

BONUS-169 AND THE BALTIC SEA STRATEGY

A sound knowledge basis is a self evident condition for making the Baltic Sea region environmentally sustainable, prosperous, accessible and attractive as well as safe and secure. Research and Development should, therefore form an inherent and integrated part of the European Baltic Sea strategy. The collaboration within the Baltic Organisations' Network for Funding Science EEIG (BONUS) has established an efficient mechanism for producing and exploiting strategically driven research results. Already now, over 100 universities and research institutes, are working in projects funded by BONUS EEIG and its members and the EU, and producing research results in support of the HELCOM's Baltic Sea Action Plan. The European Commission should ensure the community's financial contribution to this co-operation as an Article 169 programme.

Introduction

In the end of 2007 European Council requested the Commission to develop a strategy for the Baltic Sea region. The overall idea behind such a strategy is that the policies of the Member States of the region should be integrated, as they all have an impact on each other, and they should be based on a cooperative dialogue, as they all have an impact on the neighbouring countries. Besides a strategy for a common governance of the region, the Strategy has four main objectives:

1. Improve the environmental state of the Baltic Sea region, especially the Baltic Sea;
2. Make the Baltic Sea region a more prosperous place by supporting balanced economic development across the region;
3. Make the Baltic Sea region a more accessible and attractive place for its inhabitants, a competent labour force and tourists;
4. Make the Baltic Sea region a safer and more secure place.

BONUS EEIG is an independent multinational funding organization founded in 2007 by 10 major national research funding institutions in the eight EU member states (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden) around the Baltic Sea which collaborates with the Russian Federation with dedicated agreements. Its objective is the implementation of a Joint Baltic Sea Research Programme of all members and associated members of the EEIG in a contract under article 169 EC Treaty.

The goal of the Joint Baltic Sea Research Programme, BONUS-169, is to create a cooperative, interdisciplinary, well integrated and focused transnational research programme in support of the Baltic Sea region's sustainable development, by providing scientific outputs that facilitate the implementation of ecosystem-based management of the Baltic Sea environmental issues.

The activities of the BONUS -169 include opening of competitive calls and funding research projects on strategically specified topics, arranging conferences and workshops, synthesizing and disseminating research outputs, educating and training new generations of young scientists and promoting the transfer of its achievements to other European regional seas.

The fundamental basis for the collaboration, is the joint BONUS-169 Science Plan and Implementation Strategy, published in 2006. It defines the following seven interlinked research themes of the programme: linking science and policy, understanding climate change and geophysical forcing, combating eutrophication, achieving sustainable fisheries, protecting biodiversity, preventing pollution and integrating

ecosystem and society. The eighth theme includes actions targeted at strengthening collaboration and use of common resources.

BONUS EEIG launched its first call for proposals with total funding of 22 M€ originating from the participating national funding agencies and the EU's 7th Framework Programme in 2007. Based on a scientific peer review and relevance evaluation, over 100 universities and research institutes, will start their work in 16 selected projects in 2009.

BONUS will make a change

BONUS-169 is a completely novel funding collaboration, which has restructured Baltic Sea research funding landscape by removing fragmentation and increasing coordination and synergism in marine research policy, funding and use of research infrastructure in the Baltic Sea region. For the first time in the history, it has created a dedicated mechanism for creating and exploiting research results in support of a regional strategies and action plans while simultaneously taking into account wider European policies and strategies over thematic, sectorial and geopolitical borders.

BONUS-169 funding cooperation has several innovative features which in an optimal way create conditions for supporting a multisectorial regional strategy.

- Joint programme, multinational funding and projects

Instead of many diverse national research programmes, BONUS-169 is one joint programme with commonly agreed goals and research agendas, a joint funding pot and management structure. Instead of scattered small national research projects, BONUS-169 projects are large and multinational, which receive their funding from a common pot created by the national funding agencies and the European Commission. In this way the output created by combined national scientific expertise and by the use of the multinational infrastructure facilities is most efficient and synergistic.

- Multisectorial integration

BONUS-169 is an initiative which has emerged within the RTD sector, by national funding and science policy actors and the EU's DG Res. Its inherent goal, therefore, is to foster the excellence in science. In order to exploit the excellence in science for better management of the sea, and to take into account other sectorial goals, the BONUS cooperation has defined the most relevant research topics in a broad consultation among the science community and stakeholders. In particular, the research needs arising from HELCOM's Baltic Sea Action Plan were considered crucial. By opening competitive calls on research themes, which reflect current issues of environmental and societal importance, BONUS-169 has a great potential to integrate multiple sectorial targets and thus lead to better and more sustainable environmental status of the Baltic Sea.

- Linking science and policy

BONUS-169 collaboration is not restricted to opening calls and funding projects but has as a premise to ensure and facilitate the involvement of the main end users of the research results, in particular the Baltic Sea Environment Protection Commission, in the strategic planning of the research agendas and selection of projects to be funded.

- Junction of European policies and strategies in a regional context

BONUS-169 is directly addressing the European Maritime Policy its Marine Environment Strategy because its major aim is linking science with policy and management. The Strategy and its associated Directive are designed to play a central role in promoting sustainable development. A key element of the Strategy and its Directive is implementation of the integrated ecosystem approach to management to achieve 'good environmental status', by Member States cooperating at the regional sea level within the framework of existing regional seas conventions. The research needs arising from the Baltic Sea Action Plan of HELCOM are a key element of BONUS-169.

BONUS-169 is a regionally tailored research programme which occupies the central position in linking the evolving European Strategy of Marine Maritime Research with the research needs of a management action plan aiming to restore ecosystem health and achieve sustainable use of goods and services of a regional sea as described in the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan.

EU Neighborhood Policy. Research is within one of the four Common European Spaces between Russia and the EU, as depicted by the recent years' Russia EU Summit Meetings. BONUS-169 can offer means to develop a more proactive strategy for collaboration with the Russian Federation through research, assessment and management to achieve improved conservation and restoration of the environment and the living resources of the Baltic Sea, and to insure the sustainable development of the region. BONUS-169 will be a new opening with major future challenges for research cooperation with Russia.

The Northern Dimension policy is a common project of the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the Russian Federation to reaffirm their responsibility for the prosperity of Northern Europe, its sustainable development and the well-being of its population.

The Northern Dimension supports the existing multilateral co-operation within the Northern Regional Councils and aims to maximize their synergies as well as those of all other Northern Dimension participants and actors.

The Northern Dimension is a regional expression of the four EU / Russia Common Spaces, one of which is a space of research, education, and cultural exchange. It also focuses on issues of specific relevance in the North, such as its fragile environment, public health and social issues, culture and indigenous peoples' issues. Cross-border cooperation is a cross-cutting Northern Dimension theme, producing added value at the sub-regional and translational level.

The Common Fisheries Policy. The 2002 reform of the CFP aimed at ensuring the sustainable development of fishing activities from an environmental, economic and social point of view. It also aimed to improve the basis of the decision-making process through sound and transparent scientific advice and increased participation of stakeholders. It shall aim at a progressive implementation of an eco-system-based approach to fisheries management. One of the themes of the BONUS-169 Science Plan is 'Achieving Sustainable Fisheries', thus BONUS-169 is directly addressing the research need related to the key issue of the CFP.

What can BONUS offer to the Baltic Sea Strategy

It is obvious that an ambitious regional strategy such as the Baltic Sea Strategy has to be based on sound knowledge of the multitude of ecological, sociological and economic dependencies and interlinkages in the sea and its drainage area within the framework of the global change. Therefore, Research and Development should form an inherent and integrated part of the European Baltic Sea strategy.

BONUS-169 is seamlessly linked to the environmental part of the Baltic Sea Strategy by supporting the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan to reduce pollution and restoring the health of the marine environment. The research topics of all 16 funded projects are directly addressing the main research needs that support the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP). These research topics are not limited to producing the scientific knowledge needed to solve the issues related to the four basic modules of the BSAP: eutrophication, pollution, impact of maritime activities, biological diversity, but following BONUS-169 Science Plan and Implementation Strategy sets an ambitious objective to develop a set of science-based management tools including cost-effectiveness analysis of various management approaches, potential societal consequences of policy decisions. Thus, the research force mobilized by BONUS-169 involves besides the natural scientists, also economists, social and policy scientists. In the context of European Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, BONUS-169 has a capacity to demonstrate effectively by its cross-disciplinary projects how the vision of healthy environment, strong economy, openness to the world and security may be best achieved.

In future, with launching of an Article 169 Programme opening targeted calls on regular basis, the potential for triggering such multi-disciplinary research projects will even increase.

Conclusion

Based on five years' preparation, the BONUS collaboration has established an efficient mechanism for producing and exploitation of strategically driven research results. Through the processes of developing the BONUS-169 Science Plan and Implementation Strategy, of establishing a dedicated management structure, as well as opening and managing the first call and of the projects' coordinating actions, the mechanisms related to the common strategy and implementation have been tested successfully. All countries around the Baltic Sea have committed to continue the collaboration in a long term perspective. The current financial commitments by the participating funding agencies extend to the year 2016.

The new European Baltic Sea Strategy should facilitate the integration of the RTD sector into the common activity and ensure the community financing contribution in this co-operation.

In the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009 BONUS team actively participates in discussions on the future Strategy arranged by both the Commission services and member states of the region, which include commitment to support Joint Baltic Sea Research Programme in to their national action plans to implement the Strategy. Final formulation of the document envisaged for the middle of 2009 will allow to further refine BONUS-169 Strategic Research Agenda to better serve the needs of our region.