

# HELSINKI COMMISSION

Baltic Marine Environment  
Protection Commission



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### **Session IV    *Lessons of Experience - Longstanding Multicountry Institutions*** ***Plenary Session***

#### **Baltic Sea/Helsinki Commission**

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#### *1.    Some characteristics of the Baltic Sea and its region*

The Baltic Sea is a semi-enclosed brackish water basin with only narrow connections to the ocean. The hydrological basin comprises 1.72 million km<sup>2</sup> and is shared by 15 countries with a population of about 85 million inhabitants and mostly developed industry and agriculture. Main polluting substances are nutrients, heavy metals and halogenated hydrocarbons which remain for a long time in the Baltic Sea (residence time about 25-30 years). The pollution affects adversely the use of Baltic Sea resources like fish and recreation and is threatening the ecosystem.

#### *2.    The way to the signing of the Helsinki Convention*

After World War II the industrial and agricultural production increased rapidly worldwide and also in the Baltic Sea Region. It took some years to learn that the carrying capacity of the sea does not any more correspond to the amount of polluting substances released in the course of the production processes. Environmental catastrophes on different continents accelerated the increase of public awareness and generated investigations on the state of the marine environment in several seas, including the Baltic Sea (1968). The findings resulted in a wave of regional agreements on protecting seas and oceans in the 1970's and in the signing of the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area, 1974 (Helsinki Convention).

#### *3.    Restricting political environment between 1974 and 1989/1990*

The Contracting Parties to the Helsinki Convention were divided by the iron curtain into two blocks. The western block consisted of NATO and neutral countries (Finland, Sweden), the countries of the eastern block all belonged to the Warsaw Treaty Organization. Given the political climate prevailing at that time, the signing of the Helsinki Convention was quite a remarkable event. However, big differences of both sides regarding environmental legislation and the political will combined with the economic means reduced the room for actions. It resulted in opposite developments in East and West. In the Eastern countries the emissions and discharges of pollutants increased, whereas in the Western countries the amount of pollution dropped. Nevertheless, many HELCOM Recommendations were adopted by the Contracting Parties regarding limits on emissions of harmful substances and specific restrictions on agriculture and other activities of major environmental consequence.

#### *4. Prospects for cooperation after the end of the cold war*

The liberation process in Eastern Europe, accompanied by the breakdown of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, led to stronger political contacts across the Baltic Sea. The number of Contracting Parties increased from seven to ten: one country “disappeared” due to the reunification of Germany, three others were re-established (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), and also the European Community joined the Helsinki Convention. The status of the Contracting Parties regarding EU-membership comprised members, applicants, and one country which did not intend to apply for memberships. Harmonising the environmental laws and standards with those of the EU members is an important task for the applicants but not for Russia. To define the Baltic Sea as a special area, which requires stronger environmental standards regarding issues to be specified, could be seen as one of the future tasks of the Helsinki Commission.

#### *5. New Convention*

A new Convention was signed in 1992 (and entered into force on 17 January 2000), including actual demands like Polluter-Pays Principle, Best Environmental Practice, Best Available Technology, Precautionary Principle, as well as nature conservation and biodiversity, etc. The Convention Area was extended to the internal waters. The entire catchment area of the Baltic Sea became subject to monitoring and assessment activities as well as of actions within the context of the JCP.

#### *6. Baltic Sea Joint Comprehensive Environmental Action Programme (JCP)*

In the wake of the political change after 1989 the adoption of the “Baltic Sea Declaration” in Ronneby, Sweden, in 1990 was a cornerstone for further environmental cooperation in the region. This document proclaimed the determination to establish and implement a Joint Comprehensive Action Programme in order to restore the Baltic Sea to a sound ecological balance. Already at the stage of drafting the Baltic Sea Declaration all the countries with a territory within the catchment area of the Baltic Sea and the main international financial institutions (IFIs) were invited to participate, and the cooperation has been continuing since then. After the JCP was presented to the Environment Ministers of the countries concerned and endorsed by them (1992) the implementation of the Programme started immediately.

In order to achieve the objective, the Programme (JCP) is targeted to decisive and long-lasting reduction of emissions and discharges of pollutants. To ensure the implementation of that approach the Programme covers all key sectors concerned. It is structured around six elements and should be implemented in a time span of 20 years. The investments needed for prevention and curative actions, as estimated in 1991/1992, amount to 18 billion ECU.

The six components are:

- Element 1: Policies and Regulations
- Element 2: Institutional Strengthening and Human Resources Development
- Element 3: Investment Activities
  - Point-source pollution from municipal and industrial sources
  - Non-point source pollution from agriculture, rural settlements and transportation
- Element 4: Management Programmes for Coastal Lagoons and Wetlands
- Element 5: Applied Research
- Element 6: Public Awareness and Environmental Education.

The most significant pollution sources - 132 Hot Spots - within the catchment area of the Baltic Sea were identified after comprehensive pre-feasibility studies, conducted by the IFIs as executing agencies. Hence the main element of the Programme, Element 3 "Investment Activities", is to be seen as the core. The remaining five programme elements are principally of a complementary and supporting nature but by no means insignificant.

#### *7. Programme Implementation Task Force (PITF)*

The PITF was established in order to initiate, facilitate and monitor the coordination of the implementation of the JCP and to periodically update the Programme. The implementation has been remarkable and is reflected by decisive reduction of emissions and discharges from Hot Spots and by the deletion of 18 Hot Spots from the list. In the year 2000 several countries already pronounced to apply to PITF for deletion of Hot Spots. The status of implementation regarding all the elements can be seen in the Annual Report 1999 which is available on the HELCOM homepage <http://www.helcom.fi>.

The PITF plays a unique role in the work of HELCOM, since it is the only official body which includes the participation of the European Community and all the countries in the Baltic Sea drainage basin, provides an institutional framework for cooperation with IFIs and creates a means for effective collaboration with a wide range of NGOs on JCP activities.

The Heads of Governments which met in Visby in 1996 to review regional cooperation with an emphasis on promoting sustainable development in the region requested the PITF to prepare a review of progress in the JCP implementation and to provide recommendations for future action to address emerging issues. The review process reconfirmed the soundness of the Programme but limited adjustments to the structure and content should be made. A further focus on investment activities was among the demanded adjustments, underlined and confirmed as priority for PITF by the Helsinki Commission in 1999 in the course of the HELCOM review process.

In order to identify obstacles and gaps which hinder the upgrading and reconstruction of Hot Spots towards deletion from the list as well as to consider the need of including new Hot Spots to the list the PITF is arranging Regional Workshops in the countries concerned. The First Regional Workshop in Riga, Latvia, was a valuable exercise. The Second Regional Workshop will be held at the end of October 2000 in Vilnius, Lithuania and others will follow.

#### *8. Lessons learned by HELCOM PITF*

The success achieved to date in the implementation of the JCP is directly related to sustained political commitment and to the broad-based public support it has received. The maintenance of this support requires effective dissemination of accurate information about the objectives, achievements and challenges of the Programme. The broad support has been critical for the mobilisation of domestic resources, grants and loan resources as well as for obtaining commitments from elected municipal governments.

The political commitment and the broad support can be attributed to the exceptionally effective development of a strong series of partnership between HELCOM, the European Community, regional organisations, cooperating countries, local governments, international financial institutions, bilateral donor organisations, academic and applied research institutions, non-governmental organisations, private sector interests and a large number of individual citizens.

#### 9. *GEF Baltic Sea Regional Project (BSRP) and the involvement of HELCOM*

As mentioned above the Governments of Baltic Sea Region decided to promote sustainable development in which environmental, economic as well as social aspects play a decisive role. The countries in transition to market economy in particular need support to catch up to standards like those in the member states of the European Community. Hence the objective of the GEF BSRP is to increase sustainable biological productivity, improve coastal zone management, and to reduce pollution from agricultural sources taking into account economic welfare, awareness of environmental issues, sustainable agricultural practices and an integrated regional approach for ecosystem-based management in practice.

In other words the Project will provide for

- the implementation of the Helsinki Convention and of the JCP,
- the cooperation and coordination between three international bodies (HELCOM, IBSFC, ICES), the countries, and all the other cooperating organisations, as well as
- transboundary management.

HELCOM will serve as the GEF BSRP executing agency.