

Regional co-operation to deal with major spills

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I'm very glad to be present today - at the Final Conference of the projects BRISK and BRISK-RU, and to speak on the significance of regional co-operation in pollution response.

Let me start by expressing my appreciation to all colleagues and partners in the Baltic Sea countries involved in BRISK and BRISK-RU for their dedication and efforts, as well as to the Kaliningrad Information Office of the Nordic Council of Ministers for financial and overall support.

Safety of navigation and preparedness to pollution accidents have always been of the highest priority for Denmark, due to intense maritime traffic and the high number of ships that pass through the Danish Straits and ply its shallow and narrow waters. Pollution prevention and spill preparedness are two sides of the same coin, and either of these could be considered in isolation when talking about shipping and the risks it creates. I would like to highlight this link, in the context of the possible future risk reduction measures.

The Admiral Danish Fleet has been actively engaged in regional response co-operation within HELCOM – the co-operation which is an example of one of the most successful frameworks on a European and global scale. It has been created from the need to establish a mechanism for the Baltic Sea countries to assist each other in case of major pollution, whereby common procedures for pollution reporting, requesting and rendering assistance and conducting international response operation have been defined in advance, as contained in the HELCOM Response Manual, and are followed during real-world accidents.

HELCOM serves as a forum to continuously discuss among the relevant authorities how to enhance preparedness, exchange experience of responders and share information on available emergency and response resources. The fact that these authorities are different in different HELCOM countries have never been an issue – colleagues from coastguard, border guard, navy, police, maritime administration and ministries of environment and environmental authorities work together to maintain and further enhance oil spill readiness.

Today a high number of emergency and response vessels are located around the Baltic Sea, forming a so called HELCOM fleet of stand-by ships which are ready to be used by the countries to assist each other in response operations. The assistance has proved to be effective in case of previous oil accidents, such as “Baltic Carrier” in 2001, and “Fu Shan Hai” in 2003.

HELCOM co-operation covers also other important topics such as aerial surveillance, established already in the late eighties, with the aim to spot and monitor oil and other substances released into the sea. The countries conduct regular national surveillance outside their coastlines and undertake jointly coordinated surveillance activities to monitor main shipping routes. Additionally, HELCOM countries co-operate with the European Maritime Safety Agency on satellite surveillance by the CleanSeaNet, the

service which helps to provide the first indication of possible oil slicks, and thus allows using aircrafts in an optimized manner.

While aerial and satellite surveillance is used on daily basis to detect illegal discharges of oil, it is also available to assist in case of a major accident.

Moreover, several kinds of exercises are conducted under the HELCOM flag. The most famous ones are the BALEX DELTA exercises, which test the alarm procedures and response capability of the Contracting Parties in case of a major accident and an international response operation.

This year's BALEX DELTA exercise was organized by Denmark, off Bornholm. In total, 14 oil-pollution-combating ships as well as smaller vessels participated from eight HELCOM countries - Denmark, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden.

It was upon the Danish initiative that the BRISK and BRISK-RU projects have been initiated, following an experience of a risk assessment of shipping accidents and pollution in the national waters, which had been taken into account by the Admiral Danish Fleet when deciding on localization of the bases and response vessels.

The HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan adopted by the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in 2007 provided the policy framework for carrying out a risk assessment covering the whole Baltic Sea area, with the aim to enhance response resources to deal with the risk of major spills.

There are two aspects of this ministerial commitment which I would like to point to in particular and which I think make the BRISK-BRISK-RU projects unique:

- Never before has a single risk assessment been conducted, covering the whole Baltic Sea area and involving all nine Baltic Sea countries,
- It is not the risks on national level that are in focus, but risks on sub-regional level where the resources of neighboring countries all together are to be evaluated and improved to make sure that they are sufficient to meet these risks.

This approach initiated under the Action Plan and implemented in BRISK and BRISK-RU, has already inspired other regional seas to start up similar activities, which I'm glad to see, especially in the North Sea area.

I hope that the outcomes of the projects will be useful for further co-operation in our region and beyond, and I wish all of us a fruitful conference.