

"I welcome the decision made by the leaders of the European Union countries at the European Council to approve the Baltic Sea Strategy.

This is an initiative that begun five years ago from a report I presented to the Friends of the Baltic Sea at the European Parliament. This became a European Parliament report, which was brought to passage two years later by Alexander Stubb. Now this has become an official European Union macro-regional strategy.

The Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is directed primarily at those member states of the Community who are interested in creating stronger and more open ties with the European Union's Baltic Sea Region.

Now it is up to us, the Baltic Sea countries, to give this strategy its substance.

I envision three great objectives. Firstly, the improvement of the quality of the Baltic Sea.

The environment is one of the topics of the Baltic Sea Strategy that must be expanded to all relevant countries, including those whose territories are located on the rivers that flow into the Baltic Sea.

Secondly, the wish to maximally utilize, develop and increase the European Union's four freedoms – the free movement of people, labour, capital and services - in the region. To achieve this, we must conclude agreements that result in the elimination of the collateral obstacles to these four freedoms that still exist today.

Thirdly, the creation of new synergy and forms of cooperation. If we want our universities, scientists, as well as small and mid-sized businesses, to survive in a globalized world, where we must compete with China, India, and the United States, we must cooperate more effectively. We must have the courage to avoid a duplication of activities and to promote the creation of competency centres.

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region provides the countries on the Baltic Sea with the opportunity to grab the reins. Let us jointly focus on this opportunity and find the will to eliminate the political obstacles that still exist today."

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