and Sasley conclude that the more democracy-dense an IO, the less likely it is to use membership sanctions (2014: 19). However, research also shows that by imposing sanctions against an aggressor, politicians can also gain domestic support despite the costs because the people support the answer to non-compliance (Barber, 1979: 370; Lindsay, 1986: 156).

Finally, membership suspension also follows *systemic goals*. Borzyskowski and Vabulas (2019), for example, conclude that geopolitical considerations, such as alliance relationships, natural resources, and economic as well as military strength, are vital in explaining why IOs suspend some members but are reluctant to suspend others (2019: 143). Both scholars argue that suspension is unlikely when the norm violator is “geopolitically essential to the regional power or remaining member states“ (2019: 143). Hardt and Sasley add economic interdependence as a crucial decision-making factor, arguing that member states with higher levels of economic integration are less likely to opt for suspension as a punishment tool (2018: 346). In sum, if we assume member states to follow a rational choice logic, losing such politically and economically essential states would be too costly for the other member states of the IOs, making suspension rather unlikely.

In addition, Hardt and Sasley (2018) highlight one more influential factor: *great power and external pressure*. According to both authors, regional powers can heavily influence the decision to suspend (Hardt&Sasley, 2018: 200). Research has shown that regional organisations tend to have regional powers that dominate each region's politics and economics (Lemke, 2010). It has also shown that "the more dependent an IO is on the support of its regional powers, the more likely [it] will suspend if those powers demand it" (Hardt&Sasley, 2018: 200). In the Baltic Sea and Arctic regions, IOs such as NATO and the EU play influential roles. NATO primarily focuses on the state's international "hard" security, while the EU significantly influences the political and economic aspects of most member states of the three RCs. Therefore, it has to be investigated what influence external policies and a coherent policy of the "united West" had on the member states' decision-making.

Regarding this, it is essential to note that membership suspension is not necessarily an isolated phenomenon (Borzyskowski&Vabulas, 2019: 140). The regional level and sanctions imposed by regional organisations must be seen in a global context. In the case of the three RCs, the suspension is only one element of a larger package of diplomatic and economic sanctions imposed by the same states, and suspension can complement these sanction packages.

To summarise, membership suspension comes with costs and benefits. Therefore, institutionalists, based on the logic of consequences, expect the decision on suspension to reflect a cost-benefit calculus of the IO's member states, following specific rational objectives they want to achieve. In this logic, rational member states are motivated to suspend non-compliant states only if the benefits outweigh the costs (Borzyskowski&Vabulas, 2019: 142). The analysis of existing literature has shown that three dimensions can influence the cost-benefit calculation of why member states suspend: 1) overall cooperation gains, 2) geopolitical considerations, and 3) internal organisational and domestic considerations.

### **1.2.2 Social Constructivism: Membership Suspension and the Logic of Appropriateness**

The term *Constructivism* was first introduced by Nicholas Onuf in 1989, who stresses that states and individuals live in a "world of our making" socially constructed by human beings. The primary difference to Neo-liberalism is that constructivist key assumptions focus not

only on the role of material but also on ideational factors such as ideas, meanings, identities, norms and beliefs in international relations (Wendt, 1994: 385). These ideational factors are not structurally determined but result from social interaction between states and individuals (Ruggie, 1998a: 879). Therefore, they are inter-subjective, relational, and shared between different people and can even “lead states to redefine their interests“ (Ruggie, 1998a: 868). Moreover, the constructivist emphasis on norms contradicts the neoliberal assumption of an anarchical international system. Wendt states that, from a constructivist point of view, “anarchy is what states make of it“ (1992: 395). Therefore, anarchy can exist, but not necessarily.

In the constructivist socialisation process, *international institutions* are social constructions that play an essential role as embodiments of a certain shared identity. Therefore, constructivists approach IOs not in a material sense but on a societal level (Ruggie, 1998b: 53-54; Wendt, 1994: 385). According to them, international institutions are defined as “value-based communities“ (Etzold, 2010: 29) and shared ideational factors are a prerequisite for their establishment and functioning. In this sense, states establish an institution based on shared values, norms and principles, a consensus of which is defined in the founding acts. These rules and values lay the foundation of equal cooperation between states and teach them “to value certain goals“ (Checkel, 1998: 8) and follow “collective interests“ (Wendt, 1994: 386).

Therefore, Social Constructivism highlights reasons for membership suspension that would remain hidden with a solely institutionalist perspective. By emphasising norms, identities and interests, constructivists open up a “black box“ (Checkel, 1998: 326) that remains closed when only looking through the institutionalist lens. Such an aspect is, for example, change and transformation (Ruggie, 1998). According to Ruggie, identity is shaped by the social world around it, and its transformation is possible (1998: 874-876). Furthermore, ideational factors can play an essential role in explaining, for example, the logic behind why member states decide to suspend also economic and politically influential members.

This is because, according to constructivists, the decision to suspend follows a “logic of appropriateness and sense of identity“ (March&Olsen, 1998: 949), further referred to as *logic of appropriateness*. The approach goes back to March and Olsen (see 1996, 1998 and 2004) and means that states decide based on societal conditions and norms rather than cost-benefit considerations. The approach considers “the substantial role of identities, rules and institutions in shaping human behavior“ (March&Olsen, 1998: 951). Accordingly, international institutions



provide a platform for “intersubjective frameworks“ (Ruggie, 1998: 860), meaning social practices which establish “rules of appropriate or exemplary behavior“ (March&Olsen, 2004: 2). These rules are learned over time, providing stability and predictability to an IO (March&Olsen, 2004: 2). Consequently, international institutions are understood as a “relatively stable collection of practices and rules defining appropriate behaviour for specific groups of actors in specific situations“ (March&Olsen, 1998: 948)

In this logic, states suspend a non-compliant if they deem this action “appropriate“. To concretise, because states consider the institutional norms and principles as legitimate, they orientate along them to decide on what they interpret as “appropriate“ in a specific situation. However, depending on each IO, these rules can be defined more or less precisely, leaving room for interpretation. Furthermore, as international norms evolve, what is deemed “appropriate“ changes (March&Olsen, 2004: 12-13), and it can involve “cognitive and ethical dimensions, targets, and aspirations“ (March &Olsen, 1998: 951). Moreover, considerations of appropriateness may include the severity of the norm violation and the steps necessary to restore the unity of the organisation’s values and principles among its members.

In addition, besides simply surviving in the anarchic system, states have an interest in *collective self-esteem*. According to Wendt, this “refers to a group’s need to feel good about itself, for respect or status“ (1999: 236). Therefore, an appropriate action is an “action that is essential to a particular conception of self“ (March&Olsen, 1998: 951) in distinction to the “significant other“ (Wendt, 1999: 236). Consequently, non-compliance is not just about not realising the material benefits from cooperation but also about a breach and violation of the shared values, identity and principles an IO stands for. If these foundational values are violated, IOs cannot satisfy the “self-esteem needs of their members“ (Wendt, 1999: 237), which is why “the Other“, who breaches norms and creates a negative “self-image“ of the organisation, has to be suspended. Through this, a positive self-image can be secured and reestablished, satisfying the need for collective self-esteem (Wendt, 1999: 237).

Based on these assumptions, the constructivist approach can explain why states sometimes also suspend geopolitically and economically influential members, which, according to rational choice theory, would have been too costly. They would suspend influential members if the rule break were so severe that the remaining member states considered it appropriate to react with membership suspension to restore a certain self-conception. For instance, the CBSS is

founded on the shared value of adherence to international law (CBSS, 1993). If one of the members were to invade another country, this would severely contradict and undermine the organisational principles. In such a situation, it would be necessary to take severe actions to restore the organisation's sense of integrity and the norms cooperation is built on.

In the broader IR literature, scholars emphasise the before-mentioned importance of *severeness* and the "exceptional nature" (Steininger, 2021: 543) of suspension, which is best understood as a background condition for the response. According to the broader research, membership suspension is a policy tool "of last resort" (Dzehtsiarou&Coffey, 2019: 447), only used in severe crises. Such a crisis is defined as a serious non-compliance regarding the founding principles of an IO, such as an "act of armed aggression" (Dzehtsiarou& Coffey, 2019: 449). To illustrate, this question of the severity of an offence plays an omnipresent role in the case of the three RCs. It raises the question of why the organisations did not officially suspend Russia after its non-compliant actions in Ukraine in 2014 but only after the country's full-scale military invasion eight years later. It is reasonable to think that the actions of Russia were assessed according to different calculations of "costs" and "appropriateness" and that the "severeness" of the 2022 invasion was decisive. During severe crises, states want to make the punishment more costly for the non-compliant or see it as appropriate and answer the norm-break with suspension. Therefore, severeness is an essential characteristic of both logics and elements of appropriateness and consequences are reflected in it. Nevertheless, it might have different implications when considered through a rationalist lens or a constructivist lens: for the former, severity may be measured in terms of material damage. For the latter, it might be more a matter of symbolic damage.

Another factor highlighted in the literature is ideational reasoning based on a *cohesive identity*. From a constructivist perspective, the primary goal behind suspension is to secure the community's positive self-image. Regarding this, Hardt and Sasley found that IOs "that hold to a more cohesive identity will be more likely to suspend an offending member state" (2018: 203). To illustrate, the Baltic Sea and Arctic regions are *democracy-dense*, and all three RCs clearly state their support for international law in their founding acts. Furthermore, a significant part of the states is part of the EU and NATO. Therefore, among the states of the democratic West, cohesive identity and collective interest in promoting international peace and

democracy can be recognised. This leaves authoritarian Russia as “the Other“ aside (see Browning, 2003; Heininen&Puka, 2014; Korosteleva, 2019). Moreover, if this “Other“ violates the foundational shared values of the other members by invading Ukraine, a democratic country, the goal is to react appropriately and secure and reinforce the positive self-identity. The question of how to react “appropriately“ to severe breaches is closely connected to another factor that speaks to the logic of appropriateness: Legitimacy. This legitimacy concerns can have an international, regional and organisational dimension. First, external or international institutional legitimacy is an essential factor in states’ decision-making on suspension. Non-compliance to the rules and principles is not only a danger to the internal identity but also to the organisation’s external reputation (Hardt&Sasley, 2018: 180; Schembera, 2021: 532). If an IO does not react to non-compliance, Hardt and Sasley highlight that the loss of “reputation costs can undermine an organization’s interactions with other international actors and can affect internal unity“ (2018: 180-181). If non-compliance is not punished, states that do not feel bound by the agreements remain full members, and thus the values of an organisation are passively undermined. To illustrate, if one keeps a *rotten apple* among other apples in a basket, it not only affects the taste of the whole basket but also diminishes the basket’s value compared to other baskets on the market.

Consequently, an organisation’s legitimacy and credibility is closely connected to its ability to uphold certain norms (Schembera, 2021: 534). Through suspension, an IO signals that it stands for its values and actively protects them, which enhances its international legitimacy towards other global actors. Furthermore, by clearly punishing non-compliance, the initiating organisation also sends an international symbolic message to other IOs, such as the UN, expressing its disapproval of a particular regime and country (Lindsay, 1986: 155).

Second, suspension can bring about concerns regarding an organisation’s regional legitimacy. As before-mentioned, the three RCs represent internationally recognised regions and sub-regions. By suspending a (regional) member, the organisation loses its particular representation (Hardt&Sasley, 2014: 5). This means that it is unable to represent the interests of the entire region, and if they are not able to speak for everyone, then also their legitimacy and credibility is weakened. Hardt and Sasley concretise that for regional organisations, it gets harder “to demonstrate to constituents that they matter and can influence regional politics“ (2014: 23).

Finally, scholarly literature highlights the importance of internal institutional legitimacy (see Hardt&Sasley, 2014: 3; Dzehtsiarou&Coffey, 2019: 448). This is because reputation costs on the regional and international level can also affect an organisation's internal unity (Hardt&Sasley, 2018: 180-181). Therefore, by suspending a non-compliant member, an IO does not only prove to other international players that it is legitimate but also to its members. Furthermore, deciding in consensus on the suspension of a non-compliant member state not only secures but also reinforces the internal unity and self-identity of the member states of an IO by actively enforcing its values, norms and principles, making suspension a "legitimate sanctioning instrument" (Steininger, 2021: 566).

However, the remaining members can face some challenges regarding the consideration of the "appropriateness" of the response. First, there is the challenge of a *trade-off* between value-based legitimacy and organisational legitimacy. On the one hand, the decision to suspend can be seen as "legitimate" (Steininger, 2021: 566) because it follows organisational values. However, on the other hand, there might be difficulties regarding the organisational principles. The three RCs do not have a legal basis for suspension due to their "soft" nature. In principle, decisions in these organisations have to be consensus-based, which is impossible in situations of norm-breaks because the non-compliant member would disagree. Consequently, due to a lack of a legal suspension clause and the missing consensus, the decision to suspend can be considered "illegitimate" (Dzehtsiarou&Coffey, 2019: 447) in a procedural sense, which can cause internal ideational but also practical challenges among the members.

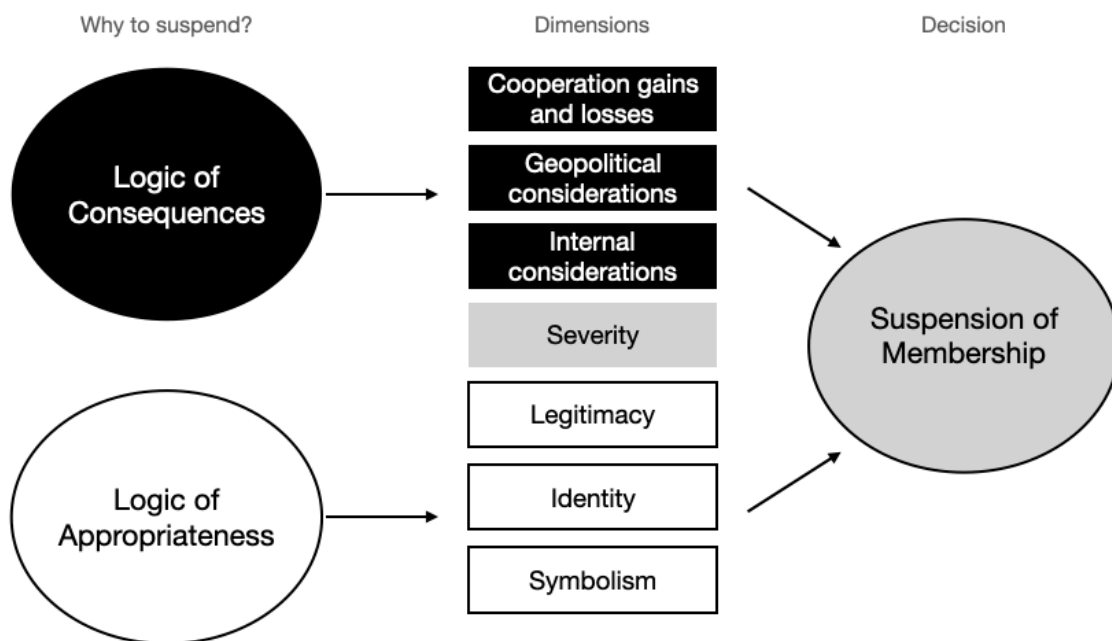
Second, regional organisations working on issues such as environmental protection and soft security must consider that the suspension of a member also means that the regional goals on these issues of joint interest can no longer be achieved. Therefore, there is the challenge of a balancing act between the credibility of the organisation's principles — interference because of norms — and the realisation of regional goals of greater international importance that can only be achieved through cooperation — non-interference because of rationality (Schembera, 2021). This link between norm and rationality is still understudied (Schembera, 2021: 532). Despite formal sanctions, it may involve creativity on the part of some member states to maintain informal cooperation in essential areas as far as possible.

To summarise, membership suspension also comes with ideational reasoning. Therefore, constructivists, based on the logic of appropriateness, expect the decision on sanctioning to re-

flect societal conditions, norms and identity rather than cost-benefit considerations. In this logic, states are expected to suspend a non-compliant if its behaviour is found not appropriate and if, to the contrary, suspension is considered the appropriate answer. Therefore, the consideration of “appropriateness“ gives insights into the factors influencing a state’s decision to suspend, such as severity, legitimacy, identity and symbolism.

Overall, after outlining the general objectives of international sanctioning, this theoretical chapter introduced Neo-liberal Institutionalism and Social Constructivism as two contrasting approaches to membership suspension. Both theoretical assumptions follow two different logics of action through which member states’ decision-making is interpreted. Based on this, two theoretical expectations for this thesis’ analysis can be concluded. First, institutionalists expect the decision on suspension to follow a rational choice reflecting a cost-benefit calculus of the IO’s compliant member states. On the contrary, constructivists expect the decision to suspend to be based on different considerations of appropriateness. These different considerations of rational choice or appropriateness are determined by concrete influential factors. As illustrated in *Figure 1*, based on the existing literature on membership suspension, three dimensions of factors influencing the states’ decision-making can be assigned to each logic.

**Figure 1:** The Logics Behind Membership Suspension in IOs



Consequently, the two theoretical assumptions deliver valuable insights and explanations regarding the cooperation between states and the question of why member states answer non-compliance with suspension. However, the picture is not black and white but grey. March and Olsen acknowledge that human decision-making cannot be explained “exclusively“ by one of the logics, but actors can be motivated by appropriateness and rational calculations complementing each other (March&Olsen, 1998: 952). Nevertheless, the thesis aims to investigate which logic dominates under what conditions in a particular situation and come up with more general explanations and factors as to why IO member states suspend a non-compliant. This will be done by gathering empirical data from three RCs in Europe’s North and their suspension of Russia, the methodology of which will be outlined in the next chapter.

## **2. Methodology**

This chapter will provide a comprehensive overview of the methodology of the empirical research that is to be undertaken to answer the research question. Therefore, in the first section, the research design will be outlined, the empirical cases introduced, and their selection will be justified. Then, in the second section, the choice of data collection methods will be elaborated on before the principles of data analysis are justified. Eventually, this chapter also refers to the study's possible limitations and methodological problems. Portions of this chapter have previously appeared in my semester work on Qualitative and Interpretive Research Methods and were adopted for this thesis' purpose.

### **2.1 Research Design: A Case Study of Three Regional Councils**

To answer the research question, the thesis follows an exploratory and case-based research approach. This indicates that the study's objective is not to establish a rigid cause-and-effect relationship between the characteristics of a regional organisation and the decision to suspend but rather openly to explore particular cases and indicate the factors that impact the member states' decision. Therefore, three case studies will be conducted to explain why members of IOs suspend norm-breakers, focusing specifically on the primary intergovernmental institutions in Europe's North: the CBSS, BEAC, and AC.

The scientific interest in these three organisations and their regions is rising. While some scholars conduct single case studies (see Wilson Rowe, 2009; Etzold, 2012; Koivurova, 2022), others use a more comparative perspective. These comparative studies investigate the three RCs according to their similar policy areas and relevance (see Mariussen et al., 2000; Etzold, 2010; Aalto et al., 2017), as well as similarities and differences in their regional cooperation (see Bailes&Olafsson, 2013; Heininen&Puka, 2014; Heininen, 2017). Others focus on their soft-law particularities (see Hasanat, 2012; Koivurova&Rosas, 2018) or the role of single states within them (see Oldberg, 2014). However, studying how these regional organisations deal with non-compliant members is a new perspective that contains insights and original empirical data, improving the overall understanding of soft law organisations.

However, despite their fairly similar setup, the phenomena of the three organisations' membership suspensions are still separate cases to study. Indeed, the RCs are relatively similar and

are also called “sister organisations” (Koivurova&Rosas, 2018: 212). Nevertheless, varying across different variables, they are not fully comparative and do not fit in one of the strict logics (e.g., most similar or different case designs) of comparison suggested by Seawright and Gerring (2008). However, approximating a comparative setup, which the three cases allow, is useful for solving the research puzzle as it produces more generalisable findings.

Therefore, the thesis has chosen an integrative analytical strategy combining within- and across-case analysis (see, e.g., Ayres et al., 2003; Libek, 2019). This strategy considers “contextual richness” (Ayres et al., 2003: 871) to produce more generalisable findings when analysing single cases. This means the insights obtained from each organisation will be compared to the other two cooperation formats allowing for research results that are more widely applicable. To illustrate, in case the thesis finds the three RCs’ responses and reasoning to be similar, these findings are much more generalisable to other comparable cases. Moreover, if differences in the responses emerge, the comparative setup enables tracing them back to variances between the RCs, identifying the decisive factor.

Therefore, to prepare the analysis, this subchapter will outline and justify the case selection. It will introduce and compare the RC’s characteristics and particularities regarding history, participation, geography, policy areas, and norms and values. All of them are relevant for analysis and demonstrate similarities and differences among the councils with regard to the variables. Notably, while the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) in the scholarly literature is often considered a fourth RC with similar characteristics (see, e.g., Mariussen et al., 2000; Aalto et al., 2017), it is not included in this study as Russia is not a member state of it.

### ***History***

First, the establishment of all three RCs is a shared history that must be seen against the backdrop of the upswing that the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought to international political cooperation. Following the end of the Cold War, there has been an increasing emphasis on regional political cooperation aimed at strengthening relationships between once-separated countries. This cooperation was built up particularly in thematic areas such as environmental protection and sustainable development (Mariussen et al., 2000: 38) and aimed to increase political stability (Heininen, 2017: 436). Accordingly, the outcome of this development was the establishment of three RCs: the CBSS in 1992, one year later the BEAC, and



finally, the AC in 1996. These Councils made the Arctic and Baltic Sea geopolitics during the post-Cold War period “one of the most successful examples of trans-border co-operation across national borders“ (Heininen&Puka, 2014: 22).

### ***Participation***

Second, in terms of participation, all three RCs have a membership overlap, an overview of which can be found in *Table 1*. Since all three Councils were established to normalise the relations between East and West in the post-Cold War period, Russia is a full-fledged founding member of all. Furthermore, a significant overlap is the Nordic states Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland, which are key players and the core countries participating in all three RCs. All six countries previously mentioned hold membership in the BEAC, giving the Council a distinct focus on Northern Europe and Russia. However, these states cooperate with varying partners in the two other organisations. On the one hand, the CBSS also includes the other Baltic Sea states, such as the three Baltic states – Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia – as well as Poland and Germany. On the other hand, besides the Nordic states and Russia, the AC includes a more global and Northern American perspective, consisting of the two Arctic states, Canada and the US. Finally, the EU — since 2011 executed by the EEAS – is registered as one of the participants in the BEAC and CBSS, underlining the “soft“ nature, as the EU, although it has legal personality, is not a subject of international law (Koivurova, 2018: 212). The AC members postponed the decision to make the EU observer state (AC, 2023b).

**Table 1:** Membership in the Regional Councils

	BEAC	CBSS	AC
Nordic States	X	X	X
Russian Federation	X	X	X
European Union	X	X	-
Baltic states	-	X	-
Germany	<i>Observer state</i>	X	<i>Observer state</i>
Poland	<i>Observer state</i>	X	<i>Observer state</i>
United States	-	-	X
Canada	-	-	X

Participation is regulated by similar procedures and organisational structures. Each member state, except for the EU, occasionally holds the organisation's rotating Presidency. The primary coordination body in the CBSS functions as the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO), which consists of civil servants of each member state's Foreign Ministry. A similar model is used in the BEAC, and in the AC, they are called "Senior Arctic Officials" (Koivurova, 2018: 214). Moreover, the member states' decisions are all consensus-based.

Furthermore, the three soft organisations involve other transnational and non-state actors, such as civil- and NGOs, scientific communities, or Indigenous Peoples. However, there are differences in the administrative and structural outlook of this integration. The CBSS mainly operates on the inter-state level and is characterised as a "traditional inter-governmental" (Mariussen et al., 2000: 20) organisation. This inter-governmental forum promotes regional cooperation and provides political guidance for other regional, sub-regional and local actors, such as the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC), the Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Co-operation (BSSSC), or the Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC). Moreover, it plays a significant role in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR).

In contrast, the BEAC has a unique two-folded structure of cooperation (Bailes&Olafsson, 2013: 57). This is because the fundament for collaboration is based on two columns: the intergovernmental cooperation (BEAC) and the interregional one in the form of the Barents Regional Council (BRC), also representing 13 regions in the far North of Norway, Sweden, Finland and North-West Russia (BEAC, 2023c). Therefore, a significant element of cooperation are people-to-people contacts on the grassroots level. The Chairmanship of the BEAC rotates every two years and is currently held by Finland (2021-2023), after which a Russian Presidency would formally follow in October 2023 (2023-2025). The Chair of the BRC is independent of the one in the BEAC and currently held by Nenets in Russia (2021-2023).

In addition, the AC and BEAC have extensive cooperation with Indigenous Peoples. Since the beginning, the AC has provided a strong platform and position for Indigenous peoples' organisations. Their engagement is reflected in the unique feature of "Permanent Participants", six organisations representing Arctic Indigenous Peoples, such as the Sami Council. They have full consultation rights in the Arctic state's decisions, contribute to its activities (AC, 2023e) and "sit side-by-side with state officials" (Hasanat, 2012: 276). The BEAC works on the issue in the form of the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples (WGIP).

Finally, the three RCs have observer states that are invited to meetings without voting rights. In particular, Arctic issues get a growing global interest and non-regional actors, like China, are trying to influence its future development (Heininen&Puka, 2014: 23). Therefore, the list of AC observers, for example, includes 13 non-arctic states, 13 intergovernmental and inter-parliamentary organisations, and 12 NGOs (AC, 2023c), underlining its global relevance.

### ***Geography***

Third, the establishment of all three RCs is based on geographic proximity (Oldberg, 2014: 8). The Councils under examination are located in three recognised regions and subregions from the Baltic Sea to the Arctic. An overview of their approximate geographic locations can be found in *Figure 2*. What becomes clear from this overview is that the regions are overlapping and vary in terms of their geographic size, population and geopolitical significance (Heininen&Puka, 2014: 26). The Arctic has a more global dimension and is considered a significant international region with a special presence of global “high politics“ since the US and Canada are involved, and China is pressing for influence (Heininen&Puka, 2014: 23). Therefore, the Barents Sea is better characterised as the European sub-region (Zimmerbauer, 2010: 94). Moreover, the Baltic Sea Region can be categorised as a European “macroregion“ (Scott, 2002: 141), having a dedicated EU Strategy. Even though the simplified visualisation in Figure 2 “excludes“ Iceland, it is a member of the CBSS and BEAC.

**Figure 2:** Geographic Locations of the Regional Councils



*Source: Own illustration, inspired by Mariussen, 2000: 7.*

In addition, each region serves as a meeting point between Russia and the West. However, the weight of Russia in the respective region varies significantly. In the Arctic, it is undoubtedly the largest country, occupying more than half of the coastline and accounting for half of the region's population (AC, 2023a). The Arctic's most densely populated area is the Barents Euro-Arctic region, where the two largest cities, Arkhangelsk and Murmansk (both in Russia), are located (BEAC, 2023a). In this Arctic sub-region, even 75% of the geographical area is in Russia (BEAC, 2023a). A particularity of the Arctic population are Indigenous Peoples, a significant part of which lives in Russia (AC, 2023a). For example, four of the six Indigenous organisations in the AC have a Russian component.

At the same time, cooperation in this part of the world gets increasingly important. The Arctic gets geopolitically relevant as global warming makes access to resources and sea routes possible (Gricius, 2021). Especially for Russia, the Arctic is of enormous economic importance. Much of its natural resources are based here (e.g., Jamal peninsula and Kara Sea), accounting for a significant part of the Russian GDP (World Bank, 2020). Additionally, the Northern Sea Route, mainly covering Russian waters, gains global attention (Gunnarsson&Moe, 2021).

In contrast, Russia's weight in the Baltic Sea Region is somewhat limited. Although the country plays an essential role in security and environmental policy with its territories in the Gulf of Finland and the exclave of Kaliningrad, it does not have such an overwhelming position as in the Arctic. Initially, the Baltic Sea economically served as a channel for Russian exports, mainly comprising raw materials to the EU, and as a provider of technologies essential to Russia (Oldberg, 2014: 13). However, this picture changed after the EU's sanctions against Russia in response to the country's military intervention in Ukraine in 2014, further extended in 2022 (EC, 2023b). This weakened the dependencies and Russia's role in the region.

### ***Policy Areas***

Fourth, there is consistency in the three RC's policy areas. A significant body of scientific literature identifies thematic overlap in the activities of the three Councils (see Mariussen et al., 2000; Etzold, 2010; Aalto et al., 2011 and 2017). The literature shows that all three prioritise environmental protection, sustainable development, education and culture (Aalto et al., 2017: 141). Therefore, it is no surprise that there are regular contacts between the three organisations to share experiences, coordinate activities, and avoid duplication (Heininen, 2017:

444). However, each cooperation adapts its agenda to its geographical context. The AC and BEAC, for example, are both dedicated to the High North and, therefore, have significant overlaps in their functional areas (Bailes & Olafsson, 2013: 58). Furthermore, the thematic work of both councils is based on *ad hoc* priorities set and influenced by each Chair.

In contrast, the CBSS sets long-term priorities guiding the yearly rotating Chairmanship programs. In 2014, the members reduced the long-term priorities from five to three. Since then, they have focused on Regional Identity, Sustainable and Prosperous, and Safe and Secure (CBSS, 2014). In the latter, the states got engaged in soft security areas such as civil protection, trafficking in human beings, and children at risk, distinguishing it from the other two councils (Koivurova & Rosas, 2018: 218). Nonetheless, the AC and BEAC also intensify their collaboration on emergency prevention and civil protection (AC, 2023d; BEAC, 2023b).

In these policy areas, cooperation with Russia was possible despite the country's increasing tensions with the West for two reasons: On the one hand, unlike, for example, the CoE or the OSCE, all three organisations are what Bailes calls "de-securitized" (2013: 49). This means they bracket out hard security issues, concentrate on "soft" security, and deal with human rights issues less directly, which allows for less conflictual cooperation with Russia in areas not covered by other organisations (Oldberg, 2014: 67).

On the other hand, despite increasing differences, cooperation remained constructive because of the organisations' unique soft law nature. Soft lawmaking as a flexible form of cooperation is becoming increasingly attractive in global governance (di Stasi, 2015: 45). It allows the inclusion of other relevant non-state actors and involves relatively low decision-making costs (Hasanat, 2012; Guruparan & Zerk, 2021). Therefore, the work in the three RCs largely depends on people-to-people contacts in the working groups (Koivurova & Rosas, 2018: 213). This supports cooperation in less conflicting areas despite problems at the higher political level because it reduces risks and political tensions between the states (Oldberg, 2014: 9).

And indeed, until 2014 and to a large extent also afterwards, Russia was considered a strategic and equal partner that actively participated in the Councils' work (Oldberg, 2014: 66). From this regional cooperation, Russia has not only benefited in terms of project funding but has also used the RCs as platforms to pursue, among others, diplomatic interests (Aalto et al., 2017: 153). However, the country remained the "Other" in these democracy-dense regions because of its authoritarianism (Browning, 2003; Heininen & Puka, 2014; Korosteleva, 2019).

### *Norms and Values*

This brings us to the final shared characteristic: norms and values. All three RCs have been established to promote regional cooperation between neighbouring countries in the North based on the principles of international law and peace (Mariussen et al., 2000: 2). These values are clearly outlined in each regional organisation's founding act and other strategic documents, a more concrete elaboration of which can be found in the analysis chapter. Furthermore, the three regions are democracy dense, and the majority of the RC's member states are also members of the EU and NATO, sharing the norms and values of these organisations, such as the rule of law and human rights. However, regarding their handling of non-compliance to these fundamental norms and principles, all three RCs are what Schembera calls "negative case[s] of intra-regional sanctions" (2021: 531), lacking an official sanction policy.

To summarise, the CBSS, BEAC, and AC are all regional soft law organisations founded on the principles of international law and peace. Just as all three RCs were affected by the upswing in international political cooperation after the end of the Cold War, they have been afflicted by the negative impact of the deterioration in relations between Russia and "the West" in recent years. As a founding member of all three Councils, Russia, with its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, violated the organisational norms and principles, resulting in the member states' decision to suspend the non-compliant member.

To justify the case selection, the elaboration above shows that all three cases confirm the research puzzle outlined in the introduction. Until now, the suspension of Russia from the three Councils has not led to compliance, and the sanctioning tool's true accountability impact is questionable. Moreover, the suspension of cooperation in all three regional organisations is relatively costly. Russia was an integral part of the cooperation, and regional goals in issues of joint interest, such as environmental protection, climate change, and soft security, can no longer be achieved. This raises the question about the reasoning behind the suspension, with the three cases holding original empirical insights into why IO member states suspend non-compliance. The study's time frame primarily focuses on the period after the 24th of February 2022 and ends on the first of May 2023, before the transition of Chairmanship in the AC. Nevertheless, if appropriate, the organisations' reactions after the annexation of Crimea, another "critical juncture" (Gänzle et al., 2022), will be considered.

## 2.2 Data Collection: Exploring Expert Interviews

To recall, the research explores the three single cases, collects original empirical data from them and uses this data to come up with more general explanations as to why IO member states sanction non-compliance. For this explorative approach, the thesis leans on two primary sources of empirical data. On the one hand, to gain a better understanding of the mode of membership sanctioning, official organisational documents originating from the three RCs will be analysed. These documents include the founding acts, declarations, joint statements, and in the case of the CBSS also CSO meeting minutes. Through this, more about the legal and value foundation of the suspension can be learned. Moreover, examining the written proclamations of the suspension gives insights into the exact wording, outlined conditions, and publicly proclaimed reasons for the suspension.

However, more detailed information on internal decision-making remains limited in official organisational documents and statements. That is why, on the other hand, the member states' motivations behind sanctioning are studied by in-depth expert interviews with the key decision-makers across the three organisations. Since the three RCs primarily operate in an inter-governmental mode, the thesis' sampling strategy is focused on three different groups of officials and member state representatives, a list of which can be found in *Appendix 1*.

1. The Heads of the Organisation (HoO) were responsible for the practical implementation of the suspension and managing its consequences. They are well-informed about the organisation and have insights into what decisions have been taken and why, participating in the relevant meetings. Furthermore, they offer a more neutral and distanced perspective on the member states' decision.
2. The Chairs of the organisation play an essential role as the primary speakers for the organisation and drivers of the decision-making processes. They lead and moderate the meetings and also the implementation of the decisions. Furthermore, the Chairs are also representing their respective states and can explain their reasoning behind the decision.
3. Finally, Member State Representatives that decided to suspend Russia were interviewed about the rationale behind their decision. Interviewing member states is essential because they are "the key actors who determine whether a violator should be suspended because the member states control the process of putting suspension motions on the agenda and

announcing suspension decisions“ (Borzyskowski&Vabulas, 2019: 142). Some member state representatives participate in multiple RCs (see BEAC/CBSS1-2) and were asked to provide a comparative perspective.

This sampling makes the research follow an elite interview type (Aberbach&Rockman, 2002), and its unique requirements must be considered accordingly. Therefore, the thesis has chosen a semi-structured interview format with open-ended questions. This is a promising approach to gain an insider’s perspective and uncover realities and meanings that may not be observable from an analysis of organisational documents (Blee&Taylor, 2002). Therefore, the decision-makers have been invited to share experiences and background information on the motivation and thoughts behind the decision to “suspend“. Furthermore, this less restricted interview type leaves room for exploring potential explanations for differences in the reactions of the three RCs’ and allows for *ad hoc* questions that emerge during the interview.

For this, an interview guide with 15 questions focused on the research purpose was designed and can be found in *Appendix 2*. The question guide was slightly modified depending on the interviewee’s concrete role and organisation. In addition to the main guiding questions, possible prompts have been noted. Prompts are essential in semi-structured interviews because they “keep people talking“ (Leech, 2002: 666) and allow for more flexibility during the interview. In general, the questions were divided into four sections:

1. The first section is dedicated to the problem description. The guide starts with a “grand tour question“, which according to Leech, “gets respondents talking, but in a fairly focused way“ (2002: 667). It offers the opportunity to get to know the interview partners, their perspective on and role in the decision-making process, and the language they use.
2. The second section discovered what particular type of suspension has been chosen. The interviewees were invited to specify their organisation’s mode of sanctioning and justify their choice. Additionally, the section discovers the role of informality and whether there are still informal contacts with Russian officials in specific fields, allowing to investigate the difference between the “formal“ and “practical“ suspension.
3. The third section examines the rationale behind the decision to suspend, exploring the possible logics employed and the indicators that influenced the decision.



4. Finally, it was asked about the consequences suspension had to understand the overall context of the suspension. The interview ended with an open question, allowing the respondent to freely highlight anything the interviewer might not have asked for.

Eventually, a total of 12 interviews were conducted. To ensure transparency, before each interview, respondents were informed about the study and the primary aspects to be discussed, together with the consent form, which can be found in *Appendix 3*. The interviews were conducted between fall 2022 and spring 2023, in English and German, primarily online but two in person at the CBSS Secretariat, each lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. Furthermore, most of the interview's audio was recorded to minimise the information loss and destroyed after the content had been summarised. Two respondents refused to be taped, and another two remain anonymous. The goal was to conduct as many interviews as possible. However, the primary reasons for non-participation were concerns regarding the geopolitical situation and the precarious environment surrounding Russia's membership status.

At this point, it is worth stressing the special value of the interviews and the empirical data. With the ongoing war in Ukraine, the geopolitical situation remains tense, as does the cooperation with Russia in IOs. Therefore, the thesis' empirical data represents an original value and is difficult to obtain in the current situation. Furthermore, even though not all member states' reasoning is represented, the number of conducted interviews is representative and sufficient to achieve the research aims. At the same time, given the tense geopolitical situation, the data had to be treated with a certain degree of caution.

Regarding this, the methodological problems that interviews entail should be mentioned. The fact that two interviewees want to remain anonymous makes reproducing the data collection process difficult. In addition, the concern of social desirability bias arises, whereby interviewees may strive to present reality in a manner that conforms to socially accepted norms (Bergen&Labonte, 2019). As a result, interview partners could be influenced and give answers that present them or the organisation in a better light but do not necessarily correspond to the facts. Moreover, interviewees are only human, and their memories are fragile, and the stories can therefore contain errors. Notably, the interview partners were solely sharing their personal reflections and did not necessarily represent their country's official stance.

To tackle these problems, the sampling strategy was extended to the HoO, who took a more neutral and observing role during the discussions. Their perspective gives insights into and

guidance regarding the general factors that have been discussed. Furthermore, they were able to elaborate on the suspension's practical implementation and consequences. In addition, more independent reporting and publications from experts about the RCs have been considered to generate input from another more independent source allowing to verify what was said.

### **2.3 Operationalisation: Measuring the Type of Motivation**

In order to measure the variables of interest and determine the motivation behind suspension, indicators have been generated. Identifying such analytical categories is an essential part of the research process (Coffey&Atkinson, 1996; Ayres et al., 2003: 880). Therefore, this thesis followed two ways in which categories can be generated, as outlined by Ayres et al. (2003: 880): First, they may be driven by concepts (Chapter 1.1) or theories and prior research (Chapter 1.2). Analytical categories derived from these sources “enter the analysis a priori“ (Ayres et al., 2003: 880) and provide orientation throughout the analysis. Second, categories can also be generated during the research as a result of the explorative approach.

In this logic, the type of motivation, distinguished according to the two underlying logic of appropriateness and consequences, can be inferred from the reasoning reported in the interviews. Therefore, the empirical material was analysed according to “like-meaning“ (Ayres et al., 2003: 871) and separated into categories of arguments. These categories, an overview of which can be found in *Table 2*, reflect theoretically based indicators that determine the states' decision to suspend and indicate the operation of one of the logics of action. For example, the logic of consequence was at play when respondents invoked arguments that justified the suspension with cooperation gains, low institutional costs, or external pressure. In turn, the logic of appropriateness was at play when respondents stressed arguments about symbolism, identity, or legitimacy. A new analytical category was created if arguments did not fit a category.

The overall measurement then depends on how centrally (importance) and often (frequency) these analytical categories were mentioned by the respondents. Based on this, an assessment of the presence or absence of indicators in each case can be made. Moreover, the relative importance and, thus, the prevalence of one logic over the other can be measured by weighing the importance and frequency regarding both logics. Finally, single-case findings and their categories were compared across the RCs, and from this, primary findings were concluded.

**Table 2:** Categorisation of Arguments on the Reasoning Behind Suspension

Analytical Category: Why to suspend?	Arguments
<b>Logic of Consequences: Dimensions of Considerations of “Rational Choice“</b>	
<b>Cooperation gains</b> (i.e., suspend to restore the organisation’s functionality)	Arguments that refer to the possible benefits from cooperating without Russia, and discuss the suspension’s practical consequences for regional cooperation. Includes assessments on the costs of not cooperating with Russia.
<b>Low institutional costs</b> (i.e., suspend because the soft nature allowed for a high flexibility)	Arguments that assess and discuss the institutional features and particularities that supported the decision to suspend. Includes references to the “soft“ law set-up, formal decision-taking and the amount of member states in the RC.
<b>Domestic gains</b> (i.e., suspend to gain domestic audience’s support)	Arguments that refer to the member states’ domestic politics and assess audience costs but also benefits of the suspension. Includes references to domestic symbolism.
<b>External pressure</b> (i.e., suspend because of global and geopolitical considerations)	Arguments that refer to systemic concerns and external powers. Includes the reactions of other global players (e.g., EU and NATO) towards the aggression, and assesses the influence these decisions and players had on the RC member states’ decision to suspend. Arguments that assess how far membership suspension as a sanctioning tool can be seen as part of a wider sanctioning package.
<b>Severity</b> (i.e., because the norm-break was so “severe“)	Arguments that refer to the exceptional nature and severity of the norm-break in terms of material damage. May include comparisons to the reactions after 2014.
<b>Logic of Appropriateness: Dimensions of Considerations of “Appropriateness“</b>	
<b>International symbolism</b> (i.e. suspend to express symbolic disapproval)	Arguments that refer to other IOs, such as the UN, but also regional organisations (e.g., CoE, NATO, EU) and assess what role international symbolism played in the member states’ decision-making process. Excludes references about international legitimacy and focuses on the wider “self“.
<b>Cohesive identity</b> (i.e. suspend to secure and reinforce self-identity)	Arguments that refer to a shared identity and collective interests among the like-minded member states (the Self) towards Russia (the Other). Includes arguments highlighting the need for securing or reinforcing identity and unity.
<b>Legitimacy</b> (i.e. suspend to ensure external reputation and internal unity)	Arguments that refer to the organisation’s internal and external legitimacy and assess the role credibility and securing legitimacy by upholding certain norms and standards played in the decision to suspend.
<b>Severity</b> (i.e., because the norm-break was so “severe“)	Arguments that refer to the exceptional nature and severity of the norm-break in terms of symbolic damage. May include comparisons to the reactions after 2014
<b>Others</b>	
<b>To be explored during the analysis</b>	To be defined during the analysis.

### **3. Analysis: Membership Suspension in the Regional Councils**

In this chapter, the research analysis will be conducted along the three cases of membership suspension in RCs. The chapter will start by investigating the decision to suspend in the CBSS, followed by the BEAC and, finally, the AC, by the chronology of their establishment. Each subchapter will first analyse the primary institutional documents and background conditions that underpin the decision to suspend and introduce each organisation's response to the norm break. This will be done to present evidence on the presence of suspension and to measure the sanctioning act, based on the thesis' conceptualisation of "suspension of membership", meaning that (1) the non-compliant officially remains a member state, but (2) temporarily (3) its full membership rights or individual rights and activities of it are blocked. After measuring the presence of suspension, the question of why the member states of these RCs have suspended the non-compliant will be explored along the previously outlined two logics of action and their analytical categories. The aim is to find out which indicators were decisive for the decision of the states to suspend and reveal the prevailing logic of action. Eventually, the empirical data from all three RCs will be compared, and the results evaluated to answer the research question of why the three RCs suspended the Russian Federation.

#### **3.1 Exploring Membership Suspension in the CBSS**

The Council of the Baltic Sea States was founded in 1992 as an "overall regional forum to focus on needs for intensified cooperation and coordination among the Baltic Sea States" (CBSS, 1992) in response to the geopolitical changes after the Cold War. Its establishment is based on the Copenhagen Declaration signed by the Foreign Ministers of its 11 founding members (i.e., Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia, and Sweden) and the EU. However, this declaration is not an international treaty and, thus, not creating any legal obligations but merely outlines the purpose and values of the cooperation (Szacawa, 2021: 16).

As stated in the Copenhagen Declaration, the core and very foundation of cooperation is the aim of peace, cohesion, democracy, and human rights (CBSS, 1992). Furthermore, cooperation should start "a new era of European relations where the confrontation and division of the past are replaced by partnership and cooperation" (CBSS, 1992). These fundamental princi-

ples are also the core of subsequent guiding documents of the CBSS, including the most recent commitment made in the Vilnius II Declaration, stating that “[a]ll countries in the Region uphold the rule of law, democracy, and respect for human rights“ (CBSS, 2021).

A second essential founding document is the CBSS Terms of Reference. However, a review of these “operating principles of the CBSS activity“ (Szacawa, 2021: 17) revealed that there are no provisions for the suspension or limitation of the participation of a member state included. Therefore, the CBSS has no legal documents defining how suspension can be imposed (Szacawa, 2022). Nevertheless, the Foreign Ministers in the Copenhagen Declaration refer to the fundamental norms and principles in other IOs, such as the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act, the Charter of Paris, and other OSCE documents, providing orientation (CBSS, 1992). The respondents stated that the parallel process in the CoE and its decision on February 25 served as a model for the suspension (CBSS1-3). However, “as time was of the essence“ (CBSS3), there was no coordination with other regional players or RCs.

To summarise, the decision to suspend Russia highlights the challenges faced by the CBSS in ensuring compliance with its basic values and principles of peace, cohesion, democracy, and human rights. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine violated the foundation of collaboration in the organisation, which led to the other members’ decision to suspend cooperation with the norm-violator. This suspension was grounded on the before-mentioned guiding documents. However, a concrete suspension procedure had to be developed due to the absence of legal grounds for suspension. Therefore, based on this soft law framework, the next section will elaborate on how the CBSS member states responded to the norm break and suspended Russia.

### **Measuring Suspension: “Suspension of Membership“ in the Form of a Declaration**

The suspension process in the CBSS can be differentiated into two phases. First, according to the Norwegian Presidency (2021-2022), the suspension process already started on February 21, when Russia formally recognised the “independence“ of the Donetsk- and Luhansk People’s Republics. After this “gross violation of international law“ (CBSS3), the Presidency concluded that “cooperation could not continue with Russia in the CBSS as if nothing had happened and something had to be done“ (CBSS3). Therefore, in a troika meeting consisting of the three consecutive presidencies (i.e., Lithuania 2020-2021, Norway 2021-2022, and Ger-

many 2022-2023) and the CBSS Secretariat, it was decided to cancel the planned 30th-anniversary event of the CBSS and also the upcoming expert group meetings. This decision was taken without a formal CSO meeting, in which decisions usually are taken, because “the Presidency could declare no consensus without a formal meeting since the Presidency itself was opposed to a continuation of cooperation“ (CBSS3).

Second, Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24 “accelerated the work on our side on how to react within the CBSS family“ (CBSS3). However, the interviewees agreed that because of the absence of legal guidance, it was necessary to find a way forward so that Russia could not object formally (CBSS1-3). The Presidency specified that “it was important not to let Russia claim that consensus was needed to limit or change already agreed cooperation“ (CBSS3). To explore different possibilities, a consultation meeting without Russia was held on February 28, which “concluded with a recommendation to suspend Russian participation in CBSS activities, and also Belarus, with immediate effect“ (CBSS3).

Consequently, on March 3, the remaining ten members suspended Russia from the CBSS. This was done as a formal Ministerial Declaration (CBSS, 2022a). The ten remaining members “strongly condemn[ed]“ Russia’s aggression by referring to the organisation’s fundamental principles and aims. They stated that there was “no possibility to continue cooperation“ and that Russia would be suspended “from the proceedings, work, and projects of the CBSS and its working bodies“ and “should not enjoy the benefits of, and participation in, any CBSS-led cooperation“ (CBSS, 2022a).

In practice, this means Russia officially remained a CBSS member state. However, it lost its membership rights and got immediately suspended from the organisation’s expert groups and activities. Regarding temporality, the declaration sets the explicit condition that Russia was suspended “until cooperation under the fundamental principles of international law has become possible again“ (CBSS, 2022a). This explicit conditionality was integrated into the declaration to “hinder the possibility of a resumption of cooperation“ (CBSS3). According to the thesis’ conceptualisation, the response can be categorised as “suspension of membership“. However, what happened after Russia’s suspension was unique compared to the other two RCs. After Russia reacted negatively to the suspension through its Foreign Ministry’s spokesperson, on May 17 (Szacawa, 2022), a letter from the Foreign Minister himself announced the Russian withdrawal from the CBSS. Accordingly, the Russian Foreign Ministry published

a statement condemning the CBSS as an “anti-Russia political tool“ and categorising the suspension as “unlawful and discriminatory“ and as standing “in violation of the consensus rule“ (MID, 2022). Interviewees stated that Russia was probably surprised by the “harsh reaction“ of the CBSS (CBSS1-4). Moreover, the Presidency specified that it “did not inform Russia that CBSS activities would go forward in full without Russia and that we even planned a Ministerial Session in Kristiansand on 24-25 May, the first regular Council meeting since 2013, without Lavrov’s participation“ (CBSS3).

To summarise, the CBSS member states decided to answer the non-compliance in the form of a Ministerial Declaration condemning the norm violation. However, Russia was not expelled and, until its withdrawal in May 2022, officially remained a CBSS member state. Nevertheless, based on an explicit conditionality, the non-compliant temporarily lost its membership rights, and all cooperation with the norm-breaker was immediately blocked. Therefore, the states’ response towards Russia can be categorised as “suspension of membership“. Whereas this is the sanctioning response, the motivations driving the states to suspend will be explored below. This will be done first with a view on how considerations of consequences and then how the logic of appropriateness is featured in the states’ reasoning.

### **3.1.1 The Presence of the Logic of Consequences in the CBSS**

Overall, the interview data suggest that cost-benefit calculations did not play a significant role in the CBSS member state’s decision to suspend Russia. The Presidency stated, “for us, it was a clear violation of some very basic foundations of our cooperation and trust, and therefore we specifically avoided any cost-benefit calculations in the decision“ (CBSS3). This assumption was shared by other members stating that “cost-benefit aspects have not been considered and were not appropriate in this particular situation“ (BEAC/CBSS1). Nevertheless, two dimensions of rational considerations become apparent when analysing the arguments and play at least a subordinate role: cooperation gains and low institutional costs.

#### ***Cooperation Gains***

The data suggests that a factor that influenced the decision to suspend Russia was ensuring the organisation’s functionality and, thus, cooperation gains. The interviewees mentioned that

already since 2014, on the practical level, there have been limitations in the regional cooperation between the member states (CBSS1-4). The Presidency explained that “Russia and the rest of us already then have departed on many practical issues, and the more successful cooperation results have been angered on EU policies“ (CBSS3), which was not associated with Russia. The data analysis shows that the respondents considered the costs of non-cooperation relatively low, even though the majority stated that getting all Baltic Sea countries on board is crucial for solving the problems in the region (CBSS1-3).

Furthermore, the steps taken immediately after the suspension, when Russia was still a formal member state, support the initial data evaluation that cooperation gains played a role in the decision-making process. All respondents agreed that the norm-break in 2022 made further cooperation “impossible“. However, they underlined that “for us, it was clear that we will go on cooperating without Russia“ (CBSS3) and that “there was a strong will and need for further even enhanced cooperation“ (CBSS1). The interviewees specified that immediately after the suspension, “we went on cooperating under the CBSS logo, started publishing statements and events and even organised a Ministerial without Russia, making clear that we were fully functioning without them“ (CBSS1).

### ***Low Institutional Costs***

Moreover, the interview data suggests that low institutional costs have built a supportive foundation for the decision to suspend and made the suspension process better manageable. The respondents referred to the flexibility provided by the soft nature of the organisation, which allowed for relatively low institutional costs (CBSS1-3). One respondent underlined:

Legally, we were able to suspend Russia easily and quickly because the CBSS is a soft law organisation established by a declaration of the Foreign Ministers. For this reason, one can also make changes by declaration and has no legal claim as in a treaty-based organisation, such as HELCOM (CBSS2).

Moreover, the Norwegian Presidency argued that “it is even difficult to challenge our decision on legal grounds because, due to the soft nature, there was no obligation beyond the political commitment, which Russia violated“ (CBSS3). However, regarding the logic of consequences, no reference was made to difficulties arising from the need for a consensus decision or the number of member states, suggesting that these aspects did not play a hindering role.



Regarding the institutional set-up and soft law nature, another factor became apparent in the interview data: Leadership. Respondents referred to the Presidency's central role in guiding the suspension process. Especially in soft law organisations, "the leadership plays an essential role in interpreting rules, formulating drafts and suggesting a way forward" (CBSS2) and, thus, "the Chair heavily influences the process" (CBSS3). This is also connected to the logic of appropriateness because respondents argued that the chair-holding country's self-identity plays a role in "how the state interprets the rules and what conclusions are drawn" (CBSS2).

To conclude, the respondents mentioned two indicators of cost-benefit calculations reflecting the logic of consequences: cooperation gains and low institutional costs. This means that the logic of consequences was present in the CBSS member states decision to suspend. However, no arguments have been made for domestic gains, external pressure or severity in terms of material damage. Furthermore, the data suggests that even though both indicated factors were present, the frequency they were mentioned and the importance given to them remains relatively low. However, to be further able to conclude this, first, the considerations of "appropriateness" at play must be analysed in the next section.

### **3.1.2 The Presence of the Logic of Appropriateness in the CBSS**

In the Interviews, considerations of appropriateness were frequently mentioned and centrally stressed. The respondents agreed that the CBSS is a "value-based organisation" (CBSS1-4) and that "there were moral and ethnic dimensions to this issue, more than cost-benefit" (CBSS3). Moreover, they stated that the decision was "morally and politically orientated" (BEAC/CBSS1) and that "it was done what was considered as right after the attack" (CBSS2). Within the broader set of considerations of appropriateness, all prior identified four indicators for the logic of appropriateness appeared to be important.

#### ***Severity***

As emerged from the interviews, all respondents frequently highlighted the high degree of perceived severity of the norm break in terms of symbolic damage as an important background condition for the decision to suspend. They considered Russia's invasion a significant

breach of the principles of CBSS cooperation, which deserved a “clear and harsh reaction“ (CBSS2). Furthermore, the data shows that there was consensus among the CBSS members that “business as usual“ could not go ahead because of the “exceptional nature“ of the attack (CBSS1-4; BEAC/CBSS1-2). By arguing so, references to international law, peace, human rights, and democracy have been made.

Consequently, the data suggests that, as a background condition, this perceived severity explains why the members have chosen “suspension of membership“. The interviewees underlined that the decision for suspension was political and considered by all remaining member states as the “right political way to deal with the aggression“ (CBSS1). All agreed that alternatives, such as only limiting or partially freezing cooperation or even expulsion, were not considered (CBSS1-4). Eventually, the suspension was the “only realistic option“ (CBSS3) because “we wanted to show that the door was open and hoped Russia would change its course“ (CBSS2). Moreover, the Presidency specified that “because of the severe violation of our foundational principles, we considered it adequate to give the suspension decision a formal political and legal standing similar to the original Copenhagen Declaration“ (CBSS 3).

Compared to 2014, the norm break in 2022 was assessed as more severe, leading to a much harsher reaction. Respondents reflected that “suddenly everything became much more evident that this is not just a coincidence“ (CBSS1) and referred to the “much more obvious military outlook of the attack“ (CBSS2). In addition, interviewees argued that “other diplomatic paths had been open after 2014, but these proved ineffective in retrospect“ (CBSS2).

In this context, it is worth mentioning that as a reaction to Russia’s annexation of Crimea, no formal meetings or sessions of the CBSS took place between 2013 and 2022, which was “the first diplomatic step in the spiral of escalation“ (CBSS2). The Presidency reflected that “there was already some kind of suspension when we took over, namely activities on the Council level“ (CBSS3). Under the Polish Presidency (2015-2016), it was then agreed to “have some dialogue with Russia, but not to let normality set in“ (CBSS4), which is why meetings were held at the Deputy Foreign Minister level. Meetings between the Foreign Ministers started again in 2017, and “even though they were no full-fledged CBSS session as envisioned in the Terms of Reference, the same members met and took decisions just with a slightly decreased status“ (CBSS1). The respondents reflected that this was a “maybe too weak response“ (CBSS3) and “obviously this message was not enough“ (CBSS2).

### *Cohesive Identity*

The interview data suggests that the remaining member states have suspended Russia to secure and reinforce their self-identity. According to the respondents, this sense of unity was already present when deciding on a particular form of declaration. The Presidency outlined that “my original idea was to express the suspension through a Presidency declaration, but we then agreed on the political declaration because it displays cohesion and unity among us“ (CBSS3). Furthermore, it was argued:

One of the reasons why we suspended was that you have a certain framework and values in the CBSS. If Russia one day wants to come back into the framework, it would be much easier to readmit the country because you can refer back to the *acquis*. It would have meant a new admission process if one had decided for expulsion. Thus, the negotiating potential would be higher again, and one can also negotiate on the part of Russia about certain values (CBSS2).

Therefore, a significant amount of arguments has shown that by suspending Russia, the aim was to secure the organisational values and thus a confident self-image. Interviewees frequently referred to a shared identity among the remaining members by stating that “all share the same aim of peace, international law, democracy, and human rights“ (CBSS1). The data further indicates that this identity may be seen in stark contrast to “the Other“, in this case, Russia. Respondents referred to it by arguing that “it was alone Russia that decided to violate the organisational principles“ (BEAC/CBSS1) and outlining that “the contact line between the EU/EEA and Russia, long a zone of cooperation and increasing trust, became one of division with the invasion“ (CBSS3). As emerged from the interviews, it was in the collective interest to suspend “the Other“ from the organisation to secure and reinforce “the Self“. To illustrate, the Presidency argued that “if we would lose our shared values, we would be much worse off morally, politically, historically but also when it comes to the West’s global standing, and that was part of my personal consideration to suspend“ (CBSS3).

Additional remarks about identity have been made about individual member states’ self-identities. Although this factor could also be a matter of calculation, the respondents primarily referred to it to express considerations of appropriateness. They stated that “each member state has their own historical experiences, security concerns and, thus, policies, which definitely influence their decision“ (BEAC/CBSS2). Therefore, countries like the Baltic states and Poland “have a particular relationship with Russia that had to be considered“ (CBSS2). Respondents argued that these “national particularities play an essential role in the decision-ma-

king process“ (BEAC/CBSS2). Therefore, this factor was called “solidarity“ (i.e., with individual member states self-identity). This is because, given the consensus-based decisions, it is a reflection of solidarity that other members show sensitivity to these national specificities.

### ***International Symbolism***

This last argument leads to another factor that appeared throughout the interviews: international symbolism. Throughout the data became clear that the cohesive identity does not stop at the rim of the Baltic Sea but includes what all respondents called “the united West“. In this logic, respondents referred to the EU and NATO — two IOs with which most member states identify. It was highlighted that “we are not functioning in a vacuum, and the broader response of the West, especially sanctions of the EU, had been considered“ (CBSS1). Other respondents have also frequently referenced other sanctions (CBSS2-4). Nevertheless, NATO and EU influence has not been referred to in the sense of “external pressure“ and the logic of consequences. Following the arguments, answering cohesively with the EU, the US, and Canada was considered appropriate as “expressing a symbolic political unity and disapproval of the West“ (CBSS2). Moreover, speaking of international symbolism, references to international norms and the UN can be found throughout the arguments. Respondents stated that “we connected a non-regional attack with our international norms and principles here in the Baltic Sea“ (CBSS3) and that “the harsh suspension with clear conditionality was also a political message to the international community and the UN“ (CBSS2).

### ***Legitimacy***

A third finding from the interviews concludes that legitimacy is a frequently mentioned and, thus, influential factor in decision-making. This factor primarily played a role in defining what is considered “appropriate“ for the states in handling the norm-violation. The essential role credibility and organisational legitimacy played shows the following statement:

We did not really dig into what we could lose from not cooperating with Russia. We were convinced we would lose much more credibility and moral standing when we did not clearly suspend Russia and make a statement on values and commitments it had broken (CBSS3).

Throughout the interviews, the arguments mainly focused on securing the international and regional dimensions of legitimacy. First, regarding international legitimacy, in line with the

argumentation about international symbolism, the data indicates an apparent will of the member states to uphold international norms and standards, thus securing the organisation's credibility (CBSS1-4). Second, the respondents argue that regional legitimacy and the particular regional representation of the CBSS was not at risk when losing Russia. This was justified by referring to other regional cooperation formats, such as the BSPC, BSSSC, and HELCOM, some of which followed the "CBSS lead" (CBSS1-2). Nevertheless, losing Russia initiated an ongoing reflection process of the CBSS, which must find its particular role besides other regional cooperation formats, such as the EUSBSR (CBSS, 2022b).

It can be concluded that all indicators of considerations of "appropriateness", namely severity, cohesive identity, international symbolism and legitimacy, were frequently mentioned and explicitly stressed as important by the respondents. This means that the logic of appropriateness is considerably high at play, and its relative importance will be elaborated on next.

### **Conclusions on the CBSS: The Prevalence of the Logic of Appropriateness**

To summarise the findings from the interviews regarding the considerations that underpinned the decision of member states to suspend, it is possible to conclude that considerations of appropriateness are more prevalent than cost-benefit calculations. Weighing the relative importance, it becomes apparent that cooperation gains and low institutional costs only played a subordinated role in the state's decision. In contrast, the respondents centrally highlighted aspects, such as a cohesive identity, symbolism, and legitimacy, that clearly speak to the logic of appropriateness. Also, severity as an essential background condition for the decision to suspend was only referred to in terms of symbolic damage. Therefore, the evidence suggests that the decision to suspend Russia was mainly following a logic of appropriateness.

In addition, the respondents mentioned the self-identity of individual member states as a central aspect that influenced decision-making. First, it became apparent regarding leadership because the respondents highlighted that the chair-holding country's self-identity plays a central role in interpreting rules and suggesting a way forward. Second, it became visible regarding solidarity with individual member states' particular sensitivity towards Russian misbehaviour, which was mentioned as a factor that influenced the consensus-based decision.

## 3.2 Exploring Membership Suspension in the BEAC

The Barents Euro-Arctic Council was founded in 1993 as an official body of the Barents cooperation on the intergovernmental level. Therefore, 2023 marks three decades of collaboration, aiming “to ensure stability and progress in the region by promoting peaceful cooperation and sustainable social economic and environmental development“ (BEAC, 2021b). The BEAC was established by the Kirkenes Declaration signed by the Foreign Ministers of its six founding members (i.e. Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden) and the EU. In its annex are also set out the organisation’s Terms of Reference. However, this agreement is not a treaty and is not binding, underlining the organisation’s soft law foundation.

The BEAC’s founding documents explicitly state that the cooperation is based on “the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights“ (BEAC, 2021b: 2). Furthermore, the members highlight that the regional cooperation should “contribute substantially to stability, progress, international peace and security in the area and Europe as a whole, where partnership is now replacing the confrontation and division of the past” (BEAC, 1993: 1). Regarding this, the Foreign Ministers are also referring to the CSCE and the CBSS. The BEAC’s fundamental principles are also included in subsequent Declarations, such as the most recent commitment made in Tromsø, stating that the members are “[u]nderlining the importance of regional cooperation, fostering mutual understanding, building trust [and] contributing to peace and stability“ (BEAC, 2021a).

To summarise, the BEAC’s founding documents clearly state organisational norms and principles of, among others, peace, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was a fundamental break of these principles, and the states responded by suspending the norm-violator. However, there are no provisions in the founding documents for suspending a member state’s participation (BEAC, 2021b). Thus, the next section will describe how the members suspended Russia based on the organisational soft law framework.

### **Measuring Suspension: “Suspension of Activities“ in the Form of a Joint Statement**

After Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on February 24th, there was no clear legal direction on how to handle the situation, and the like-minded member states needed to agree on a unified

procedure for dealing with the non-compliance. The result was that eight days after the norm break, and thus slightly after the CBSS, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the EU published a joint statement regarding the cooperation in the form of a press release on the BEAC website (BEAC, 2022). In this statement, they “suspended activities involving Russia“ due to the member state’s “blatant violation of international law, breach of rules-based multilateralism and the principles and objectives of the BEAC” (BEAC, 2022).

The suspension has been published as a political statement, and no conditions and detailed information concretise the “suspension of activities“. In practice, that means that even though Russia officially remains a member state, and “formally the institutions of the Barents cooperation are maintained“ (BEAC1), the country was stripped of particular membership rights and was immediately suspended from the organisation’s working groups and activities. This measure is supposed to be temporary, however, the conditions under which cooperation could resume are not touched upon by the joint statement.

The Russian answer to this can be found on the same webpage where the joint political statement was published (BEAC, 2022). The Russian Foreign Ministry stressed that the decision was “unlawful“ and “contrary to the fundamental principles“ (BEAC, 2022) of the organisation as it is not taken upon the consensus of all member states. Publishing both statements on the BEAC’s website underlines the International Barents Secretariat’s neutral role and the fact that the formal structures, and Russia as part of it, are willing to be maintained.

After the “suspension of activities“, the like-minded member states decided to work together informally and, thus, not under the umbrella of the BEAC. The informal collaborative arrangement between the Nordic countries and the EU was called “Friends of the Presidency“. As the name reflects, this format was based on and attached to the Chairmanship. Therefore, it is an “informal parallel track next to the formal structures of the BEAC“ (BEAC2). Under this *modus operandi*, the states have been working without Russian participation “but with the same ambitions and goals as the BEAC“ (BEAC2). However, the Finnish Presidency underlined the “short-term nature“ of this format. Formally, Russia is supposed to take over the Chair in October 2023.

To summarise, the states in the BEAC answered the non-compliance in the form of a joint political statement condemning the norm-break and suspending activities. Russia remains an official member state but temporarily lost certain membership rights, leaving open under

what conditions cooperation could resume. Therefore, even though the states framed their response as “suspension of activities“, according to the thesis’ conceptualisation, the reaction can be categorised as “suspension of membership“ since all three criteria are fulfilled, with Russia remaining a member but temporarily being stripped of activities and certain membership rights. While this suspension is the observable response to the violation, the underlying motivations that led the states to impose the sanction will be examined in the following section. The analysis will begin by examining how states weigh potential consequences and then explore how the logic of appropriateness shapes their decision-making process.

### **3.2.1 The Presence of the Logic of Consequences in the BEAC**

The interview data suggests that in the BEAC, cost-benefit calculations did not play a prominent role in the state’s decision to suspend. Respondents made clear that “it was not much about costs or benefits, but much more a value-based approach we took“ (BEAC/CBSS1) and that “we took the decision that we considered as morally right in this situation“ (BEAC/CBS-S2). Nevertheless, the respondents also referred to cooperation gains and external pressure.

#### ***Cooperation Gains***

As emerged from the interviews, cooperation gains from cooperating without Russia existed. The interviewees mentioned that “the states were able to assess and analyse that our cooperation has substance and meaning even without Russia, which was against the Russian narrative that without them, cooperation would not have a future“ (BEAC2). Furthermore, in the “Friends of the Presidency“ format, cooperation has even improved. The respondents agree that “cooperation on some issues became easier without Russia“ (BEAC/CBSS2), and the Presidency concretised:

A spring has especially been coming to the regional level. Cooperation between our Finnish, Swedish, and Norwegian regions has intensified and becomes more constructive. We have discovered that we can strengthen relations even more. [...] As Presidency, we have implemented each of our priorities and even added new elements, such as a green transition strategy in response to the war effects (BEAC 2).

However, although gains from cooperating without Russia were present, the data suggests that this factor did not play a decisive role in the states’ decision to suspend. This is because,



although “Russia did not participate so actively“ (BEAC/CBSS1) and “it was tough to get things in the working groups done“ (BEAC/CBSS2), the data also shows that the country played a relevant role and was an integral part of the cooperation. Furthermore, the Presidency stressed that “having no cooperation with Russia was the high price we must pay now because what they have done was unacceptable “ (BEAC2). This relatively small significance of cooperation gains also became clear in the frequently occurring description of cooperation losses, which according to the respondents, outweigh gains and will be elaborated on next.

### *... and Losses*

In contrast, the data analysis shows that respondents frequently highlighted cooperation losses. They explained that “integrating Russia was a significant added value“ (BEAC3). Moreover, “the country makes up for a large and considerable territory in the Barents Euro-Arctic region“ (BEAC1) and, therefore, “especially for the working groups, it was a way of engaging with a country that matters a lot when you want to solve common issues“ (BEAC/CBS-S2). Therefore, regarding cooperation losses, the respondents mainly referred to two aspects: practical consequences of the suspension and financial restrictions.

First, the respondents frequently mentioned the harsh practical consequences the suspension of activities with Russia had for the cooperation of specific regional groups. A prominent example of this, mentioned by all the interviewed member states, is the cooperation in the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples. The respondents stated that this is an example of a group “disproportionally affected by suspending cooperation“ (BEAC/CBSS2) because Russian Sami were an essential contact point in this collaboration. The respondents illustrated that cooperation here was necessary to allow the people to move freely across the borders facilitating, for example, the reindeer herding. However, when the borders to Russia were closed, “this created huge issues for Indigenous people’s daily life“ (BEAC/CBSS2). Respondents concluded that “this is only one example of the harsh practical consequences suspending activities with Russia had in the region“ (BEAC2). Furthermore, respondents who are representatives in both the BEAC and CBSS specified that these practical consequences “had more serious influence than in the Baltic Sea because Russia’s role is much more significant“ (BEAC/CBSS2).

Second, the respondents referred to cooperation losses regarding the external restriction of project funds. They pointed out that the BEAC has been financially heavily affected by the cut of external EU project funds. Many cross-border projects with Russia financed by the EU were discontinued and lost financial support. The EEAS (BEAC/CBSS2) explained:

Cooperation in the Barents Sea region comes with a different policy package than in the Baltic Sea region. Money for the EUSBSR, for example, directly comes from internal funds like Interreg because the Baltic Sea is considered an internal regional structure. The Barents Sea is referred to as foreign policy, and since the war, money was cut for projects with Russia.

Therefore, in the case of the BEAC, EU project funds were frozen, and the financial burden was significant, making the states take over financing roles that before had the EU. Nevertheless, the respondents have not referred to this appearance in the sense of external pressure. On the contrary, most members are part of the EU, supporting the sanctioning measure taken here, which was also stressed throughout the interviews. Moreover, the EU is a BEAC member, so it is somewhat considered “internal” and not “external”.

### ***External Pressure***

However, what has been referred to as external pressure is the respondents’ sense that they are part of the Arctic and its broader global significance. The interviewees highlighted that “the developments of the Arctic that we are a significant part of have much more global relevance, and we have to keep in mind that when we suspend activities with a relevant Arctic player” (BEAC3). Furthermore, it was argued that “the projects of the BEAC contribute to solving our regional challenges but cooperating on environmental issues in a part of the Arctic is also important for the fight against global climate change” (BEAC2). However, this sense of global responsibility was rarely mentioned, and therefore its relevance for decision-making remains modest. Furthermore, although it is an influential factor, it is hindering and not decisive for the decision to suspend, with the latter being the focus of this study.

In light of these findings, the respondents referred to only one indicator of cost-benefit calculations: cooperation gains. Consequently, the logic of consequences was at play in the BEAC members’ decision to suspend Russia. However, as emerged from the data, the indicator was rarely mentioned, and the respondents did not attribute great importance to it. Furthermore,

the states mentioned external pressure in the form of bearing a global responsibility, and thus as a factor speaking against the decision to suspend. Also, the data has not identified arguments about low institutional costs, domestic gains, or severity in terms of material damage.

### **3.2.2 The Presence of the Logic of Appropriateness in the BEAC**

Despite the previously outlined high costs, the remaining member states of the BEAC decided to suspend cooperation with Russia. The data suggests that this decision was primarily based on norms, values, and a sum of different considerations of “appropriateness“. Analysing the respondents’ arguments, ideational reasoning becomes clear. They highlighted that “our values play an essential role“ (BEAC/CBSS2), that “the Russian aggression violated our values and principles“ (BEAC/CBSS1) and referred to “our value community“ (BEAC2). The four factors of severity, cohesive identity, international symbolism, and legitimacy can be identified and deemed “influential“ in what was considered “appropriate“.

#### ***Severity***

The interview data suggest a high degree of perceived severity of Russia’s norm violation in terms of symbolic damage among the member states as an important background condition for the decision to suspend. The interviewees emphasised that “Russia’s unprovoked and illegal war of aggression against democratic and sovereign Ukraine“ was a major violation of the fundamental principles of cooperation in the BEAC and demanded a “severe response“ (BEAC/CBSS1-2). This severeness has been underlined by referring to the foundational organisational principles, such as international law, peace, and human rights, which have been violated by a “military attack against our values and principles“ (BEAC/CBSS2).

The data further suggest that, as a background condition, this perceived severity in terms of symbolic damage explains why the member states have responded with “suspension“. On the one hand, they outlined that “suspension“ was considered as “a hard but, therefore, right response“ (BEAC/CBSS2) and “clear message“ (BEAC/CBSS1) to the norm-break. On the other hand, they underlined that there was “the political will to maintain the formal structures for the sake of the future“ (BEAC2). Therefore, the interviewees agree that the expulsion of Russia from the BEAC was not considered. Instead, member states aimed to formally hold

Russia as a member state to leave open the possibility that cooperation could be resumed in future. The Presidency summed it up: “The door is closed but not locked!”. Even though there is no conditionality for this resumption of cooperation in the statement, the respondents clarified that this is only possible under the fundamental principles of international law and in line with the organisation’s norms (BEAC2; BEAC/CBSS1-2).

The member states of the BEAC also considered the norm violation in 2022 to be more severe than that of 2014, resulting in a significantly harsher response. “It is a full-scale war against another country, breaking all the international norms and treaties, and under these circumstances, it was impossible not to take a clear stand” (BEAC2). Moreover, the invasion in 2022 “demonstrated that this is a war that is meant to be a complete destruction of a sovereign country” (BEAC/CBSS2). However, it is worth mentioning that the BEAC did not take consequences for Russia’s non-compliance in 2014. On the contrary, “it was separated between Crimea and the Barents Sea, and especially the regional arm of the co-operation provided an extra leg to stand on and to maintain relations” (BEAC1).

### ***Cohesive Identity***

As emerged from the interviews, the member states, but Russia, share a cohesive identity and collective interest in promoting peace and democracy. The respondents agree that they “all share the same European values” (BEAC/CBSS2) and that the decision to suspend was “a question of trust and defending our principles” (BEAC2). It became apparent in the arguments that the antagonist to this positive self-image is Russia. This distinction becomes clear by stating that “Russia had broken all the promises and principles that they signed to become a member of the organisation, such as stability, peace, and sustainability” (BEAC/CBSS2) and by differentiating that “our commitment to the fight against climate change, peace and stability in the Arctic is self-evident, but it is not for Russia” (BEAC2).

### ***International Symbolism***

Furthermore, as emerged from the data, the decision had a symbolic international dimension. Throughout the interviews became clear that the self-identity was based on the broader European and democratic society. The respondents referred to the EU and NATO as foundational organisations for their self-understanding. They highlighted, for example, that “we are

also EU member states and share the common positions towards Russia here“ (BEAC2) and that “a united approach together with European partners was essential“ (BEAC/CBSS2). However, NATO and EU influence have not been referred to in the sense of “external pressure“ and, thus, the logic of consequences. Nevertheless, the analysis shows that it was seen as appropriate to react united and highlight that “Putin’s biggest miscalculation was that he believed that Europe would be weak and divided, but we stood strongly united, which was an important sign“ (BEAC2).

### ***Legitimacy***

Finally, the question of how to react “appropriately“ is closely connected to another factor that speaks to the logic of appropriateness, legitimacy. In this regard, the respondents primarily referred to its international and regional dimensions. First, regarding international legitimacy, they stated: “What we have done by sanctioning the norm-violations is demonstrate our commitment to upholding international values, which, I believe, was important and also enhanced our credibility“ (BEAC/CBSS2). Moreover, respondents referred to the other RCs. They highlighted that “it was a very good sign also towards the international community that we were able to have a common ground and reacted similarly towards Russia’s aggression“ (BEAC2). However, respondents of all three Councils clarified that there had not been an active coordination between the three regarding the decision to suspend.

Second, the data suggest that regional legitimacy played a role and was not seen at risk by the respondents but was instead ensured with the suspension. This was justified by referring to reactions on cooperation levels below the inter-governmental, which, independently from the BEAC, decided to disengage with Russia. It was explained that

the suspension activities started on the grass-roots and regional level, where the people were so upset, disappointed, and felt betrayed by what Russia did. So, NGOs, schools, universities, and municipalities decided to suspend activities and disengage with Russia. We were not needed to give guidance or tell what to do (BEAC2).

According to the respondents, this independent but still similar decision of the other regional players was seen as a “healthy sign“ (BEAC2) and a “proof of a legitimate and united regional approach“ (BEAC3).

## ***Leadership***

Analysing the arguments, one additional indicator became visible that has been repeatedly referred to by the respondents: Leadership. According to the arguments, this factor speaks to both logics and is related to institutional costs and the self-identity of the chair-holding state. On the one hand, it was noted by the respondents that the timing of the change of Presidency influences the institutional costs. This institutional particularity was highlighted by explaining that “in the BEAC there are bi-annual Presidencies and the high-political level does not meet so regularly as in the CBSS, also leading to a different decision-making process“ (BEAC/CBSS1). The respondents explained that the transition, which in the CBSS took place in May 2022, in BEAC only follows in October 2023. Only then a Ministerial Meeting would formally be held, and “we will be facing a similar problem as the CBSS“ (BEAC/CBSS2). Considering the informal “Friends of the Presidency“ format, the transition will be a significant challenge for further cooperation.

On the other hand, respondents in the BEAC referred to the central role of the Presidency in guiding the suspension process. They explained that “everything had been done in *ad hoc* principles“ (BEAC3), and in such a situation, the Presidency plays an important interpretative role. Therefore, respondents mentioned that the Presidency’s identity and national particularities, such as history, EU and NATO membership, length of the border with Russia, and national foreign policy, play a significant role in what proposals were made. However, it was underlined that “eventually, all states decide together on the proposed procedures“ (BEAC2).

To conclude, the findings show that all four indicators of considerations of “appropriateness“ were repeatedly mentioned and also centrally stressed by the respondents. Therefore, the logic of appropriateness was present in the BEAC member states’ decision to suspend, and the data also implies that it is of high significance in the decision-making. However, to assess its overall significance, it will be compared to the logic of consequences in the final section.

## **Conclusions on the BEAC: The Prevalence of the Logic of Appropriateness**

Overall, given the interview data, it is possible to conclude that considerations of appropriateness are prevalent in the BEAC member states’ reasoning for suspending Russia. The re-

spondents highlighted all four indicators that speak to the logic of appropriateness. Furthermore, the data suggest that the decision was deemed “appropriate“ because it answered the severe break and symbolic damage suitably, reflected a united approach with the European partners, secured the states’ self-identity, and was a legitimate course supported by other regional and international players. In contrast, the respondents seldom attributed importance to the only criterion associated with the logic of consequences: cooperation gains. In this regard, the respondents considered the benefits of cooperating without Russia not outweighing the costs of losing such a significant member. Therefore, weighing the relative importance of both logics, the data clearly shows that the logic of appropriateness was decisive.

In addition, the respondents referred to leadership as a factor influencing the decision-making process. Its influence was argued for on two dimensions: First, the organisational procedures connected to the Chairmanship, such as the timing of its transition, were assessed as determining the suspension’s institutional costs. Second, similarly to the CBSS, respondents referred to the ideational aspects connected to the Presidency, meaning the state’s identity and national particularities, as influential, given the Presidency’s central role in the suspension process.

### **3.3 Exploring Membership Suspension in the AC**

The Arctic Council was formally established in 1996 as the leading and only permanent inter-governmental forum promoting cooperation in the Arctic. This establishment is based on the Ottawa Declaration, signed by the eight Arctic states Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the US. The agreement is not an international treaty and, thus, not legally binding, highlighting the organisation’s soft law nature. According to the declaration, the overall goal of the AC is to promote the protection of the Arctic’s vulnerable environment, sustainable development, and the well-being of the Arctic inhabitants.

The Ottawa Declaration and its *joint communique* describe how the member states use the AC to support regional cooperation. The Foreign Ministers explicitly affirm environmental protection, sustainable development, and special contributions to Indigenous people and their communities. However, the declaration has no explicit references regarding political values and principles. Nevertheless, other key documents, such as the AC Strategic Plan 2021 to 2030, adopted at the most recent Ministerial Meeting in Reykjavik, refer to values and envi-

sion the Arctic to be “a region of peace, stability, and constructive cooperation, that is a vibrant, prosperous, sustainable and secure home for all its inhabitants“ (AC, 2021). These principles were underlined by the organisation’s nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize a few weeks before the invasion, as the AC “demonstrates the need for cooperation and trust between countries in a time where peace is threatened around Ukraine“ (Jonassen, 2022).

To summarise, in neither of the AC’s founding documents, which also include the organisation’s Rules of Procedure, adopted in 1998 (AC, 2013), a suspension clause or other provisions for restricting a member state’s participation can be found. This is because “the governing documents and mandates were not designed with a war situation in mind“ (AC1). Nevertheless, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine challenged this basic assumption, and the seven like-minded Arctic states decided to “pause“ their action in the AC. Therefore, the next section will investigate what precisely this “pausing“ means.

### **Measuring Suspension: “Paused Action“ in the Form of a Political Statement**

The answer to the Russian non-compliance in the AC came in two steps. First, directly after Russia’s aggression, the seven Arctic states, Canada, Finland, Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and the US, decided on common action and published a joint statement on AC cooperation following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in the form of a formal press release (see, e.g., US, 2022). In this statement, the seven like-minded Arctic states refer to the “core principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, based on international law, [which] have long underpinned the work of the Arctic Council“. They state that they are indefinitely and “temporarily pausing participation in all meetings of the Council and its subsidiary bodies“ and, thus, refusing to work and meet with Russia. One day later, the AC, on its official Twitter account, also announced that it “is pausing all official meetings of the Council and its subsidiary bodies until further notice“ (AC, 2022).

This initial “paused action“ means that all operations and endeavours of the AC and its working groups had been stopped, and no official AC events took place. This concerns the scientific and project level as well as the diplomatic one, including meetings of the Senior Arctic Officials. Thus, “in March, everything in the AC came to a standstill“ (AC1). However, the particularity in the case of the AC is that the like-minded states did not suspend Rus-



sia from the organisation, but themselves. One respondent explained, “we do not consider it possible to participate in the meetings, so we somehow suspended ourselves“ (AC2).

In this regard, another unique particularity of the AC must be mentioned: At the time of the invasion, Russia was holding the AC’s Chairmanship (2021-2023). The Chair reacted to the “paused action,“ stating that the decision was “regrettable“ and calling for isolating AC cooperation from “extra-regional events“ (cited in Paul, 2020: 1). Nevertheless, Russia continued to implement its Chairmanship program domestically and without the support of the AC Secretariat. The Russian Chairmanship will end in May 2023, and currently, possible ways to transition to the incoming Norwegian Chairmanship are planned.

In a second step, following this initial complete standstill and after the seven like-minded states had sufficiently examined the modalities, an additional joint statement on the limited resumption of AC cooperation in projects was published in June 2022 (see, e.g., Government Offices of Sweden, 2022). This resumption concerns projects approved by the AC at the Reykjavik Ministerial in 2021 that, since then, did not have Russian participation. To clarify, the AC has around 130 projects covering diverse topics, but not every member state and permanent participant takes part in each of them for various reasons. Therefore, cooperation was only resumed in projects Russia was never a part of, which has been approximately two-thirds of them. To resume these projects, a mechanism had to be found on how the projects could be coordinated and guided. This step was understood as a temporary solution bridging the period of the Russian Chairmanship until Norway takes over.

Consequently, the seven like-minded Arctic states did not establish informal cooperation but found a way of cooperating within the formal structures despite the Russian Chairmanship. Furthermore, different terms, such as “Arctic 7“ (Koivurova, 2022), “Arctic Council 2.0“ (Rogoff, 2022), or “Nordic Plus“ (Kirchner, 2022), have been used to refer to this cooperation. However, the respondents avoided these terms and emphasised that “there is no informal parallel structure or separate cooperation to the AC that these terms would describe, and the phrase we use is *like-minded* Arctic states“ (AC2).

To summarise, the case of the AC is the most complex one because it was significantly influenced by the fact that Russia was holding the Chairmanship at the time of the response. Nevertheless, the seven like-minded Arctic states in the AC responded to the non-compliance in the form of a joint political statement clearly condemning the norm violation but not using

the word “suspension“ as such in the statement. However, for the practical implications, there is not much of a difference because, like in the case of “suspension“, Russia remained a member state, and the seven states temporarily stopped all cooperation with the norm breaker until further notice. Thus, for the purpose of this thesis, “suspension of membership“ is also observable in the case of the AC, fulfilling the three previously outlined criteria. However, the particularities mentioned earlier must be considered throughout the analysis. Therefore, whereas suspension is the response, the next section will delve into why the states imposed it. The focus will first be on the logic of consequences and the logic of appropriateness.

### **3.3.1 The Absence of Logic of Consequences in the AC**

The interview data suggests that cost-benefit calculations did not play a role in the AC member state’s decision to suspend. In fact, the respondents only referred to one of the indicators of cost-benefit calculations: external pressure. However, similarly to the BEAC, this indicator was primarily referred to as systemic consequences of not cooperating and, therefore, bearing global responsibility. The respondents highlighted that “our projects and cooperation is not only important to solve regional issues, but what happens in the Arctic has immense global environmental, economic, but also social implications“ (AC1). Moreover, the AC was described as a ‘global common good’ because “it provides a globally important structure where we cooperate in different working groups, but that also provides ways for our observers to get engaged“ (AC3). This and similar arguments underlined the global dimension of the Arctic and the essential global role the AC plays.

In this regard, all respondents referred to the stressing issue and example of climate change. It was highlighted that while its impacts are substantial in the Arctic, their causes are also associated with developments outside the region. Therefore, all respondents provided scientific evidence stating that “research results, for example, show that the climate in the Arctic is changing three to four times faster, which impacts not only our local ecosystems but the whole global climate system and has severe consequences for the rest of the world“ (AC1, see, e.g., Rantanen et al., 2022). It was concretised that “the sea level rises and the melting in the Taiga will have tremendous consequences across the world“ (A3). The data suggests that

from these scientific facts, a global responsibility was concluded stating that “we have to recognise these pressing issues and also a special responsibility we have because of it“ (AC2).

Following this argumentation, two essential roles of the AC have been highlighted by the respondents that underline the global consequences “pausing“ has. First, the AC’s activities and projects are conducted in the six working groups. Respondents highlighted that “in these working groups, we are doing vital work and we have a responsibility globally but also to the people in our region to continue our important work“ (AC1) and that “there is a range of globally stressing issues that we must find a way to work on“ (AC3).

One example of a working group that has been repeatedly mentioned is the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP), measuring and monitoring climate change effects on ecosystems. The respondents highlighted that “the monitoring has been done across all eight states, but now there is a huge data gap and no ability of scientists to monitor data in half of the region“ (AC3). Furthermore, it was underlined that not cooperating in this field has global consequences for the research on climate change because “the AMAP also has a global dimension and supports the international work, for example, in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change“ (AC1). Consequently, “especially at the scientific level, some of those collaborations will need to resume, and there is hope that it can“ (AC1).

Second, and in this logic, the AC plays a crucial role in communicating research results and other reports to a broader global audience. One respondent explained that “we do not have to forget that the AC plays an essential role in communicating research results and scientific assessments from and developments in the region through reports and so on with the rest of the world, where are the actual causes for climate change“ (AC1). Nevertheless, “official events and communication channels, which were important in transferring this knowledge and stressing the global relevance are frozen now, which has severe consequences“ (AC3).

Consequently, the data suggests that the costs of losing Russia as a member and risking the institution were assessed as significantly high, making all respondents underline the substantial value of the AC and the need to preserve this institution. This becomes visible in statements such as “the Council is still there and exists, and that is very important“ (AC2) and “all the Arctic states see the strong value of the AC“ (AC3). Therefore, to limit the costs of not cooperating with Russia but preserving the institution as such, the seven like-minded states resumed cooperation in projects without Russian participation. One respondent explained:

After the initial pause, it was important to find a way to continue at least some of the project's important work so we do not risk losing the experts. That is why we resumed cooperation in the formal projects in which Russia prior did not participate (AC2).

Nevertheless, cooperation in these projects remains limited because high-level political meetings are needed for the respective decision-making processes. Therefore, "in terms of functionality, the impact has been tremendous on the AC. Since March 2022, there has not been one single decision made at any level, and there have been no formal meetings" (AC2). Therefore, the biggest challenge will be the transition process of Chairmanship in mid-May 2023, and "there seems to be flexibility and goodwill on all sides to ensure the transition" (AC1).

To summarise, the interview data show that none of the five indicators of cost-benefit calculations were mentioned in the sense of being decisive in the decision to suspend. Therefore, the logic of consequences was absent when deciding to suspend Russia. On the contrary, the respondents frequently highlighted external pressure, in the sense of calculating systemic consequences, and the more general high costs of not cooperating with Russia as factors impeding the decision and speaking against the suspension.

### **3.3.2 The Presence of the Logic of Appropriateness in the AC**

Despite the previously outlined severe consequences and a sense of global responsibility, the seven like-minded Arctic states decided to "pause action" (US, 2022) with Russia. The data suggest that this decision was "moral and value-based" (AC1) and a combination of various factors related to "appropriateness". Respondent argued that "you cannot go on cooperating with Russia when at the same time this country is conducting war crimes and firing missiles on apartment blocs" (AC1). Furthermore, "a strong reaction was necessary and correct and right in this case" (A3), and "we assessed the situation, and I think it was the right decision to pause activities" (AC2). As emerged from the interview, this assessment of "rightfulness" was based on a cohesive identity, symbolism, and a high degree of perceived severity.

#### ***Severity***

Throughout the interviews, the respondents frequently referred to the severity of Russia's norm break in terms of symbolic damage as a decisive background condition for why the

member states decided to suspend. Therefore, the interview data suggest that the degree of perceived severity of the violation is high, and the exceptional nature of the attack led to the decision to suspend cooperation with Russia. The respondents highlighted that “this severe attack made it impossible not to react and, in my opinion, it was taken a clear moral and value-based decision“ (AC1). Moreover, it was stated that “after this military attack, we simply couldn’t keep up the work and do business as usual“ (AC3). It was specified that “we were clear in the statement in articulating our condemnation of Russia’s military action and that under this violation of international law, we cannot take part in meetings“ (AC2).

Furthermore, compared to 2014, the data shows that the states considered the norm violation in 2022 much more severe. The respondents explained that “the illegal acts in 2014 were condemnable, and all Western countries imposed substantial sanctions, but there is a massive difference to the war crimes and breaks of international law we see now“ (AC2). Moreover, it was stated that “the full-scale invasion of Ukraine is something quantitatively different“ (AC3). However, after the annexation of Crimea, the states did not take significant measures against the Russian non-compliance and “what happened in the Black Sea was considered as extra-regional“ (AC1). As emerged from the interviews, the severeness of 2022 was the reason for the seven like-minded Arctic states to “pause“ actions with Russia.

### ***Cohesive Identity and International Symbolism***

The data analysis shows that the seven “like-minded“ Arctic states, as the name already suggests, share a cohesive identity and collective interest in promoting peace and democracy. Moreover, the respondents underlined the same norms and principles of international peace, stability, and sustainability. In addition, a symbolic international dimension became apparent as the states’ self-identity is based on the broader Western democratic society. The respondents centrally stressed that “we are all part of the West, a majority in NATO, and follow the same approach“ (AC3), and “all share the same values of peace, democracy and international law, so it was necessary to send a clear international message and give a united answer to this fundamental norm-break“ (AC1). In this logic, Russia was referred to in the interviews as “the Other,“ breaking the norms and principles, and is not a “like-minded“ state.

However, what becomes clear throughout the interviews is not only a particular self-understanding as a democratic and Western state but that one is also an Arctic state. One respondent explained that

I believe that all Arctic states recognise the strong value of the Council. To me, it represents the tangible outcome of the cooperation achieved after the Cold War. It serves as a positive example of what is possible through collaboration on topics that mutually benefit us all, such as environmental protection, climate change, and sustainable development. As the Arctic states have a special interest in leading these developments, there is also a strong consensus that we must take special responsibility for these efforts. I think this sentiment is shared across all Arctic states — it is not just about identifying oneself as an Arctic state but also ensuring that the Arctic is a well-governed place where the AC can facilitate cooperation (AC3).

In this logic, there is a unique Arctic identity based on geographic characteristics and shaped by a shared sense of international responsibility. In that sense, Russia was not referred to as “the Other“, but “there are eight Arctic states, and Russia is one of them, occupying 50% of the Arctic territory“ (AC2). However, the data suggest that although Russia is an Arctic state, it is still “different“. The respondents underlined that “we do not envision an AC without Russia, but we also do not see a resumption of collaboration with Russia any time soon under these circumstances, but the structures of the AC must be preserved for the future“ (AC1).

### ***Legitimacy***

As emerged from the interviews, this is also where regional legitimacy came into play in the decision-making of the seven like-minded Arctic states. However, the data suggest that the costs of losing Russia for legitimacy were assessed higher than the demonstration that the organisation is committed to upholding international values. It was stated that “the mandate of the Council is environmental protection and sustainable development in the Arctic, and these are things that they cannot do without 50% of the Arctic“ (AC1). The data shows that the respondents were worried that if half of the Arctic disappears, it is impossible to see the AC as a representative of the whole region. Therefore, they argued that “if it is possible again, at some point, Russia has to be involved in the cooperation again; however, until this is possible, we must find interim solutions“ (AC3). Consequently, the data shows that legitimacy did not play a role in the decision to suspend but was a factor in pushing for keeping Russia as a member and within the formal structures, thus speaking against the suspension.

In line with the arguments concerning legitimacy, one more specific aspect that has been mentioned by the respondents are the Indigenous peoples. As emerged from the data, not including all six Permanent Participants was considered a risk to the organisation's internal and regional legitimacy. It was argued that "of the six organisations representing the Arctic Indigenous peoples, four have a Russian component" (AC1). These organisations react differently to the Russian invasion, with the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North supporting Russia's actions (RAIPON, 2022) and others expressing the need for cooperation and concerns "that once more state activities are threatening their unity" (Koivurova, 2022).

### ***Leadership***

In addition, the respondents mentioned leadership as another factor influencing their decision-making. This factor speaks to both logics, as it, on the one hand, affects the institutional costs of the decision but, on the other hand, is also connected to legitimacy. First, as previously mentioned, Russia was holding the Chairmanship of the AC at the time of the invasion, which changed the institutional costs of the decision significantly. One respondent stated that "the fact that Russia was the Chair, of course, restricted the options the Council had regarding how to navigate the issue" (AC1). Moreover, another respondent specified that "we did not have any rules or mechanisms we could orientate along, and the fact that Russia was holding the Chair complicated the situation even more" (AC3).

Second, it was argued that "continuing and cooperating under a Russian Chair would give Russia legitimacy as a global leader and being a motor of global cooperation and peaceful cooperation, and this legitimacy was just not acceptable to us" (AC3). Therefore, "any engagement like travels to Russia, and giving any visibility to Russia as sort of leading the Arctic governance was out of the question" (AC2). Additionally, even though the seven like-minded Arctic states decided to resume formal cooperation in the projects Russia is not part of, "we did not really accept the Russian Chair and made it clear that Russia cannot represent the AC and will not speak on our behalf as a Chair would normally do" (AC3). Eventually, the respondents argued that "the only way of solving this issue was to pause participation" and, thus, bridging the time until the transition of Chairmanship.

In light of these findings, it can be concluded that the respondents attributed high importance to ideational factors. Three out of four indicators of considerations of appropriateness, namely severity, cohesive identity and international symbolism, were frequently mentioned and highlighted throughout the interviews. Therefore, the logic of appropriateness was at play in the AC member state's decision to suspend. Also, legitimacy was identified, but the respondents argued for it as a factor impeding the decision and speaking against the suspension.

### **Conclusions on the AC: The Prevalence of the Logic of Appropriateness**

To summarise, based on the findings from the interviews, it is possible to conclude that considerations of appropriateness are prevalent in the seven like-minded Arctic states' decision to suspend. A weighing of relative importance was impossible because all indicators of considerations of cost-benefit calculations in the decision to suspend were absent. Such calculations instead spoke against the decision to suspend, making the states "purely" following the logic of appropriateness. The data suggest that the decision to suspend was a clear symbolic moral stand against the perceived high symbolic damage of the violation and was based on a shared identity. Regarding the logic of consequences, the respondents focused on the practical implications of not cooperating with Russia for the Arctic and the whole world. This geopolitical level was repeatedly highlighted, and a special sense of responsibility that determined the member states' assessment was recognised. In this logic, legitimacy in the sense of ensuring reputation by sanctioning did not play a role in the decision-making. In addition, the respondents mentioned leadership as a factor that influenced the decision. Especially the fact that Russia was holding the Chair restricted the states' options and stressed legitimacy concerns.

### **3.4 Comparative Analysis: Exploring Commonalities and Differences**

Following the thesis' integrative analytical strategy outlined in the methodology chapter, this chapter will compare the findings from all three case studies. This comparative setup is important for solving the research puzzle and producing more generalisable findings. The central interest of the study is to find out why the member states in the three RCs decide to suspend Russia. Therefore, the chapter will start by analysing commonalities across the three



cases of “suspension of membership“. This allows for exploring more widely applicable considerations that make members suspend a non-compliant also in comparable cases. In the second step, differences will be analysed and traced back to variances between the RCs, identifying the decisive factor. An overview of the case studies’ results can be found in *Table 3*.

**Table 3:** Summary of the Case Study Research Results

Analytical Category: <i>Why?</i>	CBSS	BEAC	AC
<b>Logic of Consequences: Dimensions of considerations of “rational choice“</b>			
Severity	—	—	—
Cooperation gains	✓	✓	—
Low institutional costs	✓	—	—
Domestic gains	—	—	—
External pressure	—	(✓)	(✓)*
<b>Logic of Appropriateness: Dimensions of considerations of “appropriateness“</b>			
Severity	✓	✓	✓
International symbolism	✓*	✓*	✓*
Cohesive identity	✓*	✓*	✓*
Legitimacy	✓	✓	(✓)
<b>Others</b>			
Leadership	✓	✓	✓
Solidarity	✓	—	—

*Guide: “✓“ = identified; “(✓)“ = identified as hindering; “—“ = not identified; “\*“ = importance*

### Commonalities in the RCs’ Reasoning to Suspend

The RCs reacted similarly to the Russian norm break and suspended the non-compliant. All three, even though they did not actively coordinate their actions, took a moral stance, clearly condemning the norm-violation, and drew the same conclusion that “business as usual“ cannot go on sanctioning the non-compliant member state and temporarily stopping all cooperation with it. Similarly, all organisations were leaving the door open, did not consider expel-

ling, and Russia formally remained a member of all three organisations until it withdrew from the CBSS. Therefore, according to this thesis' conceptualisation, all three responses can be categorised as different types and cases of "suspension of membership".

In light of the findings from the data analyses, this similar reaction was underpinned by considerations of appropriateness. The logic of appropriateness is prevalent in all three cases' decisions to suspend Russia, which becomes apparent in a clear overlap in the indicators of cohesive identity, international symbolism, and severity in terms of symbolic damage, which thus were the drivers of the response and referred to by the respondents with high importance. In addition, when comparing the results from the within-case analysis, one more shared factor has been explored: Leadership. Nevertheless, the data suggest that its relevance for the decision to suspend remains limited, and it is better understood as a background factor that influences the concrete form of suspension in soft law organisations. Leadership speaks to both logics and is connected to institutional costs (AC&BEAC) and identity (CBSS&BEAC).

### **Varying Cost-Benefit Calculations**

As emerged from the cross-case analysis, a significant difference is that the suspension in the RCs comes with different "cost-packages" and thus varying cost-benefit calculations. The data shows that especially interview partners in the BEAC and AC pointed out factors that tend to speak against suspension because they are associated with high costs. One indicator especially stands out here as decisive for variance: external pressure. The factor was understood as anticipating systemic consequences of not cooperating and bearing global responsibility. The respondents in the BEAC and AC focused much more on geopolitical considerations and the practical consequences that not cooperating with Russia on critical and sensitive issues has for the Arctic but also globally. Furthermore, geographical factors were highlighted by the respondents, with Russia occupying over half of the Arctic territory, which makes it impossible to meaningfully cooperate on these issues without the country.

These varying cost-benefit calculations well explain differences in the organisation's concrete form of "suspension of membership". Indeed, there is a similarity across the three cases in that all RCs "suspended" Russia. However, the BEAC and AC respondents would protest against this "label" because there are formal differences in the concrete application of the three RCs' "suspension of membership", summarised in *Table 4*.

**Table 4:** Summary of the Differences in the Applications of Membership Suspension

Distinguishing Criteria	CBSS	BEAC	AC
Term used	“Suspension of membership“	“Suspension of activities“	“Paused action“
Publication format	Ministerial Declaration	Joint statement	Joint statement
Conditionality	Yes	No	No
Cooperation without RU	Formal (full-fledged)	Informal (parallel track)	Formal (project level)

The comparative analysis shows that the CBSS angered its “suspension of membership“ in a strongly worded Ministerial Declaration with clear conditionalities. Moreover, the member states continued to cooperate full-fledged and formally under the CBSS umbrella, despite the Russian suspension, even before the country’s withdrawal in May 2022.

In contrast, the two other councils drew less flexible conclusions from their organisations’ soft law institutional set-up. This becomes particularly visible in the communication format and the continuation of cooperation. First, in both Councils, the “suspension of activities“ and “paused action“ were published with a decreased status as joint political statements. In the case of the BEAC, it was argued that a Ministerial Declaration was not adopted “because we have not had any Ministerial Meetings“ (BEAC1). Nevertheless, the CBSS already, before its Ministerial in May 2022, adopted its declaration by a written procedure and, thus, without a Ministerial Meeting neither, using a much more flexible approach towards soft law. Furthermore, the seven like-minded states did not suspend Russia from the organisation, but themselves, a decision connected to Russia’s holding of the AC’s Chairmanship.

Second, the states in the Arctic region drew different conclusions on what the suspension means for the continuation of cooperation without Russia. The Presidency in the BEAC concluded that “since we decided not to cooperate with Russia, consensus-based decisions are not possible anymore, forcing us to cooperate informally. This is why we have created this parallel structure because we adhere to the legal obligations we made“ (BEAC2). In the case of the AC, cooperation between the seven like-minded states avoided establishing an informal parallel track, but formally and only in projects of the AC where Russia does not participate. Consequently, institutional costs, which would be low by flexibly interpreting the soft law set-up, did not play a supportive role in both’s decision to suspend.

To conclude, the comparative analysis shows that the logic of appropriateness is prevalent in all three cases' decisions to suspend. The driver of the similar response in all RCs were the three indicators of cohesive identity, international symbolism, and severity. Nevertheless, external pressure was identified as a decisive factor for variance leading to different forms of suspension. Furthermore, the data suggest that regional particularities influence this factor. As emerged from the data analysis, in their assessment of the costs of suspension, the respondents in the Arctic focused more on the systemic and practical consequences of not cooperating with Russia, which is also reflected in their less direct response towards Russia. Consequently, the research results suggest that in the CBSS, certain decisions regarding the form of suspension were taken based on a much more flexible interpretation of the soft law foundation because the states considered that there was much less to lose and more to win in cooperating without Russia. Contrary to the BEAC and AC, "suspension of membership" in the CBSS meant regaining functionality and also formality.

## **Conclusion and Outlook: About Dealing with the Rotten Apple**

The use of suspension of membership as a sanctioning tool is a recent phenomenon, and research so far remains limited. Nevertheless, various practical applications in the past ten years show that suspensions are an increasingly important mode of sanctioning that deserves further attention. Especially because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, this policy instrument got increasing attention. However, IO's use of membership suspension to ensure accountability is puzzling regarding two aspects: despite the lack of evidence that suspensions have an accountability impact, this policy instrument is also relatively costly. This stresses the research question of why IO member states suspend a non-compliant member.

In light of these developments and to answer the research question, this thesis focused on the application of membership suspension in three regional soft law organisations. It was theoretically assumed that the member states' decision to suspend is based on a logic of appropriateness or consequences, to each of which prior analysed indicators have been applied. To determine the motivations for suspension and which logic underpinned the states' decision, 12 expert interviews with key decision-makers across the three RCs were conducted. The interview data from each case was categorised according to the indicators, and the measurement was then based on how centrally and often the respondents stressed an argument. This allowed for identifying the presence or absence of indicators and thus for weighing the relative importance of one logic over the other. Eventually, the results from each RC have been compared across the cases to produce more generalisable findings on why states suspend.

The main finding that emerged from this analysis is that the logic of appropriateness prevails in the states' decision to suspend. The analysis has shown that considerations of appropriateness were predominant in all three cases and feature most prominently in the state's rationale. Thus, it can be concluded that regional soft law organisations suspend because of considerations of appropriateness. In addition, for this particular type of IO leadership and, thus, the Chair's role during the suspension process and organisational rules and procedures connected to it has been identified as an influential background factor.

While the three RCs are similar enough that the motivations for suspension work the same way, they are not identical, which is why there are differences in the suspension practice. This leads to a secondary finding: The differences in the RC's concrete application of "suspension

of membership“ can be explained by varying cost-benefit calculations. For example, in the Arctic, states focused their assessment much more on geopolitical considerations and practical consequences that not cooperating with Russia on critical and sensitive issues for the region but also globally has, leading to varying concrete applications of suspension.

To answer the research question of why IO member states’ suspend a non-compliant member, it can be concluded that they do so based on ideational beliefs and considerations of “appropriateness“. As a result of the explorative research approach and based on the empirical analysis, it can be concluded that the three explanatory indicators — cohesive identity, international symbolism, and severity — are more general and widely applicable considerations that make IO member states suspend. Accordingly, member states suspend if a cohesive identity is at stake, they want express symbolic international disapproval, and the background condition that the norm break is perceived as “severe“ is given.

These findings have two broader contributions and implications. First, the study provides original empirical evidence and insights into the reasoning behind membership suspension. It contributes three different applications of the tool, the reasons behind the use, and the particular “universe“ of regional soft law organisations to the research. By filling this empirical gap, three factors from the prior scientific literature on why states suspend could be confirmed, underlining their relevance as more general factors explaining the application of membership suspension in IOs. In addition, one more background factor for suspension, particularly in soft law organisations, has been added to the list of indicators: Leadership.

Second, the study adds new insights into comparative regionalism. The clear value-based decision indicates that cooperation in those regional cooperation formats is much more about norms and values than literature, particularly about the Arctic, often assumes. Moreover, the results support the assumption that regional particularities are influential. In this sense, it must be acknowledged that the AC covers a much larger territory, including a transatlantic dimension, and has a broader global reach and importance. This questions the comparability of the three RCs. In recent years the AC gained geopolitical relevance and played a vital role in the Arctic governance structure, questioning the four RCs’ scientific discourse.

This point already touches upon research limitations. First, in this study, only a specific subset of regional organisations could be analysed, which impacts the generalisability of the findings. Whereas the results suggest that appropriateness matters most for regional soft law or-

ganisations, whether this also applies beyond this set remains unclear and requires further comparative research. However, this does not mean a nullification of the research's results because important contributions to formulating and proofing more general explanations of why IO members suspend have been achieved. Second, there are limitations regarding the data basis and number of interviewees. Since the developments are ongoing and Russia's membership status remains precarious, some representatives were concerned and refused to participate. This circumstance is likely to improve as soon as there is more clarity regarding Russia's membership status, as the example of the CBSS shows. Nevertheless, the thesis' empirical data represents an original value and was sufficient to achieve the research goal.

Future studies may address the need to investigate more specific cases of membership suspensions. The application of this sanctioning tool increases, and with it, the study of the concrete application and reasoning behind it will only gain importance. Since three soft law organisations are a particular "universe" of IO, the research results can be further tested and applied to other "soft" collaboration formats, such as the G8 or G20. However, having identified driving concerns in three RCs, it is up to future research to explore their explanatory power beyond this universe. Following this logic, this thesis provides unique empirical evidence which will be helpful in studying additional conditions under which IO suspend non-compliant members. For example, other regional organisations and their reaction toward Russia's invasion of Ukraine could be explored, such as the two contrasting examples of the CoE and OSCE. Second, this study's cases, particularly the BEAC and AC, will remain highly valid and offer an excellent platform to study how long a suspension will last. Examining these future developments will hold insights that can concretise this study's research results.

This already touches upon the thesis' future outlook. The study holds policy-relevant contributions on how RCs in times of crises and adds to the recent debates on each organisation's future development. In this regard, the least eventful case is probably the CBSS. The reflection process on the organisation's role in the region without Russian membership, which was mandated during the Kristiansand Ministerial, will continue, and the first results will be presented in June during the Ministerial in Wismar. However, more eventful developments will be expected in the AC and BEAC. On May 11, the AC will hold a closed, digital meeting on the level of the Senior Arctic Officials to transfer the Chairmanship from Russia to Norway. It will then become apparent whether or not cooperation with Russia in some working groups

will resume. In October 2023, the BEAC will follow AC's lead and find a way forward because the organisation's Chair is formally supposed to transit to Russia. Therefore, developments in the Arctic will remain exciting, and given the social and environmental challenges ahead, ways to tackle them will need to be identified, to which the work of the RCs is crucial. Nevertheless, the lack of trust will be a significant obstacle to any form of cooperation with Russia in the future. The fact that Russia amended its Arctic strategy, deleting any mention of neither BEAC nor AC, shows the precarious future of multilateralism in the region.



## Appendices

### Appendix 1: List of Interviews

Code	Affiliation and Position	Format	Date
CBSS1	CBSS, Director General, Grzegorz Poznanski	In-person Interview (semi-structured)	22.02.2023
CBSS2	CBSS, Deputy Director General, Bernd Hemingway	In-person Interview (semi-structured)	22.02.2023
CBSS3	CBSS, Norwegian Presidency (2021-2022), Chair, Olav Berstad	Online Interview (semi-structured)	27.03.2023
CBSS4	CBSS, Polish CSO member, Ewa Debska	Online Interview (semi-structured)	02.05.2023
BEAC1	BEAC, Head of Secretariat, Markus Karlsen	Online Interview (semi-structured)	25.11.2022
BEAC2	BEAC, Finnish Presidency (2021-2023), Chair, Jari Vilen	Online Interview (semi-structured)	20.03.2023
BEAC3	BEAC, Anonymous	Online Interview (semi-structured)	27.03.2023
BEAC/CBSS1	BEAC and CBSS, Swedish CSO member, Eva Ekmevag	Online Interview (semi-structured)	14.04.2023
BEAC/CBSS2	BEAC and CBSS, EEAS Deputy CSO member, Marco D'Abbraccio	Online Interview (semi-structured)	21.04.2023
AC1	AC, Senior Arctic Official Finland, Petteri Vuorimäki	Online Interview (semi-structured)	05.04.2023
AC2	AC, Anonymous	Online Interview (semi-structured)	27.02.2023
AC3	AC, Deputy Senior Arctic Official of Norway, Ina Nygard Mossin	Online Interview (semi-structured)	28.04.2023

## Appendix 2: Interview Guide

### **Part I: Problem Description (5-10 min)**

- (1) Take me on a little tour of your work: How long have you been working at the RC's Secretariat, and what are your tasks as the HoO? / How long have you been working as a CSO member, and what are your tasks as a representative/Presidency?
- (2) From your point of view, can you describe to me what happened after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in the RC? How did the work, the atmosphere and procedures change?
- (3) What role did you play in this (suspension) process?

### **Part II: "Suspension" Decision After Russia's Invasion (10-15 min)**

- (4) How exactly did the RC "suspend" the Russian Federation from the regional organisation? What does "suspension of membership"/"paused action" mean?

*Possible prompt:*

- What does it mean in practice, what changed, or what did not change?
- Why was the decision this time different from the one in 2014?

- (5) What are the consequences of the degree of formalisation of the declaration? Please clarify why the Council has opted for this specific format in making the decision.

*Possible prompt:*

- Informality or formality of the declaration (e.g., press release, Ministerial declaration)?
- Is it purely symbolic, or has it practical implications?

- (6) What have been the concrete reasons behind this particular form of membership sanction? Was expulsion of membership considered/explored?

- (7) Are there informal communication channels with the Russian Federation, and is (informal) cooperation with Russia continuing in some fields?

*Possible prompt:*

- If yes, who conducts such meetings? Presidency, Secretariat, others? Please illustrate.
- What is the reason for this informal cooperation? Why is cooperation with the Russian Federation still important?

## Appendix 2: Interview Guide (continuation)

### **Part III: *Why?* The Reasons Behind the Suspension (15-20 min)**

(8) What were the concrete reasons for the suspension discussed during the meetings?

(9) What role did organisational/international values, norms and principles play in the decision-making process?

*Possible prompt:*

- What role did the following factors play in the decision-making?: international symbolism, cohesive identity, and legitimacy

(10) What role did cost-benefit calculations play in the decision-making process?

*Possible prompt:*

- What role did the following factors play in the decision-making?: organisation's functionality, cooperation gains, systemic concerns, the role of other global actors, symbolism

(11) Where do you see similarities and differences between the reactions of the three RCs?

*Possible prompts:*

- What factors contribute to possible differences between the three RCs, and could you provide an example to illustrate this?

- What role did the 3RCs meetings play in the decision to suspend? Has there been any form of coordination between the 3RCs?

### **Part IV: Consequences for the Regional Cooperation (5-10 min)**

(12) What have been the consequences of the suspension for regional cooperation?

*Possible prompt:*

- Do the remaining states continue to cooperate informally?

- In which areas has cooperation in the council improved/ceased without Russia? Examples?

(13) What have been the consequences for the regional organisation's functionality (e.g., budget, working groups, strategies etc.)?

(14) Open end: Can the Arctic/Baltic Sea become a region of cooperation again? How long will the suspension/paused action last?

(15) Is there anything else you want to highlight that is essential for understanding how the particular type of suspension has affected the work of the RC?

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project title:

*“How to Deal With the Rotten Apple in the Basket?”*  
Exploring Membership Suspension in Regional Councils of the  
Baltic Sea and the Arctic

Dear Sir or Madam,

You are invited to participate in the research project *“How to deal with the rotten apple in the basket?”* Exploring membership suspension in Regional Councils of the Baltic Sea and the Arctic. The study is conducted by Willi Stieger, a second-year graduate from the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies of the University of Tartu, as part of his final thesis. Before the interview is conducted, we kindly ask you to give your consent to the following items:

I confirm that I have been informed about the above-named study and understand the purpose and procedures.

I have been made aware of any known or expected inconvenience, risk, discomfort, or potential side effects and of their implications as far as the researcher currently knows them.

I understand that my participation in this study will involve me taking part in a video- or audio-recorded discussion-interview and that the questions asked will relate to the topic of the suspension of the Russian Federation from the Regional Council (*tbc*).

I understand that the data and results gathered from the interview may be diffused through the communication channels of the University of Tartu and that my information may be subject to review by responsible individuals from the College for monitoring and audit purposes.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions, and I am satisfied with the answers I received.

I freely agree to participate in this study and understand that I can withdraw at any time without affecting my current or future relationship with the University of Tartu.

I will respect the confidentiality of the interview.

**Name of Participant:** (print name) \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date/Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

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To facilitate handling, the references to the institutional documents are highlighted separately.

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