

## **Norway takes over the Presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)**

Norway will take over the Presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States for one year from the first of July. This means that Norway's Minister of Foreign Affairs will be the President of the organisation during this period, and Norway will also chair the Committee of Senior Officials. Norway assumes the Presidency in accordance with a rotation agreement between the member countries. Lithuania has had the Presidency the last year, and Germany will replace Norway on the first of July 2011. The outgoing, present and incoming presidencies form an unofficial troika.

The CBSS has all the countries with direct access to the Baltic Sea as members, in addition to Norway, Iceland and the European Commission. It functions both as a forum for political deliberations and as an organisation for concrete co-operation. The CBSS is one of four regional councils in the Northern part of Europe, and Norway is a member of all of them.

Norway's membership in the CBSS is considered to be a central part of Norway's neighbourhood policy. It serves as a forum for the development of contacts between Norway and the new EU member countries of the region: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. In addition, it is a fruitful multilateral context for developing the relations between Norway and both the Russian Federation and the European Commission.

Norway will under its Presidency promote the long-term priorities adopted by the organisation itself, in its Declaration on the reform of the CBSS of June 2008. These priorities are the environment, economic development, energy, education and culture and civil security. In addition, the Presidency will have three specific priorities: maritime policy, fight against trafficking in human beings and further development of the CBSS as an organisation to become more efficient, relevant and operative.

**Maritime transport** constitutes a large part of the trade in the region and represents up to 15 % of the global cargo traffic with a potential of increase. Shipping and related maritime activities are most central for the economic development of the region. However, there are also several environmental effects and challenges to be met, like air emissions, discharge of oil and other waste and introduction of organisms through ballast water.

The CBSS is already heavily involved in the **fight against trafficking in human beings** in and through the region. This successful work needs to be carried on and given a high priority. Trafficking in human beings is a flaw for the region and is taking new forms. It has a children and women perspective but is increasingly also a challenge for the labour market and is linked to organised crime across borders. The Norwegian Presidency will seek and see all forms of trafficking together.

The CBSS has decided to **restructure its secretariat in Stockholm** in order to better facilitate project identification, fund raising and project implementation. It has also decided that full account should be taken of the work conducted by the Northern Dimension Policy and the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, on the understanding that the five long-term priorities will require a concerted effort by all relevant actors of the region. The Norwegian Presidency will continue to work for a restructuring of the secretariat, a further efficiency of the organisation and to seek consensus among all members in building a project portfolio with other actors. The secretariat has its own home-page and can be visited on [www.cbss.org](http://www.cbss.org).