



To:
President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen

12 March 2021

Dear President,

We are deeply concerned about the risk still posed today by chemical and conventional munitions dumped on the Baltic seabed after World War II. This is one of the most important causes of pollution in the Baltic and the most dangerous one, since effects of eventual spills and leakages go beyond the borders of one country and have economic, security, social, health and environmental consequences. Therefore, we call on the European Commission for an urgent action and for the provision of adequate financial resources in the new financial perspective, not only in the Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme for the years 2021-2027, but also in other horizontal programs in which the issue of the munition dumped on the seabed should be included.

As a consequence of World War II dozens of tons of munitions and chemical weapons were sank in the Baltic Sea, which now experts consider to be one of the most polluted seas in the world. Due to inter alia incomplete documentation on the number and places of dumps, it is impossible to determine the exact amount of the chemical munitions lying on the seabed, containing toxic substances, such as mustard gas, and representing a serious hazard to the environment and to the people. Depending on the source, it is estimated that it is more than 50,000 tons. Apart from the munition itself, there are also hundreds of shipwrecks which progressive corrosion creates a risk of leakage of fuel, petroleum products and poisonous warfare agents. This may cause an ecological disaster and poison large areas of the Baltic Sea, which is particularly concerning since the Baltic is only connected to the ocean by the Danish Straits, which results in a very low self-cleaning capacity. As an effect, it might result in one of the greatest environmental disasters, which then we will have to handle with for decades.

Chemical munitions and chemical agents leaking from the shipwrecks in the Baltic Sea may affect all human activities at sea: fishing boat crews, crews of ships performing underwater engineering works, divers performing underwater works, crews of research vessels exploring the seabed, crews of floating units, port workers servicing call ships to ports, crew of rescue units and even tourists. The dangers resulting from contact with a released poison control agent is enormous, ranging from the direct harm to the human body, to the possibility of transferring poison control agents in the food chain.

We welcome the EU's successful efforts and support for mine action worldwide, including in the Balkans, Africa and Asia. We believe that the pressing problem of dumped munitions in the Baltic Sea and the Skagerrak calls for the similar engagement from the EU. Hence, we welcome the fact that the EC hosted in 2019 a Colloquium on the Challenges of Unexploded

Munitions in the Sea, which was an important step to share experience and knowledge between relevant stakeholders.

Therefore, we strongly call on the European Commission to:

1. ensure continuity of the actions undertaken in the previous years, such as CHEMSEA, DAIMON and the ongoing DAIMON 2 project,
2. secure adequate financing of research and actions required at resolving the dangers coming from the dumped munitions in the Baltic Sea, within the 2021-2027 Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme and horizontal programmes,
3. support the efforts on national levels, such as mapping of the location of the dumped munitions, as well as controlling and removing hazardous materials,
4. secure adequate financing and support the development of the environmentally friendly technology for disposal and destruction of the conventional and chemical munitions,
5. ensure that horizontal programmes allow the submission of projects covering regions affected by the same problem (the Adriatic-Ionian, the North Sea and the Baltic Sea) and would enable the exchange of experiences and best practices,
6. make sure that the problem will be reflected in all the relevant EU policies and in the programming processes, including the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the EU Maritime Security Strategy Action Plan,
7. initiate the work on the comprehensive plan of action for a disposal and removal of the hazardous remains of the World War II,
8. include the problem as one of the fields of the EU-NATO cooperation,
9. engage all relevant European agencies and institutions to utilize all available resources, including the European Defence Agency.

We are convinced that without tackling the problem of the dumped munitions the objective to 'Save the Sea', as stated in the European Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, cannot be achieved. The work on the 2021-2027 Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme is currently on the way with the next meeting of the Joint Programme Committee (JCP) planned for the end of March. Therefore, we call on the Commission to follow up conclusions of the 2019 Colloquium and address our recommendations, including within the next Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme.

Yours sincerely,

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