

The 5th BSSSC annual conference - Gdansk (Poland), 27-28 October 1997

Resolution

The 5th Annual Conference of BSSSC convened in Gdansk, Poland, on 27 - 28th October 1997 on the invitation of the Governor of Gdansk. The representatives from the subregions of the Baltic Sea States - Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Norway, Russia and Sweden - discussed the progress and perspectives of Baltic Sea cooperation and in particular the possible contributions of the subregional and local level to the pre-accession-strategy of the EU and the applicant countries in the area. The conference expressed its thanks and gratitude to the organizers of the Gdansk meeting and for the support by the Polish government, the Polish regions, the Municipalities of the Gdansk regions, the European Commission and the conference sponsors.

I. The Conference

recalling

- the political mandate for the development of the Baltic Sea co-operation by the Visby summit and its concretization by the Kalmar Action Programs,
 - the European Commission's Baltic Sea Region Initiative acknowledging the European dimension of this co-operation,
 - the Amsterdam summit confirming the enlargement process,
 - The European Commission's Agenda 2000 proposing a coherent programme to prepare the Central and Eastern European applicant countries for accession to the European Union
- took note of a great number of ensuing encouraging activities in 1997 in the Baltic Sea area, in particular
- the Baltic Sea Women's Conference in Lübeck
 - the Conference on Baltic Sea co-operation in the Youth Field in Helsinki
 - the 2nd Baltic Trade Union congress in Wismar
 - the Conference on Transnational Co-operation in the field of Spatial Planning in Rostock the annual conference of BCCA in St. Petersburg
 - the 6th Ministerial Session of the CBSS in Riga
 - the UBC IVth General Conference in Gdansk
 - the 2nd General Assembly of Baltic Sea Commission/CPMR in Riga

- the 6th Parliamentary Conference on Co-operation in the Baltic Sea area in Gdansk
- the 3rd Conference of the Ministers for Culture of the Baltic Sea States in Lübeck
- the Council of Europe and the Baltic Sea Tourism Commission's Conference on Cultural Heritage in Gdansk

as well as the forthcoming conferences

- the Conference on Decentralization Reforms in the Baltic Sea States in Copenhagen
- the Ministerial Meeting of OSCE in Copenhagen
- the CBSS summit of the Heads of States in the beginning of 1998
- as well as many other conferences on a regional or local level, which reflect the scope and the variety of Baltic Sea cooperation and involvement;

welcomed

- the growing interest of the European Parliament in Baltic Sea matters as reflected by the reports of its Regional Committee and its Foreign Affairs Committee,
- the acceptance by the European Commission of the Baltic Sea area as an European policy objective, its involvement in the work of CBSS and its committees, its political support for the BSSSC as a focal point in the Baltic Sea region, the work of the Baltic Co-ordination Committee (BCC), and its efforts to date to contribute to the Baltic Sea co-operation and to implement the Baltic Sea Regional Initiative through existing and new programs, - particularly the Phare Baltic Sea Cross-Border Programme and the and TACIS Cross-Border Co-operation Programme including the Baltic Small Project Facility and the TACIS Small Project Facility, and Interreg II C, designated to support the work of subregional and local activities.
- the conclusions of the 6th Ministerial Session of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) at Riga, and in particular the encouragement for the further implementation of the Kalmar Action Programs, the work of the task-force on organized crime, its readiness to further develop its co-operation with BSSSC and other major Baltic Sea organizations, as well as its resolution to consider a final proposal for the setting-up of a permanent Secretariat
- the priorities of work of the CBSS during the Danish Presidency for democratic participation and human rights, economic integration and social affairs, civic security, education, environment and nuclear safety and the institutional strengthening of the CBSS and underlined its willingness to contribute to this work programme wherever possible and appropriate the conclusions of the 6th Parliamentary Conference on Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Area and in particular its call on national governments to guarantee political support on all levels for co-operation in the Baltic Sea area including a broad popular information, its call on the

European Union to support as far as possible and feasible the candidate countries in their efforts to qualify for EU-membership and to make use whenever possible, of the expertise of the subregional and local level for the implementation of a pre-accession-strategy, and encouraged its intentions to further develop and consolidate this important political body into a major Baltic Sea partner organization

- the work by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the Assembly of European Regions for a European Charter for Regional Self Government.

II. The Conference

called upon the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS)

- to continue and wherever possible further strengthen its efforts for stability and security in the Baltic Sea area
- in particular to give high priority to the fight against organized crime and corruption, and to combat money laundering, drug trafficking, trafficking in women and sex-tourism involving children
- to use the Kalmar Action Programs as the major policy framework for the development of the Baltic Sea area and to make use of the particular know-how and expertise of the regional and local level in this process.
- to support the regional and local level politically and financially in their efforts to establish and enhance co-operation in the Baltic Sea area in all fields
- to consider the social dimension as a constituting element of Baltic Sea Tradition and Baltic Sea co-operation
- to actively support the setting up of a Baltic Sea Youth foundation along the lines of the successful Franco-German youth institution
- to proceed with the envisaged strengthening of the CBSS and to consider in particular the setting-up of a permanent Secretariat as a major contribution for the stabilization of Baltic Sea co-operation

called upon the European Union

- to appeal to national governments in order to ensure the ratification of the Europe- agreements with the Baltic States without further delay
- to see to it that the opportunities which provide the partnership-agreement with Russia are used to its full potential
- to support as far as possible and feasible the applicant countries of the Baltic Sea area in their efforts to qualify for EU-membership and for fair and equal negotiation chances for all

democratic applicant countries

- to promote, that the accession-partnerships also actively involve the sub-regional and local level, especially in such areas as environment, transport, energy and structural funds in order to strengthen institutional and administrative capacity to implement community legislation.
- to optimize the effects of its policies and programs through improved transparency and practicability, in particular by enhancing flexibility and compatibility, by decentralizing the management of its programs and by setting up a Baltic Sea desk in the Commission as well as a joint programme framework (Baltic Sea Fund)
- to actively support as part of the pre-accession strategy the transfer of the know-how among BSSSC-members in the management of EU structural funds by giving financial support to networks and twinning arrangements which can give the candidate countries operational experience with EU structural funds.
- to support efforts to consolidate a Northern dimension as a bases for an enhanced co-operation between northern regions in the European Union and the Russian Federation.

III. The Conference took note with great satisfaction of

- the progress achieved so far, a notable spirit of joint commitment and a growing mutual understanding on all levels of Baltic Sea co-operation
- the BSSSC paper implementation of the Action Programs of Kalmar on the subregional level and in particular
- the interim reports of the Working Groups, and encouraged them to develop their role as focal points for the regional and local actors, as think-tanks for the Baltic Sea co-operation and as expert discussion partners for other bodies and organizations on the international, national and regional level
- a first list of promotional co-operation projects, which as model projects should set examples for further activities, and encouraged the Working Groups and participating regions to contribute, together with the Secretariat, to an early implementation and to come up with new project ideas
- the valuable work of the four workshops of this conference underlining the importance of such issues as the development of regionalization in the Baltic Sea area, the common heritage of the Baltic Sea region and its role for future development and co-operation, citizen participation in
- the Baltic Sea co-operation as an in dispensable part of the people-to-people approach and the contribution of the local and regional actors to the implementation of the Agenda 21 for the Baltic Sea area, and asked the permanent Working Groups to follow up on these deliberations

- the second Partner Search Forum, which provided again a successful meeting place for presenting and organizing co-operation projects, and of the generous support by the European Commission, and encouraged ideas to make this a permanent item on the Baltic Sea Calendar
- the call for further improving and deepening the co-ordination and co-operation between the major Baltic Sea organizations
- the successful work of the newly established Secretariat of BSSSC.

IV. The Conference accepted the new terms of reference as proposed by the Board of BSSSC.

- The Conference expressed its deep respect and its thanks to the parting Speaker of BSSSC, Minister Gerd Walter, for his outstanding devotion to the Baltic Sea Co-operation and his success in establishing and shaping BSSSC
- The Conference welcomed the new Speaker, Knud Andersen, County Mayor of Bornholm, wished him all success in his new office and approved of the political priorities for the next year as put forward by him on behalf of the Board of the BSSSC:
 - The BSSSC shall be the contact centre for the regions in the Baltic Sea area and shall act as intermediary for regional demands and strategies for a democratic, economic, social and sustainable development of the region. The BSSSC shall ensure a common targeted policy for the Baltic Sea region in international forums and in relation to the CBSS, the European Union and the national governments. The BSSSC shall work for a more specific and goal-oriented use of the available financial sources, in order to ensure the implementation of concrete projects to the benefit of all regions in the Baltic Sea area.
 - The BSSSC shall act as an umbrella organization for all actors and organizations In the Baltic Sea region and it shall ensure a good information flow and co-operation between those actors.
 - The BSSSC shall be a market place for the exchange of experiences between the regions and for the creation of new partnerships. The BSSSC, through its working groups, shall also actively contribute to the identification of new co-operation projects in the regions, and help to find financial sources for such projects. The BSSSC shall ensure that all regions have the possibility to participate in these projects on equal terms.
- The Conference gratefully accepted the invitation of the six Danish County Councils to hold the next annual Meeting 1998 in Roskilde, Denmark.
- The 1999 meeting will take place in Kaunas, Lithuania.

Workshop I -Regional Development in an EU Context

I. Objectives

The aim of the workshop was to discuss ongoing changes in the regional structures of the Baltic Sea States and their implications for co-operation with the Commission of the European Union.

II. Discussions

The workshop affirmed that the goal of sub-regional co-operation among the Baltic Sea States is

- to promote stability, security and democratic processes as well as further economic development
- to reinforce the role of a strong basis for implementation of democracy and sustainability
- to facilitate cross-border co-operation between sub-regions in order to encourage trade and business

III. Conclusions

While affirming the necessity of project funding instruments as a means to promote joint development activities, the workshop asked the Commission to review the rules that govern the access to project funding. The complexity of the rules presently tend lead to a low success rate among applications, thus discouraging the cross-border co-operation these instruments are designed to promote.

The Workshop encouraged the BSSSC Secretariat to strengthen its capacity to support regions planning or developing co-operative activities. Specifically the workshop recommended the secretariat to provide expert advice, to collect and maintain information about regional actors, networks and projects and to make them readily available. The workshop recommended that the work on documenting regional structures and current trends be continued and reported in the Baltic Sea Region and Urban Management Conference in Helsinki, December 10-13, 1997.

Workshop II -Common Heritage of the Baltic Sea Region and Prospects for the Future

The Workshops main objectives were the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Economic development in the Baltic Sea Region and the inter-link between these areas.

The Workshop recognized a tremendous willingness, largely based on sympathy among the workshop participants, which led to the conviction that if there is a will like such, there is a way to continue on this path of sub-regional co-operation and achieve the goals it is aimed at.

The Workshop recognized the cultural heritage as an essential part of all kinds of activities, as

reflected in the main objectives of the discussion. The exchange of arts and cultural events, the important impact on education, the development of personal contacts among the citizens of the Baltic Sea States, the great importance for tourism, the co-operation of businesses and entrepreneurs, which largely rely on personal contacts and understanding - all of these and many more issues of our lives are effected by our cultural heritage and cultural identity.

It was therefore concluded, that The Baltic Sea Region is a valuable independent multicultural unit of various subregions with its own values within present and future Europe.

There is an absolute necessity to elaborate and develop means of communication among the citizens of the Baltic Sea Region, by way of publication, infrastructural improvements, exchange of information, also via electronic means, such as the Baltic Sea Alliance.

There is an urgent need to concretize the established mechanisms and structures through cultural projects in order to achieve an authentic and mutual understanding and consciousness for a cultural identity in the Baltic Sea Region.

The Balder Heritage Programme offers a platform for joint development between the regions in the Baltic Sea Area, regarding cultural tourism.

The Workshop strongly supports the Idea that local and regional democratic authorities should cooperate to promote the creation of a joint Baltic Sea Action plan for:

- the preservation and development of strategically important parts of our common heritage
- joint initiatives for the promotion of sustainable and cultural tourism for it is convinced, that culture, nature and environment are vital elements of tourism and economic development, as well as of trade and industry in the Baltic Sea Region
- the creation of new transport links, such as ferries and railroads, to create new bridges between the people in the Baltic Sea Region.

Workshop III -Citizen Participation in Baltic Sea Co-operation

I. Objectives

The objective of the workshop was to deal with citizen participation in general, as to what are the obstacles and the possibilities for participation. A special focus was to be laid on the participation of women and youth and the role of NGO's and their co-operation with governmental authorities. As a

specific example of citizen participation, activities of NGO's as well as Governmental (legal) actions, the workshop discussed the recent development on trafficking in women.

II. Discussions

Obstacles to citizen participation:

- Lack of interest in politics.
- Lack of financial compensation for elected representatives of local government.
- Prejudices against women and minorities, concerning their role in politics.
- Traditional male dominated communication patterns.
- Lack of Baltic identification.
- National and cultural differences.
- Differences between rich and poor regions.
- Lack of funding, particularly for NGO's.

III. Conclusions

Examples for solutions:

- Surveys and studies on the opinions and concerns of young people.
- Programs to activate and strengthen regional identification.
- Special compensation for women representatives.
- Language education and communication training, especially for women.
- Participation programs of children and young people, in matters of their concern.
- Special privileges for people doing voluntary work in NGO's.
- Extension of the voting right to minorities, including young people 16 years and older.
- Construction and strengthening of networks.

Because of the importance of the issue of trafficking in women, especially in the Baltic Sea Region, the workshop calls on the BSSSC to keep this issue on the agenda and urge national governments to strengthen the co-operation and build up networks with NGO's, support the victims, and enforce prosecution of this particular form of organized crime.

Workshop IV -Agenda 21

Objectives

The main objectives were to deal with environmental strategies for the Baltic Sea Region, their interconnection with other policies, and in particular, the role of subregions in the process.

Discussion

The Workshop recognized that Agenda 21 (A 21) activities have started on different levels from the national to the local level in the Baltic Sea Region. There is a need for subregional co-operation and networking in order to further spread out the A 21 process to all the subregions. We agreed that A 21 should be further developed as a long-term and bottom-up-process in which especially young people should be involved. The main goal should be to improve life quality in the Baltic Sea Region as a whole.

Conclusions

The Workshop IV concluded that

1. the notion of sustainability not only refers to environment, but also to social needs and economy. A 21 can integrate these aspects in a cross-sector process and be a basis for political decision-making;
2. the local, subregional and national level all have a responsibility to carry out the A 21 process. Since A 21 is a common task for all the levels, there is a strong need for links between them;
3. the subregions have three major tasks in the A 21 process:
 - a. implementation of A 21 within the framework of regional and spatial planning,
 - b. creating forums for A 21 activities in co-operation with other actors, e.g. NGO's and organizations from the commercial and public sector, to develop a regional action plan for sustainable development,
 - c. to play an active role in order to guide and advise the local authorities in their implementation of the Local Agenda 21;
4. all the Baltic Sea subregions are encouraged to form partnerships and develop networks in order to exchange experience, increase activities and find means and ways of financing the common activities;
5. there is an immediate need to bring forward projects and solutions on the severe environmental problems facing the Baltic Sea and its surroundings, mainly caused by urban, industrial and agricultural development.