

## INDEPENDENT PUBLIC WATCH OVER THE BALTIC SEA GAS PIPELINE

### 1<sup>st</sup> International NGO Meeting on the Nord Stream Project

Helsinki, Finland, 4 March 2008

The 1<sup>st</sup> International NGO Meeting on the Nord Stream Project took place in the Finnish capital on 4 March, organised on the initiative and with the support of the Russian Regional Environmental Centre (RREC), at the same time as regular conference of the contracting parties of the Helsinki Convention for the Protection of the Baltic Sea (HELCOM), where 200 delegates from 9 coastal states discussed the Baltic Sea Action Plan adopted at the Ministers' Meeting on 15 November 2007.

The representatives of German, Finnish, Russian, Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian NGOs agreed to exchange information and cooperate with each other and with other NGOs from all 9 Baltic coastal states. Their aim is to set up an independent control and public participation in the process of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the Nord Stream Project within the framework of the Espoo Convention.

The aim of the Nord Stream Project is to construct a gas pipeline on the Baltic seabed from Vyborg in Russia to Greifswald in the East of Germany. However, each country affected has a different procedure for considering EIA and making information available to the public.

NGOs have interest in equal access to information on the issues of environmental impact of the Nord Stream Project in all Baltic States. At the same time it is very important for the NGOs not only to inform the public in all affected countries but also to intensify the discussion to make the public hearings on the Project a working mechanism of the public influence.

During discussions in working groups at the Conference as well as during the Nord Stream Project meeting particular attention was paid to specially protected natural areas of the Baltic Sea Region. These areas can serve as a test for environmental responsibility of the Nord Stream AG. The situation in these areas, and in particular in the "Ingermanlandsky" strict protected nature reserve (located in the zone influenced by the pipeline) will serve as an indicator of the *bona fides* of the company whose activity the NGOs plan to scrutinise.

Every state involved has assigned its own experts to the Nord Stream Project. However, the opinion of independent specialists is of utmost importance for large-scale projects like this one. Representatives of the WWF (as discussed with Anita Makinen, Head of WWF Finland, and Jochen Lamp of WWF Germany) and the CCB (as discussed with Lotta Nummelin, Chair of the CCB) could become the core expert group for international public control over the Nord Stream Project development. In Russia representatives of the Friends of the Baltic, the Transboundary Environmental Information Agency (TEIA), the Oil Project, the Centre for Environmental Initiatives (CEI), the Green World and other organisations have volunteered to perform the public control. The 1<sup>st</sup> International NGO Meeting was prepared by Friends of the Baltic, TEIA and CEI NGOs.

The participants of the 1<sup>st</sup> International Meeting have agreed on the need to meet again in order to inform the parties concerned on the development of the process in the countries affected by the Nord Stream Project, raising public awareness and development of tools for

independent public control and influence to ensure that the Project is implemented in an environmentally friendly manner.

The next NGO meeting is preliminarily scheduled for 13-14 May 2008 in Riga, in time with the 7<sup>th</sup> Baltic NGO Forum. It is planned to invite the Nord Stream Project experts from all involved countries. NGO representatives will exchange views on the progress of the EIA procedures and obtaining permissions in their countries, assess to what extent the observations and proposals on the EIA are taken into account, discuss possible cooperation, plan the next steps.

The participant list of the next meeting is open; proposals concerning the organisation and content of the meeting are welcome.

Information support of the action for the independent public control activities related to the Baltic Sea gas pipeline project is provided by the Saint-Petersburg Association of Environmental Journalists.

More information concerning the organisation of international NGO meetings on the Nord Stream Project can be obtained from:

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