

**Closure Meeting of the
COMMIN Project**

Introductory Speech

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It is my great pleasure to join you today for this closure conference of your COMMIN - Project which is part of the trans-national programme for the Baltic Sea region. I would like to thank you for your kind invitation. This gives me the opportunity to underline how strongly attached we are in DG REGIO to territorial cooperation in its various forms. And, of course, it gives me the opportunity to listen and to learn which is of particular importance to me as newcomer in the field of regional policy.

The closure of a project is generally a good moment to lean back, to take stock, to draw conclusions and to learn the lessons from the past. But is also a good moment to think and exchange about the future. And I think this is exactly what you intend to do today and tomorrow. To do so, you have established in the structure of your conference a coherent link between theoretical considerations, technical and practical questions and a discussion of the new policy framework for your actions.

I will not repeat today what most of you already know about the new trans-national strand of the European territorial cooperation. Instead, I should like to say just a few words and make a few suggestions with respect to these key components of your approach.

First, during this afternoon session, you will make use of the COMMIN project results to raise and discuss a certain number of theoretical questions. I agree with you that finding a common language and terminology in the very complex and diversified domain of spatial planning, elaborating harmonised spatial planning methodologies, and improving the joint understanding of an integrated cross-sector approach of territorial development, are all key elements for strengthening the common culture and common understanding, and, hence, the basis for cooperation in the Baltic Space.

In the future, the ESPON Programme should help even more than in the past to follow up and enrich these more theoretical considerations, and I am glad to note that you have invited the coordination unit of ESPON to this session. Defining or harmonising methods and concepts, promoting training and transfer of good practice, these are indeed core tasks for networks like ESPON or INTERACT. This, in turn, should allow the trans-national programmes to focus on concrete cooperation projects.

Second, tomorrow morning, you will examine how to use the COMMIN knowledge and experience in support of future trans-national projects. In this context, you will discuss key issues at project level such as public-private partnership. I am grateful that you will address this subject, because, as you know, we believe that public-

private partnerships are not yet sufficiently developed in trans-national cooperation projects.

But allow me to make a suggestion here: why not extending the discussions, tomorrow or at another occasion, to a few major themes you consider of importance for the future Baltic Space Programme? And this with a view to make this Programme more concrete and to increase its capacity to address common development challenges of the Baltic Sea Region in a way that has a real positive impact.

With a total budget close to 215 Mio EUR, the future Baltic Space Programme has indeed the possibility to focus on a few key projects with a real impact:

Think for example of the important challenge of improving the maritime environment and the sustainable development of the Baltic Sea. In this context, think of joint actions to prevent land-based maritime pollution as well as maritime accidents and natural disasters. Or think of implementing integrated coastal zone management in the context of climate change.

These are only some examples. Another example is the promotion of innovation in small and medium sized enterprises and the cooperation between these enterprises. Think of innovation in domains like renewable energies, environmental technologies, and sustainable

tourism. This would respond to the key priorities of both the Lisbon and the Gothenburg strategies.

You clearly have the capacity and the instruments to address these issues on the basis of your knowledge and your experience. Nobody knows the Baltic Space, its needs and its opportunities, better than you do. Please, turn this capital to good account. And wherever the ESPON or INTERACT Programmes can support you in achieving this, please do not hesitate to make use of the possibilities they offer.

Third, let me make a few comments with respect to your last session tomorrow afternoon in which you will discuss the policy framework for the future Programme.

Within the new cooperation objective, trans-national cooperation is meant to be the component which should serve territorial cohesion mainly by promoting the integration and the improvement of territorial structures within macro-spaces. This is why it is so important in our view to develop concrete projects which establish and implement common solutions to the major challenges these macro-spaces are facing and which have a real impact on the whole territory. Integrated coastal management in the context of climate change or joint actions to prevent land-based maritime pollution are just two examples in this context which I mentioned earlier.

The fact that trans-national cooperation refers to macro-spaces allows to ensure a better articulation between geographic and institutional levels in territorial development. This is why cooperation with neighbouring countries can be very important. I know and I highly appreciate the efforts made in the preparation of the Baltic Sea Programme which includes partners from Russia and Belarus, to set up common priorities.

Finally, last, but not least, it is essential for us to create more synergies between trans-national programmes and cross- border programmes as well as between trans-national Programmes and convergence and competitiveness programmes. This is why it is important that the major themes for the Baltic Space, like maritime environment and innovation, are in line with and complement all the other programmes implemented in the Baltic area.

This is what I wanted to say, Ladies and Gentlemen, as regards the main orientations of the Commission for the future trans-national cooperation programmes. They are, by the way, fully in line with the Territorial Agenda currently developed under the German Presidency. This strategic and action oriented framework for territorial development is foreseen to be adopted by the EU Member States at the informal meeting of Ministers next month in Leipzig.

Let me end here. I hope that the few comments and suggestions I made can be useful as an input into your reflections and your discussions at this conference. Of course, I am very interested in its conclusions, and I shall pay particular attention to its follow-up. I am convinced that the most important contribution this conference can make is to favour a better understanding of the priorities and implementation questions for the future Baltic Sea Programme in the perspective of the first call for projects which will probably be launched this autumn. And for this, I wish you every success.

Thank you very much for your attention.