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Baltic Sea Strategy

Press release by PCTVL MEP Tatjana Zdanoka

Speaking in a debate at the European Parliament in Strasbourg on the EU's proposed €50 billion plan for economic regeneration in the Baltic Sea region, Latvian MEP **Tatjana Zdanoka** criticised the proposals for failing to put sufficient emphasis on social protection.

Ms Zdanoka noted that Latvia has been particularly badly hit by the economic crisis and has received substantial EU aid to deal with its balance of payments deficit. The MEP criticised the European Commission for allowing the Latvian government to cut pensions and benefits whilst receiving this aid, cuts which have had a detrimental effect on standards of living in Latvia.

The Baltic Sea Strategy, announced by the European Commission in June this year, aims to clean up the maritime environment and promote regional prosperity, whilst improving accessibility and security. Some €50 billion will be made available from the EU Cohesion Fund and other sources to support the plan up to 2013.

In her contribution to the debate in Parliament, Ms Zdanoka said:

"As an MEP elected in Latvia I do welcome that the first example of a Strategy for a 'macro-region' is one targeting the Baltic Sea Area.

"Nevertheless, in my opinion a number of Community objectives have been forgotten here. For instance, a high level of social protection.

"Some of the region's Member States (including Latvia) are severely hit by the economic crisis. Our financial sector is interconnected with that of Scandinavia [it means that our problems will create problems there, so this is not a national issue.

"Latvia has recently received medium-term financial assistance for balance of payments provided by the Commission. Unfortunately, there are no social conditions for such assistance. As a result, the government is reducing pensions and benefits, yet the Commission tolerates this.

"My second concern is about fundamental rights. Mass statelessness and minority protection is still a topical issue in two of the region's Member States [Latvia and Estonia.

"The Baltic Sea Strategy must be more ambitious and deal with problems related to all of the objectives of the European Union."

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