

Citizens' summary

EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

- The Baltic Sea is threatened. If no action is taken, this famous sea, renowned world-over for trading links, for its history and for leisure pursuits, is in severe ecological danger. The development of the Baltic Sea Region is also at risk, despite the opportunities created by the European Union single market. These challenges can only be addressed through better cooperation between the countries concerned, which are primarily EU Member States (Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland) but also include third countries.
- The main challenges are to diminish the pollution of the sea, to conserve fish stocks in a sustainable way, to reduce the risk of oil spills, to limit the impacts of climate change, to harness all opportunities afforded by the single market, to support the labour market, to promote entrepreneurship, to alleviate the energy isolation of the Baltic States, to improve transport links and to increase maritime safety and security.
- Although many Inter-Governmental and Non-Governmental bodies have cooperated over the course of many years in the region, in December 2007, EU Member States expressed their will to develop up a comprehensive strategy. For the first time, concrete actions will be targeted at the level of a 'macro-region'.

WHO WILL BENEFIT AND HOW?

- The strategy involves a wide range of actors: Member States, regions, cities, inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations, international financial institutions, the private sector, interest groups and the general public.
- The Member States will be charged with the implementation of actions, with support from the European Commission. Regional and local authorities, Inter-Governmental and Non-Governmental Bodies will be officially involved in the decision-making process and in the implementation.
- Citizens will benefit from the concrete actions of the strategy which will improve many aspects of their daily lives. For instance, action will be taken to reduce high levels of pollution in the sea, to improve transport systems and energy networks, to support small and medium enterprises and to improve maritime safety.

WHY DOES ACTION HAVE TO BE TAKEN BY THE EU?

- Following the 2004 EU enlargement, eight of the nine countries bordering the Baltic Sea became members of the European Union. The Baltic Sea became increasingly a concern for the EU. It could also profit more clearly from the EU opportunities.
- Many of the challenges identified fall within the scope of EU policies. The European Union - as an independent player with respected authority - is well-placed to facilitate cooperation in the region. The aim is to maximise the effectiveness of actions taken in the context of the strategy. EU programmes are already operating in the region (structural funds and rural development programmes notably) and can provide much of the framework for cooperation in the region.

WHAT EXACTLY WILL CHANGE?

- A set of 15 priority areas have been identified to be implemented in the coming years. They cover the environment, the economy, the transport and energy links and the safety / security of the Baltic Sea Region.
- The EU Council of Ministers, the European Commission and national authorities, with the support of all interested stakeholders will work together to ensure the success of the strategy. The objective is that joint decisions are taken and transformed into joint actions implemented in a cooperative manner.

WHEN IS THE PROPOSAL LIKELY TO COME INTO EFFECT?

- The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region will be discussed during the Swedish Presidency of the EU (second half of 2009). It is expected that implementation will start by the end of 2009.
- The action plan is rolling and will be reviewed regularly. New actions will be undertaken as new challenges arise.

For more information: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/baltic/