



## MARITIME CROSS-BORDER (INTERREG A) PROGRAMMES SHOULD BE MAINTAINED ALSO IN THE UPCOMING FUNDING PERIOD

### Principle of subsidiarity

Successful implementation of cross-border co-operation within the European Union funding programmes requires strong involvement of regions. Subsidiarity, which is one of the key principles of the EU, has been followed well in the programme level decision making in ongoing cross-border programmes.

The A strand programmes, such as the Central Baltic and Botnia-Atlantica, are well-established and close to the applicants and beneficiaries. Regions have lead planning the content and objectives of the programme and they are strongly committed to the work of the programming bodies such as monitoring and steering committees. The management of the programme has been very efficient. In transnational (B) programmes such as the Baltic Sea Region, the involvement of the regions does not realize in same way; neither in planning, nor in decision making.

Regions recognize the local needs and they have necessary pre-knowledge on the applicants, their history, tasks and previous accomplishments. Being closer to people and matching the needs of the regions, the programme has attracted also smaller municipalities and NGOs. It has also been able to apply the bottom-up approach by involving citizens and having a high participation of local and regional organizations as applicants and beneficiaries.

## Enhancing maritime co-operation

Should regulations on maritime cross-border programmes change so that a Central Baltic or a Botnia-Atlantica programme would no longer be possible, this would narrow down the possibilities for cross-border cooperation especially in a bilateral basis, which is extremely important for example for South Finland and Estonia as well as Western Finland and the Kvarken region in Sweden. The roots of this co-operation are far back in time before Central Baltic Programme and the Botnia-Atlantica programme.

The undersigned regions therefore disagree with the idea of merging cross-border co-operation programmes into the transnational programme framework. Cross-border programmes have their own specialties, needs and strategies. It is extremely difficult to see how a new programme could be developed and implemented in a satisfactory way from the regions' viewpoint.

Such a move would dramatically change the local character of EU cooperation. Whereas the A strand programme (like Central Baltic or Botnia-Atlantica programme) has been an active participant in its beneficiaries' lives, present in the region and represented in each country, the B and C strand programmes are much further from the applicant and beneficiary, and from the regions. Geography matters. It matters for maritime cooperation for example in Finland whose EU borders are mainly on sea, not land. Therefore successful cooperation in maritime border areas matter.

## Avoid overlaps between the programmes

However, much stronger division of tasks can be achieved between A and B strand programmes in future. In the Central Baltic region as well as in Botnia Atlantica region, the cross-border programmes and transnational programme can only benefit of clearer strategic focus and avoiding overlaps. This can be achieved during programming. We accept that the budget revisions need to be assessed, however these needs can be met by addressing the issues of strategic choice and overlapping.

The Central Baltic programme and the Botnia Atlantica programme can deliver impact in strategically important topics, and in the areas where Member States alone cannot achieve results. The region also still has challenges that need to be worked on actively, like decreasing population, environment, innovation policy, and climate change.