



Priorities of the Latvian chairmanship of HELCOM and challenges in the current geopolitical situation

By Evija Šmite, Chair of HELCOM

BSPC Standing Committee Meeting
6 March 2023, Brussels



About HELCOM chairmanships

The chairmanship of the Helsinki Commission rotates between the Contracting Parties (Denmark, Estonia, EU, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden, Russia) every two years, starting on 1 July, according to their alphabetical order in English.





Priorities of the Latvian Chairmanship of HELCOM

1 July 2022 – 30 June 2024

The Contracting Parties of the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) have agreed on a vision¹ of a **healthy Baltic Sea environment** with rich biodiversity and resilient ecosystem which requires the continued regional cooperation guided by the ecosystem approach.

¹HELCOM vision is “a healthy Baltic Sea environment, with diverse biological components functioning in balance, resulting in good environmental status and supporting a wide range of sustainable human economic and social activities.”



Objective 1

HELCOM as an effective and well-functioning organisation of regional cooperation which is capable of action, including in unforeseen and *force majeure* situations.

The Latvian Chairmanship will:

- *(i) contribute to the preparation of a legal framework in line with international law to ensure that HELCOM is able to act effectively and efficiently to achieve the objectives of the Helsinki Convention and the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP2021);*
- *(ii) work to ensure that the renewed HELCOM working structure ensures the implementation of the BSAP2021 and the Helsinki Convention.*



Objective 2

Implementation of the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP 2021)

A healthy and resilient Baltic Sea ecosystem being the ultimate objective, the Latvian Chairmanship will pay particular attention to the:

- **i) protection of marine biodiversity - e.g. the “30 by 30” target**
- **ii) advancing ecosystem based sustainable marine management by integration of environmental objectives with socio-economic goals – e.g. developing regional Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) processes, taking into account climate change aspects**



Objective 3

Strengthening the role of regional cooperation in the context of international ocean governance

- UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development
- post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity
- other relevant regional, European and global processes.
- *Sustainable Development Goals, esp. those on conservation of marine and coastal biodiversity.*

Coordinating and harmonizing the work in the context of the BSAP2021 with e.g. EU Biodiversity Strategy, EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, Marine Strategy Framework Directive



Challenges in the current geopolitical situation

- Strategic pause of HELCOM was announced on **4 March 2022** by the then-effect German Chairmanship of HELCOM.
- EU and the Contracting Parties to the Helsinki Convention that are Member States of the EU (“H 9”) unanimously agreed that they could not currently engage in business as usual with the Russian Federation in the context of HELCOM.



Challenges in the current geopolitical situation

- Suspension was announced of all official meetings of HELCOM bodies and meetings of project groups with Russian involvement under the HELCOM umbrella with immediate effect. The meetings were not cancelled, but rather postponed until further notice.
- The suspension has been prolonged until further notice under the current Latvian Chairmanship of HELCOM. However, it does not imply that HELCOM as such has ceased operations.



Main events in 2024 organized by Latvian chairmanship

- HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in Riga, spring of 2024
- HELCOM 50th anniversary year



Thank you!

