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## Background

The EU DGENV financed project “Environmental monitoring of the Black Sea with focus on nutrient pollution” (Baltic2Black, 2011-2013, finalized in December) was coordinated by the Black Sea Commission (BSC) Permanent Secretariat and carried out in cooperation with the HELCOM Secretariat (Professional Secretary Maria Laamanen and Project Researcher Miia Mannerla (half-time employment)).

Baltic2Black had the general aim to improve the capacity in the Black Sea region to monitor and combat eutrophication. HELCOM Secretariat’s role as a partner in the Project was to share HELCOM experience regarding eutrophication, involve leading Baltic Sea experts in transfer of knowledge, as well as closely cooperate with the BSC Permanent Secretariat to contribute regarding practical and technical aspects of project implementation. More specifically, HELCOM experts contributed regarding usage of automated systems for monitoring of eutrophication, the development of implementation plan on setting up modeling tool in the Black Sea involving BNI experience from the HELCOM nutrient reduction scheme, and the use of the HELCOM eutrophication assessment tool HEAT.

Overall, the Secretariat evaluates the Project as a useful experience, especially from the point of view of striving for coherent approaches across the European Seas and thus creating the added value at European level. The Project established networks consisting of experts from both regions and reached a better understanding of the importance and benefits of cooperation between the two Commissions to tackle the common challenges they may have through e.g. learning from each other regarding assessing the status of eutrophication, harmonization of monitoring and improving data availability. Another conclusion is that there is potential to utilize the joint knowledge and lessons learnt during Baltic2Black regarding the two special, semi-enclosed and brackish sea regions in marine environment policy considerations of the EU’s, and possibly global, fora.

The last workshop of the Project proposed continuation of the expert activities to be led by the two Secretariats and asked the Secretariats to cooperate and draft a proposal for a possible new project.

## Action required

The Meeting is invited to

- take note of the information and, in general, reflect on the need for and benefits of cooperation between the two regions and Commissions,
- consider the proposed way forward that the two Secretariats, HELCOM and BSC, will draft a plan for further cooperation between the Black and Baltic Seas, including investigating opportunities for funding.

## Lessons learnt from the Baltic2Black project and recommendations for future cooperation between the regional seas

During the three-year project “Environmental monitoring of the Black Sea with focus on nutrient pollution” (Baltic2Black, 2011-2013) the main method of working was expert workshops, each focusing on specific themes, and several exchange visits.

Several national institutes from the Baltic Sea countries were represented in the expert workshops, including the Baltic Nest Institute (Sweden), the National Environmental Research Institute as well as the Danish Centre for Environment and Energy at the Aarhus University (Denmark), The Marine Systems Institute at the Tallinn University of Technology and Estonian Marine Institute at the University of Tartu (Estonia), Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation, the Central Research Institute for Complex Development of Water Resources (Belarus), and the Finnish Environment Institute as well as the Ministry for the Environment of Finland.

### A series of workshops to share good practices

The workshops were organized by the Black Sea Commission Permanent Secretariat (BSC PS) and HELCOM Secretariat, with the aim to exchange the best practices and the methods used in combating eutrophication in both the Baltic and the Black Seas. The themes of the workshops and visits covered the tools that have been developed to assess the status of the sea, modeling of nutrients from the catchment area and in the sea, as well as good practices in data management and monitoring methods.

The first expert workshop “*Assessment of eutrophication and nutrient pollution in the Black Sea and experiences from the Baltic Sea*”, organised in September 2011 in Istanbul, Turkey, focused on creating a dialogue between the networks of the Black Sea and Baltic Sea regions on methods used for region-wide assessments of eutrophication status and nutrient pollution load. Notes and presentations from the workshop are available [here](#).

The second workshop “*Eutrophication assessment in the Black Sea and experiences from the Baltic Sea*”, held a year later in September 2012, took a step further expanding the work started in the first workshop and took more concrete consideration into harmonized assessment of eutrophication, including a demonstration of the HELCOM eutrophication assessment tool HEAT and initiating a similar tool in the Black Sea region (named BEAST). Notes and presentations from the workshop are available [here](#).

The third meeting “*Monitoring and reducing nutrient loads to the Black Sea*”, arranged in early 2013, in turn focused on monitoring and reducing nutrient loads to the Black Sea, and listed the needed steps to developing a decision-support tool for reduction of nutrient inputs to the Black Sea. Notes and presentations from the workshop are available [here](#).

The fourth and final workshop “*Towards reaching a good status of the Baltic and the Black Seas: lessons learnt in Baltic2Black and ways forward*” held at the end of the project, in November 2013, bound together the lessons learnt during the project. Test cases of the use of the BEAST tool for assessment of eutrophication in the Black Sea region were presented. The workshop also produced recommendations for future cooperation between the two regions after the project period. Notes and presentations from the workshop are available [here](#).

### Exchange visits

The exchange visits included a visit in 2013 by Black Sea region experts to the Baltic Nest Institute in Stockholm, Sweden to learn about the ecological modeling approaches used for the Baltic Sea.

A visit was also made from the Black Sea Commission Permanent Secretariat (BSC PS) to the HELCOM Secretariat in 2012 for mentoring of the staff of the BSC PS about the best practices used for e.g. arranging workshops in the HELCOM Secretariat.

#### Future perspectives of regional cooperation

Specific components of the project enabled the Black Sea Commission to strengthen its capacities with regards information systems and to start developing databases and common approaches for joint assessment of eutrophication in the Black Sea. For assessment purposes, HELCOM via Mr. Jesper Andersen, Århus University, Denmark, provided a potential assessment tool "BEAST" for assessment of eutrophication in the Black Sea. The fourth workshop considered test cases of the use of the tool and agreed that the tool is useful and its use should be explored further.

This project that combined the strengths of the two regional sea conventions of the Baltic and the Black seas was meaningful in that the project enabled these two marginal sea regions of Europe to join their forces and work together to raise awareness of the challenges and opportunities of semi-enclosed, brackish sea regions towards global and EU fora.

Many of the experts involved in the work throughout the project have expressed their willingness to continue cooperation where it is possible to continue learning from each other. Experts from both regions found the project beneficial. There is hence a willingness to plan for cooperation between the consortia of the Baltic and the Black Seas after the project ends in December 2013.

In the final Baltic2Black project workshop, it was recommended for the regional sea conventions to draft a future project plan. The future cooperation could expand the scope, which in the previous project was eutrophication, and gather a selection of priority themes under the Holistic Ecosystem Health Assessment (HOLAS) umbrella. Holistic assessments of ecosystem health are planned to be developed in both regions, by 2014 in the Black Sea region and by 2016 in the Baltic Sea. Some of the potential priorities were considered to be non-indigenous species and oil pollution. The HELCOM HOLAS, having its basis in the ecosystem approach and involving a holistic approach to the ecosystem and society, will be updated by 2016, and it would be meaningful to link this process to the future cooperation work.

The fourth meeting agreed that it would be useful to continue the cooperation under the two Secretariats and asked the Secretariats to draft a project plan and start preparing a project funding application.