

**Preparation of the EU's Baltic Sea Strategy:
Finland's objectives for the priorities of the Strategy**

A VISION OF A CLEAN BALTIC SEA AND A PROSPERING ECONOMIC AREA

The objective is a clean and healthy Baltic Sea and an economically strong and prosperous Baltic Sea region. The realisation of the vision is a more demanding task. Its attainment requires determined, efficient and urgent action. The state of the Baltic Sea is alarming. Increasing maritime transport, especially increased oil and chemical shipping, add to the accident risk. Eutrophication endangers the health of the Baltic Sea. The Baltic Sea region offers economic prospects which, as yet, have not been harnessed in the best possible manner. In Finland's view, the EU Baltic Sea Strategy can provide a well-functioning instrument to achieve the vision.

Finland welcomes the December European Council's decision to invite the Commission to present an EU strategy for the Baltic Sea region. The EU's Baltic Sea Strategy will make it possible to use the best and most efficient EU instruments, including legislation, policies and programmes, for the attainment of the common objectives. The strategy will improve the implementation of the ongoing action plans and regulations concerning the Baltic Sea region. There is no need for new structures.

The realisation of the Baltic Sea vision and the related objectives requires common actions and the involvement of all Baltic Sea coastal states. Therefore, it is important that the European Council conclusions make reference to the Northern Dimension and thus include the external dimension of the Baltic Sea cooperation. Most objectives can be best attained through international-level measures by drawing on the existing structures and actors. Such measures include, for example, active involvement in the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) which would then commit all Baltic Sea coastal states in an equal manner.

A clean Baltic Sea

Stopping eutrophication: The Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) Baltic Sea Action Plan, issued in November, is a programme to restore the good ecological state of the Baltic marine environment by 2021. The programme sets reduction targets for nutrient loading and a common model for burden sharing. Consideration should also be given to utilising the EU instruments in ways that best contribute to the implementation of the HELCOM Action Plan. After the transition periods for the Urban Waste Water

Directive have come to an end, all Member States will be able to fully implement the directive's objectives. The treatment of urban waste water can be supported via the EU's financial instruments. The state of coastal waters can be affected through the Water Framework Directive. The Baltic Sea coastal states should coordinate their maritime strategies in line with the EU Maritime Strategy Directive to ensure a regionally consistent approach. The European Union should act decisively within IMO to impose a total ban on discharging sewage into the Baltic Sea.

Reducing nutrient loads from agriculture: EU provisions on agri-environmental support contain certain framework conditions on the basis of which Member States can propose measures that are suitable for their special conditions. Due to varying circumstances, the emphasis and magnitude of environmental support and related actions may differ between Member States. Member States have an obligation to offer environmental support but farmers can choose independently whether or not to participate in the support schemes. With regard to the protection of the Baltic Sea, the conditions for environmental support should include supplementary measures to further improve water protection. New measures are also needed, for example, to promote the use of livestock manure as fertiliser and to find other uses for it. At the same time, it is necessary to pay attention to the growing nutrient inputs from the expanding agricultural production in the St Petersburg region. The reduction of these inputs calls for international cooperation.

The aim of the EU fisheries policy is to promote sustainable exploitation of fish stocks. The European Union agrees on the annual fishing quota for the Baltic Sea. Fisheries and related regulations aim at a gradual introduction of an ecosystem approach that maintains the diversity of seas. The environmental effects of fish farming should be further reduced.

The Baltic Sea ecosystem is also threatened by the arrival of non-native species, such as the predatory water flea (*Cercopagis pengoi*) and comb jellyfish (*Mnemiopsis leidyi*), into the Baltic Sea via ships and their ballast water. In 2004, IMO concluded the International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments. The ratification of the convention has been hampered by, for example, lack of sophisticated techniques for the treatment of ballast water. With the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) Baltic Sea Action Plan, the Baltic Sea coastal states agreed on a roadmap for the ratification of the convention by 2013. The European Union should actively promote the rapid ratification of the international convention.

Safe sea traffic

Safety at sea must be continuously improved to prevent maritime disasters, terrorist action and environmental damage. Between 1995 and 2007, oil shipping in the Gulf of Finland has increased by seven times, and is currently some 140 million tonnes a year. The growth is expected to continue to be significant in the near future. Shipping on the

Baltic Sea in difficult ice conditions during the winter introduces a special challenge. In this respect, the Baltic Sea differs from the other EU sea zones.

Common traffic image: Surveillance of the use of seas, archipelagos and coastal areas requires that authorities are capable of controlling sea areas extensively and in all conditions. A common traffic image between the European Union and the Baltic Sea coastal states and their various authorities can be enhanced by improving mutual cooperation in maritime surveillance. Intensified cooperation may result in a common traffic image covering the Baltic Sea coastal states and all of the EU's sea zones. The work is currently in progress under the European Defence Agency and the aim is to come up with a technical solution and practical implementation principles for the exchange of information between traffic image systems in order to create a common traffic image for the European Union. All Baltic Sea coastal states must be involved in the development of maritime surveillance cooperation.

The development of monitoring, surveillance and information systems for maritime transport offers an essential tool to proactively reduce the accident risks brought about by increased vessel traffic. Estonia, Finland and Russia maintain an obligatory reporting system, the Gulf of Finland Reporting System (GOFREP), for tracing the movement of ships. Measures to extend the Gulf of Finland Reporting System to cover the whole of the Baltic Sea should be promoted. It would be useful to examine if the maritime surveillance system could be further developed from traffic surveillance to traffic controlling, in line with air traffic control systems. In the development process, it is important to take into consideration the views of all Baltic Sea states. In addition, international waters require IMO-level action.

Prevention of oil pollution: The prevention of oil and chemicals pollution in the open sea is the most effective way of avoiding coastal pollution. This requires a sufficient number of oil recovery vessels capable of operating in open sea conditions. In winter, difficult ice conditions may pose a special challenge for the oil pollution response capacity, especially in the northern parts of the Baltic Sea. In case of a major accident, there is need for an efficient use and coordination of the existing oil pollution response capacity.

Safeguarding the security of supplies must be taken into consideration in order to guarantee that maritime transports function in any circumstances. With regard to the security of supplies, it is vital that the EU Member States have sufficient own tonnage and certified maritime traffic management systems.

EU civil protection cooperation: Assistance and preventive action, which are both timely and of sufficient scope, should be developed both at the Union level and internationally among all Baltic Sea coastal states. In the Gulf of Finland, cooperation between the Estonian, Finnish and Russian border guards covers sea rescue operations and exercises and exchange of information as regards the border situation. The aforementioned

cooperation could be drawn upon in efforts to intensify cooperation and exchange of information between the EU coastguard authorities and to develop the EU civil protection cooperation.

A prosperous economic environment

The Baltic Sea region is one of the growing economic areas in which the functioning of the internal market should be better ensured. The number of cross-border businesses in the Baltic Sea region is growing and therefore it is important to create an integrated market area with few barriers to the trading of goods and services and with well-functioning labour markets.

The competitiveness of regions can be enhanced through regional policy measures. This goal can be achieved through specialisation based on the regions' inherent strengths and competences, close cooperation among relevant actors, and inter-regional networking. The priorities of the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007 - 2013, include the promotion of innovation within the Baltic Sea region, accessibility to and within the Baltic Sea region, recognition of the Baltic Sea as a common resource and the promotion of attractive and competitive towns and regions. It would be important to implement the programme effectively through practical projects. The mid-term review of the programme will provide an opportunity to reassess the priorities. Finland considers it important for the EU cohesion policy to offer policy instruments with which to promote the development of the Baltic Sea region as a European and a global economic area with due attention to the principles of sustainable development.

In the implementation of the overall regional policy objectives, it is important to recognise the special characteristics of the Baltic Sea region and utilise them in regional development. It is also important to adapt EU policies to varying regional conditions. The EU members among the Baltic coastal states and Norway, Russia and Belarus participate in Baltic regional planning and regional development cooperation. This interaction provides a framework for drawing up long-term guidelines with the following priorities: urban networking, accessibility, information technology, renewable energy sources, development and protection of coastal areas and planning the use of sea areas.

In 2002, the European Parliament and Council issued to the Member States recommendations on the promotion of integrated coastal zone management. Among the recommendations was the drawing up of national coastal strategies. It would be useful to analyse the strategies of the Baltic Sea coastal states to see if they provide material for possible further action.

- Supportive science and innovation policy

In the Baltic Sea region it is possible to promote a stronger regional approach to R&D, education and cultural affairs, and the networking of SMEs. Innovation in the Baltic Sea region can also be promoted via the aforementioned Baltic Sea Programme.

Cooperation in Baltic-related research should be further strengthened . A joint Baltic Sea Research Programme, which forms part of the EU's 7th Research Framework Programme currently under preparation, will occupy a prominent role. The research programme will receive EU funding and national-level research funding from all Baltic Sea coastal states. The aim of the research programme should be to improve utilisation of gained research information to support the protection of the Baltic Sea and promote the creation of European research cooperation. It would be important for the Commission to submit a proposal for the programme by the end of 2008.

Universities and research communities in the Baltic Sea region should strengthen and deepen cross-border cooperation. The mobility of students and researchers should be encouraged and supported by making full use of the EU's various education programmes.

- Efficient logistics and transport connections

In order to develop affordable and effective transport links and to remove bottlenecks hampering their operation, cooperation among the EU Member States and towards Russia is needed. Authorities in all the countries involved should offer equal operating conditions for business.

The concept of the Baltic Sea Motorway should be drawn upon and improved operationally. The distinctive characteristics of the Baltic Sea region, including shipping in frozen waters, should be taken into account in the development of the maritime transport strategy for 2008-2018 and in measures to promote short sea shipping.

In the reform of the European Union's TEN policies, attention should be given to transport connections in the Baltic region and to their functioning and be extended to the examination of the EU's neighbouring countries and their neighbours.

The Northern Dimension transport and logistics partnership, which is currently under preparation, offers another important instrument to advance a trans-European transport route and the Motorway of the Seas projects in northern Europe.

The need to protect critical infrastructure within the Baltic Sea region is accentuated in the fields of maritime logistics, port security and energy security. It is necessary to enhance cooperation among all Baltic Sea states to protect critical infrastructure.

- Energy cooperation

As regards energy issues, the importance of the Baltic Sea region is highlighted by its role as a transit route for energy transports from Russia. And increased use of renewable energy sources, such as wind power, will affect the Baltic Sea.

The development of the internal market for electricity and gas is a prominent part of the EU's energy policy and the Union is currently discussing a proposal for the third internal market package. EU regulations have direct impact on the Baltic Sea energy markets. It would be useful to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the development of the Baltic Sea energy markets. The markets have changed, capacity is ageing and the EU's internal market package will only accelerate the pace of change.

Effective internal security

It is important to intensify cooperation to combat organised crime in the Baltic Sea region. The Baltic Sea States Organised Crime Task Force plans and cooperates to combat organised crime by, for example, promoting exchange of information and judicial, educational and investigational cooperation. The cooperation involves police forces and customs and border control authorities. The cooperation could be advanced and further developed within the Union and expanded in the entire Baltic Sea region.

Cooperation in the field of crime prevention is needed to prevent and expose intentional damaging of maritime waters and actions that endanger safety at sea. A Baltic Sea surveillance system would be a useful tool for this. Measures to prevent terrorism are vital to improve international port security and safety at sea. Steps should be taken to make the measures more preventive in nature.

Strengthening cooperation to prevent the spread of contagious diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, is important for both the region's internal security and demographic policies.