

ENVIRONMENT**Rim countries come to aid of ailing Baltic Sea**

By Anne Eckstein

Finland's President Tarja Halonen has urged the leaders of the nine Baltic Sea rim countries¹ to make a commitment to clean up one of the world's most polluted seas.

"Today, some of the richest and most environmentally-conscious countries live on the banks of one of the most polluted seas in the world," said Halonen in her opening remarks at the Baltic Sea summit, in Helsinki on 10 February.

"It is clear that something has to be done and soon," she concluded, calling on fellow leaders to carry out "serious work to reverse the trend".

After the meeting, some 150 commitments to clean up pollution in the Baltic were registered. It now remains to translate these pledges into action.

"We need the Russians and we have to give them the feeling that they are part of the process," declared Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb,

as he greeted Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

The Russian leader stressed the efforts made by his country (construction of water treatment installations in Saint Petersburg and Kaliningrad) but above all minimised concerns over the Nord Stream gas pipeline project, saying it would be "absolutely safe and reliable".

PUTIN "SURPRISED"

Putin said he was "surprised" by the stir over the future gas pipeline, construction of which is set to start this spring and which in the long term will transport 55 billion cubic metres of natural gas a year between Russia and Germany.

The Russian leader tried to reassure his colleagues: "The environment is one of our priorities: we spent €100 million on the expert report alone"².

The Baltic rim countries reiterated their past commitments to ban the use of

phosphates in detergents; to reduce and eliminate emissions and discharges of waste (excrements and other substances mainly from farms) and gas; to recycle waste water; to create a secure environment for maritime traffic; and to reduce noise and pollution from this traffic.

In practical terms, Polish Deputy Prime Minister Waldemar Pawlak announced an investment of €8 billion in a programme aimed at reducing by 75% discharges of excretions by 2015; Finland will strengthen its coastline remediation programme by 2020, concentrating on seepage of nutrients of agricultural origin; and Germany will work on reducing noise and oil emissions from maritime traffic. ■

(1) *Russia, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Germany*

(2) *Finland gave its final agreement, on 12 February, to the passage of the Nord Stream gas pipeline through its territorial waters, lifting the final obstacle to construction.*

ENERGY**Hydropower fears Water Framework Directive**

By Dafydd ab Iago

With member states having submitted, by the end of 2009, river basin management plans to the EU executive, the European Small Hydropower Association (ESHA) now fears "severely" negative impacts on future sector growth. Although the Water Framework Directive (WFD - 2000/60/EC) only came into force in 2000, it is only now having direct consequences on the approval of many new hydro projects and allocation of concessions and permissions. In many cases, this is due to the delayed deadline for implementing river basin management plans.

"This is going to be a common attitude to the WFD. We really see a danger. The decisions are taken by the ministries of environment or economy, but not energy," said Gema San Bruno, ESHA's secretary-general. San Bruno sees WFD interpretation at national level as suffering due to a lack of familiarity with how small hydro technology has evolved and its environmental performance. According to the association, the current situation of small

hydropower development in many of the EU27 member states can now be described as 'survival' rather than development.

POLAND, FRANCE, SLOVENIA AG'ST HYDRO

Several member states, in particular, are accused of taking measures that have a very negative impact for the sector. Poland, for instance, is now imposing moratorium on the construction of new small hydropower plants. It is also considering the withdrawal of already approved permits.

In Slovenia, a 2009 decree on residual flow was adopted. ESHA predicts this will lead to a loss of production for new small hydropower of between 30-60%. In France, a new river classification exercise, carried out in 2009, has resulted in diminishing the planned 7 TWh production by hydropower by 2020 to 2-3 TWh.

With no changes, San Bruno fears that current implementation of the WFD will prevent small hydropower from making a significant contribution to the 20% target for the share of renewable energy in 2020 set by the

Renewables Directive (2009/28/EC). "We are not judging the capacity of national governments to interpret and transpose the WFD. But we do believe something is wrong," says San Bruno. She points to pressure by environmentalist groups. "Local authorities are hesitant due to environmentalist pressure."

The negative atmosphere in the sector is also impacting on investment in new technologies. This would effect the refurbishing of old and abandoned plants, using new innovative technology, such as very low head hydro, infrared fish-fences, eel-friendly turbines and more to improve environmental performance.

Currently, over 55% of small hydropower plants in the EU, according to ESHA, are over 60 years of age. The association claims some 30 TWh could be won by refurbishing old sites to increase energy production. "This has so far been largely ignored in many of the EU member states," notes the association. At the same time, small hydropower in the US is apparently booming driven by federal incentives. ■