Baltic Sea region: guidelines for a Union approach in the Baltic region

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This Commission communication deals with the main aspects of the European Union's Baltic policy. It is a strategic document defining the Community's main priorities in this region (viz. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania). The main purpose of this communication is to clarify Community policy vis-à-vis the Baltic countries, paying particular attention to the poorest regions in the area. It contains a number of thoughts on how regional political and economic cooperation could be developed to complement bilateral relations. It explores a number of avenues for gradually liberalizing trade in the region as a whole and identifies the sectors and projects for which a regional approach is a better way of improving coherence and efficiency than a bilateral approach. The measures proposed in this communication do not require any additional funds. They could be financed from existing budgetary lines subject, in certain cases, to reallocation or reorientation. Measures proposed: the Commission calls on the Council to approve the guidelines set out in this document by adopting a series of specific measures: - strengthening political dialogue with the Baltic states, within a multilateral framework, on questions of common interest, in order to promote stability and security in the Baltic Sea region; - taking account of problems relating to stability and security in the Baltic Sea region within the framework of political dialogue between the Union and Russia; - calling on the Commission to continue taking an active part in the work of the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) as a full member; - stepping up the coordination of existing bilateral and multilateral assistance programmes for the region; - giving priority to infrastructures and the environment, promoting investment and re-orientating funding so that the Structural Funds, PHARE and TACIS for the benefit of the region can be used in a complementary manner within the framework of regional projects; - supporting action by economic operators in the region at sub-regional, local and private level; - encouraging regional and sub-regional cooperation for the benefit of the regions of Russia along the Baltic Sea.