

P6_TA(2006)0494

A Baltic Sea Strategy for the Northern Dimension

European Parliament resolution on a Baltic Sea Region Strategy for the Northern Dimension (2006/2171(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its resolution of 16 November 2005 on the future of the Northern Dimension¹,
 - having regard to the Guidelines for the Development of a Political Declaration and Policy Framework Document for the Northern Dimension policy from 2007, as approved by the Northern Dimension Ministerial Meeting held in Brussels on 21 November 2005,
 - having regard to the Commission's 2005 Annual Progress Report of 2 June 2006 on the Implementation of the Northern Dimension Action Plan (SEC(2006)0729),
 - having regard to the Second Northern Dimension Action Plan 2004-2006, as endorsed by the European Council held in Brussels on 16 and 17 October 2003,
 - having regard to the Chairman's conclusions of the 6th Baltic Sea States Summit held in Reykjavik on 8 June 2006,
 - having regard to the EEA Consultative Committee's resolution and report on the Future of the Northern Dimension Policy of 25 June 2006,
 - having regard to the work of the "Baltic Europe" Intergroup in the European Parliament,
 - having regard to Europe's Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region adopted by the "Baltic Europe" Intergroup in the European Parliament,
 - having regard to the work of the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the opinion of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (A6-0367/2006),
- A. whereas the Northern Dimension forms a wide framework covering all the Northern Regions - the Baltic Sea and Barents Regions and the Arctic - and all policy areas, both external and internal,
- B. whereas the Northern Dimension policy has the potential to help to promote regional and cross-border cooperation for further economic growth and to identify joint responses to

¹ *Texts Adopted*, P6_TA(2005)0430.

common challenges, but has not to date been able to fully fulfil its potential to address the variety of issues pertinent to the region,

- C. whereas the Baltic Sea region is a historically significant gateway area uniting the West and the East and should, as such, be at the core of the new Northern Dimension policy,
- D. whereas the Baltic Sea has almost become an internal sea, a *mare nostrum*, of the European Union following the 2004 enlargement, and whereas the Baltic Sea Strategy may serve as a substantial contribution to the reappraisal of the scope and activities of the Northern Dimension to reflect the changes since that enlargement,
- E. whereas the Baltic Sea Strategy could make an important contribution to the achievement of better coordination between the regional bodies operating in the Baltic Sea region,

Aim of this resolution

- 1. Aspires, by means of this resolution, to:
 - (a) support the Northern Dimension policy by defining the Baltic Sea region as one of the main priority areas, thereby promoting deeper regional integration in the Baltic Sea region, which is a viable and dynamic part of a wider European economic and political area; underlines its ongoing support for work in other areas, specifically the Barents and Arctic regions, in co-operation with the partner countries Norway, Iceland and the Russian Federation;
 - (b) make the most of the opportunities offered by the dynamic economies of the Baltic Sea region and systematically create a brand for the region as one of the most attractive and competitive areas in the world;
 - (c) help to improve the ecological status of the Baltic Sea, which is currently one of the most polluted sea areas in the world; reduce pollution and eutrophication and prevent further releases of oil and other toxic and harmful substances;

Against that background, makes the following proposals:

- 2. Urges the Commission to come up with a proposal for an EU Baltic Sea Strategy in order to reinforce the internal pillar of the Northern Dimension, cover horizontally different aspects of regional cooperation, promote synergies and avoid overlapping between different regional bodies and organisations; invites the Commission and the Member States to adjust the responsibilities of their administrations in order for them to be able to employ a horizontal approach when devising and implementing the Northern Dimension policy;
- 3. Supports the work of the Council of the Baltic Sea States; proposes an annual Baltic Sea Summit to be held before the Summer European Council; supports the work of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, the yearly meeting of the national parliaments' Speakers from the region and the upcoming Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum;
- 4. Underlines that the Baltic Sea Strategy includes both measures to be implemented by the

European Union and its Member States alone and measures to be implemented in cooperation with the Russian Federation;

5. Recalls the need to establish a full-scale regional bureau of the European Investment Bank in the Baltic Sea region;
6. With a view to achieving transparency and coherence, calls for an own EU budget line for the Baltic Sea Strategy, possibly under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, supplementing the current funding of the Northern Dimension by the European Union, Member States, third countries, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Investment Bank, the Nordic Investment Bank and others; stresses that the Strategy must receive adequate funding from all relevant budget lines in order to be able to fulfil its objectives;
7. Notes that the responsibility for the pollution of the Baltic Sea lies with both the Russian Federation and the Member States; stresses that protecting the marine environment with regard, in particular, to the reduction of eutrophication is one of the most important aspects to be considered in the implementation of the Union's agricultural and structural programmes in the region; notes with satisfaction that most of the Baltic Sea region has been granted the status of a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) by the International Maritime Organization (IMO); proposes the establishment of a network of ecologically representative and valuable off-shore and coastal protected areas;
8. Points out that a major oil disaster caused either by transportation or by exploration and exploitation could effectively kill most of the marine life in the Baltic Sea; calls for greater coordination to prevent such accidents and, should one nonetheless take place, to agree on joint mechanism to combat its effects; is of the opinion that the norms for classification of oil tankers must take account of conditions in the region, such as the thickness of the ice during winter-time;
9. Underlines the need to protect and strengthen the fish stocks in the Baltic Sea region; asks the Commission to prepare a comprehensive plan for conserving and restoring the natural salmon stocks in the Baltic Sea water system by utilising all the spawning rivers;
10. Stresses the need to reduce the region's dependency on Russian energy and encourages the Member States in the region to examine the possibility of a common energy market; calls on the Commission, the Member States and the partners to promote joint projects on energy efficiency and renewable energy resources, in the light of the region's potential as a source of bio-energy, and to encourage the usage of biomass, solar, wind and hydro energy; supports the work of the Baltic Sea Region Energy Co-operation;
11. Calls for an approach based on fairness and shared responsibility in the implementation of energy policy at national level, so that strategic decisions such as the construction of new energy networks are taken after consulting those partners among EU Member States which might be affected by those decisions;
12. Underlines that proper environmental impact assessments should be a prerequisite for all energy-related infrastructure projects, in order to guarantee that international standards of environment protection are met; calls in this regard on the Russian Federation to ratify the Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context;

13. Stresses the importance of respecting the internationally recognised principles of sustainable development, good governance, transparency and participation, gender equality, the rights of minorities, and the protection of indigenous peoples, and of the adoption of mutually reinforcing economic, employment and social policies by all partners involved, in line with the Lisbon Strategy;
14. Recalls the role of the Baltic Sea as a uniting factor in the region; suggests a new programme, to be entitled "Borderless Baltic Sea", designed to facilitate smooth border crossing in the region, including between the Member States and the Russian Federation; supports the establishment of a "Baltic Sea motorway" linking the Baltic Sea region with Member States in central and western Europe by 2010;
15. Takes the view that, in order to fulfil their responsibility to lessen the pollution of the Baltic Sea, Member States should have the right to maintain or introduce more stringent protective measures than those proposed by the EU;
16. Recognises the increase in maritime traffic, mainly due to the strong economic growth of the Russian Federation; regards maritime safety as one of the most pressing concerns of the region; proposes the gradual expansion of the joint Vessel Traffic Management and Information Systems (VTMIS) to cover the whole of the Baltic Sea instead of just the Gulf of Finland; underlines the need for a common commitment to rapid implementation of the classification of the Baltic Sea by the IMO as a PSSA, including a ban on single-hull oil transports;
17. Suggests that the Trans-European Network (TEN) Nordic Triangle be enlarged to cover the whole region and inclusion of the road and railway routes of the Barents Corridor and the Bothnian Corridor within the TEN system; calls for the realisation of the Rail Baltica project; envisages a high-speed train connection linking up the whole region;
18. Calls for the realisation of the Via Baltica highway by 2013 as a priority project linking the Baltic Sea region with Member States in central and western Europe; stresses the importance of European funding for the realisation of the project;
19. Recognises that most national markets in the region are relatively small, which has in many cases resulted in a low level of competition; points out the exceptional economic interdependence of the Member States in the region; calls for full implementation of the four basic freedoms (freedom of movement of persons, freedom of movement of goods, freedom of establishment and the free movement of capital) as between the EU Member States located in the region;
20. Notes that the status of the Kaliningrad Oblast enclave surrounded by the European Union calls for genuine cooperation between the regional authorities, the Russian Federation and the European Union; urges the Russian Federation and the European Union to examine the possibility of developing the Kaliningrad Oblast into a more open and less militarised pilot region with improved access to the internal market; stresses the need for full implementation of freedom of navigation in the Baltic Sea, including the Vistula Lagoon and Kaliningradzkij Zaliv, and free passage through the Pilava Strait/Baltijskij Proliv;
21. Points out that the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Wellbeing (NDPHS) should become more practical in combating major diseases as well

as enhancing and promoting health and socially rewarding lifestyles; calls on the Russian Federation and the EU to examine the possibilities of practically engaging the Kaliningrad Oblast in NDPHS activities;

22. Stresses that the Kaliningrad Oblast is still an enclave plagued with many social, economic and ecological problems, such as the significant ecological risk posed by the presence of the military bases and weapons in the region, the substantial health risk and the high levels of organised crime and drug addiction;
23. Calls on the Baltic Sea Region to actively support programmes aimed at generating new forms of art and communication and fostering multinational mobility and cultural exchange programmes;
24. Supports student exchanges within the region; suggests that the universities in the region form networks and agree on a division of labour in order to foster centres of excellence capable of competing at international level;
25. Is concerned that the region's Eastern border is serving as a conduit for a significant level of organised crime, with trafficking in humans and drugs giving cause for particular concern; urges a strengthened European Police Office (Europol) involvement and reinforced cooperation at both EU and intergovernmental levels on these issues;
26. Stresses the need to redouble efforts to improve the efficiency of border controls on the Eastern border, in particular as regards upgrading the existing infrastructure and promoting legal border crossing, and calls for sufficient funds to be earmarked from the proposed European External Borders Fund;
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27. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission, the government of the Russian Federation and the Presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States.