



Speech by HELCOM Executive Secretary Monika Stankiewicz at the Baltic Sea Forum, St. Petersburg, 6 April 2013

Dear Ministers, fellow speakers, distinguished participants,

I feel privileged to be invited to speak on the occasion of the High Level Conference on the Protection of the Environment of the Baltic Sea Region.

I would like to make an attempt and outline, a positive but in my opinion realistic scenario for the future of the Baltic Sea. I will do it from the perspective of the marine environment cooperation which takes place in HELCOM – Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission.

HELCOM is one of the longest cooperating organizations in our region, serving as environmental focal point and policy-maker uniting the nine coastal countries and the EU on an equal footing in action for a shared cause of protecting the Baltic Sea.

I hope that this scenario of mine can contribute to the common understanding of what kind of future we want for the Baltic, what opportunities it can bring, and how this can be achieved together and be part of the blue economy and green growth.

The future of the Baltic Sea we want is a healthy marine environment. For a regular citizen, this implies clear water to swim free from blue-green algae, and clean recreation areas; for fisherman a sea with plenty of fish to catch; for scientists – well, the scientists will use complex explanation that reflects the dynamic and multiple inter-linkages between different components of the marine ecosystems and pressures impacting upon the sea.

Currently, the Baltic marine environment is in a poor environmental status, which is a result of historical pollution as well as current pressures from the constantly increasing human activities both at sea and on land, stemming from, among others, agriculture, urban areas and industries, and shipping.

Is the goal of a healthy Baltic Sea realistic? What does it actually mean? What timeframes are we talking about here? Can a healthy Baltic Sea be a compromise between the desired status of the sea, and costs of needed actions to reach this goal or willingness to pay for the needed actions?

The topical issue for HELCOM work is to answer these questions, and most of all to agree on adequate measures, to be implemented by the member countries, and this in cooperation with the scientific community, stakeholders and interest groups at all levels.

Science tells us that pristine environmental conditions that people were able to enjoy some hundred years ago cannot be achieved. However, it is possible to restore the marine environment to a quite a satisfactory situation where the sea will be able to deliver the services and goods to people and businesses.

It needs to be made clear that it will take long time to achieve this goal, which is due to the specific characteristics and fragility of the sea as well as intensive human activities in the sea and its catchment area. But in order to observe the positive effects in the marine environment during our lifetime, we have to act now.

All major environmental problems need to be remedied: eutrophication caused by excessive inputs of nutrients, pollution by hazardous substances, loss of biodiversity and impacts of shipping.

The HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan, adopted by the Baltic Sea countries and the EU at the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting six years ago, provides a recipe for solving these major problems. The time horizon we are working with here is year 2021, with the understanding that by that time all measures that will ensure the good environmental status should be put in place. The upcoming HELCOM Ministerial Meeting on 3 October this year in Copenhagen will reveal how far we have come in implementing the Action Plan and decide on supplementary measures as needed.

This event, with yesterday's high level conference is a proof of general willingness to undertake tireless efforts to rescue the sea. It also demonstrates that the cooperation in our region is thriving as never before, and new partnerships are being built involving governments, among others through HELCOM and CBSS, authorities, cities and enterprises, IFI's as well as private foundations, like Baltic Sea Action Group.

An example of such a new partnership is the proposed initiative to boost public-private practical interaction, for the benefit of the marine environment.

Thus, the pre-requisites for tackling the environmental challenges and at the same time ensuring economic development, taking into account the societal needs, are in place. I hope that the following scenario for the future of the Baltic Sea will be realized:

1. Full and timely implementation of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan,
2. All coastal countries will cut their loads of nutrients to the allowable level according to the HELCOM nutrient reduction scheme,
3. More stakeholders on all levels and from different sectors will engage in actions to reduce pollution,
4. A constructive dialogue with sectors that affect the Baltic Sea is continued or, where still lacking, established. Such dialogue with other sectors will create a confidence and trust in the scientific advice about the healthy marine environment. This way we will manage to re-focus a discussion from perceiving environmental regulations as a costly and limiting factor to economic growth, into the understanding that economy should thrive as long as their cumulative impact on the marine environment does not exceed the capacity of the sea to receive pollution and still be in a good environmental status,
5. We will manage to take advantage of the fact that on a global scale the Baltic Sea has been one of the forerunner regions in environmental protection, which creates opportunities for green innovations, new technologies and solutions, as well as standard setting, and where new environmental regulations should be seen from a longer term perspective, driving market towards new ideas and applications,
6. And lastly, we will be well informed of the values of the services provided by marine and coastal ecosystems and the costs of their degradation. And this knowledge will become part of the decision-making, planning and operation of businesses, so we can stay on the path of sustainable development and responsible consumption.

With great pleasure I have witnessed during these two days great attention to and commitment to implement the Baltic Sea Action Plan, and I choose to be confident that one by one, the elements of the future scenario will get realized. Thank you for your attention.