

Challenges in transboundary water governance in Europe in times of instability

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Lake Peipsi

- ..largest transboundary lake in Europe; shore line 520 km
- surface area 3555 km² (44% belongs to Estonia, 56% to Russia)
- shallow (7,1 m average); eutrophication issues



Lake Peipsi is - a habitat of 37 species of fish; In winter –ice fishing (*also as a tourism attraction*)



Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation..

..has worked for 25 years with Lake Peipsi communities on both shores of the lake; with environmental education, heritage / nature tourism; but also with other Lake and border regions in Europe and Africa.

We had several cross border cooperation initiatives with Russian NGOs, schools... until Febr 2022



2022 – the year of turbulent changes

- 24 February 2022 Russian invasion started with airstrikes all over Ukraine.
- Ecological and economic consequences of the war, (incl. the energy crisis in Europe)—have all modified the state of the prewar environmental agenda.
- The EU has stopped at all levels any kind of support programs with Russia, Belarus.
- No further scientific cooperation, not between local stakeholders, NGOs.

Transboundary water governance in Europe

- The EU is a party to a number of international agreements, (e.g. UNECE Water Convention)
- The EU states have concluded numerous basin-specific agreements, incl. with non-EU countries; (e.g. Finnish-Russian transboundary water cooperation since 1964 - was ranked as best in the world)
- The biggest transboundary lakes in EU eastern borders: Lake Peipsi (Est/Rus); Lake Pyhäjärvi and Lake Saimaa (Fin/Rus)



*Map: Wetlands in Europe;
www.eea.europa.eu*



- **Transboundary water commissions** between Estonian-Russia has worked efficiently since 1997: on fisheries, water management
- Today Est/Rus, Fin/Rus Commissions continue their commitments mostly unilaterally, basic data exchange exists. (agreements of fish quotas Est-Rus Fisheries Commission, reached in Dec.)
- Scientific groups, NGOs have lost their partners they worked with for decades

Beside the socio-economic catastrophe we see **environmental disasters** that will afflict Ukraine's ecosystems for generations to come. Many impacts cross the borders

- Hazardous waste
- Water pollution (via rivers into the sensitive ecosystem of Black Sea; migratory birds).

Bombardment of a steel plant - release tons of hydrogen sulfide into the Black Sea.

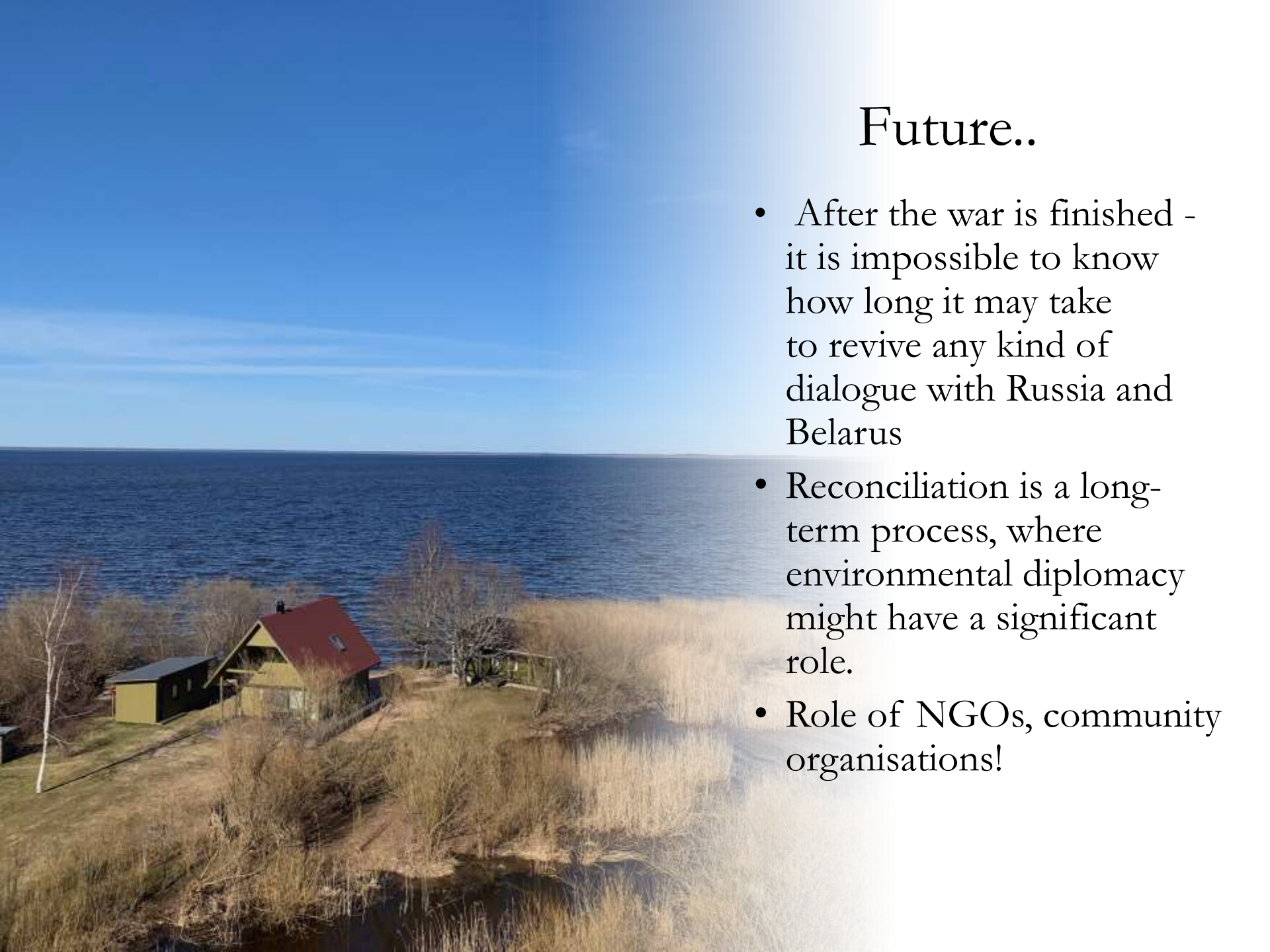
Nuclear threat (Zaporizhia nuclear plant near the front line on the banks of the Dnieper River)

- Detonation of missiles - formation of toxic gases, which pollute also across the borders.



Future..

- After the war is finished - it is impossible to know how long it may take to revive any kind of dialogue with Russia and Belarus
- Reconciliation is a long-term process, where environmental diplomacy might have a significant role.
- Role of NGOs, community organisations!





Future..

- The paradox is that sanctions towards Russia and the accessibility of oil and gas from Rus, has increased interest in clean alternative energy in Europe and beyond.
- In long term, the post war recovery process should be used for a fundamental transformation (of Ukraine) towards a green and net-zero economy