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Fostering the socio-economic potential of the Baltic Sea region

Committee Opinion¹

Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs

Rapporteur: Mr Aleksei LOTMAN, Estonia, Group of the Unified European Left

A. Conclusions of the committee

The Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs congratulates the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development on bringing the subject of the socio-economic potential of the Baltic Sea region before the Parliamentary Assembly. The comprehensive report by Mr Kaikkonen tackles the most important issues concerning the Baltic Sea region – including the ones concerning the environment.

However, these issues should benefit from an increased attention. In fact, the future of the region and its inhabitants depends on decisions to be taken and on their impact on the environment and economy in general.

B. Proposed amendments to the draft resolution

Amendment A (to the draft resolution)

In the draft resolution, at the end of paragraph 2, add the following sentence:

“Organisations for environmental co-operation, planning and sustainable development in the Baltic Sea region, like HELCOM (Helsinki Commission – Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission), the intergovernmental network VASAB (Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea) and Baltic 21, have long-standing experience in the issues of environment and sustainable development in the region.”

Amendment B (to the draft resolution)

In the draft resolution, in paragraph 6, after the second sentence, insert the following text:

“The building of the pipeline implies major environmental risks due to the fact that after the Second World War large quantities of chemical munitions were dumped on the bed of the Baltic Sea and significant quantities of various dangerous chemicals were used in agriculture and industry after the Second World War. The risks of disturbing the sediments thus include the release of hazardous substances such as chlorinated organics and heavy metals, which in turn could lead to an impact on top predators like seals and eagles due to the accumulation of these substances in the food chain.”

1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 11678](#), Reference 3483 of 29 September 2008. Reporting committee: Committee on Economic Affairs and Development. See [Doc. 12264](#). Opinion approved by the committee on 24 June 2010.



Amendment C (to the draft resolution)

In the draft resolution, after paragraph 6, add the following paragraph:

“The fishery industry in the Baltic Sea is of utmost importance to local economies. Problems due to overfishing and pollution should therefore represent an issue of concern for political decision makers. Ignoring environmental concerns because of socio-economic considerations is an unsustainable approach and leads in effect to the undermining in the long term of these very socio-economic interests.”

Amendment D (to the draft resolution)

In the draft resolution, after paragraph 6, add the following paragraph:

“Threats to the sea from eutrophication resulting from pollution by nitrogen and phosphorus coming from agricultural and municipal sources are also an issue of major concern for environmentalists. A reform of the European Union Common Agricultural Policy is needed, as well as further improvement of the treatment of waste water and a halt to the use of washing powders containing phosphate.”

Amendment E (to the draft resolution)

In the draft resolution, after paragraph 10.6, insert the following sub-paragraph:

“take into consideration, before taking any decision, issues related to the environment in the Baltic Sea region and never allow economic considerations to dominate environmental ones.”

Amendment F (to the draft resolution)

In the draft resolution, after paragraph 11.4, insert the following sub-paragraph:

“reform its Common Agricultural Policy in order to ensure a better protection of the environment, inter alia, by maximal decrease in the use of fertilisers and pesticides.”

Amendment G (to the draft resolution)

In the draft resolution, after paragraph 11.4, insert the following sub-paragraph:

“promote integrated management and spatial planning of marine and coastal areas so as to avoid conflicts between various environmental and socio-economic interests, and inter alia find best possible sites for proposed wind-parks where these would not come into conflict with the need to protect nature.”

C. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Lotman, rapporteur for opinion

1. As the report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development already mentions, there is an ongoing debate on the environmental effects of the Nord Stream project, which concerns the building, on the seabed of the Baltic Sea, of a gas pipeline linking Russia to Germany. The draft resolution mentions the fact that “the cost-benefit rationale of the Russian-German undertaking to build the North Stream gas pipeline on the Baltic seabed is debatable and the consultations leading to this grand project proved insufficient”.
2. The Parliamentary Assembly has already addressed the topic of the Nord Stream project in its [Resolution 1612 \(2008\)](#) on chemical munitions dumped in the Baltic Sea, in which it expressed its regret that no detailed study on the dumping sites of chemical munitions and their current condition was carried out before the decision was made to construct the pipeline. Indeed, the pipeline risks crossing areas where, after the Second World War, the Allies dumped chemical munitions and, according to experts, these munitions, if moved, may become dangerous for the environment.
3. Other environmental dangers to the Baltic Sea coming from the Nord Stream project also need to be pointed out today, such as the possible remobilisation of dangerous substances like Persistent Organic Pollutants (dioxins, DDT) and heavy metals (especially mercury) from the sediments, as well as related threats to biodiversity, like waterfowl and top predators.
4. The increasing marine transport in the Baltic Sea also represents a serious risk for the environment. Oil leaks from tankers or from oil rigs might represent a major threat to biodiversity in the entire region.

5. The Assembly expressed its concern in this field by adopting [Resolution 1461 \(2005\)](#) on the Curonian Spit, oil and the environment. The Curonian Spit is a narrow coastal strip shared by Lithuania and the Russian Federation (Kaliningrad) and enjoys National Park status in both these countries. It is also listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List as an outstanding natural area. However, the discovery of an oil deposit (D-6) off the coast led to the construction and bringing into operation by a Russian company of an oil rig just outside Lithuanian waters and gave rise to great anxiety about the preservation of the spit, because, should an accident occur at the oil rig, the spit would be seriously affected.
6. Large scale marine wind-parks also have a non-negligible impact on the environment and on the landscape. It is true that, on the one hand, windmills represent one of the main ways to decrease fossil fuel burning, but, on the other hand, without extremely careful planning, poorly sited wind-parks can be a serious threat to biodiversity, especially to migrating birds and bats.
7. Other major threats to the biodiversity of the coastal zone are represented by the intensification of agriculture (leading to increased quantities of nitrogen and phosphorus reaching the sea and leading to eutrophication), the abandoning of high natural value, traditional agricultural land, the development of infrastructures, etc.
8. International organisations like the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM), VASAB and Baltic 21 are constantly addressing in their activities the dangers for the environment in the Baltic Sea region; however, intensification of concrete action coming from them would be welcomed.