

1st March 2009

The Final Declaration of the VIII Baltic Sea NGO Forum 2009 in Elsinore

Representatives of diversified civil society organizations from the region of the Baltic Sea states and adjacent areas assembled in Elsinore in Denmark from the 26th of February to the 1st of March 2009. The organizations, networking in the Baltic Sea NGO Forum, covered social issues, human rights, environment, culture and education.

The NGO Forum in Elsinore was also attended by representatives of the Danish government, the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Nordic Council, the European Commission, The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC), the European Parliament and Baltic Development Forum.

The civil society organizations met to discuss social inclusion, civil dialogue, lifelong learning, cultural diversity, sustainable development, environment, human rights, culture, co-operation with media and fundraising for transnational co-operation.

The NGO Forum also dealt with promoting civil society and with NGO co-operation in order to implement EU strategies in the region.

General Remarks

EU-Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

The Baltic Sea NGO Forum discussed the EU-strategy as a contribution to the European social model. The development of the Baltic Sea region should be based on close dialogue among governments, NGOs, the public sector and the business sector. The Baltic Sea NGO Forum finds that NGOs are important stakeholders in making ordinary people support the strategy. The Baltic Sea NGO Network has competence, knowledge and skills for being a platform of the Baltic Sea region's citizens' discussions.

As an integrated part of the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region a strategy and an action plan for co-operation and dialog between EU, governments and NGOs must be developed. The action plan must include minimum standards for consultations with NGOs to promote a better dialog with EU, governments and public authorities. The Baltic Sea NGO Forum considers co-operation between NGOs of the Baltic Sea to be an important part of international co-operation in the region. NGOs

should be the relevant partner for governments and businesses as none of the modern challenges can be solved without civil society participation.

The Baltic Sea NGO Forum also finds that NGOs can be given certain duties in areas where it is difficult for public bodies to work efficiently. One area is the work with social exclusion and homeless people. With growing cross-boarder relations between the member states it is important that social work is not forgotten in the EU strategy taking trafficking, international homelessness, smuggling and use of drugs into consideration as some of the issues.

The trends and tendencies are clear: our present century will not be dominated by the change of borders but by the change of regional co-operation.

At all levels – be it in NGOs, companies, universities, municipalities or countries – collaboration is flourishing and contributing to the development of the relations between the countries in the region. The Baltic Sea NGO Forum finds that cross-boarder co-operation and integration between the different entities is the way ahead. This cross-boarder co-operation must also involve all interested NGOs from all the Baltic Sea States on equal basis. Small and medium NGOs should also be involved.

Regional co-operation in Europe does not and should not only involve members of the European Union. The Baltic Sea NGO Forum is aware that not all countries in the region are members of the EU. For The Baltic Sea NGO Forum it is essential to find a form of co-operation so that all countries in the region are included as equal partners.

Climate Change

The Baltic Sea NGO Forum strongly supports the work for an ambitious global policy to control climate change. At the climate summit in Copenhagen later this year important steps in that direction should be taken.

Climate changes represent one of the greatest environmental, social and economic treats our planet is facing. The warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising global mean sea level. The Earth's average surface temperature has risen by 0.76° C since 1850. Most of the warming that has occurred over the last century has been caused by human activities.

Negative impacts of climate change in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) will include increased risk of sea level rise, inland and coastal floods as well as soil erosion due to storms. Climate change is also projected to increase the health risks due to heat waves and the frequency of wildfires. Average Northern Hemisphere temperatures during the second half of the 20th century were *very likely*

higher than during any other 50-year period in the last 500 years and *likely* the highest in at least the past 1300 years.

The Baltic Sea NGO Forum urge the government to prioritize energy saving and the use of renewable energy as the most efficient way to meet increasing energy demands while also limiting hazardous climate change, requests governments at all levels, in co-operation with NGOs, to develop the means of informing the public on current energy use. We also find that each local community in the Baltic Sea region must develop plans for sustainable low carbon energy supply and efficient energy use in co-operation with NGOs, using best available practices.

Economic Crisis

Solutions to the crisis must be found in new values for our economy beyond the market and politics. Values of solidarity and co-operation and equality must replace greediness and free competition. Strong global and national civil societies are essential to bringing democracy and sustainable economic progress to the governance, narrowing the gap between rich and poor on the globe.

New ideas must be global in scope and support a fair global social development and social progress for all people on the planet. Unbridled market forces are not able to bring the world forward and must be replaced by transparent and judicious management of capital.

A new economic system must guarantee fundamental social rights, promote global economic development and progress, promote solidarity and equality, sustainability and cohesion and build on a foundation of responsibility towards the world community.

The VIII Baltic Sea Non-governmental Organizations' Forum took place in the shadow of the global economic crisis that has affected people all around the world, shuddered states and made the future uncertain for almost everyone, including people of the Baltic Sea states that face rising unemployment and social insecurity.

The crisis has caused a decline in confidence in the financial system. The financial system has not acted socially responsible.

We fear the crises will make life difficult for many people and that it will deepen the divisions of our societies. The most devastating that can happen now is that we start panicking and are concerned of rescuing ourselves from the crisis. Much is at stake and we should base solutions of the crisis on the principle of solidarity, shared responsibility and the inclusion of all. Social cohesion and inclusion are essential elements in a sustainable solution of the crisis.

The economic crisis shows abundantly clear the shortcomings of an exaggerated use of the market. The crisis cannot be solved by pure political decisions by the states. Massive government spending

is not sufficient to solve the crisis and make the economic system social stable and just. Therefore we invite national governments to give preference for consultations, dialogue, and co-operation with civil society organizations.

The crisis offers an opportunity for a new start on a more healthy financial and economic system. New ideas respecting democracy, social responsibility and the work of ordinary decent people all over the world, must take over. A culture of gambling must be replaced by a culture of co-operation and common good and general interest.

The Purpose of the Network

The Baltic Sea NGO Forum has existed since 2001. The NGOs co-operating in the Baltic Sea NGO Forum want to promote peace, security, democracy, human rights and sustainable development in the region and beyond it, to develop regional and international co-operation and to end poverty, social exclusion and discrimination, and to improve human rights for each citizen.

The purpose of the network is to support the civil society in the Baltic Sea Region by:

- bringing NGOs from different Baltic Sea countries and from different fields together, for exchanging experiences and information and for improving mutual knowledge
- creating partnerships, exchanging ideas and co-ordinating trans-national and inter-sectoral co-operation between NGOs from the Baltic Sea countries
- making NGOs more visible and influencing the democratic decision-making process on national, regional and EU levels
- supporting the development of international understanding and inter-cultural activities
- raising public awareness and understanding for the work of NGOs, citizens' activities and initiatives, and encouraging people to get involved and take an interest in their own affairs
- offering practical help and consultation for NGOs who don't have much experience in co-operation with partners in the Baltic Sea States.

The network is organising a NGO Forum with participants from all the Baltic Sea countries each year. The host country is the country that has the chair of the BSR NGO Network.

The NGO Forum offers an opportunity for dialogue between NGOs and public authorities on future perspectives of co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region.

At the NGO Forum 2009 there was a special wish to urge the governments in the Baltic Sea Countries to guarantee the NGOs from interference of governments that may lead to violations of basic human rights.

The results of each Forum are concluded in Forum's Final paper (statement) and delivered for further consideration to CBSRS and other institutions on regional and European levels.

The Forum operated in plenary sessions and working groups dealing with the following issues: Lifelong Learning, Cultural Diversity, Social Inclusion, Climate Change and Energy and Civil Dialogue. Each group dealt with its item taking into account the role of NGOs and the resources and tasks to be improved. Each working group also adopted a statement of objectives, addressed to Heads of States of the Baltic Sea region.

Statement of Objectives from the Working Group Lifelong Learning

1. The working group addressed the question of how to make lifelong learning more attractive for learners, learning-providers and for the political bodies providing (not only) financial support. We believe that lifelong learning has to be made relevant to its potential recipients by presenting it in an attractive way and by making it easily accessible. NGOs need to carefully analyze needs, motivation and fears at the personal, local and regional level. We need to promote and support exchange of NGO best practice, mutual learning and development of joint projects in lifelong learning among Baltic Sea region states. We ask for support to those NGO activities that aim to inform and motivate potential learners, thus increasing overall participation in lifelong learning. We want to ensure active NGO involvement in the use of European and other financial resources to provide lifelong learning opportunities for all.

2. The working group acknowledges the importance of the eight key competencies defined in the EU framework of Lifelong Learning¹. The eight key competencies are inter-linked and important in order to ensure “personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment” as defined in the EU Communication. But the working group underlines the importance of especially two key competencies, namely Civic and Social Competencies and Cultural Awareness and Expression². These two key competencies are important in order to secure citizens’ and NGOs participation in the democratic process.

The working group stresses the importance of strengthening the field of non-formal education and the role of the NGOs within the EU framework of Lifelong Learning. Therefore the working group calls on the governments of the Baltic Sea Region, CBSRS, EU, in the framework of Lifelong Learning and the Northern Dimension and the BSRPC to promote comparative studies to define the Baltic Sea Regions countries’ results on the people’s achievements on the eight key competencies. This study should lead to evidence on how the countries perform within the different key competencies. On the background of this study a programme of co-operation on different levels, for example the NGO level should be facilitated in order to improve the countries achievement on specific key competencies on a practical level. NGOs from different countries can co-operate in

¹ RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 December 2006 on key competencies for lifelong learning (2006/962/EC)

² Key competence 6 and 8 in the recommendation 2006/962/EC

order to develop a best practice standard. The working group also stresses the need of transnational co-operation among NGOs in The Baltic Sea Region concerning specific groups to improve the participants' key competencies which can be developed with the same model.

The global financial crisis and the global climate situation show the need for additional key competencies within the EU framework of Lifelong Learning. The working group calls on the EU Commission to define and develop two new key competencies, namely financial competence and ecological competence.

The indicators defined within the EU framework of Lifelong Learning are useful in the EU countries. But in the Post-Soviet countries the structure of the society is different from the other European countries and a parallel set of indicators needs to be developed in these countries. The working group calls on the EU in the framework of Lifelong Learning Programme, Northern Dimension and the EU Baltic Sea Strategy to include Belarus and Ukraine and to develop parallel indicators for relevant countries.

3. Within the field of lifelong learning we believe that the issues of transnational learning are especially important and not sufficiently taken care of presently by the existing learning networks and institutional structures.

The adult education providers should include Baltic transnational issues in the curriculum - and build on the special resources already present in the Baltic area: These are

- * a high degree of participation
- * a high degree of social capital
- * a high level of inclusion in education

The curriculum of transnational life long learning should:

include exchange programmes

relate to Baltic political institutions

ensure basic rights in all the Baltic sea countries

relate to the issues that are on the agenda of CBSRS - such as:

sea; economic, environmental, resource

trafficking

the economics in the region - workforce, knowledge, infrastructure

synergies among countries - in resources etc.

human rights and right to organize - especially for NGOs

cultural exchanges

the understanding of languages - in all countries

How to involve citizens in transnational learning

The political institutions should ensure transparency, legitimacy, and especially participation - this especially applies to:

EU
EU's - Northern Dimension
Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)
The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC)
Baltic Assembly
Nordic Council
Nordic Council of Ministers

There should be provision of infrastructure for transnational co-operation of learning networks. This involves:

Strengthening of the existing Nordic information offices in the Baltic countries, St. Petersburg - and eventually establishment in Minsk and Kiev.

The opening of funding opportunities such as Grundtvig, Comenius, etc. for all of the countries covered by EU's Northern Dimension, enabling lifelong learning organizations networking, development of co-operation and learning projects

A special EU programme for transnational learning connected to EU's Northern dimension - promotion of the integration and synergies in the Northern dimension.

Opening of social fund programmes for lifelong learning.

Statement of Objectives from the Working Group Cultural Diversity

Cultural diversity as an important social value is now one of the preconditions of sustainable development in the Baltic Sea region countries in social, economic and ecological terms. We have to underline the common issues of Baltic Sea region countries, in particular, with social exclusion of the representatives of different minorities (social, ethnic, sexual, people with disabilities, and others), obstacles in realization of democratic rights of the minorities, and arising of racist violence within the region.

To reinforce our work to promote tolerance and value of cultural diversity in the region, we are proposing:

1/ To establish a network of NGOs working on Cultural Diversity issues from the Baltic Sea region countries and to support the establishment a CBSRS WG on Cultural Diversity, Tolerance and Human Rights education

2/ To use the Internet as a resource for introduction, description, experience exchange and best practices analysis of the existing projects in the BSR region on the topic and for projects dealing with ideas and proposals for further co-operation between BSR NGOs.

3/ To promote historical, cultural and political knowledge about BSR countries to foster a better understanding of each others' traditions and cultural heritage.

4/ To establish dialogue between the NGOs, academics and other professionals, authorities, policy makers and law enforcement bodies in the creation of new projects and fighting with intolerance.

5/ To intensify the research and implementation programmes in the BSRR in the field of Cultural Diversity and Tolerance.

6/ To initiate the co-operation of NGOs and mass-media to promote cultural diversity and tolerance discourse.

7/ To encourage Human Rights Education activities promoting intercultural learning, culture of human rights and social inclusion, to be conducted in NGOs, at schools and universities

Statement of Objectives from the Working Group ‘Social Inclusion’

We call upon the Governments of the Baltic Sea States to give priority to eradication of poverty and social exclusion. Poverty and social exclusion is the main trigger of serious health and social problems such as a high level of mortality, abuse of alcohol and drugs, intolerance, ethnic conflicts and violence, corruption and crime, as well as illegal immigration and trafficking.

Many people have not shared in our societies’ increasing wealth with the risk of alienation of some of those left out and left behind. Despite sustained economic activity over recent years, the poverty rates are still high and inequality is rising with winners and losers. This fact is being put into even darker colour because of the current economic crisis.

We call upon the Governments to take the EU Year against poverty 2010 as an opportunity to put poverty and social exclusion at the top of the agenda and make visible the negative effects of poverty and exclusion for the individual and for our societies in general in the form of negative social and economic consequences. We want our Governments to recognize the right of people in poverty and exclusion to live in dignity and to play a full part in society.

We urge our governments to work together to develop trans-national and funded strategies and set up partnerships to eradicate poverty and enhance equal opportunities for all citizens of the Baltic Sea states.

We appreciate the work of the Committee of Senior Representatives on public health and social well-being under the Northern Dimension.

We think, however, it is time for our Governments to take new steps in securing better opportunities for all on a regional basis. We need a renewed political commitment for strengthening the social dimension of the Baltic Sea co-operation through an integrated approach of the social, health, educational, housing, labour market and finance sectors for groups at risk,

A strong and effective social and inclusive policy to stimulate a sustainable development and eradicate poverty and increase welfare should be an indispensable objective of the Northern Dimension and is an essential contribution to the European social model. It is the experience of the Nordic countries that social policies can mitigate the harshness of societal transformation and facilitate economic development and growth. Integrated social policies promote stability and the possibility to live a full social life and a high participation rate on the labour market, thus working for the prosperity of the Baltic Sea Region, its competitiveness and its sustainable development as a rapidly growing economic area. An effective social policy based on investment in human and social capital can improve the economy while economic growth does not automatically lead to social cohesion.

A commitment to fight poverty and social exclusion should encompass all actors and fields. Real progress requires a long-term effort that involves all levels of society, governmental and non-governmental as well as trans-national bodies.

NGO Forum 2009 appreciates the European Antipoverty Network (EAPN) initiative for the Adequate Minimum Income Campaign: “Give Europe back its dignity – Ensure an adequate minimum income for all!” We urge our governments to fulfil the 2008 European Commission Recommendation to “recognize individual’s basic right to resources and social assistance sufficient to lead a life that is compatible with human dignity”.

BSRR is as well a target of migration flows. Within the east-west exchange some regions are pushing migrants to Western Europe. Therefore migration and inclusion is a special topic, and requires special attention. The best way to deal with it is through inclusion.

Disadvantages of migrants have to be overcome especially in the framework of the education system. On the base of common acceptance of human rights and democratic values involvement and engagement of migrants should be promoted. Solutions should be found for illegal migrants to legalize their situation.

We urge our governments to start working in a Baltic Sea Area context on social themes such as: homelessness, long-term or permanent poverty, child poverty, integration of ethnic and minority groups, inclusive labour markets, inequality in health, and the needs of disabled persons.

Statement of Objectives from the Working Group Environment & Climate change

Damage from climate change has the potential to become catastrophic for the population, the economy and the wild life of the BSR and the entire world, unless necessary measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions drastically are in place.

Many consequences of climate change such as shifting of farming conditions, increase of destructive weather phenomena or social and biological migration have not yet been sufficiently researched and evaluated.

The BSR has a long-running tradition of strong research, development and civic participation, where NGOs play an active role. It was the BSR that pioneered the environmental issues in international politics and negotiation processes. Now the national governments and the NGOs have a moral and political duty to implement innovative and sustainable solutions related to climate change and energy efficiency.

1. There is an urgent necessity for immediate efforts on global climate change. The BSR governments are recommended to strengthen the post-Kyoto commitments at COP-15 in Copenhagen at the end of this year.
2. The BSR governments are strongly encouraged to work out a set of financial and planning instruments in the field of sustainable technology development which should result in a promotion of carbon neutral energy solutions.
3. Efficient use of all renewable energy sources and energy savings are of the highest priority. Nuclear energy and large-scale hydro-energy must not be considered as a solution for mitigation of climate change.
4. Nuclear power is not a solution to climate change and it is not carbon-neutral. The Baltic Sea is according to HELCOM the most radioactive sea in the world! http://www.helcom.fi/stc/files/Krakow2007/HazardousSubstances_MM2007.pdf (pg 17). As neighbouring countries, international conventions give us the legal right and we have the moral responsibility to reject final storages of highly radioactive spent nuclear fuel by the Baltic Sea. Therefore the BS NGO Forum Environmental Working Group demands a stop to all new nuclear facilities by the Baltic Sea. To stop international sea transports of radioactive waste in the BSR and to reject final storages of highly radioactive spent nuclear fuel by the Baltic Sea.
5. To take actions to stop the continuing outflow of heated water from the nuclear power plants that speeds up the blooming of poisonous blue-green algae, knocks out spawning places for fish regeneration and up speeded eutrophication. Findings in Russia, the UK and the USA tell us, that unimaginable numbers of fish life are destroyed in the intake of cooling water for nuclear power stations, up to half of commercial catches for some species.
6. Calls upon governments on all levels to develop further awareness campaigns aimed at general public, business community, media, and other stakeholders on current energy use, with an extended co-operation with the BSR NGOs.
7. The BSR governments should not step back with further commitments when combating the climate change issues but pursue a policy of energy efficiency and support for renewable energy on all levels, which in turn is set to bring favorable and sustainable economic results in the short and long-term future.

8. We call upon all the BSR governments to start advanced recycling of plant nutrients (as biofertilisers) and bioenergy (as methane in biogas) from organic waste, human and animal excreta as well as plant and animal residues.
9. To actively support the use of biological methods (bioconversion) for management of renewable organic material instead of present polluting systems as this is more sustainable. Eutrophication is still increasing due to manmade Reactive Nitrogen.
10. To actively support the use of plant nutrients return (Closing Loops) to cultivation systems as biofertilizers that also contain bioenergy and microorganisms are beneficial for the soil.
11. To actively support the use of biogas in CHP plants for production of electricity and heat or as fuel in vehicles is ecologically and economically efficient.
12. To actively support and promote demonstration projects of innovative solutions for environment and energy throughout the BSR in order to stimulate and inspire mutual learning and knowledge sharing.
13. Strong actions have to be taken to help the environment for the flora and fauna to recover before it is too late. We highly recommend the BSR governments to act and stop the eutrophication and the pollution of the air and sea.
14. We urge the governments in the BSR to declare a moratorium for commercial catch of endangered species. The threat, posed to fish stock needs to be addressed urgently and extensive monitoring activities are needed. An overlooked additional burden on fish populations is that unsustainable quantities of fish are landed.

Suggested and recommended priorities and activities will bring positive, efficient and sustainable development for the local, regional and global economy.

Civil Dialogue

As a result of discussions in the workshop of Civil Dialogue, seven activities/tools were highlighted to have positive impact on fostering civil dialogue in the Baltic Sea Region:

- in 2012 organize **Baltic Civic Dialogue forum: practice and opportunities;**
- to prepare updated **report on civil dialogue** in the Baltic sea region;
- to create **Baltic Sea NGO fund** by 2012;
- to organize **grass-rooted citizens' forums** in every country;
- to establish **co-operation with Baltic Development forum;**
- to organize **study visits where politicians and NGOs** are engaged;
- to strengthen **civic education** in informal education.