

Council of the Baltic Sea States
12th Ministerial Session
(Pori, 10-11 June 2003)

C O M M U N I Q U É

INTRODUCTION

At the invitation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) - consisting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia and Sweden and a member of the European Commission - met in Pori on 10-11 June 2003 for its 12th Ministerial Session. The Presidency of the EU was present, and representatives from France, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States attended as observers.

Since the 10th anniversary meeting of the Council in Svetlogorsk in March 2002, several important events have shaped the CBSS agenda for its second decade. In particular, the Council welcomed the conclusions from the 4th Baltic Sea States Summit meeting in St. Petersburg in June 2002 and the role accorded to the CBSS therein. The Council confirmed its readiness to continue acting as co-ordinator and focal point for intergovernmental regional cooperation.

The Council underlined the significance of the conclusion of EU accession negotiations with Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland with a view to their accession by 1 May 2004. This enlargement of the Union is expected to create new opportunities for developing the Baltic Sea region as a whole and thus will be an important contribution to realizing the region's great potential.

The Council welcomed the ongoing elaboration of a new EU initiative on Wider Europe. The CBSS has successfully overcome old dividing lines in our region. The Council will put this experience at the service of intensified regional and cross-border cooperation within this initiative.

The Council welcomed the results of the EU-Russia Summit in St. Petersburg on 31 May 2003 and expressed its conviction that the relationship between the enlarging Union and the Russian Federation will continue to develop in a constructive and mutually beneficial manner. The Baltic Sea region is the area where the EU and Russia meet, which underscores the importance of EU-Russia relations for the CBSS and vice-versa.

Cooperation within the CBSS should continue to be based on demands and clear priorities. All CBSS structures and working bodies will adapt and optimise their respective activities in the context of the forthcoming enlargement of the EU.

The Council praised efforts to improve coordination between and among the CBSS and other intergovernmental regional bodies in the north of Europe: the Arctic Council, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The Council commended the initiative of the Nordic Council of Ministers to coordinate activities with the CBSS and to jointly explore the potential for creating synergies in relevant fields. The Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) was instructed to follow-up on this initiative.

The annual meeting of heads of specialized Baltic Sea regional and subregional cooperation organisations should be continued and supplemented by other means of information exchange and coordination.

NORTHERN DIMENSION

The Council welcomed the elaboration of a new action plan for the Northern Dimension for the period of 2004-06 and looks forward to its adoption by the European Council. The Council confirmed that it would continue to be an active partner in facilitating and monitoring implementation of the new Northern Dimension Action Plan, (ND AP), especially in those areas where the CBSS can provide expertise and thereby additional value.

The Council noted with satisfaction that the CBSS has during the past year enhanced its role as a focal point by coordinating the input by Baltic Sea subregional actors vis-à-vis the ND AP.

The Council noted that Finland, during its CBSS Presidency, hosted a series of high-level Northern Dimension Forums on the following subjects: Social Protection and Health (in Joensuu); Information and Communication Technologies (in Pori); the Labour Market (in Helsinki). The Council looks forward to seeing the outcome of these discussions reflected in the new ND AP as well as in the working programme of the CBSS. The initiative by Norway to host a conference in Oslo in October 2003 to launch a Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Wellbeing was welcomed.

The Council noted the Russian invitation to all partners to build future cooperation activities in the geographical area covered by the Northern Dimension of the EU on the principle of equal partnerships in specific fields.

CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

The Council stressed the need for continued vigilance to prevent new divisions and promote cohesion in the Baltic Sea Region by intensified regional and cross-border cooperation. The Council encouraged the municipal and regional authorities in countries on both sides of the EU/EEA external borders from the Barents Sea to the south-east of the Baltic Sea Region to intensify fruitful cooperation for mutual development.

The Council urged governments, donor agencies and the EU to make appropriate funds available for this purpose. In this context, the Council recognised the efforts made by the EU to align the Tacis, Phare and Interreg programmes and called for further steps such as simplified procedures for applicants. The elaboration by the European Commission of a “proximity instrument” for regional and cross-border cooperation should be supported.

The Council asked the CSO to examine the possibilities of organising, in cooperation with other actors, a series of seminars for politicians and officials from relevant municipal and regional authorities on suitable fields and forms of cooperation, experiences gained so far and financial instruments available.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

The Council took note of the annual report of the CBSS Commissioner on Democratic Development and congratulated the Commissioner on her performance in fulfilling the mandate of her office as foreseen by the 9th Ministerial session at Bergen in 2000. The Council pledged its full support to the Commissioner in the completion of her mandate by the end of 2003. The Council called on the CSO, in cooperation with the Commissioner and the Working Group on Democratic Institutions, (WGDI), to review the plan of activities of the WGDI with a view to determining how certain functions and programmes which hitherto were the responsibility of the Commissioner's office might in future be assumed by the WGDI.

The Council noted that the Vilnius Declaration on Regional cooperation and Consolidation of Democratic Stability in Greater Europe was followed up by a meeting convened in Strasbourg in October 2002, focusing on human rights and the rule of law, fighting terrorism, local democracy, national minorities and trans-frontier cooperation. The Council welcomed this initiative and encouraged the CSO and other CBSS working bodies to participate as appropriate in the exchange of information and best practices with other regional organizations in Europe.

The Council noted the recommendations submitted by the 3rd Baltic Sea NGO Forum and welcomed the announcement of a follow-up Forum in Estonia in 2004. The Council also noted the establishment of a Working Group for Youth Affairs and underlined the importance of promoting active participation of youth in civil society and democratic processes. The Council called on the CSO to continue its consultations with the social partners on developing appropriate tools for advancing the dialogue on labour market issues in the CBSS.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND CULTURE

The Council acknowledged the contribution of the EuroFaculty during the past decade to the reform of higher education in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The Council noted the ongoing discussions on a transformation of the EuroFaculty into a postgraduate research and training programme.

The Council recognised with appreciation the progress of the EuroFaculty Kaliningrad project during its first three years and endorsed, in principle, a prolongation of the project for a second three-year period. The CSO is asked to take a definite decision about the prolongation once remaining issues are satisfactorily settled. The Council encouraged interested donor countries to contribute to the financing of the project and the host country to gradually increase its contribution.

The Council looked forward to the 6th Conference of CBSS Ministers of Culture in St. Petersburg in October 2003. The topic of the Conference - protected areas of historical cities - is timely, as the conference will take place during the tercentenary of St. Petersburg.

ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Economic cooperation is a driving force for integration and growth in the region. There is potential for further progress through improvements of the framework conditions for private business, including for entrepreneurship and innovation. Additional efforts for removal of barriers to trade and investment must be launched with a view to ensuring the full implementation of the Bergen and Moscow Action Plans.

The Council welcomed the efforts, which should be intensified, by the Baltic Sea Customs Cooperation and by national governments to measure and reduce the time needed for the border crossing of goods to a maximum of 2 hours.

The Council noted the continued activities of the Task Force on Organised Crime and the office of the CBSS Commissioner to address the issue of corruption. The Council welcomed cooperation, in the form of focused seminars, between the CBSS and the OECD in the work against corruption in the Baltic Sea region.

The Council looked forward to receiving from its Business Advisory Council (BAC) a study on barriers to investment in the region. The results could be of assistance in the process of creating a Joint Investment Area in the Baltic Sea Region.

The Council noted the activities of the Task Force on Conformity Assessment, Standards and Certification, and called for additional efforts to advance the work in this area as an important contribution to the efforts towards a Common European Economic Space.

The Council noted with satisfaction that cooperation within the Information and Communications Technology field is well underway in the framework of the Northern *e*-Dimension Action Plan (NeDAP). The Council welcomed the announcement that Tacis and Interreg have earmarked funds amounting to a total of EUR 14 mln and noted that the Nordic Council of Ministers and individual member states have also contributed by financing relevant studies and workshops.

The Council welcomed the results of the CBSS Ministers of Energy meeting in Vilnius on 20 November 2002. The Baltic Sea Region Energy Cooperation (BASREC) forms an effective contact network between stakeholders in the region as well as a platform for policy development. The Council noted with satisfaction the endorsement by the Group of Senior Energy Officials (GSEO) of the text of the Agreement on a Testing Ground for the Kyoto Mechanism in the Baltic Sea Region and invited member states to sign the Agreement without undue delay.

The Council noted that the ad-hoc Working Group on Transport has agreed on a work programme and called for additional efforts in order to meet the expectations set by the Heads of Government at the 4th BSS Summit as a follow-up to the Conference of the CBSS Ministers of Transport in Gdansk in 2001.

The Council expressed its support for continued cooperation between the EU and Russia regarding the socio-economic development of the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation, seizing the opportunities offered by EU enlargement. The CSO was asked to consider how the CBSS could contribute to such cooperation.

MARITIME SAFETY

The Council emphasised the need to enhance cooperation on maritime safety as reflected in the joint EU-Russia statement of 31 May 2003. The Council noted with satisfaction the implementation of the HELCOM Copenhagen Declaration and encouraged the HELCOM Contracting Parties to continue their efforts. The Council welcomed

that the HELCOM ministerial meeting on 25 June 2003 will address the environmental impact of shipping and noted that it will discuss measures tailored to the sensitivity of the Baltic Sea marine environment, in close cooperation with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO).

The Council urged all member-states to continue to fulfil their legal obligations to ensure the safe and secure transport of energy, especially with regard to the transport of heavy oils in the Baltic Sea. The Council expressed support for further concrete action in this regard, especially concerning the use of single-hull oil tankers, and in accordance with IMO rules. The Council noted the European Union's initiatives on maritime safety.

NUCLEAR SAFETY

The Council welcomed the signing of the Multilateral Nuclear Environmental Programme in the Russian Federation and looked forward to the resultant opening of the Nuclear Window of the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership.

The Council noted that the Agreement for the exchange of Radiation Monitoring Data has been signed by all CBSS member states and welcomed the fact that its Working Group on Nuclear and Radiation Safety put special emphasis during the past year on accession and implementation of the Agreement.

The Council also emphasised the importance of continuous efforts by international organisations and countries concerned to enhance the level of nuclear safety across the region. The Council called, *inter alia*, for further safety analysis of nuclear power plants and for taking measures as needed to reduce the identified risks.

HUMAN SECURITY

The Council deems further enhancement of human security in the region as of profound importance and will support strengthening of the ongoing cooperation to combat new threats to modern civilized societies and democracy such as, *inter alia*, international terrorism, organised crime, illegal drugs and arms trafficking.

The Council noted with concern that trafficking in human beings is a serious and growing problem in the Baltic Sea Region. Combating trafficking in human beings, especially women and children, is a political priority. Activities should include preventive measures, including demand reduction, victim protection and support as well as legislation, prosecution and law enforcement. The specific needs of trafficked children should be recognised. The work of the Expert Group on Trafficking in Women, operating within the Task Force on Organised Crime, as well as the Working Group for Cooperation on Children at Risk, which deals with child trafficking as part of the cooperation to aid unaccompanied children crossing our borders, were noted with appreciation. These efforts should be continued with vigour. Improved coordination should be sought, also with other similar efforts.

The Council noted with appreciation the work of the Task Force on Communicable Disease Control and the relevance of its work for a Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Wellbeing, as many of the established networks, projects and other initiatives should be carried on in some form.

CIVIL SECURITY

The Council expressed its support for the EUROBAL TIC Programme for Civil Protection and welcomed the fact that EUROBAL TIC received Interreg funding for 2003-2005. It called for supplementary contributions from other national and international sources to allow for actions in all the Baltic Sea states. This project should lead to improved abilities in protecting human life and the environment as well as cultural heritage, and promote sustainable development of safe communities in the Baltic Sea region.

AGENDA 21 AND SPATIAL PLANNING

The Council welcomed the Baltic 21 “Report 2000-2002: Towards Sustainable Development in the Baltic Sea Region” and noted progress in several areas while increased attention is warranted in others. The Council underlined that cooperation within Baltic 21 is consistent with the spirit of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and asked the responsible ministries to strategically develop their work within Baltic 21.

The Council noted with satisfaction progress in the implementation of the Spatial Development Action programme VASAB 2010 Plus. In particular, improved cooperation between VASAB, HELCOM and Baltic 21 was noted with regard to implementation of the relevant EU recommendation on Integrated Coastal Zone Management in the Baltic Sea Region. The strengthening of practical cooperation on spatial planning within the VASAB framework between Russia, Belarus and other countries in the region was commended. The Council welcomed efforts by VASAB to highlight aspects of territorial cohesion.

FINAL PROVISIONS

The Council thanked Finland for chairing the CBSS during 2002/2003 and for organising the 12th Ministerial Session in Pori. The Council entrusts Estonia with the Presidency for the period 2003/2004. During this period Finland, Estonia and Poland will compose the Troika. The Council noted, as stipulated in the relevant Council decision of 1998 establishing the Secretariat, that the CSO will undertake a review of the CBSS Secretariat. The CSO is instructed to report its findings with recommendations for the future of the Secretariat function by June 2004.

The next transfer of the CBSS Presidency shall take place at a special meeting of ministers' deputies in conjunction with the 5th Baltic Sea States Summit meeting to be hosted by Estonia in June 2004.

The 13th Ministerial Session of the CBSS will be held in Poland in 2005.