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Translating Good Intentions into Hard Facts

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

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Prime ministers, ministers, friends of the Baltic Sea Region, ladies and gentlemen

It is a great pleasure to be here with so many people from **different walks of life** who are working for the greater prosperity of the Baltic Sea Region. It is clear that this strategy belongs not only to the politicians! I'd like to welcome too, our friends from the Nordic Council of Ministers, HELCOM, the Council of Baltic Sea States, BSSSC, and the UBC

Let me start by **thanking** the Baltic Development Forum, Pomorskie Region, the City of Gdansk and not least the Polish EU Presidency for their excellent cooperation in organising this event. A job very well done!

And while I am about it, I would like to take the opportunity, in front of our eminent guests to thank all of you involved in running the **Priority Areas, Horizontal Actions, Flagship Projects and national coordination** of the Strategy. You are crucial to the success of this initiative and **you deserve support at the very highest level.**

Ladies and Gentlemen

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is an experiment. Others are watching to see if this new macro regional approach really works. We are currently engaged in a review, and it is important that if some features of the Strategy need adjusting, that changes are made. As you know, the Commission has been asked to provide a report by 2013 on the added value of the macro regions currently in operation, here and in the Danube region.

Therefore, today I will speak rather frankly.

This year we issued our first formal report on the implementation of the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. It showed that we have already chalked up a **number of achievements.**

As a result of the Strategy **many new projects have been developed, and it has breathed new life into existing projects and networks.** It has provided a framework in which individual projects can be anchored in a broader context, and has been useful as a point of reference for the IFIs and others.

I'd like to highlight just one example of a new project that shows the added value of the Strategy - the new Flagship Project BalticDEAL.

BalticDEAL which works to reduce algae blooms was developed by farmers' associations to help tackle eutrophication. This unique project now builds bridges between environmental concerns and agricultural needs, and works with other projects to ensure the widest possible cross-sectoral impact. **This is the kind of joined-up approach that the Strategy and Action Plan are helping to develop.**

Of course to be truly successful, the Strategy needs the active involvement of everyone in the region, including non EU Member States. I am pleased to note the very constructive cooperation with **Russia** in particular. Today we have many Strategy stakeholders working with Russian partners in areas like environmental protection, water quality or innovation, in all our interest.

And, even in the middle of a financial period, we have been able to make some **progress on alignment of funds.** Already many EU co-financed *cooperation* projects are ensuring that the Strategy is taken into account in all activities, and some have already been targeted on Strategy priorities. We are also seeing the Strategy beginning to be taken as a routine point of reference for the European

Fisheries Fund, the European Social Fund and the European Rural Development Fund.

However as our report made clear, **challenges remain**. Devising the strategy was the easy part. I have to say to you, very bluntly, we can't now just sit back and expect the Strategy to survive and prosper. Those who had the vision to launch the strategy have to keep on putting their weight behind it – even if this sometimes means difficult decisions.

I have noted progress on **alignment of funds, but we need to see so much more**. To be very honest with you, we cannot expect great results from the Strategy if we confine it to co operation funds. The Strategy requires a **change of mindset** that thinks region wide wherever relevant – at national or regional level and no matter what the topic. **Only if the needs identified in the Action Plan – which was widely consulted and agreed upon in the Region – are linked to available financial sources, will the Strategy succeed.**

The **new regulations** the Commission has just proposed will help. In the new programming period, **macro-regional strategies will have to be taken into account in the common strategic framework and the new partnership contracts**. This means that Baltic Sea strategy priorities will have to be more firmly embedded in the national proposals submitted by Member-States.

When it comes to negotiating the programmes, the new regulations make it explicit that **transnational cooperation** can also support the development and implementation of macro-regional strategies. But I hope you will choose to go beyond this and **make full use of the full range of funds available to support Strategy priorities**.

A second challenge is ensuring **adequate staffing** to implement the Strategy with enough continuity to allow expertise to be built up. We know that resources for public administration are under intense pressure. But, it is important that enough staff are in place not only to complete projects but to co ordinate and engage with partners.

This should not be seen as a benefit for the Strategy at the cost of the national administration. **There is no contradiction between the Strategy and national or regional priorities. They are, effectively, the same**. Working together is a matter of enlightened self-interest. This needs to be understood at all levels in a **real cultural shift**.

Our report made a number of recommendations that I look forward to seeing taken up in the Council of Ministers. I would like to focus on just one: the setting of **targets, accompanied by indicators**.

The whole philosophy of our reform of regional policy has been to make it more **results orientated**. We have to know where we want to get to, and define how we will measure our progress.

This is important to focus efforts. By defining the desired results, we will have greater clarity about how to work towards them. Being transparent about our goals also allows our citizens to better understand the Strategy, and to judge if it is delivering.

Therefore we suggest the development of a limited number of precise targets, both for the **Strategy as a whole**. These can be complemented by additional targets set at the individual **Priority Area level**.

To be meaningful, the targets should be accompanied by **indicators** that are measurable, and realistic with a baseline and clear deadlines. Above all, they should be able to capture the positive change that we expect the Strategy to bring about.

Over the summer, a **task force** of experts and Member State officials has met under the leadership of DG Regional Policy to identify what the overall targets could be. The outcome of this work is the topic of a plenary session tomorrow morning.

It is worth taking time for a detailed debate, using the expertise that we have in the Commission. BUT in due course we have to come to agreement, and this is perhaps **a litmus test of commitment to the Strategy as a whole.**

The Strategy was born of a spontaneous will in the Region to strengthen co operation. It will develop and grow if the will is there to do things differently from in the past. I believe that the aspiration to do this is there. But we must ensure that those good intentions **are translated into hard facts – or the high expectations that have been raised by the Strategy will be disappointed.**

Let me close by quoting the late Swedish diplomat Dag Hammarskjöld: "We are not permitted to choose the frame of our destiny. But what we put into it is ours".

The Strategy belongs to the region as a tool to make this a better place to live and work.

It is up to all of you to decide what you want from the Strategy, and how much you are willing to give to it in terms of commitment and funding. How – and indeed whether – it becomes a permanent feature of life in this region depends on the decisions and actions of that each of you will take.

Thank you