INTRODUCTION

The Baltic Sea region is a part of Europe, where sustainable development is recognised as a key objective at the level of the Council of the Baltic Sea States. To a great extent, its achievement depends on multilateral transborder cooperation and partner relations between regional and municipal authorities, business communities and civil society, research and educational institutions. One of the major aspects of such cooperation is research and developments in the field of environmental safety of the Baltic region, which is home to more than 85 mln people, including both EU member states and those bordering them. The present issue of the journal is dedicated to these aspects.

Cities, farms, forestry, industry, transport, energy, and tourism account for a cluster of environmental problems as a result of discharge of contaminants to the sea with river flow and precipitation. Although, the number of "hot spots" is decreasing, the process is much slower than stipulated by HELCOM.

The issues includes a number of publications outlining the major environmental problems of the region, international cooperation in environmental protection, as well as the research and education aspects of cooperation between the bordering Baltic States. The basic patterns of anthropogenic impact on the Baltic Sea ecosystem, the importance of groundwater monitoring for regional nature management, the assessment of potential impact of a deep-water port construction on the hydrological regime and the ecological state of the Vistula Lagoon and other issues stemming from the regional environmental problems are highlighted on the pages of the journal. A special section — *Research methodology* — is dedicated to the problems of biodiversity and its evolution, responses of natural ecosystems to external and internal impacts.

The issue concludes with a critical review of the recently published philosophical monograph on the prospects of social development in the conditions of biosphere transformation.

The editorial board