

Main partners with regard to the BALTIC SEA NGO FORUM:
AG Ostsee des "Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland" (BUND)
BalticCult e.V.
Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB)
Deutsch-Russischer Austausch (DRA)
Europa-Union Schleswig-Holstein
FIAN - für das Recht auf Nahrung
Flüchtlingsrat Schleswig-Holstein
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WWF Deutschland, Projektbüro Ostsee



Initiative Ostseekooperation der Nichtregierungsorganisationen

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Declaration

BALTIC NGO NETWORK

German Focal Point
Albert Caspari – INFOBALT e.V. – D-28217 Bremen

Dear friends of the Baltic Sea NGO Network,

it is now nearly 10 years ago since the co-operation of NGOs in the Baltic Sea Region got a re-start, initiated by Danish NGO activists. This encouraged also the work of those German NGOs, who were interested in more constant development of common initiatives of Civil Societies round the Baltic Sea. Since the fall of the Berlin wall, since the success of the peoples powerful movements to overcome the separations and limitations left after the second world war, since the regaining of independence, democracy and freedom for some of the countries at the Baltic Sea shores – the BALTIC SEA FORUM was an easy understandable sign that co-operation among people and independently and self organised initiatives is possible.

And many interesting meetings and discussions followed. The discussions of German NGOs with German Foreign Ministry in 2001 were extremely exiting, and it showed our politicians that it is not enough just to hold nice speeches. The following NGO FORUM 2002 in St.Peterburg was even more exiting, as it was nice to see how powerful Russian NGOs could work for such an international meeting of that kind. 2003 in Turku we had to learn, that the way from Germany to Finland was longer than expected, but experienced a warm welcome in Europe's future Cultural Capital. I remember especially the intense discussions about a first version of "guidelines of the NGO Network", structures responsibilities of our cooperation and communication. A similar strong performance had Pärnu in Estonia: the NGO FORUM 2004 happened not only some days before Estonia's entrance into the European Union, but saw also a large number of German NGO activists trying to discover this small courageous country. And even 2005, when for some weeks it seemed very unlikely that the NGO FORUM in Gdynia could really take place, finally Poland were a special inspiring place where many ideas for new projects and activities were born. From Stockholm 2007 I remember best the splendid conference place Saltsjöbaden near the Baltic Sea, and in Latvia we had not only a successful NGO FORUM 2008, but also two strategical meetings of the Consultative Committee with interesting results regarding the common structures and strengthening of the guidelines for the network. Finally, the NGO FORUM 2009 was like coming home to Denmark, gathering again, and among other discussions to draft visions also for the upcoming EU Baltic Sea Strategy.

All of us know that NGOs, Initiatives of Civil Society, active Citizens fighting for more participation rights, for a better environment, a sustainable, peaceful development and cooperation, social inclusion or consideration of different cultures and traditions, more exchange of views on history – we are not living in paradise. Often much more work and efforts are needed than expected, and often without adequate payment. Such it is also in Germany, and the work as a Focal Point for the Baltic Sea NGO had to be done voluntary, in spite of the comparatively low interest of German Government and German press for matters of the Baltic Sea Region.

Compared to the sometimes very difficult working conditions, the never ending financing problems, our different native languages, and the changing in responsibilities and staff, the NGO FORA were quite successful. All the process of meetings, decisions, conclusions and writing of common papers and statements were done independently and self-determined by the NGOs and the Focal Points themselves.

Just because of all this positive results I regard it especially sad, that the successful working style was not continued under CBSS-presidency of Lithuania. I would like to avoid blaming anybody personally, as there are many people working to prepare the this years NGO FORUM which I never met before. I don't know what they think, know nothing about their preferences and difficulties, even though Lithuania is one of the countries standing in focus of the work of our own organisation INFOBALT.

It is especially sad to see, that guidelines of previous work could be completely ignored, opportunities to get better finances missed, communication happening only virtually and onesided, and proposals from our side blamed as "driven only by personal interests and inappropriate ambitions". The decision to hold not even one preparation meeting was taken by sole decision and not by common consultation and evaluation of possibilities.

As a result this years NGO FORUM were not prepared by all Focal Points together, mainly only by Lithuania, Denmark and Latvia, later completed by Russia. And the Lithuanian members of our organisation were blamed to be not professional enough and to be not worth to speak about their experiences to other Lithuanians. As chair of our organisation I must say there are no arguments left for me towards our members why to continue the work as a German Focal Point yet – even if I am quite sure that the majority of other Focal Points not even had a chance to understand what happened. But if this kind of serious conflict is possible to happen in a network, it needs a reaction to make our position very clear.

We will surely continue to participate in measures to improve co-operation and exchange in the Baltic Sea Region also in future. And of course INFOBALT will continue with projects focussed on Lithuania, as we hold a lot of nice contacts to Lithuania and have many friends and partners there. But I ask the Consultative Committee for understanding for our step to withdraw our participation in the Baltic Sea NGO Network as German Focal Point.

Bremen, April 12th 2010,

Initiative Ostseekooperation der Nichtregierungsorganisationen – German NGO-Initiative Baltic Sea Cooperation

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