

2006-09-05

Dear Mr Commissioner, Ministers, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues and friends,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to this year's Annual Conference of the Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation. It is the 14<sup>th</sup> time that we meet to discuss regional matters of importance for the development of our joint interest and for many of us also home, The Baltic Sea Region.

I have led the work of the BSSSC for two very exciting and intensive years and it is time for me to pass on the "baton" to Mr Arne Ören from Eastern Norway County Network. But before doing so tomorrow, I wish to take the opportunity to give a short review of our work during the chairmanship of Region Skåne.

We started out with a new political geography in the Baltic Sea region that included four of the ten new member states. The overarching aim has therefore been to work for integration between all countries and regions an aim that will remain on the top position of priorities for us who live in the region. Here I wish to stress the importance of the new Cohesion Policy and the Structural Funds that will provide us with the foundation for our work and give us important financial tools. On this occasion I also wish to point out that the results from regional projects must be taken into consideration by the national and community level.

The Baltic Sea is one of Europe's main growth areas. Most of its countries are highly competitive, which gives the region an advantage when facing the challenges that the globalisation brings along. In fact the Baltic Sea is the gateway to North-East Europe and to EU's most important neighbour, Russia. In order to increase our competitiveness the BSSSC has identified a few key areas as particularly important to focus on during the coming years:

**The transport infrastructure:**

According to the BSSSC survey on the planning situation the existing investment plans show that northwest Europe and central Europe will be well connected. The connection between the regions and states in the eastern and southern part of the Baltic Sea Region however needs to be given higher priority. Strong attention should be paid to the connections between ports and their hinterlands with special attention to the possibilities to strengthen intermodal transports. There is a need to develop the methods for financing infrastructure investments. Public funding, fees and private public partnerships are interesting possibilities complementing each other. International cooperation is important in such a development. We will tomorrow present a framework for a joint infrastructure.

**The environment** is a horizontal priority for BSSSC. The Baltic Sea is a fragile environment on which we depend, not only for transportation but also for production of food and recreation. The increase of growth in the Baltic Sea Area will put further strains on the environment and therefore a sustainable management of the economic potentials of the sea poses a huge challenge for us in the Baltic Sea area. Here the BSSSC wishes to point out that conservation of the environment and sustainable management of natural resource cannot be realised successfully by a centralized top-down process.

The BSSSC regions together with the local level provide a solid expertise in combining economic progress with the necessary sustainability. The work done by Baltic 21 and HELCOM is important and a framework for the environmental issues in the Baltic Sea Region but one mustn't forget the local and regional authorities. One important focus is sustainable urban development

and the connection between urban centres and the surrounding region especially since experience from all over Europe shows that metropolitan areas are the major forces behind economic and regional development. In light of the transition in the Baltic Sea Region from a rural to a more urban society this development is particularly important.

This brings me onto the next prioritised area of BSSSC – that today’s conference is dedicated to: **“the future European maritime policy”**. With its 67 regional authorities that are directly linked to the sea by a coastline it is a highly prioritised issue by the BSSSC and I wish to underline that we very much appreciate the initiative as well as the holistic approach that has characterized the work of the task force. Today’s conference is part of the public consultation and I very much advise you to take the opportunity to debate and comment on the green paper this afternoon.

I also hope that you will take your time to learn more about the Interreg projects that are present here during the conference. The immediate participation of some 40 regional authorities in “Baltic MaSTER” is an excellent example for the growing awareness concerning the safety at sea. BSSSC actively supports and participates in this process. Results from the project show that

- We need improved “on land” response with clear tasks and responsibility for each organisation
- We need functional tools and methods for coastal management and marine area spatial planning for municipalities and regional authorities.
- We need clear and functional divisions of responsibility between authorities/stakeholders on local, regional, national EU- and international levels.
- We need to refine the calculation of socio-economic costs of an oil spill including the community’s direct, indirect and passive costs. For example: How much does the loss of an ecosystem cost? What is the value of 10 000 sea-birds killed by oil? What is the long term value for a community when tourism takes years to fully recover after an accident?
- The BSR countries should work more progressively with the UN classification of the Baltic Sea as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area. More preventive measures have to be enforced. Thus, taking into account, for example, the numerous sensitive areas in the Baltic Sea, maritime traffic monitoring schemes, waste handling, etc.

In the project Baltic Gateway we work together towards sustainable transport solutions. The Interbaltic Project “Intermodality and Interoperability in the Baltic Sea area” is another project where we work together for an improved infrastructure in our region. We will learn more about this strategic area tomorrow.

I wish to finish by saying something that has been said many times before - that if there is a political will the Baltic Sea Region could be a model for the rest of Europe in the process of reaching the Lisbon and Gothenburg goals, showing that it is possible to be competitive and to take the social and environmental dimensions into account at the same time. But we have to think in terms of cross border on all levels. The infrastructure, the maritime issues and the environment do not stop at national borders. They cross borders and they need resources and a common view.

I’m very glad that we today and tomorrow will have the opportunity to have a dialogue about the future of our region.

