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Ladies and gentlemen,

The state of the Baltic Sea has been of great concern for parliamentarians for many years.

Eutrophication is the most serious problem of the Baltic Sea. It is caused by excessive inputs of nitrogen and phosphorus.

Over the last century, the nutrient load to the Baltic Sea has increased considerably.

BSPC established 2006 a working group with the mandate to raise political and public awareness on the eutrophication issue, and to come up with recommendations on how to mitigate the current situation.

A lot has happened since 2007, when the BSPC eutrophication report “Clean and Clear” was adopted. The report concluded that since all countries are part of the problem, all countries also need to take part in the solution. The report pointed out 25 recommendations on how to reduce the discharge from human activity from the countries around Baltic Sea. The main contributors to the nutrient input are agricultural discharge, the discharge from urban waste water, industry and ships and airborne nitrogen originating from land and maritime transport and combustion. However, the increasing eutrophication is caused by the increasing internal phosphorus source emanating from anoxic sea floor. At present, this source is much greater than the external source.

HELCOM BSAP was adopted by the governments of the Baltic Sea countries at the end of 2007. The aim of the HELCOM BSAP is to restore the environment of the Baltic Sea and to reach a good state of the sea by 2021.

HELCOM BSAP marked the beginning of a more structured process to combat the environmental problems of our common sea. Another milestone was the adoption of the EU regional strategy for the Baltic Sea region in 2009. The HELCOM BSAP was included in the EU strategy, which strengthened the importance of the plan.

The Northern Dimension Environment Partnership has played an important role by bringing together non-EU member states, particularly Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, and the EU states in the work to combat environmental problems in the Baltic Sea region.

Concrete actions already taken and partly fulfilled are the phasing out of the use of phosphates in detergents, the improvement of WWTP in the south west of St. Petersburg. In addition, 98,4 % of the waste water in St. Petersburg is today treated according to the HELCOM treatment requirements and there are positive signs of improved environment in the eastern part of the Gulf of Finland. Investments in several wastewater treatment plants in Russia, Poland and the Baltic states and the upgrading of manure treatment at a range of piggeries and cattle farms in the Baltic Sea catchment area, are other examples of progress.

Many projects have been facilitated with the loans from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the Nordic Investment Bank (NIB) and NEFCO. Many countries have also provided grants for reconstruction projects. Private foundations, such as the John Nurminen Foundation and BSAG, are also important stakeholders and supporters of a cleaner and safer Baltic Sea.

With the support of parliamentarians in BSPC and the Nordic Council, a BSAP technical project assistant fund was established to facilitate the implementation of the action plan. NIB and NEFCO administrated the fund that came up with more than 30 project proposals from 2010-2013. The fund has unfortunately now run out of money, therefore we urge the governments to provide the fund more seed money for new projects.

A lot of progress has been done but many challenges still remain. The external supply of phosphorus to the Baltic has in fact been heavily reduced since the middle of the 1980s. In spite of this, the phosphorus level has continued to increase which has led to increasing areas of anoxic sea bottom and increasing blooms of blue-green algae.

The internal source can only be stopped by oxygenation of anoxic bottoms, but it might take generations before a successful natural oxygenation event will take place. Thus, in addition to the continuing efforts to decrease the loads of nutrients from activities on land, it is important to enhance the research of new technics to solve the problems caused by the internal load of phosphorus.

Ladies and gentlemen,

A serious concern, and threat to the on-going positive process to save the Baltic Sea, is the current political situation in the Baltic Sea region. Due to the current Ukrainian conflict, EBRD and NIB have frozen their financial aid to new projects in Russia. In the Leningrad oblast alone, over 180 WWTP's still remain in extremely bad condition and in dire need of new investments.

Another issue of great concern is the status of the WWTP investment in Kaliningrad. Kaliningrad is by far the largest city in the Baltic Sea region still lacking a modern waste water treatment plant. At the Helsinki Baltic Sea Summit in February 2010, President Putin made a commitment to build a WWTP in Kaliningrad. The project is still halfway under construction and sadly enough out of schedule. Untreated water continues to pollute the sea. It is therefore of utmost importance to urgently finalize the investment and complete the project. The example of Vodokanal in St. Petersburg is encouraging.

Finally, I want to stress how important it is that both the EP and the governments in the EU states keep up their full commitment to the EU regional strategy for the Baltic Sea. This means both directing funds and human resources for this purpose.

I also want to emphasize the need to continue the cooperation between Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and EU, in saving the Baltic Sea. We should do our utmost to guarantee a continued cooperation and not let political differences cause irreparable damage to the achieved successes and put a halt to the promising path ahead.

There is absolutely no time to waste if we want to save to Baltic Sea for our children and grandchildren... I sincerely hope that we can get back to a normal political situation as fast as possible.