

**The Fourth HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan Stakeholder Conference
Helsinki, Finland, 3 March 2009**

Statement by Peter Gammeltoft, European Commission

Your Excellencies, dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On the behalf of the Commissioner Mr. Dimas, I thank HELCOM for the invitation to this event, the fourth HELCOM Stakeholder Conference. I would also like to congratulate our Russian colleagues for their new chairmanship in HELCOM, and particularly Mr. Maydanov for his new functions.

The overall theme of the Stakeholder's Conference – cost-effective measures – is of uttermost importance. We know that measures to improve the marine environment often are very expensive; it takes time before we see the effects in the nature and it is often even more expensive if we do not cooperate. This concern has been highlighted in our efforts within the European Union to develop a new strategy for the marine environment, which I will address in a minute. While cost effectiveness is relevant at all times, it is even more so in the current financial circumstances. For these reasons, I look forward to hear the various presentations on this issue.

I have been invited to speak today about HELCOM's work from a European perspective. In fact, I would qualify this as from the "perspective of the European Union" since of course we are all, including our Russian partners, European.

To that end, I will today mention a few issues. I will describe some links between HELCOM and the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, including the identification of the Baltic Sea as a pilot project. I would also like to keep you informed of the latest efforts within the Commission to develop a cross-cutting EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. A further point is the importance of enhanced cooperation with Russia, including the need to extend our positive experience in the Baltic to other areas such as the Black Sea.

Let me start by addressing the relation between HELCOM and the European Union's Marine Strategy Framework Directive. This Directive entered into force in July 2008. It is the environmental pillar of the integrated EU Maritime Policy. The goal of the Directive is that all seas bordering EU countries should reach "Good Environmental Status" by the year 2020.

In addition, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive explicitly obliges the Member States of the European Union sharing a same marine region to cooperate among themselves, and also calls upon them to cooperate with neighbouring countries such as Russia, in particular the framework of existing regional sea conventions.

The renewed legal commitments under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive to achieve good environmental status has naturally to be a continuation on the already ongoing work in the four Regional Conventions; HELCOM for the Baltic Sea, OSPAR for the North Sea, the Barcelona Convention for the Mediterranean Sea and the Bucharest Convention for the Black Sea.

HELCOM is here a forerunner in several ways, and in particular because of the Baltic Sea Action Plan, which was agreed by all contracting parties, including the European Community, at the ministerial meeting held in Krakow in November 2007.

But let me be a bit provocative here. The BSAP is, at this stage, a simple document. For real success, we still need the effective implementation of its comprehensive list of actions and measures. This will require, among other things, that we secure the support of all the sectors of activity having an influence on its status.

In the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, there is a possibility for the Commission to make a pilot project in a particular Marine Region "*where the status of the sea is so critical as to necessitate urgent action*". The bordering countries have, however, to first decide on a plan of actions, including an earlier application of programmes of measures, and inform the Commission about their revised timetable. The urgency for actions in the Baltic Sea is obvious.

Therefore, we anticipate that the Baltic Sea will be identified as a pilot project under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

When will this be done? We expect that such recognition may be included among the list of actions that in the forthcoming EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, as a complement to a renewed support to the implementation of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan.

As you can see, the development of this new EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is particularly timely from the perspective on marine environment. Therefore, I would like to highlight a few elements of this new cross-cutting Strategy. It is an innovative development which, while linked to environmental concerns about the Baltic Sea, has a much broader scope, as it also encompasses the economic and social pillars of sustainable development.

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region has identified four main strands of action. It is directed towards developing (first) a sustainable environment, (second) a prosperous region, (third) an attractive and accessible region and (fourth) a safe and secure region

A sustainable environment should impregnate the entire strategy and we try to give input to an overall environmental perspective following the decision of the heads of State and government in the EU who agreed, in the conclusions of the European Council in December 2007 that this new EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region "*should inter alia help to address the urgent environmental challenges related to the Baltic Sea.*"

The development of this cross-cutting EU Baltic Sea Region Strategy has been an intensive process, involving international and national authorities, regional organisations and stakeholders. Last week the European Commission had bilateral meeting with all EU Member States to ensure national involvement in developing its major components, as a key to its future implementation.

The EU Baltic Sea Region Strategy will be presented in a Communication from the Commission in late June, and we know that it will be a priority of the Swedish Presidency in the second part of 2009. This will imply an increased awareness by the heads of State and government of the whole EU, since we expect the adoption of conclusions by the European Council, again by heads of State and government. This is good news for the Baltic Sea and for the objectives of HELCOM.

In addition to the Communication, there will be an Action Plan with a range of follow-up measures. On the environmental side, the new Strategy should not, and will not, reinvent the wheel. Instead, it will acknowledge the need to achieve a series of actions already identified in the HELCOM BSAP, providing a further political impetus to this objective.

Even more importantly, the new cross-cutting strategy for the Baltic Sea Region provides a unique opportunity for a more effective integration of marine environmental concerns in a range of sectoral activities (such as agriculture, industry or fisheries).

The Action Plan will be a living document and already now follow-ups, evaluations and possible reviews are discussed for the coming EU Presidencies like Poland in 2011, Denmark 2012, Lithuania 2013 and Latvia 2015.

In spite of the very different backgrounds and conditions everyone agrees that the Baltic Sea environment is a common responsibility. This finding is at the origin of working together in the framework of HELCOM.

From the European perspective, HELCOM is a well-functioning body which can help us to achieve ambitious objectives which have now additional legal force for the Member States of the European Union.

But I would like to add that, for the European Commission, a priority of our activities in HELCOM is to strengthen our cooperation with Russia. For this reason, I am honoured to share this session with Ministers from both Russia, Finland and Sweden.

In the last two years, the EC and Russia have initiated a broad dialogue on environmental matters, in the context of the overall process to develop a common space. Minister Trutnev and Commissioner Dimas identified a series of subgroups, and I was glad that one priority subgroup has been established to address water and marine issues. This subgroup has met twice last year, in Brussels and in St Petersburg. Cooperation in the Baltic Sea has always been an important matter in bilateral discussions. We have agreed that the third meeting of the subgroup, to be held next month in Brussels, will have a focus on marine issues.

I can anticipate that the Commission will call upon our Russian friends to broaden our cooperation in the Baltic Sea in the framework of HELCOM and to extend this positive spirit to other regions, in particular the Black Sea. The Black Sea, as a matter of fact, shares the very same concerns than the Baltic: eutrophication, land-base pollution, hazardous substances, biodiversity concerns (including overfishing) and maritime transport (including oil transfers). We are confident that the institutional mechanisms developed in HELCOM, involving Russia, the States in the region and the European Community, can be translated to this region as a key to its environmental recovery. The European Commission is confident that we will find a satisfactory common ground with the Russian Federation at the forthcoming Ministerial Conference of the Bucharest Convention to be held next month in Sofia.

In the Baltic Sea, it is now 35 years since the HELCOM Convention was signed, and 18 years later, 1992, a modernized Convention, including the catchment area, was signed by the now nine bordering countries and the EU Commission. The cooperation in a regional convention is what the contracting parties make of it, and in HELCOM it is mostly very positive and fruitful.