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*Committee on Regional Development*

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## **DRAFT REPORT**

on the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the role of  
macro-regions in the future cohesion policy  
2009/2230(INI)

Committee on Regional Development

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## MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

### on the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the role of macro-regions in the future cohesion policy (2009/2230(INI))

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the European Union Strategy in the Baltic Sea Region (COM(2009)0248) and the indicative action plan accompanying the Strategy,
  - having regard to the Council Conclusions on the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region adopted on 26 October 2009,
  - having regard to its resolution of 16 November 2006 on a Baltic Sea Strategy for the Northern Dimension (2006/2171(INI))<sup>1</sup>,
  - having regard to the Opinions of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Communication from the Commission concerning the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (ECO/261) and on ‘Macro-regional cooperation – Rolling out the Baltic Sea Strategy to other macro-regions in Europe’ (ECO/251),
  - having regard to the Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on ‘The role of local and regional authorities within the new Baltic Sea Strategy’ of 21-22 April 2009,
  - having regard to the Committee of the Regions own-initiative opinion ‘The Committee of the Regions’ White Paper on Multilevel Governance’ (CdR 89/2009 fin),
  - having regard to Rule 48 of the Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development and the opinions of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and the Committee on Transport and Tourism (A7-0000/2010),
- A. having regard to the fact that, since the enlargement of the European Union in 2004, the Baltic Sea has become the EU’s internal sea, which unites countries but also presents its own challenge, and also that the countries of the Baltic Sea Region demonstrate interdependence and share the same problems,
- B. having regard to the fact that the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is a pilot for future macro-regional strategies, such as the Danube Basin, the Mediterranean Sea, the Alps and the Atlantic Arc, and that the Strategy’s success will directly influence the way in which future strategies are implemented,
- C. having regard to the fact that the idea of creating functional regions, focused around joint objectives and development problems, can lead to an increase in the effectiveness of EU regional policy,
- D. having regard to the fact that in order to increase the effectiveness of regional policy, in particular in terms of its post-2013 reform, the idea of an integrated approach should be supported and developed, together with the creation of strategies for macro-regions that

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<sup>1</sup> Texts adopted, P6\_TA(2006)0494.

are strategies for the whole of the European Union, the implementation of which must not, however, lead to the renationalisation of cohesion policy,

1. Welcomes the approval of the European Commission and the support of the Council for the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, which Parliament has been calling for since 2006;
2. Welcomes, in particular, the fact that the Strategy is the result of broad consultation with interested parties in the Member States, including not only national, regional and local authorities but also the academic and business communities as well as NGOs, showing that the consultation process and the inclusion of partners from the very beginning of work on the Strategy is an important factor in its success;
3. Believes that the establishment as part of the Strategy of a new framework for cooperation based on an integrated approach opens up the possibility for the more rational and effective use of the financial resources available for environmental protection and the development of the Baltic Sea Region both from EU and national funds and from various financial institutions;
4. Emphasises the need for an environmental impact assessment of the Northern Gas Pipeline and other similar projects as well as the need to ensure that the construction of the pipeline does not affect shipping conditions adversely;
5. Draws attention to the strategic significance of the Baltic Sea Region for the development of renewable energy projects such as wind farms or biofuels available in the region;
6. Draws attention to the need to create an effective and environmentally friendly transport and communication network (sea, land and inland);
7. Draws attention to the significant economic disproportions that exists in the Baltic Sea Region and disproportions in terms of innovation, and the necessity to increase the potential of highly developed areas and eliminate inequality in order to create a permanent area of common prosperity with a high level of competitiveness, which is crucial in the face of an aging population;
8. Calls for the renewal and deepening of relations as part of the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region between the European Union and neighbouring countries not belonging to the Union whose territories are part of the functional areas of a given macro-region or affect those areas directly;
9. Calls on the Member States and regions to take advantage of the Structural Funds available for 2007-2013 in order to ensure maximum support for the Strategy, while understanding the difficulties associated with modifying the Operational Programmes in the current programming period;
10. Considers that all actions regarding sector policies with a territorial dimension are of key importance to the Strategy's success and the achievement of the ambitious goals of further macro-regional strategies, including the common agricultural policy, fisheries policy and industrial policy, as well as combining available funds intended for jointly defined goals in a given area; in this context a policy review should be carried out with regard to these new challenges and appropriate organisational structures put in place at EU level;

11. Believes that the Strategy's territorial dimension will lead to the concrete development of reflections on territorial cohesion, which the Treaty of Lisbon places on an equal footing with economic and social cohesion;
12. Welcomes the strengthening of cooperation between countries and regions in terms of macro-regions and the development of further joint action strategies;
13. Draws attention to the fact that the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region should be seen as a process in which the principle of action and cooperation is constantly developed, and that the overriding goal is to find optimal mechanisms that can be transferred to future macro-regional strategies;
14. Considers that territorial cooperation developed as part of a strategy for macro-regions can lead to a significant strengthening of the integration process through the greater involvement of civil society in the decision-making process and the implementation of concrete actions; in this context the implementation of social, cultural-scientific and tourism elements is recommended for macro-regional strategies;
15. Emphasises the importance of promoting the development of education and research as well as encouraging the Member States to enter into close cooperation in these areas;
16. Guided by the principle of subsidiarity, and seeing the enormous potential for cooperation at local and regional level, underlines the considerable importance of creating an effective, multilevel structure for cooperation;
17. Considers that the idea of macro-regions combines the considerable potential for optimising the response to the challenges and problems appearing in a given region with that of using the resources available;
18. Awaits with great interest the analysis of the first results and experiences in connection with the implementation of the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, which will lead to the development of possible sources of payment and a method for financing macro-regional strategies and be an inspiration and example for further macro-regions;
19. Draws attention, for the benefit of future macro-regional strategies, to the need for the European Commission to resolve the issue of its own appropriate human and financial resources;
20. Calls on the European Commission, in the context of the need to carry out an interim analysis of the implementation of the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, to prepare concrete instruments and criteria for evaluating projects based on indicators that allow comparisons to be made;
21. Calls on the European Commission, the Member States and its own Members to find answers to the questions of what nature macro-regional policies should take and how they should be programmed (separately or as part of cohesion policy), who should implement them and how, and with what sources of funding they should be financed;
22. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

## EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

The problems arising in this age of globalisation, rapid climatic and demographic change and increased economic competition often transcend administrative or political borders.

Thus we are faced with the need to develop specific responses to such challenges and the way existing political and financial instruments are applied to them.

This is the context which gave rise to the concept of the macro-region, a functional space concentrated on common development goals or problems and possessing certain common features and geographical determinants.

The Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is the first, and so far the only, attempt to create a complex common development strategy for a macro-region of this type.

According to the Communication from the European Commission<sup>2</sup>, 'the Baltic Sea Region is a highly heterogeneous area in economic, environmental and cultural terms, yet the countries concerned share many common resources and demonstrate considerable interdependence.' That interdependence, along with the need to confront similar challenges, is the justification for joint action within the framework of the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

The Strategy was adopted after wide consultation with interested parties in the Member States, including not only public authorities but also academic and business circles and NGOs. The consultation process and the involvement of partners from the very beginning of work on the strategy must be considered a success in itself. The work gave rise to a proposal for a new form of cooperation within the European Union. The regions of eight EU Member States, as well as those of states outside the Union, with close on 100 million inhabitants, are now able to plan, set priorities and implement action in pursuit of common goals, with the overall aim of ensuring effective protection of the environment and harmonious economic and social development.

The four pillars of the Strategy, aimed at making better use of Community programmes and national policies, are as follows:

- protection of the environment,
- enhancing the region's prosperity,
- increasing accessibility and attractiveness, and
- ensuring safety and security in the region.

The Strategy is further divided into 15 priority areas and over 70 flagship projects.

It takes as its starting point the projects and initiatives already existing in the region, whether developed by the EU or implemented in direct cooperation between Member States in the Baltic Sea region, and places them in a new cooperative framework based on an integrated policy.

The undoubted condition for the success of a strategy defined in this way is coordination of the activities pursued under all policies having a territorial impact. Optimum results are possible only if activities and available resources are linked and directed towards jointly

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<sup>2</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (COM(2009)248 final, 10 June 2009).

defined goals in a given area. Efforts to deal with challenges such as climate change can be effective only if we take into account other policies that directly affect them (e.g. fisheries policy and the common agricultural policy).

The Strategy is also predicated on strengthened cooperation with neighbouring countries not belonging to the Union whose territories are part of functional spaces defined by the given macro-region or affect those spaces indirectly. For example, in striving to ensure the cleanliness of the waters of the Baltic Sea, we cannot ignore the fact that the rivers of certain states flow into it even though the states in question have no direct access to the Sea.

The main challenge in implementing the Strategy for the BSR is to create sound structures for cooperation and coordination and an efficient management system.

The EC is nevertheless to constitute the strategic centre for the complex supervision of implementation, despite fears that it does not possess sufficient financial or human resources at this time to supervise implementation of the Strategy efficiently.

Responsibility for the actual implementation of the Strategy is to lie with the Member States, in which respect the creation of new organisational or administrative structures does not seem necessary or likely to contribute to efficient implementation.

Such an approach clearly requires an additional organisational effort and wide-ranging cooperation between institutions, organisations and partners in the framework of individual policies at EU, national, regional and local level, in accordance with the principle of multilevel governance recommended by the Committee of the Regions<sup>3</sup>.

In line with this principle, implementation of projects in the framework of the Strategy will be the task of regional authorities, NGOs and citizens' associations, which best know their own situation and possibilities, and it is on their efforts that the success of the Strategy will depend.

Furthermore, if the idea of an integrated approach is not to remain an empty slogan, and the Strategy is not to be simply a collection of separate projects but a creator of added value, practical evaluation criteria must be established on the basis of a set of indicators that permit comparability. It is important that the report on implementation of the Strategy announced for 2011 give a true picture of the achievements and difficulties, so as to enable any necessary amendments and improvements to be made and the Strategy to be given new impetus for the future.

We need to think about possibilities for exploiting our experience in implementing the Strategy, and specifically about whether it represents a desirable direction for future cohesion policy and is the right way to develop cooperation within the European Union in such macro-regions as the Danube Basin, the Mediterranean Basin or the Alps. Is the creation of macro-regions – functional regions made up of groups of regions concentrating on common development goals or problems and possessing similar characteristics and geographical determinants – an efficient approach to the challenges of future cohesion policy?

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<sup>3</sup>Own-initiative opinion of the Committee of the Regions: *White Paper on Multilevel Governance*, CdR 89/2009 final.