

The 4th BSSSC annual conference - Vaasa (Finland), 17-18 October , 1996

Resolution

The 4th Conference on BSSSC convened in Vaasa, Finland, at the invitation of the Provincial Government and the County Councils of the Province, on 17th and 18th October 1996. The representatives from the subregions of the Baltic Sea States Finland, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany, Denmark, Norway and Sweden discussed perspectives of Baltic Sea cooperation and underlined the special contribution of the subregional level to the further development of our area.

As guests the Conference welcomed Minister Valdis Birkavs, Chairman of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, as well as the Presidents of the Union of the Baltic Cities and the Baltic Sea Chambers of Commerce Association, the General Secretary of the Helsinki Commission and the representative of VASAB.

I.

The Conference invites the Heads of Governments of the Baltic Sea States to continue their leading role in forming Baltic Sea policy as started in Visby 1996,

The Conference asks for a rapid enlargement of the European Union by allowing the interested Baltic Sea States to join as soon as possible and for a strengthening of the partnership between the Russian Federation and the European Union,

The Conference draws attention to the growing economic potentials for trade and business in the region,

The Conference calls for a quick and complete implementation of the Action Programs of the CBSS and the EU Baltic Sea Region Initiative,

The Conference demands a focal point (Permanent Secretariat for the CBSS) for the Baltic Sea cooperation,

The Conference encourages the subregions of the Baltic Sea region to continue their over 300 cooperation projects, serving as the practical foundation of the Baltic Sea co-operation.

The new dynamics of the Baltic Sea co-operation, generated by the results of the Baltic Sea Summit in Visby, the Baltic Sea Region Initiative of the Commission and the Action Programs of the Council of the Baltic Sea States mark a new stage of the Baltic Sea policy. It gives the co-operation in our area a new and challenging perspective. It enables the Baltic Sea region to play an active role in furthering a peaceful and stable development in a region embracing EU member and non-member states. It will add to the competitiveness of our area with other regions inside and outside of Europe.

With the results of Visby and Kalmar, the Heads of Governments, the EU Commission and the Foreign Ministers have mutually established an overall framework of priorities for the development of the Baltic Sea region for the first time. These guidelines for activities call on all actors in our area to reconsider their efforts and to concentrate on specific priorities.

The Conference agrees with the objectives laid down in these guidelines, emphasising the efforts on five priorities:

To further democracy and to stable political development by strengthening the people-to-people approach,

To improve the conditions for economic co-operation,

To demand a stronger commitment for environmental protection,

To improve the conditions for civic security and combating organized crime,

To ask for a better coordination of the initiatives of the various Baltic Sea organizations.

The Conference welcomes the special role these guidelines attribute to the subregional level in the further development of the region.

II.

The Baltic Sea subregions consider as one of the major tasks in the future to realize on the subregional level the objectives set down in the Action Programs of the CBSS and the Baltic Sea Region Initiative of the EU.

Together with the local authorities and the chambers of commerce the subregions have played an indispensable role in developing Baltic Sea co-operation, and this will continue.

To date, the four Conferences on BSSSC have taken up in their working group sessions issues such as: Small and medium-sized industries, trade, transport and infrastructure, energy, ecology, youth policy, education and vocational training as well as the flow of information. They improved conditions for region-building, networking and strengthening regional co-operation.

In order to contribute successfully to the further development of the Baltic Sea region, the Conference calls on all subregions to organize their initiatives according to the following principles:

The subregional co-operation in the Baltic Sea region is putting life into the people-to-people approach,

The subregional co-operation will increasingly include multinational projects,

The subregional co-operation will concentrate on issues in their range of competences, especially on democracy, region-building and public administration, civic security, regional and local economic development, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, infrastructure, transport, energy, spatial planning on a regional level, environment, social services and public health, education/vocational training, culture, youth policy and flow of information,

The subregional co-operation will actively participate in the implementation process of the Action Programs of Kalmar and the Baltic Sea Region Initiative of the EU. For this purpose a working group will be nominated to prepare a report on how the Baltic Sea subregions will fulfill this obligation. This report will be submitted to the Council of the Baltic Sea States.

III.

A continuing improvement of political and economical co-operation in the Baltic Sea region will lead to increasing activities and networks on the subregional level.

In this regard, the Conference appreciates the fact that the Council of the Baltic Sea States, as the umbrella organization and co-coordinator for the Baltic Sea co-operation, is strengthened by the Summit of Visby. It draws the attention to the need to better co-ordinate the working groups of the CBSS and the conferences on the ministerial level to avoid double work. It asks for a sensible connection between the coordination tasks of the CBSS and the intended Baltic Coordination Committee by the EU Commission to avoid the organization of double and competitive instruments.

The Conference agrees with the Visby Summit request to the Swedish Prime Minister to improve the coordination of activities in our area. It offers its support as far as the subregional level is concerned. It welcomes the new practical commitment of the governments of the Baltic Sea states to provide additional funds. It reminds the national actors in the area that the co-operation on the subregional level depends on the national support.

It draws the attention to ongoing reforms and the decentralization on the regional level in several Baltic Sea states. Strong and democratically legitimized subregional bodies and effective support from the national level are indispensable for a successful region-building and are a precondition to the European integration process.

IV.

The Conference had a fruitful dialogue with the representatives of the EU Commission about

experiences and perspectives of the EU Programs applicable to the Baltic Sea region.

The need to co-ordinate already existing programs and financial means was emphasized.

In this dialogue it was stressed that more attention is needed for simplifying the required procedures, especially reducing bureaucracy and processing time from the moment of selecting projects by steering committees to their approval by the European Commission and signing of a financial memorandum.

The Conference demands from the European Commission a flexible programme for the Baltic Sea region with easy and unbureaucratic access on equal terms for all subregions in EU member and nonmember states.

The Baltic Sea subregions, represented by the Conference, are ready to act as the regional partner with the European Commission in drafting such a programme.

The proceedings of the Second Session of the 4th Conference on BSSSC will be made available in a separate document.

For the first time a "Partner Searching Forum '96" to discuss co-operation projects of joint interests between subregions was organized at the Conference. At the Forum 35 subregions prepared and

searched for co-operation projects. Approximately 150 appointments took place during two days. The very successful “Partner Search Forum” will be continued at the Conference.

The discussions and results of the workshops “Information flow in the Baltic Sea Regions”, “Youth Co-operation in the Baltic Sea” and “Energy and Sustainable Development” are attached.

V.

The Working Group has asked the Speaker to establish a Secretariat in close co-operation with the Baltic Sea subregions. The Speaker should have easy access to the Secretariat and it will therefore be started in Kiel, Schleswig-Holstein.

The Working Group proposes that Mr. Gerd Walter continues as Speaker for one more year, followed by Mr. Knud Andersen at the next Conference.

On the invitation of Mr. Henryk Wojciechowski, Governor of Gdansk, the 5th Conference on BSSSC will be held in Gdansk, Poland. In 1998 the Conference will take place in Denmark.

The Conference expresses its thanks and gratitude to the organizers of the 4th Conference in Vaasa, Finland.

Workshop I -Information Flow and Communication in the Baltic Sea Region

The Workshop recognizes the tremendous growth in the number of different regional activities and organizations involved in the Baltic Sea Co-operation. The main issue in the Workshop was to discuss and outline systematic and efficient forms of co-operation regarding communication and information flow in the Baltic Sea region. Issues of particular interest were information sources and distributions possibilities regarding various project information, past-project experiences, potential partnerships, newsletters, events calendars and EU.

The Workshop demands coordination for the information in the form of one open information system for gathering and distributing data and knowledge about operations concerning the Baltic Sea cooperation.

The Workshop agrees on the following framework of action:

The Workshop welcomes and strongly supports the formation of the Baltic Sea Alliance between state,

local and regional actors in order to establish a distributing data and knowledge about operations concerning the Baltic Sea Co-operation information flow in the form of one open joint information system.

The primary partners in the Baltic Sea Alliance, i.e. the Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation (BSSSC), the Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC), the Baltic Sea Chambers of Commerce Association (BCCA) with the assistance of the Baltic Institute of Finland (BIF), are responsible for joining forces in creating a World Wide Web-based system, which will be open to all users in the region. The experiences from the Baltic Sea Directory initiative will form the base for this new enlarged system, through which all interested organizations can receive and deliver information as well as inform others about their activities.

The Workshop calls for close co-operation between the Baltic Sea Alliance and all other organizations and offices involved in the Baltic Sea Co-operation. Contributions in form of data and mutual exchange of information are essential for the success of the database.

The Baltic Sea Alliance will contact all Conference participants and other relevant organizations and offices with further information about the progress of the system. All conference participants and their partners are welcome to deliver information about their projects and events to this system. A number of follow-up sessions will be organized in the future by the Baltic Sea Alliance.

The Workshop discussed and welcomed presented initiatives which aimed at facilitating the information flow in the region. Very informative and insightful presentations were given by the European Commission DG XIII, the Digital Media Institute, the CBSS-CSO, the BSSSC, the BCCA, the Hanse Office, the ECAT Kaliningrad and the Baltic Tourism Commission. Also, co-operation and information exchange with the Gdansk Cultural Centre is welcomed as well as the suggestion from the Pro Baltica Forum to seek Nordic financing for internet training. Problems in communication flow presented by the Latvian delegation will be taken into consideration.

The Workshop encourages the representatives of the presented issues to take contact with the Baltic Sea Alliance so that their contributions can complement the information system in an appropriate and functional way.

The Workshop draws attention to the importance of arranging different fora in the regions for the

exchange of experiences in the Baltic Sea co-operation and project implementation.

The Workshop notes that the political and media interests towards the Baltic Sea region issues have increased considerably in the past years. Joint subregional approaches will be necessary to promote the Baltic Sea region within both European and global framework.

Workshop II -Youth Co-operation in the Baltic Sea

The participants of the youth Workshop welcome the decision of the BSSSC to include NGOs in the deliberations and express the desire that this be continued in the future. The Workshop notes that different governmental and non-governmental organizations and structures are already working towards the goal of promoting co-operation in the areas of youth policy, youth and information exchange. The larger supranational structures are on the one hand the Baltic Youth Forum, the Baltic Youth Office in Kiel and the Nordic Youth Committee and on the other hand the BSSSC-Conference and the Union of the Baltic Cities, which also deal with youth questions.

The Workshop stresses the necessity of and supports the initiative of the Nordic Youth Committee to intensify and to introduce new elements in the co-operation and coordination of youth policy and action programs on the basis of structures already existing in the Baltic Sea region by bringing together NGOs and public administrations in the field of subregional youth co-operation.

The Workshop agreed that intensified co-operation is necessary in the fields of Baltic Youth Policy, in improving the flow of youth information on financing, in promoting youth mobility and participation of marginalized youth and hereby using the already existing structures of the Baltic Youth Office and of NGOs and public administrations as equal partners to implement this process.

The Workshop agreed on the following project in order to strengthen the co-operation and coordination of youth policy in the Baltic Sea region:

The Workshop agreed on the proposal of the Nordic Youth Committee to organize a Conference on Baltic Sea Youth Co-operation in Helsinki in May 1997. The target group for the Helsinki Conference is national and regional youth councils as well as public youth administrations and youth work on national and subregional level.

The aim for the Conference on Baltic Sea Youth Co-operation in Helsinki in May 1997 is to reach a

declaration and action plan between national and regional NGOs and public administrations to support a common youth strategy for co-operation in the Baltic Sea region.

The Workshop asked the Nordic Youth Committee to set up a preparatory body and to prepare a draft action plan for the Conference on Baltic Sea Youth Co-operation in Helsinki, May 1997.

The Workshop discussed setting up a Baltic Sea Secretariat for Youth co-operation and stressed the need to make a decision on this topic at the Conference in May 1997 in Helsinki.

The Workshop supports:

The initiative to look for financing and facilities to promote local youth co-operation in the Baltic Sea region,

The suggestion that regional and national public administrations provide financing for the organization of a Youth Parliament on Environment in the Baltic Sea region on the basis of the experience from the Global Youth Action for the Environment, GYAE,

The suggestion that recourses of twin cities and twin partnership of local and regional bodies should be used in a more efficient way in order to get young people together,

The need of National Public Youth Administrations to define the common goals for youth policy cooperation in the Baltic Sea region,

All attempts to relieve visa regulations and to do away with visa fees for youth,

All initiatives to provide for reduced transportation costs for youth and youth groups in the Baltic Sea region.

The Workshop proposed and discussed numerous projects for youth exchange in the Baltic Sea region to promote people-to-people contacts. These projects will be published in an extra report which will be prepared for the Conference in May 1997 in Helsinki.

The Nordic Youth Committee invites:

representatives of NGOs, National and Regional Public Youth Administrations and existing cooperation structures in the Baltic Sea region to the Conference on Baltic Sea Youth Co-operation in Helsinki in May 1997.

Workshop III -Energy and Sustainable Development

The Workshop noted with appreciation the efforts and initiatives taken by other organizations to arrest the environmental damage and enhance co-operation around energy and sustainable development in the Baltic Sea area.

The Workshop recognized, with special appreciation, national energy programs and initiatives by the European Commission to increase the use of renewable energy sources and energy efficiency. While the use of fossil fuels causes severe damage to nature and human health, the Workshop proposed that governments agree on common policies for taking the value of this damage into account when determining the price and tax on fuels.

The Workshop realized the important role of the energy sector in sustainable development. The Workshop recognized the central role research and development play in the promotion and expansion of the use of renewable energy sources, and proposed that governments fully support and make adequate resources available for identification and the development of new technologies for new sustainable and viable energy systems.

The Workshop noted the increasing possibilities and necessity for regional co-operation in the field of energy and sustainable development in the Baltic Sea area. And stressed the importance of devoting adequate financial resources to this co-operation.

The Workshop, in order to facilitate and stimulate future co-operation around energy and environmental issues, proposed the establishment of a network of regional contact persons who will act as a contact channel and provide information on potential co-operation partners in their regions. The Workshop agreed on the following priority areas in terms of future regional co-operation:

Exchange of know-how and technology related to the use of renewable energy
Establishment of the network of regional contact persons

Preparation of regional energy balance studies and energy plans.

The Workshop noted and stressed the need to establish a permanent Secretariat for Baltic Sea State Subregional Co-operation.

The Workshop states that the liberalization of the energy market in the EU Council of Ministers to cut down the budget of different energy programs orientated towards renewable energies, energy efficiency and energy co-operation. The Workshop supports proposals from the EU Commission and the European Parliament to increase funding in these sectors.

The Workshop proposes that the social and environmental costs of energy production should be reflected in the fuel prices. The Workshop considers necessary a harmonized European approach for a respective green taxation system.