

Civil society around the Baltic rim: edited on occasion of the 10th Baltic Sea Parliamentarian Conference by order of the Standing Committee of the BSPC

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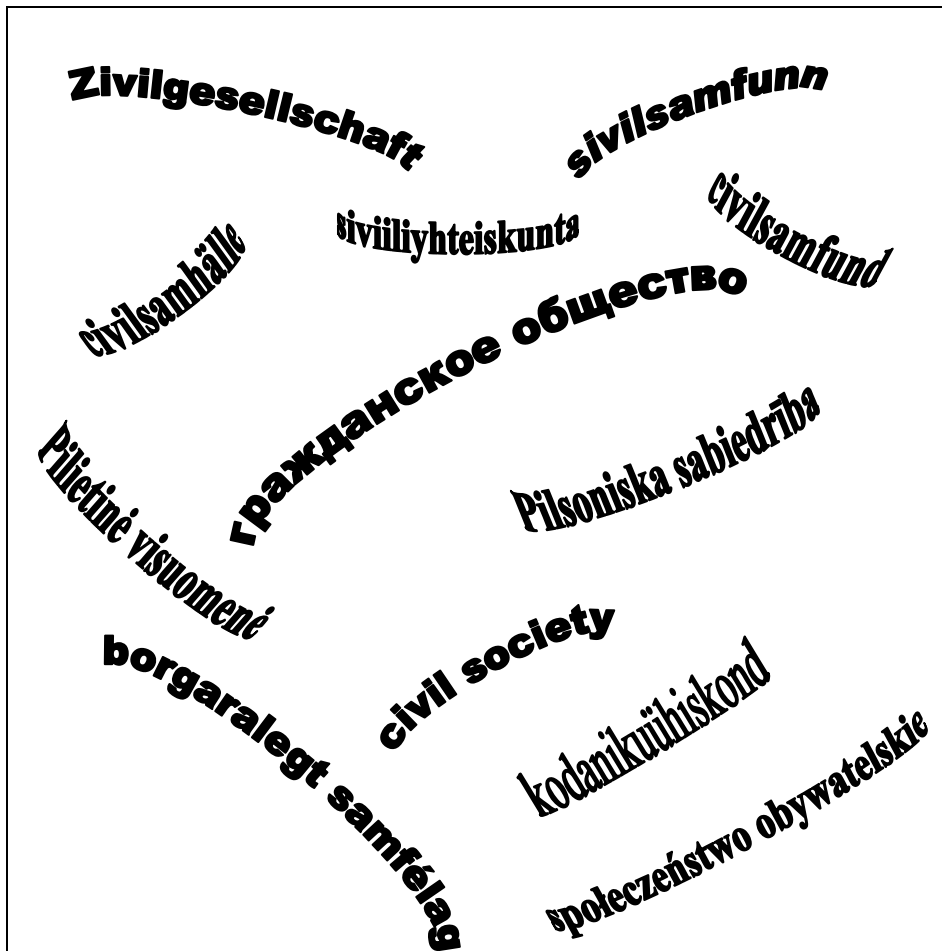
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Special Issue

Hanne-Margret Birckenbach & Christian Wellmann
(Eds.)

Civil Society around the Baltic Rim

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of the 10th Baltic Sea Parliamentarian Conference
by order of the Standing Committee of the BSPC



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INTRODUCTION

*Hanne-Margret Birckenbach & Christian Wellmann**

The Making of Civil Society in the Baltic Sea Region: On Parliamentary Co-operation, Russian Participation and Multilateralism

"What is civil society?" On this question a lively debate has been going on since the beginning of the 1990's. Indeed, the term is used in various connotations. The meaning of the term is influenced by differing national contexts. What is meant by *civil society* in Great Britain is not the same as what is meant in Lithuania when speaking about *Pilietinė visuomenė*. The term *гражданское общество* signifies in Russia something different than *Zivilgesellschaft* in Germany, *społeczeństwo obywatelskie* in Poland, *kodanikuühiskond* in Estonia or *civilsamhälle* in Sweden. All of these different expressions are deeply imprinted by the respective political cultures, historical experiences and current challenges. As a matter of fact, those who want civil society to develop as a pillar in the architecture of Baltic Sea region-building will have to cope with a considerable number of connotations.

Common ground

In the academic discourse the situation is somehow similar. The meaning of "civil society" is shaped by differing, partly competing strands in the history of political thought and in contemporary political theory. Each strand conceptualises the term in a slightly different way and thus produces a great deal of material for scholarly debate and dispute. Nevertheless, some *common ground exists*. In particular, this concerns the basic normative considerations on what civil society should be, would be, or could be. Efforts are made to bridge the gap between the various concepts and to create space that rather allows to include the multitude of approaches than exclude some of them. For example, most scholars will agree when civil society is described as a mediating interface between those who struggle for political power and those who struggle for realising their needs and values. Furthermore, civil society is not perceived as being identical with the sum of all non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Civil society is more than a sum of NGOs and not every NGO is a part of civil society. For instance, a self-reflecting public discourse by the intelligentsia, backed by the media and academic institutions, is a crucial element of civil society without being an "NGO" whilst at the same time any NGO which tracks commercial aims or pursues its goals by violent means or does not feel itself committed to human rights standards surely can not be qualified as belonging to civil society. Scholars concur in stating that civil society actors take social responsibility without striving for economic profit or

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for power within the state system. Instead, they pursue one or the other or several of the essential roles following:

- Civil society actors monitor whether the political sphere conforms to the rule of law and civil rights (control of state power).
- They encourage citizens to learn about the rules of a democratic political culture and to participate accordingly (bringing forward political education).
- The actors call routines and stereotypes into question, propose alternatives to majority lifestyles and pave the way for new perceptions in political thought (emphasising values and moral standards).
- Civil society actors give a voice to underprivileged peoples whose needs otherwise might not count because their votes are small in number or because they lack economically any bargaining power (strengthening social cohesion).
- Last not least, they make the public aware of where problems lie, consult governmental and parliamentary decision-makers and feed them with special knowledge and new experiences (pushing for reform in politics and society).

Insurrection and violence are alien to civil society. Its means are based on dialogue and may combine rational considerations and convincing enthusiasm with humour and even provocation. Of course, their effectiveness depends on many preconditions. Generally one may state that civil society actors can perform their constructive role the better, the more they meet counterparts in the political system who themselves are able and willing to take part in dialogue and share at least some sympathy even with such people who they otherwise might not interact with at all.

<i>Inside</i>	<i>Roles of civil society</i>	<i>Outside</i>
Peace and democratisation	Control of state power	Peace and region-building
	Political education	
	Promoting values and standards	
	Strengthening social cohesion	
	Pushing for reform	

Civil society may take its roles "at home", on local, regional and national levels, and thus strengthen intra-societal peace by contributing to democratisation and value-orientation of internal social and political life. However, civil society actors are no longer limited to domestic issues. They may be involved in cross-border activities and international politics in order to make human needs and the interests of the people matter more even beyond national borders. Only when the activities transcend national borders and get linked to activities of people abroad is civil society transnational and part of region building. Civil society then acts according to what the philosopher Immanuel Kant expressed by the terms of "national citizenship" and "world citizenship". However, in order to give the idea a less utopian touch one may prefer to speak about "regional citizenship".

A matter of fact

Apart from looking into the national connotations of the term "civil society" or to track the scholarly debate on the issue, a third path to explore civil society is to *describe it empirically*. If one refers to the normative concept outlined above, one will find that although the gap between theory and practice is considerable, civil society nevertheless is not a mirage. Despite the difficulty that people have in agreeing upon what civil society definitely is, they hardly deny that it exists.

This fact becomes obvious when looking to innumerable activities of NGOs which perceive themselves and their partners as being a part of civil society and at least try to act according to the normative concept and promote its values. Furthermore, diverse practices of co-operation have developed in recent years among state actors and NGOs. International organisations like the United Nations, the OSCE and the Council of Europe have declared the need to strengthen civil society as a fundament of co-operation and peace. They increasingly seek to co-operate with civil society actors in many policy areas. Also the European Union (EU) has continued with this trend. The EU expressed its high appreciation as well as strong expectations with respect to this approach. For example, the authors of the EU's "Common Strategy on Russia" rely heavily on the effectiveness and efficiency of civil society in Russia when writing: "The emergence of civil society in all areas is indispensable for the consolidation of democracy in Russia." The Programme of Action for the Northern Dimension of the EU also refers to civil society. As concerns the Baltic Sea regional context a milestone was taken during the latest Ministerial Session of the CBSS at Hamburg when it was unanimously agreed that participation of civil society in common efforts is necessary in order to achieve the overall goals in the Baltic Sea region, and when the Council promised to seek further co-operation through its working structures (cf. also *Wille*).

Civil Society and Democratic Development

The CBSS has promoted broader participation of the civil society in the efforts of regional development by convening the first Baltic Sea NGO Forum in Lübeck on 28-29 May 2001. The Council appreciated the initiative under the German presidency to support the NGOs in North-eastern Europe in developing common goals and activities and in building up networks in the region. The Council recognises the necessity of participation of the civil society in common efforts to achieve overall goals in the Baltic Sea region. Plans for a stronger contribution of the civil society to the success of the Northern Dimension concept should be developed. The Council took note of the conclusion of the first Baltic Sea NGO Forum and asked the CSO to analyse the proposals put forward. The Council stressed its willingness to seek further co-operation with NGOs through its working structures, in particular the Working Group on Democratic Institutions."

*Communiqué of the Council of the Baltic Sea States
10th Ministerial Session, Hamburg, 7 June 2001, p. 3*

Indeed, one may feel irritated when realising how close to governmental structures some civil society actors meanwhile have become. In some cases one may even wonder whether a particular NGO in fact should not better be called a

GONGO (governmentally organised non-governmental organisation). The prevailing relationship between state and civil society NGOs obviously marks one of those aspects which differ quite strongly among different societies and political cultures. However, two current developments seem to be common to all: firstly, the relationship has become increasingly interactive during the recent decade and, secondly, a debate has started among the civil society community on whether the former development is regarded to be sound and how to cope with it. The number of voices which point out the risks inherent to civil society suddenly being "discovered" by state actors has been growing. Regarding the domestic context, the question is about whether the power structures misuse civil society engagement as a stopgap in fields of basic human needs such as education, social welfare and culture, which the state authorities refuse to fund sufficiently whilst continuing to finance over-sized military capacities and other remnants of out-dated traditional power politics. Regarding the international sphere, self-reflection among transnational active NGOs looks at the degree to which support by states and international organisations has the price of being instrumentalized for state-centred political aims. Whether domestically or transnationally, the basic problem remains the same: How can state authorities and their political aims be kept at a distance and how is it possible to maintain an independent voice when being offered funds and being flattered in public speeches?

At any rate, confronting oneself with these kind of questions causes a self-reinforcing effect that deepens the common normative grounds. One can learn from such reasoning that the making of civil society apparently results from both: a bottom-up process and a top-down approach.

Reflections on Baltic Sea regional civil society development

What has been mentioned so far is valid for the Baltic Sea regional context, although it is not specific for this region. This is the case with three "gaps" in civil society development in the Baltic Sea region. Overcoming them should draw special attention by all actors who are interested in making sure that Baltic Sea co-operation and region building do not leave aside the making of a Baltic Sea-wide civil society. The three gaps in transnational civil society co-operation in the Baltic Sea region concern parliaments, Russian participation and multilateralism.

(a) The parliamentary gap

The heart of every democracy beats within parliamentary structures. Institutions like committees, advisory panels, commissions, action groups, and forums can serve in linking parliamentary duties and civil society activities (cf. *Arens*); experts from NGOs may assist parliaments in good law-making (cf. *Stephens*). However, in recent years, co-operation between civil society actors and governmental structures developed more dynamically than co-operation with parliamentary structures. Further, parliaments apparently are hardly part of the game when it comes to the international sphere and region-building. Numerous declarations by NGOs on issues such as human rights, ecology, disarmament or social welfare are addressed to governments and international governmental organizations and the NGOs have managed to negotiate with the respective bodies. NGOs addressing parliamentary bodies in order to get their assistance is comparatively

seldom. This observation is now and again commented upon as indicating a loss of relevance of Parliaments under the conditions of a system of multi-level governance as it is emerging since some years. The Parliaments, it is said, have simply missed the train.

Indeed, as concerns the Baltic Sea the role of parliamentarism in region-building is of a low profile. This statement holds also for the region-wide parliamentary representation, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC). Although it meanwhile has gained the status of a Special Participant in the meetings of the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), it is still a long way from having the mandate and impact of the Parliamentary Assembly of the CBSS. To NGOs the BSPC has to appear to be of a more decorative nature instead of representing a problem-solving capacity. NGOs have not found it very promising to work through these structures in the Baltic Sea Region, although a step was made at the First Baltic Sea NGO Forum in Lübeck at the end of May 2001, when the participating NGOs active in the field of human rights articulated a wish to be invited to the BSPC meeting in Greifswald in September 2001 in order to present their analysis and priorities for action as regards human rights related issues (cf. document *Lübeck Conclusions*).

Until now only minor attempts have been made in order to determine the relationship between the Parliaments of the region and their co-operation on the one hand and regional civil society on the other. What NGOs obviously seek most is stronger parliamentary support for holding "fora" on neutral ground and for establishing a framework that allows reliable contacts, unrestricted exchange of views and a channelling of topics they regard crucial into the political process (cf. *Günther/Wanner*).

After all, some signals exist that parliamentarians do well and encourage thinking on specific arrangements that would allow new policy directions. One example was given by the Parliament of Schleswig-Holstein and the Kaliningrad Regional Duma when they signed a "Memorandum Concerning Parliamentary Co-operation" in January 2000. By this move the two Parliaments supplemented the existing networks of co-operation and partnership and broke new ground by envisaging jointly to strengthen parliamentary co-operation with NGOs, to make use of their engagement as well as their know-how in order to support the socio-political transformation process, and to further the development of a civil society. The Memorandum contributed to encourage politicians in Kaliningrad to put aside a certain hesitation. Despite a creeping suspicion that the new Western emphasis on civil society might turn out to be an instrument of undermining Russian identity and sovereignty, the above gave priority to the hope that civil society co-operation could be instrumental to solving the many problems the Russian exclave is faced by. Earlier in 2001 the Parliament of the German Federal State of Brandenburg joined the Memorandum, and the example still waits for imitation by other regional parliaments around the Baltic rim. Hopefully, the BSPC Annual Meeting 2001 scheduled to be held in Greifswald under the heading "Civil society: A Political Model between Vision and Reality" will develop further ideas on how to bring realities closer to vision and thereby narrow the parliamentary gap in the development of Baltic Sea regional civil society.

b) The gap in participation of Russians

The highest level of cross-border civil society co-operation in the Baltic Sea region exists among NGOs from the Nordic Countries. Civil society co-operation is also relatively easy and symmetrical among actors residing within the EU member-states. Due to intensive backing by international organizations and financial support from Western governments co-operation also began to take place between civil society actors from EU member countries and from EU-candidates, although the interrelations have remained asymmetric. Only relatively few working contacts, however, have until now been established with Russian NGOs. Today it is obvious that Russian NGOs are at risk of becoming excluded from the process of Baltic Sea region building.

Searching for an explanation, one must not follow the predominant Western attitude speaking about civil society in Russia as if it were not yet existing and needed to be built from scratch, at best by Western actors. Many Western politicians seemingly have forgotten that the departure of civil society in present-day Europe is rooted also in this country. The Soviet Union was overcome from the inside and, for example, the non-violent struggle for the independence of the Baltic States was strongly supported by many ethnic Russians. Civil society in Russia does not need to be imported, but to be sensibly supported on an equal base. A broad variety of civil society actors is working in today's Russia. The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia provides just one example of Russian people taking courageous and persistent responsibility (cf. *Hinterhuber*). Indeed, the civil society sector in Russia's Baltic Sea regions could have developed much faster if it had received as many offers for co-operation as was the case with civil society actors in the Baltic States.

There is no need to hide the fact that particular difficulties in co-operation with Russian NGOs exist. Apart from a lack of financial means and a lack of English-language skills these difficulties are deeply rooted in the past. Wounded feelings and the offended pride of many people, a culture of polarisation instead of integration, remnants of cold war attitudes, as well as old and new stereotypes altogether draw day by day a new line between people who live in actual or potential EU member states and those behind this newly established 'curtain'. This, however, is not solely a Russian problem but a European as well and constitutes a challenge for regional cross-border co-operation. This is most visible when it comes to co-operation with civil society actors in Russia's Kaliningrad exclave (see *Birckenbach / Wellmann*).

Pretending that Russia were the only country that is in need of joint efforts to develop its civil society does not meet reality. Instead, it should be acknowledged that special efforts are needed to compensate Russian partners for their structurally more unfavourable situation and to make sure that they are nevertheless represented equally in the process of building a regional civil society. However, especially as concerns transnational engagement, "development aid" is by no means superfluous even for civil society actors in Western countries. Their needs and deficiencies concerning their potential to strengthen transnational ties may differ. Of course, NGOs in the Nordic countries may be ahead, NGOs in Russia may be behind as regards international contacts and experiences or in terms of financial or ideal support. Despite these different/asymmetric departures no

reason for superciliousness exists on whatever side. All will have to learn and to develop their style and their priorities; region-building across the existing divisions is to all participants in the Baltic Sea Region a new challenge and needs fresh ideas and new political skills to be developed on all sides.

c) The gap in multilateralism

In recent years states have created a number of multilateral institutions and instruments in order to better co-ordinate their policies, to achieve common goals, to increase transparency, and to avoid mistrust which previously often resulted from bilateral approaches to foreign relations. The decision of the member states of the EU to pursue a Common Foreign and Security Policy, the development of a Common Strategy on Russia by the EU and the establishment of the Council of the Baltic Sea States are some such multilateral measures of importance for the Baltic Sea Region. They contribute to civilise economic and political competition among states and thus enhance peace. Sub-regional actors have joined this process and became a driving force of Baltic Sea regional multilateralism. The major cities of the region established the Union of the Baltic Cities and the sub-regions formed the Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Co-operation (BSSSC). Both were granted, like the aforementioned BSPC, a status of "Special Participants" in the CBSS structures, reducing slightly its state-centred character. Economy has access to the CBSS channels via the Baltic Business Advisory Council (BAC), whilst civil society, until now, has been left without representation. This might change since civil society actors started to call for respective innovation. Two Baltic Sea-wide NGO meetings held in Copenhagen in March 2001 and in Lübeck in May 2001 requested an improvement of links between the NGO level and the government level of Baltic Sea co-operation, in addition by convening annually a NGO forum which addresses the CBSS ministerial meetings (cf. documents *Copenhagen Declaration* and *Lübeck Conclusions*).

Why do the existing structures need a participatory supplement? It is obvious that this would increase transparency, public attention, legitimacy and problem-solving capacities of the CBSS process. Moreover, region-building among state and sub-state actors may become undermined if it is not actively supported on the societal level. Transnational contacts have increased particularly in the field of humanitarian aid and cultural exchange. Nevertheless, one serious problem remains; most of the existing cross-border civil society co-operation is organised strictly on a bilateral basis: an NGO from one country co-operates with a partner organisation in another country. As a consequence the contribution to region building and the development of a regional civil society remains limited. Instead, bilateral transnational co-operation is in danger of being biased by national perceptions and priorities. This could be a hindrance in identifying what the region and its people - apart from a few ecological issues - have in common for better or for worse (or should have in common) and at the same time to learn how to cope with diversity. NGO co-operation between NGOs from the Nordic countries and the Baltic countries, for instance, included gender issues on the agenda, but rarely deal with the need to promote reconciliation efforts. This is a topic among many groups from Germany and Russia. Whereas German NGOs try to support Kaliningraders in restoring old Prussian buildings or arrange German language courses, Swedish NGOs invest with the help of Swedish governmental agencies

into health care in the Region. As a consequence, each group is at risk to transport also the ideologies of their nation-state, which might considerably differ from what is meant by a common regional identity. If the emergence of a regional identity is in fact desired, then civil society cross-border activities and their funding have to be based much more on a multilateral approach instead of leaving the organisational, financial and motivational support to the disposition of national bodies.

Multilateralism on the state level, as represented by the EU or the CBSS, and bilateralism on the civil society level, which is the prevailing case at present, do not fit together. The more important are the few examples of NGOs tracking a regional approach concerning their respective issue area (e.g. security or environmental protection) and/or organize themselves multilaterally (cf. *Grönick & Pääviö* and *Günther & Wanner*). The attempt to establish a "Baltic-Refugee-Net" is especially promising because it links regional identity to human rights (cf. *Willer*). However, this net has not yet been established, and it remains a crucial question whether the attempts to bring it to life will find support among the governmental and parliamentary regional structures.

What counts at the end is not the music of declarations, but the progress made in overcoming the barriers for democratisation and a living together in peace, justice and welfare in a sound environment. Region building will fail without a regional civil society coming into existence and without its active participation. Surely, civil society can not substitute for Parliaments. However, the opposite is true just as well: Parliaments can not substitute for civil society - but they can support it.

FRAMEWORK

*Heinz-Werner Arens**

Parliament and Civil Society: Why They Should Co-operate and How They Can Do It. The Schleswig-Holstein Experiences

Civil society has recently already been the topic of numerous newspaper articles or oral presentations. The relationship between civil society and parliament is a matter deserving closer attention especially in view of the changing general circumstances in Germany. When cooperating it is particularly important to know the other party's scope of action and to utilize it as fully as possible for one's own interests.

General framework of the relationship between parliament and civil society

Before discussing the relationship between civil society and parliament in greater detail, I wish to take a look at the general framework:

In view of dwindling public funds, the individual citizen is called upon more and more to play an active part in shaping the development of society. This can only be accomplished by an intact civil society in which cooperation with politics works.

First, let me give a brief outlook on the future development of civil commitment. The importance of social commitment will increase considerably over the next few years. Please regard this against the following background: as already mentioned, the financial restraints put upon the public authorities will in fact force them to retreat to the position of a guaranty authority, providing no more than basic public services.

Politics, of course, won't withdraw completely, but will rather accompany processes in a moderating capacity. Society as a whole will none the less be called upon to contribute to the development of a civil society in Germany and Europe to an increasing extent. Thus, social participation in developing Germany and Europe will play a growing and crucial role.

Public policy, on the other hand, does not want to and will not withdraw from its responsibilities. It will use its position to initiate, steer and accompany initiatives taken by civil society. In future the focus will be on the involvement of citizens in shaping social development rather than on the public policymaking bodies.

There already are several points where politics and citizens meet, where citizens have an influence on policy. On the other hand, instruments are also being developed or are actually being used which permit politics to act according to the

*) *Heinz-Werner Arens* is the President of the Parliament of the German Federal State of Schleswig-Holstein and currently the Speaker of the Standing Committee of the Baltic Sea Parliamentarian Conference (BSPC).

aforementioned criteria and to support measures in co-operation with non-governmental organizations that are the exclusive responsibility of civil society.

In order to give an up-to-date idea of the existing connections, I will describe the ties between parliament and civil society that can be found in Schleswig-Holstein.

Ties between parliament and civil society

Presently, various ties exist between parliament and civil societies. As a rule the aim is to integrate the experience of NGOs into the political decision-making process so as not to be guided by formal or financial criteria only.

Since there is no such thing as direct political lobbying in Germany, the above procedure at least provides pressure groups with the opportunity of correcting political opinion.

Committees

First and foremost, one naturally needs to mention that NGOs are included in the work of parliamentary committees.

The committees conduct hearings of the relevant pressure groups concerning all matters that have been referred or that they themselves initiated. This permits legislators to obtain a comprehensive concept of the interests related to this issue, on the one hand and it enables pressure groups to influence parliamentary decisions by providing information, on the other. The NGOs are asked to submit a written and/or oral report to the committee, but do not have a vote in the political decision.

Advisory Panels

Parliament avails itself of NGOs on a more permanent basis by setting up special panels.

Such a panel is formed in cases where constant feedback from everyone concerned is needed. This may be the case if the general conditions change constantly or if the situation constitutes a continual danger to the parties involved. All members of the panel have the right to vote. However, the decisions reached by the body do not become effective immediately, but are rather referred to parliament for deliberation if necessary. Presently the Committee on North Schleswig, the Committee for Affairs concerning the Frisian Minority and the Advisory Board of Low German are associated with the State Parliament. These panels usually convene once or twice a year and are composed of representatives of the political parties, the pertinent administrative authorities and the pressure groups.

Commissions

In some cases, members of NGOs are asked to join parliamentary commissions. This is done, if the subject at hand requires the direct participation of NGOs from a parliamentary point of view.

In some special instances a parliamentary commission may also be set up without any holder of political office being member. This is only done if one needs to

ensure that the commission's findings will not be subject to political influence (e.g. Commission on Attendance Allowance). Commissions are governed by the same set of rules as advisory panels regarding the weighting of the votes and the effect of decisions (cf. above).

Action Group

Based on the Memorandum drawn up between the State Parliament of Schleswig-Holstein and the Parliament of the Kaliningrad Oblast, I would like to discuss a very vivid, unfolding example of such ties in greater detail.

The parliaments of Schleswig-Holstein and Kaliningrad signed a memorandum on cooperation in 2000. The memorandum aims to promote and develop a civil society in Kaliningrad. We knew right from the start that the job of fleshing out the memorandum with substance could not be done unless non-governmental and non-parliamentary initiatives were involved in the process.

Because of their noticeable, concrete projects the NGOs in particular have a big part in the positive development that can already be plainly seen in Kaliningrad. In their capacity as active "bridge-builders" they have also contributed greatly to making people here in Schleswig-Holstein more aware of the problems confronting the citizens of the Kaliningrad region. In a way, the large number of municipal, social, church, scientific, and private contacts form the foundation upon which the agreement with the regional parliament of Kaliningrad rests.

This is why the memorandum states:

"The State Parliament of Schleswig-Holstein and the Regional Parliament of Kaliningrad aim to intensify the cooperation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and in doing so to utilize their experience and know-how for the social transformation process."

This expresses one of the main strategies for intensifying bilateral parliamentary cooperation. The tremendous efforts made by Schleswig-Holstein initiatives is remarkable indeed. In order to prevent the large number of activities from petering out, however, we founded the Kaliningrad Action Group on May 8, 2001. This new body, responsible for information and contacts, intends to foster the exchange of experience and to streamline the forces that are already having a beneficial effect. This method permits parliament, government and NGOs to work together in building up a civil society in Kaliningrad.

Various criteria are fulfilled from a parliamentary point of view:

- Establishing the action group essentially had the effect of deliberately including the civil societies in the memorandum.
- For its part, parliament meets the demand of the memorandum that the experience be "utilized", which partners of the civil society have already gained from their contacts in Kaliningrad. Thus the memorandum "comes to life" in a way.
- On the other hand, parliament enables everyone involved to open up a new forum to co-ordinate their activities and to help them overcome diplomatic obstacles.

In fact, a highly desirable symbiosis between parliament and civil society results because both sides can put to use their advantages to further the cause.

The action group has been established only recently so there is no reliable experience as yet regarding this co-operation. However, the response to the first invitation, attendance at the meeting, the exchange of ideas and the wishes expressed by the NGOs make me optimistic about a mutually beneficial partnership. As opposed to the examples mentioned above, the action group is not concerned with preparatory work for parliament, but rather on co-operating on an equal footing in partnership.

Forums

The State Parliament holds public forums on current affairs several times a year. These forums address themselves to the public but especially to the pressure groups concerned. Besides a general introduction to the issues at hand by the party politicians there regularly is a lot of scope for open discussion. These meetings are documented and publicized so that an exchange of opinions between parliament and civil society is possible in this fashion.

Parliamentary Society

The establishment of a Parliamentary Society in Schleswig-Holstein produced a forum not immediately associated with parliament. Instead, the society purposely sought to move beyond the framework of parliament. The aim is to enable politicians and representatives of NGOs to discuss subjects outside of day-to-day business untrammelled by party politics. This principle by now has proved successful for the exchange of information and ideas.

Summary

Parliament and civil society are mutually dependent on each other to optimize their interests. To fully exploit the respective potential and to produce quality work, parliament and civil society need an exchange on a regular basis. By now, there are many and proven links between parliament and civil society. There is a great deal of reciprocal influence within the framework of political and social decision-making and activities.

In addition to this, as the Kaliningrad Action Group and the Parliamentary Society show, we will need to pursue new paths paving the way for understanding and joint action so as to generate a better understanding of political and social processes. The tremendous changeover in paradigms manifesting itself in European societies entails that politics must not only create understanding while retreating from certain fields of activity, but must also set the framework in a timely fashion to help society build up structures to cope with the novel responsibilities. At the same time society must be empowered to accomplish its new tasks as easily as possible. Both politics and citizens are called upon to meet these mutual challenges.

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*Petter Wille**

Civil Society and Democratic Development on the CBSS Agenda

The promotion of respect for democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms is a priority of the Council of the Baltic Sea States at the outset of the new millennium. The institutions of the CBSS are not solely responsible for this task in the Baltic Sea region, but work in co-operation with other international fora to achieve this goal, avoiding at the same time unnecessary duplication of efforts.

Background

Soon after its establishment in March 1992, the CBSS set up a special Working Group on Democratic Institutions (WGDI) for the purpose of spearheading common efforts aimed at promoting democratic development in the region. Its mandate includes studying and drawing recommendations on ways of promoting democratic values and principles and supporting further development of democratic institutions in the Baltic Sea region, i.a. by way of sharing positive experience, launching and overseeing concrete projects, promoting people-to-people contacts and cross-border exchanges in the region.

Since the end of the Cold war and the fall of the Iron Curtain, multilateral co-operation in the field of democratic institutions and human rights in Europe has undergone considerable changes and adopted new forms. This has inevitably had an impact on the activities of the CBSS and its WGDI.

As a body of hands-on dialogue and assistance, rather than political decision-making, the Working Group has continuously dedicated itself to practical work, facilitating the preparation of conferences, round tables and seminars, maintaining close contacts and co-operation with the CBSS Commissioner, drafting common documents for higher structures of the CBSS and certain regional events.

Recent activities

The WGDI participated in the preparation of the Seminar on good and efficient administration, hosted by Finland in January 2000, as well as the Round table on the rights of minorities in the Baltic Sea region in Moscow in March 2000. Speeches and presentations delivered at these forums were subsequently compiled and disseminated in printed and electronic form. The Working Group also assisted Sweden in organising the Conference on decentralised co-operation and Local Government in Stockholm in October 2000.

More recently, following up on its own initiative, the WGDI helped Denmark to convene and host the seminar of National/Parliamentary Ombudsmen from the

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CBSS Member States in Copenhagen on 1st March 2001 – the first-ever event of this kind and format to be held in the region. The official texts of the presentations and remarks delivered at the Seminar by the Ombudsmen were compiled and published on the CBSS Website. The Working Group concluded, as did the Ombudsmen themselves, that the Seminar was a success, since it stimulated discussion on recent achievements and future challenges of the Ombudsman institution. A follow-up meeting in the same format is likely to be held in St. Petersburg next year, during the period of the Russian CBSS Presidency. In addition, a proposal has been launched to convene a more specialised regional seminar of Equal opportunity/gender equality Ombudsmen in Sweden.

The WGDJ also supported the process of preparation for the First Baltic Sea NGO Forum in Lübeck by elaborating a background paper explaining the national policies on, and assistance schemes for, NGO co-operation in the Baltic Sea region (also published on the CBSS website). Members of the Group participated in the Forum and will study the relevance of its outcome for the future work of the WGDJ.

Co-operation with the CBSS Commissioner

Overview of CBSS activities in the field of promotion and strengthening of democratic institutions would not be complete without at least a short reference to its institution of the Commissioner, established in 1994. The Commissioner is an instrument for promoting and consolidating democratic development in the Member States, based upon respect of human rights. The Commissioner acts independently and is accountable to the Council.

The Commissioner supports the functioning and development of democratic institutions, including human rights institutions, in the Member States, in particular concentrating efforts on such issues as democracy at national, regional and local level, good governance and administration, good law-making, local self-government, strengthening of civil society and promotion of human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. The Commissioner may recommend or organise seminars and meetings on relevant subjects, serves as a centre for exchange of information on available technical assistance and expertise, national and international programmes aimed at strengthening democratic institutions in the CBSS Member States.

The Commissioner receives and reviews communications from individuals, groups and organisations on the functioning of democratic institutions and human rights issues. The Commissioner has issued a number of surveys and reports on specific topics, and these publications included specific recommendations.

At its 9th Ministerial Session in Bergen (21-22 June 2000), the Council, taking into account the important development towards strengthening democratic institutions and the protection of human rights in the Baltic Sea Region, adopted a revised mandate for the Commissioner and appointed Ms. Helle Degn (Denmark) as *Commissioner of the Council of the Baltic Sea States on Democratic Development* until 30 September 2003.

Members of the WGDJ assist the Commissioner in preparing her visits to the Member States, identifying relevant structures, officials and contact persons

dealing with democratic institution-building or human rights issues and keeping the Commissioner up to date with any administrative or personal changes which occurred therein. Whenever necessary, the WGDI provides assistance in ensuring adequate dissemination of the Commissioner's official documents among relevant structures and authorities in the Member States.

Co-operation between the Commissioner and the Group includes invitations to regular WGDI meetings, visits to the Commissioner's office, exchange of information, follow-up on the Commissioner's past recommendations and surveys. The WGDI follows closely the implementation of the Commissioner's programme of good law-making seminars, providing assistance in their organisation and evaluation, whenever appropriate. The Working Group fully supports the Commissioner's intention to launch, as a next step, a series of three seminars on good governance, as well as to focus in the future on such areas as trafficking in human beings, border crossings and national minorities.

It is understood that the Working Group is not an instrument of implementation of the Commissioner's recommendations at the national level. Instead, the WGDI focuses on bringing political spotlight on issues and areas where the progress in the implementation had been slow or insufficient.

Joining forces with other regional structures

The WGDI maintains close contacts with relevant working structures in other organisations at national- and sub-national levels in the Baltic Sea region in order to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure harmony and synergy of activities. In December 2000, the Group held a joint session with representatives of three organisations with the status of Special Participants in the CBSS. It was stressed that close co-operation with the BSPC, BSSSC and UBC constituted a priority for the CBSS. On this background it was decided that in the future, incoming Working Group Chairmanships would take early contacts, e.g. by written procedure, with their counterparts in BSPC, BSSSC and UBC with the aim of comparing activity plans and calendars of planned events, exchanging information and ensuring synergy of work.

Examples of specific issues

During the past activity year (September 2000 – June 2001) the WGDI discussed its possible contribution to the *CBSS input to the EU Northern Dimension Action Plan*. Project proposals identified in the framework of the Working Group were forwarded to the CBSS Committee of Senior Officials. They will be kept as a source of reference and for possible follow-up in the future.

The topic of co-operation on *Children at Risk in the Baltic Sea region* was on the agenda of two meetings of the Working Group during the past season – before and after the official launch of the IT "Child Centre" project led by Sweden and Norway. The "Child Centre" is a co-operative Internet endeavour (www.childcentre.baltinfo.org) aimed at raising the level of knowledge and co-ordinating activities in the field of prevention, protection and rehabilitation of sexually exploited children. The project is partly financed by the European Commission STOP-project. The WGDI received and discussed the progress report

from the two lead countries for this IT initiative, with the Swedish Special Group on Children at Risk and national experts on children's issues from the Member States taking part. The Working Group also held preliminary discussions on organisational and institutional aspects of the future work on Children at Risk.

Study visits

The WGDI has established a tradition of arranging "study visits" to heads and other responsible officials of key democratic institutions in the Member States, usually the ones chairing the Group at the time. These visits and discussions pursue two goals at the same time: providing opportunities to collect firsthand information about democratic procedures and processes in a specific country and conveying the message about the CBSS and its activities to national authorities and structures working for the benefit of democratic development. During the past activity year, for example, members of the Working Group visited the Icelandic parliament (Althing), Office of the Swedish Equal Opportunities Ombudsman (JämO) and the Icelandic Children's House in Reykjavik. The incoming Norwegian Chair intends to carry on this useful tradition.

Outlook for the future

The WGDI discussed the preliminary work programme of the incoming Norwegian WGDI Chairmanship (2001-2002) and agreed on a set of common priorities and proposals for the next activity period. The Working Group will focus on a selected number of key issues emanating from its Terms of Reference, which include arranging and evaluating seminars and workshops dedicated to sharing experience and exchanging views on common challenges with respect to the rule of law, civil society, transparency and efficiency of administrative practices, access to information, local democracy and citizens' participation; launching and overseeing concrete projects in the field of strengthening of democratic institutions, including technical assistance, local self-government and good law-making.

Good governance and administration enhance the transparency of legislation and promote human rights awareness. These efforts should primarily be targeted at parliamentarians and executives at national and sub-national levels, providing training in human rights and state-of-the-art legislative and governance practices. The initiative of the CBSS Commissioner to hold a new series of mini-seminars is particularly relevant in this respect.

The Norwegian Chair plans to direct the thematic focus of the CBSS Working Group on Democratic Institutions during the next activity year to such issues as civic society, people to people co-operation and NGO participation. The WGDI will follow up on some topics raised by the National/Parliamentary ombudsmen during their March 2001 seminar and, if necessary, provide assistance in arranging their next gathering in the same format.

It is also the intention of the Norwegian Chairmanship to involve the Working Group in a practical discussion on racism and racial discrimination, of the role and functions of democratic institutions in promoting and protecting the rights of children and participation of women in civic life. These issues seem to be of acute relevance for all CBSS Member States, and the idea is to organise thematic

seminars (e.g. on combating racism and on promoting gender equality) where responsible officials and experts could discuss these topics in detail and report their findings, conclusions and recommendations to the Working Group. The aforementioned topics should also offer an interesting basis for practical co-operation with partner structures in the BSPC, BSSSC and UBC and with NGOs.

Finally, it might also be worthwhile from the perspective of promotion and strengthening of democratic institutions in the region to make full use of the opportunities offered by modern information technologies, particularly the Internet. Expert analyses, recommendations and solutions identified in the course of events organised by the WGDI deserve wider and more efficient dissemination not only to relevant national authorities, but also to NGOs and the general public in the countries of the region. Hopefully, the on-going process of technical upgrade of the CBSS Website (www.baltinfo.org) will create new opportunities for spreading the message about the Council's activities and achievements in the field of democratic development and human rights.

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INSPIRING EXAMPLES

*Raymond Stephens**

Assisting, Advocating, Advising: The NGO Centre in Riga

The NGO Centre in Riga is a resource and education non-profit organisation catering to the needs of non-governmental organisations throughout Latvia. Through the generosity and foresight of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Soros Foundation Latvia and the United Nations Development Programme, the Centre opened in 1996 as a non-governmental organisation (NGO) with the mission to promote the development of a democratic and integrated civil society in Latvia. At the end of 1999, the original donors began to phase out their financial commitment to the Centre as part of their agreement when the Centre was founded, and the Centre became self-sustainable with new strategic partnerships.

The Centre's primary objective is to promote the formation of a climate favourable to the development of NGOs. Specifically, the NGO Centre aims to support and promote

- any NGO by providing information, advice and technical assistance;
- co-operation among NGOs and the safeguard of their interests;
- co-operation between the third sector, state and municipal institutions;
- financial support for NGOs;
- co-operation between donor organisations, sponsors and NGOs in Latvia;
- the development of relevant skills within NGOs;
- the principles of volunteerism and to help NGOs in making good use of volunteers; and
- information on the third sector to be available to the general public.

To achieve these aims the Centre has developed a broad range of activities. However, the present article focuses on the Centre's legal advocacy activities, especially the strive for a new, more appropriate legal framework for the work of NGOs.

Advocating a new legal base for NGOs

The NGO Centre's aim to promote a climate favourable for the interests of the third sector includes working together with state institutions to develop and improve government policies is a concrete form of co-operation that the Centre has undertaken. The Centre is recognised by the State as a competent and interested partner, hence it is regularly invited to participate in various government working groups to comment or assist in the preparation of policies and/or draft laws.

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Since laws enabling the establishment of non-governmental and public organisations were adopted at the beginning of the 1990s, more than 5000 organisations have been officially registered, which is a clear sign of society's interest in becoming involved and active members of civil society. However, most organisations operate on a volunteer basis and with very limited funds, mainly the organisation's membership dues, which limits their overall viability.

At the beginning of 2000, the NGO Centre conducted a survey of all 5000 organisations to gain basic information about each organisation. More than 800 organisations responded, but nearly the same number of questionnaires was returned unopened because the organisations no longer exist.

Based on the information obtained, the Centre has concluded that in reality, only 20-25% of all officially registered organisations are active. To a great extent, this is a result of Latvian legislation, which allows NGOs to be established easily, but does not address nor resolve the issue of funding activities of the sector.

In the last year, the NGO Centre assessed and evaluated existing Latvian laws that affect non-governmental and public organisations. The Centre also analysed legislation from countries with a strong and established NGO sector to identify concrete examples suiting the third sector's needs in Latvia. Furthermore, the new Commercial Law, which provided the legal base for many NGOs, is set to expire.

The most important conclusion of the NGO Centre's research is that Latvia needs a new law, as well as several amendments to existing laws, which would regulate and promote the work and development of the NGO sector.

The NGO Centre concluded that the main objective of the new law would be to:

- clearly separate public benefit and mutual (member) benefit organisations;
- introduce clearly defined criteria on the basis of which organisations are granted the status of public benefit organisations and receive a donations permit; and
- introduce procedures for tax relief for legal and private donors who donate to public benefit organisations, which are easy to understand and to apply for.

At the end of 2000, the Minister of Justice and the Director of the NGO Centre reached agreement on the need for a new law on NGOs based on the Centre's research and recommendations. The Director of the NGO Centre was appointed the chairman of a Ministry of Justice's working group whose members included representatives from the State Chancellory, Enterprise Registry, Ministries of Culture, Finance, Justice, Welfare and other relevant institutions.

The working group concluded that several legislative amendments need to be made in order to radically improve the sector's ability to develop. The amendments suggested are

- adoption of a new law on NGOs, which would not include political parties, as the present law does;
- providing definitions and criteria which clearly distinguish mutual benefit from public benefit NGOs and specify that only the latter are entitled to receive tax relief for donations;
- ensuring an easily applicable and understandable mechanism on how to receive tax refunds for individuals that have donated to public benefit NGOs.

Based on the discussions of the working group, the NGO Centre submitted concrete recommendations to the government and parliament on how to improve the NGO legal environment. The priority of the NGO Centre is now to draft a new law and amendments to existing legislation, which regulate the activities of NGOs and to advocate on behalf of the sector's interests.

The Centre also organised public events and forums to discuss its findings and recommendations with all NGOs and individual meetings were held with the leaders and representatives of all political factions in Parliament. An equally important task will be to inform the general public about the needs of NGO's from a legal perspective. An extensive public campaign will be organised throughout Latvia to inform the general public and specific target groups, including members of parliament and civil servants. The Centre will also monitor the developments and trends of the NGO sector to better understand and reflect the challenges and problems faced by the sector. It will continue its current activities to strengthen the co-operation and understanding between the private business sector and NGOs. Working on these issues, the NGO Centre will further implement its mission as an advocate for the third sector's interests and as an agent for mobilising resources ensuring that the NGO potential in Latvia prospers. The aim of the NGO Centre is now to ensure that within 2001 a new law as concerns NGOs will be adopted.

Advising law-makers

The NGO Centre also participated in other legislative initiatives including the government working group to develop the National Social Integration Programme together with representatives from the government and NGOs. The aim of the programme is to promote mutual understanding and co-operation among individuals and different groups living in Latvia. It will support projects on a national and local level aimed at promoting social integration. The programme also aims to promote greater interaction between the state and private sectors as well as the NGO community. The programme was developed in a very progressive manner because it was the first time that the government organised wide-scale public debate on issues which are relevant to the entire population of Latvia. This was an important step towards bringing NGOs and the government closer together to discuss the concerns and challenges that society faces. The NGO Centre played an active role by informing NGOs throughout the country about the programme and the possible impact it could have on different groups (minorities, children, elderly, economically disadvantaged, etc.).

In July 2000, the Civil Service and School for Public Administration requested the NGO Centre to comment on amendments to the "Law on Procedures for the Examination of Submissions, Complaints and Proposals by State and Local Government Institutions". The aim of the amendments was to improve the activities of State administrative and local government institutions and enterprises so that their priority would be the quality of services provided and to guarantee that their work reflected the interests of the public.

A further area in which the NGO Centre has advocated for new legislation concerns the issue of freedom of conscience in Latvia. By the end of 2000, four people have been prosecuted for refusing to undertake military service because

of their convictions. On the initiative of the NGO Centre and the Ministry of Defence, an inter-ministerial working group was established to address this issue. A representative of the NGO Centre participated in the working group. The draft law, which the working group has submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers, provides for an alternative to military service that may be performed in public organizations. Alternative service is anticipated to begin in Latvia in 2002.

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*Eva Maria Hinterhuber**

Struggling for Human Rights in the Army: Russia's Soldiers' Mothers Movement

Russia's Soldiers' Mothers Movement emerged when the struggle in the Baltic Republics of the Soviet Union for regaining their independence had already gained momentum.

In 1989, the Latvian women's league published for the first time a list of draftees who died after being tortured or subjected to violence in the armed forces. In the same year, as a reaction to the list and to the discussion in the media, relatives of the soldiers affected started to establish representative interest groups which were aiming on the protection of the rights of conscripts, of soldiers and of their families. The Moscow "Committee of the Soldiers' Mothers of Russia" started the ball rolling. Since then, more than 100 regional groups of Soldiers' Mothers have sprung up.

In autumn 1994 the war in Chechnya set in motion a mobilisation of Russia's Soldiers' Mothers to an extent never previously reached, not least because the rights of the servicemen were also massively violated. The Soldiers' Mothers organizations were among the few which protested loudly against the military invasion of Chechnya by the Russian army. The action attracting the greatest attention in connection with this was the 'March of Motherly Sympathy', a peace march from Moscow to Grozny, which took place in 1995.

Today the war is still going on and despite a number of efforts Russia so far failed to reform the army in a way that conforms with European standards. Russia's armed forces are the locus of innumerable violations of human rights. The spectrum of maltreatment and humiliation which awaits the recruits in their units

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during their military service is wide-ranging: Instances of men being kicked, beaten with belts and chains, strangled and raped have all been documented (e.g. by amnesty international in their yearbooks on the Human Rights situation in Russia). In many cases, the soldiers suffer permanent injury from this mistreatment. According to the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg every year between 6,000 and 8,000 soldiers suffer a violent death during peacetime.

The extent of human rights violations can only be explained by referring to the informal hierarchical status system, the *dedovshchina*, existing side by side with the official hierarchical command. *Dedovshchina* can be meaningfully translated as 'rule of the grandfathers', a system in which those who have been in the service for a shorter period are forcibly suppressed, exploited and systematically maltreated by senior servicemen. The long-known supply difficulties within the Russian forces make the problem even worse.

Although *dedovshina*'s tradition dates back to tsarist Russia, criminal actions and violations of human rights within the armed forces were strongly tabooed themes during Soviet time and remained untouched for long even by *glasnost*' and *perestroika*. The emergence of the Soldiers' Mothers Movement since 1989 has strongly contributed to a development due to which the internal military situation has nowadays become a subject of open discussion.

The Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg

One of the most important organisations within the movement is the Soldiers' Mothers organisation of St. Petersburg. To illustrate the work of Russia's Soldiers' Mothers movement it will be presented exemplarily.

With the creation of an independent Russian Federation, a differentiation among the Soldiers' Mothers Associations took place. It became rigidly established as regards the position adopted towards a possible co-operation with the military and in connection with attempts to centralise the movement in Moscow. Moreover, pseudo-organisations established by the local military commissions in order to discredit the authentic citizens' associations continued to exist even after the end of the Soviet Union.

Building on this background, the independent legal protection organisation of the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg came into existence in 1992. At the beginning, the organisation was financed only by membership fees and donations. Later on, it was supported by the SOROS-foundation, and in 1996 it took part in the European Union's TACIS-Democracy-Programme. Under the so-called programme line SOLIS the Soldiers' Mothers got financial support to organise seminars and conferences (especially for similar organisations in the provinces), to publish information material and to buy the necessary technical equipment. Three of them could be paid a salary for one year. Today the organisation consists of approximately sixty members, women and men alike, who work on a voluntary basis.

Objectives

The immediate objectives as laid down in the statutes of the organisation are the "protection of life, health and civil rights of the military servicemen, of persons

liable for military service and of recruits, as well as the members of their families, help to families of servicemen who lost their lives or were severely wounded or contracted diseases during the time of their actual military service". Their self-declared primary aim is to make a contribution to the development of a civil society. The organisation's task is to keep a check on the institutions of the State, in particular on the Russian armed forces.

Another closely related aim is "to make a contribution to the transformation of Russia into a State under the rule of law, in which the rights and freedom of the people have the highest priority", as it is written in one of the organisation's leaflets. This is an attempt to provide an answer to one of the most severe problems in today's Russia - the discrepancy between norms and reality, not only at the legal level, but also at the level of cultural tradition: human rights are of course anchored in the constitution, but not in the awareness of the citizens. It is for this reason that the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg see their task as one of educating and informing the citizens of their rights and encouraging them to make use of and defend these rights.

The organisation claims to be pacifist and justifies its stand in the following way: In one of its German language leaflets it informs, that "as long as this system [what is meant here is Russia's armed forces; E. H.] continues to exist, in which a specific part of the society is excluded and enjoys no civil rights, so long the key to totalitarianism also continues to exist, and so long no reforms can take place with us". Nevertheless, at the pragmatic level the organisation aims at a reform of the armed forces in the sense of abolition of general compulsory military service and replacing it with a professional military.

Forms of Action

Provision of legal advice constitutes the major part of the activity of the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg. Three times a week, the organisation offers legal support to those who refuse to do military service, those who wish to avoid it, as well as to deserters, both on group as well as on individual level. The organisation does not recognise desertion as a criminal offence; it refers to a law according to which rules set down in the penal code may be violated without being punished in cases of danger to life. Until a court has taken decision the organisation makes secret accommodation available and offers medical, psychological, material and, as far as possible, also financial help.

Furthermore, seminars and conferences are conducted to build up a network of Soldiers' Mothers organisations in Russia.

Since its founding, the St. Petersburg organisation has also collected testimonies to human rights violations in the armed forces. The positive consequences of this meticulous documentation can be observed in particular in the response it gets from abroad. For instance, the resolution on human rights violations in Russia's armed forces passed by the European Parliament in 1995 can be cited as an example thereof.

In the eyes of the Soldiers' Mothers organisation of St. Petersburg, co-operation with international organizations is at present the only way in which pressure can be brought to bear on the Russian government. This opinion is the consequence

of the generally negative attitude of the Russian government towards NGOs in general and the innumerable acts of repression showered upon the Soldiers' Mothers organisation.

Success

According to an US-American study, the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg (as well as the Moscow "Committee of the Soldiers' Mothers of Russia") stand out from other relevant Russian human rights organisations as regards three crucial factors: the scope and clarity of the group's goals, the priority placed on information networks and services, and the ability to generate local sources of economic support, i.e. the capacity to exist even without Western financial support. This guarantees a certain stability in the face of significant social, political and economic changes during the ongoing transformation process.

Despite the Soldiers' Mothers' achievements on the individual level, the information provided by them through their activities and publications has also put pressure on officials to respond to accusations of abuses and misconduct. By protesting against the war in Chechnya they contributed to the spreading of pacifist ideals in Russia. One of their crucial achievements consists in their educational work as regards Human Rights: By campaigning for and referring to this concept they contribute to establish a State under the rule of law.

In this respect, the Soldiers' Mothers organisation of St. Petersburg has achieved a great deal of success – which is due partly to the specific way in which it proceeds in its undertakings.

Strategies

The armed forces of Russia are characterised by the Russian scientist Levinson (in an article published 1997 in the German journal „Berliner Debatte Initial“) as following: "The Soviet army, the products of whose dissolution represent the armed forces of present-day Russia, established a very specific 'demographic' concept of war. The so-called living forces constitute only a kind of material to be used along with other materials like fuel, ammunition etc."

The Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg resist this abstraction from the concrete subject in the military and emphasise the local, physical and social existence of the subject. In its world-view as well as in its objectives, forms of action, and texts the organization places the individual and his personal fate in the foreground. It refers to the ascribed responsibility and authority of women in the protection and saving of life, especially in their roles as mothers. By pushing the family into the field of vision, it focuses attention on the social relationships of the affected people. In this way, the Soldiers' Mothers attempt thus to return to each one his individuality which got lost in the armed forces according to the described military logic.

The organisation chose - as other Soldiers' Mothers organisations - the emblematic designation "Soldiers' Mothers" and, in doing so, confirmed the traditional image of women as mothers. Western style women's organisations sometimes have difficulties in understanding this self-portrayal of Russian women activists.

At the same time, however, it must not be missed that the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg broke with the corresponding role assignment in two respects.

First, the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg stand in contradiction to the traditional image of "the mother of soldier sons". They refuse to play the role of the "victim mothers for the nation" (a quotation of the American scientist Cynthia Enloe), demanded of women equally in times of peace and war and keep away both in word and deed from ideologies that promote such identification patterns by their pacifist stand.

Furthermore, in their actions, they also break with the traditional image of a woman banished to the private, supposedly apolitical world - as can be seen already in their demands for massive publicity. Their practice of resistance is not in conformity with the traditional role assignment. This becomes especially clear as regards the object of their criticism, the Russian armed forces. Evgenija Borisova, a Russian journalist wrote in an article published in the St. Petersburg Press in 1996: "These women have dared to oppose the most powerful body in Russia: the Russian army."

Nevertheless, by emphasising the role of motherhood and family and by presenting their work as primarily motivated by moral and religious convictions, the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg employ the traditional role patterns prevalent in nowadays Russia. To the extent to which in these points the Soldiers' Mothers make use of them, their specific form of reference to these fulfils also the function of legitimising their practice of resistance and helps to ensure acceptance by the public. A form of resistance which gains legitimacy via the existing traditional image of woman, via morality and religion, cannot, in contrast to directly politically articulated protest, be interpreted by the State as something directed against the society itself – a fact that can be interpreted as one key to success of the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg.

More than anything else, Russia's Soldiers' Mothers need the attention of the general public - nationally and internationally. Therefore, to invite them to conferences, to visit their organisations and to spread information about their work is one possibility to support their activities. Not only in the provinces, Soldiers' Mothers organisations are also interested in further Human Rights training and in information about the legal status of soldiers or the experiences of other countries e.g. as regards an alternative civil service.

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Pioneering Security: The Finnish Committee for European Security (STETE)

After the significant changes in the European security architecture starting from the very beginning of the 1990's security issues are widely regarded to be no longer primarily of military nature. Instead, they gained a wider, more human dimension. Networking and co-operation of politicians, officials and civic society actors from all Baltic Sea countries are important in order to have a fruitful base for common future challenges. It is the idea of STETE, *The Finnish Committee for European Security*, to provide a platform for dialogue, however, of unofficial character in order to include also decision makers in the discussion of matters regarded by them to be sensitive.

STETE's roots

STETE was established in 1970 to support the initiative for the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE, today the OSCE). The Committee joins all leading Finnish political parties, also women, youth and student organisations of the political groups, and a variety of Finnish non-governmental groups and organisations, such as trade unions, peace organisations, the Paasikivi Society and the Association of Finnish Adult Education Organisations (together 27 member organisations, out of that 21 political organisations; STETE does not have individual members). Its executive committee consists of representatives of leading political parties and is currently chaired by Mr Kimmo Kiljunen, Member of the Finnish Parliament.

STETE promotes both a national (Finnish) and an international (Baltic Sea wide) discussion on security issues by organising seminars and conferences on current topics, publishing a quarterly bulletin *European Security – OSCE Review* and books on security issues. One of STETE's most important tasks is to co-ordinate the work of the *Nordic Forum for Security Policy*, a group for Nordic-Baltic discussion in the spirit of security in a wider sense. Designed as a place where parliamentarians and politicians can meet unofficially with researchers, experts, NGO-representatives and journalists the Forum has emerged as one of the leading forums for informal dialogue on security issues within the Baltic Sea region.

Small can be big – from initiative to action

In the beginning of the 1980s the different political groups at the Finnish parliament made an initiative to establish – via STETE – a platform for discussion on security questions between the Nordic countries. This was special because security issues were not discussed in the Nordic Council, just as nowadays they are excluded from the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS). Step by step the unoffi-

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cial discussions expanded from disarmament and arms control to include other security issues and led to the establishment of official working groups between the Nordic Countries. This is an example how the parliament groups were able to co-operate with an NGO and the outcome was fruitful for both sides.

Within civilian crisis management STETE was one of the pioneers in the Finnish discussion in the beginning of the 1990's. STETE made an initiative to the foreign ministry of Finland to appoint a committee to study the development of a civilian crisis management and early warning both in peace keeping situations and human catastrophes. As a result the foreign ministry did appoint a working group to prepare a report which was then presented to the parliament. STETE made also another initiative to the ministry of labour to use persons undergoing non-military service in international civilian crisis management tasks. At that time the initiative did not result to an outcome but the discussion has continued and recently the Finnish minister for defence presented such an idea to public discussion. Since these initiatives STETE has closely followed the development of civilian crisis management and included the theme into its seminars, conferences and publications. In 1996 the Swedish and Finnish foreign ministers made a joint initiative for the EU to strengthen the EU's conflict management capability - that today is one of the central priorities of the EU. STETE supports all initiatives to educate NGO specialists for civilian crisis management tasks and encourages dialogue in civil military co-operation for instance in STETE's bulletin.

STETE's latest activities

Nordic-Baltic forum and the northern dimension

Over the past year, Russia's Kaliningrad Oblast often made headlines in the context of stability and co-operation in the Baltic Sea region as well as EU enlargement. Against this background of increased attention, STETE together with the Kaliningrad State University organised a Nordic Forum for Security Policy Conference in Kaliningrad on 8–10 February 2001. Its main objective was to provide a platform for an open and concrete discussion of the possibilities for enhanced co-operation in the region and the place and role envisaged in this respect for Russia's exclave on the shores of the Baltic Sea.

Some 260 participants from 22 countries and international organisations attended the conference, making it probably the biggest event of its kind having been held in Kaliningrad in years. Among the speakers were high-ranking politicians from virtually all Baltic Sea states, such as the new Governor of the Oblast Mr. Vladimir Yegorov and the Finnish Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr. Erkki Tuomioja, as well as researchers and representatives from the media and from NGOs, such as the Peace Union, the Youth Co-operation Allianssi (Finland) and the Danish Russian Association.

The discussion at the three-day conference encompassed a wide array of questions, such as: What is to be done in the future when Poland and Lithuania join the EU? How could the Northern Dimension initiative really provide new possibilities for co-operation? How to encourage networking and co-operation between civil society actors? Whilst the big decisions will obviously be taken in the framework of official negotiations between Russia and the EU, the conference provided

a broad discussion forum for several key issues and came up with a lot of initiatives for the future.

The Nordic Forum for Security Policy will continue its series of conferences and of open discussion forums. The Forum would like to see the Baltic Sea region as a strong area of co-operation in as many fields as possible and had organised events similar to the Kaliningrad Conference already earlier in Estonia, Lithuania, Russia (St Petersburg) and Poland. The discussion on co-operation and confidence-building in the Baltic Sea region and in Northern Europe will hopefully continue at a meeting scheduled to be held in Murmansk in 2002.

NGOs and the CBSS

We support the initiative of the 1st Baltic Sea Region CBSS NGO Forum organised in Lubeck, 28-29 May 2001, to create a permanent NGO network and forum to complement the governmental and parliamentary co-operation. The NGO forum could meet regularly once a year before the CBSS ministerial meeting in the country chairing the CBSS. The permanent network would allow contacts, dialogue and an exchange of information between the NGOs and the CBSS. In international activities one of our main priorities has been to activate civil society co-operation within the Baltic Sea countries and areas of the Northern dimension of the EU. We believe that NGOs have an important role in contributing to the public awareness and strengthening democratic development in the member states of the CBSS. With knowledge on every-day life, NGOs often are better acquainted with the problems and demands existing in society and which should be taken more serious on all levels of decision-making.

Soft security

Even though the world is becoming smaller all the time, the problems of racism are increasing all over Europe, also in Finland. STETE has taken up issues of racism, its roots, the responsibility of the media etc. In addition to international conferences on the Holocaust in 2000, in summer of that year STETE organised a seminar on "Dealing with the Holocaust Past" in the Finnish Parliament. The aim was to show where racism can lead at the worst and also how different countries have coped with their past – a fact which effects their present. The Swedish government launched a campaign *Living history* to tell the children on the holocaust and to raise questions on equality and democracy. A publication serving this campaign became very popular in Sweden and was available free of charge to every Swedish household and school. It was translated into Finnish and STETE's idea was partly to pay attention in Finland to this successful campaign having taken place in Sweden. At the same time there was a study book edited in Germany on *Learning from History - The Nazi Era and the Holocaust in German Education* (2000, Bonn), with a CD Rom that was delivered for the audience of the seminar.

At the moment STETE responds to the concerns on the situation of the Roma minority in different European countries, both East and West, and is going to organise a significant seminar on *Roma Participation in Europe* in the Autumn of 2001 in Helsinki together with the *Finnish Advisory Board on Romani Affairs* (RONK). The aim is to discuss Roma participation and particularly focus on the

initiative made by the President of Finland, Mrs. Tarja Halonen, to create some kind of consultative assembly to represent the Roma minority on the pan-European level.

Assessment and self-criticism

Strengths

To criticise oneself is difficult. It is easier to find positive aspects: STETE's strength is its flexible structure that allows rapid responses on needs to organize smaller events on pressing themes. One of the specialities of STETE is its close links to all political parties and the parliament, scholars and civil society actors – there are many people from very different background involved in our activities. STETE co-operates closely also with organisations and activists in the peace movement and because of its good reputation as an organiser of interesting events it is easy to find experts and speakers ranging from high-level specialists to grass-root activists to present their ideas in seminars, conferences and publications. Providing deeper insight in problems and challenges STETE acts as a mediator and interpreter between decision-makers, administration and civil society.

Weaknesses

STETE's strength can also be considered as a limitation. Because of its nature as a forum for dialogue and the membership of different political groups and organisations, STETE must respect the variety of its member's views. Thus it cannot always assume sharp positions in all issues but it can contribute to an exchange and be a forum allowing different views to be presented.

Modest finances is a weakness that faces many NGOs and their networking. This goes for STETE, too. It is often impossible to respond all the hopes and wishes for seminar initiatives and other activities because of limited funds and staff. This also hampers STETE's participation in international co-operation and networking which would be of great importance.

One could criticise that it is impossible to be independent and receive government subsidy at the same time – but as far as STETE's experiences are concerned never such danger occurred thanks to the Finnish system where it is normal that NGOs receive government subsidy without administrative interference. In countries with a small population, basic public financing for NGOs is necessary in order to offer democratic channels to influence the development of the society and to increase democratic input and output. Besides, private financing for NGOs is also in danger to be accompanied by conditions.

Instead of competing for scarce resources organisations should together lobby for better and more fruitful co-operation between NGOs and decision makers in all levels and also for more funds for civic activities in order to strengthen democratic participation in public affairs.

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Wolfgang Günther & Antonia Wanner*

Founding a Family: The Environmental NGO-Network Coalition Clean Baltic

Leningrad, 1989:

On invitation of the State Association for Culture of the Leningrad Oblast representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from Western countries met with Russian officials from cultural and environmental institutions. Before, some of the visitors had been in contact with an independent environmental protection group in Leningrad. At the foreign delegation's request also representatives of this group were invited. Besides the official programme a lively exchange of experiences between the activists from the East and the West arose. Further, through the contact to foreign partner organisations the local group gained access to official talks and received an attention by governmental bodies and the public that it otherwise would not have had. At the same time the Western NGOs learned a lot about the difficult situation of independent environmental groups in Leningrad and gained insights which otherwise would have been impossible, but which were necessary for realistically assessing the state of Baltic Sea Region environmental protection.

Similar experiences were made by several people from different environmental NGOs at various places around the Baltic Sea at the end of the 80s. This led to the wish to intensify co-operation among the region's environmental activists. It was felt enthusiastically that there should be a common platform to meet and to work together. In February 1990 some of these activists met in Helsinki and founded an international network of environmental NGOs in the Baltic Sea Region, the Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB). An important step towards more intensive co-operation was done.

Today CCB is a network of 28 organisations in 9 countries. CCB's member organisations have over half a million members in total. The vision behind CCB is that the Baltic Sea is common to all and should unite people, not separate them. The political changes in Eastern Europe opened new possibilities for co-operation between people from all countries around the Baltic Sea aiming at protecting the environmental values of the region. The large catchment basin of the Baltic sea, with all its river systems, unites people in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Russia, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Germany. To protect this sensitive semi-enclosed sea it is not enough to work only on the national level, but requires co-operation throughout the whole catchment area. To initiate, promote and facilitate this co-operation on the grass-root level is CCB's main activity.

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More than any other organisation, the CCB initiated and developed co-operation among non-governmental organisations in the Baltic Sea Region. It created a new and unique meeting point for environmental organisations in the whole Baltic Sea Region and has strengthened the importance of the environmental movement, especially in the countries in transition. CCB works in an efficient and concrete way to improve the environmental situation of the Baltic Sea and in its catchment area, thereby focussing on problems which can be solved by cross-border co-operation of environmental organisations and different authorities. CCB does not only strive for improving the chemical parameters of the Baltic Sea that would constitute good water quality, and for improving and restoring the biodiversity of the sea, but also for getting the people living in the catchment area involved into the process of making the Baltic Sea a living sea!

*Proposals by the Coalition Clean Baltic
for desirable action
to be taken by the Baltic Sea Parliamentarians*

CCB would like the Baltic Sea Parliamentarians to

- offer thematic fora which allow representatives from NGOs and GOs as well as independent experts to meet and to discuss on "neutral" ground issues ranking high on the agenda;
- establish a regular exchange of views with NGOs in order to improve common understanding and co-operation, e.g. by organising once a year an informal round-table with not more than 15 participants from national NGOs engaged in Baltic Sea environmental protection;
- appoint NGO contact persons for topics such as fishery, agriculture, shipping etc. in order to facilitate communication and co-operation;
- bring issues raised by NGOs to the attention of the public and of the governments, e.g. by adopting respective motions.

CCB's overall aim is to conserve and recreate the environment and the natural resources of the Baltic Sea Region. To achieve this aim the member organisations co-operate actively. They focus on identifying and promoting constructive new approaches which allow people to feel as being a part of the solution and thereby strengthening democracy.

Three examples shall show how this is put into practice:

1. In Soviet times lighthouses powered by radioactive thermonucleid generators were built along the coast of the Baltic States and Russia. CCB member organisations made this issue public and started campaigning against the use of this dangerous form of energy supply. As a result of CCB activities the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) agreed upon a recommendation to remove all radioactive thermonucleid generators from lighthouses around the Baltic Sea. Today, in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia these batteries do not exist any more.

2. In order to raise public awareness CCB organised Baltic Sea Ship Campaigns in Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Russia. During these summer campaigns ships call various ports, allowing a large number of people (decision-makers, mass media, tourists, and inhabitants of the harbour towns visited) to be effectively reached by information regarding the Baltic Sea, its environment and how everyone in his or her daily life can contribute to its protection.
3. An enterprise announced to newly construct a huge ferry terminal on the Estonian Island Saaremaa next to the National Park of Vilsandi. However, the Estonian Green Movement, a CCB member organisation, started a comprehensive national and international public campaign and lobbied against the project successfully: the Minister of Environment of Estonia declared to oppose a terminal at this place. Now the company is searching a less sensitive location for its ferry terminal.

St. Petersburg, 2000:

Again, a conference of environmental NGOs was held in Leningrad, however, meanwhile re-named St Petersburg. In contrast to the meeting of 1989 it was hosted by the independent NGO "Green World". It had invited to join the celebration of CCB's 10th anniversary and annual international conference. The meeting started with a press conference. The room was crowded with journalists. "We had never got that much attention, if we were not member of the international network CCB", Oleg Bodrov, chairman of Green World, told us gratefully after the meeting. To have international contacts is still very important for the work of NGOs in Russia.

The highlight of the first conference day was the speech by Professor Alexey Yablokov from the Russian Centre for Environmental Policy in Moscow. Professor Yablokov is one of the most famous persons in Russian environmental policy. His speech can be briefly summarised like this: Forget about environmental protection in Russia as long as we do not manage to establish a functioning civil society. He observed Russian policy rather to be "de-ecologized" at present. E.g., President Putin recently dissolved the National Committees for environment and for forestry. Furthermore, construction of 40 new nuclear power plants is under consideration, some of them afloat on pontoons, i.a. in the Baltic Sea.

To oppose this development, Professor Yablokov regarded environmental organisations like Green World to be of utmost importance, especially if backed by international partners such as the CCB. Therefore, he delivered his birthday greetings for CCB in gratitude for its work done with respect to the protection of the Baltic Sea environment, but above all for its promotion of social and democratic structures in society.

For example, Green World set up a website (www.greenworld.ru) and is practising transparency of information. Supported by CCB it critically informs the public about environmental issues in North-western Russia. A special focus of their work is on struggling against the nuclear power plants in Sosnovy Bor. Four reactors of the Tschernobyl-type are still operating in a closed zone which can only be entered with a special permission. Green World keeps the national and international public informed about what is happening behind this secret wall

since 1988. It is hard to estimate what would have happened if Green World had not played this role of a watch dog. The international community is thankful: in May 2000 Green World was awarded one of the Baltic Sea Prizes from the Foundation for the Baltic Sea for its successful engagement.

In the evening of the conference musicians joined the meeting and the participants from the entire Baltic Sea Region chatted, sang or strolled along the beach of the Gulf of Finland enjoying the nearly white nights. Such socialising among CCB-networkers allows to experience the CCB family and is one of the most valuable sources of motivation for our work. A very important component for the CCB approach is "to save environment and have fun together".

The conference ended with an excursion. Green World managed to get a permission for the participants to enter Sosnovy Bor. Four reactors, one intermediate storage for spent nuclear fuel as well as nuclear industrial enterprises and research institutions form the core area of the closed zone in which also the town Sosnovy Bor is located. About 80 % of the inhabitants of Sosnovy Bor work for the nuclear industry. One of them was Oleg Bodrov, the host of the conference and the chairman of Green World. Of course, being an opponent of nuclear power he does not find much support in a nuclear city. The inhabitants can imagine the economic consequences of a shut-down of the nuclear complex much better than the consequences of radioactive contamination. Thus, he is very grateful to have friends backing him from outside the area and from abroad.

At the outlet of the cooling water the excursion group stopped. Some children were sitting at the concrete banks of the discharge channel fishing in the shadow of the reactor. Nowhere else they catch as much as here in the warm water. The ecosystem Baltic Sea is less grateful. The thermal pollution by the power plant takes effects far out into the Gulf of Finland.

No doubt: there is still is a lot of work ahead. But CCB offers a very helpful framework to tackle these tasks as good as possible. CCB started with a lot of enthusiastic people and this enthusiasm is still alive. It makes the CCB-network active, committed and hopefully long-lasting. The CCB family lets us feel that we are not alone, that we can achieve a valuable contribution to the maintenance and restoration of our common Baltic Sea. This is a good feeling. We will continue.

If someone would like to join our CCB family, she or he is very welcome. On the website of the CCB (www.ccb.lt) there is a list of all member organisations and further interesting information about our network. The CCB's international secretariat in Uppsala is ready to help when it comes to more detailed questions.

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*Astrid Willer**

The Refugee Council Schleswig-Holstein: Towards a Baltic Refugee-Net

Why do we support refugees?

50 million people world-wide are fleeing from civil wars, violations of human rights and dictatorship. Ecological and economical catastrophes force people to leave their countries. New ethnic conflicts arose after the decline of the communist system. Globalization progressively opens the borders for goods and investments to flow in but not for human beings. Whilst the citizens of the member states of the EU are free to travel and to work in other member-states, restrictions for Non-EU-citizens have become stronger because of several agreements like the Schengen Agreement or the Dublin Convention which are meant to "compensate" the opening of borders.

Even for people looking for shelter the situation has worsened in spite of existing international instruments like the Geneva Convention of 1951 and its protocol of 1967, the European Declaration of Human Rights or the Convention against Torture. The international human rights instruments have been interpreted in a very restricted way in many European countries. Germany for example does not grant asylum for people from Afghanistan. They are not regarded as persecuted by state authorities because Germany does not recognise the Taliban-regime as a regular government. The refugees from Afghanistan cannot be expelled, but they stay without the right to learn a profession or without the right of family-reunification. Many asylum seekers are also confronted with discriminating laws restricting for instance their freedom of movement or their right to work. Thus, there is a need of advocating the right of asylum and shelter as well as better living conditions for refugees.

The concept of Refugee Councils in Germany

Due to German federalism there is no official nation-wide structure of refugee aid existing, the way it does for instance in most Nordic countries. There are different welfare organisations mandated by the governments of the German Federal States to support refugees and asylum-seekers as far as lodging and everyday needs are concerned. Some of these organisations also give advice and are willing to advocate the rights of refugees. But the support which is provided by welfare organisations based on their official mandate is frequently insufficient compared to the problems of refugees, who for example are not eligible for receiving legal assistance free of charge and who are faced by many restrictive rules set forth by the German Act on Aliens and by the refugee laws.

Therefore, in parallel an independent structure of refugee aid developed, based on regionally active advisory-centres, church groups, initiatives and individuals engaged in human rights. Against this background refugee councils in every

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German state were founded. Their aim is to improve the living conditions of refugees and to advocate the rights of refugees. They co-operate mainly in the framework of their membership in the nation-wide organisation *Pro Asyl* (www.proasyl.de). Most refugee councils work on a voluntary basis. Only a few, like the *Refugee Council Schleswig-Holstein*, have a budget to employ a small staff for part of the activities.

The *Refugee Council Schleswig-Holstein* is an independent umbrella organisation of advice centres, initiatives, organisations and individuals engaged in refugee aid activities in Schleswig-Holstein. It was founded 1989 and exists as an civil association since 1991. It is a non-profit organisation. In the beginning it worked on voluntary basis. Since 1997 the Refugee Council receives a subsidy by the government of the Federal State of Schleswig-Holstein, which made it possible to open an office in Kiel. At present three persons are working in the office. The Refugee Council gets additional financial support through donations, membership fees and fund-raising in order to cope with its vast range of activities, of which only some are mentioned here:

The Refugee Council

- counsels its members (120 organizations and individuals) and other interested groups on questions concerning the rights of asylum seekers and foreigners, and provides them with information about the development of legislation and politics on asylum and refugees;
- informs the German public on the situation in the countries of origin and on the development of asylum legislation in Germany and Europe;
- organises public meetings, press conferences and training seminars on issues concerning international migration;
- advocates the rights of the refugees and the improvement of their living conditions vis-à-vis the local authorities and the government of Schleswig-Holstein and hold regular meetings on these issues with politicians from different levels of decision making;
- co-operates on respective subjects with churches, charity organizations and human rights groups, political parties, administrative bodies and local grass-roots initiatives;
- publishes the German language quarterly *Der Schlepper*.

By being a member of *Pro Asyl* the *Refugee Council Schleswig-Holstein* participates in refugee aid networking on the national level. Located at the Baltic Sea with the Nordic countries, Poland, Russia and the Baltic States being the littorals the Council also faces the need for multilateral cross-border co-operation. In particular this is true in view of the EU expanding eastwards. The EU demands from the candidates, including the Baltic States and Poland, to implement the Schengen agreement by accession at latest. This will also have an effect on Russia, in particular its Kaliningrad Oblast. Further, the process of harmonisation of the asylum and migration policies inside the European Union concerns all states in the Baltic Sea region. This development calls for the civil society in the Baltic Sea area to get engaged in order to make sure that the existing international conventions for human rights are fully implemented also in practise in all states concerned.

For this reason the Refugee Council is preparing for a Baltic Sea Project, which includes organizing a conference and establishing an electronic network as well as an online-school.

The Baltic Sea project and its background

In forerun to the forthcoming EU enlargement bi- and multilateral co-operation among Baltic Sea littoral states increased already, however, mainly driven by economic and civil security interests. In consequence of tightening and harmonizing the laws on asylum and refugee rights throughout Europe, Germany's borders with Poland and the Czech Republic as well as the Eastern borders of the EU-candidate states for instance Poland's borders with Belarus, the Ukraine and Russia (Kaliningrad) have been closed for refugees.

From the point of view of state security institutions the consequence is an increasing "illegal migration". However, NGOs engaged in refugee aid perceive refugees as being in the situation of victims.

Refugees are more and more forced to make use of escape helpers or to enter the country on dangerous routes, avoiding the official border crossings. One of these routes goes across the Baltic Sea. Due to such circumstances refugee families are regularly separated on their flight route. Refugee assistance groups are increasingly asked to search beyond national borders for lost relatives. For Germany the flight route across the sea is new, however, increasingly gets visible. The German Ministry of the Interior informed on 20 March 2000 that there had been 349 "illegal immigrations" coming via the sea in 1999 as compared to 191 in 1998.

State security institutions from countries of the Baltic Sea area classify the refugee problem within their jurisdiction under the key terms of "organised crime" and "illegal immigration". The border protection structures of the countries in question were co-ordinated and linked-up. They develop a more and more effective co-operation in cases of rejection, deportation and internment of picked-up refugees, for example in the Baltic States.

On the other hand, the network and co-operation between NGOs assisting refugees in the Baltic Sea states is not well developed yet. Initial co-operations have been organised in first line regarding individual cases. A German-Scandinavian seminar in Lübeck, which the *Refugee Council Schleswig-Holstein* organised together with the Commissioner on Refugees, Asylum and Migration Matters of the I Parliament of Schleswig-Holstein in September 2000, was a small step towards the strengthening of co-operation. Representatives of refugee aid organisations from Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Germany compared the effects of the European laws and agreements on the situation of refugees in their countries and discussed different strategies and possibilities of advocating human living-conditions for refugees as well as access to fair legal procedures.

The work of the refugee aid organisations in the Baltic Sea area demands increasingly the knowledge of refugee and asylum politics, as well as of legislation and social conditions of refugees and foreigners. A more intensive networking between the counselling structures in the neighbouring countries is necessary.

The conference "Baltic Sea as an Escape Route" and the "Baltic-Refugee-Net"

For these reasons, the *Refugee Council Schleswig-Holstein* is organising an international conference on the situation of refugees in the Baltic Sea region in co-operation with other organisations like *Pro Asyl*, the *Refugee Council Mecklenburg-Vorpommern*, the Commissioner on Refugee, Asylum and Migration Matters of the Parliament of Schleswig-Holstein and supported by *the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)*. The conference will take place from 16th to 18th November 2001 in the Protestant Academy Bad Segeberg in Schleswig-Holstein.

The conference shall serve the purpose to draw more public attention on the international flight migration in the Baltic Sea region, on the existing political deficiencies in the field in question and last but not least on the victims, the refugees.

The Baltic Sea Conference aims to stimulate networking between the German refugee-aid organisations, who deal regularly with the issue of flight across the sea, like the refugee councils of Schleswig-Holstein, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Hamburg and will bring together persons who are involved on a voluntary or professional basis in the refugee aid around the Baltic Sea. The aim is have an exchange on practical experiences in working with refugees, on current developments regarding the political, legal and social situation of political and war refugees, and on future perspectives of migration work in the Baltic Sea region. Representatives of concerned NGOs and other initiatives from the "transit countries" Russia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia and Poland shall be invited as well as representatives from the "target countries" Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Germany. The Conference will also facilitate discussion between representatives of the refugee-aid lobby and police authorities, border authorities, and representatives of government.

The initiators intend to organise a co-operative electronic network and want to establish together with interested organizations mailing-list and e-group: the *Baltic-Refugee-Net*. It will provide refugee aid organisations with an infrastructural basis, on which contacts established at the Baltic Sea Conference can be continued. Using this infrastructure there will be established an Baltic-Online-School in 2003 organizing online-based seminars on special issues like the situation of unaccompanied minors, family-reunification, development of the asylum legislation etc.

How to support the project

In preparing for a most successful Conference the *Refugee Council Schleswig-Holstein* is looking for further contacts to NGOs and initiatives in the Baltic States, Poland, Russia and the Nordic Countries. The Council will be grateful to receive addresses of organizations, working in this field. In the Nordic countries a developed infrastructure of refugee welfare organizations exists whereas it is quite difficult to get information about refugee support structures in the Baltic States and Russia.

In the past Russia and the Baltic States have mainly been "sources" or transit-countries for refugees. Nowadays some refugees choose them as target

countries or refugees are stopped there unwillingly on their way to Western Europe. So these countries are changing into so-called target countries, which is a new task for the authorities as well as for the NGOs. Thus, the discussions between NGOs from Germany or the Nordic countries and from Eastern and Central Europe first have to clarify the different definitions of for instance "forced migrants", "refugees" or "illegal migrants" and the needs of these groups. Furthermore, due to a lack of funding a firm structure of NGOs engaged in refugee-aid has not yet developed in the Eastern and Central European countries which makes it difficult to get in contact with people or groups interested in the issue.

The conference language will be English with simultaneous translation into Russian and German being provided. Nordic and Baltic language interpreters interested in the subject are very welcomed to support the participants of the conference.

The Baltic-Sea-Project has its own home-page (www.baltic-refugee.net). It informs on our project and its co-organisers and brings news on the development of asylum politics in Europe. The information about the situation and legislation for refugees in the different countries still needs to be completed, so we would be glad to get more information on flight and migration in the Baltic Sea area to publish it on-line.

During a NGO-conference held at the end of May in Lübeck under the auspices of the CBSS, the participants of the concerned working group criticised the fact that the CBSS established a task force on organised crime but has not created a structure in order to improve the social and legal conditions of refugees and migrants. It should be an issue on top of the agenda of Parliamentarians in the Baltic Sea region to promote such a structure of social support coming into existence and international instruments which guarantee minimum legal standards for refugees and migrants being fully implemented. A dialogue with NGOs and support of their activities in this field should be developed in order to facilitate participation of civil society and to fight political and social exclusion in the region.

The participating NGOs and initiatives agreed in the importance of a more intensive net-working in the field of migration. The conference *Baltic Sea as an Escape Route* was considered to be a useful means to strengthen this co-operation.

The programme of the Conference will be available on the home-page mentioned above. For further information please contact the *Refugee Council Schleswig-Holstein* and its Baltic Sea Project.

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SPECIAL FOCUS

*Hanne-Margret Birckenbach & Christian Wellmann**

Kaliningrad: A Pilot-Region for Civil Society Co-operation?

The multilevel structure of Baltic Sea co-operation is an important prerequisite for assuring that negotiations among states meet what people perceive to be the problems relevant to them and to develop the mutually accepted goals of reliability and responsibility. Baltic Sea co-operation under the umbrella of the CBSS includes the sub-regions, the cities, and - although less developed - the parliamentarians. However, until now channels that provide equal inclusion of civil society from the region are lacking. Against this background the first Baltic Sea NGO Forum held under the auspices of the CBSS at Lübeck in May 2001 was indisputably an important step forward in recognizing the capacity of NGOs for region-building. Unfortunately, it also became a confirmation of fears among people living in the Russian Oblast Kaliningrad that they might be left out of the process. Although the list of registrations for the Lübeck Forum included representatives of Kaliningrad-based NGOs, they did not participate. It was not their fault. Already in early spring rumours circulated in Kaliningrad that the participation of NGOs from Kaliningrad was unwanted. Some NGOs nevertheless asked for an invitation to the meeting and finally a few people received one. However, it was sent only a week in advance of the meeting and it is common knowledge that it is impossible for Kaliningraders to apply for a visa on such short notice, at least if they abstain from the means of bribery.

Civil Society in Kaliningrad

Whereas people concerned could not participate in the Forum and its working groups, the future perspectives of the Kaliningrad exclave and the role of the CBSS in the issue were discussed in the speeches held. However, no explanation was forthcoming for why the Preparatory Committee of experienced NGO representatives had not made sure that Kaliningrad NGOs were able to join the meeting. Unofficially, it was said that the NGOs in Kaliningrad were only sticking to their local affairs and had not yet developed a perspective on Baltic Sea co-operation. However, such presumptions completely fail to meet reality.

Just as in other Russian Baltic Sea regions, civil society in Kaliningrad is home to a lively and highly differentiated scene of civil society NGOs, active in fields such as environmental protection, anti-drug campaigning, youth problems, protection of civil and minority rights, migrant affairs, and women's issues. Civil society in Kaliningrad is not a homogenous bloc but a heterogeneous, differentiated and pluralistic entity as regards the forms of organizing and financing as well as the issues of concern, world views, political aims and visions. It combines varying

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political orientations, organizations competing against one another, tiny grass-root initiatives and local branches of national organizations. Possibilities for transnational co-operation between NGOs from Kaliningrad and from abroad already exists or may be initiated in the short term. This is true with respect to most issues which were dealt with in the workshops during the NGO Forum in Lübeck, such as Environment and Sustainable Development, Civil Society, Participation and Human Rights, Youth Co-operation, Access to Information and NGO/GO Co-operation.

Basically, civil society groups in Kaliningrad are challenged by the same problems which respective groups in Western Europe complain about, for instance: apathy among the addressees of one's own endeavours, frustration due to the small impact of their work, fluctuation among the activists, the permanent shortage of funds. Correspondingly, similar internal disputes emerge. How is it possible to balance independence from the power structures which wish to influence them? How provocative must action be in order to raise sufficient attention and where ought limits to be set?

What differs most is the political and societal context in which these common problems have to be solved. They take on a different meaning in a situation as in Kaliningrad where people find themselves confronted with the lack of the rule of law, where poverty is widespread and social care has deteriorated. Faced by such conditions it is much more difficult for civil society actors to raise the élan necessary for a social movement, to find supporters, to vouch personally for unconventional values, to articulate dissent with bodies of power and so forth. Thus, what differs primarily is the socio-economic, political and psychological context in which NGOs in Kaliningrad operate and which they want to impact. In many ways this is the same as with other Russian regions. Specificities do exist in relation to what has been called the "Kaliningrad puzzle". They need to be considered seriously in mutual exchange not only by state actors, but also by active NGOs in order to make sure that civil society co-operation and joint actions meet the criteria of transparency, avoid misunderstanding and actually contribute to region-building instead of restructuring new dividing lines.

Why focus on Kaliningrad?

Kaliningrad ranks high on the current agenda of Baltic Sea co-operation and the CBSS council at its 10th Ministerial Session in Hamburg on 7 June 2001 unanimously stressed the need to insure the involvement of the Kaliningrad Oblast in the economic and social development of the area. The background is the following:

The Kaliningrad Oblast is a place of widespread concern, however a peripheral and isolated place, and it took years to make politicians in Kaliningrad, from Moscow and from abroad ready to recognize officially that in several respects problems do exist. Apart from conflicting perceptions concerning the politics of the international security role of the Oblast and of the military forces deployed there, Russia worries about its territorial sovereignty even though no other state has announced any claims on Kaliningrad. On the domestic level power-sharing between the federal centre and the Russian regions is still disputed and affects negatively the interrelations between the exclave and Moscow as well as the

interrelations between the exclave and other North-Western Russian regions. In particular St. Petersburg and the Leningrad Oblast compete with Kaliningrad as a Russian gate-way to Europe and thus are not too much in favour of the exclave enjoying any privileges which could compensate it for its disadvantaged location. According to official statistics, the economic and social performance of the Kaliningrad Oblast is declining, bringing it beneath the Russian average, not to speak of any comparison with the immediate neighbours Lithuania and Poland. Uncertainty with regards to the social and economic consequences of EU-enlargement has not diminished even after the EU and Russia agreed on desiring the EU-enlargement to create positive effects for Kaliningrad. The worries concern

- the future attractiveness of the exclave for foreign investment and transit trade,
- trade barriers hampering the access of Kaliningrad-produced goods to the neighbouring market and their decrease in competitiveness in mainland Russia,
- the further fate of border trade and energy-supply,
- and last not least severe restrictions on what is a core condition also for civil society co-operation: the freedom of movement of people.

Having the possibility to cross borders easily and frequently is not only crucial due to the existence in an exclave and its economic dependence from exchanges with neighbouring countries. It is also necessary if the widespread wish of Kaliningraders to develop more cosmopolitan attitudes, which in any case are contested by traditional Russian national self-assurance, shall not run the risk of meeting frustration and taking a turn to the contrary.

Furthermore, human needs of local people have been violated. Changes such as the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the introduction of market economy, the outstanding strong reductions in military manpower in the Oblast, the move of neighbours towards the EU and NATO with isolating consequences for the Russian exclave were imposed on the people like a fate which they felt they could hardly influence. A feeling of insecurity is creeping up. It is obvious that the current constellation hinders them from developing at least some confidence in their personal futures. Such self-confidence however is a fundament that allows a person to make plans with regards to such basic needs as education for the children, housing, professional choices, saving or investing money and coping with the enormous stress that derives from modernisation in all fields of social, economic and political life. As a high percentage of Kaliningrad residents, especially younger persons, have never visited mainland Russia, but often have experienced at least Poland and the Baltic States they take the latter, not the former as a measure of comparison when judging their own economic and social situation. Experiencing the welfare gap between Kaliningrad and the surroundings, many people feel aggrieved, some feel ignored either by Moscow or by the West, or even by both. At any rate their feeling of belonging is challenged. The spread of provocative speech and action as well as the spread of rumours add to a psychological constellation that is a hotbed for mistrust, misperception and fears, and hinder 'rational' evaluations of prospects and pursuing concrete tasks.

Among the reasons contributing to difficult problem-solving one finds such strong barriers as (a) national interests, (b) financial restrains, and (c) mentality.

(a) European states may want to find good solutions to the "Kaliningrad issue", however their national interests, priorities and perceptions on what constitutes the problem are rather competing. The priority of Russia is to provide for all-Russian sovereignty, security and economic interests. However, it is not only Russia that has priorities not matching the needs on-site in Kaliningrad. The EU is primarily interested in strengthening integration among the EU-countries and EU-candidates and is afraid of smuggling, crime and communicable diseases. The Polish priorities are determined by the aim that Kaliningrad should not become an obstacle for the accession negotiations with the EU. The policy of Lithuania, EU-candidate as well, is further determined by matters of Russian transit over its territory and its aim that Kaliningrad should not become an obstacle in the Lithuanian strategy to join NATO. For Sweden Kaliningrad is a favourite aid-recipient because it is small enough to make a difference and to test a "soft security" approach. German politicians are in general afraid to touch the Kaliningrad issue in order to subdue voices from the organisations of expatriates and due to mistrust of German motives from abroad rooted in history. Thus the official policy is to declare Kaliningrad either a Russian problem or a European problem and to ensure that it does not become a German problem.

(b) Political and financial resources for problem-solving remain deficient and disproportionate. Efforts to mobilize local, national and/or foreign resources to overcome the economic disaster in Kaliningrad have so far failed although it has increasingly become a topic on the international agenda and a destination for many visits of national and international high-level politicians. Local actors are increasingly frustrated because their expectations that the EU might financially compensate Kaliningrad's isolated position have not been realized. And indeed it is difficult to understand why it has not yet been possible to establish a multi-lateral Kaliningrad Development Fund as has long been proposed by several experts who work closely with the EU.

(c) Much has been said about the "Russian" mentality as a blockade for tackling the challenges of transformation and European integration. However, once again it is not only Russians who 'wait and see'. Although a relatively liberal atmosphere can be found in the Baltic Sea countries, consensus building is hindered by trauma, myths, and hesitations to constructively deal with the past. There is no understanding agreed upon among the people around the Baltic rim what happened during the Second World War, in pre-war times, and afterwards. Up to now it seems to be extremely difficult to initiate a debate even among intellectuals on these issues. The result is that we find many and contradictory attitudes, myths, partiality, and much hesitation to deal realistically with these kinds of issues. Contrary to the situation in St. Petersburg – which has become a positive example for new attempts at East-West-Dialogue – Kaliningrad has become a symbol for all those things that people do not want to be reminded of. For instance, many people still believe that the old German town Königsberg was destroyed by the Russians. They ignore the fact that the Red Army and the Soviet settlers on arrival found a city that had already been destroyed by British air raids in 1944; and that this was the result of a War started by Germany in 1939. In other words, neither in the Baltic States nor in Russia and its exclave Kaliningrad, nor in other Baltic places like Sweden does a common answer exist on the questions of what National Socialism, Soviet rule and the Cold War have

meant to different places in the region. Generally speaking, cold war attitudes and the use of scapegoats have survived in the Baltic Sea region and form a barrier against a creative approach to the various problems of today. Although Russia has proved to be an active participant in Baltic Sea co-operation and has not not got lost in the traps of interethnic disputes in this region, it has not yet been determined whether the people from the region and beyond want to see Russians be integrated more in European structures or prefer Russians to remain outside.

Today it is obvious that the development of Baltic Sea co-operation will be decisive for tackling constructively the Kaliningrad puzzle and for overcoming existing hurdles to problem-solving. Baltic Sea co-operation is accepted by Russia as a conditional way to reliably ensure the stability and security of the Kaliningrad Region, and it has given ample proof of its capacity to initiate a multilateral dialogue and the process of agenda-setting. It is very much to the credit of Baltic Sea networking that Kaliningrad is addressed in the Action Plan for the EU's Northern Dimension adopted in June 2000 and that in 2001 the EU presented in a "Communication on the EU and the Kaliningrad Oblast" a number of proposals on how to solve some of the problems which are expected to result from EU-enlargement. A breakthrough, however, has not yet occurred. National reservations, concurring financial priorities and the mentality of exclusion still rule the game.

However, "Balkanisation" can be prevented. The handling of minority conflicts in Estonia and Latvia provide examples for the region's capacities to deal with even severe conflict by peaceful means. It is an important point of departure that the CBSS has put Kaliningrad high on its agenda. This is also true of the Russian proposal to develop Kaliningrad as a pilot-region in transboundary co-operation within the framework of the Euro-Russian co-operation in the 21st century, as suggested in Russia's mid-term EU-strategy from autumn 1999. In any case, contrary to issues of co-operation in the fields of economy, energy, and transport, the paper did not touch upon civil society co-operation. It is no secret that Russian politicians usually hesitate to refer to this term. Doubt has been raised as to the relevance, however this is not a Russian specificity that. Some Russian politicians consider it being a strategy of undermining Russia's identity and sovereignty, others worry that a focus on such a "Western" issue as civil society could result in a delineation from mainland Russia and could trigger off a process which is neither wanted nor controllable. Thus, until now the discourse on civil society has not been related to the concept of the pilot-region. The question is if such a concept can indeed have a chance of success without the citizens wanting it to be realized and without having a chance to participate in its implementation.

However, one should neither blame Russian politicians nor the European Union's bureaucracy for this reluctance. It is not the duty of states and governmental organizations, but in the first instance of civil society actors to add meaning to what civil society co-operation could add to the concept of the pilot-region, which admittedly is still left in a rather vague state.

A pillar in the pilot-region: expectations

The challenge will be to design a practice of civil society co-operation that meets the needs of the Kaliningrad population and at the same time gives proof that it neither violates Russian interests nor the interests of other states, but contributes to region-building in the interest of all – just as it is the case with the co-operation on state and sub-state actor level in the frame of the CBSS. The effects of such a civil society pillar within in the concept of a pilot-region Kaliningrad will surely remain small, but might matter nevertheless. The major outcome will be quite similar to what politicians already praise as a strength of Baltic Sea co-operation: the density of personal contacts allows a response to certain problems which have to do with the minds and hearts of the people. The experience has been that efforts for co-operation are the more successful the more people know each other, trust each other, are able to understand each other and develop a minimum of personal reliability. Expanded and improved involvement of NGOs into the official structures and as well into the more informal process of Baltic Sea co-operation would certainly contribute to intensify mutual insight, sensibility, empathy and recognition. The expected outcome might take the following directions:

1. Increased involvement of Kaliningrad NGOs might offer to them and their partners a contemporary frame for identification, action and co-ordination.

Kaliningrad, which is not a place of ethnic struggle, is obviously a place where Russian citizens of different ethnicity search for what their "identity" as residents of a "Russian exclave in Europe" is about. This process started already in the 1960s, then as a protest against certain policies during Soviet rule. Nowadays it continues under completely different circumstances, and tends, for various reasons, to take a somehow unrealistic and ambiguous direction of searching for East Prussian history as a 'paradise lost'. Civil society co-operation may introduce new and much broader perspectives. The fact that until now only maps in Russian or German but not in English exist of the city of Kaliningrad although the CBSS secretariat would be prepared to assist in lifting a prerequisite for business and private visitors to more international standard, is only one indicator for what is needed in Kaliningrad in order to cope with the requirements of a globalizing world and an integrating Europe.

Kaliningraders often mock themselves about circulating visions on the future of the exclave such as a Baltic Hong-Kong, a Bridge to Europe or even a Pilot-Region, but instead of transforming them into concrete steps, simply replacing them by the next. Civil society co-operation with Kaliningrad NGOs may help to qualify the visions in the sense of making them more a guideline for action and thereby more realistic. Civil society co-operation might also enhance the concept of Baltic Sea regional identity and contribute to overcome mental barriers against problem-solving, such as the mentality of exclusion, the use of scapegoats, and the spread of rumours instead of information.

Further, increased involvement of Kaliningrad NGOs and their partners in the structures of Baltic Sea co-operation might be helpful in identifying activities that promote pan-European integration (as compared to EU integration) and encouraging multilateral involvement (as compared to bilateral approaches which too often are restricted to single purpose particularities). It would ease

the co-ordination of activities, enhance transparency and allow a broader reconsideration of experiences made. A "Code of Conduct" for civil society cross-border co-operation, distributed with the help of the CBSS in English, Russian and other Baltic Sea languages, would not only encourage solidarity but also provide criteria for action and help to establish barriers against destructive tendencies which might result from frustration, despair or from other reasons. Finally, a "Citizen-Prize", awarded for instance by the BSPC to individuals or NGOs from Kaliningrad which engage in multilateral projects, may help to spread information on best practices.

2. Increased involvement of Kaliningrad NGOs in civil society co-operation would also contribute to the strengthening of the potential for intellectual reflection on the envisaged course of future development of the Oblast. The establishment of an Eurofaculty at Kaliningrad State University by the CBSS in autumn 2000 was an important step forward. However, it should not be ignored that this endeavour is restricted to professional training in law and economy plus some language training. Equally important but missing are measures which enhance the ability of the up-coming regional academic elite to reflect consciously and meaningfully on the overall basics of the societal and political development of Russia and the Oblast within a Baltic Sea regional and pan-European context. A major step in that direction could be to add to the Eurofaculty a visiting professorship in Baltic Sea Region and Russian-European Studies. Such an institution could function as a transmitter between civil society discourse in the wider region and in the Kaliningrad civil society.
3. Finally, the aim of increasing involvement of Kaliningrad NGOs in civil society co-operation will encourage the establishment of a political structure that allows people to meet. While a regime of visa-free entry for the entire Baltic Sea region might not be achieved in the near future, easy entry is a precondition for civil society co-operation, and lobbying for this purpose will be of utmost priority to all who seriously think about Baltic Sea region-building. Some proposals related to costs and facilitation of visa issuance have been made by the EU. Some experts added the idea of creating a special visa for multiple one-day visits, facilitating small border traffic, whilst civil society actors in line with the typical need for their transnational co-operation could lobby for making the slogan "Buy a one-week visa for one Euro" a reality. At any rate, lobbying for easy entry to and from Kaliningrad will irradiate and also give support to the people in those other Russian regions which do not host a Consulate issuing Schengen Visa and also feel that their right for freedom of movement has been neglected. Generally speaking, the more civil society in Kaliningrad is successfully supported by a multitude of actors, the more it will become obvious that this is not only in the interest of the Kaliningraders but is supportive also to other regions in Russia and elsewhere in Europe which face similar problems.

A great deal of efforts will be necessary in order to develop the capacity that can prevent the people who live in Kaliningrad from becoming a sacrifice to the games of high politics. Efforts to bring European politics to solve the Kaliningrad puzzle in a way that meets the interests and needs of the people concerned will take long determined efforts, however success is possible. Previously, politicians

in trouble went to church in order to pray. Today, they give a speech and ask civil society to help. The result depends on whether a path will be opened that allows to develop togetherness. In other words, the impact of civil society in the Baltic Sea region depends on the resources and channels provided to civil society actors by the political structures, as well as on the preparedness of civil society actors to get engaged and make a difference. Kaliningrad may provide the example and serve as a pilot-region.

DOCUMENTS

The Copenhagen NGO-initiative (24-25 March 2001)

The Copenhagen Declaration

Background

The Copenhagen NGO-initiative arranged a NGO-Conference in Copenhagen on 24-25. March 01 with 110 participants representing 61 NGO organizations in 9 Baltic Sea countries. Half of the participants came from following countries: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Russia (Skt. Petersburg and Kaliningrad), the other half from the Nordic countries and Germany.

The NGOs represented different kinds of interest for instance: Culture, Environment, Exchange, Human Rights, Women and Youth.

At the end of the Conference the Copenhagen Declaration of the Copenhagen NGO-initiative was unanimously passed. The NGO Copenhagen Declaration will be sent to the CBSS Ministerial meeting which will be held on 7 June in Hamburg for consideration and adoption. Each national NGO delegation will send the NGO Declaration to their respective Minister of Foreign Affairs asking for support of the recommendations in the NGO Declaration.

Introduction

The aim of this initiative is to secure the civil society and Baltic Sea-based NGOs a stronger role in the development of the Baltic Sea Region generally, and in relation to CBSS specifically. It is a response to the concern of a broad range of Baltic Sea-based NGOs about the current development-path of the Region. The Copenhagen initiative seeks collaboration with, other NGOs, nation states and regional fora.

At an overall level the present forum of NGOs wishes to emphasise that a sustainable development of the Region presupposes stability, which can only be achieved if development is considered as a multi-dimensional and integrated phenomena. Thus taking into account security, social, environmental, cultural, gender and economic aspects. This should be achieved through the principles of transparency, participation, coherence and accountability. Furthermore on a general level it is argued that the regional institutional fora supposed to integrate the Region and set the track towards sustainable development are in crisis and have lost momentum. Generally speaking they produce documents and strategies which are rarely transformed into action.

The NGO community is urged to strengthen its internal communication, networking, sharing of information and prioritise co-operation. Further, the NGOs commit themselves to increase cross-sector co-operation at domestic level with the aim of improving their working conditions.

Recommendations

The NGOs urge Governments to consider civil society building a key issue for development, allowing for public participation and democratisation. The NGOs emphasise the fundamental importance of a well functioning civil society regarding this aspect as having a crucial role for all kinds of activities.

The NGOs call for a strong inter-governmental framework based on high demands of quality in order to promote a strong Baltic Sea-region market based on social, environmental, gender and ethic responsibility. This could provide regional companies with a very strong, competitive advantage and at the same time contribute to sustainable development. The NGOs are keen to establish a dialogue with organisations and initiatives within the corporate sector working within such a vision.

The NGOs support sub-regional exchange and development of intellectual capacity.

"The Northern Dimension" and other regional initiatives should be given a civil society dimension and NGOs should be considered as consulting partners in the implementation of the action plan.

We urge the CBSS to use a broad concept of security emphasising soft and civil security. All confidence building measures, e.g. creation of a nuclear-free zone, should be considered and promoted.

The NGOs in the CBSS area recommend as representatives of civil society that they become actively involved in crisis management actions such as post conflict peace building, involving civil society in prevention mechanisms, and have consultative status or as a minimum be informed about other security measures.

The NGOs urge the governments to commit themselves fully to sustainable development as described in the Brundtland Report. Despite some progress in increasing energy and resource efficiency in production, the total net output and thus pressure on the environment is still increasing, and a much more comprehensive effort is needed. Thus we emphasise the need to revitalise regional structures supposed to be leading forces for sustainable development, such as CBSS, Helcom, Baltic Agenda 21, and Vasab. The revitalisation should be achieved particularly by securing NGO participation in the processes of implementation of the tasks formulated by these structures.

We call for all the CBSS governments and stakeholders to implement the principles of the Aarhus Convention and to ensure that people do really have access to information, decision-making processes and justice. Furthermore the NGOs urge all Governments in the Region to take serious action, regarding the problem of nuclear waste.

The NGOs note that an important economic influx is likely to come into the Region and the CBSS structures in relation to EU accession process. These financial resources should support sustainable development of the weakest regions, promote agri-environmental activities, safeguard the natural values and be used solely to promote empowerment, employment and environment in accordance with the principles of the CBSS.

Within the field of cultural exchange, co-operation between public institutions and NGOs should be supported as a potentially strong force in the development of the democracies in the Baltic Sea Region.

Attention should be paid to exchange of culture in the shape of art, film and literature as a way of preventing the spreading of stereotypes about other people in the Region. An increase in the number of translations must be supported. The NGOs furthermore believe, that the establishment of an annual literary prize would be a great opportunity for increasing public knowledge of literature from neighbour countries in the region.

Generally the NGOs emphasise the importance of a Baltic Sea region where all parties respect and implement the United Nation declaration on Human Rights and other internationally recognised human rights instruments.

In relation to trafficking in women the NGOs call for co-operation between governments and NGOs in countries of origin, transit and destination to address, take measures to combat and prevent trafficking in women.

It is considered vital for the social stability, that policies and measures be developed for supporting the poorest communities.

Finally, the NGOs ask the CBSS governments to improve the domestic conditions for NGOs. Furthermore, each country should secure financial conditions supporting the development of the domestic NGOs.

Final recommendations

Various bi- and multi-lateral funding mechanisms must incorporate substantial space for the issues of civil society building, democratisation and education in all kinds of project interventions. Specifically, there must be better funding possibilities for NGOs to meet across the borders, to inform and educate the public and create independent expertise. The funds should be open for a wide spectrum of organisations and co-operation activities.

It is crucial that all CBSS government see themselves as economically co-responsible for the development of the civil society in the Region. For this purpose we urge that a new democratic fund be established, which should support financially the venues and headed by the CBSS commissioner.

The Copenhagen initiative wishes to support the Lübeck NGO forum initiative and other similar initiatives and it urges that a permanent NGO forum is established. It is recommended that the country of CBSS chairman-ship hosts an annual meeting of the NGO forum preferably as a back-to-back session with the CBSS meeting. The NGOs urge close co-operation between the governments and the NGO forum.

Update: 26-04-01

*1st Baltic Sea NGO Forum under the auspices of the CBSS, Lübeck***Conclusions by the Preparatory Committee**

1. The First Baltic Sea NGO Forum, convened in Lübeck on 28 – 29 May 2001, provided a platform for 151 NGO representatives from 10 countries of the Baltic Sea region to discuss the substance of their work and to develop joint goals and visions as a framework for their activities. At the same time it gave an opportunity for a dialogue between NGOs and Government representatives from the area on future perspectives of NGO–GO co-operation. The Forum appreciated the input from the NGO Conference in Copenhagen on 24–25 March 2001. The Copenhagen Declaration (the Copenhagen NGO Initiative) served as a point of departure for several Forum workshops.

2. A vibrant, broadly based and well-linked NGO community is considered to be essential for *further democratic development of the region*. NGOs play an important role of watchdogs holding authorities accountable to civil society. For the citizens of all CBSS countries NGOs provide an important opportunity to express their general and specific interests through active participation in their respective societies. NGOs can provide decision-makers with information, which can be important and relevant before adopting decisions. As participants in the political debate in the CBSS countries, NGOs can help to reach solutions in contested issues, which satisfy and reconcile diverging interests. A specific asset of NGOs is their capacity for timely reaction to the interests and opinions of citizens and for delivering relevant messages to the various audiences. NGOs have the ability to act as intermediaries between the society and decision-makers and mobilise political and social engagement of individuals and groups, which is necessary for i.a. sustainable development. Within this context, NGOs can contribute significantly to the achievement of goals defined for the Baltic Sea region i.a. in the Kalmar Action Programme and the final documents of Baltic Sea States Summits and CBSS Meetings. It is therefore necessary and useful for national authorities to learn how to co-operate with the NGOs and use their great potential, their knowledge and expertise on specific subjects to develop a modern civil society.

3. The *Baltic Sea region* offers tremendous opportunities and already existing structures for a democratic sustainable development of its societies. These include the intergovernmental co-operation within the CBSS, with one of its priorities on democratic development and with specialised structures such as the Working Group on Democratic Institutions and the CBSS Commissioner on Democratic Development, the Baltic 21 process with its broad participation of NGOs, the long tradition of Ombudsmen in the region and the established role acquired by NGOs in some Baltic Sea countries. In recent years NGOs in the region have formed various kinds of networks. These include close co-operation in the fields of women's rights, environment and youth exchange. Despite these encouraging developments the relevant actors have not yet fully exploited this potential. There is a need for improved co-operation among NGOs at regional and national levels. NGOs could gain strength if they join forces and better understand the differences in and among nation states.

4. *Access to information* is part of freedom of expression, together with an active citizenry, and thus one of the preconditions for ensuring a vibrant and well-informed democracy. NGOs demand of the governments to respect and comply

with their obligations following national and international standards, promoting openness in state affairs thereby assisting the formation of transparent and responsible governments in the region. They remind the governments of their obligation to provide for unhindered access to information, which i.a. contributes greatly to environmental safety of all countries. The NGOs appeal to the CBSS Member States to engage in constructive dialogue with the civil society, thereby establishing a regional platform for access to, and exchange of, information. The need for access to information cuts across all sectors of society, and there is therefore a need for exploring the possibility of setting up broad and interactive information networks within the entire Baltic Sea region, which would help foster open societies by means of monitoring and providing training where needed, both for the civil society and state structures.

5. *Participation* of civil society is not only a matter of involvement in the political process - it also comprises social integration and the fight against social exclusion. Processes of social and political exclusion are mainly influenced by the individual political and social setting of the country concerned. However, there is a clear regional dimension to these questions. Growing economic and political interdependence in the Baltic Sea area can play a positive role in fighting political and social exclusion region-wide. The NGOs call on the CBSS Member States to make the realisation of *all human rights* – civil, political, economic, social and cultural – a top priority on their political agenda. They ask the CBSS to commission a study on the actual situation of economic, social and cultural rights. The NGOs demand the guarantee and respect of minority rights and the participation of all groups, including young people. The human treatment of refugees and migrants and combating the trafficking in women are important aspects of a broad understanding of human rights. People seeking security on their way to Western Europe are cast off the Baltic Sea region. The governments of the countries bordering the Baltic Sea deal with the refugee problem in the region only in the context of organised criminality and/or illegal migration (Task Force on Organised Crime). The Member States of the CBSS play an important role as target states, states of origin and states of transit of trafficked women. Trafficked women are working in slave-like conditions across the Baltic Sea states, unable to leave the brothels. The NGOs wish to be invited to the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference in Greifswald in September 2001 to present their analysis and priorities for action in the area. In continuation of the co-operation process, NGOs will meet on the same issue in November 2001 to develop regional networking (www.baltic-refugee.net). The NGOs ask the Baltic Sea states to review their present policies on migration, follow strictly international standards and ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Migrants. They call for minimum legal standards of migrants' rights in the region as well as for the establishment of structures for social support of migrants.

6. NGOs in the region were the early stewards and still keep high on their agenda the *sustainability concept* and the concept of equal environmental space. The Agenda 21 for the Baltic Sea Region (Baltic 21) as the main instrument of the CBSS to implement the integrative approach of sustainable development is in general very much welcomed by the NGOs. It is a new platform for the dialogue, where the different actors are recognised and can keep their integrity. It is a new level of developed democracy, where dialogue replaces conflict. However, the

entire Baltic 21 process with its eight sectors of agriculture, energy, industry, forestry, transport, fishery, tourism and education must be fully recognised and empowered by the CBSS and its governments. Today, the implementation of the proposed actions remains completely insufficient. The Baltic 21 process must invest in concrete measures and provide the different sectors with adequate support. To facilitate successful implementation of the Baltic 21, close co-operation with national activities of sustainable development and a public oriented marketing of the Baltic 21 process are recommended. The NGOs expect that the Baltic 21 process will be the forum for all stakeholders that reconciles the challenge of sustainable development in the Baltic Sea Region. It is of great concern that the Baltic Sea region is in many respects faced with immediate and increasing ecological risks. Regarding the factors that constitute threats to its natural environment, the Baltic Sea is the best investigated sea in the world. Political decisions for its protection that need to be taken will consequently be based on solid ground. Main urgent political decisions should with priority focus on environmentally sound transport policies, an agricultural policy that decreases the eutrophication of the Baltic Sea, sustainable fisheries policies, integrated coastal zone management and protection based on natural dynamics and public participation, sustainable tourism policy and full and immediate financing of the HELCOM Joint Comprehensive Action Programme. Three immediate threats to the Baltic Sea ecosystem are eutrophication, over-fishing, and shipping. The NGOs appeal to the ministerial conference in Hamburg that firm actions will be taken in the EU pre-accession process, the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), and other fora in order to eliminate these threats. An environmental threat of a special dimension for the whole Baltic Sea region is the nuclear power, where the NGOs want to stress The Copenhagen Declaration of a nuclear free zone. An immediate problem in Russia is the lack of openness and transparency, which leaves the public with fear and suspicions that too big safety risks are taken by the Russian nuclear industry.

7. International youth work is a classic field of NGO based *youth co-operation* and has already developed institutional structures in the Baltic Sea region through the Baltic Youth Forum and the Baltic Sea Secretariat for Youth Affairs. The NGOs agreed that those organisations are important for ensuring the continuity in the work in the youth field. The principal goal of Baltic Sea youth co-operation is to develop, among young people, a common regional identity and understanding of the common cultural heritage while respecting the cultural diversity of the region. Furthermore, it aims to improve the living conditions of young people and the development of their potentials. The aim is also to promote an active participation of young people in the development of democratic and pluralistic civil societies in the CBSS Member States. The NGOs particularly focused on the topics of participation, continuity, and training. The idea to develop a Baltic Sea trainer pool was raised. The youth NGOs also raised concerns about the difficulties to get young persons involved in traditional NGO youth work. To ensure youth participation, the NGOs have to be more flexible and less structured. The NGOs request the Governments of the CBSS Member countries to increasingly recognise the importance of young people in society and give young people the opportunity to pursue a youth policy with a comprehensive approach and to make youth issues a cross-sectional topic within governmental policies.

8. *International Voluntary Service* is an important contribution to the civil society in the Baltic Sea region. The big potential for International Voluntary Service should be used especially by the NGOs in the Baltic Sea region while respecting the broad variety of forms of volunteering. Young people of all CBSS countries must be able to participate. Networking and the support of networks should reach out to increasing numbers of participants. Governments of the CBSS Member countries should ensure an appropriate legal status for volunteers and agree on liberal visa regulations.

9. *Co-operation between governments and non-governmental organisations* should be based on mutual understanding and equal dialogue. This includes free access to information, transparency and monitoring of GO and NGO activities and providing an NGO-supportive legal framework in the CBSS Member countries, including the right to institute proceedings. The main issues of such co-operation are the strengthening of civil society, sustainable development and an enhanced synergy with the EU Northern Dimension. The influence of NGOs on the government decision-making process should be strengthened and made more effective, including the transfer and learning of best practices. The legal and political basis of NGOs should be clarified in order to make them eligible for government funding. The NGOs stressed that a) priority has to be given to a more intensive dialogue with the aim to communicate priorities of the different partners and to identify options for joint programmes; b) the CBSS has an important role to play in improving the flow of information about, and channel applications for, funding to international programmes (EU Northern Dimension); c) the need to identify a national contact organisation to act as member and facilitator in an international NGO Forum and communicate with the CBSS in an effective dialogue. NGOs agree that national NGO strategies and models for their organisation are required, using the already existing structures. NGOs realise that funding (thematic topics, events, as well as organisational support) will have to come primarily from national sources or multi-lateral programmes. NGOs put forward the idea to mandate the Preparatory Committee as a focal point and intermediate facilitating structure during the formation process of an international NGO structure in the Baltic Sea region.

Final recommendations

The Baltic Sea region offers a unique setting and exceptional potentials for NGO-related co-operation within and among the discussed subject fields. Subject areas with already existing co-operation structures and a potential and need for further developments include gender equality, social rights and conditions and cultural exchange. To exploit these potentials fully, NGOs might establish a Baltic Sea area-wide network to foster information exchange, further the development of joint goals for action as commenced during the Lübeck NGO Forum and provide a better-organised link towards government-level Baltic Sea co-operation. It is recommended to convene, on an appropriately regular basis, NGO Forums, which could address CBSS Ministerial meetings. NGOs could make use of the existing regional institutions, namely the CBSS Commissioner on Democratic Development and the CBSS Working Group on Democratic Institutions. A good basis for such an international umbrella might be an improved networking at the national level.