

CBSS High-Level Meeting of Education and Science

“Higher Education and Science for Sustainable Development and Competitiveness of the Baltic Sea Region”

Riga, Latvia
September 13, 2007

Chair’s conclusions

On 13th September, 2007, the third high level meeting of representatives from the Ministries of Education and Science from the Member States of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS); Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia and Sweden, was held in Riga, Latvia. The meeting was held under the auspices of the Latvian Presidency of the CBSS, where education is defined as the first priority field to promote competitiveness and sustainable development of the region.

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- discuss the role and possible contribution of higher education and science in the promotion of sustainable development and competitiveness in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR);
- reflect on the best ongoing practices as well as current and future challenges in the field of higher education and science in achieving the promotion of the above;
- analyze former achievements and existing institutional frameworks in the region dealing with education issues and to discuss the future needs and possible new initiatives which could strengthen the sector of higher education;
- consider the need for new forms of cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region that address the challenges in front of us in the field of education and science in order to foster innovation and promote competitiveness.

The participants of this meeting acknowledged that a competitive education sector is an instrument to foster sustainable development and growth, and a possible avenue to ensure the region’s competitiveness on a global scale and to promote its recognition and positive image abroad. The participants also acknowledged that in a knowledge based economy Education is an area for concerted action and improvement if the BSR wants to meet the challenges and use the opportunities of globalization, thus promoting the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy goals. This action would sustain and improve our position in and amongst the world leading innovation hubs where science and creativity blend in unison.

They acknowledged the need of education, research, development and innovation to be included in the agenda of the cooperation of the Governments of the CBSS, and for this level of cooperation to be duly reflected in the future Strategy of the Baltic Sea Region.

They urged for a stronger linkage between higher education, science, innovation, and technology development as a way to ensure the continuation of a sustainable, dynamic and progressive social-economic environment. In this context the CBSS was encouraged to consider the establishment of an ad-hoc Expert Working Group on Higher Education, Science and Innovation as an instrument of regional cooperation with a task to exchange best practices and experience in higher education and come up with recommendations which would foster and advance innovative development.

They also recognized the importance of research infrastructure for the competitive development of education and science and general access to global knowledge. In this respect, it was additionally requested to establish an ad-hoc Task Force on Science Infrastructure in the BSR, where the focus should be placed on the development of an academic network through the Baltic States which would work to overcome the digital divide. This would facilitate access to, participation in and the exchange of global knowledge - thus preventing the region from brain drain.

Participants also recognized the importance and benefits of the initiatives of the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM), for example, the NordPlus program for student exchange, and the Reykjavik declaration on the mutual recognition of qualifications concerning higher education, and therefore expressed their satisfaction for the recent developments in expanding this program to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The participants also acknowledged the need for a more broadened exchange *within* the CBSS region between our own institutions and not just the exchange of students with institutions *outside* of the region.

They welcomed actions of different regional networks of higher education institutions, for example, The Baltic University Programme, ScanBalt Campus, The Baltic Sea Region University Network, the Conference of Baltic University Rectors, and BALTECH, and they urged for a more intense cooperation in the region to promote the quality of the region's higher education networks and institutions on a European and global scale. Participants also called on more cooperation to adapt to the needs of the region, especially the labour market and changing demographic pattern.

A special focus is needed on topics such as university management and financing, joint degrees and study programmes, network and alliance building, the attraction of foreign students, freer movement of researchers and scientists and international benchmarking. It was also noted that analytical skills, adaptability, flexibility, entrepreneurial and learning skills, social communication, creativity and open-mindedness of graduates are important indicators of qualitative education.

Participants took note of ScanBalt's activities and appreciated the ScanBalt Campus and its approach to organizing life sciences in the BSR and promoting specific areas to a level where they can become globally competitive through cross-border collaboration. ScanBalt Campus ensures close collaboration with industry and coupled with a Top of Europe Life Science Foundation it constitutes the initiation of a true BSR Innovation System. This will gain momentum since a shared service between the clusters in the ScanBalt BioRegion is currently being organized by ScanBalt to promote SME –participation in FP 7 projects and other EU activities.

They also recognized the success of the CBSS EuroFaculty Programme in the Faculties of Law and Economics, at the Immanuel Kant State University of Russia in Kaliningrad. Furthermore, they welcomed the launch of a new EuroFaculty Project in the Russian town of Pskov, which would commence in 2008.

Participants also acknowledged the importance of higher education in the sectors of resource, energy and demand management, sustainable production and development, all subjects which are essential to meet the global challenges,. It is also important to take measures to make these subjects attractive to study, and higher enrollment of women into these topics would be beneficial.

Participants encouraged higher education institutions to increase their role and responsibility towards sustainable development; moreover, higher education institutions should themselves be models of sustainable development.

The Agenda 21 for the Baltic Sea Region – Baltic 21 has been instrumental in advancing education for sustainable development through its Education sector ever since the launch of its Education Agenda in 2000. Participants encouraged Baltic 21 to develop new strategic projects with an aim to increase the role of education institutions in promoting sustainable development which would constitute an excellent basis for an upcoming mid-term review within the *UN Decade for Education on Sustainable Development*. Another important initiative is the Baltic 21 Eco-region project which will systematically collect information on best practices and create a database for this.

They expressed support to the activities of the Baltic University Programme as a focal point in the region for higher education on sustainable development. The Programme has made a valuable contribution for example through its environmental management curricula and book series, and the current production of material for higher education on Ecosystem Health and Sustainable Agriculture will be an important tool throughout the BSR to improve the agricultural practices and the situation of the Baltic Sea.

The Baltic 21 *Strategic Project on Innovation for Sustainable Development* will concentrate on sustainable production to support and enhance the creation of goods and services using eco-efficient and socially responsible industrial production processes.

It was also recognized that closer and stronger cooperation among different stakeholders, like state institutions, municipalities, higher education bodies, private sector, industries, civil society, and NGOs is a prerequisite for a more successful development of a sustainable and competitive region, where environmental, economic and social dimensions are addressed and interlinked.