

1st Baltic Sea States Summit, Visby, 3-4 May, 1996

Baltic Sea States Summit

VISBY 3-4 MAY 1996

PRESIDENCY DECLARATION

STABILITY, PROSPERITY AND SOLIDARITY

The Heads of Government of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, the Russian Federation and Sweden met in Visby on 3-4 May 1996 in the presence of the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission.

They affirmed their support for the process of co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region with particular emphasis on promoting the Region as an area where co-operation, democracy and market economy prevail. They were determined to secure for the Baltic Sea Region its proper place in the new Europe of co-operation and integration. They recognised the importance for European stability of ever closer links between the Baltic Sea Region and the European Union.

They welcomed the presentation by the President of the European Commission of the Baltic Sea Region Initiative prepared by the Commission at the request of the European Council.

They stressed the identity and significance of the Baltic Sea Region and the strong links forged through neighbourhood, trade, culture and history.

They recognised that they had a unique opportunity to advance prosperity in and solidarity between their countries and to make the Region stable and secure. They confirmed the instrumental role of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) in furthering these aims.

They confirmed their commitment to the rule of law, democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with relevant international human rights instruments and their OSCE and Council of Europe commitments. They reaffirmed their support for the CBSS Commissioner on Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, including the Rights of Persons belonging to Minorities.

They wished to enhance confidence, stability and civic security in the Region, be it through co-operation between civilian authorities, be it in fighting organised crime, be it in promoting maritime safety and nuclear safety. They wanted to continue to co-operate within the OSCE on issues concerning the security of Europe. They wished also to develop interaction between their regional endeavours and those of the OSCE.

They confirmed that the essential objective of the Baltic Sea co-operation is the constant improvement of the living and working conditions of their peoples within the framework of sustainable development, sustainable management of natural resources and protection of the environment.

They agreed to facilitate contacts between individuals, organisations and government bodies at all levels within the Baltic Sea Region and considered sub-regional contacts and dialogue to be a particular characteristic of the Region. They deemed all such contacts as being an essential complement to their intergovernmental co-operation.

They called upon business and industry to fully realise the potential for co-operation and economic growth which has arisen as a result of the political reforms and the economic restructuring taking place in the Region and welcomed the impetus given by the Baltic Sea Business Summit held in Stockholm on 24-25 April 1996.

AGENDA FOR ACTION

The Heads of Government discussed various measures in the three areas of increased people-to-people co-operation and civic security, economic development and integration, and strengthened environmental

protection which could be implemented through action programmes to be further elaborated by the CBSS. Among the topics were:

- support for Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland in their preparation for membership of the European Union;
- support for an early ratification of the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement between the Russian Federation and the European Union;
- reinforcement of co-operation between police, border, customs, immigration and coast guard authorities as well as search and rescue services of the Baltic Sea States with the aim of enhancing their citizens' security and stepping up the fight against organised crime;
- promotion of a people-to-people partnership, such as educational exchange programmes around the Baltic Sea, school partnership exchanges and interaction in the cultural field;
- promotion of contacts between young people in the Baltic Sea Region, inter alia through the mutual recognition of university degrees;
- support for Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Russian Federation in their preparation for membership of the WTO and their commitment to apply, in the interim, most favoured nation treatment in accordance with WTO principles as a minimum standard for trade within the Region;
- support for the early realisation of the free trade area between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and for the objective of establishing free trade between these countries and Poland;
- recognition of the new law on the special economic zone for the Kaliningrad oblast as a contribution to trade liberalisation and economic development in the Baltic Sea Region as a whole;
- improvement of transport systems in the Region including their integration into the Trans-European Networks with particular emphasis on the importance of maritime safety and the prevention of environmental damage;
- the need for speeding up border crossing and customs procedures and the possibility of establishing a focal point for monitoring problems and progress in this field;
- intensification of co-operation in the areas of energy and nuclear safety;
- restoration and maintenance of the ecological equilibrium of the Baltic Sea and the need to update and strengthen The Baltic Sea Joint Comprehensive Environment Action Programme;
- the development of an Agenda 21 for the Baltic Sea Region;
- the need for an assessment of the risks to the environment from the handling and transportation of oil before the Helsinki Commission Ministerial Meeting in 1998.

FOLLOW-UP

(a) General

The Heads of Government recognised the CBSS as the forum for guidance and overall co-ordination among the Baltic Sea States and the European Commission. They called upon the CBSS to consider adoption at its meeting in Kalmar on 2 - 3 July 1996 of action programmes in the three areas emphasised by the Heads of Government, taking into account the Baltic Sea Region Initiative elaborated by the European Commission.

(b) Financial Institutions

They called upon the International Financial Institutions to increase their participation in the financing of infrastructure and economic development in the Region and to intensify in co-operation with the CBSS the co-ordination of efforts with regional, bilateral and national agencies.

(c) Combating organised crime

They agreed on the urgent need for direct and concerted action to combat organised crime.

They decided therefore to establish a task-force of personal representatives of the Heads of Government to elaborate measures for immediate implementation and other concrete proposals to reinforce the regional co-operation in this field.

The taskforce will report to the next Baltic Sea States Summit in 1997.

(d) Future co-ordination

They agreed to continue to meet regularly and informally at the level of Heads of Government.

They asked the Swedish Prime Minister to assure, for the time being, the co-ordination of the Baltic Sea Co-operation.