

EUROREGION BALTIC



Response to the European Commission's public consultation on the future EU 2020 Strategy.

Euroregion Baltic welcomes the initiative taken by the European Commission to design the EU 2020 Strategy as the successor to the current Lisbon Strategy, with a vision to achieve a sustainable social market economy, a smarter and greener economy.

Euroregion Baltic fully agrees the proposed key priorities of basing growth on knowledge, empowering people in inclusive societies and greener economy constitute good foundations for the EU to make a full recovery from the current economic crisis as well as help to prevent a similar one in future. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that this is not only the crisis that should lie at the roots of the Strategy but the profound conviction of the need to strengthen the effectiveness of the European economy.

Surprisingly though, the specific priorities are very similar to the 24 priority areas listed in the integrated guidelines for the EU Growth & Jobs Strategy from 2005. This does not indicate a specific new or ambitious orientation of the strategy, though we do appreciate the more concretely underlined need to combat poverty and social exclusion, to prevent youth from leaving school too early, to take advantage of the potential in the creative industries as well as the need to develop smart, upgraded transport and energy infrastructures.

Euroregion Baltic partners propose that the Commission includes specific priorities aiming at improving transport accessibility to peripheral and maritime areas, as well as specific priorities linking the agriculture and rural areas more closely to the development of a greener economy, which seems rather obvious. In addition, we would like to observe that a proper linkage of transport and energy should make a significant impact increasing the competitiveness of the EU. Therefore, projects of this kind should be considered with appropriate attention.

Euroregion Baltic argues that the EU Cohesion Policy should be retained as one of the EU's core priorities. This objective co-funds projects in the fields of innovation, entrepreneurship, environmental protection and human resources thus being very much in line with the proposed priorities of the EU 2020 Strategy.

Euroregion Baltic would also like to stress the importance of the principles of territorial cohesion and sub-national subsidiarity, enshrined in the Treaty of Lisbon which has come into force. EU 2020 Strategy should accommodate these principles accordingly. The new macro-regional strategies such as the EU Baltic Sea Strategy should be considered as one of the key elements in the implementation, and the role of the regional and local

authorities should be more clear, as expressed on 6th October 2009 by Commissioner Mr Pawel Samecki¹

Euroregion Baltic believes that the involvement of regional and local authorities in policy implementation and a bottom up approach, both in the delivery of the Strategy and in its development are vital to safeguard ownership and governance among all the Strategy stakeholders. The Cohesion Policy principle of partnership would be the ideal partnership approach in the implementation of the EU 2020. To our disappointment the role of regional and local levels as implementers of the proposed goals and actions is not clearly defined in the document. We strongly believe it to be true that, as the Lisbon Treaty points out, a more open, effective and democratic EU could only be reached if the regional and local dimension is considered.

Euroregion Baltic fully supports the proposal to achieve clearer governance and a more effective implementation of the strategy. We propose a major reform in order to align the EU funds and programmes, as several existing funds and programmes at present overlap each other. In particular, we propose that Community programmes such as the Competitiveness & Innovation Programme (CIP), the PROGRESS programme and parts of the rural development, fishing development, LIFE, lifelong learning and research programmes be integrated with the structural fund programmes, and thus a much more coherent and coordinated approach is adopted to implement the EU 2020 strategy with its economic, social and environmental dimensions, which correspond to the Cohesion Policy objectives. This process will also improve transparency and not at least ensure a genuine partnership approach including both the elaboration, implementation and evaluation stages.

Euroregion Baltic considers it extremely important that cross-border co-operation should be highlighted throughout the Strategy, and as a key element in the goal of building a European system of flexicurity where it will be of benefit between schools and enterprises, as well as between national employment services.

Euroregion Baltic would like to see an information and communication plan accompanying the EU 2020 Strategy with the view of making it more visible and more accessible to a larger number of people within the European Union.

Euroregion Baltic would also like to note the fact that public consultation of the EU 2020 Strategy should have started earlier. Consultations over the holiday period will most certainly not have allowed sufficient and efficient process.

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¹ "The European Commission regards the association of local and regional authorities in all aspects of the new (2020) strategy, from its elaboration to its implementation, as a key to its successes." (Reference: Speech at the Open Days Workshop 06A13: Presentation of the outcome of the consultation of European regions and cities on a new Lisbon Strategy after 2010)