



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Brussels, 7.7.2011
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COMMISSION DECISION

of 7.7.2011

concerning the adoption of the 2011 work programme for the implementation of activities of "Technical assistance and dissemination of information on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and an improved knowledge of macro-regions strategy" to be financed under budget line 13 03 31

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THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,

Having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999¹, and in particular Article 45(2) thereof,

Having regard to Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002 of 25 June 2002 on the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the European Communities² (hereinafter referred to as the 'Financial Regulation'), and in particular Article 75 thereof, and Commission Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 2342/2002 of 23 December 2002 laying down detailed rules for the implementation of Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002 on the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the European Communities³ (hereinafter referred to as the 'Implementing Rules'), and in particular Article 90 thereof (hereinafter referred to as the 'Financial Regulation'), and in particular Article 75 thereof,

Whereas:

- (1) Article 45 (1) of Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 defines the technical assistance actions at the initiative of or on behalf of the Commission which can be financed by the European Regional and Development Fund (ERDF).
- (2) In addition to the ERDF technical assistance covered on available credits from budgetary line 13 01 04 01 (ERDF) and 13 03 20 (ERDF), a budget line for "Technical assistance and dissemination of information on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and an improved knowledge of macro-regions strategy" has been introduced in the 2011 budget (13 03 31) by the European Parliament.
- (3) In accordance with Article 75 of the Financial Regulation and Article 90(1) of the Implementing Rules, the commitment of expenditure from the budget of the European Union shall be preceded by a financing decision setting out the essential elements of

¹ OJ L 210, 31.07.2006, p. 25.

² OJ L 248, 16.9.2002, p. 1.

³ OJ L 357, 31.12.2002, p. 1.

the action involving expenditure and adopted by the institution or the authorities to which powers have been delegated by the institution.

- (4) In accordance with Article 110 of the Financial Regulation an annual work programme must be adopted for grants.
- (5) The 2011 work programme being a sufficiently detailed framework in the meaning of Article 90(2) and (3) of the Implementing Rules, the present decision constitutes a financing decision for the expenditure provided for in the work programme for grants and procurement.
- (6) Under Article 168(1)(c) of the Implementing Rules, grants may be awarded without a call for proposals in the case of bodies with a *de jure* or *de facto* monopoly, duly substantiated in the award decision. During the Polish presidency a grant without call for proposals may be awarded to the region of Pomorskie designated by the Presidency for the organisation of the Annual Forum on the Baltic Sea Region strategy. In addition a grant will be given to the Priority Area Coordinators dealing with thematic priorities under the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Since those Priority Area Coordinators have been designated in a strategy endorsed by the European Council they are in a *de facto* monopoly situation.
- (7) This financing decision may also cover the payment of interest due for late payment on the basis of Articles 83 of the Financial Regulation and 106(5) of the Implementing Rules.
- (8) For the application of this decision, it is appropriate to define the term 'substantial change' within the meaning of Article 90(4) of the Implementing Rules
- (9) In accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 103 (2) of Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006, the Coordination Committee of the Funds was consulted and delivered a favourable opinion on the work programme for 2011,

HAS DECIDED AS FOLLOWS:

Article 1

The 2011 annual work programme for the implementation of the activities of "Technical assistance and dissemination of information on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and an improved knowledge of macro-regions strategy", as set out in the Annex, is hereby adopted. It constitutes a financing decision in the meaning of Article 75 of the Financial Regulation.

Article 2

The maximum contribution authorised by this Decision for the implementation of the programme is set at EUR 2 500 000, to be financed from budget line 13 03 31 of the General Budget of the European Union for 2011.

These appropriations may also cover interest due for late payment.

Article 3

Grants may be awarded without a call for proposals to the region of Pomorskie designated by the Presidency for the organisation of the Annual Forum on the Baltic Sea Region strategy, as well as, to Priority Area Coordinators dealing with thematic priorities under the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, bodies with a *de facto* monopoly situation, in accordance with the conditions detailed in the annexed work programme.

Article 4

Cumulated changes of the allocations to the specific actions covered by the work programme not exceeding 20 % of the maximum contribution authorised by this Decision are not considered to be substantial provided that they do not significantly affect the nature and objective of the work programme.

The authorising officer may adopt such changes in accordance with the principles of sound financial management and of proportionality.

Done at Brussels, 7.7.2011

For the Commission
Johannes HAHN
Member of the Commission

ANNEX-2011 WORK PROGRAMME

1. Introduction

1.1. *Budget line: 13 03 31*

1.2. *Basic Act: Article 45 of Regulation (EC) n° 1083/2006*

1.3. *Policy context*

The Baltic Sea Region is a highly heterogeneous area in economic, environmental and cultural terms, yet the countries concerned share many common resources and demonstrate considerable interdependence. This means that actions in one area can very quickly have consequences for other parts, or the whole, of the region. In these circumstances, the area could be a model of regional co-operation where new ideas and approaches can be tested and developed over time as best practice examples.

Recognising this, the European Parliament published a report in late 2006 calling for a strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. On 14 December 2007, the European Council in its Presidency Conclusions invited the Commission to present a European Union strategy for the Baltic Sea region no later than June 2009. This Strategy was adopted by the European Commission on 10th June 2009 and endorsed by the European Council in October 2009.

Acknowledging the need for coordination between relevant EU policies as well as between EU and national, as well as regional policies having an impact on territorial cohesion, the European Council invited the Commission, amongst other tasks:

- to play a leading role in strategic coordination of the key delivery stages of the Strategy, in partnership with the Member States and in accordance with the subsidiarity principle,
- to actively facilitate, on the basis of the usual EU procedures, the implementation of the agreed actions and the coordination of existing EU funds and instruments,
- to safeguard an involvement of stakeholders concerned from all levels in the region,
- to disseminate to all Member States information, best practices and lessons learned, on the basis of experiences of implementing the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region,
- to identify coordinators with the role of coordinating and supervising the progress of the actions and flagship projects within the 15 priority areas in the Action Plan.

The above mentioned Action Plan comprises 15 *priority areas* which represent the main areas where the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region can contribute to improvements (either through tackling the main challenges or through seizing the main opportunities). Coordination of each priority area should normally be allocated to a Member State which would work on its implementation, in close contact with the Commission, with all stakeholders involved, especially other Member States, but also Regional and Local Authorities, Inter-Governmental and Non-Governmental Bodies. In addition, coherence with the Integrated Maritime Policy will be assured.

In this respect, the intensity of the cooperation between partners and the success of the Strategy will also depend on the structure and the quality of existing networks and organisations, as well as on the need to create new forms of cooperation.

Therefore, in order to promote the success of the Baltic Sea strategy defined in Communication COM (2009) 248 final concerning the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), the European Parliament has decided to introduce an allocation of EUR 2.5 millions in the 2011 budget for activities of "Technical assistance and dissemination of information on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and an improved knowledge of macro-regions strategy" at the initiative of the Commission in order for the Commission to promote:

1. a proper circulation of information on EUSBSR through newsletters, reports and conferences and specifically an annual forum;
2. the organisation of on site events to familiarise all interested Europeans regions with the Baltic Sea approach and the principles of macro-regions;
3. the successful governance of the strategy through the decentralised system that has been established and in particular the operation of the system of Priority area coordinators and flagship project leaders.

2. Description of the action

Three different types of actions will be financed:

2.1. ACTION 1: Circulation of information on EUSBSR

After a first annual forum in Tallinn in October 2010, the organisation of an annual forum in Gdansk will be supported in October 2011 under the Polish Presidency. Notwithstanding the fact this is a request from the European Council, such an annual event is very important to safeguard the involvement of stakeholders from all levels in the Baltic Sea Region.

Some specific or thematic seminars will also be organised in order to reach the objective of a better dissemination of information. These seminars will contribute to a better linkage between partners' activities as well as between the Baltic Strategy and EU2020 priorities.

In addition, reports studies and surveys might be supported, as part of first evaluation works undertaken on the performance of EUSBSR, and/or on the concept of macro-regional strategies.

2.2. ACTION 2: Organisation of on site events to familiarise all interested Europeans regions with the Baltic Sea approach and the principles of macro-regions

The adoption of the EUSBSR in June 2009 and of the Danube region strategy in December 2010 involving altogether 15 member-States has generated a strong interest from other member-states throughout Europe.

This new macro-regional approach is carefully contemplated by a large number of political and institutional partners, but also from stakeholders in the civil society.

Therefore, in order to familiarise all interested European regions, the organisation of seminars in other parts of Europe on EUSBSR topics or on macro-regional issues, may be supported at the request of national or regional partners. This action will contribute to disseminate exchange of experience, practices and reflections on the main principles guiding the implementation of macro-regional strategies, as well as on the first concrete achievements of EUSBSR.

2.3. ACTION 3: Successful governance of the strategy through the decentralised system

The implementation and the success of the EUSBSR are mainly based on the action of the Priority area Coordinators (PACs). They are key actors in its implementation, as well as committed and effective coordinators, whose primary role is to take the appropriate measures so that, as far as possible, the actions and projects mentioned in the Action Plan are implemented as foreseen and on time.

In this respect, their main tasks are to:

- Find the relevant contact persons in all the Member States concerned by the actions
- Agree on a programme of work among the parties involved, and take appropriate steps to be able to measure progress.
- Facilitate the implementation of the actions, in cooperation with Flagship project leaders.
- Provide advice in respect of sources of financing.
- Report to the Commission.

These tasks cannot be completed without involving a large number of stakeholders and partners, and without multiplying contacts and meetings in order to find the right actors at the right place, who will be the guarantors of the success of the Strategy.

The experience they have developed so far, related to these different tasks, has highlighted a serious issue concerning technical assistance resources.

Therefore, the main part of the budget will be devoted to help Priority area coordinators and flagship project leaders to implement the Strategy in their own area.

As PACs are designated by Member-States to coordinate the implementation of the seventeen thematic fields of the Strategy, they hold a *de facto* monopoly position in this respect. The PACs are national or regional public bodies. Their appointment is based on an agreement by all countries involved in the Strategy.

The assistance to PACs will cover running costs for organisation of meetings and conferences (travel costs, room rental, catering), and staff costs. It will also cover studies and/or expert costs for specific questions (in connection with a project, on feasibility questions, on thematic issues, etc.).

3. Type of financial intervention

3.1 Circulation of information on EUSBSR and annual forum

a) A direct grant will be awarded to support the Pomorskie Region that holds a *de facto* monopoly position, since it has been appointed by the Polish Presidency to organise the Annual Forum of the Baltic Sea Region in Gdansk. The ERDF co-financing rate for this action will be up to 90% of eligible costs with a maximum EU contribution of EUR 220 000.

b) Public procurement rules will be followed to organise thematic seminars or order reports, studies and surveys.

Maximum indicative budget under public procurement contracts: EUR 80 000

3.2 Information on macro regional strategies

The organisation of seminars in other parts of Europe on EUSBSR topics or on macro-regional issues that can be supported at the request of national or regional partners by technical assistance will follow public procurement rules (for direct or specific contracts under existing framework contracts). Maximum indicative budget: EUR 160 000

3.3 Successful governance of the strategy through the decentralised system:

A Grant will be awarded to each PAC (17 grants in total for a maximum amount of EUR 120 000 to each PAC) to implement the Strategy in their own area. Since those beneficiaries are designated by Member-States to coordinate the implementation of the seventeen thematic fields of the Strategy they hold a *de facto* monopoly position in this respect and a grant can be awarded without prior call for proposal.

The ERDF contribution to PACs will be up to EUR 2 040 000 with a co-financing rate up to 95% of the eligible costs.

4. Total budget: EUR 2 500 000

The indicative distribution of the budget between the actions is the following:

| Actions | Allocation (M €) |
|--|------------------|
| 1. Circulation of information and annual forum | 0.3 |
| 2. Information on macroregional strategies | 0.16 |
| 3. Priority area coordinators' activity | 2.04 |
| Total | 2.5 |

5. Indicative calendar for procurement procedures

The main part of the technical assistance budget will be allocated through grants (to Pomorskie Region and to PACs) for a global amount of about EUR 2.26 million. Grant agreements are expected to be signed no later than June 2011.

As to the remainder of EUR 0.24 million, it will depend on when national or regional partners decide to use the opportunity of organising meetings or conferences on the EUSBSR. As regards specific seminars or studies, procurement procedures will be launched in the second part of 2011.

6. Expected outcomes

The expected outcomes are those described above under Point 2.

It is expected that the organisation of different seminars and in particular of the annual forum in Gdansk, but also in different parts of Europe will foster the macro-regional concept, will help disseminate good practices and ideas throughout Europe.

As regards the contribution to PACs, which mobilises the major part of the assistance, the Commission hopes that it will help priority area coordinators to better coordinate the activities of different partners and stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Region (at political, institutional, technical and operational level), and that it will strengthen the cooperation dimension between Member-States and regions. It should also contribute to facilitate decisions at policy level, by bringing national legislations closer together on certain topics, as well as by using existing funding sources from different programmes more effectively thanks to this cooperative approach.