

BSC 27 maj 2011-06-13

Thank you Mr President and thank you for inviting me to this jubilee event.

I hope that all of you have picked up the booklet about “The early years of Baltic Sea Commission” and for those of you who want read more about creation of the organisation there is a more developed version available at the homepage.

When I was asked if I could write the story behind the creation of the Baltic Sea Commission I thought I knew most about the background but when I read the documents I realise that I did not know much of the steps behind the establishment of the organisation and especially not of the strong Finnish effort.

It has been an interesting job to summarise the establishment and I am grateful to all who has been so helpful to find documents and notes which were necessary to make the booklet as well as the webpage.

I have also been asked to give some personal reflections on my time with the Baltic Sea Commission and the CPMR and will be delighted to

Fifteen years are when it comes to the development of the Baltic Sea cooperation a long time and the situation is very different in compare to the one I met 1997.

When I first started to work with CPMR and the Baltic Sea Commission I had no knowledge whatsoever about European Regional policies and certainly not anything about CPMR.

I was primarily enrolled to the secretariat in Stockholm to organise the working groups which were set up at the first meeting of the new Executive board.

My background was in Human Resource Management which was supposed to be a good background when dealing with the working groups.

The Executive Secretary at that time was Mr Dag Boman, who I think some of you have met before.

I began at the Secretariat in February 1997 and shortly afterwards Dag Boman announced that he should leave the County Council for another job and that the suggestion was that I should replace him which also was the result.

Do I need to say that I was rather unprepared for my new position?

My first challenge as Secretary was to learn about the European Union and regional policies.

Keep in mind that at this time it was not very easy to find information about EU or EC as the name was at that time.

Internet was not very much in use by the European Commission.

And when it was the documents was preferably in French rather than English. Quite a change compare to today.

But I was not all on my own. I had good support from the members and from the CPMR secretariat in Rennes which was very supportive and helped me a lot to understand European policies and how the European Commission was structured and acted.

My first tasks as Executive Secretary were primarily to keep up the dialogue with the new members, to promote Baltic Sea Commission to potential members and to establish contacts with other organisations and official bodies related to the Baltic Sea.

This could be seen a rather easy tasks but there were several obstacles when it came to realisation.

First of all the telecommunications around the Baltic Sea were in bad condition.

The internet facilities were not developed at that time and certainly not the e-mail system.

Mobile telephones were not in common use so one had to use the usual telephone network which, as I said before, did not function so well.

Some board members had no direct telephone number so to get in contact with those I had to call a switch board number to the regional office.

Sometimes it was difficult to dial from a international number and when I succeeded I often was connected to a person not familiar with the English language.

Often they did not understand my request for a specific person maybe because I pronounced the name of the person wrong.

So it was not unusual that the person just hang up.

And to ask for a message to call me back later was often not possible.

But it was not only difficult with ordinary phone calls but also to send faxes

The fax connections were not better and at that time we had no group fax facility at least in Stockholm.

So to send the papers for the board meetings were mostly a challenge. The amount of papers was as usual when I come to European affairs significant and the numbers to dial as well.

So to send out the papers took mostly several hours and often this was done in the afternoon.

But it was a rule rather than an exception that the next morning I found the meeting papers in the fax machine labelled with the word ERROR. So then I was to try again.

So ordinary, regular post service was mostly the only way and I am still surprised that the board members turned up at the meetings.

At first the board meetings were mostly rather quite and un dramatic and the most obvious reason was that the members were not familiar to speak and discuss in English.

The interventions were often few or none I remember I tried to

prolong the meetings by asking for comments etc.

I thought that otherwise the time and costs for the participation were not relevant.

But more and more politicians and civil servants learned to communicate in English, which by the way was established as working language from the first beginning, so step by step the meetings became more lively.

To use the English language was a necessary decision as there are nine languages around the Baltic Sea.

I think that the organisation would not have survived practically and financially if we had to have all communication translated even if it sometimes can lead to some complications when no one uses their mother tongue.

The political changes and the growing of the EU or EC as the abbreviation were at that time, created an interest for inspiration and knowledge how to affect the European Regional policy from our members and potential members.

This was shown especially at the board meetings when our representative from CPMR at that time, Mrs Claudine Stanislas made her interventions.

The item "News from CPMR", at that time a fixed paragraph on the agenda, was an important one and the possibility for the board to get useful information not only about CPMR but about the European Commission.

Keep in mind that the Committee of Regions was rather unknown. So the possibility to find out what was going on within the EC was limited.

At that time all of us thought that an entrance to the European Community was a long long time ahead. And know all nations around the Baltic Sea, except for Russia, are members of the EU.

I also remember at that time there was a positive interest in taken part in the working groups which were set up within the Baltic Sea Commission and within the CPMR, intercommissions. We even had to say no to some members

An interesting mission was to enrol new members to the Baltic Sea Commission

Alone or together with others I travelled around the Baltic Sea and I felt always welcomed even of course every region we visited not became a member.

Especially when we met representatives from Baltic regions there was a huge interest to know more about EU and how to affect the Regional policy.

And in comparison with today it was not that easy to travel around the Baltic Sea. The flight connections were not very frequent and the domestic communications within respectively country not as well.

By making those trips I learned a lot about the Baltic Sea Region outside the capital areas which I have had good use for.

The third objective was to promote CPMR and Baltic Sea Commission to other actors and authorities in the Baltic Sea Region.

This was mainly done by taken part in different conferences etc sometimes for an intervention but mostly to meet other actors and discuss how to use one other to promote the interest of the Baltic Sea Region.

I remember that there was a positive curiosity upon CPMR even if the knowledge about the organisation was limited at that time.

I left the secretariat after about one year and a half but I was involved in the organisation even after that primarily to support the politicians from Stockholm Region first Mr Anders Gustâv and then Mrs Inger Linge.

When looking back on the development of the Baltic Sea Commission I can notice a big change in running the secretariat comparing to the organisation I left.

The usage of internet as well as e-mail is obvious and of course this makes it much easier to keep in touch with the member regions.

It is nowadays much easier to travel to different parts of the Baltic Sea Region which of course makes the position easier.

Nowadays the Baltic Sea Commission is well known and the work has got a more solid structure. So even if there is an ongoing task to promote the organisation the CPMR and BSC as such is familiar to most actors in the area.

I hope that my successors also have enjoyed the position as secretary and I wish you and the Baltic Sea Commission all luck in the future.