

BONUS Day 9 February 2010 – Opening remarks

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Welcome to BONUS Day. Tomorrow the Baltic Sea Action Summit will bring together heads of states and leaders representing the business community, governments, NGOs and charitable organisations to make their commitment to action for the Baltic Sea. The President of the Republic of Finland Tarja Halonen, the Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen and the Chairman of the Board of Baltic Sea Action Group Dr. Ilkka Herlin have convened the Summit to carry out the actions of the Baltic Sea Action Plan of the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM). This BONUS Day is a unique opportunity to send a clear and concise message to political decision-makers present at the Baltic Sea Action Summit: “use research as a basis for policy decisions”.

It has become obvious that the role of science as a source of new knowledge has taken on increasing importance in meeting the challenges of a globalised world. No state or nation is capable of meeting those challenges alone. We need to create a better coordinated, more coherent response to these challenges. The health of the Baltic Sea is one of the challenges that I refer to here.

An understanding of the full importance of a dialogue between science and society has recently emerged in Europe. New approaches to coordinating and integrating national science funding and research programmes have been developed and new processes are planned. Baltic Sea research is a pioneering effort in this context. The European Research Area Board has recently published a strategic overview of research in Europe entitled *Preparing Europe for a new Renaissance*. One of the policy themes needed is a shared responsibility between science, policy-making and society, where public policy is based on evidence and underpinned by a ‘new social contract’ between science and society; a ‘contract’ that emphasizes responsibility for action as well as freedom of thought.

The integration of the scientific research process with civil society and policy-making is a key element of the knowledge-based society. High-quality research is an

important objective for the academic community, and it is also crucial for private enterprises, public decision-making and individual citizens. Scientific research may not always provide clear solutions but it creates deep understanding about specific phenomena in the world. Such knowledge is essential for risk-management in an uncertain world. In a knowledge-based society, policy-making is based on scientific research rather than on commonly held beliefs or old traditions.

The European Union's Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region was accepted a few months ago. The importance of research and science was strongly underlined as a basis for the strategy. This will require close cooperation between different funding sources at European, national, regional and local level.

Stakeholder involvement is a key to successful implementation of the European Union's Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Specific actions will be undertaken by governments and agencies, municipalities, international and non-governmental organizations in the region. The European research community has a long tradition of working together. Consequently, research networks are a sound partner for implementing the European Union's Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

The European Commission submitted a proposal on a Joint Baltic Sea Research Programme ('BONUS-169') to the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament in autumn 2009. BONUS 169 is the logical next step when developing long-term high-quality scientific cooperation and promoting the use of research results in policy-making. The focus is on the most critical environmental issues, such as eutrophication, pollution, climate change and maritime safety. The societal impact of the programme is enhanced through intensive stakeholder involvement and cooperation with other relevant EU and national programmes.

HELCOM is a leading organization in marine environmental protection, incorporating the latest scientific knowledge and innovative management approaches into policy implementation. The HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan and its objectives are highly compatible with those of the BONUS 169 research programme. Close cooperation between the two programmes would strengthen the policy-driven aspects of BONUS 169 and provide an excellent opportunity for HELCOM to use the most up-to-date scientific research results. This would offer a solid basis for implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan as adopted by the Helsinki Commission in 2007.

The Academy of Finland is committed to promoting scientific research in the Baltic Sea region in a long-term perspective. The Academy of Finland has consistently allocated funding for Baltic Sea research in several research programmes. Recently, the Academy of Finland also selected two Baltic-related doctoral schools. In addition to financial support, it is one of the foremost goals of the Academy of Finland to enhance cooperation between all stakeholders in Baltic Sea research. This BONUS Day is a good example of such activities. This event has been planned and implemented in collaboration with the BONUS EEIG, the Baltic Sea Action Group, the Ministry for the Environment, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Marine Research Centre, the Finnish Meteorological Institute and Tekes.

This is a forum where academic research can achieve societal impact through communication between science and society.

This is our opportunity to send a clear and concise message to the heads of state who will convene tomorrow at the Baltic Sea Action Summit.

I wish you a very productive BONUS Day.