

**FINAL STATEMENT**  
**of the IV Baltic Sea NGO Forum**  
**„Challenges for Baltic Sea Civil Society in a Changing Europe“**

The IV Baltic Sea NGO Forum was held in Pärnu, Estonia on 16 – 17 April 2004 under the patronage of Mr. Arnold Rüütel, the President of Estonia. **The general theme** of the IV Baltic Sea NGO Forum was **„Challenges for Baltic Sea Civil Society in a Changing Europe“**. Seven workshops and the cooperation and contact conference entitled “Civil Society Building Bridges” took place during the Forum.

The Pärnu Forum brought together over 280 representatives of NGOs, other civil society organisations, public authorities and officials from ten Baltic Sea countries and adjacent new areas as well as representatives of European structures.

Forum approved seven conclusions of the IV Baltic Sea NGO Forum workshops: 1) Sustainable Development: Baltic 21 Back on Track; 2) NGOs for Guaranteeing Civil Security; 3) NGOs for Supporting Social Inclusion; 4) „The Whole Baltic Sea Region Must Live“: NGOs for Developing Regional, Local and Rural Life; 5) NGOs for Human Rights and Multicultural Society; 6) NGOs and Better Employment; 7) From Recipient to Partner: Experiences of NGOs in Development Cooperation.

The IV Baltic Sea NGO Forum welcomes, accepts and adopts the further development of the structure of the Baltic Sea NGO Network and its cooperation with European institutions, especially the CBSS. All the designed and planned structural reforms and institutionalized cooperation must serve the civil societies and NGO-work on the grass-root level and strengthen the bottom-up approach and democratic process of decision-making as traditionally constitutive for NGOs.

**\*\* The IV Baltic Sea NGO Forum emphasizes (chapters A - I):**

- A. Development of Civil Society and Democracy**
- B. Strengthening of the Baltic Sea NGO Network**
- C. Development of Cooperation and Partnership between NGOs and Public Institutions in the Baltic Sea Region**
- D. Development of Cooperation and Partnership between NGOs and Public Institutions in Europe**
- E. Development of Cooperation between NGOs and Various Networks in the Baltic Sea Region**
- F. Development of Cooperation between NGOs and Various Networks in Europe**
- G. Improvement of NGOs' Knowledge and Potential**
- H. Baltic Sea: Preservation and Protection of People and Environment**
- I. Guaranteeing the Sustainability of Civil Society Development and Baltic Sea NGO Forums**

**\*\* The IV Baltic Sea NGO Forum decides to (articles 1 – 12):**

#### **A. Development of Civil Society and Democracy**

1. Today one of the main tasks in the Baltic Sea region is to develop Civil Society and NGOs. The IV Baltic Sea NGO Forum encourages CBSS, each CBSS country and governments to fix the development of civil society as a key priority
2. Encourage all governments of CBSS member states to evaluate the regulations regarding NGO legislation and involve NGOs in the law-making processes, implementation of legal acts and participation in the decision-making processes
3. Express its full support to the "Turku process" – the research and report of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference on NGO legislation in the Baltic Sea Region – and sees it as an important initiative to strengthen the role of civil society organisations, which also can foster cooperation between governments, parliamentarians and civil society organisations in the Baltic Sea Region
4. Emphasise the need to adopt the core principles and challenges identified in the Civil Society Declaration to the World Summit on the Information Society as stated under Article 2.1.3 Gender Justice. Knowledge based, innovative and stable societies must be based on gender justice and be particularly guided by the interpretation of principles of gender equality, non-discrimination and women's empowerment in accordance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

#### **B. Strengthening of the Baltic Sea NGO Network**

5. Stress the necessity for and develop the Baltic Sea NGO Network and annual Forums
6. Guarantee the continuous work and functioning of the Baltic Sea NGO Network by establishing a legal body and structure of this network and evaluating the need to establish an NGO, a permanent secretariat, a non-profit association, a foundation or some other juridical form
7. Elaborate the statutes or constitution and prepare a working paper in order to formalize the Baltic Sea NGO Network and Forum. Authorize the Baltic Sea NGO Consultative Committee to prepare the draft. It will be ready for discussion in October 2004. The decision on the issue is prepared for the next Baltic Sea NGO Forum in Poland in 2005
8. Continue discussions on the formalization of the Baltic Sea NGO Network and Forum, and the real juridical establishment and content of a legal structure by national focal points of the Baltic Sea States. The need for legal structure should be carefully evaluated as well as the advantages and disadvantages of its establishment. The final decision will be made by the Baltic Sea NGO Consultative Committee by the end of 2004
9. Consider the necessity and essentiality of establishing and guaranteeing the functioning of the Baltic Sea NGO cooperation networks in the following spheres:
  - 1) sustainable development and nature conservation (on the basis of the Coalition Clean Baltic);
  - 2) civil security;
  - 3) social care, social inclusion and health care;
  - 4) local and community development, rural life development and agriculture, and lifelong learning and culture;
  - 5) human rights and multicultural society;
  - 6) employment;
  - 7) development cooperation.

The networks would deal with the exchange of experiences and cooperate between the annual NGO Forums

10. Ask to contribute to, participate in and co-operate with the already existing networks in the Baltic Sea region as the Baltic Sea NGO cooperation networks. They also are dealing with the exchange of experiences and cooperate between the annual NGO Forums
11. Authorize the working groups of cooperation networks formed by the workshops of the IV Baltic Sea NGO Forum, and of existing networks to begin and continue organizing the work of the networks, mentioned in article 9 and 10
12. Develop and strengthen national platforms and national focal points in each CBSS country and the Baltic Sea NGO Forum both nationally and at CBSS level as one of the most important tasks for the benefit of the Baltic Sea NGO Network and Baltic Sea NGO Consultative Committee

**\*\* The IV Baltic Sea NGO Forum actively works for and encourages (articles 13 – 33):**

**C. Development of Cooperation and Partnership between NGOs and Public Institutions in the Baltic Sea Region**

13. Recognition of the Baltic Sea NGO Network and Forum as a consultative and cooperative partner to CBSS. Authorization of the Baltic Sea NGO Consultative Committee to apply the Status of Special Participant in CBSS and send official application to CBSS during May 2004, signed by the Chairman of the Consultative Committee, representatives of Estonia and Poland
14. Cooperation of the Baltic Sea NGO Network and Forum with the CBSS structures and strategic partners (Baltic Development Forum; Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, Union of the Baltic Cities, etc.)
15. Appointment of NGO representatives into the Baltic Sea networks, structures and institutions of the CBSS. Authorization of the Baltic Sea NGO Consultative Committee to prepare decisions for such appointments
16. CBSS and the Baltic Sea States to acknowledge informal NGO networks and involve them in real cooperation

**D. Development of Cooperation and Partnership between NGOs and Public Institutions in Europe**

17. The Baltic Sea NGO Forum and Network making the maximum use of the possibilities and opportunities of the European Union and European cooperation (WGDI – Working Group on Assistance to Democratic Institutions of European Commission, Committee of Regions of European Commission, directorates of the European Commission, etc.)
18. Appointment of NGO representatives into all-European networks, structures and institutions of the European Union. Authorization of the Baltic Sea NGO Consultative Committee to prepare decisions for such appointments. It should be guaranteed that NGOs in all the Baltic Sea NGO Network countries, also Russia, have an opportunity to be appointed as representatives of the network into all-European networks

**F. Development of Cooperation between NGOs and Various Networks in Europe**

19. Intensification of cooperation between the Baltic Sea NGO Network and the European NGO structures and networks (Civil Society Contact Group; European Social Platform; CONCORD; European Women's Lobby; Solidar; PREPARE-network; ECAS – European Citizen Action Service; European Foundation Centre – efc; European Environment and Health Network – eHEN; European Public Health Alliance; Health Action International – HAI; European Antipoverty Network; ECOVAST; etc.)

#### **G. Improvement of NGOs' Knowledge and Potential**

20. Informing, training and strengthening of NGOs for real and active participation in the decision-making processes nationally, in the Baltic Sea region, in EU, etc.
21. Building of a system and a model for cooperation and learning to know, exchange and use positive experiences and knowledge of NGOs from various states and regions
22. Support and development of cross-border and cross-sectoral cooperation projects of NGOs in several states and various spheres, stressing its essentiality
23. Stressing and informing of the good examples and results of NGO cooperation (Estonian NGO Roundtable), partnership of NGOs and officials (real cooperation and building of Civil Society in Denmark; real cooperation in Finland; implementation of the Estonian Civil Society Development Concept), development of NGO support systems, ethical behaviour of NGOs (Code of Ethics for Estonian NGO-s), etc.

#### **H. Baltic Sea ...: Preservation and Protection of People and Environment**

24. Safeguarding of the Baltic Sea resources to be used in an ecologically sustainable, socially responsible and economically viable manner, based on the principles of ecosystem-based management
25. Stressing that a sensitive and susceptible area such as the Baltic Sea and its surroundings need complex solutions and actions. All partners – CBSS with its working bodies, state governments, NGOs and business companies – must work together and in close cooperation for this purpose. The good cooperation with Russia is needed
26. Contribution of the CBSS to the establishment of the Baltic Sea or parts thereof as a PSSA (Particular Sensitive Sea Area) in order to ensure a general environmental protection against unsustainable sea transportation. Forum welcomes the decision of the International Maritime Organisation from 2 April 2004 to approve in principle the respective request of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden. Forum calls for Russia to join and support the PSSA initiative
27. Building of a network of well-managed BSPAs (Baltic Sea Protected Areas) by designating areas supplementary to the existing HELCOM-areas and by strengthening the responsibility of the national governments to implement management plans
28. CBSS and Prime Ministers to reinforce the Baltic 21 process by setting up a time schedule, budget line and target values for selected indicators for the sector-specific and cross-sector action plans. Implementation of the Baltic 21 Action Programme should be evaluated action by action and existing barriers should be identified together with appropriate measures to overcome them
29. Support the development, work and activities of children and youth and related organisations in close cooperation with CBSS and state governments

30. Appeal to the CBSS countries to ensure that employment policy contributes to social inclusion and reduction of poverty and call on the CBSS countries to take concrete steps to prevent risk of social exclusion and poverty and further take steps to reduce poverty and counteract social exclusion. Also to invite the CBSS to involve NGOs on all levels in the fight against poverty and social exclusion
31. The Baltic Sea NGO Forum and Network in close cooperation with the CBSS and National Governments to actively participate in the work for the concretisation of the contents of the EU Northern Dimension like the cooperation for the Southern Europe – especially for the NGO's
32. Strengthening the protection of fundamental rights in the light of changes in society, social progress and scientific and technological development by making those rights more visible in CBSS, NGO and EU cooperation and ask the CBSS to ensure free possibilities for ethnic minorities to engage in contacts across the borders
- 33.** Protection of the fundamental rights of women and girls and working towards the protection of women and girls against all forms of violence, such as trafficking of women for prostitution, etc.

**\*\* The IV Baltic Sea NGO Forum decides to (articles 34 – 38):**

**I. Guaranteeing the Sustainability of Civil Society Development and Baltic Sea NGO Forums**

34. Express the disappointment about the relatively low level of implementation of proposals from previous NGO Forums. Governments are recommended to discuss the reasons for such situation with the civil society organizations and groups and to speed up the implementation of the according recommendations
35. Emphasize that the key issue for successful development projects of NGOs is financing of activities, cooperation and building up the necessary system
36. Stress the need and challenge for establishing a Baltic Sea Civil Society Development Foundation. Mobilization and use of financial resources – of the Baltic Sea States, CBSS, European Union, European Commission and others – is essential for this. Appeal to CBSS and Governments and other partners to start preparatory work for that in close cooperation with the Baltic Sea NGO Network and Consultative Committee
37. Support the continuous implementation of the Conclusions of the III Baltic Sea NGO Forum (III Baltic Sea NGO Forum, 8-11 May 2003, in the City of Turku, Finland: Conclusions)
38. Inform the IV Baltic Sea NGO Forum, take into consideration and authorize the Baltic Sea NGO Consultative Committee to work on the following:
  - 1) The Statute of the Baltic Sea NGO Network: Preliminary Theses (prepared on behalf of the Baltic Sea NGO Consultative Committee by Joanna Szewczyk, Helmut Hallemaa and Stefan Nilsson)
  - 2) Danish Proposal - Action Programme for NGO Forum 2004
  - 3) Estonian Proposals for the Baltic Sea NGO network and activities between NGO Forums (14 January 2004)
  - 4) (Summarized) Proposals and comments made by and at the IV Baltic Sea NGO Forum

Poland will succeed Estonia as the next President of the CBSS. The participants hope for the initiative of the Polish NGO community to organise the V Baltic Sea NGO Forum in Poland in 2005.

**We are confident that when we meet in Poland, many new, long and significant steps have been taken in order to promote mutual cooperation, strengthen the Baltic Sea NGO Network, the Civil Society and human dimension in the Baltic Sea Region!**

*Adopted by the IV Baltic Sea NGO Forum on 16 - 17 April 2004 in Pärnu, Estonia*