

RESOLUTIONS

11TH BSSSC annual conference – St Petersburg, Russian Federation 2003

In its tenth year of existence the BSSSC has completed the Baltic Sea Region circle by having its annual conference in St Petersburg, Russia, which symbolically expresses the subregional's level interest in covering all the countries of the Region in our work.

With the European Union's enlargement, which involves four countries within the Baltic Sea Region, due to take place on May 1st 2004, this part of Europe faces new challenges. Having adjusted its terms of reference accordingly, the BSSSC will be an active partner in defining the conditions for the Region's growth.

In this context the Conference views the 2nd Northern Dimension Action Plan as an important tool for achieving the Area's development. Through the Plan's provisions, it embraces all important sectors and covers all the countries of the Baltic Sea Region; regardless of their affiliation to the EU. Appreciating the more focused plans as far as aims, objectives and fields are concerned, the conference expects that more adequate financial tools will be established as well as the greater involvement throughout the process of the decentralised levels. The BSSSC will continue initiating projects within the Northern Dimension's scope of actions and will participate in monitoring the implementation process.

The conference also welcomes the debate as mirrored in the documents: "A Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Eastern Neighbours" and "Paving the way for a New Neighbourhood Instrument". It is obvious to us that if the proposed measures are to meet the goal of "spreading the benefits of enlargement for political and economic stability in the neighbouring countries and help reduce prosperity gaps where they exist" there definitely has to be a clear vision of how contacts between the enlarged EU and its new neighbours are to be improved and how sound financial support is to be established. And within this process, the decentralised level has to be involved effectively.

With the enlargement of the European Union and the demands of today's world, Europe's citizens as well as decision-makers face new challenges. Therefore, we regard with great esteem the work of the EU Convention to draft a new EU Treaty. We also appreciate the Convention's proposal to include the regional and local level within the future constitutional set up of the European states. A further step should be the adoption by the Council of Europe of the Charter of Regional Self-Government, as well as ensuring the broader involvement of the decentralised level in the European Commission's consultation processes.

Having high expectations as to the future of Europe and the Baltic Sea Region, the BSSSC has followed with interest the preparatory work related to future EU regional policy. With the ambitious goals of the Lisbon Strategy in mind we underline the need for a strong EU regional policy. In this respect we also appreciate the new focus on the need for economic growth in Europe. At the same time the Conference sees an indisputable need for solidarity to still be a guiding force behind the new measures. We also strongly advocate that the Interreg initiative continues in such a way as to permit regional partners from Norway to participate, as well as to call for maritime borders to be treated as land borders. This, together with well-adjusted TACIS tools, is indispensable for decentralised co-operations to contribute fully to a prosperous United Europe.

The Conference sees as focal points for the BSSSC's activities in the year to come:

- Trans-european networks, which when in place, will make an essential contribution to economic growth in the Baltic Sea Region;
- Maritime safety – given the vulnerability of the maritime eco-system and increased activities in the Baltic Sea, it is essential to ensure that effective protective measures are in place, so that the Region's citizens do not suffer the adverse results of accident-, crime- or neglect-related pollution;
- Agenda 21, with its special stress on sustainable production and consumption patterns, improved multi-stakeholder involvement and the demonstration of initiatives such as the so called “lighthouse projects”;
- Youth involvement in the Baltic Sea Co-operation and public life as this will help guarantee a better future;
- Quality of life related activities, such as the establishment of a European network for people with disabilities;
- Cultural heritage – with the stress on creating a Baltic Sea identity and, at the same time, building greater understanding and respect for different cultural backgrounds and the richness of historic and cultural differences.

In its work for the Baltic Sea Region, the BSSSC appreciates the role of the CBSS as an umbrella organisation of which the BSSSC is a partner. With achieving greater synergy and the strengthening the role of the sub-national level as goals, the BSSSC will continue co-operating with other organisations, with special stress on other Baltic Sea Region organisations as well as the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee.

The Conference expresses its gratitude to the Russian hosts for inviting the BSSSC to meet during the city's three hundred-year anniversary. It also appreciates the invitation of the Swedish authorities to hold the BSSSC 12th annual conference in Malmö/Sweden on October 21st-23rd, 2004.