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Regional Cooperation in the Baltic Region as a Prerequisite to Protect the Baltic Sea

I am honored to have the opportunity to address the importance of the Baltic Sea.

The Baltic Sea has been and is the source of recreation, transport, tourism and fisheries. I am especially glad to have you all here in Helsinki. Here we all feel the presence and essence of the Sea. It is our livelihood and backyard.

I would like to thank you, Minister Trutnev, for your inspiring speech. We have indeed learned a lot on your views about the Baltic Sea region and the Russian activities.

We shall be seriously concerned about the present state of the Sea. In spite of several international and national measures taken over the past decades, the degradation trend is still severe. It is time for improved actions.

The main challenge of the Sea is twofold. On the one hand eutrophication and nutrients worsen silently the condition of the sea. On the other hand maritime activities, including the growing maritime transport brings closer the risk of the ultimate threat, a major oil spill.

Eutrophication is by far the worst problem affecting the Baltic Sea. It is a consequence of more than a century of nutrient loading caused by human activity. The effects can be seen on beaches, seashores and fishnets, not to forget the vulnerable species of the Sea. This trend cannot continue.

Secondly, during the last decade, both the amount of maritime traffic and especially the volume of oil transported on the Baltic Sea have risen significantly. At the same time, the passenger ferry traffic has increased substantially.

The Baltic Sea countries have agreed on measures to improve maritime safety. Fortunately the number of accidents has not risen as rapidly as has the traffic flow. In addition, new technology has increased the safety of shipping. Still our oil spill response capacity, if a major accident would occur, is not sufficient enough.

The essential element to improve the present state of the Baltic Sea is the international cooperation. That is why we are here today. It is self-evident that all riparian countries have to reduce emissions from all pollution sources. We have no other choice but co-operation.

Intergovernmental activities have increased in and also outside the Baltic Sea region. One of the strongest forms of co-operation is the EU and the development of its Baltic Strategy.

However even greater importance has to be placed on the shoulders of the Helsinki Commission. HELCOM is the only intergovernmental organization within the Baltic

Sea region which gathers all riparian countries together and which has the mandate to act in a comprehensive way. HELCOM is the forum where we can jointly agree on implementation of the measures to preserve and protect the Baltic Sea.

For the sake of the Baltic Sea, we must use all methods and instruments. First of all we need a sufficient legislative structure. Legislative control should enable regional and local initiatives, best practices and innovations. These all are needed to ensure that our marine environment reaches a good environmental state by 2021. This is of course one of the objectives of the Baltic Sea action plan.

Secondly, we have to learn to think the Baltic Sea region as a whole. In the future we need to cross every border: not only those between the countries, but also the imaginary ones between the different policy sectors. Crossing the borders has to be done both nationally and internationally.

Together with EU marine strategy directive and the work of HELCOM we have the needed framework for holistic approach. The mentioned directive is the environmental pillar of the EU maritime policy which brings the maritime traffic policies, fisheries and environmental issues on board.

The HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan opens a new era in marine environment protection and it has momentum to bring variety of stakeholder together. The long list of actions and commitments are needed to improve the Baltic environment. We need to call a wide range of small and large players into the game in balanced and transparent way.

A coherent integrated national policy on marine affairs is prerequisite of the coherent environmental protection. The real challenge is to include several policy fields to the process. To secure the holistic approach to the marine environment protection is necessary and HELCOM will play a central part in implementing the strategy. Establishing the BSAP implementation group was a breakthrough on our way forward.

In Finland we have several national water protection and action programmes which include the protection of the Baltic Sea. I am convinced that by implementing those by the deadline we protect both inland waters and the Baltic Sea.

The business and trade communities and financial institution, both in the public and private sector have expressed their interest in Baltic environmental protection. Their concern is more than welcomed and highlights the possibilities of co-operations and mutual learning.

The success-stories on how the cooperation has helped the decision making do exist. With the support from the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership and the active private sector we have been able to tackle the most critical hot spots in the Baltic Sea region.

Here, I would like to stress the activity of the city of Helsinki. Together with Turku they have committed to improve the state of the Sea. This will be done through concrete actions that have the local and larger influence. This is an example of a true leadership.

The Baltic Sea provides us economic wealth and it is increasingly used as transportation for great deal of our trade. In the future win-win policies with the economic aspects and marine protection will be even more important in helping us to solve complex of marine problems.

The shipping sector needs to be involved in global efforts to cut emissions, even if it is difficult to find a way of doing so. Otherwise it may turn out that previously environmentally friendly modes of transport will fall behind developments and their emissions will continue to increase.

Cooperation on the Baltic Sea as well as on other regional seas is anchored to the agreement structures within the International Maritime Organization, IMO. The role of the IMO is decisive in all central fields of maritime policies, including the environmental protection. Finland will carry out the active role both in HELCOM and in IMO.

Sea areas vary in nature and we also have to be able to protect especially sensitive sea areas by means of local regulations. The Baltic Sea is a good example of one where we need special measures to protect what is an exceptional environment. A shallow, cold sea with a low salt content, one that is divided by thousands of islands and is heavily polluted, requires more effective protection solutions than, for example, the open seas of the Atlantic.

We are powerful together and we need to protect what we love.