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Ministry  
of Foreign Affairs  
Republic of Poland



## Polish Chairmanship of the EUSBSR<sup>1</sup> National Coordinators

1 July 2015 – 30 June 2015

From July 2015 to June 2016 Poland acted as the Presidency in the Council of the Baltic Sea States. Simultaneously, Poland volunteered to chair the meetings of the National Coordinators (NCs) of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (NCs). Covering the same period with the two Presidencies in the Baltic Sea cooperation formats (CBSS and EUSBSR) created a welcome and favourable opportunity to build synergies and join forces in coping with common challenges in the Baltic Sea Region.

After a joint effort of reviewing and updating the Action Plan of the EUSBSR which was completed by June 2015 PL Chair proposed to concentrate on the most crucial and recurring challenges of the EUSBSR. The Chair wanted to respond in practice to *“a need to develop a perspective whereby the Strategy is not viewed in terms of its structures but rather with the perspective of the value and effectiveness of its actions as relevant to its targets and objectives”*<sup>2</sup>. Therefore the PL Chair suggested to concentrate on the improvement of **governance**, facilitating of **implementation**, better **visibility** through promotion of the results and relevance of the EUSBSR.

Main achievements and highlights:

### Governance

- **improved dialogue among the main stakeholders (NCs, European Commission and Policy Area and Horizontal Action Coordinators PACs/HACs);**
- **continuation of the dialogue within the European Social Fund - Baltic Sea Network;**
- **closer and better established cooperation of the NCs with the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme;**
- **working out the procedure for assuming the role of a new PAC/HAC;**

### Implementation

- **exploring and identifying the methods of effective implementation during a seminar ‘A Positive Change in the Baltic Sea Region. How far have we gone and why do we want to go on?’;**
- **a step forward towards better coordination and support to the implementation of the EUSBSR – meeting of NCs and Managing Authorities/line ministries managing the ESIF programmes**

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<sup>1</sup> European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Discussion paper and recommendations on the EUSBSR. Based on meetings between the EUSBSR team and Priority Area Coordinators and Horizontal Action Leaders in Brussels 16.12.13 – 21.02.14’ prepared by DG REGIO.

**which led to the kick-off of the European Regional Development Fund Managing Authorities' Network (ERDF MA Network);**

#### **Visibility**

- **completing an EUSBSR Communication Strategy;**
- **promoting the achievements and relevance of the EUSBSR at the seminar 'A Positive Change in the Baltic Sea Region. How far have we gone and why do we want to go on?' in Warsaw;**
- **promoting the EUSBSR at other Baltic events.**

In detail the following efforts have been taken up during the PL EUSBSR Chairmanship:

#### **GOVERNANCE**

##### **1. Improved dialogue among the main stakeholders (NCs, EC and PACs/HACs)**

The need for closer cooperation among key stakeholders has been identified. PL Chair proposed a series of meetings between Policy Area and Horizontal Action Coordinators (PACs and HACs) and National Coordinators (NCs) together with the European Commission (EC) and Interact. Three meetings with PACs/HACs have been organized (15.09.2015 Gdańsk; 29.10.2015 Warsaw; 11.12.2015 Warsaw). PACs/HACs were grouped and invited along the three thematic blocs: Increase Prosperity, Save the Sea, Connect the Region<sup>3</sup>. During the meetings NCs, EC, PACs/HACs and Interact exchanged information, identified challenges in the implementation process, discussed how to improve the internal communication, the ways of mutual support and cooperation. All PACs and HACs seized the opportunity to present their ambitions reflected in the new version of the EUSBSR Action Plan.

Main reflections:

- A **dialogue of NCs, EC, PACs/HACs and Interact** should continue; PACs/HACs should be invited to the NCs meetings on a regular basis, e.g. in a formula 'PA/HA X in focus'; to communicate the EUSBSR successfully NCs have to learn directly from PACs/HACs about the current developments; PACs/HACs are interested in the constant, working contacts with the NCs;
- The dialogue should involve relevant DGs;
- NCs should be more engaged in ensuring their country's participation in the steering groups/committees (**identification of Focal Points**); NCs could help in **getting more attention from the Member States** when not all the countries are engaged in a given PA/HA;
- NCs could help (Focal Points and PACs/HACs themselves) to **mobilize stakeholders** in Member States and to initiate contacts in order to engage in the processes going on in MSs that PACs/HACs are not aware of;
- NCs could be more supportive when it comes to the **cooperation with external partners** (non-EU, like Norway or Russia);
- NCs and the EC should support PACs/HACs in their efforts to **pave the way for project recommendations** to reach and influence the policy/decision-making level;
- More **cooperation among PACs and HACs** is needed (discussions on funding, conferences to change policies in the region, the criteria to grant a flagship status);
- A need to regularly organize **synergy seminars**, meetings with policy coordinators and experts to solve problems faced by PACs/HACs;
- A need to **engage the societies** into actions within the EUSBSR;
- The idea of **cooperation between all macro-regional strategies** should be explored.

##### **2. Meeting of the informal Baltic Sea Network, which uses the European Social Fund to promote transnational activities that allow the implementation of the EUSBSR objectives**

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<sup>3</sup> Sometimes due to the other assignments PACs and HACs could not strictly follow this division line.

Baltic Sea Network-European Social Fund (BSN-ESF) meeting organized by the PL Ministry of Economic Development took place on 1-2 October 2015 in Gdańsk.

BSN-ESF has been established in order to strengthen transnational cooperation between projects funded by the ESF and different stakeholders in the EU Member States and regions in the Baltic Sea Region. The additional aim of BSN-ESF project is to analyze and emphasize the relation between the ESF and the EUSBSR. It also promotes actions to encourage ESF projects to include implementation of the social dimension in the EUSBSR and constitutes a common platform for information and communication within the network and among project promoters and stakeholders in order to disseminate relevant news and perform policy impact activities.

The network involves ESF Managing Authorities and Implementing Bodies from the Member States and regions concerned – Sweden, Åland Islands, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and German Land of Hamburg and a number of joint activities are carried out: conferences, partner search forums and learning seminars.

The most important aim of the event in Gdańsk was to discuss the schedule of transnational ESF calls for proposals for 2015 and 2016 and possibilities of calls' synchronization as well as to confirm common themes for cooperation (employment, social inclusion, youth employment, learning and skills and social economy).

The participants have also shared their experience in implementation of the EUSBSR. A representative of Marshal Office of Pomorskie region explained the process of matching the goals of the EUSBSR with the goals of Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020 funded both by ESF and European Regional Development Fund.

Update was also given on *School2Work* EUSBSR flagship project implementation by the project coordinator – Swedish Association for Local Authorities and Regions. The idea of this project was developed in the Baltic Sea Network. The project focuses on early school leaving and NEETs (young people not being in employment, education or training).

### **3. Closer and better established cooperation of the NCs with the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme (IBSR)**

The links between the EUSBSR and IBSR have been steadily growing, especially with the current funding period 2014-2020. The Programme takes an active part in the implementation of the EUSBSR and its Action Plan. For the funding period 2014-2020 the thematic priorities 1-3 of the Programme have been very much aligned with the objectives of the Strategy. The Programme offers support to the Strategy implementation by financing flagship projects and their preparation (seed money support). In addition, the Programme provides direct support to the coordination activities of the EUSBSR (thematic priority 4 'Institutional capacity for macro-regional cooperation' and the specific objective 4.2 'coordination of macro-regional cooperation')<sup>4</sup>. Under 4.2 the Program provides co-financing for *support to the PACs and HACs and targeted support and communication activities related to the implementation of the EUSBSR*. During the PL Chairmanship the following developments took place:

- Support to the PACs/HACs – debate on the basis of the Swedish proposal to differentiate the level of support (higher level of funding for PACs/HACs of more demanding character). The NCs worked out a compromise solution which required a voting procedure of the NCs for the first time – it was agreed that most of the PAs/HAs get a basic 'level A' financing and two PAs, with broader scope and responsibility after the last revision, will get an additional 'level B' financing (PA Bioeconomy and PA Innovation).
- Targeted support and communication activities. The NCs identified the needs for the targeted support and communication activities related to the implementation of the EUSBSR, agreed on a joint position and informed the IBSR Programme. Based on this information the Managing

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<sup>4</sup> On the basis of the IBSR information materials.

Authority/Joint Secretariat (MA/JS) drafted a call announcement. Subsequently the NCs evaluated the relevance of the proposals – the results of the discussion were sent to MA/JS and the Monitoring Committee (12.04.2016 the NCs participated for the first time in the assessment of the applications submitted to the IBSR); all NCs participating signed the declaration of confidentiality and impartiality. The topic of targeted support and communication activities has been regularly discussed during the following NCs' meetings: 15.09.2015; 29.10.2015; 11.12.2015; 12.04.2016; 28.06.2016.

As a result a good working relationship with the MA/JS of Interreg Baltic Sea Region has been established.

#### **4. Working out the procedure for assuming the role of a new PAC/HAC**

NCs for the first time went through the procedure of accepting the change in the function of PAC Innovation (the Nordic Council of Ministers and Estonia agreed to replace Sweden). Currently PA Innovation is coordinated by Estonia, Poland and NCM. The procedure of accepting the new PAC foresees a strong participation of the steering group of a given PA.

#### **IMPLEMENTATION**

##### **1. Exploring and identifying the methods of effective implementation during a seminar 'A Positive Change in the Baltic Sea Region. How far have we gone and why do we want to go on?', 10 December 2015, Warsaw**

The one day seminar was looking for best ways of cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region using the potential of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

The participants looked into and discussed i.a. the concrete examples of what has already been achieved with the EUSBSR and what the ambitions are for the future; the best ways of making the achievements work on the policy level and how to enhance support to the EUSBSR by the European Structural and Investment Funds programmes, what are the bottlenecks and what solutions could be found to overcome those.

The seminar brought together the current EUSBSR stakeholders (European Commission, NCs, PACs/HACs, Flagship Leaders and cooperating partners, INTERACT, Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme, Focal Points) and potential new players interested to join in as well as European Structural and Investment Funds programme managers.

The first panel '*The EUSBSR and its achievements: What is the recipe for success? How to ensure sustainability of results?*' showed some concrete examples of the achievements and ambitions for the future. The added value and success factors for maximizing and sustaining results have been discussed.

##### **2. A step forward towards better coordination and support to the implementation of the EUSBSR – meeting of NCs and Managing Authorities/line ministries managing the ESIF programmes which led to the kick-off of the European Regional Development Fund Managing Authorities' Network (ERDF MA Network)**

The EUSBSR has no dedicated funding sources for financing the implementation of its projects (Flagships). However with the new financial period 2014-2020 new opportunities emerged in this regard. The EUSBSR was one of the main strategic factors, together with the EU 2020 Strategy and domestic socio-economic strategic frameworks, to be taken into consideration while preparing programming documents for cohesion policy 2014-2020 – Partnership Agreements and operational programmes.

The idea of more efficient financial support to the EUSBSR implementation by the ESIF<sup>5</sup> programmes has been further taken up during the **EUSBSR Seminar *Positive Change in the Baltic Sea Region, 10 December 2015***, Warsaw. The aim of the **panel *Cooperation and coordination across programmes in the Baltic Sea region: How to better implement the EUSBSR?*** was to discuss the gaps that need to be addressed but also to focus on defining concrete actions and identifying possible solutions for closer coordination among ESIF programmes in the region. The discussion between NCs and Managing Authorities or line ministries managing the ESIF programmes was continued on 11 December 2015<sup>6</sup> in Warsaw. One of the conclusions was the idea to **establish the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Network across the Baltic Sea Region**. A pilot ERDF MA Network focusing on Innovation in the EUSBSR was launched on 19 May 2016 in Warsaw<sup>7</sup>. Participants of the meeting included: representatives of interested Managing Authorities (MAs – from DE, EE, FI, PL, SE), line ministries and agencies (from LT, PL, SE), EUSBSR National Coordinators (EE, PL, SE), representatives of the European Commission (DG REGIO), Coordinators of the Policy Area Innovation (PA INNO) and the Interact Programme.

Main issues raised during the discussion:

- the cooperation within the pilot ERDF MA Network should be demand-driven;
- at the outset we need to focus on small-scale initiatives;
- need to identify and 'advertise' concrete examples of support to EUSBSR implementation by the ESIFs;
- the Network must be beneficial to all participating stakeholders (PA INNO as well as OPs);
- since joint actions may very difficult in many aspects we should look for more coordination among programmes;
- the question of the Network's formalization: perhaps at some stage there will be a need to consider the formalization of the cooperation within the Network (a declaration, an agreement etc.; in the BSN - ESF there is a letter of intent);
- in the long term perspective – the need to screen the priorities and indicators in the relevant OPs (in which indicators the transnational cooperation is needed) in order to match them with the PA INNO's targets and indicators;
- a role of the National Coordinators (NCs) in the Network – NCs' role should be limited: to support the Network and exchange information with relevant stakeholders.

Participants of the first meeting of the pilot ERDF MA Network focusing on Innovation in the EUSBSR agreed to:

- explore the possibility to launch a pilot initiative in connection with the "Cleaner Growth" project – PAC INNO will prepare an invitation/proposal for relevant MAs to cooperate on cleantech (it will be presented to PA INNO Steering Committee for approval);
- the Swedish Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation will lead the ERDF MA Network for the upcoming year (July 2016 – June 2017);
- Network leader will contact the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) and the Joint Research Centre (JRC) to explore other possible themes for cooperation that are identified by the Baltic Sea Region member states and regions in their Smart Specialisation Strategies.

In the longer run if successful the Network might help relevant stakeholders to use the EU funds better, meeting the long-lasting demand of better and coordinated use of existing resources. The success of the Network may be a game changer in terms of funds supply and an inspiration for other macro-regional strategies. The Network may help in strengthening the implementation side of the EUSBSR.

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<sup>5</sup> European Structural and Investment Funds.

<sup>6</sup> The relation on the meeting on the basis of the Summary Note prepared by INTERACT and other organizers.

<sup>7</sup> The meeting was preceded by a preparatory meeting on 29 April 2016 in Warsaw.

## **VISIBILITY**

### **1. Completing an EUSBSR Communication Strategy**

NCs after discussing the topic on 15 September 2015 in Gdańsk offered their written contributions to the efforts of the Task Force on Communication led by Interact Point Turku. The EUSBSR Communication Strategy was finalised in December 2015. It is available at [www.balticsea-region.eu](http://www.balticsea-region.eu). It aims to show plain and interesting methods and tools of raising awareness about the EUSBSR and the results it achieves to broaden commitment and ownership of the EUSBSR and attract new stakeholders.

### **2. Promoting the achievements and relevance of the EUSBSR at the seminar 'A Positive Change in the Baltic Sea Region. How far have we gone and why do we want to go on?' in Warsaw**

During the seminar on 10 December 2015 in Warsaw some of the achievements of the EUSBSR have been presented. It raised the visibility of the EUSBSR among the participants (ab. 150 persons) and possible future stakeholders. Additionally, one of the panels was devoted to communication aspects ('Communicating the EUSBSR: How to reach out and promote our achievements? How to attract newcomers and improve internal communication and knowledge exchange?'). The panelist discussed how to best communicate about the EU Strategy for the BSR and show benefits it provides for countries involved and ordinary people in the region. Enhancing information exchange among present EUSBSR stakeholders was also brought into attention. It was agreed that good communication and telling stories about bringing change to the BSR should be the basis of future development of the EUSBSR. The main elements of the EUSBSR Communication Strategy were presented.

### **3. Promoting the EUSBSR at other Baltic events**

PL Chair participated in a number of Baltic Sea events promoting the EUSBSR: 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Forum of Euroregion Baltic Stakeholders 2.11.2015 Gdańsk <http://www.eurobalt.org/6th-annual-forum-presentations/>; Polish Stakeholder Seminar PA Education, Research and Employability in the EUSBSR 16.11.2016, University of Warsaw; HA Capacity workshop for PACs stationed in Warsaw on partnership building and MLG in practice 17.11.2015 in PL MFA; PA Innovation Steering Committee Meeting 25.02.2016 Warsaw; Conference 'INTERREG changes the Baltic Sea Region. Stories that inspire'. 24-25.05.2016 Gdańsk <http://www.mr.gov.pl/strony/aktualnosci/region-morza-baltyckiego-wspolpraca-w-ramach-programow-interreg/>; PA Nutri seminar 'Reducing nutrient inputs to the Baltic Sea – how to strengthen project partnerships in the region' 14.04.2016 Gdańsk <http://groupspaces.com/eusbsr-nutrient-inputs/pages/seminar2016>; Baltic Leadership Programme. Bioeconomy. 16.06.2016 Warsaw.

## **OTHER INITIATIVES**

- NCs signed **two letters of support for Germany** (12.04.2016) **and Estonia** (28.06.2016) to support granting the necessary funds for the successful preparation and organization of the Annual Forum in 2017 in Germany and in 2018 in Estonia.
- NCs had an opportunity to participate in a **training on KEEP** (how to use it in the context of the EUSBSR) [www.keep.eu](http://www.keep.eu). KEEP is the online database of territorial cooperation projects and beneficiaries. It can be used of searching for achievements of the EUSBSR.
- EUSBSR key stakeholders (European Commission, EUSBSR National Coordinators, Policy Area and Horizontal Action Coordinators, together with ESPON/HELCOM/VASAB/Interact/IBSR) participated in a **Participatory Workshop on Monitoring of the EUSBSR** 27.06.2016 PL MFA Warsaw. The participants made an effort to take stock of developments and identify needs for a tailor-made monitoring system for the EUSBSR. It was considered how monitoring results and findings can be

used, including for possible evaluation needs or to feed into relevant policy processes. The ESPON cooperation programme has offered to develop custom-made territorial monitoring systems to all European macro-regions. Based on past experience gained with the territorial monitoring system named "ESPON TeMo" (<http://bsr.espon.eu/>), developed together with VASAB stakeholders, ESPON intends to develop it further to cover the needs of stakeholders in the EUSBSR.

### **CALENDAR OF MAIN EVENTS**

**15.09.2015**, Gdańsk, NC meeting; NC + PACs/HACs meeting (PA Culture, PA Education, PA Health, PA Innovation, PA Security, HA Capacity); NC + PACs/HACs + CBSS Committee of Senior Officials meeting (Joint Meeting);

**28.10.2015**, Warsaw, Joint Meeting (EC, CBSS CSO, CBSS EGSD, NCs, PACs/HACs, HELCOM) on sustainable development;

**29.10.2015**, Warsaw, NC meeting; NC + PACs/HACs meeting (PA Bioeconomy, PA Hazards, PA Nutri, PA Safe, PA Ship, HA Climate, HA Spatial Planning, HA Neighbours);

**10.12.2015**, Warsaw, a seminar 'A Positive Change in the Baltic Sea Region. How far have we gone and why do we want to go on?';

**11.12.2015**, Warsaw, NC meeting; meeting of NCs + Managing Authorities or line ministries managing the ESIF programmes; NCs + PACs/HACs meeting (PA Tourism, PA Bioeconomy, PA Energy, PA Transport, HA Capacity, HA Neighbours, HA Spatial Planning, HA Climate);

**25.02.2016**, Warsaw, PA Innovation Steering Committee Meeting;

**12.04.2016**, Warsaw, NC meeting; Joint Meeting of NCs, CBSS CSO, EU institutions;

**14.04.2016**, Gdańsk, PA Nutri seminar 'Reducing nutrient inputs to the Baltic Sea – how to strengthen project partnerships in the region';

**29.04.2016**, Warsaw, a meeting of the task force to prepare the first ERDF MA Network meeting;

**19.05.2016**, Warsaw, a kick-off of the ERDF MA Network;

**24-25.05.2016**, Gdańsk, Conference 'INTERREG changes the Baltic Sea Region. Stories that inspire';

**15.06.2016**, Warsaw, PA Culture Steering Group Meeting;

**27.06.2016**, Warsaw, a Participatory Workshop on Monitoring of the EUSBSR;

**28.06.2016**, Warsaw, NC meeting.

### **REFLECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

- Dialogue of NCs with PACs/HACs should continue, preferably focused around specific subjects and organized back-to-back with other Baltic Sea events;
- The NCs should further reflect on how to meet the needs of PACs/HACs expressed during the meetings over recent months (cf. Governance – point 1);
- To be successful the ERDF MA Network still needs some assistance from the NC level; in the future it should be a result- and interest-driven format of cooperation which does not need the support from the NC group;
- The cooperation with the IBSR Programme has become an important element of the NCs' work. This welcome development creates opportunities to consolidate and bring more synergy to the activities in the BSR;
- Combining CBSS and EUSBSR Presidencies creates favourable conditions for building thematically oriented cooperation in the BSR;
- EUSBSR Communication Strategy should be a living document, a reference point for the efforts of all the stakeholders.