

**Dinner speech at European Small Islands Federation 9th of September 2008,
MEP Ville Itälä**

Dear chairman of ESIN, dear friends of Small Islands,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank ESIN and FÖSS for this kind invitation for your event. The small islands have a special place in my heart. I spend my summers in Velkua on a small island here in the archipelago of South-Western Finland.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The last bigger decision that relates to archipelagos or small islands in the European Parliament was the adoption of MEP Francesco Musotto's report in spring 2007. The Musotto report was on "the islands natural and economic constraints in the context of the regional policy". Although the report put forward many good initiatives and called on the Commission to act upon these matters, unfortunately so far very little has been done. The problem in many of the non-legislative texts adopted in the European Parliament is that they very rarely lead to concrete measures.

So, there is still a lot to be done. A good thing for the islands is that the principle of territorial cohesion has been strengthened in the regulations on the Structural Funds 2007-2013. This is a step forward to secure equal opportunities for all the regions and their populations in EU's territory. In my view though, the lobbying of ESIN should be focused more on the Maritime Policy of the European Union and not so much on cohesion policy. We also need a full support from our national Governments for all aspects of the Maritime Policy and ESIN.

It is also possible to draft a budget amendment to the European Commission's budget that would concern small islands. My Irish colleague promised already last year to table a budget amendment to the EU budget in island issues. He is specialised in small island issues. Unfortunately the deadline for this is already next week 17th of September, so the timetable would be very tight. Naturally the amendment would have to contain valid arguments. The aim should be focused, the legal base clarified and the budget line where the amendment would be tabled, should be clearly considered.

Dear guests,

A few words about the Baltic Sea,

I have been working actively for the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea, which is now under preparation by the European Commission. As a spokesman of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea or other Finnish politicians do not undermine other regional outreaches. The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region benefits from the widely discussed Union for the

Mediterranean and vice versa.

The preparation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea helps to mobilize this region, identify EU instruments that could be better utilized for the region and thus make the EU more strongly present in the North. It is up to Swedish EU Presidency a year from now to bring this regional strategy for take-off. A successful strategy here can be seen as a model for other regions.

We do not want more paper and structures but new and more effective concrete action with results. At the Baltic Sea this requires also involving Russia. Here we can use the existing cooperation mechanisms like the Northern Dimension. What we do need though - is money. The Baltic Sea would desperately need its own budget line for the EU budget. This got a good start when the Baltic Sea got, for the first time, money for pilot project for the EU budget 2008, thanks to the co-operation of all the Finnish MEP's.

All the coastal states of the Baltic Sea have given their remarks and contributions to the Commission draft of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea this spring. As I was browsing them through, I noticed that islands were mentioned only indirectly. A challenging task for ESIN would be to make sure that islands and archipelagos are strongly present in all the regional strategies of the European Commission such as the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea and the Union for the Mediterranean.

Dear members of ESIN,

Dear friends,

I would like to give recognition for the very important work you do in ESIN. The future of smallest inhabited islands needs a lot of attention and work. ESIN has an important role in raising awareness in the field of sustainable island development. Together we need to ensure that the special environmental, cultural and social characteristics of the island regions are effectively protected.