



European Economic and Social Committee

REX/262
Baltic Sea Region

Brussels, 13 May 2009

OPINION

of the
European Economic and Social Committee
on the
**Baltic Sea region: the role of organised civil society in improving regional cooperation and
identifying a regional strategy**

Rapporteur: **Ms Peltola**

At its plenary session held on 16 and 17 January 2008 the European Economic and Social Committee, acting under Rule 29(2) of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an own-initiative opinion on:

Baltic Sea region: the role of organised civil society in improving the regional cooperation and identifying a regional strategy.

The Section for External Relations, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 16 April 2009. The rapporteur was Ms Peltola.

At its 453th plenary session, held on 13 and 14 May 2009 (meeting of 13 May 2009), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 171 votes to 6 with 7 abstentions.

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1. Conclusions and recommendations

- 1.1 The EESC considers that the four aims of the Baltic Sea Strategy, which seek to make the region 1) an environmentally sustainable place, 2) a prosperous place, 3) an attractive and accessible place and 4) a safe and secure place, are important, well-founded and complementary.
- 1.2 The EESC underlines the vital role of organised civil society in implementing the Baltic Sea Strategy. The EESC recommends that the Commission set up a consultative "Baltic Sea Civil Society Forum" in order to ensure organised civil society's involvement in the Baltic Sea Strategy.
- 1.3 The external relations dimension of the Baltic Sea Strategy must be linked to cooperation within the Northern Dimension, opening the way for a partnership of equals between the EU and third countries.
- 1.4 The EESC believes that the implementation of the Baltic Sea Strategy will require the establishment of its own separate budget, otherwise the strategy risks remaining merely a political statement and will not achieve its aims.
- 1.5 Promoting economic growth and prosperity requires institutional measures from the EU, in particular the strengthening of the international treaty base. This would assist the various players, be they companies or private individuals, in bringing about economic integration and growth in the region more successfully than has been the case so far. The EESC considers that strengthening the economy of the Baltic Sea region will enhance its attractiveness and

promote the creation of a Baltic Sea brand. Economic growth would also bring wider benefits to the EU area as a whole, improving the functioning of internal markets and economic integration.

1.6 The EESC is of the view that following the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan, as agreed by the EU and the Baltic coastal states, is the best way of protecting the Baltic Sea environment.

1.7 The EESC believes that citizens' active participation will take on increasing importance in the future, even in those sectors and areas which have traditionally been managed by the public sector. Environmental protection in the Baltic Sea region is a good example of this.

2. Introduction

2.1 The European Union is in the process of drawing up a Baltic Sea Strategy. The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the drawing up of an EU Baltic Sea Strategy in November 2006. In December 2007, the European Council asked the Commission to draw up the strategy by June 2009. This strategy sets out the most important parameters for improving future regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea region. The Commission is preparing the strategy as a regional policy initiative. All in all, 19 Commission Directorates General are involved in the preparatory work.

2.2 The strategy aims to cover four aims: to make the Baltic Sea region¹ 1) an environmentally sustainable place, 2) a prosperous place 3) an attractive and accessible place, and 4) a safe and secure place. The EESC considers such aims for the Baltic Sea Region both important, well-founded and complementary. The notion of creating a clear Baltic Sea identity is also well-founded. By putting forward recommendations on better governance, the Baltic Sea Strategy will also aim to simplify procedures and cut red tape.

2.3 The content and overall viewpoint of the Commission's Baltic Sea Strategy has been built up through open public dialogue and wide-ranging consultation with stakeholders. In addition to these round table events, a public Internet consultation was used to gather views and opinions². The EESC supports the approach chosen by the European Commission.

2.4 The Baltic Sea Strategy will be submitted to the European Council on 19 June 2009. The strategy's implementation plan is intended to be a very practical document which defines the responsible parties and timetables and to which, should the need arise, complementary

¹ In this opinion, the Baltic Region means states with shorelines on the Baltic Sea: Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Russia. All, with the exception of Russia, are Member States of the European Union.

² The first round table was held in Stockholm on 30 September 2008 and the second will be held in Rostock on 5-6 February 2009. In addition, round table events were held in Kaunas on 18-19 September 2008, Gdansk on 13 November 2008, Copenhagen on 1-2 December 2008 and Helsinki on 9 December 2008. The Internet consultation took place between 3 November and 31 December 2008.

measures may be added. Implementation of the strategy will begin under the Swedish presidency of the EU and work will continue under the presidencies of other Baltic Member States, first Poland in 2011 and then Denmark and Lithuania in 2012 and 2013.

- 2.5 The external relations dimension of the EU's Baltic Sea Strategy is linked to cooperation within the Northern Dimension³. The Northern Dimension is an instrument by means of which the EU and Russia, together with Norway and Iceland, implement policies in agreed areas of cooperation in northern Europe. Cooperation within the Northern Dimension will enable a Partnership of Equals between the EU and third countries to be created. The EESC strongly supports the inclusion of all Baltic Sea states in joint projects in the Baltic Sea region. That is why Russia's participation and commitment to Baltic Sea cooperation from the outset is of crucial importance. In addition, the EESC encourages the Baltic Sea states, Norway and Iceland to continue their cooperation, which has close historic, economic and cultural roots.
- 2.6 No new funding instruments are envisaged for implementing the Baltic Sea Strategy. Available funding channels include the EU Structural Funds (EUR 55 billion for the Baltic Sea region between 2007-2013), national funding from each Baltic Sea state and funding options from international financial institutions such as the EIB, NIB and the EBRD. The EESC believes that more effective use must be made of the various EU funding channels for the purposes identified in the Baltic Sea Strategy.
- 2.7 The EESC believes that the implementation of the Baltic Sea Strategy will require the establishment of its own separate budget, otherwise the strategy risks remaining merely a political statement and will not achieve its aims. The EESC will address the issue of funding more closely in a future opinion.

3. The role of organised civil society in implementing the Baltic Sea Strategy

- 3.1 The EESC welcomes the fact that the Commission has actively involved civil society organisations in drawing up the Baltic Sea Strategy: their active participation is also required for implementing the strategy's action plan. The EESC stresses that without organised civil society's genuine involvement in the Baltic Sea Strategy, implementing the strategy's measures and achieving its goals will not be possible.
- 3.2 At present, the important work of numerous different organisations, such as NGOs, consumers, and business or nature conservation groups often never progresses beyond the level of recommendations. Knowledge of their work is patchy and practical measures may never get off the ground.

³ Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee adopted on 5/07/2006 (Rapporteur: Mr. Hamro-Drotz), OJ n° 309 of 16/12/2006.

- 3.3 As well as national bodies, regions, cities and organised civil society associations are also key players in the Baltic Sea region. The EESC feels there is a need to clarify their various roles, to encourage organisations to work together and to develop cooperation arrangements. There is also a need to clarify the confusing morass of initiatives and projects under the various funding programmes by coordinating programmes more efficiently and taking systematic account of the Baltic Sea Strategy's priorities.
- 3.4 The EESC is concerned about the practical implementation and monitoring of the Baltic Sea Strategy's action plan and therefore proposes that the Commission establish a consultative "Baltic Sea Civil Society Forum", whose remit would be:
- to ensure organised civil society's involvement in the Baltic Sea Strategy;
 - to voice organised civil society's views and recommendations on topical issues to the relevant Baltic Sea Strategy authorities;
 - to promote the active engagement of organised civil society in countries involved in the Baltic Sea Strategy;
 - to promote organised civil society's participation in implementing the Baltic Sea Strategy at national, regional, and EU level;
 - to foster and encourage public discussion and awareness of the Baltic Sea Strategy's measures, progress made and goals to be attained, both in the EU Member States and in other countries covered by the strategy;
 - to use various means, such as visits, workshops and the dissemination of best practice, to promote networking between regional civil society groups (both inside and outside the EU).
- 3.5 The EESC is ready to begin preparatory work on the "Baltic Sea Civil Society Forum" with regard to its remit, composition and operation. The EESC's existing contacts with regional civil society organisations and its experience in similar fields will enable it to manage the Forum's activities. The EESC has some very positive experience and functional models at its disposal from securing the active participation of organised civil society in projects such as Mediterranean cooperation⁴ and network cooperation in the Black Sea region⁵.

4. Making the Baltic Sea a prosperous economic area

- 4.1 The effective implementation of the EU's internal market within the region brings with it very significant benefits in terms of economic growth. The EU, national states and international organisations create the institutional structures which underpin economic relations in the

⁴ The EESC established a network of economic and social councils and similar institutions in the Euromed region in 1995 on the basis of a mandate given to it in the Barcelona Declaration.

⁵ Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee adopted on 9 July 2009 (Rapporteur Mr. Manoliu, Co-rapporteur Mr. Mitov) OJ n° C 27 of 03/02/2009

Baltic Sea region and allow it to grow. It is nonetheless clear that it is the economic players themselves, firms as well as private individuals, who are responsible for economic integration. Hence, this will be the factor determining how successfully the integration of the Baltic Sea region's economy proceeds and how quickly it grows. The EESC believes that strengthening the Baltic Sea region's economy will considerably enhance the region's attractiveness and promote the creation of a Baltic Sea brand. Strengthening the Baltic Sea region's economy would also bring wider benefits to the EU area as a whole.

4.2 The following sets out the main priorities on market integration and measures to promote growth in the Baltic Sea economic region.

4.2.1 Strengthening the international treaty base

4.2.1.1 Exploiting the economic opportunities offered by the Baltic Sea region requires, in the first instance, a significant expansion in the international treaty base as well as the deeper integration of Europe. Although Russia's membership of the WTO and its new cooperation agreements with the EU (New EU/Russia Agreement) do not concern the Baltic Sea region exclusively, their potential benefits to the region are of decisive importance as drivers of regional economic growth and as promoters of development. The Baltic Sea is the most important natural export route for Russia's and Asia's products to Europe.

4.2.1.2 It is a matter of concern to the EESC that Russia is not a signatory to the European Union's Baltic Sea Region Programme (INTERREG IVB 2007-2013), which is endeavouring to make the region an attractive place to invest, live and work in.

4.2.1.3 Falling within the decision-making powers of the EU and its Member States are several contractual arrangements which could have an extremely positive impact on the Baltic Sea region. For example, at present, a company with operations in each of the nine Baltic Sea region countries has to use up to eight different currencies. Only Finland and Germany belong to the euro zone. It is very important for economic and monetary union to be extended to include Denmark, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. In particular, initiatives from Denmark and Sweden to join economic and monetary union would lend effectiveness and credibility to efforts to exploit the full potential of the Baltic Sea economic region.

4.2.2 Promoting the functioning of the internal market

4.2.2.1 More needs to be done to ensure the proper functioning of the Baltic Sea region's internal market. With increased specialisation, more and more firms are operating in various international networks formed according to field of activity. Through their customers, subcontractors and business partners, firms have links to markets and producers throughout the Baltic Sea region. With the increase in cross-border commercial transactions, it is vitally important for the Baltic Sea region to create as uniform a market area as possible so that trade

in goods and services, public procurements and investment flows are unimpeded and capital and labour markets function smoothly.

- 4.2.2.2 The entry into force of the new Lisbon treaty in 2010 is potentially very important for EU Member States in the Baltic Sea region. The treaty strengthens the EU's competence in important areas for industry such as customs union, competition rules and trade policy.
- 4.2.2.3 Achieving as uniform an application of EU law as possible is also crucial. For example, a key element of the revised Lisbon strategy on jobs and growth is the service directive, which must be implemented in Member States by 28 December 2009. Eurochamber's⁶ February 2009 report⁷ highlights, *inter alia*, significant differences between the implementation of this directive in the Baltic EU Member States in terms of both timetables and substance. The current situation presents the EU Baltic Member States with an excellent opportunity to work together to create a standardised, centralised business system for services providers. This centralised business system must clarify authorisation procedures for the provision of services, make it easier to obtain information on administrative formalities and consumer protection as well as making it easier for service providers to transfer from one Member State to another.
- 4.2.2.4 Several key sectors in the Baltic Sea region remain outside the scope of the service directive. These include some transport services, temping agencies, financial services and healthcare services. These services also need a properly functioning internal market, especially if companies are required to be active service providers.
- 4.2.2.5 Various trade barriers still prevent firms from operating efficiently in the Baltic Sea region. The European Union and other players still have much to do in the Baltic Sea region in terms of consolidating the basic principles of the rule of law and, in particular, eradicating corruption.
- 4.2.2.6 The EESC would like to draw attention to an excellent example of trade facilitation between the EU and Russia. A pilot project on the electronic transmission of customs clearance data began on 1 January 2009. At this initial stage, Russia and eight EU countries, three from the Baltic region (Latvia, Sweden and Finland) are involved. Three more Baltic countries (Lithuania, Estonia and Poland) will join the project later in 2009. This project marks the first step in modernising customs procedures between Russia and the EU. Further harmonisation measures are needed to facilitate customs clearance so that opportunities for criminal activity in this area are closed off. Harmonisation will improve logistics and bring down company costs.

⁶ The Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

⁷ The 4th edition of survey on the Implementation of the Services Directive: www.eurochambres.eu

4.2.3 Infrastructure

4.2.3.1 Infrastructure needs sea, river, land and air transportation to be linked up across state borders. This calls for competition and joint planning so that routes can be linked together seamlessly. More attention also needs to be paid to their quality. Cooperation between EU Member States and with Russia in particular is needed to develop cheap and efficient transport chains and to eliminate bottlenecks. This could be accomplished by making full use of the Baltic Sea motorway concept, the Europe-wide TEN-T⁸ policy on transport networks and the forthcoming Northern Dimension's transport and logistics partnership. Any analysis of this should encompass neighbouring EU Member States and trans-European transport routes. This is a key condition for the improved mobility of goods, services and labour.

4.2.4 Boosting economic growth

4.2.4.1 Several pieces of research show that there is a positive correlation between economic growth and the effectiveness of the legal system⁹. Inadequate protection of property, corruption and uncertainty about the honouring of contracts and the independence of the judiciary as well as the inconsistent application and interpretation of the law combine to slow down economic growth. This makes investment more risky and investment flows dry up. The countries of the Baltic Sea region could agree on joint steps to remedy any shortcomings in this regard. The Baltic Sea Strategy would offer an excellent foundation for such action.

4.2.4.2 The nine countries of the Baltic Sea region differ widely from each other in many respects. The countries of the Baltic Sea region and their economic relations have changed significantly during the last 20 years. Levels of economic development and industrial structures differ from one country to another and new business opportunities created by differences in supply and demand and diversity should be exploited more effectively than has hitherto been the case. The mega trends in the region, such as European integration, Russia's changing international status and global changes in the energy, commodities and service markets, should be exploited in a commercially and economically sustainable way. This means that civil society players must have favourable underlying conditions and incentives for their activities.

4.2.4.3 The EESC would emphasise that economic growth and efficient production do not necessarily need to stand in opposition to environmental concerns. On the contrary, the positive opportunities offered by the interaction of a growing and diversifying economy with a cleaner environment should be highlighted.

4.2.5 Cooperation in research and innovation

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/transport/infrastructure/consultations/2009_04_30_ten_t_green_paper_en.htm

⁹ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Transition report 2005: Business in transition and World Bank (2008), Macroeconomics and Growth Research Program/Investment climate and the Microeconomics of Growth/Institutions and Governance. See also: <http://www.enterprisesurveys.org/> on business climate conditions in various countries.

- 4.2.5.1 Interesting, international joint innovation projects on a cluster basis are underway in the Baltic Sea region. For example, the Nordisk Innovations Centre (NICE) has launched over 100 different projects and cross-border networks which have been grouped into different thematic groups: creative sectors, environmental technology, micro- and nanotechnology, innovative construction, nutraceuticals and food safety.
- 4.2.5.2 The EESC sets great store on the importance of the so-called fifth freedom and on cooperation between researchers, students, teachers and between the public and private sector. Efforts should be made to promote exchanges of research personnel between research institutes and universities. For example, developing the operational conditions for clusters would require the removal of national barriers to research funding creating a common system for the Baltic Sea countries which combines research funding from national sources. In line with the revised Lisbon strategy, each EU Member State in the Baltic Sea region should endeavour to increase its proportion of research and development spending to three per cent of gross national product.
- 4.2.5.3 The scientific and research communities of the eight Baltic Sea region countries which are EU Member States have been active participants in BONUS ERA-NET projects. In 2008, as part of the EU's 7th framework research programme, the Commission approved the Joint Baltic Sea Research Programme (BONUS+), which is jointly funded by the EU and by national research funding bodies from the Baltic coastal states. The EESC warmly welcomes the establishment of this new permanent Baltic Sea research programme BONUS+ and particularly hopes that its results will have a greater impact on the protection of the Baltic Sea and on the region's sustainable development than has been the case to date.

4.2.6 Labour mobility

- 4.2.6.1 Although five years have passed since EU enlargement in the region, free movement of labour in the EU area has not yet been attained. However, as of 30 March 2008, all the EU Baltic Sea Member States have been covered by the Schengen provisions that facilitate the free movement of persons. The EESC believes that an end should be put to transitional periods for the free movement of labour. The movement of labour and expertise from one country to another, so-called "brain circulation", is of benefit to everyone. To ensure the availability of qualified labour, the whole Baltic Sea region must swiftly adopt an employment-based immigration policy. This is necessary even though at a time of economic slowdown, labour supply is likely to grow in the area for some time. Efforts should also be made to further promote the matching of job vacancies with employees. Work cultures and minimum working conditions need to be harmonised in order to avoid distortions of competition and to ensure employees' fundamental rights. With regard to training people for the labour market, the objective must be to develop a common vocational training structure and a list of professional qualifications. Much remains to be done across the whole Baltic

region in promoting work incentives and facilitating the move from place to place or country to country.

4.2.6.2 The Baltic Sea Labour Network (BSLN) has just begun a three year joint project involving dozens of participating partners from the various countries in the region. It aims to make the Baltic Sea Region a European model of transnational labour market policy as well as an attractive place to work, live and invest in. The Trade Union Network (BASTUN) is, one of the key partners involved in the BSLN project.¹⁰

5. Making the Baltic Sea Region an environmentally sustainable place

5.1 The aim is to make the Baltic Sea Region an ecologically sustainable area. The Baltic Sea is a relatively small, shallow basin of brackish water, which makes it, ecologically speaking, exceptionally vulnerable.

5.2 Over the last twenty years the condition of the Baltic Sea has deteriorated to a worrying degree. Waste discharges into it remain at an unsustainable level. The Baltic's eutrophication and its high levels of environmental toxins mean that nutrient levels, the frequency of algae blooms and other flora are on the increase. The increase in algae blooms is directly determined by the high levels of nitrogen and phosphorous, their primary nutrients.

5.3 Over 85 million people live in the Baltic's drainage area and they are becoming increasingly aware of its worrying state. The challenge in taking measures to protect the Baltic lies, however, in the fact that there are nine countries at different stages of development on the Baltic coastline and around a dozen countries, including Belarus and Ukraine, situated in the drainage area. This has made coordinating work between the various stakeholders difficult. The EESC believes that the Baltic's alarming condition makes swift and effective cross-border measures imperative¹¹.

5.4 The EESC feels that the most rapid and cost-effective way of improving the whole Baltic's condition is to tackle the worst sources of pollution at a very localised level. In the Gulf of Finland, for example, the worst single polluter is the city of St. Petersburg, which still does not do enough to remove nutrients from its waste water. Nevertheless, significant progress has been made. At its biggest sewage treatment plant, which came on-stream in 2007, the chemical precipitation of phosphorous in waste water has contributed to a significant reduction in phosphorous pollution and algae blooms in the Gulf of Finland. In particular, fugitive emissions from agriculture must be tackled more effectively in all Baltic coastal states. Reducing these would significantly improve the condition of coastal waters.

¹⁰ Partners include central employees' organisations, international employees' federations, the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), central employers' organisations and the German Institute for Social and Training Policy.

¹¹ <http://www.wwf.fi/wwf/www/uploads/pdf/balticseascorecard2008.pdf>.

5.5 The EESC considers the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP)¹² to be the most important instrument for halting the eutrophication of the Baltic. All the Baltic coastal states and the Commission signed this agreement in 2007.

6. Energy and maritime safety

6.1 The ESSC has prepared a separate opinion on the external dimension of the EU's energy policy¹³ which states that the EU attaches particular importance to the energy issues contained in the Baltic Sea Strategy. Energy cooperation in the region mainly covers energy consumer countries and energy transit countries. The central feature is the connection to Russia. A particular priority for the Baltic region should be the establishment of a new agreement between the EU and Russia (New EU/Russia Agreement) based on the principles of reciprocity and mutual understanding, which also covers energy issues. Russia should allow gas transit on its network and permit European firms to invest in developing its energy networks and energy sources.

6.2 The Baltic Sea's fragile ecosystem, already seriously polluted, means that the planned Nord Stream Baltic gas pipeline project must meet stringent safety and environmental requirements. For example, after the Second World War, ammunitions, munitions and chemical weapons were sunk in the Baltic Sea and there is no knowledge of their exact location and condition. The EESC supports the resolution adopted by the European Parliament¹⁴ on 8 July 2008 and strongly recommends that stakeholders in the Nord Stream gas pipeline project look closely at alternative routes, especially over land. Whatever happens with the Nord Stream Baltic gas pipeline, Russia must also unconditionally respect the EU gas market's legal framework, including access for third parties.

6.2.1 Maritime safety is a particular cause for concern for the Baltic coastal states. A particular environmental challenge is the amount of oil transported across the Baltic which has increased seven-fold over the last fifteen years. In 2007, the amount of oil transported via the Baltic was 145 million tonnes and this is forecast to increase to 240 million tonnes by 2015. This cooperation between the Baltic coastal states has resulted in the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) designating the Baltic Sea as a particularly sensitive sea area (PSSA). Vessels with double bottoms and double hulls, mandatory from 2010, will help to prevent possible oil spillages. The EESC nevertheless urges the countries of the Baltic Sea region to

12 www.helcom.fi.

13 Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee adopted on 14 January 2009, Rapporteur Ms Sirkeinen, REX/253 CESE 52/2009 "The external dimension of the EU's energy policy".

14 European Parliament resolution of 8 July 2008 on the environmental impact of the planned gas pipeline in the Baltic Sea to link up Russia and Germany (Petitions 0614/2007 and 0952/2006) (2007/2118(INI)).

develop a joint monitoring and information exchange system to further promote maritime safety.

- 6.2.2 Nutrient emissions from ships can be reduced by changing the waste water requirements in annex IV of the MARPOL convention. The aim of Directive 2000/59/EC was to increase port reception facilities for ship-generated bilge and waste water. Voluntary action to reduce waste water discharges should continue to be encouraged, for example, by increasing the number and volumes of port reception facilities. Baltic Sea ports must also ensure that their operational conditions are sufficiently flexible and swift to deal with large cruise ships¹⁵.
- 6.3 Although the eutrophication of the Baltic is not significantly affected by ship discharges, they are easier to reduce than fugitive emissions, and therefore must not be overlooked.

7. Reduction of agricultural emissions

- 7.1 The HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) sets out clear minimum nutrient pollution targets for each country in the Baltic Sea region. Meeting those targets requires the EU to develop certain elements of the common agricultural policy in which the particular circumstances of the Baltic Sea region's agricultural production and environment are also taken into account¹⁶.

It is useful therefore that, in its draft action plan, the Commission has to a large extent taken on board the proposals of the Baltic countries' farming organisations concerning sustainability, the environment and agriculture. Among other things, these focus more specifically on action relating to environmental technology, consultation, manure management and the implementation and administration of the EU's rules on pesticides, feed and food.

¹⁵ HELCOM recommendation 28E10 (Application of the no-special-fee system to ship-generated wastes and marine litter caught in fishing nets in the Baltic Sea area) should likewise be fully implemented.

¹⁶ The effective implementation of the integrated river basin management plans of the EU Water Framework Directive should be secured. Water protection within agriculture can be enhanced by giving priority to environmentally sensitive areas.

Here cooperation between players and organisations in the individual Member States such as agricultural producers, environmental organisations and consumers is of particular importance. Agreeing on best practice in order to apply and disseminate it across the various countries is vital for the area. Practices which could be systematically utilised by different players should be sought under agricultural development programmes in the new programme period. Likewise, methods which improve the use of fertilisers and energy should also be sought¹⁷.

8. Reducing phosphorus and nitrogen emissions by means of more efficient waste water treatment

8.1 The EESC considers the full application of the EU Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive¹⁸ to be the most important step in bringing down nitrogen and phosphorus emissions. Another important measure for a more efficient removal of phosphorus is the application of HELCOM recommendation 28E/5. Current EU timing requirements are, however, too generous given the alarming state of the Baltic Sea. More ambitious targets are necessary. The EESC sets store on improving the efficiency of these technical and chemical treatment processes as they are reasonably cost-effective and produce swift results.

8.2 The John Nurminen Foundation is a good example of how organised civil society can act to protect the Baltic Sea environment. The principal aim of the John Nurminen Foundation's project for a clean Baltic Sea is to halt its eutrophication and to raise environmental awareness of the Baltic's condition¹⁹. The main focus is on measures which impact most rapidly and cost-effectively on the Baltic Sea's natural environment and utility values. Donations fund measures such as improvements in the chemical removal of phosphorous from municipal waste water destined for the Baltic Sea. The advantage enjoyed by the foundation as an active player in protecting the environment also flows from the fact that it is a non-profit organisation, flexible and free from bureaucratic constraints.

17 To reduce the agricultural loading to the Baltic Sea, innovations within agricultural policy are needed both in planning and in implementation of the measures. One possible example of new practices could be voluntary competitive biddings in an agri-environmental scheme. Background: competitive bidding is a voluntary measure by which measures are focused on those fields where the risk of nutrient release is highest and the cost-efficiency ratio of the protection measures is best. Based on the bids, the authorities pay the farmer according to the environmental advantage of measures concerning each of the fields offered to the programme, instead of the present flat-rate subsidies.

18 The Council Directive 91/271/EEC concerning urban waste-water treatment.

19 <http://www.johnnurmisenensaatio.fi/?lang=en>.

8.3 The EESC believes that active citizenship initiatives can play a significant role even in areas traditionally managed by the public sector. Clearly, the expertise, knowledge and approach provided by the private and third sectors can complement measures put in place by the public sector.

Brussels, 13 May 2009

The President
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

Mario Sepi
