

Our Baltic Conference 2023

29 September 2023

Palanga, Lithuania

Commitments on Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) by the Baltic Sea Member States,

On 29 September 2023, the EU Ministers and ministry representatives for Environment of the Baltic Sea Member States have gathered in Palanga, Lithuania, upon invitation of the Member of the European Commission in charge of Environment, Ocean and Fisheries, Mr Virginijus Sinkevičius.

Recalling the concerns and the engagements expressed in 2020 in Our Baltic Declaration *“recognizing the need for a full environmental risk assessment and joint research in order to identify the best environmental practice on how to address the issue of hazardous submerged objects in the Baltic Sea and to develop financial support in that regard with the involvement of Helcom”*.

Acknowledging that the matter of submerged munitions is a priority across Europe and recalling that there have been a number of policy efforts to tackle the challenge of salvage in order to pave the way towards concerted action, in particular in the Baltic Sea Region we appreciate the most relevant deliverables: the European Parliament resolution of 27 April 2021 on chemical residues in the Baltic Sea¹, the updated Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) Baltic Sea Action Plan (October 2021)², the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference Resolution 2022³, the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) Declaration from June 2023⁴ as well as the Revised EU Maritime Security Strategy and its Action Plan of 2023.

Building on the work done by HELCOM on the issue of unexploded munitions aiming at developing a regional strategic approach and a comprehensive risk assessment of hazardous submerged objects and ensuring their safe management, notably by developing best practices for risk assessment and maintaining and regularly updating data and information on hazardous submerged objects in the Baltic Sea.

¹ European Parliament resolution on chemical residues, 27 April 2021

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0123_EN.pdf

² Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP), October 2021

<https://helcom.fi/baltic-sea-action-plan/>

³ The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference Resolution (BSPC), June 2022

<https://www.bspc.net/conference-resolution-31-bspc/>

⁴ CBSS Declaration, 20th CBSS Ministerial Session, 2 June 2023,

https://cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/cbss-wismar-declaration_2-june-2023.pdf

Recognizing added value in cooperation between HELCOM and the CBSS in this regard, in particular, the round table on dumped munitions during the Baltic Sea Region Future Forum (BSRFF) closing with the Kiel Declaration in August 2022 and the expert roundtable organised in December 2022 in Kiel under the German Presidency of the CBSS.

Building on the willingness expressed by the CBSS to continue dialogue between different actors, with a preference for joint ad hoc meetings between CBSS and HELCOM over an institutionalized format.

Expressing willingness to close knowledge gaps regarding the issue of UXO in the Baltic Sea, in view of taking further actions as appropriate.

Acknowledging that the lessons and experiences drawn from all this work could be applied to other sea basins where UXOs are present, including in the Black Sea due to Russia's military aggression against Ukraine.

They have agreed to the following actions/commitments:

1. We COMMIT to pursuing cooperation with existing regional fora, in particular with HELCOM and the CBSS, to concretely tackle the issue of hazardous Submerged Munitions in the Baltic Sea.
2. We COMMIT to closing the knowledge gaps, including the legal aspects as deemed necessary and technologies of remediation as well as their associated environmental impacts. In addition, we COMMIT to share technological knowledge, experience and monitoring of progress. We also consider setting up a reporting scheme of encountered munitions, accounting for already existing formats and particularly OSPAR.⁵
3. We COMMIT to working towards a comprehensive mapping of submerged munitions and appropriate associated risk assessments, in line with the best environmental practices and principles to be developed under the HELCOM BSAP. In 2027, we COMMIT to take stock of a progress made until then on mapping and risk assessments.
4. On the basis of the progress made on the mapping mentioned under point 3, we COMMIT to cooperate towards establishing priority areas for further coordinated actions related to submerged munitions in the Baltic Sea, making use of information available from both civil and military sources where possible. These priority areas should include marine protected areas and areas designated for offshore renewable activities, in respect of the

⁵ The Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic

precautionary principle and in line with existing EU legislation and policies, inter alia the EU Green Deal, MSFD⁶ and EIA/SEA⁷.

5. Considering the results of the risk assessment mentioned under point 3, we COMMIT to take appropriate actions, including the extraction where necessary and appropriate, in line with the priorities to be defined under point 4.
6. We COMMIT to exploring financing options, including EU means and funding mechanisms, for developing and implementing best available techniques for environmentally sound and safe management of submerged munitions. In this respect, we welcome the financial support of the European Commission in our endeavour to conduct the comprehensive mapping and risk assessment provided under point 3.

⁶ Marine Strategy Framework Directive

⁷ Environmental Impact Assessment/ Strategic Environmental Assessment