



SECOND BALTIC SEA NGO FORUM

Within the framework of the Russian CBSS Presidency (St. Petersburg, 19-20 April 2002)

CONCLUSIONS

The 2nd Baltic Sea NGO Forum was organised in St. Petersburg on 19-20 April 2002 as a direct follow-up to the 1st Forum in Lubeck on 28-29 May 2001 and the NGO Conference in Copenhagen on 24-25 March 2001.

Over 340 NGO representatives from CBSS Member States took part in the Forum. Officials from Ministries for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Germany, Russia and Sweden, as well as representatives from Consulates-General of Denmark, Estonia, Norway, Finland, Germany and The Netherlands, also attended the Forum.

The current and previous Chairmen of the CBSS Committee of Senior Officials, the CBSS Commissioner and Deputy Governor of St. Petersburg addressed the Forum participants. Representatives of the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Council of Europe and St. Petersburg Legislative Assembly also welcomed the Forum. Foreign Minister Igor S. Ivanov, Chairman of the CBSS, and St. Petersburg Governor Vladimir A. Yakovlev sent written welcoming addresses.

Discussions during the Forum were divided in four thematic conferences devoted to some of the most important fields of Baltic Sea co-operation, where NGOs are able to make a substantial contribution - Social care, Environment, Human rights, Cross-sector co-operation.

The following Conclusions have been prepared by the Preparatory committee in co-operation with the Moderators of the Forum's thematic conferences.



ENVIRONMENT

The Forum stood in favour of signing, ratification and implementation by all Baltic Sea States of the Aarhus Convention on Access to Environmental Information and Public Participation in Environmental Decision-making and Access to Justice.

Forum participants urged for reinforcement of the Baltic 21 process by way of ensuring the support of CBSS Prime Ministers for a full integration of environmental matters into sector policies and allocation of a proper mandate and resources for the implementation of agreed sector-specific and cross-sector action plans.

The Forum supported the application of Integrated Coastal Zone Management principles in local and national planning. The NGOs also urged for strong additional measures to stop eutrofication, resulting in widespread alga bloom, oxygen deficits and fish death in summer periods, and called for preservation of virgin forests, stopping of illegal forestry activities and illegal timber trade.

Forum participants stood in favour of creating a Nuclear Free Baltic Sea Area by way of phasing out the use of nuclear energy, and - before this goal is achieved - banning the construction of new nuclear facilities, operation of existing reactors beyond their design limits and the transportation of nuclear waste across the Baltic Sea region.

SOCIAL CARE

The Forum pointed out the growing importance of NGOs in developing of social policies in the region and promoting sustainable welfare. Although the role and status of social and health care NGOs varies a lot in different areas, the NGOs have a common mission: to improve the well-being and protect the rights of the most vulnerable members of the society. It is therefore essential for the NGOs of the region to continue the dialogue and plan further co-operative actions in the field of social welfare and health care, moving from occasional contacts to sustainable co-operation and networking.

Combining the efforts of different actors by networking is the most cost-effective way to promote the well-being of all citizens in the Baltic Sea region. More resources should therefore be allocated for sustainable co-operation and efficient exchange of information through NGO networking at both national and international levels.



HUMAN RIGHTS

Forum participants reaffirmed the relevance of the recommendations regarding human rights issues agreed at the 1st Baltic Sea NGO Forum in Lubeck. They urged the governments of CBSS Member States to take co-ordinated steps towards bringing their legislation and normative acts regarding freedom of the media in line with Council of Europe recommendations.

Participating NGOs pointed out that xenophobia, racial and ethnic intolerance are typical of all CBSS countries, but the degree of these problems in the ex-Soviet republics is higher. The participants also pointed out that in Russia there are virtually no effective legal mechanisms and laws protecting the rights of women against violence and discrimination in the society and labour market. Stemming from different roots, the growing xenophobic tendencies are often a result of social, economic, political, demographic and ideological changes and the globalisation process. CBSS Member States should bring their legislation in line with ratified international agreements and monitor their implementation.

NGOs stressed the need for CBSS countries to work out common approaches to migration problems in the region and find common ways of facilitating adaptation, socialisation and integration of different migrant groups.

It was also pointed out that, like Russian government structures, judicial, law enforcement and local authorities in other countries of the region, do not, in fact, recognise that they are infected with racism, xenophobia and national intolerance. These authorities do not pay due attention to organisations spreading such ideas in their countries, which reveals their ignorance of the dangers stemming from political or ethnic extremism. In order to make these government structures more effective in their efforts to oppose intolerance, extremism and xenophobia, participants of the 2nd Baltic Sea NGO Forum recommend:

- a. Carrying out, together with national, regional and local authorities, joint educational and cultural training programmes for the officials of administrative, law-enforcement and judicial structures, placing specific emphasis on human rights, international and inter-confessional relations for small town officials.
- b. Establishing a culture of experience sharing with officials in CBSS countries working at the medium level of administration and in law enforcement agencies.
- c. Strengthening national human rights structures in CBSS countries and developing regional institutions of human rights commissioners.



CROSS-SECTOR CO-OPERATION

Forum participants stood in favour of establishing the NGO sector as an equal partner of the government and private sector and focusing their common work on contributing to the democratic development of Baltic Sea societies through an open dialogue among all actors involved. The NGOs are willing to strengthen their co-operation - both "internal", based on the already existing networks, and "external", with direct access to government authorities - at local and national level. Favourable attitude and support of national and supranational authorities of the Baltic Sea States at all levels would be more than welcome. NGOs regard relevant CBSS structures as proper partners of the emerging Baltic Sea NGO network.

Welcoming the EU enlargement, the Forum participants stressed that it should not create new obstacles in relations between Russia and EU countries in governmental, civil society and business spheres. In this respect, special importance should be given to Kaliningrad.

The Forum underlined the need for the governments to observe the principle of equal opportunities in the Baltic Sea region with regard to access to resources, power, research and technological innovations. It supported CBSS efforts to tackle "civil security" issues in the Baltic Sea region and stood in favour of wider NGO participation in this work.

Forum participants called for working out a clear set of procedures facilitating international NGO projects in the Baltic Sea region and supported the idea of holding regular meetings at international level, which improved contacts between national NGO networks and provided access to the experience of people in other CBSS countries. They agreed to work for establishing direct links with CBSS structures, primarily via national NGO focal points

There is a good deal of accumulated expertise among NGOs in the Baltic Sea region, which can be summarised and presented to the leadership of the Baltic Sea States in the form of practical recommendations.



General Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Participating NGOs confirmed the intention to hold Baltic Sea NGO Forums on an annual basis, under the auspices of rotating Presidencies of the CBSS. The 3rd Baltic Sea NGO Forum will thus be convened in Turku on 8-11 May 2003.
2. In order to enhance the efficiency of NGO co-operation in the Baltic Sea region and to strengthen their interaction with the CBSS, delegates agreed to establish a Board, which would consist of representatives of national NGO focal points in CBSS Member countries (11 persons) and of cross-border NGO networks dealing with Social Care, Environment, Youth, etc. (4-5 persons). It would be up to the national and sector NGO networks themselves to select their respective representatives on the future Board. The Baltic Sea NGO Network Board would thus become an effective and efficient structure, expected to act as a civil society counterpart of the CBSS.
3. In order to promote regular information exchange between NGO networks and the CBSS secretariat, Forum participants put forward the idea of dedicating 1-2 pages of the official monthly Newsletter of the CBSS, BALTINFO, to news about Baltic Sea NGO activities several times a year.
4. The Forum stood in favour of looking into ways of establishing a special Baltic Sea NGO Forum Fund, which would help avoid financing obstacles for both the participants and organisers of future NGO Forums and serve as a stable and reliable source of support for NGO activities.
5. Forum participants stressed that co-operation among NGOs in the Baltic Sea region would be considerably facilitated by simplified visa procedures and waving visa fees for NGO representatives travelling within the framework of civil society co-operation projects, and urge the governments of CBSS Member States to take the necessary steps in this respect.

