

Speech from Mr Uno Aldegren, Chairman of BSSSC (Malmö, Sweden)

Dear friends,

The Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation, BSSSC has existed for more than a decade. During those years the Baltic Sea Region has undergone dramatic changes. Today the Baltic Sea Region is more united than ever. Old and new EU-members are finding new ways to co-operate and new relations are being established.

The Lisbon agenda brings a strong focus on the regional level. The key to growth and competitiveness in Europe lies on the regions. Therefore the interest in sub national co-operation is growing, and there are many networks and organizations operating on the Baltic Sea arena. This is undoubtedly a very good development; the future looks very promising. However, there are many challenges to be met in order to secure a positive development.

The BSSSC is working together with many other organizations in order to strengthen the ties between the different actors within the Baltic Sea. This includes exchange of information and concrete co-operation between the different Baltic Sea organizations and network. Important themes are visions and strategies. This work is done with the aim to help creating a more unified vision and to strengthen the Baltic Sea Region as a whole.

The BSSSC has identified some areas as particularly important to focus on during the next few years.

**Territorial cohesion** is important in order to create a strong and integrated region. Within the European Union the new Cohesion Policy and the Structural Funds will be very important tools for the Baltic Sea Region since the region includes four of the ten new member states. However, optimal growth conditions as well as a highly educated workforce must be provided for.

Further the BSSSC has in its position paper decided to follow a common objective focusing on Environmental protection and risk prevention as well as better access – transport, investment, information and communication technology, transfer of know-how and technology. The Baltic Sea Region forms a natural bridge for the ongoing development of the neighbourhood relations with Russia. It is important to expand the Russian market, especially in Saint

Petersburg and Kaliningrad, in order to support a stable political development in Russia for the benefit of the whole European Union.

A solid political co-operation is necessary for practical co-operation and regional authorities are essential in realising the political objectives. The local and regional authorities in the Baltic Sea Area are capable of contributing actively to a successful implementation of the Structural Funds.

**Infrastructure** is another area of great importance to the BSSSC. Land, sea and air transport in the Baltic Sea Region has increased enormously in the last decades. The expected integration within the area will further increase the amount of transports. The transport infrastructure has to be sustainable and effective.

In fact the Baltic Sea is the gateway to North-East Europe and to EU's most important neighbour, Russia. The area is characterised by rapid economic growth – exceeding that of many other European regions. Therefore it is important for the Baltic Sea area to build and invest in further maritime infrastructure. The Fehmarn-Belt-Crossing is one example of a very important infrastructure project in the Baltic Sea area.

The BSSSC supports sea borne transports by prioritising sea and coastal shipping. BSSSC also supports “Motorways at sea”, and wishes to see special strategies for each European sea of how the maritime traffic could be the backbone of the transport sector in the area.

Consequently the future European maritime policy is of outmost importance for the Baltic Sea Region with its 67 regional authorities that are directly linked to the sea by a coastline. The increase in maritime and coastal traffic is related to the problem of maritime safety. BSSSC points to the fact that maritime safety in the Baltic Sea is of particular concern for the regional authorities in the area. Worried regions in the south of the Baltic Sea has recently organised three conferences to draw special attention to the regional and local dimension of maritime safety and preparedness for ship accidents. Kiel May 4, Trelleborg May 10 in 2004 and Brussels March 16 in 2005.

A number of practical consequences have followed to raise accident preparedness at the local and regional level. The immediate participation of over 40 regional authorities in an Interreg project “Baltic MaSTER” is the best example for this growing awareness concerning the safety at sea. BSSSC actively support and participate in this development.

BSSSC has in its contribution to a European Maritime Policy listed measures such as ratification of international conventions and EU directives and regulations, implementation of one compulsory Tanker transit route in the Baltic Sea, plans for places of refuge in all countries, lean decision making structures for disaster management.

**The environment** is another priority for BSSSC. 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. BSSSC will explore options and support implementation for sustainable development at the sub-regional level. In light of the transition in the Baltic Sea Region from a rural to an urban society this development is particularly important.

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 take social and environmental dimensions into account at the same time.