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## HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan, Kick-off conference (Helsinki, 7 March 2006)

### Kick-off Stakeholder Conference on the development of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan, on 7 March 2006 in Helsinki.

#### Intervention by Ambassador Kornelius Sigmundsson, Chairman of the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) of the Council of the Baltic Sea States

Mr. Chairman,  
 Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address this Conference on the development of a HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan of behalf of the Icelandic Presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States. Thank you for your kind invitation. I am happy to back here in Helsinki where I served for 4 years as Ambassador of Iceland.

#### Briefly about the CBSS

In the wake of the dramatic changes in Europe following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism, the Danish and German Foreign Ministers took the initiative to establish the Council of the Baltic Sea States (or in short CBSS) in 1992. Its task was to intensify cooperation and co-ordination among the Baltic Sea States, spur democratic development in the region, forging greater unity among the 10 member states and securing their favourable development. My country, Iceland, became a member of the CBSS in 1995.

CBSS is today an overall political forum for regional intergovernmental cooperation.

In the field of environment, CBSS can be proud of the BASREC<sup>[1]</sup> Baltic Sea regional testing ground agreement for flexible mechanisms of the Kyoto protocol and the complementing financial facility for energy sector investments that reduce anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases.

The CBSS today consists of 11 member states and the European Commission. In comparison, HELCOM has 9 countries and the EC as its contracting parties. It is noteworthy that all of these 9 members and the EC are at the same time also members of the CBSS.

Iceland is not a contracting party of HELCOM. However, although Iceland is not so close to the Baltic Sea in geographical terms, Iceland attaches great importance to the environmental situation we are facing. This is due to the fact that Iceland itself is quite dependent on the sea for its livelihood. For this reason, environment and related issues were considered very important when Iceland formulated the priorities for its Presidency. Without going much into detail, I could mention the following:

- **Protection of the Environment:** in particular the maritime environment in the region and adjacent areas. Reduction of pollution and prevention of oil spills in the face of ever-increasing oil transportation in the region is very important.
- **Cooperation on nuclear and radiation safety:** Continuation and strengthening of cooperation in this field is important for all countries in the region. A formal agreement on the exchange of radiation measurement data between in the CBSS Member States has been in place since 2002, and it is now being considered whether to include also air-measurements into this agreement.
- **Cooperation with Regional Organizations in Northern Europe and elsewhere:** Cooperation with the other regional organizations in Northern Europe is of particular importance in view of common interest and to avoid overlapping and duplication of work. Here I would like to mention the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Arctic Council. We would like to include HELCOM in this category.

## **6<sup>th</sup> Baltic Sea States Summit**

The culmination of the Icelandic CBSS Presidency will be the 6<sup>th</sup> Baltic Sea States Summit, which will gather the Heads of Government and a representative of the European Commission for a meeting in Reykjavik on 7-8 June this year. While the agenda of the Summit is still being negotiated, it seems beyond doubt that the environmental situation in the Baltic Sea and most likely the work of HELCOM will be on the table.

The previous Baltic Sea States Summits (which are held every 2<sup>nd</sup> year) have frequently made references to HELCOM.

Thus, the Chairman's conclusions from the last Summit read:

“The Heads of Government confirm the importance of the work of the HELCOM. They welcome co-operation to protect the Baltic marine environment as established by the HELCOM ministerial meeting in Bremen 2003 and followed up at the 25<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the HELCOM in March 2004.”

### **Environment a priority for CBSS**

The environmental situation in the Baltic Sea has been an issue at heart of the CBSS since its foundation back in 1992. In the Declaration from the 1st CBSS Ministerial Meeting, held in March 1992 in Copenhagen, the Foreign Ministers “expressed their deep concern about the pollution of the Baltic Sea and underlined that cleaning up of the Baltic Sea is a joint responsibility.”

More recently the CBSS has paid special attention to the environment: In the Communiqué from the 13<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Session of the CBSS held in Szczecin in June 2005, gathering the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, it was stated that “the protection of the Baltic Sea and adjacent areas environment remains one of the priorities of the CBSS.”

In addition, the “Council reiterated the significance of the work of the HELCOM . It also called for a strengthening of the cooperation among the Baltic Sea States to prevent the risks associated with increased seaborne oil transport in the area. The Council underlined the need for close cooperation in safeguarding transboundary response activities, *i.a.* in the framework of HELCOM RESPONSE, and invited relevant stakeholders to participate actively.”

Furthermore, the “Council welcomed the role of HELCOM in developing an Action Plan for the Baltic Sea, and expected that it could also be an important contribution to the European Marine Strategy”.

Also at the level of field ministers, the CBSS has discussed the environmental situation in the Baltic Sea. At the recent informal meeting of CBSS Ministers of the Environment with the participation of HELCOM and the EU Presidency held in Stockholm in November 2005, there was general agreement that the state of the Baltic Sea requires strengthened action in order to tackle the major problems: eutrophication, hazardous substances, environmental impacts of shipping and the threats to fish stocks. It was agreed that the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) would facilitate the coordination of activities to improve the ecological status of the Baltic Sea. The upcoming HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan will be used as a guiding instrument for further action.

### **Input and support from Baltic 21**

The type of activities addressed by this conference, and in particular, HELCOM's Baltic Sea Action Plan, requires the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders in the Region. If I may say a few words in favour of the Baltic 21 activity of the CBSS, I would like to note that, with its broad stakeholder membership and its various Sectors, Baltic 21 has relevance to the issues being addressed by this conference and is well-positioned to support the objectives spelled out in the Baltic Sea Action Plan.

The continued development and implementation of the Baltic 21 Lighthouse Projects is a very good example in this respect. The Baltic 21 Lighthouse Project concept encompasses the objectives of ensuring high project visibility, the participation of as many countries and sectors as possible, and the broader implementation of existing and new solutions in pursuit of sustainable development in the Baltic Sea Region.

The CBSS Presidency recognizes the value of HELCOM's Baltic Sea Action Plan as a very important aspect of our Region's joint efforts to achieve a healthy Baltic Sea environment, and to also realize the Baltic 21-proposed Eco-region concept recognized by the Prime Ministers of the Baltic Sea States at their 5<sup>th</sup> Summit held in Estonia in

2004.

### **In conclusion**

One may say that while HELCOM has elaborated concrete recommendations and proposals for action, the CBSS has worked to maintain a political commitment to the topic of environmental protection of the Baltic Sea. Being an overall political forum for regional intergovernmental cooperation, the Council of the Baltic Sea States can continue to encourage and support HELCOM activities.

In the view of the Icelandic CBSS Presidency, it is high time to intensify the political, as well as more practical, relations between the two institutions. The serious situation of the Baltic Sea – despite some improvements during the last decade – calls for cooperation and coordinated action among all actors. For this reason, the Icelandic CBSS Presidency is looking forward to intensifying the relations between our organisations and to explore means of cooperation. Let's join forces and work together.

Thank you for your attention.

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[1] Basrec = Baltic Sea Energy Cooperation, was established following a decision taken by the Energy Ministers of the Baltic Sea States and the European Commission at their meeting in Helsinki in October 1999.