

# The Prospects for a Baltic Europe: The View from Poland

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"We are united by the Baltic Sea but from most other aspects we are separated. This must change. But this change cannot come if we don't invent a common strategy. And for that we need a daring and farseeing vision." These were the words of Groel Thurdin, Swedish Minister of Environment at a 1992 meeting of Environment Ministers from all the countries that surround the Baltic Sea. The notion of a Baltic Europe--now coming to be taken seriously in Poland--is one response to the challenge of placing environmental management in the context of integrating social, diplomatic, cultural, political and economic ties across the Baltic Sea.

Four years of Polish economic and political reforms oriented to meeting the criteria of European Community membership have prompted a neglect in the broader political and economic context of Baltic Sea environmental issue. Attention on the Baltic Sea has been focused on environmental restoration and effluent control through the construction of sewage plants and other technical controls in industry and agriculture. There has also been growing interest in designating new parks and protected areas along Poland's coast, including marine reserves. But to date, there has been little interest and little priority on the part of national government to seize the opportunity for trade and industrial restructuring offered by building closer ties with the other countries that surround the Baltic Sea.

There is now growing interest in Poland in the idea of Baltic Europe as a strategic vision for the economic and political reform process because: (1) economic reform has focussed on privatization and markets as ends and not means; (2) administrative reform now being undertaken will re-organize Poland's 49 administrative regions; (3) major restructuring of marine industry is now under way leading to unemployment and economic recession in coastal areas; (4) pressure on land development for residential uses and some homes is creating pressure on valuable coastal habitats and ecosystems; (5) prospecting for oil and other minerals in off-shore areas is a growing threat to coastal habitats; (6) despite political declarations and environmental investments, beaches and coastal waters continue to be polluted; (7) the prospect of Poland joining the EEC and sharing in the economic benefits now appears more remote than four years ago.