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HELCOM

Statement by Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC)

Agenda Item 4

Statements by HELCOM Observers



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HELCOM and the BSPC,

this is the story of long years of intense collaboration.

Not just since the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference has been enjoying an official observer status at HELCOM since the start of this millennium, the 27 parliaments and parliamentary organizations we represent all around the Baltic Sea and beyond have actively supported the work of HELCOM and called on their governments to give HELCOM the political and in particular parliamentary support it needs to execute the measures considered necessary.

And we don't do this just as an end to itself. We do this because the people who elected us expect us to provide them with a clean and healthy Baltic Sea. The people are on **our** doorsteps, saying, Do something, when they see algal carpets on the Baltic Sea,

when they are confronted with visible pollution and 'bathing prohibited' areas, but also when they are troubled by reports on the increasing invisible pollution.

And we all know that this is about questions, problems and measures that, due to different interests, cannot be radically implemented from one day to the next, leading to quick success. That is why it is so important to achieve the goals that we have set ourselves with the Baltic Sea Action Plan and to do so within the very time frame set in the plan. If we do not succeed, if we are too hesitant or act not consequently enough approaching the necessary measures to achieve our goals, then it will be far more expensive and difficult in the long term to reach what the people expect of us.

Here it is important to continue not asking ourselves to do the impossible but always a little more than we believe is doable, because – as the past has shown – this can release innovative forces allowing us to reach stringent standards after all.

I myself am from Åland. Our 6700 islands in the middle of the Baltic Sea, due to their location and history, not only have had a particular role and a lot of experience in peace-making processes. For us, the Baltic Sea is a central lifeline and central living space. We are surrounded by it, and we live amidst it and with it.

That is why we have a vital interest in the well-being of the Baltic Sea. That is why we have developed a wide-ranging sustainability strategy which we hope will be acknowledged as a Best Practice and repeated by others.

Of course, I am aware that the political focus is different in a large territorial nation only bordering the Baltic Sea. Unless catastrophic conditions occur in the ocean, for the majority of the population in such a nation, for instance, it is considerably more important that they can continue to drive into the large inner cities and metropolitan areas and reduce the air pollution there.

Nonetheless, I consider it as necessary to keep emphasizing the political will for stringent action regarding a clean Baltic Sea and to thus shift it a lot more closely into the focus of the political debate. For that reason, I am glad about this ministerial meeting happening here today. Such meetings generally lead to more forceful follow-

up actions. That is why we call for such ministerial meetings to happen regularly every year, as we have also asked of the CBSS, making HELCOM more political again.

With you sitting here together, we are achieving a political focus that is not possible on the administrative level. And past experience has proven this. The meetings of both environmental and transport ministers 17 years ago on maritime safety led to a breakthrough for wide-ranging measures to increase the safety in the Baltic Sea Region as well as wide-ranging internationally binding agreements from which we still benefit. Here, too, much has been achieved. And yet the world keeps turning ever faster, and we find ourselves having to refocus on this topic with different aspects.

We, the parliaments and parliamentary organizations around the Baltic Sea, will continue to support you in all your efforts for a timely implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan which we welcomed and supported from the start. But we will not only be benevolent companions but also demand the implementation on schedule from our governments.

As early as 5 years ago, at the last HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in Copenhagen, the BSPC reiterated its appeal to governments for sincere and forceful efforts to implement the Baltic Sea Action Plan.

Apart from all the progress achieved by HELCOM in the meantime, the current situation shows us that appeals alone are not enough. We must act more widely and rigorously and make greater efforts.

At this point, it may not be impossible but certainly a particular challenge to implement the requirements of the action plan on time by 2021 and the further goals of HELCOM. If we want to achieve these goals, we have to force ourselves to act more stringently than before.

The climate debate – where in some respects we were on a better course at the start of the 1990s than we are today and could have achieved more wide-ranging goals than seem possible today – is another issue that has shown that we have to constantly stay

on target. Otherwise we would run the risk of only being able to achieve our goals in the end with two or three times the effort and immensely higher costs or having to cut down on our goals to the detriment of the environment and the people whom we are representing.

The HELCOM Chairs and Executive Secretaries have regularly kept us informed – such as Ms Wenning did two weeks ago – both during our annual conferences as well as our winter sessions here in Brussels on the continued development at HELCOM. For that, I would like to offer my sincere thanks once again. Our parliamentary colleagues, who are the observers at HELCOM and rapporteurs on eutrophication, have presented respective reports every year to the BSPC.

Accordingly, we are very familiar with what you are doing and are observing it very closely. This also means that we can see where difficulties occur. And that is precisely where we would like to help and support you.

At our 26th Annual Conference last year in Hamburg, we called on the governments in the Baltic Sea Region, the CBSS and the EU, to

1. intensify the cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region including the Northern Dimension, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the Strategy for the Socio-Economic Development of the North-West Federal District of Russia in addition to other regional actors by identifying common priorities and developing respective regional strategies and action plans in fields of common interest and mutual benefits.
2. further strengthen and develop HELCOM as the coordinator of the regional implementation of ocean-related goals of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda of the United Nations, through the strengthened implementation of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan and further commitment to achieve a Baltic Sea in good environmental status by 2021 and, if applicable, by renewing the Baltic Sea Action Plan in line with the UN Sustainable Development Agenda with a time perspective until 2030;
3. support HELCOM in elaborating a regional action plan on underwater noise as well as in implementing the marine litter regional action plan and in its battle against eutrophication; concrete measures to reduce the input of plastics into the marine environment should be taken on.

Some of our parliaments have voted unanimously in favour of our resolution in total and have called on their governments to implement the resolution within their responsibilities. Almost all of them have already passed the resolution on to their respective governments and have asked them to report on the implementation of these demands.

That is what you have on your desks.

At this point, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for the fact that - not only in relation to the environment - the statements of all governments on our resolutions – as you can see on our website – are becoming more comprehensive from year to year.

(Moreover, in the year before, in Riga, we emphasized the necessity to strengthen and develop HELCOM as the main coordinating body in the effort to protect the Baltic marine environment, and to strongly support and encourage a fast implementation of the Marine Litter Action Plan, as well as the implementation of the NO_x emission control area Roadmap for the Baltic Sea, and to stress the importance of the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) as one of the environmental pillars of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.)

Dear Ministers of Environmental Affairs,

You are most welcome at our annual conference and to discuss there the environmental problems of the Baltic Sea with the parliamentarians from the whole Baltic Sea Area at the political level on 27 August 2018 in Mariehamn, thereby strengthening and increasing the parliamentary dimension and support of your work. I invite you all to come to the Åland Islands even if it is a little more difficult for many of you than coming to Brussels. (But that way you will then be in the visible core of what we're negotiating).

If you want to use this as an additional meeting with each other, we will offer the logistical support for you to do so.

We are confronted with tremendous challenges which we jointly can turn into a bright future through our common efforts.

Let us – parliaments, governments and societies – strengthen our efforts working toward a good environmental status of our Baltic Sea, which is a lifeline for most of us. Let us continue our successful and committed cooperation.

This event here and today is a further cornerstone on this path.

The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference in Åland on 26-28 August 2018 will continue on this path, and also offer dialogue, debate, solutions, friendship and a strong will to increase cooperation, prosperity and a healthy environment in the region. We are the Islands of Peace in the midst of the Baltic Sea, and we want the whole of the Baltic Sea Region to follow our example.

You all are welcome to participate!

Thank you very much for your efforts to reach a good environmental status of the Baltic Sea as soon as possible and welcome to Åland.