

## III

(Preparatory acts)

## EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

## 481ST PLENARY SESSION HELD ON 23 AND 24 MAY 2012

**Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the ‘Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions — Developing a Maritime Strategy for the Atlantic Ocean Area’**

COM(2011) 782 final.

(2012/C 229/05)

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On 13 July 2011, the European Economic and Social Committee, acting under Article 29(2) of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an own-initiative opinion on the

*EU Strategy for the Atlantic Region.*

On 21 November 2011, The European Commission decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, acting under Article 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, on the

*Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions — Developing a Maritime Strategy for the Atlantic Ocean Area.*

COM(2011) 782 final.

On 6 December 2011, the Bureau of the European Economic and Social Committee asked the Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion to prepare the Committee’s work on the subject, converting the own-initiative opinion into a consultation.

The Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion, which was responsible for preparing the Committee’s work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 7 May 2012.

At its 481st plenary session, held on 23 and 24 May (meeting of 24 May), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 151 votes to 2 with 5 abstentions.

## 1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1 The European Atlantic coast, which is Europe’s western gateway, must strengthen its central role and avoid the risk of becoming removed from Europe’s political and economic heart. Through the Atlantic, Europe establishes economic and political ties with America and Africa.

1.2 The Atlantic macro-region comprises the regions and islands of the Atlantic coast of Ireland, the United Kingdom, France, Spain and Portugal. Iceland, which is currently applying

for EU membership should be involved, as should Norway, which is a member of the EEA. The same applies to Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Although the North Sea regions have common interests in the Atlantic area, they could in future develop their own strategy.

1.3 The European Atlantic region has a significant tradition of political cooperation in order to promote initiatives of common interest covered by European transnational programmes. This cooperation involves not only regional authorities, but also civil society.

1.4 The EESC welcomes the European Commission's proposal for the Atlantic under the European Integrated Maritime Policy: it will provide support for the new and emerging economic sectors and a fresh impetus for traditional sectors, as part of a sustainable development-based approach.

1.5 The EESC proposes a more ambitious approach, however; a macro-regional strategy which, in conjunction with the maritime pillar, incorporates the territorial pillar, taking account of the experiences of the Baltic Sea and Danube regions.

1.6 The EESC's proposal is supported by the position of the European Parliament, the governments of the regions of the Atlantic Arc Commission, the Economic and Social Councils within the Transnational Atlantic Arc and a number of civil society stakeholders (business leaders, unions, chambers of commerce, towns and cities, etc.).

1.7 The EESC believes that the Atlantic Forum provided for by the Atlantic maritime strategy is a first step towards transforming the Atlantic maritime strategy into a macro-regional Atlantic strategy. The Forum will harness the experience gained in drawing up, monitoring and assessing maritime affairs, to become the future macro-regional forum, which will set common strategic action lines and the priority projects for territorial cohesion among the Atlantic regions.

1.8 The EESC, which is a member of the Atlantic Forum leadership group, has proposed that the Atlantic Transnational Network (ATN) of Economic and Social Councils participate in the Forum, because they are grassroots stakeholders and are crucial to identifying and implementing projects. For the Action Plan to succeed, the most important social and regional stakeholders must be involved.

1.9 The priority objectives of the Atlantic macro-region should be based on the thematic pillars of the Europe 2020 Strategy. The EESC considers the Atlantic strategy to be very important, not only for the regions concerned, but also for the European Union as a whole.

1.10 The Atlantic Strategy should be involved in both sectoral policies and cohesion policy and the EESC therefore recommends moving beyond the principle of the '3 NOs', in order to ensure that in future, macro-regional policies have appropriate legislation, their own funding and the necessary administrative structures.

## 2. Macro-regional strategies in the EU: new instruments for cooperation and territorial cohesion

2.1 In June 2009, the European Commission presented a European Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region<sup>(1)</sup>, which by promoting territorial cooperation, defines an integrated, multi-

<sup>(1)</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (COM (2009) 248 final).

sectoral strategic geographical framework aimed at resolving common problems through various specific objectives. Next, the Danube Region policy was implemented<sup>(2)</sup>.

2.2 The Commission refers to macro-regions as areas which comprise a number of administrative regions but with sufficient issues in common to justify a single strategic approach<sup>(3)</sup>. On the basis of a geographical area, macro-regions are defined at functional level.

2.3 The administrative, regulatory and financial conditions are based on the '3 NOs': no additional financing, no new administrative structures, and no new legislative provisions. Although this was the condition agreed to in the Council by the Member States, the EESC does not agree with these restrictions.

2.4 Eight EU Member States and three neighbouring states were involved in the Baltic Sea Strategy.

2.5 In 2011, the EU set up the Strategy for the Danube Region, in which eight Member States and six non-EU countries participated<sup>(4)</sup>.

2.6 The first operating analysis of the Baltic Sea Strategy<sup>(5)</sup> shows it to be a satisfactory instrument for improving macro-regional cooperation, with a view to achieving the challenges and opportunities that go beyond regional and national scope. It is a very useful instrument for the territorial cohesion objective and the Europe 2020 Strategy.

2.7 The EESC agrees with the idea of extending this type of instrument to other macro-regions that could offer added value.

2.8 The Lisbon Treaty, which incorporates the objective of territorial cohesion within that of economic and social cohesion, has given impetus to the macro-regional strategies.

2.9 The Territorial Agenda 2020<sup>(6)</sup> adopted in Gödöllő, Hungary, proposes an innovative 'place-based approach', taking into account existing macro-regional strategies.

<sup>(2)</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (COM(2010) 715 final).

<sup>(3)</sup> See footnote 1.

<sup>(4)</sup> See EESC opinions on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, OJ C 48, 15.02.2011, p. 2, and OJ C 248, 25.08.2011, p. 81.

<sup>(5)</sup> Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) COM(2011) 381 final.

<sup>(6)</sup> Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020. Towards an Inclusive, Smart and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions, 19 May 2011.

2.10 Cohesion policy is the basic instrument used to address the challenges of the EU's regional policy and boost endogenous development of the macro-regions.

2.11 The process of setting the EU's new multi-annual financial framework for cohesion policy from 2014-2020 is already underway.

2.12 Territorial cooperation continues to be an objective of cohesion policy, which would increase its budget. It will be covered by a regulation, and it will specifically include 'new forms of territorial cooperation, tailor-made responses to address macro-regional challenges' (7).

### 3. The Atlantic region

3.1 The European Atlantic arc (Appendix I) is an extensive geographical area stretching from north to south, which is linked by the Atlantic ocean. The Atlantic macro-region comprises the regions and islands of the Atlantic coast of Ireland, the United Kingdom, France, Spain and Portugal. Iceland, which is currently applying for EU membership, is also interested, as is Norway, which is a member of the EEA. The same applies to Greenland and the Faroe Islands.

3.2 The region's location to the west of the European continent and its outlook over the ocean have for centuries been a strong factor for dynamism and prosperity.

3.3 The maritime dimension is a key feature of this area, whose shared economic, technological and cultural heritage includes activities such as fishing, shipbuilding, the metallurgical industry, engineering, research and science, ports, trade and maritime transport.

3.4 The European Atlantic coast stands far removed from Europe's political and economic heart. There are also problems of accessibility, and the lack of transport, energy and communications infrastructure between the Atlantic regions and with more prosperous areas of Europe.

3.4.1 Most of the Atlantic regions have income levels below the Community average, and some fall under the cohesion policy convergence objective (Appendix II).

3.4.2 The situation is worsening, due to traditional Atlantic businesses falling off sharply, with an over-capacity fishing sector that has drastically reduced its workforce and catches, shipyards in decline and under-exploited maritime and port transport.

(7) Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal. COM (2011) 611 final.

3.5 On the flip side, the Atlantic has valuable resources that remain untapped, which could be sources of wealth, economic diversification, job creation and environmental improvement, such as renewable marine energies, underground resources, marine biotechnology, nautical leisure and tourism activities, etc.

3.6 The EESC believes that the Atlantic area comprises a variety of regions with their own development challenges, whose unity and specific features are rooted in their maritime nature and global outreach and their lack of connections with the European economic and political centres.

### 4. The Communication on Developing a Maritime Strategy for the Atlantic Ocean Area

4.1 At the request of the Council and the Parliament, the European Commission published a communication on 21 November entitled 'Developing a Maritime Strategy for the Atlantic Ocean Area' (8).

4.2 With the overarching aim of promoting growth and sustainable jobs, the **strategy** groups the challenges and opportunities facing the Atlantic Ocean into five interlinked themes:

4.2.1 **Implementing the ecosystem approach**, under which activities having an impact on the Atlantic must be managed in a way that maintains a healthy and productive ecosystem. The strategy focuses on developing three areas: fisheries, aquaculture and observation systems.

4.2.2 **Reducing Europe's carbon footprint**, under three headings: marine wind power, marine energies and maritime transport.

4.2.3 Sustainable exploitation of the Atlantic **seafloor's natural resources** is geared towards encouraging sustainability, research and knowledge.

4.2.4 Responding to **threats and emergencies** caused both by accidents and natural disasters, improving security and coordination.

4.2.5 **Socially inclusive** growth, because many Atlantic seaboard communities need to create new jobs in emerging activities in order to replace traditional activities now in decline.

4.3 **The EU instruments** are a strategic combination of the EU's financing and legislative instruments:

(8) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Developing a Maritime Strategy for the Atlantic Ocean Area, 21.11.2011, COM(2011) 782 final.

4.4 Implementation of the strategy: adopting an Action Plan by the end of 2013.

4.4.1 The tools to implement the strategy are: political cooperation, targeted actions within existing agreements and structures, combination of financing and legislative instruments.

4.4.2 An **Atlantic Forum** will be set up, to which Member States, Parliament, regional authorities, civil society and representatives of existing industries will contribute. The Forum, which will commence work in 2012 and be dissolved in 2013, will include a set of thematic workshops and a think tank.

## 5. General comments

5.1 The EESC welcomes the European Commission's initiative, which proposes an approach for the Atlantic region rooted in the European Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP). The IMP provides a common framework for all sectoral policies having implications for the sea, thereby avoiding inconsistency and efficiency.

5.2 The Committee believes that the practical implementation of the IMP in the Atlantic region will offer a new approach to drawing up marine policies and make use of the opportunities offered by the Atlantic for economic and social development.

5.3 The EESC supports the approach underpinning the strategy: to support both the new, emerging economic sectors and to provide a new boost for traditional sectors, as part of an approach based on sustainable development.

5.4 The Committee suggests that renewable marine energies should receive as much political and financial support as possible from the EU's institutions, because they help reduce Europe's carbon footprint and create substantial related industrial and economic activity, which goes beyond the coastal areas neighbouring wind turbine installations.

5.5 The strategy must act as a driver for research, technological development and production in the marine energy industry, auxiliary industries and related logistical networks in the Atlantic regions. This will make it possible not only to diversify the economic fabric but also to steer declining sectors in a new direction.

5.6 This applies not only to fixed wind turbines but also to floating wind-energy generators.

5.7 Waves and tides represent a high-potential energy and economic resource, since the Atlantic has the world's best resources in this field. The EESC suggests that the Atlantic Strategy step up support for research and development in these activities.

5.8 Renewable energy sources in the sea require links between the main production centres and centres of consumption. Networks linking these centres are essential if the sea's energy potential is to be harnessed. This means having maritime electricity grids that are linked to land-based grids.

5.9 Shipbuilding is also one of the traditional economic activities in the Atlantic regions that needs support, but in new forms. Building technologically advanced, more environmentally friendly ships that comply with strict legislation on emissions and pollution levels and the different range of vessels linked to marine wind energy, are new sectors offering a future for Atlantic shipyards.

5.10 The geographical remoteness of many Atlantic coastal communities, especially of some of the islands, requires the new communication technologies to facilitate the development of innovative economic activities, the creation of networks and contact with the markets.

5.11 The EESC suggests that measures for socially inclusive growth be stepped up in the Atlantic regions. Training, especially for young people, is crucial. The transmission of knowledge and skills between generations must be ensured. Cooperation between universities, businesses and centres of secondary education must be improved and social dialogue promoted.

5.12 The fisheries sector has suffered significant job losses in recent decades and the EESC therefore considers that coastal communities traditionally involved in this activity need measures enabling them to diversify and move into new areas of activity. Small-scale coastal fishing, shellfishing and aquaculture are the most sustainable activities and are crucial to the economic and social development of some coastal regions. They are also of great cultural importance.

5.13 The EESC suggests that greater use be made of maritime freight transport, thus reducing freight transport by road. The motorways of the sea should be promoted, which will require improved intermodality between ports and railways.

5.14 As demonstrated by a number of accidents, security in terms of emergencies and threats is a major challenge. Mechanisms and systems must be put in place to improve vigilance and security. The EESC proposes a larger role for the European Maritime Safety Agency, improved coordination between Member States and the adoption of appropriate legislation that can prevent the current risks.

5.15 The Atlantic Strategy represents an opportunity for the regions concerned. The EESC suggests that a bold approach be adopted to make use of all existing resources.

5.16 The **Atlantic Forum** must ensure the appropriate participation of all players involved in the strategic development of the Atlantic. It is extremely important that in addition to the Member States and the European institutions, regional authorities and civil society organisations are also involved.

5.17 The EESC, which is a member of the Atlantic Forum leadership group, has proposed that the Atlantic Transnational Network of Economic and Social Councils participate in the Forum, because they are grassroots stakeholders and are crucial to identifying and implementing projects. For the Action Plan to succeed, the most important social and regional stakeholders must be involved.

5.18 The Forum could play an important role in monitoring and assessing implementation of the Action Plan and Strategy. It therefore regrets that the Commission plans to dissolve the Forum just at the start of the operational stage of the projects' implementation. The Committee proposes that the Atlantic Forum continue to operate even once the Action Plan is drawn up.

## 6. Atlantic cooperation: transnational cooperation projects and networks

6.1 To promote balanced development in the EU, networks have been set up linking regions in Ireland, the UK, France, Spain and Portugal and cities and civil society in these regions (economic and social councils, chambers of commerce, trade unions, employers' organisations, social economy organisations, NGOs, universities, etc.).

6.2 The Atlantic Arc Commission<sup>(9)</sup> is one of the six geographical commissions of the European Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR). It comprises 24 regions on the Atlantic seaboard and is a political forum for issues of interest to the regions which boosts transnational Atlantic cooperation on common projects. The Atlantic cities also pursue similar objectives in the context of the Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities<sup>(10)</sup>.

6.3 The Atlantic Transnational Network<sup>(11)</sup> (ATN) of social and economic players was set up in 2003, comprising social and economic councils and similar bodies from the British, French, Spanish and Portuguese Atlantic coasts, as a platform for cooperation between civil societies from the Atlantic area. Its goal is to promote cooperation and policies which, in the context of European integration, have a positive impact on the development of the Atlantic regions, improving competitiveness and social and territorial cohesion, and overcoming the inherent disadvantage of their geographical location.

<sup>(9)</sup> <http://arcatlantique.org>.

<sup>(10)</sup> <http://www.atlanticcities.eu>.

<sup>(11)</sup> Welsh Economic Forum, Conseils Économiques, Sociaux et Environnementaux Régionaux de Basse-Normandie, Bretagne, Pays de la Loire, Poitou-Charentes, Aquitaine, Centre y Limousin; Consejos Económicos y Sociales de País Vasco, Cantabria, Asturias, Galicia y Canarias; Instituto de Soldadura e Qualidade de Lisboa, USALGARVE.

6.4 The ATN has drawn up various studies and proposals on innovation and technology transfer, intermodality in the transport of goods, with particular focus on maritime transport, ports and the hinterlands, and on maritime security in the Atlantic area. Recently, the ATN worked on the development of renewable marine energy and on the European Atlantic Strategy.

6.5 Other Atlantic networks exist, such as the Chambers of Agriculture of the Atlantic Arc, (AC3A) and others in the academic sphere. Since 2007, the Atlantic Arc Commission has welcomed representatives from all of these networks on its Coordination Committee, in a common forum for discussion of strategic topics for the Atlantic Area.

6.6 Cooperation began in 1989 through INTERREG. In the current programming period, large scale, cohesive projects are being developed in the fields of transport and the creation of an Atlantic cluster for renewable marine energies.

6.7 The EESC shares the concerns of those involved: Atlantic cooperation has suffered from the limitations of transnational territorial cooperation in general, the lack of a strategic vision, the absence of coordination between projects and the resulting loss of synergies, and the proliferation of non-operational projects<sup>(12)</sup>.

6.8 The EESC believes that this history of dynamic, diversified cooperation between the Atlantic stakeholders provides a solid basis from which to implement new cooperation initiatives with greater ambitions and strategic dimensions.

## 7. The EESC's proposal: a macro-regional strategy for the Atlantic area

7.1 The EESC believes that a macro-regional strategy is a suitable instrument for the Atlantic region. Promoting the endogenous development of the Atlantic macro-region through a wide-ranging strategy will place the Atlantic Region in a better position to achieve the EU's goals and to implement the Europe 2020 Strategy.

7.2 The Council has called upon the Member States and the Commission to continue driving forwards the current macro-regional strategies, and to consider implementing others in the future.

7.3 The EESC believes that the goal of territorial balance in the EU justifies the promotion of a macro-regional strategy in the Atlantic that makes it possible to address the transnational challenges affecting the area. The situation of the Atlantic arc in Western Europe is emphasised with the impetus given to the northern and central regions of the EU with the two current macro-regional strategies.

<sup>(12)</sup> *Schéma de Développement de l'Espace Atlantique (SDEA)*, Atlantic Arc Commission-CPMR.

7.4 The preparation of the multi-annual financial framework for 2014-2020 and the framing of policies during the new period mean that this is the right time to take the necessary decisions.

7.5 A macro-regional strategy for the Atlantic region is an opportunity to tap into the rich and extensive cooperation experience already obtained and to make a leap in quality towards more complex, ambitious forms of cooperation, because the Atlantic region needs to develop joint large-scale projects, which cannot be carried out by means of the current instruments.

7.6 Many of the opportunities and challenges of the Atlantic area reside within its maritime dimension, but bearing in mind that its relationship with the continent remains vital, the EESC proposes that as well as the maritime dimension, the territorial dimension also needs to be included. The continental region manages and develops the hinterland, without which any attempt to enhance the maritime potential would be meaningless. The maritime coast needs an active, dynamic hinterland and the synergies that allow for consistent development of the region as a whole.

7.7 The European Parliament has also spoken out in favour of a macro-regional approach that includes the maritime and territorial pillars in the Atlantic area <sup>(13)</sup>.

## 8. Structure and thematic pillars

8.1 The EESC recommends adopting a framework similar to the Baltic Strategy:

8.1.1 A clear, action-oriented strategic document which covers the thematic pillars.

8.1.2 An action plan with priority actions for the thematic pillars and flagship projects.

8.1.3 The EESC believes that systems should be introduced to assess the progress of the strategy, as it is a dynamic, innovative process that should include mechanisms for monitoring, assessment and review.

8.2 The EESC proposes that the macro-regional strategy for the Atlantic region be based on the thematic pillars of the Europe 2020 Strategy. This will ensure that the thematic content and sectoral policies are fully interlinked.

### 8.3 International dimension

8.3.1 Iceland and Norway are also European countries located in the Atlantic region and should take part in the macro-regional strategy, with the same applying to Greenland

and the Faroe Islands. Member States from the North Sea Region might also be interested in developing a macro-regional strategy for that area.

8.3.2 The geopolitical position of the Atlantic, its historical and cultural links and cooperation experience must be included in an Atlantic macro-regional strategy. The transatlantic dimension is crucial because relations with the USA, Central and South America and Africa are of strategic importance for the EU.

### 8.4 Sustainable growth

8.4.1 The Atlantic region needs a more sustainable transport system that would reduce dependence on road transport, which emits more carbon dioxide than other modes. Traffic should be transferred to the sea by boosting maritime transport: motorways of the sea, and land-based port connections, principally via rail. This would involve the planning of port areas, port-city relations and transport platforms and networks in general. Maritime safety and cooperation in disaster prevention and response should be included.

8.4.2 The sustainability of the marine environment is interlinked and is very vulnerable to pressure from human activity, including the pollution of land and inland waterways that flow into the Atlantic.

8.4.3 Coastal sustainability and the integrated management of coastal areas should cover not only coastal economic activity and pollution, but also the phenomenon of the heavy concentration of urban development along the coast and the link between the coast and inland areas.

8.4.4 Measures for adaptation and prevention of climate change, and its impact on urban and rural coastlines, should be included.

8.4.5 The Atlantic's renewable energy potential offers a massive source of clean, local power which remains untapped.

### 8.5 Smart growth

8.5.1 North-south Atlantic communication and its connection with central and eastern European markets is a key factor for competitiveness, and should be achieved by creating an Atlantic rail-port corridor. Air links in the Atlantic area are also inadequate.

8.5.2 The use of Atlantic resources such as renewable marine energies, marine biotechnologies and other deposits from under the sea floor offer the opportunity to create flourishing, highly innovative economic sectors that could create wealth and jobs.

<sup>(13)</sup> European Parliament resolution of 9 March 2011 on the European Strategy for the Atlantic Region.

8.5.3 These policies require the substantial involvement of economic and social players, along with those from the scientific, technological and financial world. Goals must be set in fields such as infrastructure, industry, training, R+D+I policies, cooperation between universities, technological centres and businesses, the creation of clusters, etc.

8.5.4 Research into advanced environmental systems and technologies is opening up new strategies and new opportunities for traditional Atlantic activities in decline, such as fishing and shipbuilding. The nautical sector is very strong and contributes to development strategies.

8.5.5 Nautical tourism and holidays form an attractive sector that should be given a boost, focussing on both natural and cultural heritage. Tourism generates economic activity and jobs and also helps develop the Atlantic and European identity.

#### 8.6 *Inclusive growth*

8.6.1 The Atlantic strategy should include a strong social dimension. Economic development and the creation of new jobs should make it easier for the inhabitants of Atlantic regions to enjoy a better quality of life and stay living in the area.

8.6.2 The regional authorities should promote social dialogue and the involvement of social and civil society partners.

8.6.3 It is a priority to improve training in maritime and nautical subjects, and cooperation between universities and training centres.

8.6.4 Information technologies require greater development, particularly in the more remote areas of the Atlantic region, which need better connectivity.

8.6.5 Based on an integrated approach to territorial cohesion, account should be taken of the situation of small coastal towns, the islands, cities and metropolitan areas and rural areas.

### 9. **Governance and funding**

9.1 The EESC considers that the Treaty provides a number of legal bases supporting these policies, including Articles 174 to 178 (Cohesion), 38 and 39 (Agriculture and Fisheries), from 90 to 100 (Transport), 170-171 (European Transport Networks), 173 (Industry), 191-193 (Environment), 194 (Energy), 195 (Tourism) and 349 (Outermost Regions).

9.2 The strategy must be European, drawn up by the Commission, approved by the Council and Parliament and endorsed by the EESC and the CoR. Its implementation will require a substantial commitment on the part of the Atlantic coast's Member States.

9.3 It should be implemented as part of a broad process of consultation and dialogue with all stakeholders, at national, regional and local levels, both institutionally and in organised civil society.

9.4 Various stakeholders should be involved; these can only be mobilised through a model of multilevel governance that covers them all. Their participation and contributions need to be ensured in a balanced, structured fashion.

9.5 The EESC considers that the principle of the '3 NOs' should be abandoned, taking into account the experiences of the Baltic Sea and the Danube Region, because in the future new legislative, administrative and financial instruments will be needed, if the macro-regional strategies are to succeed.

9.6 The European Commission should have the role of facilitating and coordinating actions.

9.7 A high-level group should be set up, representing the Member States, the Commission, the EP, the EESC and the CoR.

9.8 There should be contact points in each of the five Member States involved, to coordinate national actions linked to the strategy.

9.9 The coordinators for each priority area and for projects could come either from national bodies or regional or local ones.

9.10 The EESC wishes to highlight the importance of the Atlantic Forum which, on the basis of multi-level governance, would meet and serve as a conduit for the contributions of all interested parties, with regard not only to the strategy's drafting but also to its monitoring, assessment and review. The Atlantic Forum's membership should come from regional authorities and civil society organisations, businesses, the unions, the social economy, universities and technology centres and other stakeholders should be actively involved in its work.

9.11 The principle of 'no additional funding' means that the Cohesion Funds form the biggest source of funding for the macro-regional strategy. In the EESC's view, however, specific funding will be required in future.

9.12 The EESC believes that the Funds currently harnessed have some limitations as regards financing a number of strategic projects. The range of funding instruments needs to be enlarged, also harnessing Community funds linked to sectoral policies.

9.13 The European Investment Bank can also provide funding for specific projects. National, regional and local resources should co-finance projects, along with public-private partnerships.

9.14 As the multi-annual Community financing framework is being shaped and EU regional policy is being reformed, it would be a good time to ensure that the regulation of funds allows for financing of the macro-regional strategies.

9.15 In order for the actions and projects of the Atlantic macro-regional strategy to be included in the programming of funds for the 2014-2020, the decisions should be taken in 2013 to guarantee that the macro-regional strategy will be operational at the start of the new programming period.

Brussels, 24 May 2012.

*The president*  
*of the European Economic and Social Committee*  
Staffan NILSSON

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