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Dear colleagues,

Once again, we would like to share with you the concerns of civil society organizations and over 800,000 individual members of CCB's network around the Baltic Sea.

These concerns are not just about single cases of Krasnyj Bor hazardous waste dumpsite or Kurgalskiy Peninsula Nature Reserve that will be presented separately in the course of this meeting. Those cases, unfortunately, are not the only ones around the Baltic and just coincided with our today's meeting, but prove the need for an urgent action. And it is no longer a question of blame-and-shame approach, but a question of added value and credibility of the Helsinki Convention.

We would like to raise your attention to a more profound reason that lies in the very nature of HELCOM cooperation and which we would like you to consider seriously.

Almost ten years have passed since the adoption of the Baltic Sea Action Plan and only six years are left till the plan is supposed to be implemented. In 2007, the Contracting Parties agreed, in order to diminish nutrient inputs to the Baltic Sea to the maximum allowable level to take actions not later than 2016 to reduce the nutrient load from waterborne and airborne inputs aiming at reaching good ecological and environmental status by 2021. Despite the fact, that it will certainly require longer time for the Baltic Sea ecosystem to recover, it is becoming evident, especially after revealing the assessment of progress in reaching MAI and CART, that the 2016 deadline is yet another one in a row of missed commitments to improve environmental situation in the Baltic Sea. And it is one of the most important deadlines, crucial for the survival of the Baltic Sea unique ecosystem!

We have repeatedly, prior and during Ministerial Meetings in 2010 and 2013, addressed HELCOM with a plea to stick to the agreed timeline of the BSAP implementation for various actions, ranging from restoration of salmon rivers and banning eel fisheries to implementation of agri-environmental measures stipulated by the Helsinki Convention. We pointed to the fact that it is a matter of HELCOM's ability to act jointly, being often praised as one of the leading environmental conventions in the world. We are persistent in our action and will continue to be so, letting the national Governments to hear the voice of the residents of the Baltic Sea Region.

Our members often ask two simple questions about HELCOM: "Why?" and "What?": **Why** joint intergovernmental cooperation of the Baltic Sea nations does not work as it should be? And **What** needs to be done to make it efficient? Nobody any longer asks: do we know enough, as everybody shares the view that knowledge that we can base the action on is already there and it is just a need to take a decision and even more importantly – implement it!

Obviously, there is no single and simple answer to those questions, but one of those lays in the nature of HELCOM, being a commitment-based agreement, relying on compromise, good will and voluntary implementation. However, if we want to save the Baltic and HELCOM still to be heralded not only as an environmental focal point, but a real policy-maker for the Baltic Sea Region, we need to do the change. The change towards implementation and compliance, the shift from commitments to solid obligations, potentially painful, but needed upgrade towards strengthening the role of Helsinki Commission and better performance of its Contracting Parties.

We hope that next HELCOM Ministerial Meeting should act as a body forming renewed and strengthened Helsinki Convention with efficient compliance mechanism and not just "cosmetic" changes of its structure. We believe that it is the time to apply stronger and binding tools and set a schedule for implementing obligations.

We also strongly hope that seeking compromise within HELCOM will become a strength and not the weakness of the Convention in achieving of its goal on protection of the Baltic Sea marine environment.

Finally, our CCB's answer to "Why" and "What" questions is as follows: WE altogether share this problem and WE must solve it, it's not a one-man race! HELCOM actions currently have strong support from the public, but you may lose it quick if promises are broken again and again!