

Political statement

Joint Political Statement on the commitment of the South Baltic Sea regions to implement the Baltic Gateway Quick Start Programme

We, the leading political representatives of the South Baltic Sea regions, assembled at the Baltic Gateway conference 'A Quick Start Programme for the South Baltic Sea area', organised in Rostock, 23-24 February 2006, agree to continue the joint co-operation based on the following points of understanding:

We recognise the unique challenges and opportunities facing our regions as global trade and contacts continue to increase across borders and continents.

Globalisation of the economy and European integration has already resulted in structural change, which influences natural, economic, cultural and social conditions in our regions. Our geographical location offers both opportunities and hindrances when managing rapidly growing flows of cargo transport, passing through our regions and cities. As we are inevitably dependent on maritime transport services, and facing common threats like global warming, safety and security, we recognise new possibilities related to the revolution of industrial production, logistic chains and the information technology. We conclude that the transport system in the South Baltic Sea area requires specific attention, which motivates joint regional initiatives across natural and administrative borders, the South Baltic Sea area is a global growth area, which offers challenging opportunities for business renewal and economic

We acknowledge European goals and priorities

We share the goals of the Lisbon process, the European policy for cohesion and sustainable growth, and related European policies including the European transport policy. We welcome the decision on the TEN-T priority axes

and projects, which includes several projects of vital importance to our specific geographic area. We also welcome the High Level Group proposal to extend the major trans-European transport axes to neighbouring countries and regions.

We acknowledge that a well functioning transport system is essential for sustainable economic growth and the well-being of all citizens in this part of the world.

Better integration of national and regional networks will foster cooperation and integration within EU, and with neighbouring countries and regions. A practical and inexpensive solution is to connect the maritime-related intermodal transport system in the regions around the South Baltic Sea. This will bridge the gaps between our countries and regions, and cope with the challenge of developing an efficient gateway for trade by sustainable transport modes and services.

We conclude that complementary soft and hard transport measures in combination are needed to realise the growth potentials in the South Baltic Sea area.

Outcomes from several trans-national cooperation efforts, including those co-funded by the Interreg IIIB programme for the Baltic Sea Region, have taught us that fast improvements are needed to develop a coherent and efficient maritime-related inter-modal transport system in the South Baltic Sea area. This includes improved knowledge and skills to support connectivity among all actors involved in intermodal transport chains, efficient use of information and communication technologies in ports and their networks, as well as improved inter-modal services which will provide for more efficient use of existing transport resources. However, there is also a need for increased standard and capacity in terminals and transport infrastructure within the ports and along the hinterland connections.

We have identified a trans-national Quick Start Programme, which includes European, national and regional transport and development investment plans, and complementing actions to strengthen the gateway function of the South Baltic Sea area.

At last year's Baltic Gateway political conference, we decided to prepare a joint implementation plan for an effective transport system in the South Baltic Sea area. Accordingly, the Baltic Gateway Quick Start Programme has been developed in a close political dialogue between the co-operating regions in the South Baltic Sea area and incorporates the results of discussions with European and national authorities and private stakeholders.

We agree on the priority actions included in the Baltic Gateway Quick Start Programme.

We endorse the Baltic Gateway Quick Start Programme, described in detail below, the result of a joint trans-national planning debate among the co-operating regions.

We agree to promote the Baltic Gateway Quick Start Programme, as a package of prioritised transport-related projects for improved accessibility and cohesion, in our communication with European and national authorities.

We are motivated to strengthen our own efforts in realising the actions. We also intend to initiate negotiations with private stakeholders and relevant financial institutions regarding implementation of the projects included in the programme. The Baltic Gateway PLUS-project provides opportunities to elaborate feasible strategies further and to investigate various options for implementation and financing.

The political co-operation, initiated in the Baltic Gateway project, should be continued and strengthened. We look forward to a report on the progress achieved at a political follow-up meeting in 2007.