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Background

HELCOM is a symbol of successful regional cooperation on marine protection, deeply rooted in science and in dialogue with stakeholders. It looks for practical ways to ensure that decision-making processes give due consideration to the economic and social significance of healthy marine ecosystems. During the Chairmanship Germany wants to advocate stepping up cooperation that has already been initiated in the Baltic Sea region between HELCOM and other important stakeholders for marine protection. Furthermore, Germany advocates HELCOM playing an active part in the UN Ocean Conference in 2021.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to:

- note the planned initiatives by Germany on further elaborating on a global ocean governance.
- in principle support the idea of strengthening cooperation between HELCOM and other regional actors and accepts the offer from Germany to take the lead with the aim of pro-actively initiating exchange, i.a. with respective acting presidencies of other actors in the Baltic Sea Region with the aim of establishing, extending, or even formalizing the cooperation.
- in principle support addressing the OSPAR Commission with regard to strengthening and extending the existing co-operation between HELCOM and OSPAR.
- stress that any measure from the side of the Lead Party Germany, which might have political and/or financial consequences for HELCOM and /or the HELCOM budget, would need to be coordinated with the HELCOM Secretariat and be agreed by HELCOM HoD.

Strengthening Global Ocean Governance under the German HELCOM Chairmanship

Background

The Earth's resources are finite. The resilience of the world's oceans is limited too.

It's not only due to the present Covid 19-Pandemic that we become aware of the need for fundamental changes in our behavior as regards treating our environment, our oceans and seas included.

Despite a large number of already existing internationally binding regulations we have the impression of an inadequate daily treatment of our marine ecosystems.

The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and a colorful bunch of other global, European and national provisions and policy arrangements are obviously not suitable to protect our oceans and seas sufficiently. Apart from missing coordination inside this fragmented policy area we can also observe a lack of integration of differing interest, expectations and goals, including economic and ecological aspects.

On top most of the responsible organisations and institutions work independently from each other, sometimes not even interested in other issues. At the UN level the IMO, for instance, regulates international shipping, the ISA is responsible for seabed mining. Alongside these are regional organisations for fishery or environmental protection.

All in all we see the strong need for a coherent approach, i.e. further elaborating on a global ocean governance, striving for an integrated and balanced way of dealing with our oceans and seas. We need to strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration and interregional cooperation. In addition we need to ensure that regional co-operations' and global efforts match.

Present situation in the Baltic Sea Region

When directing our attention to our Baltic Sea Region we realize a comparable challenge, of course in a smaller dimension.

Apart from the Helsinki Commission, which represents all Baltic riparian states and the EU, and aiming at strengthening the protection and restoration of the Baltic Sea, we count a number of other institutions, which bear responsibility for the quality of the Baltic Sea's environmental status, be it politically or due to their factual mandate. Inside the BSR, organisations / institutions such as CBSS, BSPC, VASAB 2010 and BaltFish may serve as examples.

When considering partnership or cooperation amongst regions, OSPAR comes into play.

Targeting the UN level we can refer to the UN Agenda 2030 – as a comprehensive tool- and the IMO, as far as a particular issue, i.e. international shipping, is concerned. UNECE with the Convention on Long-Range Transport of Pollutant (CLTRAP) provides another example of topic-specific international cooperation with high relevance for achieving our objectives in the Baltic Sea region.

Very first encouraging steps

Finland, during its chairmanship, made a strong attempt, to establish a closer cooperation between HELCOM and BaltFish.

In 2019 the Baltic Sea Parliamentarian Conference (BSPC) took up the issue of dumped munition in the Baltic Sea in the course of its resolution.

HELCOM organized a highly successful workshop with the River Basin Management Authorities in 2019 to enhance the transboundary cooperation and to coordinate the efforts to reduce nutrient loads to the Baltic

Sea. An institutionalization of this cooperation is one goal of the updated BSAP. Under the German presidency, it is planned to hold a second workshop in 2022 focusing on best practice examples and implementation obstacles for eutrophication abatement.

This year Germany – in its position as a member state of the CBSS – supported some language in the declaration with regard to addressing the issue of dumped munition, which is a HELCOM issue, when it comes to technical implementation of possible measures.

How to proceed?

The German HELCOM chairmanship proposes to pursue further the idea of a strengthening and – to a certain extent even – formalizing cooperation of HELCOM with other regional actors and OSPAR, a natural partner outside the BSR.

Germany offers to act as a lead party for establishing contact with the countries chairing those co-operations and institutions. Needless to say that those missions can only be successful if all HELCOM CPs and the Secretariat are in principle supportive towards this idea. Final decisions on establishing, only deepening or, if appropriate, finally formalizing collaboration, has to be taken by HELCOM HoD in any case.

Since Germany also borders the North Sea, it is Contracting Party to OSPAR as well. With regard to the component of interregional cooperation, which provides the second pillar of good ocean governance, and which HELCOM and OSPAR have in fact already issue wise established, Germany would offer to examine possible additional issues for deepened co-operation between HELCOM and OSPAR.