



THE 8TH CONFERENCE OF
MINISTERS FOR CULTURE
OF THE BALTIC SEA STATES
RIGA 16-17/10/2008

Riga Declaration

The Ministers for Culture of the Baltic Sea States (hereinafter – BSS) met in Riga, Latvia, on 16 – 17 October 2008 for their eighth Conference.

The main theme of the Conference “Future of Culture in the Baltic Sea Region” invited participating countries to consider and discuss the role of culture in the future development processes of the Baltic Sea region. In the light of the new political frameworks the discussions of the Ministers focused on improving the structures and contents of the BSS cultural cooperation, as well as on examining the possible role of the Ministerial Conference in the construction of a Northern Dimension Cultural Partnership and in the contribution to an EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region.

Recalling the declarations of the previous Conferences of the Ministers for Culture of the Baltic Sea States, especially the Bergen Declaration of 2005 (<http://www.baltic-heritage.net/declarations/bergen-declaration.pdf>),

welcoming the Declaration on the Reform of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (hereinafter – CBSS) endorsed by the 7th Baltic Sea States Summit in Riga on 4 June 2008 (<http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/cbss/Summit-CBSS/declaration-on-reform/>),

recalling the Political Declaration and the Policy Framework Document of the Northern Dimension adopted by the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the Russian Federation on 24 November 2006 (http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/north_dim/doc/pol_dec_1106.pdf),

taking note of the European Council Conclusions of 14 December 2007, point 59, on a future EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region (http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/97669.pdf),

also taking note of the EU Work Plan for Culture 2008-2010, (http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Council_Conclusions/May/0521_EYC2.pdf), a proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the European Year of Creativity and Innovation (2009) (http://ec.europa.eu/prelex/detail_dossier_real.cfm?CL=en&DosId=196866),

recalling the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue declared by the European Union (http://ec.europa.eu/culture/portal/events/pdf/proposal_en.pdf),

welcoming the first meeting of the EU-Russia Permanent Partnership Council on Culture in Lisbon on 25 October 2007 and its Joint Statement. <http://www.km.gov.lv/UI/ImageBinary.asp?imageid=6057> (the Russian Federation),

taking into account the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue “Living Together As Equals in Dignity” presented by the Council of Europe in 2008 (http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/Source/White%20Paper_final_revised_EN.pdf),

noting international conventions in the field of culture, such as the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001325/132540e.pdf>), the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001429/142919e.pdf>) and the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (2005) (<http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/199.htm>),

stressing the importance of culture as an economic factor, as described in the Creative Economy Report 2008: *The challenge of assessing the creative economy towards informed policy-making* presented by UNCTAD in 2008 (http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/ditc20082cer_en.pdf) and in a Study on the Economy of Culture in Europe, prepared for the European Commission in 2006 (http://ec.europa.eu/culture/eac/sources_info/studies/economy_en.html),

Ministers decided

1. to focus future cultural collaboration on long-term objectives, where structured co-operation and networking can bring a clear added value and successful results could be reached by joint efforts of all interested countries, thus implementing the decision of the 7th Baltic Sea States Summit to set culture as one of the priorities of Baltic Sea regional cooperation;
2. to set the following long-term objectives for intergovernmental cooperation on cultural issues among the BSS in order to promote the regional identity and strengthen the contribution of culture to sustainable development and competitiveness of the Baltic Sea region within Europe and beyond:
 - safeguarding cultural heritage, paying particular attention to the enhancement of accessibility to cultural heritage, especially for children and young people,
 - promoting cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and exchange,
 - enhancing the impact of cultural sectors on the development of the creative economy;
3. to develop the following structure of cultural cooperation in the Baltic Sea region in order to reach the aforementioned objectives:

- to convene the Conference of Ministers for Culture of the BSS, when it is necessary to give political guidance and take decisions on strategic policy issues and initiatives, once consensus is reached among all interested countries,
 - to establish and maintain working groups responsible for the implementation of adopted objectives and activities, as necessary and avoiding overlap with existing organizational structures,
 - to appoint Senior Officials who will meet at least once per year and will work according to the mandate approved by the member states. Coordination of these Senior Officials is the responsibility of the country holding the CBSS presidency,
 - to base practical cultural cooperation on the activities carried out by experts' working groups, cultural networks and platforms set up by interested countries and institutions, and further strengthening of existing networks as the most successful way to reach the long-term objectives,
 - to call on cultural actors in the Baltic Sea region to develop direct contacts and partnerships, and to submit to the Ministerial Conference and the Senior Officials strategic proposals where political decisions are necessary,
 - to apply the open coordination method to give the possibility for interested countries that encounter similar problems to improve their knowledge, exchange information, as well as share common goals, thus enriching the content and methods of Baltic Sea region cultural cooperation;
4. to observe the following general principles in the building of future cultural cooperation in the Baltic Sea region:
- mainstreaming culture in all relevant policies, such as economy, research and education,
 - promoting interaction with other regional and international structures, in particular the CBSS, the Nordic Council of Ministers, other structures of Baltic Sea regional cooperation, the European Union, the Council of Europe and UNESCO,
 - coordinating activities and resources among the developing frameworks of the Conference of Ministers for Culture of the BSS, the CBSS, the Northern Dimension and the future EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region in order to seek complementarity and synergies.

The Ministers agreed

5. - that the activities carried out by the Monitoring Group on Cultural Heritage are efficient and have resulted in strong partnerships and well functioning information exchange among the National Heritage Bodies of the BSS,

- to invite the Monitoring Group in cooperation with the Senior Officials for Cultural Cooperation to prepare and submit to the next Ministerial Conference proposals, such as a Code of Good Practise on underwater heritage, and to evaluate its organisation and financing;
6. - that the Ars Baltica network has played an important role in developing a vibrant cultural co-operation among creative people around the Baltic Sea and has successfully branded regional cultural events;
 - to invite to continue collaboration on the Ars Baltica´s networking strategy and other activities within the new international frameworks, including the EU-Russia Cultural Partnership;
 7. - that it is important to develop stronger cooperation among the BSS with respect to creative industries,
 - to invite the Nordic KreaNord working group to cooperate with the Senior Officials for Cultural Cooperation and with other cultural actors in the Baltic Sea region.

Finally, the Ministers also decided

8. to support the initiative of the Nordic Council of Ministers to examine, in the Northern Dimension, the creation of a possible Northern Dimension Cultural Partnership;
9. to follow the elaboration of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region in order to include culture components in the development processes of the region;
10. to invite the next country holding the CBSS presidency to arrange the first meeting of Senior Officials to follow up decisions of this Ministerial Conference.