

1999 CBSS 8th Ministerial session - Palanga Communiqué

Council of the Baltic Sea States

Eighth Ministerial Session

(Palanga, 14-15 June 1999)

Communiqué

At the invitation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) – the Foreign Ministers of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany (representing also the Presidency of the Council of the European Union), Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia, Sweden - met on 14-15 June 1999 in Palanga for its Eighth Ministerial Session. A Representative of the European Commission also participated to the meeting.

The Council welcomed as observers the Foreign Minister of Ukraine as well as Representatives from France, the United Kingdom and the United States of America in accordance with the Principles and Guidelines for Third Party Participation and noted the interest they expressed in contributing to the activities and projects of the CBSS.

CBSS - regional co-operation for creating a stable, democratic, prosperous and undivided Europe

The Council underlined the importance of the CBSS as an established instrument for regional co-operation in the process of creating a stable, democratic, prosperous and undivided Europe. The Council expressed its satisfaction with the development of good-neighbourly relations between the peoples and countries in the Baltic Sea Region and reiterated the importance of building stability as well as promoting people-to-people contacts, cross-border co-operation and civil security in the Region. It noted the valuable contribution made in this context by the ministerial conferences held in the areas of environment, spatial planning, transport, culture, labour market, youth, trade and industry, small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), energy and children at risk.

The Council also stressed the importance of the further implementation of Kalmar Action Program of July 1996 and noted the useful contributions made so far by states, sub-regions and local authorities as well as various inter- and non-governmental organisations.

The Council welcomed the dynamic character and widening scope of multilateral regional co-operation in the Baltic Sea area, which contributes to the continued interaction between the societies of the member countries, broadens the network of contacts across the Baltic Sea, promoting economic, social and democratic development of the Region. The Council stressed the great growth potential of the Region, which should be exploited to the benefit of its people in a socially and environmentally sustainable way.

CBSS and the European Union

The Council stressed the high political relevance for the Baltic Sea Region of three interrelated political processes of the European Union - EU enlargement, the Common Strategy towards Russia and the Northern Dimension. The similarity of aims and close links between EU and CBSS countries offer a unique opportunity for the Council to bring added value in key sectors of economic and social life of the Region. The Council reiterated its determination to ensure that the enlargement of the European Union has positive effects on the level of regional co-operation and the scope of bilateral relations.

The Council welcomed that the European Council in Cologne emphasised its resolve to maintain the momentum of enlargement negotiations with Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia and welcomed the intention of the European Union to open negotiations in all areas as early as possible in the following year. As for Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia, the Council expressed its hope that reaching the bilateral phase in the analytical examination of the "acquis" would allow those countries to speed up their preparations for the membership.

The Council welcomed the progress achieved so far under PHARE Institution Building. It encouraged efforts to further enhance twinning projects under this programme.

The Council welcomed the Common Strategy of the European Union on Russia adopted at the Cologne European Summit. The Council supported the principal goal of the Common Strategy – to strengthen the strategic partnership between the Union and Russia at the dawn of a new century. The future of Russia is an essential element in the future of the continent and constitutes a strategic interest for the EU.

The Council stated its readiness to play an active role in the implementation of the Northern Dimension of the EU and to contribute to the development of practical co-operation in key areas: infrastructure, trade and investment, nuclear safety and energy, environment and cross-border co-operation, democracy and rule of law, education and human resources development, public health and social administration. The Council viewed the Northern Dimension as a useful framework to promote synergies between the many relevant EU instruments and programmes. In this context the Council noted the need for a better co-ordination of efforts, undertaken by the European Union and CBSS States aimed at working out and implementing concrete projects within the existing legal and budgetary framework.

Economic co-operation, trade and investments in the Baltic Sea region

In the area of economic co-operation continued attention should be given to the further removal of barriers to foreign trade and investments. Contributions from the Baltic Business Advisory Council (BAC) and the Baltic Sea Chambers of Commerce Association (BCCA) are welcomed in this regard. In respect to foreign trade the Council highlighted ongoing activities on trade legislation, certification, business incubators and web-sites on trade information and invited the Third Baltic Sea Customs Conference in Gdansk in September 1999 to contribute to improved border crossing conditions for trade in the region. As regards foreign investments the Council welcomed the report on administrative barriers and looked forward to the upcoming CBSS/OECD conference in St. Petersburg on investment conditions.

The Council welcomed the findings of the meeting of Ministers of Trade and Industry in Vilnius in July 1998 and endorsed its recommendations to dismantle barriers to trade and investment, to promote the adaptation of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to

international competition and to increase their financing. The Council urged the Committee of Senior Officials to follow up on the recommendations and stressed that continued emphasis on the creation of favorable conditions for SMEs is an important contribution to the economic growth and stability in the region. In this context the Council attaches special importance to the forthcoming meeting in Bergen in February 2000 of Ministers for Trade and Industry.

The Council noted the importance of tourism in the context of sustainable development in the region and welcomed the Tourism Development and Cooperation Program for the Baltic Sea Region prepared by the Baltic Tourism Commission with the support of CBSS.

Energy and transport co-operation in the Baltic Sea region

The Council welcomed the outcome of the meeting of the Ministers for Energy in Stavanger on 30 November - 1 December 1998 and confirmed the commitment to co-operate in establishing an effective and more integrated regional energy system, based on the criteria of sustainable development. The Council agreed that stable and reliable supplies of energy are of fundamental importance to economic growth and long-term regional stability. It welcomed the ambitious work program for the energy co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region in 1999, and looked forward to the meeting of the Ministers for Energy in Helsinki in October 1999 furthering co-operation in this field. The Council noted that the Energy Ministers expressed their intention to evaluate the work accomplished in this area and looked forward to their report.

The Council underlined the importance of strengthening measures at national level and increased international co-operation in nuclear safety enhancement and radioactive waste management. The Council urged the Member States to finalise the work on the agreement on the rapid exchange of radiation monitoring data and other information in radiological or nuclear emergencies.

The Council noted the significant progress achieved in the development of an integrated transport system in the region. As further growth of trade both in volume and in value is expected in the Baltic Sea region, considerable investments in transport infrastructure and its maintenance are required. In this context the Council took note, with appreciation, of the contribution of CBSS Member States to the development of the Pan-European Transport Corridors and the common Transport Infrastructure Needs Assessment (TINA), as well as of the finalisation of the joint Baltic 21/ HELCOM PITF Project on Transport – "Transport sector Investment Decision-Making in the Baltic Sea Region."

Democratic Institutions, rule of law and human rights

The Council, with respect to further development of democratic institutions and promotion of the rule of law and human rights, recalled the importance of close co-operation with other international organisations, particularly the Council of Europe, OSCE and the European Union. The Council welcomed the fact that all member states now had national ombudsman or similar institutions. The forthcoming seminar in 2000 in Finland on good administration was also welcomed.

The Council expressed its satisfaction with the activities of the CBSS Commissioner on Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Including the Rights of Persons Belonging to Minorities. It invited the Commissioner to continue devoting special attention to the issue of

human rights and democratic participation. The Council welcomed the Commissioner's initiative to launch a Programme for the Strengthening of Democratic Processes in the Baltic Sea Region, which places special emphasis on good law making. The Council noted with satisfaction the Commissioner's intention to assess the situation and development of local democracy in the region.

The Council recalled that the mandate of the CBSS Commissioner expires on September 30th 2000 and tasked the CSO to take up the review process.

The Council welcomed the increased co-operation in the area of civil security and noted the positive results of various expert conferences and meetings in this field. The Council emphasised the importance of improved security in parallel with increased inflow of people and goods. The Council underlined that exchange of information and joint projects was an important means of sharing know-how and costs related to the development of new technologies and opportunity to achieve a synergy effect from pooling resources in rescue work and surveillance. The Council asked the CSO to continue work in this field and to present concrete proposal for the future activities and projects.

The Council expressed its appreciation of the work carried out by the Task Force on Organised Crime in the Baltic Sea Region. The activities involved the police, customs, border and coast guard forces, immigration authorities, prosecutors' offices and tax administrations in a joint and multidisciplinary approach. The Council welcomed the establishment of special communication centres, manned 24 hours a day, and setting up of a communication system, Baltcom, which resulted in the increase of the exchange of information between law enforcement authorities of the region.

The Council underlined the importance of continuing joint operative measures, successfully carried out in the field of drugs, illegal migration, stolen vehicles and highly taxed goods, as well as within the field of money laundering. The Council took note of the activities carried out by the Task-Force on issues pertaining to judicial co-operation, special surveys and training in the areas of witness protection, regular Prosecutor-Generals meetings, technical co-operation and assistance, new models for exchange of information, operative seminars, interaction between the Tax Administrations of the region.

The Council noted with satisfaction the progress reports from meetings and seminars arranged with a view to raise awareness and promote regional co-operation on combating commercial sexual exploitation of children. The Council welcomed the increased focus on Children at Risk and supported the intensified exchange of experience in this field. The Council welcomed the proposal by Norway and Sweden on the establishment of an Information Technology network for the facilitation of closer contacts between all interested parties in the Baltic Sea Region working on questions related to Children at Risk.

Environment

The Council welcomed the progress report on the implementation of the joint Baltic 21 action programme and encouraged further work of pursuing the overall goal and sector objectives for sustainable development. The Council furthermore stressed the importance of elaboration and implementation of strategies and guidelines for work on sustainable development within the public and private sectors, harmonisation of legislation and the use of economic policy tools.

The Council noted the significance of the ministerial work on Visions and Strategies around the Baltic Sea 2010 (VASAB 2010) for the spatial development within the Baltic Sea and welcomed the co-operation between VASAB and Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) in various fields in the Baltic 21 Action Programme.

The Council welcomed the ongoing review of HELCOM structures, procedures and programmes towards increased capacity in reacting more rapidly and effectively to the challenges to the marine environment and reconfirmed a major role of HELCOM in the protection of the environment in the Baltic Sea region. The Council also stressed the importance of improved co-operation on the marine environment among international organisations in the Baltic Sea region.

Education, Culture and Youth

The Council underlined the importance of the successful academic project EuroFaculty and supported the plan of its re-establishment in Kaliningrad. The Council requested the CSO to take measures to strengthen the EuroFaculty and especially to consolidate its financial situation and to clarify its legal status. The Council welcomed the new activities of the EuroFaculty and EuroCollege to introduce European themes.

The Council underlined the importance of the Cultural Heritage of the Baltic Sea Region. It looked forward to the Fourth Conference of Ministers for Culture in Gdansk in September 1999 and adoption of an Action plan for the Common Cultural Heritage of the region.

The Council emphasised the importance of youth policy co-operation in particular for the promotion of people-to-people partnership. The Council welcomed the conclusions of the 1998 Youth Ministers Conference in Visby, as well as the establishment of a Baltic Sea Secretariat for Youth affairs in Kiel, Germany in March 1999.

Cross-border and sub-regional co-operation

The Council noted with satisfaction the rapid development of cross-border co-operation between local and regional authorities, firms and institutions in the framework of Euroregions, the EU INTERREG, PHARE and TACIS programmes and through bilateral co-operation. It appreciated the contribution to this development from the Council of Europe and welcomed the adoption by the EU Council of the guidelines for the implementation of the Northern Dimension for the policies of the Union, in particular with regard to improved interoperability and co-ordination of these EU programmes.

The Council stressed the importance of central action to facilitate decentralised co-operation. It underlined in particular the need to continue the development of local, and, where applicable, regional self-government and asked the CSO to pursue the issue.

The Council noted with satisfaction that the visa requirements between most Member States of the European Union bound by the Schengen Acquis and the three Baltic States had been abolished and that an agreement had been signed on the association of Norway and Iceland with the Schengen co-operation. The Council took note of the recent survey by the CBSS Commissioner on Conditions for Travel Across the National Border of the CBSS Member States. It asked the CSO to examine the recommendations. The Council took note of the need to examine the possible effect of the enlargement of the EU with respect to the conditions for

travel in the Baltic Sea Region. The Council supported the establishment of close contacts between the CBSS Commissioner, the CBSS Secretariat, the Council of Europe and representatives from the European Union for further examination of the issues.

The Council welcomed the growing involvement of regions around the Baltic Sea in the CBSS related activities in the areas of economic co-operation, promotion of investments, training of public administration and environment protection, civil security, energy and infrastructure, and agreed on the need to continue and extend this co-operation. In the context of EU enlargement the Council underlined the importance of enhancing various types of cross-border activities and people-to-people contacts with Kaliningrad Oblast and other regions of the Russian Federation.

The Council noted with appreciation the active support and interest of the Parliamentary Conference on Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region, Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Co-operation (BSSSC), Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) and the Baltic Co-ordinating Committee for the Multilateral PHARE Cross-border Co-operation with regard to the activities of the CBSS. It is the long-term objective of the Council to forge closer institutional co-operation contacts with parliamentary, sub-regional and municipal-level organisations in the Baltic sea area on the basis of the status of Special participants in the CBSS granted to the Parliamentary Conference on Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region, BSSSC and UBC. It also welcomed the role played by UBC and BSSSC in implementing the necessary changes in connection with the EU enlargement process.

The Council agreed that next Baltic Summit at the level of Heads of Government would be convened in the first half of the year 2000 in Denmark.

The Council expressed its appreciation of the contributions and reports of participating guests.

The Council thanked Lithuania for chairing the CBSS during 1998-99 and for organising the 8th Ministerial Session in Palanga. The Council entrusted Norway with the Presidency for the period 1999-2000. During this period, Norway, Lithuania and Germany will compose the Troika. The 9th Ministerial Session of the CBSS will be held in Norway in 2000.