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Resolution adopted at the North Sea commission Annual Business Meeting 13 June 2008.

Towards a Sustainable European Regional Cohesion Policy - Challenges and opportunities in geographically delineated areas.

The North Sea and Baltic Sea Commissions:

- Support the consideration shown for the geographically delineated regions highlighted in the Treaty of Lisbon, Article 158, and welcomes the new take on regional policy with the added territorial dimension with a holistic approach, assuming the application of appropriate financial instruments in support of an E.U. regional policy based on the tenants of territorial cohesion.
- Will continue to work to provide for regional and local innovation, improve access and infrastructure, building on the Lisbon and Gothenburg Agendas to strengthen the position of peripheral regions in view of the future European Cohesion Policy post 2013, trusting that the use of E.U. financial resources are targeted and structured to reduce socio-economic disparities between the regions
- Believe that now is the time to stress the need to identify and communicate the challenges and opportunities such regions are facing, building on sustainable rural-urban partnerships, ensuring a good dialogue with national governments and the EU, and by shifting the focus on to utilize potentials and enhance the attractiveness of peripheral, sparsely populated, island and mountain regions
- Would like to emphasize that sparsely populated; peripheral; island and mountain areas are rich in resources positive externalities and territorial excellence, all representing added value to the EU
- Advocate the principle of subsidiarity and a framework enabling the use of regional models to enhance the regions potentials for the local, regional, national and international benefits

Future European Cohesion Policy

CPMR North Sea Commission (NSC) and Baltic Sea Commission (BSC) support the territorial cohesion aspect of the Lisbon strategy. BSC and NSC want to contribute together with the European Union to reduce economical and social differences and to strengthen the cohesion between regions and countries. Regions are at the core of the post 2013 project for Europe. This calls for a strong and sustainable territorial cohesion policy framework, with room to develop diverse regional priorities, utilising their current and future potentials.

Article 158 Regions & Territorial Cohesion

We support the consideration shown for regions facing development constraints as a consequence of factors of geographic handicap in the new Treaty of Lisbon, where the need for special action is stressed in Article 158. This legal basis of support should ensure that the special conditions of these regions also are reflected in other EU policy fields such as the EU regional policy, competition policy, state aids policy, environmental policy, transportation policy and fisheries policy amongst others. The new approach to a regional policy for Europe is emphasized by the added territorial dimension, complementing social and economic cohesion. We welcome this process due to the new focus on geographical specialties, which strengthen the role of peripheral regions.



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One example of a geographical area, where geographical constraints can be turned into assets, is the North Calotte. This area, sensitive to climatic changes, holds great natural resources, i.e. welfare for Europe, and has a low population density similar to other sparsely populated areas in Europe. Peripheral areas like the northern regions, islands, mountain areas etc. are rich in resources and territorial excellence, all **representing an added value to the EU** if allowed to develop and grow. Without a good framework of development for people living in such regions, it will be even more difficult to take advantage of these resources which, also greater Europe is depending on. A good dialogue needs to be nurtured between the peripheral regions, their governments and the EU to bring out the potentials.

Peripheral Rural Regions – Added Value

Life in peripheral areas adds challenges as well as opportunities for inhabitants, businesses, authorities and the environment. Challenges are often shared with islands and mountain regions in Europe. As the European Union is in the process of developing a post 2013 territorial cohesion policy, the NSC and the BSC want to stress that it is now time to identify and communicate the challenges and opportunities peripheral areas are facing.

Traditionally, peripheral areas contribute heavily to the national economies. Natural resources, from the sectors of energy, forestry, mining, fisheries and agriculture, in addition to cultural aspects enhancing the tourism potential and local, regional and national identity are being extracted locally for the greater and common good. However, as a side effect of being peripheral, special needs often come second to the needs of more central and more heavily populated areas, due to the “greater public interest.” In this perspective we have to remember cities are not isolated entities; they exist within rural areas where they rely on the externalities associated the rural domain such as clean air and water; space for recreation and reflection, culture, landscape and bio-diversity creating the need of sustainable rural – urban partnerships.

The Territorial Perspective

As Europe is becoming more congested, more crowded and more centralised around urban areas, it is crucial to stress the importance of peripheral rural values and to ensure a balance between periphery and centre. Peripheral areas face challenges in higher development and living costs, the poor infrastructure, long distances to markets, fewer qualified and highly educated people, a growing elderly population, the demise of social hubs, cultural offers /services etc. As a consequence there are high public expenditures and high costs for the private industry.

It is time to shift the focus on to utilize potentials and enhance the attractiveness. Therefore, the North Sea Commission and the Baltic Sea Commission want to stress that not only GDP should be an indicator, but also aspects of natural and cultural resources, positive externalities, diversity and opportunities offered by these regions. The territorial excellence policy proposed by the CPMR, as part of the future cohesion policy, would apply in all European regions in order to optimise each region's potential, and this adds an important spatial dimension to cohesion policy. The idea being that any region can grow if its assets and niches are developed. This would strengthen regional knowledge, innovation and competitiveness, and make the regions more attractive places to live and work. The EU states that people should not be disadvantaged according to where they live. Indeed this should be the basis of the new territorial cohesion policy.



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Regional Models and the principle of Subsidiarity

The holistic approach must cover all political areas when discussing regional development, cohesion policy and territorial cohesion and there is a need for clear definitions of terms. Employing the principle of subsidiarity and using the tools of regional policies to enable each region to enhance territorial excellence in peripheral and rural areas, will be the best way to ensure stable and prosperous peripheral communities and territorial cohesion. Using regional models suitable and adjusted especially for each unique region, bring the before mentioned added value to the greater region of Europe, making Europe into an even stronger economy.

(N.B. - The phrase “positive externalities” is used to describe the attributes and resources provide by peripheral rural, sparsely populated, mountain and islands regions to urban areas, often free of charge. Commonly cited examples include clean air and water, space for recreation, solitude, wilderness, cultural landscapes, environmental attributes such as landscape a.