

The European Council adopts the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and endorses the Council conclusions on the subject (doc. 13744/09). This Strategy constitutes an integrated framework to address common challenges, i.a. the urgent environmental challenges related to the Baltic Sea, and to contribute to the economic success of the region and to its social and territorial cohesion, as well as to the competitiveness of the EU.

<...>

36. The European Council calls upon all relevant actors to act speedily and ensure full implementation of the Strategy, which could constitute an example of a macro regional strategy. It invites the Commission to present a progress report to the Council by June 2011.

#### THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

RECAPITULATING the European Council conclusions of 14 December 2007, welcomes the Commission's Communication concerning the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, and

COMMENDING the Commission on the extensive consultation process conducted in preparing the Communication;

WELCOMING the innovative integrated approach in addressing challenges of common aspiration within the EU through current and possible future macro regional strategies, on a voluntary basis;

NOTING that the Commission intends to present in the near future an EU Strategy for the Danube region as the next macro regional strategy as outlined by the European Council 19 June 2009;

RECOGNISING the potential of territorial strategies, in this particular case at the macro regional level, for contributing to the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the EU. For achieving EU objectives, amongst others the ones expressed in the Lisbon Agenda and the European economic recovery plan, and for helping to adapt to future challenges facing the EU, inter alia climate change;

RECOGNISING, without prejudice to the situation in, and the diversity and needs of, other geographical areas and individual Member States, the serious environmental state and fragility of the Baltic Sea, and NOTING the implementation of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan in this regard;

RECOGNISING the specific conditions of different Member States, the economic disparities and the insufficiently integrated energy and transport infrastructures in the Baltic Sea region;

EMPHASIZING the need to speed up the integration of infrastructures and markets, as well as to bring people closer together, and CALLING for the effective implementation of the Baltic Energy Market Interconnection Action Plan;

AGREEING on the need for an integrated framework to address these issues within the remits of the European Union, especially in making the region environmentally sustainable, more integrated and prosperous economically, more accessible and attractive as well as safe and secure;

REITERATING that the Strategy is financially neutral and relies on a coordinated approach, synergetic effects and, on a more effective use of existing EU instruments and funds, as well as other existing resources and financial instruments;

RECOGNISING, in that respect, 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, respecting the principle of subsidiarity;

REITERATING the objectives of the Integrated Maritime Policy and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) as the latest achievements in the field of marine protection and maritime policy, and

STRESSING the need for close coordination between priorities set in the action plan and policy development, including at EU level, to facilitate achievement of these objectives, inter alia by setting up relevant pilot projects;

WELCOMING active cooperation with all interested regional organisations in areas where actions of mutual interest can be identified;

ACKNOWLEDGING the internal EU scope of the Strategy and

NOTING that constructive cooperation with interested non-EU countries is most welcome and that such cooperation could contribute to the attainment of the objectives of the Strategy.

REITERATING that this cooperation could be pursued, notably but not exclusively, in the context of the Northern Dimension which provides a functioning format for an enhanced cooperation in the region.

1. ENDORSES the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, as proposed in the Commission's communication, and TAKES NOTE of the annexed Action Plan elaborated by the Commission on the basis of a consultation of Member States and other stakeholders.

2. AGREES that a governance structure for the implementation and follow-up of the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is required and therefore invites the Commission:

a) 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,

b) to review the Strategy and update it as appropriate on a regular basis, and seek endorsement from the Council on the amendments made,

c) to take the Strategy into account in relevant policy initiatives and programme planning,

d) 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, and to cooperate closely with relevant financial institutions necessary for the realisation and funding of the Strategy,

e) to report on the implementation of the agreed actions and the evaluation of results, and make necessary updates of the Action Plan, as well as inform the Council on a regular basis on the progress made,

f) to safeguard an involvement of stakeholders concerned from all levels in the region, for example through an annual forum with the aim to help the Commission in its tasks above,

g) to set-up a high-level group of officials from EU Member States in order to assist the Commission in the task of facilitating the implementation of the Strategy. The Highlevel group should be consulted about amendments of the Strategy and the Action Plan,

h) 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, in view of the forthcoming EU Strategy for the Danube region and possible other future macro regional strategies.

3. CALLS UPON the concerned Member States, the Commission and other parties 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 coordinators should report on a regular basis to the high-level group and the Commission, and in cooperation with the Commission seek to identify lead partners for the flagships projects identified within each priority area. The lead partners should on a regular basis report to the coordinators.

4. STRESSES the importance that the implementation of actions and projects starts without delay, and CALLS ON the Commission to report by no later than June 2011 to Council on the progress made and on the results already achieved."