



## **B7 Baltic Islands Network** **B7 Åland Chairmanship 2006**

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### **B7 Position: Europe's Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, proposed by the Baltic Europe Intergroup of the European Parliament**

After the meeting between the Baltic Europe Intergroup (BEI) and the Baltic Islands Network (B7) on March 29 at the European Parliament, the members of the B7 have discussed the strategy for the Baltic Sea Region proposed by Baltic Europe InterGroup. The B7 submits its input:

#### **Key sectors and topics of strategy**

The B7 welcomes the strategy document for the Baltic Sea Region and its focus on 1, environment; 2, economics; 3, culture and education; and 4, security. The B7 also appreciates the simple straightforward presentation of the key points of the strategy. The strategy is sector based. The strategy provides the essential framework for further action.

#### **Island dimension**

The strategy contains no island dimension. Neither is there an urban dimension and reference to polycentric development. The B7 feels that the strategy could benefit from a more regionally nuanced perspective. As an example, the B7 would like to see the cost of travel across and within the Baltic Sea region at levels similar to travelling from the main centres out of the region.

#### **Environment**

##### Maritime and marine security

The responsibility for maritime and marine safety and security is often at the state level whereas the consequences are at the regional level. With the greater emphasis on tourism islands are at economic and environmental risk from oil and other forms of pollution often without the framework and finances to deal with the consequences. The B7 hopes that these kind of issues could be more thoroughly dealt with in the implementation of the strategy.

##### The Marine Thematic Strategy and the proposal for a Marine Strategy Directive.

In the Baltic Europe Intergroup strategy it is stated that "The EU needs a more coherent action plan to protect the environment of the Baltic Sea". The B7 support this objective, but miss a standpoint about the Thematic Strategy on the Protection and Conservation of the Marine Environment and the proposal for a Marine Strategy Directive.

In the proposal for the directive, the pace of implementation is too slow. It would be logical and appropriate to adjust the timetable of the marine directive to the timetable of the water framework directive (2000/60/EG). The water framework directive, stating that good ecological status in the coastal waters should be achieved at the latest by 2015, has already been implemented in the member states. It's not appropriate to simultaneously propose a less ambitious goal for the partly overlapping and adjacent marine waters and furthermore,



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it will not be possible to achieve good status in most coastal waters if there is not a corresponding status in the marine waters.

A timetable adjusted to the water framework directive is realistic. In the Baltic Sea Region it would be possible with a even faster timetable, due to the work with the Baltic Sea Action Plan under HELCOM.

It should be strongly emphasized that the quality criteria set by the water framework directive and the marine strategy directive should be clear, consistent and comparable, and, above all, be ambitious enough. It is crucial that the quality objectives are indeed ambitious enough, since they will decide the content of the programmes of measures for a long time into the future.

The proposal for a Marine Strategy Directive lays down that the Commission may approve the environmental targets and the programmes of measures of the member states. However, it is uncertain what happens if there is no approval. The Commission needs to clarify what the consequences are, if a member state's goals and measures are not met and therefore not approved of by the Commission.

In the Thematic Strategy it is said that the overall governance framework through which the users and uses of oceans and seas can be regulated is to be addressed in the Green Paper on the new European Maritime Policy. It is important for the Commission make sure that the environmental questions are considered accurately and sufficiently in the European Maritime Policy and also ensure that the overall governance framework is regulated in a satisfactory way. That is, the communication and co-ordination between different sectors should be adequately managed in an efficient and effective manner.

#### Global warming

Global warming will lead to severe consequences for coastal regions worldwide. The consequences in the Baltic Sea Region should be identified and stressed on an early stage. One scenario could be an increase in precipitation with a corresponding increase in diffuse loading (runoff into catchment areas), which emphasizes the need of an EU agricultural policy for the Baltic Sea Region.

#### **The challenge for the BEI strategy**

From the B7's viewpoint the real challenge lies in the implementation of the broad wishes/objectives of the strategy and the measures available to do this. How will BEI work with the key regional stakeholders? What are the next steps envisaged in the process and how will this be communicated to stakeholders?

The B7 supports the initiative of the BEI in developing this strategy and looks forward to the next steps in the process of realising the strategy.

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### **A short description of the B7 and of island issues:**

#### **WHAT IS THE B7?**

The B7 is a co-operation of the 7 largest islands in the Baltic Sea from 5 different countries that began in 1989.

The B7 islands believe that as a co-operation they can influence developments for their common good.

The partners of the co-operation are, Bornholm (Denmark), Gotland (Sweden), Hiiumaa (Estonia), Rügen (Germany), Saaremaa (Estonia), Åland (autonomous region of Finland), Öland (Sweden).

The B7 has an annual rotating Chairmanship and Secretariat. In 2006 Åland holds the Chairmanship of the organisation and is responsible for the Secretariat.

The principles of membership are:

- Each member is a Baltic Sea island.
- Each island contributes to the co-operation based on population size.
- The B7 co-operation is a partnership of equals.

The B7 islands believe that they can better serve the interests of our islanders and achieve more as a co-operation than alone.

#### **WHAT ARE ISLAND ISSUES?**

##### **THE ISLANDS DIMENSION**

**Islands** have permanent constraints that put them at a comparative and competitive disadvantage to the mainland.

**Islands** often cannot or do not know how to benefit from the single market.

**Islands** need to develop win-win strategies with their neighbouring regions.

**Baltic Islands** have a small population base, face geographic constraints but must still be able to offer their citizens the basic range of services and quality of life compared to the mainland.

##### **Typical Island Issues:**

- Accessibility - transport limiting development.
- Comparative disparities with major city regions in the country.
- Limited markets
- Limited tertiary education and training opportunities.
- State commitment for lagging regions.
- Technological backwardness.
- Tighter budgets
- Total population and population in employment decreasing.
- Younger citizens moving to the mainland and a greater proportion of elderly.