

## **Speech of Mrs Liljestrom delivered at the CPMR Balkan & Black Sea Regional Commission General Assembly held in Odessa on 9 June 2009**

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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. Yesterday, the 10th of June, this Strategy has been presented in at least Sweden and Finland. The day after that it had been handled out from the Commission.

During the past winter the Baltic Sea regions have been stirring with activities concerning the Baltic Sea. Organisations of all kind, individually and in cooperation, have rallied to rise to the challenge the region is facing. Baltic Sea Commission as one of the most active ones.

The strategy and the proposed actions and flagship projects have been prepared following intensive consultation of the Member States and stakeholders. During the work to get a Baltic Sea Strategy written, the Commission has engaged in an intensive consultation process which has had three principal components:

1. Governments in the region and other official bodies (non-Member States, regions, others) have been invited to submit "non-papers" setting out informally the most important ideas for the strategy.
2. A public consultation was held on the basis of preparatory documents. About 110 responses were received and these have been incorporated into the strategy and action plan as appropriate.
3. A series of Conferences and 4 bigger Round Tables included governments, regions, international bodies, NGOs and private enterprises. The Round Table regarding environmental issues was held in Poland and The BSC was responsible of it together with the city of Gdansk and the Promorski Region.

These meetings culminated in the beginning of 2009 in the Stakeholder Conference held at Rostock, where the Commission's proposals for the action plan and for implementation were discussed in detail. This way of working, that DG Regio and director Dirk Ahner has made the strategy come to life, is an exceptional good way of involving people from the region. I really think that this way of working, as a process, is a new method within the European Union's way of working, and I hope that this will also be implemented into other processes. The Commission proposes also an indicative action plan, fully discussed with the Member States and other stakeholders in the region, which will allow rapid and visible projects to be implemented.

It is an integrated strategy; the proposed actions will often contribute to more than one identified objective.

BSC has proposed that the action plan is regularly updated in order to reflect the needs of the region even as these change, and this proposal is taken into the strategy.

From the conclusions in the Strategy, I can notice:

There should be no new institutions for this work. The Baltic Sea Region has many cooperative structures; there is no need to create new ones that could impose added administrative overhead without contributing to effective action.

It is not sufficient to propose a strategy that will result only in one more paper..

There must be actions - concrete, visible actions - to overcome the challenges facing the region. In the action plan for the strategy, the Commission therefore insists that Member States and other stakeholders take responsibility as lead partners for specific priority areas and flagship projects.

As the strategy says "no new institutions for this work" it still has to appoint who will be responsible for the work. In the Strategy one can read:

**Policy development** should remain with the Member States working through the Council of Ministers (General Affairs Council) with periodic reports made to the European Council as the Presidency in office considers appropriate.

The Commission will be responsible for **co-ordination, monitoring and follow-up**. In partnership with the stakeholders of the region, it should prepare regular progress reports, and make proposals for adaptation of the strategy and action plan whenever these are required. A high-level group will meet as necessary to provide the expert advice to the Commission and to help ensure effective implementation.

**Implementation on the ground** – the responsibility of the partners already active in the region – must continue in line with the objectives and targets of the strategy. This work will be done in partnership with the Commission and Member States, international bodies and inter-governmental organisations.

In order to maintain the high level of motivation of all the stakeholders in the region, clearly evident during the consultation exercise, there will be an **annual forum** to bring together partners concerned with different aspects of the strategy and make recommendations on implementation. In this the BSC is aiming to play a very active role.

Finally, **relations with third countries**

While the strategy is a strategy of the European Union it is clear that many of the issues can only be addressed in constructive cooperation with our external partners in the region, and in particular the Russian Federation.

However, the strategy cannot dictate action to third parties: rather it indicates issues on which cooperation is desirable and proposes forums where this discussion and cooperation would take place. As the European Council conclusions noted the Northern Dimension, a common policy of the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland, provides the basis for these external aspects of the strategy

At the moment the EU Parliament decided that a Baltic Sea Strategy should be developed, the Parliament took a distinct step into the Europe of Regions. The Commission and DG Regio have accomplished this task in an involving manner.

BSC have direct discussions with DG Regio Director General Mr Dirk Ahner and the people at DG Regio directly responsible for writing the basic structure of the strategy.

Together with other stakeholders and organisations BSC have participated in talks stressing the importance that the strategy shall take stance in the knowledge base we have regarding our region. Only via this approach, the Strategy will be based on the knowledge from the region, the knowledge about the region and also the willingness to implement the strategy in the region.

As Mr Tsiotras, president of the CPMR Balkan and Black Sea Commission, presented his regions Black Sea Synergi, one can draw the conclusion that we as commissions have a lot in common. We would all benefit from a closer cooperation and we could share best practise in the coming work. Therefore, I gladly invite The Balkan and Black Sea Commissions presidium to a meeting with Baltic Sea Commission. I suggest that this meeting could take place in connection to the CPMR General Assembly in Gothenburg september-oktober 2009.

Until then, I thank you for given me the possibility to take part in your General Assembly, which you all a nice summer and hope to see you in Gothenburg.