Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the participation by the Community in a Joint Baltic Sea Research and Development Programme (BONUS-169) undertaken by several Member States'

COM(2009) 610 final — 2009/0169 (COD)

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Rapporteur-general: **Mr RETUREAU**

On 12 November 2009, the Council decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 169 and the second paragraph of Article 172 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the

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On 15 December 2009, the Committee Bureau instructed the Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption to prepare the Committee's work on the subject.

Given the urgent nature of the work, at its 462nd plenary session, held on 28-29 April 2010 (meeting of 29 April), the European Economic and Social Committee, under Rule 57 of its Rules of Procedure, appointed Mr Retureau as rapporteur-general and adopted the following opinion by 140 votes to 4 with 3 abstentions.

1. **Conclusions and recommendations**

1.1 The Baltic Sea brings together major challenges: it is affected by global warming and pollution due to human activity and is a strategic area of economic and social activity given the nature and number of jobs that depend on it. Its preservation is vital for current and future generations and it must be managed on the basis of consultation between all the countries that border on it and their people.

1.2 However, it is not clear whether the national and European social partners from these sectors will be properly included in the stakeholder consultation procedures by the Bonus consortium. The Committee calls for this to be spelt out clearly.

1.3 The system for governing these consultation platforms and the sectoral research forum must include civil society stakeholders and in particular the relevant national and European social partners. It is also essential that the R&TD projects of the BONUS-169 programme involving social scientists include research and measures which take account of stakeholders involved in the process of managing jobs and skills in the sectors concerned by the programme.

1.4 The SIAs (sustainable impact assessments) could be a useful and effective instrument for supporting the decision on the choice and implementation of R&TD projects carried out within the framework of the BONUS-169 programme, which could take account of the three dimensions of sustainable development by involving a significant cross-section of civil society stakeholders in the challenges linked to these three dimensions.

1.5 However, the impact analysis carried out in the framework of the Bonus-169 programme has certain shortcomings, particularly in terms of the consideration given to the social and employment dimensions, especially as the civil society stakeholders (particularly trade unions and the European social partners) did not participate in the drawing-up of the programme.

1.6 Civil society stakeholders could become involved on the basis of at least two types of measure:

a) improving the distribution of information, its collection and the processing of contributions from civil society stakeholders from countries concerned by the Bonus-169 programme as well as the feedback systems; to this end, ensuring transparency as regards the recognition and use of contributions from all relevant civil society stakeholders, including the European social partners and providing for appropriate feedback;

b) incorporating the questions raised by all relevant civil society stakeholders, including the European social partners, into the debates and analyses. The challenge would be to put forward an approach with a tangible impact on the development and implementation of the Bonus-169 programme taking account of the three dimensions of sustainable development (environment, social, economic).

1.7 The Committee reiterates its support for the programme and its financing arrangements, which provide fresh resources for Bonus-169, and not just existing resources, except in the case of research tools particularly suited to the research objectives. These will be allocated in full for a set period, with a limited budget.

1.8 Research into the Baltic Sea is justified by the fact that it is bordered by a large number of Member States affected by the heavy pollution which built up during the industrial era and which continues today. As a result, the Baltic Sea has become one of the most polluted major bodies of water in the world, to the point where this is jeopardising a number of industrial and craft activities, given that population and activities are concentrated in the coastal area. The Committee believes that all the countries concerned including, where appropriate, the Russian Federation, should be involved in the research and make their contribution according to their circumstances and taking account of the situation of sparsely populated and third countries.

2. **The Commission's proposals**

2.1 The European Community's 7th Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration activities of 20 December 2006 specifies the 2007-2013 regional guidelines surrounding four types of activity: 'cooperation', 'ideas', 'people' and 'capacities'.

2.2 The Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 October 2009 on the participation by the Community in a Joint Baltic Sea Research and Development Programme (BONUS-169) undertaken by several Member States applies this framework to the issues of the Baltic Sea and specifies the project's objectives and the details for financing its implementation.

2.3 In order to reach its objectives, BONUS-169 is being implemented in two distinct phases:

a) an initial strategic phase, lasting two years, during which appropriate consultation platforms for active stakeholder involvement will be set up, a Strategic Research Agenda prepared, and precise implementation arrangements will be broadened and developed;

b) an implementation phase, of minimum 5 years, during which a minimum of three joint calls for proposals will be launched in view of funding strategically targeted BONUS-169 projects addressing the objectives of the initiative.

2.4 The topics shall originate from the BONUS-169 Strategic Research Agenda, respect as much as possible the established roadmap and cover research, technological development, and training and/or dissemination activities.

2.5 One of the initial phases of the BONUS-169 project was broad public consultation. An internet page was set up, impact assessments carried out and NGOs consulted. These consultations were necessary and should continue during the projects' implementation. The abovementioned civil society stakeholders must participate in the monitoring of the funds' management and developments throughout the life of the projects so that they are properly carried out with a view to 'investing more and better in knowledge for growth and jobs' ([1]), as advocated by the revised Lisbon Strategy. Article 5 of the Decision of the European Parliament and the Council of 29 October 2009 stipulates that Bonus EEIG, which is responsible for managing BONUS-169, must report to the Commission, on behalf of the Community. According to Article 13, the Commission shall communicate the conclusions of the evaluation of the activities undertaken within the framework of BONUS-169 to the Parliament and the Council. The EESC can therefore only monitor *a posteriori* and cannot express its views on the development of BONUS-169 projects.

2.6 Annex 1, point 1 of the decision sets the objectives of BONUS-169. Even though point d) states that the initiative shall 'establish appropriate Stakeholder Consultation Platforms including representation from all relevant sectors', no objective mentions the project's socio-economic objectives or its importance for the development of employment around the Baltic Sea.

2.7 Annex 2 is vital as it establishes the bodies that manage the BONUS-169 project. Point 4 creates a consultative committee composed of scientists of high international standing, representatives of sectors of stakeholders and of civil society with an interest in these sectors. It is within this framework that representatives of employees and employers, NGOs and associations will have observation, monitoring and proposal rights as regards the BONUS-169 project.

2.8 This is a long-term programme, and its duration could correspond to that of the implementation of joint measures.

2.9 The twelfth recital of the decision indicates that the BONUS-169 initiative 'cross-cuts a number of related Community research programmes on a range of human activities having accumulated impacts on the ecosystem such as fisheries, aquaculture, agriculture, infrastructure, transport, training and mobility of researchers as well as socio-economic issues'.

2.10 Establishing the programme in two phases should 'ensure the effective use and uptake of results for policy and resource management arrangements across a wide array of economic sectors'.

([1]) COM(2009) 610 final, pt. 1.4.

2.11 Likewise, the impact assessment mentions the economic and social impact in its assessment of the possible economic, environmental and social effects (point 5, which is however particularly limited on social and environmental aspects). Some options would make it possible to assist 'other economic sectors such as maritime infrastructure, mining, and windmill parks, transport, fishing, oil, gas and telecommunication companies to adopt more environmentally-friendly, ecosystem-based, operations'. This point of the analysis remains seriously inadequate (underdeveloped), but it indicates clearly the general focus of the programme's strategic phase.

2.12 The three projects to be chosen and implemented by EEIG BONUS must certainly take account of the social and human challenges of climate change in the coastal areas of the Baltic Sea. The latter is likely to cause population movements with social consequences for employment that must be anticipated, as stated by the EESC own-initiative opinion on *The sustainable development of coastal areas* of 13 October 2009. The labour regulations of certain sectors of activity such as fisheries and maritime transport might change. The European Commission must taken account of these factors and provide for a section on training and retraining in its evaluation and guidance of projects, with the support of civil society stakeholders and the EESC.

2.13 The EU will deal directly with BONUS EEIG, the Baltic Organisations Network for Funding Science, established in Helsinki, Finland, which is the dedicated implementing structure of BONUS-169 and will be in charge of allocating, administering, monitoring and reporting on the use of the Community contribution and the Member State cash contributions.

2.14 The BONUS-169 programme will be managed by BONUS EEIG through its secretariat. BONUS EEIG must establish the following structures for the purposes of the programme: Steering Committee, Secretariat, Advisory Board, Forum of Sector Research, and the Forum of Project Coordinators.

2.14.1 The Advisory Board will assist the Steering Committee and Secretariat. It will be composed of scientists of high international reputation, representatives of relevant stakeholders, including for example, tourism, renewable energies, fisheries and aquaculture, maritime transport, biotechnology and technology providers and including both industry and civil society organisations with an interest in these sectors, other integrated Baltic research programmes and other European regional seas.

2.14.2 It will provide independent advice, guidance and recommendations, regarding scientific and policy-related issues of the BONUS-169 programme. That includes advice on the objectives, priorities and direction of the BONUS-169 programme, ways of strengthening the performance of BONUS-169 and delivery and the quality of its research outputs, capacity building, networking, and the relevance of the work to achieve the objectives of BONUS-169. It will also assist in the use and dissemination of the results of BONUS-169.

2.14.3 Furthermore, the BONUS Advisory Board comprising a spectrum of stakeholders such as HELCOM, ICES, DG MARE, WWF, and Finnish Farmers Association also played a pivotal role in the preparation of the BONUS-169 Science Plan and Implementation Strategy.

2.15 The revised BONUS-169 Outline Research Agenda submitted to DG RTD in June 2009 is largely based on the work and consultations carried out for the original BONUS-169 initiative.

2.16 It is foreseen that an extensive and strategically-driven programme of stakeholder consultations will be carried out during the strategic phase of the programme addressing stakeholders from other relevant sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture, transport and water-management.

2.17 The Stakeholder Consultation Platforms

2.17.1 On the basis of a comprehensive analysis of the BONUS-169 relevant stakeholders in local, national, regional, and European contexts, Stakeholder Consultation platforms and mechanisms will be established aiming at strengthening and institutionalising the involvement of stakeholders from all relevant sectors for the identification of critical gaps, the prioritisation of research themes and the enhancement of research output uptake. This will include participation of scientists, including from other relevant non-marine natural sciences and from social and economic science disciplines, to ensure the required multi-disciplinarity in developing the Strategic Research Agenda, its strategic vision and research priorities.

2.17.2 A Forum of Sector Research (a body of representatives from ministries and other actors dealing with Baltic Sea System research and governance) will be established as a permanent body in support of the programme, responsible for discussing the programme's planning, outcomes and emerging research needs from the decision-making perspective. This forum will promote progress towards pan-Baltic integration of research, especially the joint use and planning of infrastructure; it will also help to highlight research needs, promote use of the results of research and promote integration of financing.

2.18 The challenges of sustainable impact assessments:

2.18.1 Sustainable impact assessments (SIAs) are a key policy tool for measuring the consequences of policies and measures on the three pillars of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental).

2.18.2 These SIAs have been conducted and employed by the European Commission above all in the framework of trade agreement negotiations (but also less formally in the framework of negotiations prior to the adoption of the European Reach regulation and directives under the European climate-energy package) and they represent a substantial challenge for consultation and taking account of the positions and requirements of civil society stakeholders.

2.18.3 Aset of indicators has been established to support the SIAs:

— for the economic pillar, indicators from the World Bank and the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD);

— for the social pillar including decent work, indicators from the CSD and the ILO;

— and for the environmental pillar, indicators from UNDP, the European Environment Agency and the CSD;

2.18.4 A European Commission communication ([2]) on SIAs introduced a complete framework for impact assessments in all areas of work undertaken by the European Commission, particularly trade negotiations and agreements. In March 2006, a methodological guide put together by DG External Trade formalised the SIAs on the negotiation and implementation of trade agreements between the European Union and third countries.

2.18.5 These SIAs could be used in an approach that consults the significant and representative stakeholders from civil society.

3. **General remarks**

3.1 In 2009, the EESC believed it was necessary to simplify the planned management arrangements. It proposed therefore, in its exploratory opinion on Macro-regional cooperation – Rolling out the Baltic Sea Strategy to other macro-regions in Europe ([3]), establishing a Baltic Sea Civil Society Forum in order to facilitate public debate and raise public awareness of the strategy's implementation.

3.2 In a process of overall macro-regional governance, it is essential to provide information on projects and carry out assessments of the impact of projects on populations and employment. It is necessary to involve and create cross-border networks among sister organisations in various countries, such as trade unions, consumer associations and local and voluntary organisations in order to create a civil society that is competent in terms of the socio-economic issues linked to the Baltic Sea. The general public and workers should be the beneficiaries of the fruits of research projects. It is necessary to anticipate development needs in terms of training, particularly as regards the changes that will affect the region in the near future - consequences of the current state of resources and of global warming.

3.3 Point 2.2.2 of the Communication on stakeholders does not stipulate the nature of these stakeholders, except the emphasis on the participation of researchers. This point should mention the importance of civil society in the implementation of these stakeholder platforms, including the useful role of the EESC's European social partners as well as the European sectoral social dialogue committees concerned by the BONUS-169 programme.

3.4 The useful role of the European social partners should be recognised in the system of managing the BONUS-169 programme.

3.5 In order to optimise the role of the social and civil partners, it would be useful to train their representatives in the work of consultation platforms, included under a budget heading.

4. **Further comments**

4.1 This is a programme designed to promote research into the de-pollution of the Baltic Sea and the international coordination of researchers.

4.2 It is quite clear therefore that this research programme has very direct implications for:

— the economic and industrial fabric of the region;

— sectoral developments (intra and inter-sectoral);

— the types of employment, and the necessary skills, with the long-term likelihood that some workers will have to change careers or face extensive changes.

4.3 The EESC makes the following proposals, which have two objectives:

— that the BONUS-169 programme takes account of the social impact, and the impact on jobs, the requirements for new skills and the redundancy of other skills currently used; and if possible that these effects are anticipated (forecast, and measures to redirect some people into new careers);

— that measures to promote positive effects and mitigate negative ones are established in cooperation with representatives of civil society.

([2]) COM(2002) 276 final.
([3]) OJ C 318, 23.12.2009, p. 6.

4.4 In order to satisfy the two abovementioned objectives, the proposal would be twofold:

a) to fully integrate economic and social representatives;

b) to carry out the impact assessment not using the Commission's internal impact assessment model, but rather the SIA model (with some improvements).

4.4.1 To fully integrate economic and social representatives (a)

— to integrate the European and national social partners from 'participating countries', as mentioned above, into the sectoral research forum;

— but also to provide certain clarifications on the 'consultation mechanisms' of the stakeholders' consultation platform: simply creating an internet link or providing periodic information will not have any impact:

  — if everyone speaks at once no-one will be heard – society's voice needs to be organised;

  — the establishment of a limited working group of social and economic partners could be proposed which would work in concert and add another voice to that of the researchers;

  — it would even be possible to go further and suggest that the working group act as a reference point for the establishment of an impact assessment (participation in the study steering committee) and produce an advisory opinion for the European Commission. The impact study must be publicised, with reports made public in the 'participating countries'.

4.4.2 To carry out the impact assessment not using the Commission's internal impact assessment model, but rather the SIA model (b)

— suggest that the impact assessment is indeed an assessment of the impact on sustainable development and incorporate social, economic and environmental elements;

— in particular, not to forget to include elements associated with economic and industrial changes, and employment transitions; for example, the study could include elements such as:

  — mapping of jobs around the region;

  — identification of jobs at risk (those which might disappear) and jobs with strong potential for growth, on the basis of different research agendas;

  — identification of capacities in terms of skills development: levels of knowledge, possibilities for adapting to new knowledge/know-how, existence of local learning/training channels;

  — integration of jobs linked to a restructured and future-oriented industry;

— these elements underpin regional job and skills forecast management [4], and cannot be carried out in isolation among researchers.

Brussels, 29 April 2010.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Mario SEPI

[4] Job and skills forecast management provides for better anticipation of the adaptation of skills to jobs, a better knowledge of the consequences of technological and economic changes, better synthesis of the factors underpinning competitiveness, qualification-based organisation and development of workers' skills, better career management, reduction of the risks and costs linked to imbalances, better selection and programming of necessary adjustment measures (source: www.wikipedia.org).