

Forum Summary, ANNEX I (V)
Baltic Sea NGO Forum 2006, Stockholm, Sweden
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ANNEX I

Notes from the Baltic Sea NGO Forum October 5 (day 1)

Opening of the NGO Forum _____	2
Plenary Session _____	4
Introduction to the Forum Themes _____	8
Panel Discussion _____	9

Please observe that this is an annex of the document "6th Baltic Sea NGO Forum Summary", which can be found at www.bsngoforum.org.

Opening of the NGO-Forum

Welcome Address

Ms Aase Fosshaug, Coordinator of the Baltic Sea NGO Forum 2006, welcomed all the participants on behalf of the Swedish Focal Point Forum Syd, wishing for constructive discussions during the days of the Forum, as well a way forward - how to create thematic working groups active in between the annual NGO-Forums. She also expressed her sincere recognition to the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, represented by ambassador *Christer Persson* and *Eva Ekmeahag* Deputy Director of the Department for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, for their support, which enabled us to arrange this year's NGO-Forum.

Opening speeches

Ms Inger Björk, Secretary General of Forum Syd, the Swedish Focal Point of the NGO Forum:

Forum Syd, by using the means of advocacy and development cooperation, fight for global justice in different areas – poverty reduction, democracy and human rights, gender equality, environmental sustainability and HIV/aids. Since several years Forum Syd is cooperating actively with partners around the Baltic Sea, and the Forum is an important part in this work, serving as a platform for exchange of experience. There are many challenges for the countries surrounding the Baltic Sea – the environmental situation, especially the climate change, social exclusion and discrimination as well as threats to the democratic development when the NGO sector is put under pressure. One recent development affecting the possibilities of NGOs act is the war on terrorism. This is a threat to the democratic development, since no democratic decision-making is possible without participation of a broad range of civil society organisations. This is why it is important to meet in Fora like this, but not only on occasions like this, but also to work continuously in between the yearly NGO-Forum. I took part in the Baltic Sea NGO Forum in Turku in 2003, and since that I have seen several steps being taken. I hope that this Forum will mean another step forward in this process.

Mr Christer Persson, Ambassador, Council of the Baltic Sea States, Chairman of the Committee of Senior Officials:

I wish you welcome on behalf of the CBSS and the Swedish Ministry of Foreign affairs to the very special building of Grand Hotel Saltsjöbaden, a historical place for negotiations of the Swedish parties and the labour market.

The Swedish presidency of CBSS sees cooperation with the civil society of greatest importance, the NGO-sector playing an important role in changing the social situation. CBSS was started in 1992 by a German and Danish initiative and consist of 11 countries as well as the European Commission. It is an overall political forum for regional intergovernmental cooperation. It aims to intensify cooperation and coordination and to work form the development of democracy. CBSS tries to be an demand driven and result driven forum. The Baltic Sea NGO Forum is a strategic partner. The presidency of CBSS is rotating. The overall objective of the Swedish Presidency (June 2006-July 2007) is "Cooperation to achieve common objectives, greater visibility and concrete results". The work is done within three main areas – energy and environment, civil society and trade and investment. I hope that the overall objective of the CBSS would partly also be the motto of the 6th Baltic Sea NGO Forum. I also welcome the idea of thematic working groups, looking forward to the outcome, to concrete suggestions to the member state governments in CBSS.

Ms Arja Ahlo, Chair of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference Standing Committee:
The Committee is a structure uniting parliamentarians in the Baltic Sea region. It is working with democracy including civil society, environment and maritime safety but also the so-called Northern Dimension. We try to collect and combine already existing data on the environmental situation and formulate some recommendations for actions; within the democracy field working for the promotion of transparency and human rights, in order to make the region a better place to live. In this work the NGO sector is important. The Committee has studied the possibilities of NGOs to work in the different countries in the region. The Committee has a good relationship to the CBSS, and sees as one of its challenges how to raise the Baltic regions in the respective national agendas. In this work the civil society, especially the NGOs, can play an important role.

Mr Per Unckel, Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers:
The Nordic Council of Ministers can be presented as a "sister organisation of the CBSS". It is built up of the Ministers of the Governments of the five Nordic Countries, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, as well as representatives from the three autonomous regions; Greenland the Faroe Islands and Åland. The Nordic Council of Ministers has a sister structure in the Nordic Council, uniting parliamentarians from the countries mentioned above. Over the years the Nordic Council of Ministers has developed into a "Baltic Sea organisation", opening offices in the three Baltic States in 1991, and in Russia, Saint Petersburg, in 1995. The most recent office is situated in Kaliningrad. The current focus in the work of the Council is Russia. This does not mean that the Baltic Countries do not matter, but they are playing a different role now, more on a partnership basis, especially after them joining the EU. The work in Russia is divided into four different thematic areas – for example mobility and networks and the NGO sector, small and medium industries (Nopef) and Barents Sea region together with the Barents Council. The first two of them should be of special interest to the Baltic Sea NGO Forum audience, the first one supporting different exchange programmes for civil servants, education and research, business and the civil society, and the second one aiming at capacity building in the entire Baltic region through tripartite cooperation between Nordic, Baltic/Polish and Russian/Belarusian NGOs. There is also a special programme open for cooperation between Nordic NGOs and NGOs for the three Baltic Countries. The programmes are demand driven, and I strongly encourage interested actors so send in their suggestions. The deadline for the NGO-programme is November 1st, and applications can be sent in by mail.

Plenary Session

Politics and Business only? - Some arguments for cooperation between citizens, not only states

Mr Bengt Göransson, Chairman of the Norden Association in Sweden, Former Swedish Minister for Cultural Affairs, Chairman of Parliamentary Commission on Democracy 1997-2000

In my speech I would like to compare the character of Nordic cooperation to the one in the European Union. I admit that my experience is based on Swedish examples, I regret if I will appear provincial – but then again, provincialism is a global phenomenon. The Swedish attitude to EU-cooperation is seldom enthusiastic, while it is friendlier to the Nordic cooperation. How come?

The Nordic cooperation has always been open-minded. It has been most successful in the cultural field. The Nordic cooperation is built on solidarity and community, not, as the EU cooperation, on loyalty. The Nordic cooperation can be looked upon as a model, not only for cooperation between states, but also between citizens. Cultural cooperation is always a question about communities, relations between people. One example of the difference between the EU and the Nordic cooperation is how the question of trans-border TV programmes was handled – in EU this was an issue of making it possible for TV companies to get in touch with new audiences, while in the Nordic countries, the same issue was a matter of freedom of expression, of making it possible for neighbours to see each others programmes.

Nordic cooperation can be seen as a model for international cooperation in the right sense of the world, since it is cooperation *between*, not *above* nations. The EU has its shortcomings – it is a union of states, not of nations or citizens. It is built as a trade organisation, to make companies in Europe compete on a fair basis. Business is about sticking to the rules, to stick to the area of common interest. Do not get me wrong – I voted for the Swedish membership in EU but I still see its weaknesses. It is a fortress to shelter the European Countries, and the main enemy is – the United States. And I think that this is the reason why Swedes are not very keen on the EU, because as a matter of fact we are the most Americanised country in the EU. Such a comment is never popular to make.

Voluntary organisations, popular movements, or, if to use the more internationally, less Swedish name for them, NGOs, are built on an individual sense of responsibility and are in a way elitist. They have to be so, as they give more influence to those who are active.

Opinions develop when people discuss. There is a growing tendency in politics that the actors say that they know what is right. But the world can only be developed if you are aware that you might be wrong. This is also valid when comes to the voluntary organisations – they cannot be "used" as an army; they have to be convinced. Voluntary organisations have to be independent, but they must accept that governments have other responsibilities. You must learn how to loose in a democracy, and accepting that you cannot always get what you want.

From Copenhagen to Stockholm – The NGO Forum Process, 2001-2006

Mr Carsten Schymik, Department for Northern European Studies, Humboldt University, Germany

I must start by noticing the remarkable development of the civil society in this region. It is unique in a global context. The NGO cooperation in the region is at least as old as the intergovernmental cooperation. And from its start, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, CBSS, supported the civil society.

I first intended to name my speech *From Lübeck to Stockholm*, as Lübeck 2001 was the place of the first Baltic Sea NGO Forum. But actually, earlier that year there was another Forum in Copenhagen. While the Copenhagen Forum was an initiative from below, from Danish NGOs, the Lübeck Forum was an initiative from above, from the German government and the first official Forum under the auspices of the CBSS. The Forum in 2002, in Saint Petersburg, was one of the most important ones, as it was not clear in Lübeck if this was a one-time Forum or a regularly recurrent event. In 2002 the NGO-Forum got a process character, which it has kept since.

Every NGO-Forum has been unique and specialized to the hosting country - the ways of communication, addressing different issues, introducing new structures. How is the Baltic Sea NGO Network, as it is usually called, working today? It makes sense to put a historical approach to that. It all began in Lübeck 2001 with the creation of *national focal points*, one NGO in each country acting as a connecting link to the national NGO community. At the Forum in Saint Petersburg 2002 there was a proposal to create a *Baltic Sea NGO network board*, coordinating the work above the focal points, and a *Baltic Sea NGO Fund*, to secure stable financial support for arranging future NGO-Forum. However, these ideas were not implemented as such. But it was actually taken over by the next NGO-Forum in Finland (Turku 2003) with the creation of what was then called *the Consultative Committee (CC)*, consisting of the eleven focal points + experts that could also join in (1-2/country). In the final declaration it was stated that CC should meet two times between the Forum in order to prepare the next Forum and to implement the decisions taken at the previous Forum. The discussions went on at the NGO-Forum in Pärnu, Estonia (2004), with the proposal of creating a "legal body", which could for example be a permanent *Baltic Sea NGO Secretariat*. The draft statutes were to be adopted by the Forum in 2005, but there was no follow-up of that next year, as the discussions were inconclusive (Gdynia, 2005). Now, in Stockholm 2006, the new initiative of the Swedish hosting organization is the *Principles of the Baltic Sea NGO Network*, which is a summary of what has been achieved this far in the Forum-process that fixes the structure of Focal Points and the CC, which should now be called the Coordinating Committee. There is also an initiative to create permanent *Thematic Working Groups* to work between the annual NGO-Forum. (Stockholm, 2006)

What about the future of the Baltic Sea NGO Network? It is influenced by two issues:

- The relation to the Council of the Baltic Sea States: CBSS has turned out to be the most important partner of the NGO-Forum process. The Network is currently seen as a "strategic partner" of the CBSS, but in order to have more of an influence and to secure more reliable funding, the Network in 2004 applied for the status of "special participant" of the CBSS but was rejected.
- The future of the Baltic Sea Region NGO Network itself – should it be a formalized organization or not? Should it have a permanently working Secretariat?

Ms Darja Akhutina, Director, Norden Association in Russia, Russian Focal Point of the Baltic Sea NGO Forum

I was offered the opportunity of adding some comments to Carsten's speech, but I must admit that he has covered the most important points. But I would like to stress the importance of the

Network as a meeting point for NGOs, as an opportunity for dialogue between NGOs and public authorities.

As for the future development, the Forum cooperates not only with the CBSS, but also with other actors as for example the Nordic Council of Ministers and the European Union. And it is also important to notice, that the Network as a whole cannot be a partner, for that we will need a small coordinating body, an executive board, to facilitate the work – planning, contacts and fundraising.

During and after every Forum we get critical comments, and that is good for our development. What we have lacked up till today is a permanent work between the Fora, as well as a follow-up of the conclusions that we make at every Forum.

Firstly, I want to point out that all the focal points work on a voluntary basis, and only have time to prepare the next Forum, which demands a lot of effort. A second problem is that the conditions in our countries differ a lot, and this, of course, affects the work of the Network. A third factor is that we seem to start the work from zero every time, when it comes to fundraising for upcoming Forum and for Coordinating Committee. It is a vulnerable question for the development of the Baltic Sea NGO Network.

Also I want to point out that the 11 Focal Points are inside the Coordinating Committee. And the Thematic Working Groups are very close to CC in the decision making process up to the consensus, because we are working very closely with experts on our national level.

How can then the Baltic Sea NGO Network be a relevant partner of the CBSS or other Baltic Sea Region initiatives and organisations, as well as an important actor in EU?

It is very important with the sustainability of this Network. For this we will need a permanently working secretariat – right now we have a car, but no fuel.

We will need to develop the Networks inside cooperation. We have all the opportunity to become involved in different projects and programs, and the Thematic Working Groups can be an excellent instrument to provide sustainability of the work and interaction between the annual NGO-Forum.

Comment from the moderator, Ms Gabriele Kötschau, director of the Secretariat of the CBSS: The question about status is complicated. There is a difference between "strategic partner" and "special participant", but not so crucial.

How can the Baltic Sea become a region of success?

Mr Jan Åman, Director of Färgfabriken and the Baltic Turntable Project, Sweden

I come from a slightly different sector than most of you, and I would like to present a project that is currently being planned for the next year. Working with exhibitions, we have noticed that we can address issues in a way that politicians, bureaucrats and the media cannot. On the basis of our work, things happen in society. The idea with the Baltic Turntable Project is to set the Baltic Region as the most interesting region in the world.

We are facing a new global situation. The world is getting more and more urbanised. We are not talking about cities any more, but mega cities or regions, attracting people from other cities. This affects how people live their lives.

Currently we are running the Stockholm Turntable Project focussing on what we can do *now* in order to make the Stockholm region an interesting place in 30 years. Our project "Stockholm at large" changed the way politicians, city planners and media saw the city. The interest from the audience was big. The modern project of the Swedish welfare state has paradoxically created one of the most segregated cities in the world. We would like to create an "urban DJ" that would remix the city, not to add another object in the process, but to make the objects existing today to cooperate more among themselves.

In this work, is the welfare state an asset or a burden? How can we keep the old ideas, but use them in a new way? By the Stockholm Turntable Project we want to set the Stockholm situation in a global context as well as in a more regional context. The Baltic Turntable Project is broadening that approach. How could the Baltic Sea Region compete? Do we have something of our own to show the world? The Baltic Sea is the perfect area, where we, as in the Stockholm area, can see segregation and the conflict between nature and culture, and these are actually the same problems as in the mega cities in the world. So if we can solve the problems here, we will have something to contribute with. The Baltic Sea is said to be the most polluted sea in the world, but it is also the most studied. This is something to use to attract attention – Al Gore will come, Bono will come... On one side of the Baltic Sea we had the welfare utopia, on the other side the Soviet utopia. What do we have today? A compact region with many contacts, a concept region of the world, where we can find concepts for regional thinking, well-being, knowledge, welfare meeting emerging economies, a holistic view after ideology.

Polish priorities in the CBSS Working Group on Democratic Institutions – in the context of civil society issues

Mr Miroslaw Luczka, Chairman of the CBSS Working Group on Democratic Institutions, Director of the Department of United Nations and Global Problems Department in Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs

I am quite excited to be at this event – it is a difference from the routine government meetings. I work in a structure with a close contact with the civil society, and I see the civil society as an important link between the state and the citizens.

The Forum in Gdynia in 2005 came up with some concrete recommendations, and I am glad to see that the Swedish focal point Forum Syd has considered these in the planning of this Forum. Last year we made a study citizen participation in the decision-making process, on how to broaden the knowledge on this issue in CBSS member states. The study can be downloaded from the CBSS website.

The thematic focus of the Polish Presidency of WGDI the relation between corruption, democracy and human rights. In this issue, the civil society plays an important role, and we hope to invite representatives of the NGO sector to the last meeting of our presidency, in May 2007.

Introduction to the Forum Themes

Civil Security, Ms Anna Markina, Tartu University

The topic of civil security is huge. The recent growing threat of war and terrorism affects our societies. A lot of people feel insecure, and demand their governments to act. As a result of the this fear i society we see a growing tendency of isolation, segregation, and increase in hate crimes, as there is less understanding for those considered different. There is a role for NGOs to play in this situation. Crimes like this are often the result of instability, caused by disorganised communities. NGOs can also work to protect the victims of these crimes.

Discrimination and Social Inclusion, Ms Anette Sjödin, the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay and Transgender Rights

The themes in this Forum are linked to each other. Crime and insecurity are connected to the discrimination theme, and both of them are a question of democracy. If we want a vivid democracy, it is important to include people, as exclusion fosters distrust, which in its turn is a threat to society and democracy. Anti-discrimination work can be based on different grounds of discrimination – gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, age or sexual orientation. In Sweden we usually work separately with each issue, but we also see the advantages of comparing the experience from working with different discrimination grounds, to present different tools, methods and future plans. Our theme will be divided in different workshops dealing with alternative reporting, prejudices, strategic cooperation and a democratic understanding of inclusion.

Environment and Sustainability, Ms Maret Merisaar, Coalition Clean Baltic, Estonian Secretariat

How can NGOs cooperate in order to find solutions? Earlier we have concentrated on problems, now it is time to look for solutions. Three years ago we did a social experiment – we wrote to the governments in our region to see to what extent they are ready to implement the suggestions of the NGOs, and today we have a rather clear understanding of the cooperation in different countries. In November 2007, HELCOM is planning to adopt a plan for the Baltic Sea, including issues like biodiversity, toxic substances, transport, climate change, and radioactivity. In our workshops we want to discuss which issues can be of interest for NGO cooperation in the region.

NGO-legislation, Legal Security and Civil Society, Mr Mikhail Gorny, Center Strategy

The legal situation for NGOs in Russian, not to mention Belarus, is getting worse. This will of course be a topic in our workshop, but we will also discuss more successful examples, for example the case of Latvia, as well as to prepare a plan for activity. We will also focus on the relations in the NGO community, as well as its relations to science, authorities and business. We have several topics – comparative analyses of NGO legislation, corruption as a threat to civil society, the role of NGO legislation, recent developments.

Panel Discussion

The Baltic Sea Region and the role of NGOs – is there a future dialogue between NGOs and governments in promoting civil society development?

Moderator: Mr *Lars Erik Häggman (LH)*, Norden Association, Finland

Panellists: Ms *Rasma Pipike (RP)*, Civic Alliance Latvia, Latvian Focal Point, Ms *Arja Alho (AA)* BSPC, Mr *Mirosław Luczka (ML)* CBSS WGDI, Ms *Tatiana Poshevalova (TP)*, Centre for Social Innovations

LH: I want to start with a question to our two state representatives: When did you last time (except for today) deal with an NGO?

ML: We are definitely not uninterested in cooperating with NGOs, and there are several state conferences where parts are open for NGOs.

AA: I have regular contacts with NGOs. I met with a network of teachers this morning.

LH: NGOs can play different roles. One of them is being an expert. Is that a role for NGOs to play?

RP: Yes.

AA: Yes

ML: I think I have to say something different. NGOs do not necessarily have to be experts. We have to remember that the state apparatus is full of qualified experts, and that the state also has other sources to find expertise.

TP: When answering such a question, it is important to ask: experts on what? NGOs are a phenomenon with its root in the Western democratic societies. Such societies are built on the acceptance of different opinions, thus compromises, seeking for consensus or going into contradiction are natural features of such a society, and hence also the role of a mediator is needed. One example of such a process is the employer and the trade union that have two different positions, where the state can act as a mediator. Another such situation, where the NGOs can play the middle role, is in the meeting between the state and the citizen. All these meetings are going on in a public sphere. But there is also another system, another type of society, where the position of "the other" is not accepted and where there can be only one dominant opinion. In such a state there is no public sphere, no community. It is replaced with the state. With only one allowed opinion, there is no need for a mediator. The state is corporate, and people belong to the state, which deserves loyalty in all spheres. In Belarus we have the second system, where NGOs are not tolerated. We want to create the first system. So if we want to see NGOs as experts, we still need to answer the question: Experts on what?

LH: There are also other possible roles of NGOs – pressure groups, project keepers or teachers of democracy. How do you look upon these roles?

RP: I think an important role of NGOs is to support each other. There is, for example, cooperation between Belarusian and Latvian NGOs.

AA: NGOs act in the public domain between state and citizens. The access to media is crucial in this work. In this discussion about NGOs and politics, we must not forget the political parties – they are not the state. I also see another important role of NGOs, to create possibilities for a participatory democracy.

ML: I will be looking on this question from a rather narrow point of view, the one of the state official. From that point of view the most important role of the NGOs is to put pressure on the state, to monitor, and I think this is very important, and also inspiring for us working in the state. The most important part of a civil society is seldom the initiatives coming from the

political/public process, but the ones organising people to reach a goal, not necessarily within the public process.

TP: The NGOs can play many roles, but there are a couple of them that can only be played by NGOs – building solidarity and the self-organisation of people.

LH: In the framework of this Forum we have a dialogue between the Baltic state organs and the NGOs around the Baltic Sea. What does the NGOs and the states respectively want to get from this process?

RP: There is a set of problems in the different expectations from NGOs on the government and vice versa. NGOs want to get acknowledgment from the government, that the government will use its expertise, while the government from its side wants the NGOs to say nice things. The government often wants fast and cheap solutions to questions, while the NGOs want a transparent governmental decision-making. A trendy word in Latvia nowadays is “legitimacy” – the government keeps asking the NGOs who they are representing and seem to expect the NGO sector to have *one* opinion, not understanding that we are diverse. We must make them change their expectations in this regard.

AA: Social capital is important for every individual, and for every society. A parliamentary organisation is also in need of social capital. In our cooperation with NGOs we expect the democratic system to strengthen, we expect to have links to different issues – education, cultural issues, youth. We on our side want to support the NGOs in having a working legislative system. We need the companionship of NGOs to solve the problems in society.

ML: I want to underline once again, that the main theme in the Polish presidency of the CBSS Working Group in Democratic Institutions will be corruption in the context of democratic institutions. This is an important issue, since corruption damages the legitimacy and the public support of the system. The role of NGOs in this work can be to create legitimacy, although I am aware that such a comment may seem cynical.

TP: The expectations of the Belarusian government are for us to disappear. We have strong ties to European governments, who are trying to support the introduction of European norms in Belarus. The problem is that we in Belarus have the second system I mentioned earlier, not the democratic. In this system dialogue is not acknowledged, since there is no “other”. There is a battle between two programmes in Belarus today – one is the introduction of European norms and values, the other is the restoration of Soviet style of government. The European governments think that they can support the existing system in Belarus, thus creating a democratic institutions’ infrastructure, but it does not work. I think that the impact of Belarusian Civil Society in relation to European governments is, that if we manage to solve the Belarusian problem, we might solve the European problem.

RP: I want to finish with an anecdote on the similarities between the NGO sector and Columbus. Columbus went away on a long trip, he did not know what he was looking for, he did not know where he was heading, and look what he found! And all the expedition was financed on someone else's money!