

“The power of the Baltic Sea macro-region” Baltic Sea Region Programme Conference 2010

Jyväskylän Paviljonki, Finland, 30 November – 1 December 2010

Role of macroregional strategies in the EU’s future Cohesion Policy needs further debate



“The Baltic Sea Region Strategy contains many elements which can be best addressed in a macro-regional context but there are also things that are addressed by national policies and programmes – focussing is therefore needed”, stated Finland’s Minister for Economic Affairs, Mr Mauri Pekkarinen when opening the Baltic Sea Region Programme Conference in Jyväskylä, Central Finland yesterday. Almost 300 participants followed the discussions of Day 1 representing central, regional, local as well as EU public administrations and agencies, research institutions, and networks from the overall Baltic Sea area.

“We must make the Baltic Sea region an example of sustainable development. This requires serious work and enhanced cooperation” stressed Finland’s President Tarja Halonen in her video message. “The Baltic Sea Strategy can help set concrete goals in developing the region. We should seek to co-operate and to share experiences with other maritime regions. In addition to European level cooperation, it is important that regional cooperation receives attention.”

It is the first time in history that the EU has developed a tailor-made development strategy for a geographic macro-region – the Baltic Sea region. “Every macro-regional strategy has to have its own rationale”, said Mr Colin Wolfe, representing the European Commission’s DG Regional Policy when reflecting on lessons learnt from the process so far. These might differ from area to area. For the second EU strategy in the Danube area, Ms Anna Bérczi of the Hungarian ministry of foreign affairs emphasized that a renewed partnership between neighbouring countries as well as strengthening the relationships with the Western Balkan countries was the most important strategic objective. An informed discussion on the opportunities and risks of macro-regional strategies followed including lively interventions from the audience. Mr John Bachtler, director of the European Policies Research Centre summarized results in four points:



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- The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region presents potential in both, symbolic and practical sense
- It is worth to look at the preconditions for having a macro-regional strategy before starting to design it
- There are operational issues that are not solved yet, e. g. the flexible but also complex approach to governance as well as the question how to involve external partners
- The relationship between macro-regional strategies and transnational cooperation needs to be further explored but also towards other concepts.



The conference was organised by the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013 in close co-operation with Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy, the Regional Council of Central Finland and the City of Jyväskylä. Jyväskylä has not only been selected as location because of its impressive conference infrastructure and the strong support from the municipal and regional authorities to the event. Jyväskylä, located in the heart of Finland, is a typical example for a developing region far away from the shores and harbours around the Baltic Sea. Bridging

distances, creating future oriented business and quality job opportunities, as well as offering a high standard social and natural environment are necessary to attract people to come and stay. Ms Anita Mikkonen, executive director of the Regional Council of Central Finland as well as Mr Markku Andersson, the Mayor of Jyväskylä explained how Jyväskylä and the surrounding region are managing these challenges. “Jyväskylä region is one of the main growth centres outside the capital Helsinki”, Mr Andersson was proud to report.

Participants of the conference received a lesson on what it means to live in a region quite distant from metropolitan areas: Both the wintry weather conditions as well as a strike of airline staff heavily affected the travels both to and from the conference. Following this, everybody was convinced that more efforts need to be taken to improve transport infrastructure all over the region.

The European Union’s Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013 promotes regional development through transnational cooperation. Project partners from eleven countries including Belarus, Estonia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia and Sweden work together in transnational projects. The partners mainly originate from the public and non-profit making sector (regional and local administrations, universities, non-governmental organisations and networks). The total Programme funding is 236 million Euros from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and from Norwegian national funding.

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