

# panorama

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The Directorate-General for Regional Policy

**SPECIAL  
EDITION**

## EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region at a glance



## A EUROPEAN UNION STRATEGY FOR THE BALTIC SEA REGION: FROM WORDS TO ACTIONS

*The EU's Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is a new way of working together in the Union. Regions in eight Member States, nearly 100 million people, will be able to plan, prioritise and implement activities confident that their colleagues and neighbours are working in the same vein, towards the same goals. This will enable the Baltic Sea Region to enjoy a sustainable environment and optimal economic and social development.*

### **Involving everyone**

The strategy was requested by the European Council following work by the European Parliament. As you will read in this edition of Panorama, the strategy has benefited from an exceptional level of commitment from partners and stakeholders at every level. Working together, we can make better use of the money and other resources available to improve the region's future. Expertise and energy can be harnessed more effectively, and the benefits of EU legislation be passed on to all those living in the region.

### **First steps**

An action plan prepared by the Commission puts forward 80 projects that will lead the way in meeting 15 interlinked priorities. The projects cover improvements to the environment (e.g. reducing nitrate and phosphate levels in the Baltic Sea), efforts to increase prosperity (e.g. promoting entrepreneurship), better accessibility (e.g. improving transport links), and promoting safety and security (e.g. better accident response). Real improvements are underway and their success, the success of the strategy as a whole, depends on the many partners in the region and the support from the highest political levels in all countries. The strategy offers a framework and following it will provide people with the certainty that they are building a better Baltic Sea Region. This edition of Panorama shows how the strategy proposes to unleash the region's strengths.

The Commission, the European Parliament, the Member States and all the stakeholders in the region are exploring a new way of working together. A way not based on money, or on special laws, or even on new institutions, but on the will of people to cooperate to solve the problems of a region. This macro-regional strategy, as we call it, is not limited by national or regional frontiers, nor by specific policy areas. There is a need for positive change – the extent of which will only be limited by the willingness of partners to act.



# THE EU STRATEGY FOR THE BALTIC SEA REGION

## MANY COUNTRIES, ONE REGION

A large portion of the Baltic Sea's 8 000 km coastline is shared by eight EU Member States, each with its own priorities and cares, its economic imperatives and political concerns. A shipping highway, all too often a dumping ground – the Baltic Sea is surrounded by nearly one hundred million people.

But despite years of collaborative action to improve the condition of the sea, it continues to deteriorate: so the European Union requested the Commission to come up with a living strategy to ensure the region's future is brighter.

The result? What comes through clearly is that everyone participating believes a strategy is urgently needed, the region's problems being too obvious to ignore. The initiatives and policies that are already up and running in a variety of fields, in a variety of countries, are good, but not coherent and so, not as efficient as they should be. Another very clear message is that the strategy must have practical application and not be theoretical – the time for just talking is past and the Baltic Sea Region needs to see action. This was echoed in the list of things people do not want to see – empty declarations without assigned actions within specific deadlines.

### 'First of a kind' strategy

Five years ago this May, Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania joined the Union. Their accession means that eight of the nine Baltic countries benefit from free movement of goods and services, share common water quality legislation in addition to sharing a largely common heritage. This physical and cultural proximity makes the Baltic the perfect place for which to create a 'first of a kind' strategy, one that embraces an entire macro-region. In particular, the strategy also constitutes an important first step towards the regional implementation of the Integrated Maritime Policy. The four cornerstones of the strategy are to make this part of Europe environmentally sustainable, prosperous, accessible and attractive and safe and secure.

The strategy was adopted by the Commission on 10 June, following intense debate and consultation involving over a hundred contributions. Two major conferences opened and closed the consultation period which ran from 30 September 2008 to 6 February 2009. In between, four open workshops were held, one on each of the strategy's cornerstones. At the same time, the Commission set up an open consultation to give everyone the chance to contribute their opinion, wherever they were. From young people at the Hamburg youth conference to the World Wide Fund for Nature, everyone was invited to have a say.

### Baltic Sea Region Programme area 2007 – 2013

- EU Member States
- Non-EU States



"Let the Baltic Sea Strategy show the world that working jointly can make a difference and the Baltic Sea can be saved."

Alm Anders

### What people are saying – responses to the public consultation

"The EU's Baltic Sea Strategy will need a body that is in charge of coordination and steering the process. Suitable for doing that could be the European Commission, having the capacities and the staff."

Tobias Etzold

"The Baltic Sea region is an important part of our common environment. Each of us has to contribute to the wellbeing of the Baltic Sea region. We can all be part of the strategy for restoring and saving this wonderful sea."

Börje Hagman



## Getting the strategy up and running

In December 2007, the Member States asked the Commission, with the Directorate-General for Regional Policy steering the process, to prepare a strategy for the Baltic Sea region. This would, amongst other things, help address the urgent environmental challenges related to the Baltic Sea. The Commission adopted the strategy on 10 June, with a Communication and action plan. It will now be transferred to the Parliament and the Council for discussion and agreement.

## Something for everyone

The four cornerstones of the strategy are couched in such a way that almost nothing is excluded. The Commission, having decided to go for a structured rather than selective approach, created a framework made up of: priorities, actions which are continuous and projects which have a deadline for their completion. By doing so, it set up a methodology which can endure while the individual goals, and the means to achieve them, change in line with the region's evolution, making it adaptable.

Not only does this mean the strategy can be used to structure an approach to the region for years to come, but it also allows every participant – Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany and Denmark – to have its priorities recognised within the strategy. Not all the priorities will have been embraced by every player, but every player has a priority which is addressed.

The strategy proposes to use primarily the Northern Dimension framework, a common policy of the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland, for the external aspects of cooperation, but with the option to use alternative channels (such as the Council of Baltic Sea States) when they are useful. Russia and other neighbouring countries have indicated that they perceive positively EU efforts to keep them informed, and the EU looks forward to cooperating with them on matters of common interest.

The strategy does not imply any additional funding at this stage – it is more a question of coordinating the large number of people and organisations involved across the area and deriving

maximum benefit from the existing ways national and EU policies operate. Practical rather than idealistic, it touches on many aspects of day-to-day life in the region. New projects will, for instance, contribute to reducing high levels of pollution in the sea, improving transport systems and energy networks and reinforcing protection from major emergencies at sea and on land.

## Easy to say, but where do we start?

The strategy hits the ground running with suggestions that build on measures that are already in place, if fragmented, in a bid to tackle the main challenges and seize the main opportunities. Here are some ideas:

### ••• SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

*The Baltic Sea, average depth only 58 metres, is losing its quality and biodiversity due to excessive discharges of nitrates and phosphates – from agriculture, industry and domestic sources. These flow into the sea, causing increasing eutrophication. This algal blooming turns large areas of the sea into stinking green slime which deoxygenates the water and kills off many of the species living in the affected area. It takes more than 30 years for the waters to change completely, so pollution is a particular problem.*

Some ideas in the strategy include building on action already taken in the region to remove phosphates from detergents. By removing them from all detergents, the amount of phosphates ending up in the Baltic could be cut by a quarter, reducing algal blooms.

A formal network of specialist advisers on environmental issues as they relate to agriculture, from all countries around the Baltic Sea, should encourage best practices that minimise fertiliser runoff while maintaining or even improving productivity.



Although the strategy itself does not have its own financing, between 2007-2013 the Baltic will benefit under Regional Policy and other EU funding:

- **Making the Baltic environmentally sustainable**

A total of €9.8 billion has been earmarked, including €3.1 billion to process waste water

- **Making the Baltic competitive**

A total of €6.7 billion has been earmarked, including €2.4 billion for Innovation in SMEs

- **Making the Baltic accessible**

A total of €27.1 billion has been earmarked: Information Society, €1.4 billion, transport €23.1 billion, energy €2.6 billion

- **Making the Baltic safe and secure through risk prevention**

A total of €697 million has been earmarked.

## INCREASING PROSPERITY

*The key weakness of the region is the low level of internal competitive pressure. Some countries in the region do not have a market big enough to promote needed competition. The only solution is to integrate the region more closely. In 2005 it was estimated that a typical international trade transaction would involve 27-30 actors, 40 original documents and 360 copies.*

The Services Directive sets out to achieve a real single market for services within the EU by cutting red tape and helping people to set up their businesses or move to another country. But its use is ragged and disjointed in the Baltic Region. The strategy includes actions to use the Directive more effectively, boosting trade and providing SMEs with greater opportunities.

To help tomorrow's entrepreneurs there needs to be an improvement in the education services on offer, so the strategy suggests setting up an 'Ivy League' of colleges and universities. This would ensure quality and bring together departments in the same field, in different centres of learning. The focus is also on encouraging people's right to move freely throughout the region in pursuit of knowledge or to teach.

## MAKING THE REGION ACCESSIBLE AND ATTRACTIVE

*The East and the North remain too isolated from the rest of the Union, which is, increasingly a gateway from Asia. Northern Finland, Sweden and the Baltic States have the lowest accessibility rates in the whole of Europe. Energy supply and security is also a particular concern, the region has too few links, with much reliance on imports and inadequate interconnections to ensure security.*

If you intend to travel from Warsaw to Tallinn you may well prefer to fly. The 36-hour train journey is certainly an unattractive prospect to those with little time to waste. With the need for environmentally-friendly ways of travelling, trains have to become a viable alternative, so the strategy suggests achieving the Rail Baltica target of a 120 km per hour link from Warsaw to Tallinn by 2013.

Energy is a key issue for the region – and crucial to it becoming an attractive place to live. Again, the strategy moves to boost existing measures in a practical and direct way. It sets out ways in which to complete energy interconnections between the

Baltic States and the wider region by supporting the Baltic Interconnection Plan and the Sweden-Lithuania/Latvia high voltage connection. And support is not just rhetoric. €500 million will be invested by the EU in the region's gas and electrical infrastructure.

## SAFETY AND SECURITY – THE PARAMOUNT ISSUES

*Maritime traffic is set to increase, and with huge oil tankers using the sea as a highway, the threat of accidents is very real. Between 2000 and 2007, oil shipments into the Baltic more than doubled to reach 171 million tonnes. In difficult winter conditions the risk is heightened and ships are frequently not adequately reinforced against ice. Organised crime also makes the region less secure. Situated where it is, the Baltic's crime patterns are exacerbated by the disparities in economic and social conditions.*

With long external borders, the region has need of coherent, cross-border measures to eliminate the trafficking of people, drugs and arms. Border guard exchange systems would be useful, including maritime law enforcement cooperation. The strategy's action plan suggests ways to coordinate the fight against crime by integrating the existing organisations to help them be more cooperative. It proposes joining forces to combine: law enforcement, mobile patrol squads, investigation teams, intelligence teams, the sharing of equipment between services and more cooperation on the development, purchasing, deployment and use of technology.

To deal with maritime risk, the action plan puts forward, among other ideas, the creation of an integrated network of reporting and surveillance systems for all maritime activities, such as maritime safety, protection of the marine environment, fisheries control, customs, border control and law enforcement.

## What makes the Baltic Sea so special?

The sea's ecosystem is unique – almost fresh water fills the northern parts which are under ice for up to half the year. Where the North Sea meets the Baltic, at the Danish Sounds, the water is salt. This strong contrast creates a unique ecosystem in which species are fine-tuned to respond to the degree of brackishness and only a specific selection can survive. Such a delicate balance makes the ecosystem particularly vulnerable to changes, whether in its physical and chemical composition or in the structure of the food web.

The basin around the Baltic, which drains into the sea, is roughly four times the surface area of the sea itself. Around 20% of this is used for agriculture and pasture, other areas are densely populated, so run-off and sewage treatment are key factors contributing to the generation of algal blooms.

The countries bordering the sea have always been trading partners. The Vikings built their trading empire around the area in the early Middle Ages, finding it rich in furs, amber, lumber and wood tar. Between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries the Hanseatic league made the Baltic its own, becoming the strongest economic force in Northern Europe, using the sea to establish routes.

This common heritage which stretches over a millennium provides a base upon which to construct a strategy that will ensure the Baltic becomes a European success story, with a future as prosperous and dynamic as its past.







•••• **European Commission links:**

**EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region**

[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/cooperation/baltic/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/baltic/index_en.htm)

**European Cohesion Policy in the states around the Baltic Sea**

[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/informat/info\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/info_en.htm)

**The Northern Dimension Policy**

[http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/north\\_dim/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/north_dim/index_en.htm)

**European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) for cross-border cooperation with Russia**

[http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/index_en.htm)

•••• **Other useful links:**

**Actors in the Baltic Sea Region**

[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/cooperation/baltic/pdf/websites.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/baltic/pdf/websites.pdf)

•••• **Links to projects/organisations mentioned in this issue:**

**HELCOM**

<http://www.helcom.fi/>

**JOSEFIN**

<http://www.josefin-org.eu/>

**COHIBA**

[http://meeting.helcom.fi/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?folderId=89317&name=D LFE-33722.pdf](http://meeting.helcom.fi/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=89317&name=D LFE-33722.pdf)

[http://www.helcom.fi/projects/on\\_going/en\\_GB/cohiba/](http://www.helcom.fi/projects/on_going/en_GB/cohiba/)

•••• **Link to key websites for the next issue:**

**Climate change**

[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/climat/home\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/climat/home_en.htm)

**Credits**

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