

## Concept of cooperation in the Baltic Sea region

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

I would like to thank you for inviting me to present the concept of cooperation in the Baltic Sea region in the context of the currently discussed European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. The Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region should be a good example of closer regional cooperation in the European Union sea areas. In view of maritime tradition, the strategy should naturally be open. Although its geographical scope is limited to the EU Member States located at the Baltic Sea, it will be an important reference point for other EU macroregions, due to the fact that it is to be a forerunner of similar strategies. We should thus make sure to provide **good and reliable** information about our sea to the public.

The Strategy is first of all an important step towards the implementation of the regional integrated maritime policy in the Baltic Sea region, not only by means of the improvement of the condition of the maritime environment, but also thanks to growth of prosperity in the region, increase in the region's availability, attractiveness and security.

The strategy should be implemented taking into account the balance between its main pillars, i.e. environmental protection, economic prosperity of societies, availability of resources and security. The condition of the environment is an important challenge faced by the region. Nature is not a politician. Laws of nature do not yield to a compromise, which for us, people, is often a desirable tool for accomplishing social and economic goals. Understanding this natural characteristics for our expectations towards the Baltic Sea is a key to a **permanent** possibility of using its resources.

As a large European country, located almost entirely in the Baltic Sea basin, Poland has a large potential to influence the condition and protection of the Baltic Sea environment. In this context, Poland will support actions aimed at full use of the existing international framework of cooperation for the benefit of environmental protection in the region, such as the Baltic Sea Action Plan of the Helsinki Commission. The use of international organisations, such as HELCOM, to accomplish the objectives of the Strategy for the Baltic Sea region is important due to experience and achievements of this organisation in the field of marine environment protection and in order to create a platform of cooperation between Russia and the EU Member States.

The Baltic Sea Action Plan developed by the HELCOM was adopted on 15 November 2007, during the meeting of the EU Ministers of Environment in Cracow. The fact that such an important event took place in Poland makes us, Poles, feel more responsible for appropriate and full implementation of the Plan. The Action Plan defines the main threats to the condition of the Baltic marine environment. We know today that the excessive nutrient concentration in our sea coming from the inflow of biogenic substances is the major factor affecting the Baltic ecosystem. In this context, Poland will aim at more intensive treatment of municipal, industrial and agricultural wastewater, as well as precipitation and thaw water, particularly in the seaside area. We expect that the **dosage of nutrients per capita in each Baltic state** will be comparable, possibly low and safe for the Baltic Sea environment.

The cooperation of the Baltic states within the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) may play an important role in the protection of the Baltic Sea region environment against eutrophication. The conference of the CBSS on agricultural impact on eutrophication of the Baltic Sea organised in April 2007

in Saltsjöbaden, Sweden, and attended by representatives from the Ministries of Agriculture and Environment was an important initiative. Such initiatives, which unite politicians, non-governmental organisations, environment users (e.g. farmers' organisations) and representatives of financing institutions, are very important, allow to exchange information on good practices and to finance new initiatives aimed at reducing the pollution of the Baltic waters with biogenic substances.

As a representative of the Ministry of Agriculture, I am aware of the fact that agriculture is of key importance for eutrophication of the Baltic Sea. The reduction of the discharge of pollutants of agricultural origin is a difficult and long-term process and a great challenge in the context of implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. The activity of non-governmental organisations promoting good agricultural practice and organic farming cannot be overestimated here.

An equally important threat for the Baltic Sea region is the degradation of the natural species and habitat structure of the Baltic Sea, as well as the decline in biological diversity. We believe that in this context the important issues include the improvement of the quality of the Natura 2000 sites management and the improvement of the integration of Natura 2000 sites network with protected areas within the European Union, outside the European Union and with the Baltic Sea Protected Areas (BSPA), as well as the restoration of the most endangered species of plants and animals.

Apart from the future cooperation of scientists on the improved analysis of threats to biological diversity, methodology of valorisation of nature in the entire Baltic Sea region, preparation of the map of habitats for marine areas and further development of research in marine areas, the cooperation at

political level is also necessary. A good example of such cooperation is the planned organisation of the meeting of the Ministers of Environment from the Baltic Sea region in 2010 in Moscow within the framework of the Helsinki Commission, with the participation of Russia. One of the issues to be discussed during the meeting is the establishment of the ecologically coherent network of protected areas for the Baltic Sea and the North Sea under the Helsinki Convention and the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (the OSPAR Convention). We should also make sure that the provisions of other international environmental conventions and agreements, signed and to be signed in future, are fully respected and implemented in the Baltic Sea region.

The Baltic Sea Action Plan shows it is virtually impossible to protect biodiversity without recourse to **responsible** fisheries in terms of the natural structure and size of natural resources in the framework of protecting the rules of nature.

Due to the above, in order to establish the framework of cooperation with a view to ensure that fishery in the Baltic Sea region is based on the ecosystem approach, HELCOM established the Fisheries and Environmental Forum, mainly for representatives of government administration, with the participation of the Russian party. The main task of the Forum is to exchange experience in the area of initiatives aimed at implementing measures included in the Baltic Sea Action Plan in relation to minimising the negative effect fishery has on sea ecosystems, such as management of fisheries in sea areas of Natura 2000, protection of coastal and migrating fish species, and actions for minimising by-catch of Baltic mammals and diving birds.

Yet, the solutions discussed during meetings of the Fisheries and Environmental Forum may be implemented on the regional level on the basis of competence

of individual states due to the sole competence of the Community in respect of management of fish resources in the territory of the European Union.

From the wider EU perspective, the planned reform of the Common Fisheries Policy in 2012 is expected to introduce measures to ensure sustainable use of resources of sea organisms and mitigate the negative impact of fisheries on sea ecosystems. On 22 April 2009, the European Commission issued the Green Paper on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy which is to serve as the point of departure for social debate and gathering opinions on the future of the Common Fisheries Policy of the European Union.

An important problem which should be solved by the intended reform is overfishing of sea fish resources and fleet overcapacity. It seems that the solution may lie in introducing Individual Tradable Quota for selected fleet segments. A fisherman would be granted ownership of fishing rights for a few years and would be able to sell them or rent them to other fishermen. Sure enough, the conditions of selling fishing rights would be subject to limitations so to prevent illegal fishing and purchasing fishing rights to cumulate them in the hands of large enterprises. Based on the experience of the Danish cod fleet and the Swedish pelagic fleet, we know that introduction of the system results in more responsible fishing, observing the principle of nature conservation, and in limiting the surplus of fishing effort.

In our opinion, another valuable proposal is to establish the Baltic Sea a region of limited discards and introduce an absolute ban on discarding catch which can be legally docked (ban on high grading). Stress should be placed on increasing selectivity of fishing gear and introducing temporary zones closed for fishing.

In the context of aspirations to implement the Common Fisheries Policy successfully, it is very important to exchange experience in applying appropriate solutions in the area of fisheries as well as good practice which may be implemented in the Baltic region. It must be stressed here again that it is difficult to compare fishing in the Baltic Sea to fishing in other maritime areas of the EU due to its specific character. Thus, it is essential that Baltic Sea countries cooperate to formulate the provisions and methods of implementing the Common Fisheries Policy since 2012.

The Baltic Sea Regional Advisory Council (BSRAC) could play a particularly important role in implementing the future Common Fisheries Policy in the Baltic Sea region. In our opinion, the reformed Common Fisheries Policy should furnish regional Advisory Councils, such as the BSRAC, with more extensive competence in respect of making decisions which impact specific environmental conditions and the conditions of fishing in individual sea regions. As BSRAC brings together organisations of fishermen and ecologists, and the voices of professional ichthyologists and ecologists can also be heard in its forum, the Council should constitute a very good trigger for discussions and opinions which could impact decisions concerning the Baltic Sea made on the political level of the European Union.

In the context of the Common Fisheries Policy reform, one cannot neglect the need for integration and ensuring compliance of the reform objectives with the objectives included in the Marine Strategy Framework Directive which describe the welfare of the sea environment. Implementing the ecosystem approach in development and shaping the future forms of tourism and urbanisation of coastal areas is also becoming an important and pressing issue. The physical degradation of habitats, which frequently have also beautiful scenic features, is

becoming a threat to their biological and ecological natural state. Moreover, the situation results in deterioration of coastal areas and the services offered there in an economic sense.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is virtually impossible to mention all the issues connected with cooperation under the future EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. I only touched upon the most important ones. On my part, I can assure you that Poland will play a vital role in implementing the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

I believe that if we also invest in maritime **research** and specialist **scientific and administrative personnel**, devising and implementing the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region will turn into our joint success. It would allow us to revisit the times when the Baltic Sea was clean, with no eutrophication or pollution with hazardous substances, rich in diverse species of fish and other sea life forms, such as mammals, as well as natural ecosystems and sea habitats. Thanks to our efforts, the European Baltic Sea will become a symbol of naturalness and economic welfare as a result of intellectual and cultural capacity of our societies to cooperate.

Thank you for your attention.