The Council of the Baltic Sea States
– multilateral cooperation between the governments of the Baltic Sea region

The Baltic Sea region is one of the areas in the world with the fastest economic growth, and is of great political and economic importance to Sweden. Governments in the Baltic Sea region are cooperating in a number of different sectors in order to develop the region and to bring people closer together. The Swedish Government attaches great importance to cooperation in the Baltic Sea region.

In order to take advantage of the opportunities for cooperation in the region, the governments of the Baltic Sea region established the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) in 1992. The CBSS is one of several intergovernmental organisations working for cooperation, peace and democracy in Europe as a whole or in its various regions. Sweden considers that the Council of the Baltic Sea States is playing an important role in overcoming old divisions in northern Europe and in preventing the emergence of new ones. The Council has consistently supported Poland’s and the Baltic States’ membership of the European Union and continued close cooperation between the EU and Russia. The Council is playing a significant role in implementing the EU’s Northern Dimension, i.e., its policy for the Baltic Sea region.

Objectives and member states
After the former Soviet republics gained their independence, conditions were created for close cooperation between the governments of the Baltic Sea region. At a conference in Copenhagen in March 1992, the ministers for foreign affairs of the region decided to establish the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS). The Council has twelve members: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia, Sweden and the European Commission.

The Council of the Baltic Sea States has the following objectives:
• to work for greater unity between the member states and to reinstate the Baltic Sea area as a cohesive region,
• to contribute to the continued democratic development of the Baltic Sea region,
• to contribute to economic growth in the area,
• to help ensure that development is sustainable, i.e., that it does not harm the environment and other conditions for future development, and
• to support regional Baltic cooperation in different spheres and at various levels.

In March 2002, the Council of the Baltic Sea States celebrated its tenth anniversary at a special meeting of foreign ministers in Svetlogorsk in the Kaliningrad region of Russia. An anniversary declaration was adopted which affirms that the Council will continue to make important contributions to development in northern Europe by flexibly adapting itself to changing political circumstances, taking up new issues of vital common interest and achieving concrete results. The dynamics of the relationship between trade and investments, growth and welfare, stability and security are particularly emphasised, as is the importance of sustainable development.

The membership of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland in the European Union from May 2004 will create a new situation for the CBSS since eight of the Council’s eleven member states will also be members of the EU. Baltic Sea cooperation will continue, focusing on issues that are appropriate for informal political and practical cooperation between a smaller group of neighbouring countries.

Structure and forms for cooperation
When it chaired the CBSS in 1995-96, Sweden took the initiative for a Baltic Sea States Summit, i.e. a meeting between the heads of government of the member states and the President of the European Commission. The meeting was held in May 1996 in Visby, Sweden and was a great success. Since then, Baltic Sea State Summits have been held every other year, and the 2004 Summit will be held in Tallinn in June. At their meeting in Kolding, Denmark in 2000, the heads of government decided to integrate all intergovernmental cooperation between the entire group of Baltic Sea states into the framework of the CBSS. Much practical work had previously been done outside the Council. Individual ministries and agencies retain the main responsibility for cooperation in their spheres, however.

Meetings of ministers for foreign affairs
Up to now, the CBSS has met at foreign minister level once a year, usually in June. The European Commission is normally represented by the Commissioner for External Relations. A communiqué is issued at each meeting, addressing vital issues for the countries of the Baltic Sea region and for Baltic Sea cooperation. This year, instead, a meeting of foreign ministers’ deputies will be held in connection with the Baltic Sea States Summit in Tallinn.

In between Council meetings, activities are led by the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO), which meets about seven times per year. There are three
working groups under the CSO: on democratic institutions, economic cooperation and nuclear and radiation safety. The CBSS also has two task forces under the heads of government and about ten groups of high-level officials working directly for their individual ministries. Meetings of ministers responsible for the various policy areas are common. The CSO has a coordinating role.

**Rotating Chairmanship**

The Chairmanship involves considerable responsibility for the Council’s operations and rotates between the member countries each year. All the member countries except Iceland have chaired the Council. Estonia holds the Chairmanship in 2003-2004, followed by Poland in 2004-2005. Iceland has offered to lead cooperation in 2005-2006. In 1998, an international Secretariat, based in Stockholm, was established. The Secretariat prepares CBSS meetings and monitors the implementation of decisions. Hannu Halinen of Finland heads the Secretariat. For more information, see www.cbss.st

**Cooperating countries and organisations**

Seven countries (France, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States) have observer status in the Council.

At parliamentary level, parliamentary conferences between the countries of the Baltic Sea region – Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conferences (BSPC) – are organised once a year. At local government and regional levels, there are four organisations: the Union of Baltic Cities (UBC), the Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation (BSSSC), which organises county council and county cooperation, the Conference of the Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR-Baltic Sea Commission) and the Baltic Sea Seven Islands (B7) organisation. All these organisations have special participant status in the CBSS and are invited, for example, to the meetings of foreign ministers. Cooperation among non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the Baltic Sea states is widespread, and since 2001, these have held a special forum together with the CBSS every year. The Barents region has a special body for cooperation, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), with the five Nordic countries, Russia and the European Commission as members.

**Political and practical cooperation among the countries in the Baltic Sea region**

The wide-ranging cooperation between ministries and agencies within the framework of the Council of the Baltic Sea States is described here in alphabetical order.

**Baltic 21**

It is essential that economic development is sustainable. To this end, the region’s environment ministers took the initiative in 1996 for a regional Agenda 21 for the Baltic Sea region (Baltic 21) as a follow-up of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. It was adopted in 1998 and was followed by a supplementary regional Agenda 21 for education, adopted in 2002. Baltic 21 was also mentioned as a means of promoting sustainable development in the action programme adopted at the UN Summit in Johannesburg in 2002. Baltic 21 is now in the process of being implemented and work is being undertaken in eight sectors: agriculture, energy, fisheries, forestry, industry, tourism, transport and education. Indicators have been established and a number of concrete projects are in progress. The Baltic Sea States Summit in 2004 is expected to adopt guidelines for future cooperation. Baltic 21 has its own secretariat within the CBSS Secretariat in Stockholm. For more information, see www.baltic21.org.

**Children at risk**

Regional cooperation on children at risk has taken place since 1999. This cooperation takes place between government officials and experts at central, regional and local levels. Cooperation with NGOs is a central part of this work. A working group for cooperation on children at risk (WGCC) was established in 2002. At the same time, a Children’s Unit was set up in the CBSS Secretariat. The working group deals particularly with sexually exploited children, street children, children at institutions, children who commit crimes and children crossing borders unaccompanied in the Baltic Sea region. For the past two years, the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs has placed an official at the disposal of the Children’s Unit, for a special cooperation project on unaccompanied children. Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova are taking part in this project in addition to CBSS member countries. Its aim is to focus on unaccompanied children who have become victims of human trafficking, who seek asylum or for other reasons are staying on their own in another Baltic Sea country. It also intends to create better conditions for these children, through cooperation between migration authorities, the legal system, the social services and NGOs. An action plan is expected to be adopted in the spring of 2004. The www.childcentre.baltinfo.org website is a useful resource in all aspects of cooperation on children at risk.

**Civil security**

The heading ‘civil security’ is used for measures to prevent and manage non-military threats to society. Civil security aims at increasing people’s physical security. Several conferences have been held since 1998, which have led to practical cooperation in a number of sub-areas. Rescue service cooperation named EUROBALTIC has been developed jointly with the EU. Among other things, this has involved the introduction throughout the region of the common emergency number 112 and cooperation in connection with environmental and other accidents. Joint exercises by rescue services are also undertaken. Sweden has been proactive in this work and in the field of crisis management. Here, joint programmes have been developed for research and training, aimed at improving crisis management capability. The coastguard authorities in the countries bordering the Baltic Sea have their own cooperation programme to enable them to carry out their tasks more efficiently, the Baltic Sea Region Border Control Cooperation Conference (BSRBCCC).
Communicable disease control
In recent years, the spread of serious communicable diseases such as tuberculosis and AIDS has increased in parts of the Baltic region, leading both to suffering and the possible obstruction of development and contacts between countries. Sweden was one of the first countries to draw attention to this danger and has organised several conferences, which have done much to highlight the problem and formulate measures to deal with it. In an attempt to reverse this serious trend, the Baltic Sea States Summit in Kolding in 2000 decided to set up a special group of personal representatives of heads of government, which has drawn up and implemented an action programme for the control of communicable diseases in the Baltic Sea region. The task force has six programme groups consisting of national experts within priority areas: monitoring communicable diseases, tuberculosis, HIV, antibiotics, primary health care and health care in prisons. These programme groups have developed a large number of key projects in their individual fields, most of which have been financed and are in the process of being implemented. The Baltic Sea States Summit in St. Petersburg in June 2002 adopted a special declaration on communicable diseases, which urged, inter alia, national mobilisation in the fight against AIDS and reforms to make infectious disease care more efficient. The task force will present its final report to the Baltic Sea States Summit in June 2004. A broader partnership was established in October 2003 for further health cooperation in the Baltic Sea region – the Northern Dimension Partnership on Public Health and Social Well-being.

Cultural cooperation
The ministers of culture have held six meetings. An action programme has been drawn up for the protection of the region’s common cultural heritage. It consists of four lines of action: the practical protection of buildings, the sub-marine cultural heritage, coastal culture and sustainable preservation of historical cities. Cooperation is led by a coordination group and implemented by working groups. A meeting place has also been established in the form of a Cultural Heritage Forum, which is held every other year and is due to take place next in Finland in 2005. The Swedish National Heritage Board is an active participant and led cooperation from 1998 to 2003. Another lively cultural cooperation programme, Ars Baltica, has been taking place in parallel since 1988. Its aim is to promote the regional exchange of artists and culture, in the form of networks, festivals, seminars and exhibitions. Participating jointly from Sweden are the Swedish Institute and the National Council for Cultural Affairs. In 2002 and 2003, Sweden chaired the coordination committee for Ars Baltica and in October 2002, a successful conference was organised in Visby, Sweden, on conditions for cultural cooperation in the Baltic Sea region. Ars Baltica has a secretariat in Poland. For more information, see www.ars-baltica.net.

Customs cooperation
Since 1995, a conference has been held every other year for the heads of customs services in the Baltic Sea region and in between these, working groups have been dealing, inter alia, with customs procedures, particularly on how to reduce the time for border crossings for goods to a maximum of two hours. Extensive studies have been made to time border crossings, which have provided information on bottle-necks. After the EU enlargement, customs conferences will no longer be supported by the EU, but meetings between the heads of customs services are expected to continue, as is work to reduce the time required for goods to cross borders to and from Russia.

Democratic development
The democratic system is now well-established in all the Baltic Sea countries, but democracy is in constant need of further development. Between 1994 and 2003, the CBSS had a Commissioner for Democratic Development working on support and monitoring in the region. Democracy cooperation is now focused on the exchange of experiences in a working group on democratic institutions. In recent years, the CBSS has particularly concentrated on good legislative work, local self-government, minority issues, freedom of the press, the treatment of detained persons, trafficking in human beings and the various ombudsman institutions.

Education
In the educational sector, the Council of the Baltic Sea States has a special university programme called the EuroFaculty (EF). The EF has the task of assisting in reforming higher education in law, economics and public administration at the universities of Tartu in Estonia, Riga in Latvia, Vilnius in Lithuania and Kaliningrad in Russia. Visiting lecturers from abroad help with courses, teacher training and the development of syllabi. At the three universities in the Baltic Sea countries, the EF has been working with a ten-year project, which will be concluded in 2005. The EF project in Kaliningrad has a separate organisation which only includes law and economics, and did not start until 2000. As a result of a Swedish initiative, the ministers of education and science from the Baltic Sea region met at the Haga Palace, Stockholm in March 2000 and again in January 2001, within the framework of the Baltic 21 cooperation. The first meeting decided that a special Agenda 21 would be developed for education and the second meeting established the Baltic 21E programme. The work of implementing it is led by a coordinating group headed by Sweden and Lithuania.

Energy
Reliable access to energy is one of the keys to the development of the Baltic Sea region. Integrated energy markets, especially for electricity and gas, lead to efficient production, distribution and use of energy. In this way costs and negative impact on the environment are reduced. Renewable sources of energy are promoted. The energy ministers of the Baltic Sea region have held three conferences and established cooperation in energy policy (BASREC) with a special group of officials, several working groups and a small secretariat tied to the Stockholm CBSS Secretariat. Cooperation includes harmonisation of regulations and other measures to promote investment. A special cooperation project is responsible for counteracting climate change. At its meeting in Vilnius in November 2002, the energy
ministers took the decision to make the Baltic Sea region a testing ground for joint climate-friendly investments. For more information, see www.cbss.st

**Fisheries**

The use of fish resources in the Baltic Sea is regulated by a special Fisheries Commission, established as early as 1974. This is not included in the sphere of the Council of the Baltic Sea States because it builds upon a separate international agreement between a somewhat smaller group of all those countries bordering the Baltic Sea.

**Information technology (IT)**

At the Baltic Sea States Summit in Kolding in April 2000, the heads of government decided on cooperation for the development of the information society in the region that would be closely linked to EU policy for the Baltic Sea region (the Nordic Dimension). Assisted by a special initiative from the European Commission, an action programme was drawn up for a "Northern e-dimension", which was adopted by CBSS ministers responsible for IT in September 2001. The programme contains seven action lines: research networks with broadband, electronic security, IT skills and education, electronic commerce, electronic government, IT in environmental work and benchmarking of IT development. A number of initiatives have been taken such as seminars, conferences, feasibility studies and preparations for other projects. The results of this work have included new development projects in the IT sector, financed by the EU and the Nordic Council of Ministers. For more information, see www.riso.ee/nordic.

**Marine environment**

Since 1974 the Helsinki Declaration has regulated joint efforts to protect the marine environment of the Baltic Sea. A special commission (HELCOM) manages this cooperation, with a Secretariat in Helsinki. Cooperation is intensive and includes a special programme to deal with the largest sources of emissions around the Baltic Sea. Marine safety and marine environmental rescue services are other important areas of cooperation, since shipping accidents can lead to serious pollution. Cooperation within HELCOM is not included in the CBSS for the same reasons as for fisheries cooperation. For more information see www.helcom.fi.

**Nuclear safety**

Nuclear safety, i.e., technical safety and radiation protection when using nuclear energy and processing radioactive waste, is of great importance in cooperation between neighbouring countries. There is a common interest in the control and supervision of nuclear technology operations by the authorities, since emissions of radioactive substances can spread to other countries in the event of an accident. The Council of the Baltic Sea States has a special group in this sector, working for the exchange of information and experiences, taking part in joint activities such as emergency exercises and compiling data of common interest. After preparations by the group, a special agreement has been entered into on the regular exchange of data from national radiation-recording stations and the working group is responsible for ensuring that this exchange works smoothly. Exercises have also been carried out to test early-warning and other communications between the countries' contingency planning organisations. The goal is to strengthen preparedness for collaboration in the event of a nuclear accident.

**Organised crime**

Organised crime constitutes a growing threat to safety and security in the Baltic Sea region. A Task-Force on Organised Crime in the Baltic Sea Region was set up at the Visby Summit in 1996, consisting of personal representatives of the heads of government. Under the task force are a cross-sectoral Operative Committee (OPC) and a number of expert groups with representatives of the crime-prevention agencies of the different countries. All the national crime-prevention agencies are involved in this work, coordinated by a special coordinator in each country. These cooperate closely with the Baltic Sea Region Border Control Cooperation Conference (BSRCCC). Communications centres with round-the-clock monitoring and a common system for information exchange have been established. Joint operations are continuously undertaken in such areas as illegal migration, trafficking in women, gang crime, drugs, stolen vehicles, highly taxed goods and money laundering. An annual status report on corruption is also produced. Cooperation between public prosecutors has also been linked to the task force's work and judicial cooperation, joint investigations and training courses are among its responsibilities. Sweden chaired the task force for the first four years, but from 2001, Denmark has taken over main responsibility. For more information, see www.balticseataskforce.dk.

**Regional development/planning**

VASAB 2010 (Visions and Strategies Around the Baltic Sea 2010) aims at promoting the exchange of experience and transfer of knowledge in the fields of regional development and planning and building the foundation for sustainable development in the Baltic Sea region. Cooperation began in 1992 at the initiative of Sweden. Several meetings have been held with ministers responsible for planning and regional development, and at a meeting in Stockholm in 1996, an action programme was adopted which designated a number of priority projects. The action programme was further developed at the last ministerial meeting in Wismar in 2001, in the light of the new possibilities and challenges facing the Baltic Sea region.

**Taxes**

The taxation authorities in the Baltic Sea region have their own cooperation. This takes place at the annual meetings of directors-general, which decide the guidelines for the focus of future work. When necessary, meetings are held to discuss control measures that have been decided. Co-operating countries also organise seminars on relevant subjects.

**Trade and investment**

In the view of Sweden, opportunities for growth in the Baltic Sea region are among the greatest in the world.
It is important that efficient use be made of these opportunities. Economic issues have always played a major role in cooperation in the Baltic Sea region. The Council of the Baltic Sea States has a permanent Business Advisory Council. Regular meetings are held with ministers of trade and finance and at the last two, action programmes were adopted aimed at abolishing trade barriers and promoting trade and investment. The next ministerial meeting will be held in April 2004. The working group on economic cooperation implements the action programmes and prepares ministerial meetings. Some examples of measures:

- a goal has been established that border crossings for goods should not need to take more than two hours and a number of measures have been taken to achieve this goal (see also under the Customs heading),
- a special web portal, www.balticmarket.de, has been opened to provide practical information to companies on trade and investment,
- corruption that hinders trade and investment is being fought, inter alia, by holding a conference on systems for public procurement that prevent the use of bribery,
- investment-promotion bodies are cooperating in examining the possibilities of making the Baltic Sea region a common investment area.

Transport

The transport ministers last met in 2001, when they decided to establish a working group under the CBSS. The working group has met several times but has not achieved very much up to now. Discussions are underway on the future of this working group.

Youth policy

Youth policy cooperation is governed by an action programme adopted at the conference for ministers responsible for youth affairs, held in Visby, Sweden in 1998. As part of the follow-up of this action programme, a youth secretariat was set up in 1999 in Kiel, Germany, with the task of coordinating government cooperation and of supporting in a practical way the extensive youth work being undertaken in the Baltic Sea region. In 2000, a conference at high official level was held in Lübeck, Germany, for a follow-up of this cooperation and in the summer of 2002, another meeting of ministers for youth affairs was held in Vilnius. In Vilnius, a supplementary action programme was adopted, focusing on young people in the knowledge society. This action programme resulted in the establishment of a working group for youth policy issues. An evaluation of cooperation since 1998 is underway and will provide the basis for discussions on future youth policy cooperation. For more information, see www.balticsea-youth.org.

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Almost all ministries and a number of agencies participate in some form of multilateral cooperation between the governments of the Baltic Sea states. Information about the officials responsible can be obtained from Christer Persson.

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