



## Culture heritage important for economic and social development

The Ministers of Culture of the Baltic Sea States met recently in Lübeck for their third Conference. Ministers agreed that special attention should be given to cultural heritage which is an important part of the environment and an important factor for economic and social development. At the invitation of Sweden, a special working group will be established by the end of this year.

It shall present its work and its results for consideration to the next conference of the Ministers of Culture of the Baltic Sea States. Before the 4th conference of Ministers, which will be held in Poland 1999, a preparatory meeting will take place in Iceland. The Russian Federation invited the conference in 2003 to St Petersburg which then will celebrate its 300th anniversary.

## Summit in Strasbourg

Baltic heads of state attended 10-11 October a summit of the Council of Europe. It was the second summit in the Council's 48-years history. The first summit was held in Vienna 1993, the so-called "United Europe Summit". The session then adopted a declaration calling for the formation of a permanent European Court of Human Rights. Building on the results, this summit looked upon how much groundwork still needs to be done. In 1998 hopefully the Court for 800 million inhabitants will be set.

## Energy

### Energy forum

The Baltic regional forum "Energy Strategies in the Baltic States - from Support to Business" was held in Riga in September. The forum focused on problems in the energy sector in the Baltic countries. Organised by the Latvian Member Committee of the World Energy Council (WEC), the forum brought together professionals to talk about the sector and discuss possible solutions to the problems they are facing.

### New Latvian pipeline

Latvia is set to build a new oil pipeline to Ventspils in order to increase the Russian oil transit via Ventspils Port by about 5 million tons. "The capacity of the present pipeline are close to maximum and oil export from Russia will only increase," says Latvian Transport Minister Vilis Kristopans. The oil export route via Ventspils is one of the shortest from Russia to the European markets and is not affected by seasonal changes because Ventspils is an ice-free port.

## A new committee for increased trade

Sweden's trade with Poland, Russia and the three Baltic States - already booming - will be promoted further. A committee headed by the Swedish Minister of Trade Leif Pagrotsky has been formed by the Swedish Government with a purpose of promoting both trade and investments in that region.

## US - Baltic Cooperation Charter

Concerning the problems of cooperation in the international realm of security and integration into Western organisations, the first ever charter between the Baltic countries and the United States is set to be signed this November. The charter will be a single document that covers all three Baltic states.

## Forum Lithuania in Kalmar, Sweden

The Swedish-Lithuania Society and the city of Kalmar organised in October the annual meeting called Forum Lithuania targeting i.a commerce, industry and culture. Some 300 delegates participated.

## Business

In October, the three Baltic chambers of commerce came together for a first-ever tri-Baltic meeting. Members dived into what they can do to help influence their resources in the Baltic states. On the agenda was solving general issues for companies doing business in the Baltic states, working together with "all issues for all nationalities" and being the voice that could further the business environment are considered important tasks for the chambers to concentrate on.



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## The next summit on Baltic Sea cooperation in Riga

The second Heads of Governments Meeting in the Baltic Sea region will take place in Riga 22-23 January 1998. The first such meeting was held in Visby, Sweden, in 1996. Heads of Government are expected to review the results of the cooperation achieved so far and to set the priorities for the continued regional integration process. The meeting will be co-chaired by the Latvian Prime Minister, Mr Guntars Krasts, and the Danish Prime Minister, Mr

Poul Nyrup Rasmussen. (Denmark currently holds the presidency in the CBSS).

## Interview

**Four questions to the chairman of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation (WGEC), Mr Albrecht von der Heyden, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Germany:**

**What is the overall objective of the WGEC within the CBSS?**

"Our aim is to serve as an efficient, target-oriented consultative forum to improve the economic framework in the Baltic Sea area, e.g. to bring down barriers to trade and investment between countries of the region and to promote regional economic cooperation."

**What is guiding your work?**

"Basically we have two guidelines: The resolutions from the Visby summit in 1996 and the Kalmar Action Programmes. But also other sources, like the Baltic Sea Initiative of the EU Commission."

**How is your work progressing so far?**

"Quite well, thank you. Our first session has taken place in Kiel, within this context, an ambitious work programme has been adopted. Beyond that, we concentrated on some key questions of regional cooperation like telecommunication as part of the infrastructural development. An intensive dialogue on economic cooperation is now established."

**What is on your agenda for the immediate future?**

"Three things will be particularly in focus:

1. Continued revision of the cooperation in the field of infrastructure.
2. A review of border crossing procedures and customs clearance.
3. Development of the financial sector in the various Baltic Rim countries and an in-depth analysis of the needs for loan guarantee schemes for SMEs lacking securities as collateral.

Besides these three items we also intend to take a closer look at establishing a regional network of research institutes as a means of promoting the macroeconomic identity of the Baltic Sea area and also to see what more could be done for tourism."

## Background:

The Working Groups are the major working structures of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS). In order to ensure efficient implementation of the various programmes and priorities the chairmen of the Working Groups give regular reports to the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) on the activities undertaken and progress achieved by each group. As progress depends on decisions and actions of each of the CBSS members, it is essential for each country represented on the Council to organise the follow-up of decisions made at the national level. The chairmanship for the Working Groups is rotated between the CBSS countries.

### The three Working Groups are:

- Assistance to Democratic Institutions, Latvia chairs during 97/98
- Economic Cooperation, chaired by Germany during 97/98
- Nuclear and Radiation Safety, Finland continues to chair during 97/98

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