



## **Conclusions by the Environmental Conference of the Baltic NGO Forum - 2002 St.Petersburg, 18-21 April, 2002**

The Baltic Sea is a fragile and sensitive ecosystem. For more than 80 million people, who live around the shores and in the catchment area, the health of the Baltic Sea is important. Major environmental risks and negative trends in the Baltic Sea Area are well known by both the Governmental authorities and the public but are still poorly addressed.

Environmental NGOs were the early stewards of the sustainability concept and the concept of equal environmental space. The NGO position was presented in 1998 by Coalition Clean Baltic in the Environmental Citizen's Organisations Vision on Sustainable Baltic Sea Region. The initiative of the Environmental Ministers at Saltsjo'baden in 1998 was thus welcomed and, jointly with governments, the Agenda 21 for the Baltic Sea Area was developed as an excellent example of NGO-GO co-operation. Today NGOs feel that this great Baltic Agenda 21 process has lost status following transference of the Secretariat to the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and that the process now lacks political strength and resources. NGOs urge Prime Ministers of CBSS to put power back into the Baltic Agenda 21 process and to ensure participation of the sector ministers in implementation of agreed actions. Of equal importance is the integration of environmental considerations into sector policies. Prime ministers should ensure that sector ministers and environment ministers organise cross-sectoral, joint meetings to implement Baltic 21.

Within this framework of strong commitment to sustainable development, securing the sustainable future of the Baltic Sea calls for cautious planning and comprehensive conduct of environmental impact assessments. NGOs are not against economic development but support development, which takes full account of environmental considerations.

There are still too many environmental **"hot spots" in the Baltic Sea Region** in need of mitigation at both the national and international level.

**Industry** strongly affects the Baltic environment by its emissions and deposits, by processes and products in use. NGOs call for a regional action programme to achieve a total phase-out of discharges, emissions and other losses of hazardous substances. The Baltic Sea Countries should implement the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants immediately.



In the sphere of **energy production and consumption**, the present trends of use of fossil fuels and nuclear power cause short and long-term damages and risks to the environment, which are in contradiction with basic sustainability requirements. We need to shape energy policy of the Baltic Sea Area in order to promote the use of renewable energy and energy saving. Long term aim should be the Nuclear Free Baltic Sea Area - phase out of the use of nuclear energy and until that ban for construction of new nuclear based capacities and ban for operation of existing reactors beyond design limits, as well transportation of spent nuclear fuel or wastes at Baltic. Along that also exploration and exploitation of uranium deposits in Karelian Republic should be banned.

**Unsustainable consumption patterns**, particularly on Western Baltic, have to be changed. Public awareness and strengthening of the consumers' responsibility should be encouraged. The governments must establish economic incentives for, fostering this shift. In connection of over-consumption, proper systems for waste minimisation, recycling and environmentally friendly management of residuals should be established in all Baltic Sea states.

Still existing areas as well as semi-natural and semi-cultural landscapes are housing enormous richness of **biological diversity** of the region thus ensuring ecological sustainability and providing basis for sustainable rural development - traditional agriculture, eco-tourism etc. NGOs call for stronger co-operation between the Governments to develop and preserve the Protected Areas Network in the whole Baltic Region. Sufficient resources must be allocated for conservation of semi-natural landscapes and securing sustainability of local development programmes.

Old-growth and undisturbed **forests** and well-developed secondary forests in the Baltic Sea Region are under severe pressure of domestic and international commercial interests. Also overall forest management practices often include violations of national legislation and good management habits. NGOs call for preservation of virgin forests, stop of illegal forestry activities and illegal timber trade. Old-growth forests at border areas in Karelia and secondary forests at Karelian Isthmus should be protected by establishment of cross-border national parks as planned by Russian and Finnish Governments recently.

**The transport sector** is the source of widespread pollution, congestion and health problems. New investments in highways are in deep contrast to concerns regarding climate change. NGOs call for a consistent set of policies within the transport sector, in particular, for conversion of public investments from highway systems into public transport and specially railways. We call for stricter fuel efficiency standards and rapid introduction of alternative fuels.

Increased shipping and extensive construction of new ports, often close to protected nature areas, bring risks and damages to these areas and to the Baltic ecosystem as such. NGOs call for careful planning and proper application of Environmental Impact Assessments for site selections and designs of these facilities with arrangement of public participation at all stages of development and consideration of public opinion. Number and impact of oil spills as consequence of oil-transit is continuously growing and NGOs call for significant joint efforts from governments to prevent and mitigate negative impacts of oil handling and oil transportation. Oil exploitation at Baltic Proper should be banned. NGOs welcome proposals to conduct independent international assessment of sea-traffic safety on Eastern Gulf of Finland.



Water pollution due to over-fertilisation in **agriculture** causing eutrophication is an extremely serious problem, resulting widespread algae bloom, oxygen deficits and fish deaths at summer. This has led to significant changes both in shallow coastal waters and in the deeper basins with economically important fish species. NGOs call for adoption of agricultural policies, which secure decreased nutrient loads to river systems and to the Baltic Sea. Furthermore Governments need to install wastewater treatment plants in all major cities around the Baltic, to eliminate point-sources contribution to oxygen depletion, eutrophication and sanitary problems.

Over-catch, use of damaging **fishing** techniques and pollution of spawning habitats cause damage to fish population thus threatening viability of communities depending of coastal fisheries. NGOs call for fisheries policies that secure the growth and improvement of the threatened fish stocks, mainly cod, salmon and herring.

Serious concern have been expressed by the public, that pollution from **chemical munitions from II World War dumped to the Baltic Sea** may threaten the ecosystem and health of people. NGOs call for reopening of monitoring and assessment of seriousness of this problem by HELCOM.

Existing **international agreements and national legislation** provide a good basis for environment protection and nature conservation in the Baltic Sea Area. NGOs note that most of damages brought to the environment are connected with violations of these commitments, and call for their strict observance.

Better governance of societies, strengthening, and in case of Russian Federation even reestablishment of environment protection structures together with better enforcement of national environmental regulations and international conventions is urgently needed. NGOs call that Prime ministers should secure a rapid implementation of:

- The Baltic 21 actions, from 1998
- Baltic Sea Joint Comprehensive Environmental Action Programme, from 1992
- the 50 % reduction goal of discharges of nutrients, toxic substances and metals to the Baltic Sea, from 1988,

and establish proper control mechanisms over the implementation of these programmes.

Ensuring application of proper **Environmental Impact Assessment**, including implementation of provisions of Espoo Convention in case of developments having trans-boundary impact, is essential to secure reliability of authorities and accountability of business sector towards public.

**Public awareness and participation** are prerequisites of decision-making and of implementation. Russia has not signed the Aarhus Convention on **access to environmental information** and public participation, and not all countries in Baltic Sea Region have ratified it. Consequently there are too many cases, particularly in Russia, when development projects are started with no public awareness about them, or the public is not given the opportunity to participate in decision-making and thus not taking into account of public concerns. NGOs call for full implementation of provisions of Aarhus convention by all Baltic Sea countries.



Public awareness can be increased through co-ordinated efforts and through allocation of additional resources to improve **environmental education**. For that, existing structures and networking should be improved and new initiatives, like regional centres for environmental education, launched.

**Assaults upon environmental activists connected with their activities** become the issue of special concern. NGOs demand thorough investigation of all these cases and strict punishment of the guilty in accordance with the law.

The momentum of the progress towards sustainable development has ceased. NGOs call for a strong inter-governmental framework for the support of public initiatives and encouragement of Local Governments, particularly for establishment of Local Agenda 21. NGOs should be considered as equal partners to the GOs and sufficient support must be allocated for the work of the Third Sector. NGOs calls for a renewed and strengthened commitment to build up sustainable societies, allowing the Baltic Sea Region to realise its potential, becoming a global model for sustainable region. In order to reach this we call for the rapid implementation of the Baltic Agenda 21 as well environmental action programmes at national and regional level agreed already.

