BSPC

Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference

Report on the Exercise of the Observer Status of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) at the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (Helsinki Commission – HELCOM)

2021

Part I

Report on HELCOM 2021, Part I

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The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) was established in 1991 as a forum for political dialogue between parliamentarians from the Baltic Sea Region. BSPC aims at raising awareness and opinion on issues of current political interest and relevance for the Baltic Sea Region. It promotes and drives various initiatives and efforts to support a sustainable environmental, social and economic development of the Baltic Sea Region. It strives at enhancing the visibility of the Baltic Sea Region and its issues in a wider European context.

BSPC gathers parliamentarians from 11 national parliaments, 11 regional parliaments and 5 parliamentary organisations around the Baltic Sea. The BSPC thus constitutes a unique parliamentary bridge between all the EU- and non-EU countries of the Baltic Sea Region.

BSPC external interfaces include parliamentary, governmental, sub-regional and other organizations in the Baltic Sea Region and the Northern Dimension area, among them CBSS, HELCOM, the Northern Dimension Partnership in Health and Social Well-Being (NDPHS), the Baltic Sea Labour Forum (BSLF), the Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation (BSSSC) and the Baltic Development Forum.

BSPC shall initiate and guide political activities in the region; support and strengthen democratic institutions in the participating states; improve dialogue between governments, parliaments and civil society; strengthen the common identity of the Baltic Sea Region by means of close co-operation between national and regional parliaments on the basis of equality; and initiate and guide political activities in the Baltic Sea Region, endowing them with additional democratic legitimacy and parliamentary authority.

The political recommendations of the annual Parliamentary Conferences are expressed in a Conference Resolution adopted by consensus by the Conference. The adopted Resolution shall be submitted to the governments of the Baltic Sea Region, the CBSS and the EU, and disseminated to other relevant national, regional and local stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Region and its neighbourhood.

Content

I. Introduction 5

II. Cooperation between the BSPC and HELCOM 7

1. *HELCOM Progress Report at the BSPC Standing Committee* 8
2. *HELCOM Expert Presentations at the Meeting of the BSPC Working Group on "Climate Change and Biodiversity"* 9
3. *BSPC Efforts to Support HELCOM* 12
4. *Sea-Dumped Munitions as a Common Priority for HELCOM and the BSPC* 14

III. Main Developments and Events in 2020/2021 16

1. *Update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP)* 16
2. *HELCOM Stakeholder Conference on Ecosystem-Based Management* 17
3. *Launch of the HELCOM BLUES Project to Support the Attainment of GES* 19

IV. HELCOM Reports, Recommendations, and Manuals 20

1. *HELCOM Annual Report 2020* 20
2. *HELCOM Recommendations* 22
3. *HELCOM Manuals* 23

IV. Prospects and Outlook 24

1. *HELCOM Ministerial Meeting 2021* 24
2. *Strengthening Cooperation between the BSPC and HELCOM* 25

Sources and Links 26

ANNEX I: Updated List of HELCOM's Working Groups and Projects 27

Annex I.
1. List of Current HELCOM Working Groups and Expert Networks 27

Annex I.
2. List of Ongoing HELCOM Projects 29

ANNEX II.
Activities of the BSPC Observer to Support HELCOM 30

1. Proposal to Update the Scope of Work of the BSPC Working Group on Climate Change and Biodiversity with a View to Relevant HELCOM Activities 30

2. Letter to HELCOM Chair Dr. Lilian Busse 31

3. Summary of the Public Discussion on Munitions Salvage in the Baltic Sea from 12 August 2021 33

List of Abbreviations 38

I. Introduction

Ms Beate Schlupp

The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (Helsinki Commission – HELCOM) is an intergovernmental organization engaged in implementing the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area (Helsinki Convention) signed in 1974. Throughout the years, HELCOM has established itself as a regional platform for environmental policy-making and science-policy dialogue on pressing ecological issues. The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) shares HELCOM's vision of a "healthy Baltic Sea environment" and traditionally refers to HELCOM's goals and aims in its annual resolutions. Since 2002, the BSPC holds observer status at HELCOM; in November 2020, the BSPC Standing Committee has re-appointed me as BSPC observer at HELCOM to continue closely following the work of HELCOM bodies and report back to the BSPC on relevant developments.

Unlike previous reports, the present Report on the Exercise of the Observer Status of the BSPC at HELCOM, prepared in fulfilment of my observation mandate, is divided into two parts pending the outcomes of the forthcoming HELCOM Ministerial Meeting on 20 October 2021. The first – present – part of the report covers the main highlights in the cooperation between the BSPC and HELCOM as well as the central developments in HELCOM's work from October 2020 to August 2021. It provides a summary of the presentations held by HELCOM representatives at the meetings of BSPC working bodies as well as the communication between HELCOM and myself in my observer capacity – with a special focus on nutrient inputs, biodiversity and climate change as well as **sea-dumped munitions**, which constitute areas of mutual interest and concern for both BSPC and HELCOM. The latter issue deserves specific attention in this regard.

Finding new solutions for the problem of unexploded ordnance in the Baltic Sea has been identified as one of the priorities by the current German HELCOM presidency. The BSPC has been following relevant developments since its early years, as has been underlined by BSPC Secretary General, Mr Bodo Bahr, at the kick-off event of the German HELCOM chairmanship on 2 July 2020. The 28th and 29th resolutions of the BSPC directly addressed this issue, calling upon the governments of the Baltic Sea region to develop a cross-border sustainable strategy for dealing with sea-dumped munitions and to support the German HELCOM presidency's intention to intensify efforts to monitor and treat this problem. With a view to the demands of the 28th and 29th BSPC resolutions, the current HELCOM presidency's priority and the motion on reducing the risks stemming

from unexploded ordnance in the sea (Drs. 7/6082(neu)) passed by the State Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern on 6 May 2021, I have participated in a public discussion on ammunition recovery in the Baltic Sea. A summary of the event, which was also attended by the BSPC Secretary General Mr Bodo Bahr, is included in the annex.

Further, the report briefly summarises the ongoing update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan and concentrates on a number of notable past events, such as the HELCOM Stakeholder Conference 2021, as well as HELCOM recommendations and publications. The update of the BSAP, which was mandated by the Ministerial Meeting in 2018, has constituted a major part of HELCOM's work in 2020–2021. Overall, three drafts were presented for approval at the 59th and 60th meetings of the Heads of Delegation (HOD) and the 42nd meeting of the Helsinki Commission. With the final text to be adopted at the Ministerial Meeting in October, the work is still ongoing – as is the finalisation of the action and supporting documents, which would be adopted together with the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan. The second part of the report, which will be issued after the Ministerial Meeting in October, will address these processes and outcomes in detail.

The BSPC will closely follow the forthcoming HELCOM Ministerial Meeting, which will agree on a wide range of strategic commitments, measures and actions towards the protection of the Baltic marine environment and restoring the good ecological status of the Baltic Sea until 2030. It is crucial that the proclaimed aim of preserving the ambitious character of the original plan is upheld and that the implementation of both old and new measures is intensified. In addition, the BSPC will continue to pay special attention to HELCOM's efforts in addressing the priorities of the current presidency, with a particular focus on solving the problem of sea-dumped munitions.

Beate Schlupp
First Vice President of the
State Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern
BSPC Observer at HELCOM

II. Cooperation between the BSPC and HELCOM

The long-standing tradition of cooperation between the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference and the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission was continued and strengthened in 2020/2021 in the run up to the 30th BSPC in August 2021 and the upcoming HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in October 2021. These developments did not only encompass explicit references to HELCOM's work and chairmanship priorities in the resolution of the 29th BSPC but also HELCOM's participation in the meetings of BSPC working bodies as well as communication and contacts between HELCOM representatives and myself in my capacity as BSPC Observer at HELCOM.

Baltic Sea parliamentarians traditionally signal their strong support towards the goals and efforts of the Helsinki Commission in the annual BSPC resolutions. In line with this tradition, the 29th BSPC called upon the Baltic Sea governments, the CBSS and the EU to support that the current German HELCOM chairmanship "pursues the objectives of explicitly considering aspects of sustainability, relevance for the climate and biodiversity as well as suitability in the updating of the Baltic Sea Action Plan and future HELCOM decisions."[1] The resolution also underlined the importance of not only updating the BSAP but also visibly accelerating its implementation and intensifying efforts to further reduce the excessive nutrient load in the Baltic Sea – the main reason for eutrophication, which continues to plague the marine environment and severely affect human activities. In addition, the resolution of the 29th BSPC specifically addressed Germany's chairmanship priority of intensifying efforts "to monitor and treat the problem of dumped munitions, wrecks and ghost nets in the Baltic Sea" with the ultimate goal of making the Baltic Sea region "a global leader" in this field.[2]

With the aim of intensifying the information exchange between the two international organisations, HELCOM was invited to report on the progress in the ongoing update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan, in addressing the demands and recommendations of the 29th BSPC and on the Commission's relevant activities in the area of reduction of nutrient inputs, biodiversity and climate change. Consequently, current HELCOM Chair Dr. Lilian Busse, HELCOM Executive Secretary Mr Rüdiger Strempel and HELCOM Professional Secretary in charge of biodiversity and climate change Ms Jannica Haldin outlined the main developments in these fields at the meetings of the BSPC Standing Committee on 22 February 2021 and the BSPC Working Group on Climate Change and Biodiversity on 15 March 2021.

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1 *Conference Resolution adopted by the Digital 29th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) on 24 August 2020, https://www.bspc.net/29th-bspc-resolution-final-adopted/*

2 *Ibid.*

Although the possibilities for direct contacts have been significantly reduced as a result of the safety and protection measures in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, I have strived to uphold and broaden the mutual communication channels in my observer capacity despite these limitations. Thus, in December 2020, I have addressed a letter to the German HELCOM presidency and later held an information talk with HELCOM Vice Chair from Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Dr. Andreas Röpke. The following sections will elaborate on this exchange in more detail.

1. HELCOM Progress Report at the BSPC Standing Committee

On 22 February 2021, **HELCOM Chair Dr. Lilian Busse** informed the BSPC Standing Committee – the highest executive body of the BSPC – about HELCOM's ongoing activities in connection with the update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan and presented Germany's chairmanship priorities for 2020–2022. Dr. Busse specifically addressed the issues of excessive nutrient loads, sea-dumped munitions and biodiversity – which constitute areas of mutual concern and interest for both HELCOM and the BSPC.

In the beginning of her presentation, Dr. Busse introduced the German chairmanship team, which took over HELCOM's rotating presidency from Finland in July 2020. She explained that HELCOM's presidents set the strategic direction, convene and chair the meetings of HELCOM's decision-making bodies and briefly sketched out the organisational structure and decision-making process of the Helsinki Commission. Dr. Busse then shortly introduced the Baltic Sea Action Plan adopted in 2007 and reminded that it aimed at restoring the good ecological status of the Baltic Sea by 2021. Seeing how this goal was unlikely to be attained by the target year, the 2018 Ministerial Meeting had mandated an update of the BSAP, which has constituted a significant part of HELCOM's work in the past three years. The update follows an evolutionary rather than revolutionary path, adopts an ecosystem approach, includes actions managing human activities, adapts the plan to current HELCOM topics and considers global targets and commitments (such as the SDGs, Aichi targets, EU MSFD). The updated BSAP would also take stock of and integrate related HELCOM tools, such as the Nutrient Recycling Strategy, the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter, the Regional Action Plan on Underwater Noise, the Climate Change Fact Sheet, and the Regional Baltic MSP Roadmap. Dr. Busse reminded that the updated BSAP is expected to be adopted by the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in October 2021.

Dr. Busse further outlined the priorities of Germany's HELCOM Chairmanship, which include: strengthening ocean governance, updating and implementing the Baltic Sea Action Plan, trying new solutions for well-known, pressing challenges, strengthening marine biodiversity, and understanding and responding to climate change in the Baltic Sea region.

Finally, the presentation touched upon three issues, which were raised in the resolution of the 29th BSPC: biodiversity, excessive nutrients and sea-dumped munitions. In regard to strengthening marine biodiversity, Dr. Busse informed the meeting that HELCOM was working to complete and develop a coherent network of marine protected areas (MPAs) and step up efforts to protect and conserve endangered species. On the issue of the reduction of nutrient inputs, she underlined the need for developing further actions by studying best practices and analysing barriers to implementation but also updating nutrient hotspots. Regarding the problem of munitions, shipwrecks and ghost nets, HELCOM is concentrating on the exchange of knowledge and expertise and seeking ways to ensure the safe and environmentally sound removal of submerged hazardous objects from the seabed. Dr. Busse added that the latter issue has been one of the priorities of HELCOM's Vice Chair from Schleswig-Holstein Dr. Johannes Oelerich. The main tasks here are identifying affected sites, analysing the concentration and impact of toxic substances, and finding ways to ensure the safe removal of sea-dumped munitions, shipwrecks and ghost nets.

2. HELCOM Expert Presentations at the Meeting of the BSPC Working Group on "Climate Change and Biodiversity"

The BSPC Working Group on Climate Change and Biodiversity was established at the 29th annual conference in August 2020 and is tasked with closely following the developments and formulating recommendations in the area of climate change adaptation and preservation of biodiversity in the Baltic Sea area. Ahead of the first meeting in November 2020, Mr Philipp da Cunha, Member of the State Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and I have proposed to update the WG's "Scope of Work" in order to consider ongoing HELCOM activities with a focus on climate change and biodiversity (see annex). The proposal came against the backdrop of the BSAP update, which would include climate change as a crosscutting topic within the revised plan. In addition, we proposed to pay special attention to the Climate Change Fact Sheet final report prepared by the joint HELCOM/Baltic Earth Expert Network on Climate Change (EN CLIME) as well as the HELCOM Science Agenda, in which climate change and biodiversity are featured as prominent issue areas.

The Working Group held its second meeting on 15 March 2021 and invited HELCOM representatives to update the Baltic Sea parliamentarians on HELCOM's related efforts and activities. HELCOM experts spoke about the update of the BSAP, also with regard to potential political/parliamentary support, and the Climate Change Fact Sheet, which accumulates existing knowledge on the effects of climate change on the Baltic See environment as well as economic and social life.

At the beginning of his presentation, **Mr Rüdiger Strempel, HELCOM Executive Secretary**, underlined the uniqueness but also the fragility of the Baltic Sea ecosystem and reminded that HELCOM's goal of reaching the good environmental status of the Baltic Sea could not be reached by 2021. Mr Strempel noted that eutrophication, which affects 97% of the Baltic Sea and results in total losses of 3.8–4.4. billion euros annually, remains a grave challenge despite the observed trend towards nutrient input reductions since the 1980s. Furthermore, the Baltic Sea environment is affected by emerging and previously unaddressed challenges, such as pharmaceuticals, underwater noise, seabed disturbance and climate change. These challenges, along with additional factors such as the ecosystem lag and insufficient or lacking implementation, could explain the delay in reaching the environmental goals set by the Baltic Sea Action Plan in 2007. Mr Strempel then briefly sketched out the main developments in the history of HELCOM – starting with the signing of the Helsinki Convention in 1974, the establishment of the HELCOM Secretariat in 1980, the update of the Convention in 1992 and finally its entry into force in 2000. He further emphasised that the Helsinki Convention is binding for its ten Contracting Parties, but governing bodies are required in order to ensure implementation. Consequently, Mr Strempel briefly presented the structure of HELCOM as well as its decision making process, which follows a bottom-up, science-based approach. Accordingly, HELCOM's Contracting Parties may provide an impulse or a mandate to look into specific issues based on the findings of HELCOM Working or Expert Groups. Expert Groups are made up of national experts, who provide technical and/or scientific background information, while Working Groups translate scientific findings into draft recommendations, strategies or actions. These drafts are then forwarded to the Heads of Delegation, who meet twice a year, for formal approval. The Helsinki Commission meets once a year, whereas Ministerial Meetings, which set the strategic direction and provide the necessary political commitments, take place every three years. The main tools at the Commission's disposal encompass first and foremost the Helsinki Convention, which represents an instrument of international law and contains binding obligations, recommendations on measures to address areas of concern and implementable through national legislation, as well as actions plans and projects (such as e.g. the BSAP and the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter). In addition, monitoring and assessment constitutes a significant part of HELCOM's work, with the holistic assessment of ecosystem health (HOLAS), thematic assessments and indicators standing at its centre.

Mr Strempel then turned to the update of the BSAP reminding that it was mandated by the Ministerial Meeting in 2018 and should preserve the original level of ambition but also address current issues and consider

global targets and commitments. He also pointed out that while 71% of joint actions contained in the 2007 BSAP were implemented, only 29% of national actions requiring steps to be taken at the national level were put into practice as of March 2021. Mr Strempel concluded by saying that a lot has been done already, but a lot remains to be done still and specifically noted how parliamentarians could contribute to the process. Thus, parliamentarians could influence their respective governments towards implementation but also communicate the goals, measures and actions to be taken to their respective constituents, since local ownership is central to BSAP's success.

Subsequently, **Ms Jannica Haldin, HELCOM Professional Secretary in charge of biodiversity and climate change**, presented HELCOM's work in the area of climate change. She noted that the ultimate aim in this regard was increasing the overall resilience of the Baltic Sea ecosystem in the face of climate change impacts. To this end, HELCOM aims to expand its function as a regional platform for policy-science dialogue and adopts a long-term multidisciplinary approach to understanding and communicating the implications of climate change for the marine and coastal environment. The Joint HELCOM/Baltic Earth Expert Network on Climate Change (EN CLIME) was established in 2018 and includes over 110 experts from across the Baltic Sea region. Its objective is to share relevant information and experience, support decision making through quality assured science, and to promote closer dialogue between policy makers and climate scientists. The network has prepared a Climate Change Fact Sheet, which synthesises existing peer-reviewed information and presents a science-based consensus view on the direct effects and indirect impact of climate change on the Baltic Sea region. The report considers a total of 34 parameters divided into direct parameters such as air and water temperature, precipitation, sea level, etc. as well as indirect parameters with a focus on the ecosystem on one hand and human use of the marine environment on the other. Based on available knowledge, the report provides information on what already is happening, what is expected to happen, identifies knowledge gaps and provides messages relevant for policymaking.

The Fact Sheet reveals that climate change impacts are already evident in the Baltic Sea region and are demonstrated through such direct effects as rising water temperature, decreasing ice coverage as well as increased annual mean rainfall in the northern part of the region. Indirect effects include changing wintering range of birds, increase in the number of warm water species, earlier trawl fishing, etc. Ms Haldin noted however that the Baltic Sea is a complex system, which is affected by multiple environmental pressures. This makes it difficult to distinguish climate change effects from other anthropogenic pressures and to find straightforward and common management solutions that would work everywhere. Ms Haldin then turned to the issue of biodiversity describing its state as poor. Climate change is already affecting the distribution and behaviour as species, since it impacts processes related to food-web interactions, nutrient recycling and ecosystem processes. Eutrophication is not a result of climate change but is exacerbated by its effects. Thus, rising water temperature may increase

primary production, which could in turn prompt different responses in organism groups. Decreasing salinity would also affect the species composition. At the same time, Ms Haldin stressed that future nutrient loads would affect nutrient concentration and consequently eutrophication more than climate change. The reduction of nutrient inputs from agriculture would therefore decrease eutrophication regardless of climate change effects.

In conclusion, Ms Haldin explained how the Climate Change Fact Sheet could inform international policy-making. She underlined that the mitigation of the negative effects of climate change and other anthropogenic pressures requires a better understanding of their differences and interactions. The plan is to use the gathered information in order to review target and threshold values. Thus, climate change is included as one of the horizontal segments in the updated BSAP, but also figures as a crosscutting topic in all segments and would be incorporated into future assessments such as HOLAS III.

In the subsequent discussion with experts, BSPC Secretary General Mr Bodo Bahr posed a question in relation to Marine Protected Areas and their actual protection status. Ms Haldin replied that there was an intention to link HELCOM MPAs with the EU Biodiversity Strategy, which severely limits human activities other than for scientific purposes in strictly protected areas. She noted, however, that the discussion was still ongoing. Mr Strempel in turn underlined that the Baltic Sea region is a complex area governed by different global, regional and national legal frameworks but stressed the need for more consistency.

3. BSPC Efforts to Support HELCOM

Following the well-established tradition of cooperation and exchange between the BSPC and HELCOM, I have addressed a letter to the **current HELCOM Chair, Dr. Lilian Busse**, in December 2020 (see annex). In this letter, I informed Dr. Busse about the demands and recommendations contained in the resolution of the 29th BSPC and specifically drew attention to item points 14 and 15, which address the update process of the Baltic Sea Action Plan and Germany's HELCOM chairmanship priorities in matters concerning sea-dumped munitions, wrecks and ghost nets. The letter also informed Dr. Busse about the newly constituted BSPC Working Group on Climate Change and Biodiversity and noted that HELCOM's relevant work in the area of mitigating the effects of climate change as well as preserving and strengthening marine biodiversity was of particular interest to the Working Group – as outlined in its updated "Scope of Work" strategic document. In view of the shared goals of the BSPC and HELCOM, I also enquired whether HELCOM representatives would consider updating the BSPC in regards to relevant developments in areas of mutual interest. This especially concerned

the BSAP update process, efforts to monitor and treat the problem of sea-dumped munitions, as well as issues related to climate change and biodiversity. HELCOM representatives followed this invitation and have updated the BSPC Standing Committee as well as the BSPC Working Group on Climate Change and Biodiversity on the processes and activities of interest.

Further, I have met with the State Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Dr. Jürgen Buchwald and the upcoming **HELCOM's Vice Chair Dr. Andreas Röpke** on 11 March 2021 – ahead of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern's HELCOM vice presidency. In July 2020, Germany took over the chairmanship of the Helsinki Commission from Finland. In addition to the Chair, Dr. Lilian Busse, Head of the Department "Environmental Health, Protection of Ecosystems" at the Federal Environment Agency, the German Chairmanship team includes two Vice Chairs from the German states bordering the Baltic Sea: Dr. Johannes Oelerich, Head of the Department of Water Management, Marine and Coastal Protection at the Ministry of the Environment of Schleswig-Holstein, and Dr. Andreas Röpke, Head of Unit for Water and Marine Protection at the Ministry of Agriculture and the Environment of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. On 1 July 2021, the vice chairmanship has passed from Schleswig-Holstein to Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Against this backdrop, I have met with Dr. Röpke in order to discuss opportunities for deeper cooperation and exchange between the BSPC and HELCOM.

The discussion highlighted the positive impetus provided by BSPC resolutions on the issue of unexploded ordnance in the Baltic Sea, as mentioned by Ms Svenja Schulze, German Federal Minister for the Environment, in her address to the 29th BSPC in August 2020. Thus, the BSPC called for a transboundary sustainable strategy for dealing with unexploded ordnance and buried/deposited munitions in its 28th resolution. On this basis, Mr Peter Stein, Member of the German Bundestag, was appointed as BSPC Rapporteur on Sea-Dumped Munitions in November 2019. Furthermore, in its 29th resolution, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference referred to the priorities of the German HELCOM chairmanship and called for an intensification of international efforts to address the problem of unexploded ordnance, wrecks and ghost nets in the Baltic Sea with the ultimate goal of making the Baltic Sea region a world leader in this field.

4. Sea-Dumped Munitions as a Common Priority for HELCOM and the BSPC

As it has already been explicitly mentioned in the introduction to the present report, the solution of the problem of sea-dumped munitions constitutes an area of mutual concern for both the BSPC and the current HELCOM presidency. In 2021 – following the impulses provided by Baltic Sea parliamentarians – a number of steps have been made at the regional, national and European levels, yet this is only the beginning of a long and hard road lying ahead.

The latest draft of the updated BSAP contains actions aiming at developing Best Environmental Practices for assessing the risks posed by munitions, wrecks as well as hazardous submerged objects and further implementing Best Available Techniques in order to ensure their environmentally safe management. Furthermore, HELCOM's thematic assessment on submerged objects should be maintained, whereas relevant information should be included in the HELCOM Map and Data Service. In this regard, it is crucial that the work of the HELCOM Expert Group on Environmental Risks of Hazardous Submerged Objects (SUBMERGED) is continued in order to ensure the continuous assessment of the risks posed by hazardous submerged objects.

At the European level, the European Parliament passed a resolution on Chemical residues in the Baltic Sea[3] on 27 April 2021, whereas at the national level, the German Bundestag passed a motion on the responsible handling of munitions in the North and Baltic Seas on May 6 2021 (Drs 19/29283). At the regional level, also on 6 May 2021, the State Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern has passed a resolution recommendation titled "Reducing the Risks Stemming from Unexploded Ordnance in the Sea" (Drs 7/6082(neu)), which also includes a report on the relevant expert consultations at the Landtag's Committee of the Interior and Europe. The Landtag committed to regularly put the issue of unexploded ordnance in the Baltic Sea on the agenda of the Parliamentary Forum Southern Baltic Sea and the BSPC in order to intensify the search for common solutions along with other Baltic Sea coastal states.

In line with this commitment and in an attempt to promote public awareness on this issue at the local level, I have been in contact with the Foundation for Climate and Environmental Protection Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (Stiftung Klima- und Umweltschutz MV). The Chairman of the Foundation's Executive Board and former Prime Minister of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Mr Erwin Sellering, was invited to speak at this year's 30th

3 *European Parliament resolution of 27 April 2021 on chemical residues in the Baltic Sea, based on Petitions Nos 1328/2019 and 0406/2020 (2021/2567(RSP)), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0123_EN.html*

BSPC. As a result of a joint talk between the members of the State Parliament's delegation to the BSPC and the representatives of the Foundation on 11 June 2021, a public event on ammunition salvage in the Baltic Sea was organised in Kühlungsborn (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany) on 12 August 2021. The event was attended by BSPC Secretary General Mr Bodo Bahr, member of the State Parliament Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and member of the BSPC Working Group on Climate Change and Biodiversity Mr Philipp da Cunha and myself. A range of experts from the private and public sectors have shared their insights on a broad array of topics ranging from innovative technical solutions to division of responsibilities and the planned pilot project on constructing a waterborn platform for munition salvage in the Baltic Sea, while I have summarised the international efforts undertaken within the framework of the BSPC and HELCOM in order to address this issue. A detailed summary of the event is included in the annex.

III. Main Developments and Events in 2020/2021

1. Update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP)

The work on the update of the BSAP – one of HELCOM's central priorities in 2019–2021 – has reached its final stages in 2021. Since the COVID-19 pandemic has severely curtailed the opportunities for travel and personal interactions, the drafting of the text has been primarily conducted online based on the preliminary timetable and work plan agreed at the 58th Meeting of the Heads of Delegation (HOD 58-2020). According to the work plan, drafting was to be carried out by the BSAP Drafting Group (BSAP DG), thematic Working Groups in collaboration with the HELCOM Secretariat and with input provided by HOD 59-2021 in December 2020 until the draft's approval by HOD 60-2021 in June 2021 and the adoption of the revised BSAP by the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in October 2021.

HELCOM agreed that the updated BSAP would build on and adapt the structure of its 2007 predecessor and address pressures stemming from land ("Eutrophication" and "Hazardous substances and litter") and sea activities ("Sea-based activities") as well as the state of the environment ("Biodiversity and ecosystems"). In addition, it would feature a segment on horizontal actions, which includes climate change, monitoring, maritime spatial planning (MSP), economic and social analysis and financing. The revised BSAP would set 2030 as the new target year for implementing the agreed measures and actions.

In accordance with the plan and following this tight schedule, the first full draft of the revised BSAP was presented at the 59th meeting of the Heads of Delegation at the end of 2020. At this meeting, decision-makers discussed and made comments on the overarching preamble and introduction, segment introductions, the horizontal actions segment, the operative section as well as annexes and supporting documents. The meeting gave guidance for further work and approved a draft of the HELCOM Science Agenda, which is designed to support the implementation of the BSAP and other HELCOM processes by identifying scientific knowledge needs related to the Baltic marine environment.

The second full draft of the updated BSAP was presented at the 42nd meeting of the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM 42-2021) in March 2021. The meeting gave guidance on further refinements to be made by the various HELCOM bodies tasked with the drafting of the updated plan. In addition, the meeting discussed and

provided comments on several key processes and documents due to be adopted alongside the updated BSAP and serving as supporting tools in reaching its goals. These included the draft Baltic Sea Regional Nutrient Recycling Strategy and the draft Regional Maritime Spatial Planning Roadmap 2021–2030.

Finally, the 60th meeting of the Heads of Delegation held online in June 2021 made further comments on the latest BSAP draft and endorsed a number of key documents to be adopted alongside the revised plan in October 2021. These included the revised HELCOM Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter, HELCOM Guidelines for Sea-Based Measures to Manage Internal Nutrient Reserves in the Baltic Sea Region as well as the Regional Nutrient Recycling Strategy and the Regional MSP Roadmap 2021–2030 addressed earlier. The meeting provided further input on the different text segments and specifically discussed the comments submitted by the Contracting Parties on the proposed actions. Further preparations and finalisations will be conducted at the intersessional meetings of the Heads of Delegation (HOD 60A-2021 and HOD 60B-2021) ahead of the Ministerial Meeting in autumn.

Since the work on the update of the BSAP is still ongoing, more details on the processes leading up to the adoption of the revised plan as well as the outcomes will be provided in the second part of the 2021 Report on the Exercise of the Observer Status of the BSPC at HELCOM after the Ministerial Meeting in October 2021.

2. HELCOM Stakeholder Conference on Ecosystem-Based Management

The HELCOM Stakeholder Conference 2021 "**Practically Implementing Ecosystem-Based Management**" took place on 11 March 2021 as an online workshop. It was organised in cooperation with Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB) and the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM) and gathered around 100 participants from across the Baltic Sea region. The workshop was divided into three thematic stations, namely policy, science and society, while the participants were given the opportunity to switch between them in order to encourage exchange of knowledge and expertise, generate ideas and provide comments on the discussed proposals and solutions.

At the workshop, HELCOM stakeholders exchanged their views and provided input on the ecosystem approach (EA) and ecosystem-based management (EBM). The workshop set the following three objectives:

- reaching a common understanding of the basic principles of EA and EBM,
- discussing the bottlenecks to and opportunities for the implementation of EBM,

- elaborating on how the results of the conference could be used to support the drafting and future implementation of the BSAP.

Overall, the workshop delivered the following key messages:

- "Thinking and working in silos" was mentioned as a main barrier to EBM implementation. In order to overcome this challenge, the workshop proposed better cross-sectoral integration as well as more coherence and cooperation across the international, regional, national and local levels.
- EBM implementation should follow a holistic science-based approach, which should consider the management of human activities in addition to the biophysical system and environmental questions.
- Improved communication, knowledge sharing and capacity building on all levels, including through better science-practice collaboration, would contribute to developing a better understanding of issues and help drive the implementation of EBM.
- Small, easy-to-manage pilot projects could be helpful for gaining insights on the implementation processes and should later be widely communicated across the Baltic Sea region in order to ensure broader knowledge sharing.
- Ownership through stakeholder involvement is crucial for implementation.
- Enough knowledge has already been accumulated, the main obstacle to a wider EBM roll-out being lack of concrete application rather than policies or knowledge.

The outcomes were presented at the 42nd Meeting of the Helsinki Commission and forwarded to relevant HELCOM bodies in order to elaborate how the results could be used in the update of the BSAP, the HELCOM Science Agenda as well as the update of the HELCOM Roadmap on the Ecosystem Approach.

The next Stakeholder Conference is tentatively scheduled for 10 March 2022. It will address climate change and feature a presentation of the joint HELCOM/Baltic Earth Climate Change Fact Sheet.

3. Launch of the HELCOM BLUES Project to Support the Attainment of GES

The beginning of 2021 saw the launch of the "HELCOM Biodiversity, Litter, Underwater noise and Effective regional measures for the Baltic Sea" (HELCOM BLUES) project co-funded by the EU and led by HELCOM. The project aims at supporting regional capacity, coordination and cooperation with a view to achieving a good status of the marine environment and would run for two years until the beginning of 2023. The project is structured along seven activity areas encompassing:

- analyses to support effective regional measures and policies,
- improved regional assessment of biodiversity,
- support for and harmonisation of the regional work on marine litter,
- support for and harmonisation of the regional work underwater noise,
- data accessibility,
- dissemination,
- and project coordination.

The project is expected to deliver relevant products and results, which would further support the preparation and execution of the next Holistic Assessment of the State of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS III), which will cover the assessment period 2016–2021 and be finalised in 2023. The project will further support the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan as well as national work relating to reporting under articles 8 and 13 of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). It will do so by delivering better methodologies, developing indicators as well as improving the capacities for assessment and reporting in such areas as biodiversity, marine litter and underwater noise.

The project includes 14 partners from six Baltic Sea states with various backgrounds ranging from politics, research and civil society. The joint kick-off online meeting took place on 2–4 February 2021 and gathered 90 participants from all nine Baltic Sea coastal states. The meeting lay the foundation for a common regional understanding and sharpened the focus for the work lying ahead.

IV. HELCOM Reports, Recommendations, and Manuals

1. HELCOM Annual Report 2020

The HELCOM Annual Report 2020 summarising the main processes and activities of HELCOM bodies in the past year was released as part of the Baltic Sea Environmental Proceedings series in March 2021. In his forward to the report, Mr Rüdiger Strempel, Executive Secretary of HELCOM, noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected international events and processes hampering what should have been a "biodiversity and ocean 'super year'," with e.g. the UN Ocean Conference 2020 having been postponed until 2022. Nonetheless, he stressed that HELCOM was able to continue implementing the program for 2018–2021, as agreed by the 2018 Ministerial Meeting. Among the main highlights of the year 2020, Mr Strempel named the BSAP update process, which has reached its final stage in 2021, as well as the change of HELCOM's chairmanship with Germany having taken over the reins from Finland in July 2020.

The report is structured along HELCOM's central issue areas: agriculture, Marine Protected Areas (MPA), species and biotopes, underwater noise, marine litter, dredging and seabed, industrial and municipal releases, maritime spatial planning (MSP), fisheries, response to spills, shipping, climate change, monitoring and assessment, international cooperation, and finally the update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan.

Among the important ***developments in the year 2020***, the report enumerated:

- The change of HELCOM's presidency, which Germany assumed in 2020 for a period of two years. In addition to setting a list of strategic priorities, the German chairmanship will lead the finalisation of the BSAP update process and host the Ministerial Meeting in October 2021.
- The adoption of Recommendation 41/3 on the use of national manure standards as well as the continuation of work on the Baltic Sea Regional Nutrient Recycling Strategy.
- The continued mapping of gaps, needs and existing knowledge pertaining to the entire process of designating Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) with the aim of identifying future priorities and getting a systematic overview of positive examples and best practices.
- The adoption of Recommendation 17/2 on the protection of harbour porpoise as well as the beginning of the planning phase for the next regional Red List assessment.
- The work on the Climate Change Fact Sheet prepared by the Joint HELCOM/Baltic Earth Expert Network and expected to be published by the end of 2021.

- The continued development of the HELCOM Action Plan on Underwater Noise, the update of the underwater noise monitoring programmes as part of the HELCOM Monitoring Manual as well as the set-up of a HELCOM continuous noise database and soundscape tool.
- The production of Best Practices to reduce marine litter from net cutting waste and the HELCOM policy message on End of Life Boats (ELB), continued work on the updated HELCOM Recommendation 23/5 on storm water management as well as the start of the revision of the HELCOM Action Plan on Marine Litter.
- The update of Recommendation 36/2 on management of dredged material as well as the Guideline for Management of Dredged Material at Sea with a view to streamlining the dataflow on depositing of dredged material and avoiding double reporting.
- Publication of the project results relating to the Assessment of progress towards nutrient input ceilings for HELCOM countries and the four overviews of hazardous substances of high concern as well as the launch of an update of the HELCOM Recommendation on storm water management.
- The preparation of a new regional MSP Roadmap 2021–2030 by the joint HELCOM-VASAB MSP working group, which is expected to be adopted together with the updated BSAP in October 2021.
- The adoption of a Roadmap on the collection of fisheries data in order to assess incidental bycatches and fisheries impact on benthic biotopes in the Baltic Sea as well as the continued work of the development of BAT/BEP for sustainable aquaculture in the Baltic Sea.
- The completion of the revision of the HELCOM Response Manual and of Recommendation 31E/6 on integrated wildlife response planning in the Baltic Sea Area.
- HELCOM joining the EMERGE project on shipping emissions in EU marine waters as well as the finalisation of the revised Joint Harmonised Procedure for the Contracting Parties of OSPAR and HELCOM on the granting of exemptions under the IMO Ballast Water Management Convention.
- The finalisation of the review and update of HELCOM's 40 monitoring programmes as well as of the HELCOM Monitoring Manual and the preparation of the HELCOM Indicator Manual ahead of the next Holistic Assessment (HOLAS III), which will start in 2022. In addition, HELCOM launched the Baltic Data Flows project aiming at the enhancement of the existing harmonisation and sharing of data on the marine environment across various sea monitoring programmes.
- HELCOM joining the EU4Ocean Platform, which consolidates existing ocean literacy initiatives and stakeholders, as a founding member.

In addition, the report briefly outlined the central developments within the framework of the BSAP update process. It specifically mentioned the 2020 Stakeholder Conference, which focused on proposing new actions and measures to be considered for the updated BSAP, as well as the completion of the revision of the HELCOM Explorer database documenting Contracting Parties' progress in achieving the goals agreed upon in the BSAP.

2. HELCOM Recommendations

The 42nd Meeting of the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM 42-2021) held online from 17 to 18 March 2021 adopted the revised HELCOM **Recommendation 31E/6 Rev on integrated wildlife response planning in the Baltic Sea Area**. The Recommendation proposes options and strategies for the response to maritime accidents (such as oil spills) on the bases of best practices and existing handbooks and guidelines. In 2019, the HELCOM Response Working Group agreed to invite the HELCOM Expert Network on Oiled Wildlife Response (EWG OWR) to review the Recommendation in consultation with HELCOM Expert Coordination Network on Response on the Shore (SHORE Network) with a view to simplifying the existing Guidelines. Consequently, the revised Recommendation includes references to updated international guidelines.

In June 2021, the 60th Meeting of the Heads of Delegation (HOD 60-2021) adopted the amended HELCOM **Recommendation 23/5 on the reduction of discharges from urban areas by the proper management of storm water systems**. The Recommendation was revised throughout 2019–2020 by the HELCOM Pressure Working Group with a view to extending its scope considering additional environmental aspects of urban storm water managements such as e.g. climate change resilience. The revision process took stock of the knowledge accumulated within regional projects in the area of waste and storm water management as well as the modern concept of Integrated Storm Water Management (ISWM).

3. HELCOM Manuals

HELCOM indicators represent a crucial part of the efforts to assess the status of the Baltic Sea environment, to address the effectiveness of the measures agreed upon within the BSAP and to evaluate the progress towards reaching its goals and objectives. Throughout the years, HELCOM has developed a comprehensive and ever advancing array of indicators, highlighting the need for a strategy to outline the indicator development process. Following this aim, the 59th Heads of Delegation meeting from 7–8 December 2020 approved the HELCOM Indicator Manual,[4] which introduces HELCOM indicators as well as their relevance for HELCOM's work and provides information on how they are developed and maintained.

The 42nd Meeting of the Helsinki Commission held online on 17–18 March 2021 adopted two important instruments to improve and **coordinate international efforts in response to transboundary maritime incidents** affecting the waters of several countries. The Revised HELCOM Manual on Co-Operation in Response to Marine Pollution[5] and the Marine HNS Response Manual,[6] which will replace the current HELCOM Response Manual Volume 2, provide guidelines on dealing with major pollution accidents such as oil or chemical spills and are intended for authorities involved in response operations at sea and on the shore.

4 *HELCOM Indicator Manual version 2020-1,https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/BSEP175.pdf*

5 *HELCOM Manual on cooperation in response to Marine pollution, https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/HELCOM-Manual-on-Co-operation-in-Response-to-Marine-Pollution.pdf*

6 *HELCOM Manual on marine HNS response 2021, https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Marine-HNS-Response-Manual.pdf*

IV. Prospects and Outlook

1. HELCOM Ministerial Meeting 2021

The next HELCOM Ministerial Meeting will be organised by Germany as the Contracting Party currently holding HELCOM's chairmanship and is provisionally scheduled to take place in Lübeck (alternatively online, depending on the development of the pandemic situation) on 20 October 2021. At the meeting, the Ministers of the Environment of the Baltic Sea coastal states and the Commissioner for the Environment of the European Union will agree on a wide range of crucial commitments to achieve a good environmental status of the Baltic Sea until 2030. The adoption of the **updated Baltic Sea Action Plan** at the highest decision making level in HELCOM will be the main highlight of the event and will send a strong collective signal for stepping up efforts in the area of marine environment protection not only at the regional but also at the global level.

Together with the BSAP, the Ministerial Meeting will adopt a package of associated action documents, supporting documents and background documents. The **action documents** directly relate to the implementation of actions and measures with the aim of achieving the objectives of the updated BSAP and include the HELCOM Regional Action Plan on Underwater Noise, the updated Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter, the Baltic Sea Nutrient Recycling Strategy, the Regional MSP Roadmap 2021–2030 and the revised Recommendation for amending the Annex III part II of the Helsinki Convention. The **supporting documents** contribute to achieving the visions and objectives of the updated BSAP but do not require specific actions. These include the Climate Change Fact Sheet and the HELCOM Science Agenda. In addition, **background documents** would provide supplementary information on the BSAP update process.

Furthermore, the meeting is expected to issue a Ministerial Statement, which would adopt a broader perspective and reflect upon HELCOM's political and strategic positioning as a significant regional player striving not only for achieving a good environmental status of the Baltic Sea but for also contributing to the international debate and providing input on the protection of oceans and seas.

2. Strengthening Cooperation between the BSPC and HELCOM

The updated BSAP will reinforce existing commitments towards a stronger and healthier Baltic Sea ecosystem but also address newly emerging challenges and align with existing international and regional objectives. It is crucial that the high level of ambition is upheld and progress in achieving these objectives is accelerated. The adoption of the revised plan will signify the finalisation of an important conceptual phase with the elaboration of goals, objectives and targets for the next decade – until 2030. In the next phase, it would be crucial to ensure that the agreed measures and actions – both old and new ones – are put into practice. The success of the updated BSAP will largely be determined by the Contracting Parties' political will. Yet communication, cooperation and exchange across various sectors and different levels will be no less crucial. The state of the Baltic Sea ecosystem is a matter of common concern and a shared responsibility. With this in mind, the BSPC will continue to follow the implementation of the measures and actions agreed upon by the Contracting Parties in the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan and strongly support HELCOM in its current and future efforts to achieve a good ecological status of the Baltic Sea by 2030.

Looking beyond the BSAP update and the 2021 Ministerial Meeting, the BSPC will further support HELCOM in achieving progress on the priorities identified by the current chairmanship with a special view to strengthening marine biodiversity, increasing the ecosystem's resilience in the face of climate change, further reducing nutrient inputs and – specifically – addressing the problem of sea-dumped munitions, wrecks and ghost nets.

The BSPC Working Group on Climate Change and Biodiversity will further follow and support the relevant HELCOM activities in its areas of concern. In this regard, the planned HELCOM Workshop on Blue Carbon in the Baltic Sea Region, which would concentrate on the potential of the Baltic Sea for carbon sequestration, as well as the 2022 Stakeholder Conference with a focus on broader issues related to climate change, would be of particular interest and importance.

Sources and Links

HELCOM Activities Report 2020, *https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/HELCOM-Activities-report-2020-BSEP176.pdf*

HELCOM Recommendation 23/5-Rev.1 on the reduction of discharges from urban areas by the proper management of storm water systems, *https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Rec-23-5-Rev.1.pdf*

HELCOM Recommendation 31E/6 Rev on integrated wildlife response planning in the Baltic Sea Area, *https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Rec-31E-6_revised-2021.pdf*

Outcome of HELCOM 42-2021, *https://portal.helcom.fi/meetings/HELCOM%2042-2021-746/MeetingDocuments/Outcome%20of%20HELCOM%2042-2021.pdf*

Outcome of HOD 59-2020, *https://portal.helcom.fi/meetings/HOD%2059-2020-784/MeetingDocuments/Outcome%20of%20HOD%2059-2020.pdf*

Outcome of HOD 60-2021, *https://portal.helcom.fi/meetings/HOD%2060-2021-786/MeetingDocuments/Outcome%20of%20HOD%2060-2021.pdf*

Outcome of the HELCOM Stakeholder Conference 2021 (HSC2021) "Practically Implementing Ecosystem-Based Management", *https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/HSC2021-outcome.pdf*

ANNEX I: Updated List of HELCOM's Working Groups and Projects

Annex I.
1. List of Current HELCOM Working Groups and Expert Networks

1. Gear – Group on the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach
   1.1. Economic and Social Analyses (ESA) network

2. Maritime –Maritime Working Group
   2.1. AIS EWG – Expert Working Group on Mutual Exchange and Deliveries of AIS Data
   2.2. Green Technology and Alternative Fuels Platform for Sustainable Shipping
   2.3. Safe NAV – Group of Experts of Safety of Navigation
   2.4. JTG Ballast & Biofouling – The Joint HELCOM/OSPAR Task Group on Ballast Water Management Convention (BWMC) and Biofouling

3. Pressure – Working Group on reduction of Pressures from the Baltic sea Catchment area
   3.1. EN Marine Litter – HELCOM Expert Network on Marine Litter
   3.2. EN Noise – HELCOM Expert Network on Underwater Noise
   3.3. EN DREDS – HELCOM Expert Network on Dredging and Subsequent Depositing Operations at Sea
   3.4. REDCORE DG – Reduction Scheme Core Drafting Group
   3.5. CG PHARMA – HELCOM Correspondence Group on Pharmaceuticals

4. Response – Response Working Group
   4.1. EWG OWR – Expert Working Group on Oiled Wildlife Response
   4.2. IWGAS – Informal Working Group on Aerial Surveillance
   4.3. SHORE Network – HELCOM Expert Coordination Network on Response on the Shore
   4.4. SUBMERGED – Expert Group on Environmental Risks of Hazardous Submerged Objects

5. State and Conservation – Working group on the State of the Environment and Nature Conservation
   - 5.1. EG MAMA – HELCOM Expert Group on Marine Mammals
     - 5.1.1. HELCOM SEAL – HELCOM ad hoc SEAL Expert Group
   - 5.2. EG STUR – HELCOM Expert Group on Sturgeon Remediation
   - 5.3. EN Hazardous Substances – HELCOM Expert Network on Hazardous Substances
   - 5.4. EN BENTHIC – HELCOM Expert Network on Benthic Habitats and Biotopes
   - 5.5. IN Benthic Habitat – HELCOM Intersessional Network on Benthic Habitat Monitoring
   - 5.6. EN CLIME – Joint HELCOM/Baltic Earth Expert Network on Climate Change
   - 5.7. IN Eutrophication – HELCOM Intersessional Network on Eutrophication
   - 5.8. JWG Bird – HELCOM-OSPAR-ICES Joint Working Group on Seabirds
   - 5.9. MORS EG – HELCOM Expert Group on Monitoring of Radioactive Substances in the Baltic Sea

6. Agri Group – Group on Sustainable Agricultural Practices

7. Fish Group – Group on Ecosystem-Based Sustainable Fisheries
   - 7.1. CG Aquaculture – Correspondence Group concerning a draft document on Best Available Technology/Best Environmental Practices (BAT/BEP) descriptions for sustainable aquaculture in the Baltic Sea region
   - 7.2. FISH-M – Task Force on Migratory Fish Species

8. HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG – Joint Working Group on Maritime Spatial Planning
   - 8.1. MSP Data Expert Sub-Group – Baltic Sea Region Maritime Spatial Planning Data Expert Sub-Group

Annex I.
2. List of Ongoing HELCOM Projects

1. ACTION – Actions to Evaluate and Identify Effective Measures to Reach GES in the Baltic Sea Marine Region (2019–2021)
2. Baltic Data Flows (2020–2023)
3. BLUES – HELCOM Biodiversity, Litter, Underwater Noise and Effective Regional Measures for the Baltic Sea (2021–2023)
4. BSR WATER – Platform on Integrated Water Cooperation (2018–2021)
5. Capacity4MSP (2019–2022)
6. COMPLETE PLUS – Practical Implementation of the COMPLETE Project Outputs and Tools (2021)
7. EMERGE – Evaluation, Control and Mitigation of the Environmental Impacts of Shipping Emissions (2020–2024)
8. FanpLESStic-sea – Initiatives to Remove Microplastics Before they Enter the Sea (2019–2021)
9. FISH-PRO III – Project for Baltic-Wide Assessment of Coastal Fish Communities in Support of an Ecosystem-Based Management (2018–2023)
10. HASPS 3 – Horizontal Action "Spatial Planning" Support 3 (2018–2020/21)
11. PEG – Quality Assurance of Phytoplankton Monitoring in the Baltic Sea (PEG QA) (2020–2022)
12. PLC-8 – Eighth Baltic Sea Pollution Load Compilation (2020–2024)
13. RETROUT – Development, Promotion and Sustainable Management of the Baltic Sea Region as a Coastal Fishing Tourism Destination (2017–2021)
14. SuMaNu – Sustainable Manure and Nutrient Management for Reduction of Nutrient Loss in the Baltic Sea Region (2018–2021)

ANNEX II.
Activities of the BSPC Observer to Support HELCOM

1. Proposal to Update the Scope of Work of the BSPC Working Group on Climate Change and Biodiversity with a View to Relevant HELCOM Activities

Landtag
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern
International Affairs
Members in the BSPC Working Group
on Climate Change and Biodiversity

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Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC)
Mr Bodo Bahr
Secretary General
Schlossgartenallee 15
19061 Schwerin

- per E-Mail -

Schwerin, 5. November 2020

Scope of Work of the BSPC Working Group on Climate Change and Biodiversity (CCB) – Proposal to Include an Abstract on HELCOM Activities

Dear Mr Bodo Bahr,

With a view to the topics, themes and priorities of the BSPC Working Group and against the backdrop of the ongoing HELCOM work with a focus on climate change and biodiversity in the Baltic Sea area, we would like to put forward a proposal to include the following abstract to the "Scope of Work" section of the overarching "Scope of Work of the BSPC Working Group on Climate Change and Biodiversity (CCB)" Work Programme:

> "The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM) has been closely focussing on issues of both biodiversity and climate change as well as its impact on the marine environment of the Baltic Sea region specifically and has stressed the importance of recognising climate change as a cross-cutting topic within the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP). In addition, the HELCOM Expert Network on Climate Change (EN CLIME) is preparing the Climate Change Fact Sheet final report to be adopted in 2021. Moreover, both biodiversity and climate change are featured as a prominent issue areas within the currently developed HELCOM Science Agenda. Given the intensive work and accumulated HELCOM expertise on these topics, the WG should also closely follow the climate change- and biodiversity-related work conducted within relevant HELCOM bodies and continue the long-standing tradition of cooperation and exchange between the BSPC and HELCOM."

We would like to bring this proposal up for discussion at the First BSPC Working Group Meeting on Climate Change and Biodiversity on 16 November 2020.

Best regards,

Philipp da Cunha
Member of Parliament

Beate Schlupp
First Vice President of Parliament

2. Letter to HELCOM Chair Dr. Lilian Busse

Landtag
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern
1. Vizepräsidentin

Landtag Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 1. Vizepräsidentin
Lennéstraße 1 (Schloss), 19053 Schwerin

Helsinki Commission
Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission
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Schwerin, 30 December 2020

Cooperation between the BSPC and HELCOM
in View of Germany's HELCOM Chairmanship Priorities 2020–2022

Dear Dr. Busse,

I would hereby like to express my warmest congratulations on your appointment as Chair of the Helsinki Commission. Thank you for your professional moderation of the 59th Meeting of the Heads of Delegation on 7–8 December 2020, which I had the pleasure to follow with great interest.

The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) shares HELCOM's vision of a healthy Baltic Sea and has concerned itself with environmental protection issues for many years. The BSPC has held the observer status to HELCOM since 2002 and has repeatedly expressed its support for HELCOM's work and goals in numerous resolutions.

At the 29th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, which took place online on 24 August 2020, the Baltic Sea parliamentarians have unanimously adopted a resolution containing recommendations in support of Germany's HELCOM Chairmanship priorities. The German Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Ms. Svenja Schulze, laid out these priorities at the conference. The complete resolution of the 29th BSPC is enclosed for your information.

In my role as BSPC Observer at HELCOM, I would like to draw your attention to item points 14 and 15, in which 29th BSPC calls upon the governments in the Baltic Sea Region, the CBSS and the EU to:

> *14. support that the HELCOM Chairmanship – also in light of the socio-political and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic – pursues the objectives of explicitly considering aspects of sustainability, relevance for the*

climate and biodiversity as well as suitability in the updating of the Baltic Sea Action Plan and future HELCOM decisions and - in accordance with the calls for action of the BSPC - not only to update the Baltic Sea Action Plan but also to visibly accelerate and intensify its implementation, to work together to the best of all abilities to further reduce the excessive nutrient load in the Baltic Sea, as well as to strive for another Ministerial Meeting in 2021;

15. acknowledging the priorities of Germany's HELCOM Chairmanship to intensify efforts to monitor and to treat the problem of dumped munitions, wrecks and ghost nets in the Baltic Sea on a common international approach supporting the existing national and international efforts and responsibilities, moreover to strengthen existing political structures and scientific projects, also thus to make the Baltic Sea region become a global leader in the field of solving problems associated with dumped munitions and unexploded ordnance located underwater as well as in the field of wrecks and ghost nets.

Moreover, in its item point 33 the 29th BSPC has decided to establish a two-year Working Group on Climate Change and Biodiversity, which has assumed its work on 16 November 2020. HELCOM's relevant work in the area of mitigating the effects of climate change as well as preserving and strengthening marine biodiversity is of particular interest to the BSPC Working Group – as outlined in its "Scope of Work" strategic document.

In view of the shared goals of the BSPC and HELCOM as well as the priorities of the current German Chairmanship, I would like to enquire whether HELCOM's representatives would consider the possibility of participating in upcoming BSPC meetings and reporting on the activities planned and the progress achieved in areas of our mutual concern and interest. This specifically regards the BSAP update process, efforts to monitor and treat the problem of sea-dumped munitions, wrecks and ghost nets, and biodiversity as well as climate change-related efforts.

The BSPC Standing Committee will hold its next meeting on 22 February 2021; the spring meeting will preliminarily take place on 31 May 2021. The 30th BSPC is scheduled for 29–31 August 2021 in Stockholm. The BSPC highly values HELCOM's engaged work and is looking forward to our future cooperation.

With best regards,

B. Schlupp

Beate Schlupp
First Vice President of the State Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern
BSPC Observer at HELCOM

Attachment:
Conference Resolution Adopted by the Digital 29th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) on 24 August 2020

3. Summary of the Public Discussion on Munitions Salvage in the Baltic Sea from 12 August 2021

On 12 August 2021, the Foundation for Climate and Environmental Protection Mecklenburg-Vorpommern ("Stiftung Klima- und Umweltschutz MV") organised a public event on ammunition salvage in the Baltic Sea. The event was held in a face-to face format under COVID-19 safety measures. The event was attended by the First Vice President of the State Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Ms Beate Schlupp, Member of the State Parliament Mr Philipp da Cunha and BSPC Secretary General Mr Bodo Bahr.

Ms Beate Schlupp, Mr Philipp da Cunha, Mr Bodo Bahr (left to right)

In recent years, the issue of unexploded ordnance in the Baltic Sea has been gaining ever-increasing attention – but the need for discussion and action still remains. Over 70 years after the end of World War II, sea-dumped munitions continue to plague the Baltic Sea environment. Currently, about 1.6 million tons

of conventional munitions lay on the seabed in the North Sea and the Baltic Sea – not only as a result of military operations during the war but also massive dumping after the war. Around 300,000 tons of conventional munitions remain on the Baltic Sea seafloor. The short-sighted disposal of munitions has resulted in enormous problems for the environment. Unexploded ordnance is rotting away, releasing carcinogenic, mutagenic substances and heavy metals, which are accumulating in organisms and entering the food chain. Even though the concentration of these harmful substances in the Baltic Sea is hardly detectable at present, the situation will only deteriorate in the future.

The event was opened by Mr Erwin Sellering, Chairman of the Executive Board of the Foundation for Climate and Environmental Protection Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Mr Sellering introduced the Foundation and explained that it strived to promote public awareness on the issue of sea-dumped munitions in the Baltic Sea, together with the members of the State Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference. The issue was urgent, the recovery and remediation of old ammunition from the Baltic Sea required not only political and social attention, but also appropriate funding.

Mr Dieter Guldin, Ms Beate Schlupp, Ms Anke Rösler, Mr Erwin Sellering, Mr Philipp da Cunha (left to right)

The event featured a panel discussion moderated by Ms Anke Rösler, Head of Communication and Press of the Foundation for Climate and Environmental Protection Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and followed by a round table discussion. The panel, consisting of Ms Beate Schlupp, Mr Philipp da Cunha and Mr Dieter Guldin, COO at SeaTerra GmbH, first exchanged thoughts on the various aspects of the issue of ammunition salvage, including international and national efforts as well as technological solutions. In the course of the panel and round table discussions and during the informal exchange afterwards, it became apparent that the issue raised three central questions in relation to political will, technological possibilities and funding.

Both Ms Schlupp and Mr da Cunha devoted their speeches primarily to the question of political will. At the beginning of the panel discussion, Ms Schlupp outlined the political efforts that had been made so far. Thus, the State Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern passed a resolution and a report on the motion of the parliamentary group DIE LINKE titled "Reducing the Risks Stemming from Unexploded Ordnance in the Sea," which had emphasised the urgency of the problem at the regional, national and international levels. Among other things, the resolution called upon the State Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern to put the issue of unexploded ordnance on the agenda of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference and the Parliamentary Forum Southern Baltic Sea. In addition, the State Government had been asked to urge the German Federal Government to consider the issue in the update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan and with a special view to Germany's HELCOM chairmanship priorities. However, the topic had hardly been taken into account, especially in the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan, the level of consensus at HELCOM being rather low. HELCOM could not fully address the demands contained in the 28th and 29th resolutions of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference. Although there was general agreement that old ammunitions in the Baltic Sea posed a risk to the environment, there was massive dissent when it came to responsibilities and financing. Meanwhile, certain efforts in connection with the issue of ammunition in the North and Baltic Sea have been made at the national level. The German Bundestag had decided to release 100 million euros for a pilot project on the disposal of old ammunitions, e.g. by means of constructing a waterborne platform in the Baltic Sea. However, the concrete details in connection with the pilot project remained to be clarified.

According to Ms Schlupp, it was evident in all political processes regarding this topic that there was a lack of communication between the various actors. For that reason, she welcomed the event organised by the Foundation for Climate and Environmental Protection Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, since open exchange was what was urgently needed. Ms Schlupp appealed to all actors to not let the issue slide and to act now with a view to effective hazard prevention in the future. In this context, the Baltic Sea region had the opportunity to become a worldwide leading region in the recovery of old ammunitions. Mr da Cunha agreed with this appeal. Some of the dumped munitions dated back to World War I and have been lying

at the bottom of the Baltic Sea for over a hundred years. Mr da Cunha also saw promising opportunities for the Baltic Sea region to become a model region in the recovery of unexploded ordnance from the sea. As a member of the BSPC Working Group on "Climate Change and Biodiversity," Mr da Cunha also expressed the intention to place more emphasis on this topic. After all, the Working Group was responsible for providing the executive with recommendations for action concerning the protection of the marine environment and marine species in particular.

Mr Claus Böttcher, member of the "Expert Network Munitions in the Sea" of the joint Bund-Länder Working Group North and Baltic Sea – BLANO Expertenkreis Munition im Meer, stated that Schleswig-Holstein had already put extensive political effort into the subject. He said that various ministries in Schleswig-Holstein were working on the issue. For example, several ministries from Schleswig-Holstein were members of the above mentioned BLANO Expert Network. He advised to seek bilateral exchange with Schleswig-Holstein in order to solve the problems and advance developments jointly.

Furthermore, according to Mr Böttcher, it was essential that responsibilities and competences were clarified at the federal-regional levels, since valuable time was wasted due to these uncertainties. Mr Böttcher appealed to finally clarify the responsibilities and to set the necessary political framework. Mr Eyk-Uwe Pap from Baltic Diver Germany agreed with Mr Böttcher's assessment. Politicians must create the necessary framework so that companies could dedicate themselves to the enormous task of ammunitions recovery. At the end of the event, Ms Beate Schlupp and Mr Philipp da Cunha agreed that Mecklenburg-Vorpommern should seek exchange with Schleswig-Holstein in search of joint solutions.

A number of speakers focused on the existing technical possibilities. Mr Dieter Guldin highlighted that technology had made a huge leap forward and was thus ahead of politics. Mr Böttcher and Mr Pap also agreed with this statement. Currently, automated, remote-controlled technology was actively being used underwater. SeaTerra GmbH, for example, worked with crawlers that could relocalize, identify and recover old ammunitions. New technologies allowed to do much more than was being done at present. He explained that only 2 % of SeaTerra's salvage operations were carried out with environmental protection in mind. Further 8 % of the salvage operations carried out by SeaTerra aimed at establishing construction safety. The remaining 90 % of salvage operations were carried out in the context of infrastructure development, in particular due to the expansion of offshore facilities in the Baltic Sea. However, offshore facilities were not built in or around dumping sites, which occupy an area of about 15,000 km² in the Baltic Sea. Consequently, there was no comprehensive recovery and treatment program for dumping sites. If one were to continue the munitions recovery in the Baltic Sea at the current rate, it would take another 893 years to completely clear the Baltic Sea of contaminated sites.

Mr Robert Molitor, Head of the Extraction Service Mecklenburg-Vorpommern – Munitionsbergungsdienst Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, MBD MV, however, pointed out that no matter how efficient new salvage technologies were, the problem of environmentally friendly disposal of old munitions still remained. There were only four disposal sites in Germany, and even without the dumped munitions from the Baltic Sea, most of them were already working at full capacity. In addition, the transportation of recovered ammunitions to these disposal sites required considerable planning and safety precautions. Therefore, there was the urgent need to find possibilities for salvaging and destroying old munitions on site – preferably at sea. Waterborne salvage and destruction platforms could be a helpful solution in this respect. According to Mr Tommy Kaltofen from Atlas Elektronik, Thyssen Krupp Marine Systems was developing such pilot platforms. However, the platform alone was not enough. In order for the platform to be economically worthwhile, it had to work at full capacity, thus requiring a comprehensive program for ammunition recovery and disposal.

The participants all stated that appropriate funding mechanisms to start clearing the Baltic Sea seabed of old munitions were still missing. The 100 million euros intended to fund the pilot project were not enough. In the future, federal states – in particular coastal states – would also have to contribute financially. This further explicated the need for cooperation and exchange between Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Schleswig-Holstein. In the long term, more platforms would be needed for the task. However, Mr Böttcher also pointed out that this challenge could be understood as an economic opportunity. Without proper funding, there would be no development, but new developments would create and stimulate new economic opportunities. New companies could settle in coastal regions and more jobs would be created.

Mr Molitor stressed that international cooperation in the Baltic Sea region, also with a view to financing, should be continued. Toxic substances that continue to be released into the sea would not stop at national borders. At the same time, Germany alone did not have the resources to clear the entire Baltic Sea.

The final message was clear: all participants agreed that the salvage process must begin soon. In his closing remarks, Mr Sellering underlined that funding opportunities should be found urgently. The private sector had already developed the necessary technologies; it was time for policymakers to catch up.

List of Abbreviations

BSAP	Baltic Sea Action Plan
BSPC	Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference
CBSS	Council of the Baltic Sea States
EA	Ecosystem Approach
EBM	Ecosystem-Based Managament
EN CLIME	Expert Network on Climate Change
ESA	Economic and Social Aspects
EU	European Union
EUSBSR	EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
GEAR	Group on the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach
GES	Good Environmental/Ecological Status
HELCOM	Helsinki Commission
HOD	Heads of Delegations
HOLAS	Holistic Assessment of the Ecosystem Health of the Baltic Sea
MPA	Marine Protected Areas
MSFD	Marine Strategy Framework Directive
MSP	Maritime Spatial Planning
OSPAR	Oslo Paris Commission
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SOM	Sufficiency of Measures
UBA	German Environment Agency
UN	United Nations
VASAB	Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea

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