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Opinion

Title **Impact Assessment on: Joint Baltic Sea Research Programme
BONUS (Article 169)**

(draft version of 28 July 2009)

Lead DG **RTD**

1) Impact Assessment Board Opinion

(A) Context

Article 169 of the Treaty provides a legal basis for the Community to support the integration of national research programmes. The history of BONUS dates back to 2003, when the BONUS ERA-NET project started with the aim to develop and broaden the Baltic Sea research funding cooperation. In November 2006, the Commission published a roadmap including BONUS as one of four potential Article 169 initiatives to be implemented. As a bridging phase to the Article 169 initiative, the participating Member States cooperated within the framework of the BONUS Plus scheme. In March 2009 the Competitiveness Council invited the Commission to transform BONUS Plus into a joint research programme based on Article 169.

(B) Positive aspects

The report gives a good overview of the context of this joint research programme and the explanation of its links to the other EU initiatives related to the Baltic Sea.

(C) Main recommendations for improvements

The recommendations below are listed in order of descending importance. Some more technical comments will be transmitted directly to the author DG.

General recommendation: As it stands, the report needs significant further work to provide clarity on a number of key issues. First, the report should provide clearer evidence for the fragmentation of research on the Baltic Sea and substantiate the claim that this fragmentation is an important obstacle to filling the identified knowledge gaps. Secondly, it should explain better the value added of EU action and why this initiative will make a difference as compared to previous attempts to overcome research fragmentation. Thirdly, the report should explain how this initiative will change the financing of Baltic Sea research and substantiate the claim

that it will mobilise additional funds as a result of removing existing duplication. Finally, the report should revise its objectives and monitoring indicators with a view to making them more operational.

Given that the recommendations concern the key elements of the IA report, the IAB requests DG RTD to submit a revised version of the IA report on which the Board will issue a new opinion.

(1) Provide evidence for the fragmentation of research on the Baltic Sea. To substantiate the claim about the fragmentation of the research on the Baltic Sea, the report should provide evidence (in terms of indicators or, if these are not available, with concrete examples) for its poor coordination, duplication or insufficient capacity. It should substantiate the claim that these are important obstacles to filling the identified knowledge gaps. The problem definition should also address the issue of barriers to enhanced integration between the relevant national research institutions and programmes.

(2) Explain better the value added of EU action. The report should justify more fully why the objectives can be better achieved by Community-level action as opposed to the action by (a group of) Member States. In particular, given that the joint research programme is ultimately motivated by the need to fill the identified knowledge gaps, the report should demonstrate that the planned research actions are relevant and necessary for the realisation of EU policies (as opposed to national policies). In this context, the report should also explain why previous attempts to overcome research fragmentation failed to bring the desired results and why this initiative is expected to perform better.

(3) Explain how this initiative will change the financing of Baltic Sea research and substantiate the claim that it will mobilise additional funds. The report should explain more clearly the level and sources of financing of Baltic Sea research and compare them with the status quo situation. The report should also assess the order of magnitude of additional funds, including from the EU, which will be mobilised as a result of removing existing duplication (in the absence of aggregated data/indicators, this could be illustrated by examples). It should also clarify the impact on capacity building in the Member States with lower research achievements and discuss in greater detail expected structural changes in the national Baltic Sea research systems.

(4) Revise the objectives and the monitoring indicators. The specific objectives should reflect the concrete results of the policy intervention and where possible refer to measurable targets (such as for example the percentage of coordinated research). The corresponding indicators should be revised in a similar vein and be reassessed in terms of their potential relevance to serve for monitoring purposes.

(D) Procedure and presentation

The report would benefit from a glossary and a list of abbreviations. The executive summary should contain information on the financial implications of this initiative. It should clarify whether the correct terminology for the governing structure of the joint programme is "supra-national".

2) IAB scrutiny process

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