

Brussels, 10 April 2008

**Position Paper
of the Interregional Group „Baltic Sea Regions“
of the Committee of the Regions
on
an EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region**

The Interregional Group “Baltic Sea Regions” of the Committee of the Regions,

- *bearing in mind* the European Parliament resolution of 16 November 2006 on a Baltic Sea Region Strategy for the Northern Dimension,

- *bearing in mind* the declaration of the Council of Baltic Sea States of June 2007 on the development of a strategy for the Baltic Sea Region,

- *bearing in mind* the invitation of 14 December 2007 of the European Council to the European Commission to present an EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region at the latest by June 2009,

- *bearing in mind* that the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region will be one of the top priorities for the upcoming Swedish presidency in the second half of 2009,

1. *welcomes* the fact that the European Commission has taken up work on a stocktaking report with a view to drafting the Strategy, *recognizes* the importance of a European perspective on the circumstances of the Baltic Sea Region, and *stresses* its support for the upcoming Swedish presidency in its willingness to promote the implementation of the Strategy;

2. *considers* necessary to ensure the implementation of the strategy by initiating an Action Plan with concrete benchmarks for a sound success control;

3. *emphasises* that an EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region should complement, support and constitute a framework for existing cooperation efforts;

4. *highlights* the fact that the Strategy must reflect the specific circumstances of the Baltic Sea Region;

5. *calls* for a coherent policy in order to tap the existing high economic potential of the Baltic Sea Region while at the same time supporting the improvement of the environmental status of the Baltic Sea, thus contributing to the sustainability of the region and the implementation of the agendas of Lisbon and Gothenburg;

6. *notes* that regional and local authorities of the Baltic Sea Region have a key role to play in areas such as energy, transport and infrastructure planning, research and development, and environmental measures;

7. *calls* for the involvement of the existing governmental and non-governmental Baltic Sea organizations and other stakeholders in the drafting and implementation of the Strategy, thus making use of their expertise and experience and of the high level of integration of the Baltic Sea Region with its long tradition of political and project-based cooperation in order to further develop the region as a role model and blueprint for European regional cooperation;

8. *stresses* the necessity of cooperation with Norway and Russia as the only non-EU Member States of the region in the Strategy as early as possible because a coherent and sustainable Strategy requires an institutionalized dialogue and cooperation with all states of the Baltic Sea Region;

9. *notes* that there is a developed cooperation between local and regional authorities of the Baltic Sea Region, and *stresses* the importance of deepened cooperation at the national level between the states of the Region on the matters of the Strategy;

10. *emphasises* the need to coordinate the Strategy with the activities and policies of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the other Baltic Sea organizations and the Northern Dimension so that the Strategy would fit into the context of the political reorientation in the Baltic Sea Region, thus giving an additional impulse to optimize existing cooperation structures that would also benefit the implementation and acceptance of the Strategy;

11. *welcomes* the preliminary considerations of the European Commission to use an objective based and cross-sectoral approach in the drafting of the Strategy which would correspond with the approach of the integrated European Maritime Policy and therefore will – particularly as maritime activities characterize the Baltic Sea Region – have to be an important element of the Strategy by establishing structures and instruments of implementation of the Maritime Policy in the Baltic Sea Region;

12. *considers* the enhancement of competitiveness, of prosperity, of the ecological situation and the quality of life in the Baltic Sea Region to be the overall objectives of the Strategy, and *calls* on the European Commission to consider the following aspects in relation to the Strategy:

- a) to implement the integrated European Maritime Policy within the Baltic Sea Region and to develop the Baltic Sea Region into Europe's maritime best practice region as claimed by the Kiel Conference on Maritime Policy in 2006 and affirmed by the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference in 2007;
- b) to establish – due to the critical status of the Baltic Sea and in accordance with the EU Marine Strategy Directive – the Baltic Sea Region as a pilot area with stricter timetables and content, notably by supporting the implementation of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan;
- c) to establish a new cross-sectoral approach with a coordinated and coherent regional implementation of EU legislation and policy, as called for in the integrated European Maritime Policy with the EU Marine Strategy as its environmental pillar;
- d) to include all sectors that have significant importance in order to improve the environmental status of the Baltic Sea, e.g. land-based activities such as agriculture, transports and energy production; further action in various areas will also have to be considered in order to meet the regional needs, including measures within relevant EU policies such as the Common Agricultural Policy and the Common Fisheries Policy;
- e) to enhance the efforts of mitigating global warming and at the same time elaborating strategies to adapt to the impacts of climate change;
- f) to achieve a sustainable and less vulnerable supply of energy in the Baltic Sea Region by e.g. promoting renewable energies and improving energy efficiency;
- g) to develop transport and communication infrastructures by reducing the distances within the region (improved east-west communication) and the region's distance to Central Europe (improved north-south communication);
- h) to develop common and harmonised politics for SMEs in order to capitalize on the many small innovative firms in the region;
- i) to create better conditions for research and development (R&D), not only making the Baltic Sea Region more attractive for R&D, but also for the individuals involved, thus placing the region in a position to attract creative collaborators;
- j) to encourage student exchanges within the region; suggests that the universities in the region cooperate in networks and move towards a division of labour in order to foster centres of excellence capable of competing at international level;
- k) to counter the downsides of increased mobility by supporting and complementing the efforts of fighting human trafficking and other forms of organized international crime in the area.