



Words of welcome by State Secretary Gerhard Fuchs at the Opening of the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013 Conference at the Curiohaus, Rothbaumchaussee, Hamburg on 10 May 2007

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Representatives of governments, regions, cities, municipalities, counties and organisations from:

Belarus, Belgium, Brunei, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Indonesia, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Norway, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, Spain, Sweden and the UK

- from a total of 21 nations -

Distinguished guests from the “Baltic Sea Region”,

It is my pleasure and privilege to welcome all of you most warmly to Hamburg for this Conference of the “Baltic Sea Region” Programme 2007-2013. I am delighted to see that so many of you have come to our city – some of you travelling a very long way for this purpose.

May I convey the cordial greetings of the Mayor of Hamburg, Ole von Beust, and of the whole of the Senate of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg – welcome to all of you!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The subject of this conference now has a remarkable record to show. It all started in 1990 with INTERREG I, which was initially set up for a period of only three years; that was the first period of the work, which at the time exclusively concerned cross-border cooperation. But it very rapidly became clear that it was necessary to continue and extend this instrument of the European Community. Many of you will certainly also remember the year 1994, when transnational cooperation was first included in the programme

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with INTERREG II – that was the beginning of the process which was to prove so successful in subsequent years.

And finally, INTERREG III expanded the international nature of projects in 2000-2006, with more depth and intensity of transnational cooperation.

The INTERREG process clearly shows that cooperation across national borders had a genuine value in itself. Integration within Europe can only work if the efforts made by governments also reach the people.

That requires more than the material contributions, more than funds from Brussels. It is also essential to reach people's hearts – they have to feel the benefits directly.

That is why we need concrete results – and there are many of these – for example the freedom of movement which we all take for granted for our holiday travel is now also becoming a part of the world of work.

I am grateful for that, and I am pleased to see here today those people who were involved as the driving forces in this development, mostly with success, and who now intend to continue this work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

INTERREG IV is now coming up – or, as it is now called in this part of the world, the “Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013”.

We are all working on the basis of the experience of recent years, with a wide range of cooperative projects, some of them very substantial. They have achieved success, and they have given us insights into how to do things better in future – even more efficiently, and even more sustainably. These insights have been incorporated in the new programme. We are still waiting for final approval by the European Commission, but I have been told that this waiting period cannot be more than a few months now.

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Let us make use of this time!

Here in this room we have a large number of the people who developed the foundations for the new programme. We also have those who worked on these foundations, often in very exhausting sessions and lengthy negotiations, to create the programme which is to be the basis for our work in the coming years. And we also have a number of those who are now to implement the programme, to flesh it out and put it into practice.

The Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg is proud to act as the host at this phase of transnational cooperation.

Hamburg looks back on a long tradition – a tradition which is unquestionably a bit longer than that of INTERREG.

The Baltic Sea has always played an important part in this history. There is no need for me to remind you of the days of the Hanseatic League to underline Hamburg's historic role in the region. The Hamburg Senate acknowledges its position as a link with the Baltic Sea Region. Some describe the port of Hamburg as the “most westerly Baltic Sea port” – and that is true, although we do not have a direct connection by water. This description is justified by the flow of goods transported from here to the Baltic Sea and exported from the Baltic into the wide world via Hamburg – and the volume of cargoes is rising year by year.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There are people behind those goods – people who consume, who talk to one another, who negotiate and trade with one another – ever more intensively – to the benefit of the regions, and of the people living there.

The Senate is explicitly committed to intensive international contacts, because these have proven to be fruitful. In our annual “European Policy Guidelines”, we give political backing and set the signs that lead to action

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such as the close contacts we have in the Baltic Sea Region – and the achievements of the past INTERREG III period give us great pleasure. Partners from Hamburg were involved in no less than 19 cooperation projects in the Baltic Sea Region alone. This means they are networking with several hundred partners, in intensive exchange, for mutual benefit. We intend to continue this excellent Hamburg tradition!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The first meeting of this kind for the Baltic Sea Region, held in Malmö last year, was a successful conclusion to the “old” programme; I trust that Hamburg conference will provide you with a platform for future work. Hamburg as the host will do its best to help you in this endeavour.

I wish you all the best for the next two days – with useful presentations, stimulating debates, informative discussion forums and, alongside all your work, a very enjoyable evening now, taking you through our port for a few hours.

For those of you who are able to stay in Hamburg for a few days longer, I wish you an exciting time at our Port Anniversary Festival – the Hafengeburtstag – starting at 5pm tomorrow. You will see – Hamburg has much to offer, and is always worth a visit.

We trust you will feel at home in Hamburg, and enjoy your time here!