

**June 6, 2003 – Special Presentation with HAH Ecumenical Patriarch  
Bartholomew I**

**HE Ms Margot Wallström**  
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Your All Holiness, Eminences, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman.

Let me first of all express my thanks to Patriarch Bartholomeos for taking the initiative of organizing this symposium. I am honored to be invited to speak to you about the views of the European Commission regarding the Baltic Sea and about the role of the European Community in protecting it.

Allow me to deviate a little, only for one minute, from the theme that I have been asked to speak on to say that I was really fascinated by this mix of religion, science and environment. I think this represents the ultimate approach to the environment issues, in fact. I thought that maybe this is also the right audience to present the idea that I heard exists in Bhutan, where they have replaced the concept of having a gross national product, the GNP, with a GNH, that is, a gross national happiness index, instead. Maybe that could lead us to a more sustainable development and a more sustainable way of living. I also could not keep from you a quote which I found in an article that I read on the plane from Brussels this morning. This was actually a quote from the teachings of Buddha, a book called *The Teachings of Buddha*:

King Udyana, as the story goes, was upset to hear that his queen consort had offered the monk Ananda five hundred garments. A suspicious man, the king demanded of Ananda his purpose with these garments. 'I am going to distribute the garments among the brothers,' Ananda replied.

'But what will you do with the old garments?' the king asked.

'We will make bed covers out of them.'

'But what will you do with the old bed covers?'

'We will make pillowcases.'

'But what will you do with the old pillowcases?'

'We will make floor covers out of them.'

'So what will you do with the old floor covers?'

'Use them for foot towels.'

'So what will you do with the old foot towels?'

'Use them for floor mops.'

'And what will you then do with the old floor mops?'

'We will tear them into pieces, mix them with mud, and use the mud to plaster the house walls.'

There the story ended. The writer of this article used this as an example of looking at the whole life-cycle of products and maybe changing our attitude. It is not always that simple to look at either the end-of-pipe solutions or the end result or the sources of pollution. You have to look at things in a more holistic way. Also, he says that we tend to forget in this new and improved world where internet years pass in weeks, that much of what is important has been known for a very long time. That thought we can maybe keep with us.

The theme is, of course, the Baltic Sea. The Baltic Sea is one of the world's most extraordinary seas and the largest body of brackish water on the planet. The

beauty and the great variety of the sea and its surrounding landscapes are unique. Since the last ice age the Baltic has gone through various transformations, having been at various times a straight, a large bay, a lake, and now an inland sea connected to the world's oceans by narrow straights.

The marine ecosystem of the Baltic Sea is very sensitive, partly due to the natural conditions and partly due to the pressure from the activities of the eighty-five million people living and working in the catchment area. This pressure has taken its toll. Over the past few decades, pollution of the Baltic Sea has become increasingly evident, as have other threats to it. Most of these threats are not as evidently striking in the short-term as the recent prestigious disaster off the Spanish coast. However, just imagine the consequences if a similar accident had taken place here in the Baltic.

We have many recent examples which should serve as warning bells. Only last week we saw the sinking of the bulk carrier Fu Shanghai between Bornholm and the Swedish coast after a collision in good weather and with good visibility. The ship had a cargo of 60.000 tons of fertilizers and 1.700 tons of bunker oil. On a local scale this could have quite a serious impact, but imagine in the cargo was 60.000 tons of heavy oil? The entire Baltic ecosystem would have been at risk. We cannot wait for the day when our worst nightmares come true. We need to start increasing safety now.

In addition, other impacts, such as loss and degradation of biodiversity, loss of habitats, contamination by dangerous substances and nutrients, and the possible future effects of climate change, are no longer just theoretic risks for the longer term. These problems are with us now. Just think about the nutrient pollution. It causes excessive algae growth and sometimes results in massive de-oxygenation which killed large numbers of fish last year in Danish waters. Think of the intensive fishing and the impact this has on the ecosystem. Or think of oil spills and the sight of oil-smeared birds and mammals. If you have held an oil-smeared bird in your hands, you will never forget it. I have done that, both after the Erika accident and after the Prestige accident. Or the hazardous pollutants that persist for generations, harming animal and man alike.

Thanks to the joint endeavors of the Baltic Sea states, though, some of these threats have now been diffused. Concentrations of some heavy metals as well as DDT and PCB have been reduced. For example, sixty-two marine and coastal areas have been designated as Baltic Sea protected areas. Millions of sea birds use these areas as staging posts during migration, and more than thirty species breed in them.

But the Baltic is like a human patient whose immune system is slowly wearing down. Superficially, everything seems to be fine, but then one day he gets an acute infection and his health collapses. We need to avoid this at all costs. We cannot accept that soon our seafood may not be safe to eat, or that fish stocks and the fishing communities that depend on them disappear. We cannot accept that birds and other animals die smothered in oil. We cannot accept that many female seals are unable to produce pups due to uterine occlusion caused by PCBs and dioxins, which is the case already now.

You will know that World Summit in Johannesburg last year confirmed the need to enhance the protection and conservation of the marine environment. The political commitment to sustainable development should lead to a more integrated approach to policy making and management. Each policy sector should consider the side-effects, positive or negative, on other sectors and on marine ecosystems. This is in simple terms what scientists call an ecosystem approach to management of human activities.

How well are we equipped to tackle all the problems faced by the Baltic Sea environment? I think it is fair to say that we know there is a need for urgent action. We know what our ultimate aims should be and we have enough knowledge to act swiftly. But we need to do more work to identify and specify some of the details of the route we should take to achieve our aims. The commissioner set out a series of ambitious objectives for the future of our marine environment in his recent communication *Towards a Strategy to Protect and Conserve the Marine Environment*. With enlargement of the European Union in May 2004 including four new Baltic states, eight of the nine Baltic countries will be covered by existing and new E.U. legislation. This will significantly effect both the political and the natural environment of the area.

One of the main new instruments of the European Union is the Water Framework Directive, and this comprehensive piece of legislation requires an integrated approach to the management of water resources in each river basin and the associated estuaries and coastal waters. The objective of this directive is to achieve good ecological and chemical status in all water bodies by 2015. The directive is particularly important for the Baltic, as it will have substantial effects of the quantities of pollution transferred from the land to the sea, and it will also have a significant impact on the quality of coastal waters. A healthy ecosystem should be achieved through integrated management of water resources at the level of river catchment areas.

This is the key instrument of E.U. water policy, but it is not the only one. The entry into force of the urban wastewater treatment directive, and the directive dealing with the reduction of nitrate pollution from agriculture will also have significant effects on the Baltic Sea and associated river systems. The wastewater directive, as you know, requires wastewater from any town with more than two hundred inhabitants to be treated, and the nitrates directive addresses the problem of over-fertilization with animal manure and chemical fertilizers. Proper implementation of these directive will have a massive impact on the nutrient loads entering the Baltic. It will reduce eutrophication, algal-bloom, deoxygenation and fish kills.

We should be aware that there are still reasons for concern, and the concern is linked to the fact that agriculture is probably the main cause of nitrogen-causing eutrophication in the Baltic Sea, and the enlargement process will bring large new areas of the Baltic Sea catchment area under the E.U. common agricultural policy. We need to make sure that the reduction in nutrient loadings resulting from the implementation of the water framework directive, the wastewater directive and the nitrates directive are not canceled out by increases linked to more intensive patterns of agriculture. Furthermore, implementation of the E.U. habitats and bird directive also needs to be given a new impetus. In addition to the already existing Baltic Sea protected areas the identification of additional Natura 2000 sites will also be a major contribution towards biodiversity protection.

The Community will also continue the fruitful cooperation that has been established with the Russian Federation. Russia has succeeded in reducing the discharges from some of its nine environmental hotspots in the St. Petersburg and Leningrad regions. Major investment plans should diffuse other major sources of pollution and a particular challenge is the upgrading of the St. Petersburg sewage system which is dated pre-war, which will be funded by international financial institutions and donors including the European Community.

We of course from the European Commission put emphasis on international coordination. The conventions on trans-boundary rivers are important, and we try to

play an active role in different international conventions. The Helsinki Commission should play a key role, and the cooperation of the Baltic Sea countries will continue to be essential for identification of problems and threats to the marine ecosystem.

One of the other priority issues, of course, is to increase maritime safety and to eliminate illegal discharges of oil. This is again an issue where we need to join forces. We have made some far-reaching proposals for enhancing maritime safety, as well as proposals for new legislation to enhance the enforcement of existing international legislation. We will need to make sure that sea transport is carried out with seaworthy vessels manned by well-trained and responsible crews. It is also important that the offenders are caught and punished, not just because they acted illegally, but also a clear deterrent to others. So we strongly support initiatives taken by HELCOM to enhance maritime safety.

The Baltic Sea is a precious resource which we must cherish and conserve for our own well-being. But more important is the shared responsibility we have towards future generations. A lot has been achieved so far, but much more has to be done. I think this seminar is an important contribution in putting this message across.