

Position paper and input of Region Blekinge to the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region

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I. EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region – the background

The European Commission has been mandated by the European Council to prepare a proposal for the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region. The proposal shall be presented during the Swedish EU presidency in 2009. In contribution to this process Region Blekinge would like to present specific viewpoints.

I.1 The initiative

Both the initiative taken by the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the European Council to develop a strategy for the Baltic Sea region and the preparatory process launched by the European Union are strongly appreciated. Very acknowledged is also the will expressed by the Swedish government to adopt and further implement the strategy under the country's EU presidency in the year 2009.

I.2 Aim

The overarching aim for the strategy shall be to create pre-requisites for transforming the Baltic Sea area into a functional European region that would demonstrate a long-term sustainable growth, competitive potential and high quality natural environment, in line with the Lisbon and Gothenburg criteria, and in which also the Russian Federation, and in particular the Kaliningrad region, will be integrated to a maximum extent. The strategy shall be worked out in understanding that the overall growth is created locally and regionally. It is thus important to take into account that functional regions are rarely confined to national boundaries.

"In this way we can strengthen the regional competitiveness, enhance the internal market and support one another in complying with the regulations, develop the infrastructure and apply a wiser regional perspective in the planning process. We can intensify cooperation in research, education and innovation. We can work together in combating eutrophication, depletion of fish resources and pollution of our commonly shared sea. We can strengthen collaboration between our crime prevention authorities and thereby increase security of our citizens."

Cecilia Malmström, Swedish Minister for EU Affairs, 9 May 2008

I.3 The structure

The strategy will consist of 10-15 pages divided into four chapters:

- To make the Baltic Sea Region a sustainable place
- To make the Baltic Sea Region a prosperous place
- To make the Baltic Sea Region an attractive place
- To make the Baltic Sea Region a safe place

The strategy, which formally will become a communication from the Commission, will not have a legally binding status. The responsibility for the implementation of the strategy will be jointly shared by the EU Member States. The strategy will be pursued in a form of an action plan with a list of concrete measures. The action plan will be monitored and evaluated on an annual basis.

I.4 Timeframe

- June-September 2008:
First draft of the strategy estimated to be released by the Commission.
- September 2008 and January 2009:
Two stakeholder conferences will be arranged; thereof one is preliminary scheduled for 30 September in Stockholm, with invitations sent out to local and regional actors as well as to interested counterparts from all the Baltic Sea countries. The other stakeholder conference is tentatively set at the beginning of 2009 in Rostock.
- Autumn 2008:
Four round table discussions will be organised, dealing with specific topics of the strategy: sustainability, competitiveness, attractiveness and safety/security.
- Winter 2008:
A public consultation process will be arranged at the end of the year.
- January-March 2009:
An internal consultation within 18 Directorates-General of the Commission.
- March-May 2009:
The strategy adopted by the Commission.
- Autumn 2009:
The strategy presented during the Swedish EU presidency in the second half of 2009.
- December 2009:
The strategy endorsed by the European Council.

I.5 Possibilities for Region Blekinge to influence the EU Baltic Strategy

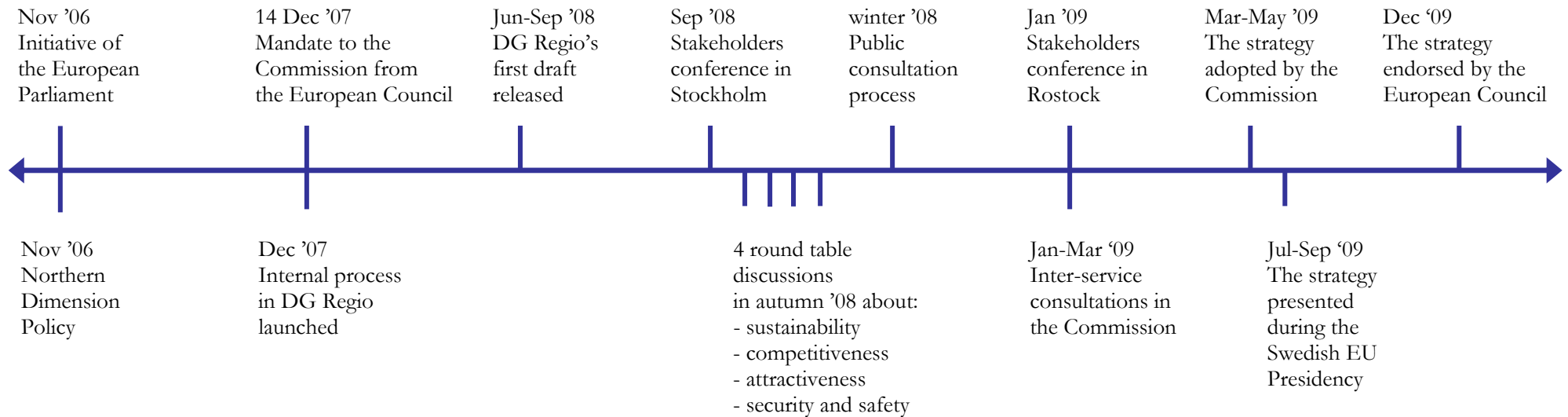
The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region and the subsequent action plan will serve as a guiding and influential instrument for priorities of international financing institutions, for priorities in ongoing and upcoming EU programmes as well as for national, regional and local planning initiatives. The strategy is especially important since the action plan will undergo an annual evaluation. Therefore, the strategy and the action plan are regarded fundamental steering documents for the development of the Baltic Sea region, not the least affecting Blekinge in its strategic location in the South Baltic Sea area.

Having that in mind Region Blekinge needs to make an effort to influence the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region and the action plan vis-à-vis the national level and through direct contacts with the European Commission. Furthermore, Region Blekinge may formulate the viewpoints and proposals at the fora of partaken organisations:

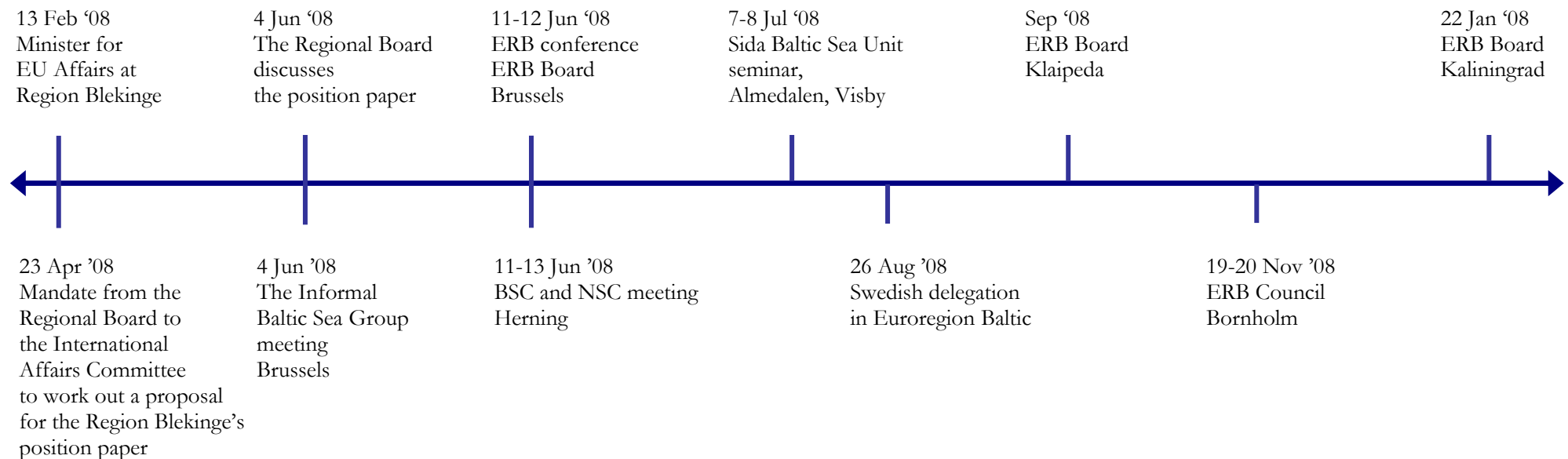
- Sydsam
- Euroregion Baltic (ERB)
- Baltic Sea Commission (BSC) of CPMR (*Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe*)

The networks created by means of Interreg projects with a lead partner or partner role of Region Blekinge may also be perceived important platforms for expression of Region Blekinge's interests.

I.6 Timeline: EU preparatory process of the Baltic Sea Strategy



I.7 Timeline: various activities and events during the preparatory process of the EU Baltic Sea Strategy



2. The strategy – position of Region Blekinge

In the Commission's work to prepare the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region there are several areas of primary importance for Region Blekinge and in line with the organisation's interests and competence:

- Maritime safety and sustainable development
- Transport and communication
- Political cross-border co-operation
- The new generations
- Kaliningrad Oblast

Concrete proposals to the measures in respective thematic areas are listed in the chapter on the action plan (chapter 3).

2.1 Division of responsibilities

The Baltic Sea Strategy will be complemented with an action plan containing a list of concrete measures. The action plan will be evaluated on an annual basis.

Region Blekinge believes that the measures proposed in the action plan shall be to the maximum extent concretised and shall have a clear division of responsibilities between local, regional, national, cross-border, EU and international tiers of governance. Furthermore, the proposed measures shall be complemented with projection of relevant and feasible financial sources for their implementation.

2.2 Financing

The strategy will not constitute a new and separate financial resource for the Baltic Sea region but all EU financial instruments available in the Region shall be coordinated in a better manner. All financial instruments, irrespective whether they come from the regional level, the national level, EU (Structural Funds etc.), business sector, financial institutions (EIB, EIF, NEFCO, NIB etc.) shall be harmonised in order to secure an effective implementation of the action plan and the strategy.

Region Blekinge believes that it is of utmost importance to pursue such coordination. It is essential for local and regional authorities to carry out concrete measures included in the action plan also by means of harmonised financial instruments within the limits of economic capacity.

2.3 Importance of the local and regional levels

In Sweden it is taken for granted that anchoring of the development process in the communities requires a strong local and regional involvement. This applies also to the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region. It is important that experience, knowledge and competence of local and regional stakeholders is utilised in the preparatory and realisation process of the strategy.

Among a number of regional cooperation structures, which have been established over the borders around the Baltic Sea, one of the most prominent roles for Region Blekinge is played by Euroregion Baltic (ERB). The ERB Joint Development Programme comprises, among all, the issues of integration, sustainable development and infrastructure, which are tackled upon by sev-

eral Interreg projects. Region Blekinge has a substantial experience in the transnational and cross-border cooperation in the Baltic Sea region, particularly in the area of transport, maritime safety and political cooperation.

Region Blekinge believes that the strategy shall be worked out and implemented in close cooperation with the local and regional governance levels, representing first of all the coastal regions. It is therefore of utmost importance that in the strategy-making process the Commission utilises competence and networks created by means of regional and local cooperation across the borders, which shall also be used as a tool for the strategy implementation.

2.4 EU Cohesion Policy

The development in the Baltic Sea Region is of great importance for Blekinge, with its strategic position in the South Baltic Sea area. Short-term and long-term cross-border co-operation projects are therefore perceived highly important by the Region. Blekinge is able to benefit from newly established and enhanced cooperation structures, strengthen integration ties and deepen the internal market. The intensified cooperation leads to increased growth, competitiveness and better natural environment. On the other hand, local and regional actors lack sufficient resources for such a joint work.

Joint projects implemented within the framework of the territorial cooperation programmes as a component of the EU Cohesion Policy deal with practical EU as well as local and regional policy questions. In effect, they establish networks for exchange of experience and make it possible to tie together local and regional communities along the borders.

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region shall be worked out in understanding that the overall growth is created locally and regionally. It is thus important to consider that functional regions are rarely confined to national borders. The EU Cohesion Policy promotes local and regional cooperation between the Member States and thereby contributes to a decrease of negative impact of the national borders.

Region Blekinge believes that the Cohesion Policy strengthens the local and regional actors as EU programmes generate resources for enhanced cooperation across the national borders. Additionally, the local and regional stakeholders can influence the development and implementation of these programmes, which results in a further strengthening of their capacity. The EU Cohesion Policy is therefore essential for durable growth at the local and regional level.

2.5 The role of Russia

The Russian Federation, and in particular Kaliningrad Region, is and will continue to be an important and natural social, economic and environmentally liable part of the South Baltic Sea area. Kaliningrad Region is also one of the founders and active members of Euroregion Baltic¹ (ERB).

Kaliningrad Region is a transport node and gateway to Belarus and other parts of Russia. In its capacity Kaliningrad Region will be involved in the ongoing revision of the TEN-T. It is also an eligible territory for the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013. The Russian Federation must be regarded an important stakeholder in the joint work on solving environmental problems of the Baltic Sea.

¹ Euroregion Baltic (ERB) is a political cooperation structure in the South Baltic Sea area established in 1998 between the coastal regions of Klaipėda, Kaliningrad, Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Pomorskie, Bornholm, Blekinge, Kronoberg and Kalmar.

Region Blekinge believes that the Russian Federation in general and Kaliningrad Region in particular shall be given appropriate address in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region so that the integration of Kaliningrad Region becomes a natural part of the development processes in the Baltic Sea region and the South Baltic Sea area. For that purpose Euroregion Baltic is an evident and noteworthy platform for constructive cooperation of political authorities at the regional level.

2.6 Marine ecosystem of the Baltic Sea

Due to a central and strategic location of Blekinge in the Baltic Sea region, the marine ecosystem of the Baltic Sea and fishing industry are essential ingredients of both the business life and archipelago culture in the Region.

Region Blekinge believes that sustainable fishing and environmental policies in the Baltic Sea region are of utmost importance for Blekinge.

2.7 Organised crime

In line with the geographical location the role of Blekinge as a strategic outbound spot for ferry traffic from Karlshamn and Karlskrona to Lithuania, Russia and Poland is on the rising curve.

Region Blekinge believes that the combating of various forms of organised crime, which often accompany intensive ferry traffic, should have high priority.

2.8 Security policy

Security and safety in all their dimensions are ranked high on the political agenda. Nowadays, civil and military security issues are fully intertwined with each other.

Region Blekinge thus believes that security and safety issues shall either directly or indirectly be tackled upon by the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region.

3. The action plan – input from Region Blekinge

Region Blekinge wishes to submit the following proposals to the measures included in the action plan complementing the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region.

3.1 Maritime safety and sustainable development

Baltic Master

Baltic Master is a transnational project focused on the improvement of maritime safety in the Baltic Sea region by means of increased cooperation, exchange of knowledge and development of new methodological approaches, plans and demonstrations. The project lifts up the local and regional perspective in the field of preparedness, preventive measures and spatial planning tools in the coastal zones and offshore areas.

Region Blekinge assumed a role of the lead partner for Baltic Master, which won the European Regional Maritime Champion 2007 award, being the best EU maritime project. The award was funded by the Regional Review magazine and the EU Committee of the Regions. Recently, Region Blekinge has submitted an application to the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013 for the follow-up stage of the Baltic Master project co-financed in the Interreg IIIB period.

The action plan adopted in the Baltic Master project contains the following priority measures:

- Integrate a local and regional perspective in the maritime safety work
- Initiate a pro-active on-land contingency planning activities
- Improve implementation of current legislation and international regulations
- Develop coastal zone planning in the whole Baltic Sea area
- Prepare concrete proposals for protected areas under the PSSA regime (Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas)
- Intensify and improve monitoring of ships movement in the Baltic Sea

Region Blekinge proposes that the measures elaborated by the Baltic Master project shall be integrated in the upcoming action plan of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region.

3.2 Transport and communication

In the recent period Region Blekinge led and participated in several large transport-related transnational projects within the framework of the BSR Interreg IIIB programme. This work brought on positive results. Projects like Baltic Gateway, SEB Trans-link and East West Transport Corridor have contributed to an increased integration and improved transport system in the South Baltic Sea area. These projects have, among other, facilitated a decision of the Swedish government to submit an application to the EU Motorways of the Sea programme for the maritime connections of Klaipeda-Karlshamn and Karlskrona-Gdynia, including the port infrastructure and some hinterland connections. This initiative results also in a deeper cooperation with Kaliningrad Region.

East West TC

East West TC is a transport corridor between Esbjerg in Denmark via Öresund to Vilnius in Lithuania, which records the highest traffic volumes and growth rates in the South Baltic Sea

area. The Karlshamn-Klaipeda ferry link stands for the only ro-ro connection between Sweden and Lithuania. A section of the corridor is included in the Northern Transport Axis.

Region Blekinge has recently submitted an application to the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013 for the follow-up stage of the East West TC project co-financed by the Interreg III programme. The new project proposal has a budget of about 10 million euro and is backed up by the national transport ministries from Sweden and Lithuania. Its overarching objective is to develop the green corridor concept in line with the EU policy on freight logistics. The project contains also a development of an innovative ITS platform (information broker system, pay as you pollute etc.). Kaliningrad Region authorities are involved in the project activities.

Region Blekinge proposes that the investments featured by the upcoming MoS project for the Karlshamn-Klaipeda link are approved for implementation, while the East West TC Action Plan becomes included in the action plan of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region.

SEB Trans-link

SEB Trans-link is a transport corridor leading from Gothenburg via Karlskrona to Poland and farther southwards. The Karlskrona-Gdynia ferry connection served by Stena Line has seen a dramatic increase of traffic over the recent years, while the connection itself has become the most voluminous between Sweden and Poland in terms of cargo and passenger flows. In 2008 the traffic volumes are estimated to reach about 100 thousand cargo units, 450 thousand passengers and 80 thousand cars and buses. The ferry connection ties together the Baltic Link corridor in Sweden and the TEN-T corridor from the port of Gdynia southwards (previous pan-European corridor No. 6).

Region Blekinge proposes that the investments featured by the upcoming MoS project for the Karlskrona-Gdynia link are approved for implementation, while the development measures in the corridor become included in the action plan of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region.

Baltic Gateway

Baltic Gateway and Baltic Gateway Plus –"Quick Start Programme" have been anchored among regional political leaders in the South Baltic Sea area. Project results and a continued political cooperation in the field of transport development in the South Baltic Sea area are incorporated in an upcoming TransBaltic project submitted to the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013. This particular project intends to prepare and implement a transport action plan for the whole Baltic Sea region, based, among all, on the Baltic Gateway Quick Start Programme.

Region Blekinge proposes that the implementation of the TransBaltic project becomes included in the action plan of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region.

3.3 Political cross-border co-operation

Establishing of durable networks at all levels has a fundamental importance. The cooperation shall include such sectors as business, community associations, NGOs, schools and universities.

It provides necessary ground for cooperation over the borders between municipalities and regional authorities in the Baltic Sea region, which has evolved into stable institutional networks, the example of which are euroregions and EGTCs.

Region Blekinge proposes that the action plan supports in various aspects the development of political cross-border co-operation and such institutional platforms as euroregions and EGTCs.

3.4 The new generations

Children and youth are the key to the future of the regions. Interest in seeing the neighbouring countries around the Baltic Sea shall be stimulated among the now growing generation so that they may contribute on their part to the long-term regional development and integration. In compliance with such an approach in the year 2007 Euroregion Baltic set up a Youth Board aimed at finding new forms of facilitating contacts and cooperation over the borders among youth in the South Baltic Sea area.

The primary objective of the youth cooperation across the borders is to provide the young citizens with opportunities for meeting, exchanging ideas and experiences, and to build a network for successful cooperation. The enhanced cooperation across the borders enables young people to learn about the Baltic Sea, the Baltic Sea region and its inhabitants from historical, cultural, environmental and political cooperation contexts, and thereby help counteract prejudices.

It is therefore important that various EU programmes in a more active manner support youth cooperation in the Baltic Sea region, within relevant frameworks for schools, universities, NGOs, sport and leisure associations, environmental organisations, cultural associations etc.

Region Blekinge proposes that the action plan comprises measures and financial instruments for the support of present and new forms of cooperation between the new generations in the Baltic Sea region, and in particular in the South Baltic Sea area.

3.5 Kaliningrad Oblast

Russia, and especially Kaliningrad Region, is and will continue to be an important and natural social, economic and environmentally liable part of the South Baltic Sea area. Kaliningrad Region is also one of the founders and active members of Euroregion Baltic.

Region Blekinge has been a lead partner for two bilateral projects with Kaliningrad Region; the one named RED (Regional Economic Development) in Kaliningrad and co-funded by the Interreg IIIB programme, the other on the Community University in Kaliningrad Region 2004-2006 financed by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Region Blekinge proposes that Russia, and in particular Kaliningrad Region, receive appropriate address in the Baltic Sea Strategy so that the integration of Kaliningrad Region becomes a natural part of civil, environmental, social and transport development in the South Baltic Sea area. For that purpose Euroregion Baltic is an evident and noteworthy platform for constructive cooperation of political authorities at the regional level.

4. Reference sources

The following documents and literature sources have been used in the preparation of this position paper:

European Parliament Report on a Baltic Sea Region Strategy for the Northern Dimension, October 2006

Declaration of the Council of Baltic Sea States, June 2007

European Council, 14 December 2007 – Presidency conclusions

The yearly chronicles of the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, December 2007

Paper to the meeting with the Swedish Minister for EU Affairs at Region Blekinge, February 2008

SKL's statements on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region, 08-02-08

Region Skåne's viewpoints before the upcoming EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region, 08-03-25

Sydsam's proposal to the position paper

Swedish Non-paper, a Swedish Contribution to the Preparation of an EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, March-May 2008

Draft documents of Euroregion Baltic, spring 2008, and a written input to the conference on 11 June 2008 in Brussels

EIB's seminar at Rosenbad, 10 April 2008

Polish-Swedish Forum in Warsaw, 16 April 2008

Informal Baltic Sea Group (iBSG) Workshop Brussels, 22 April 2008 and a written input to the conference on 4 June 2008

"The future Baltic Sea region" input to the SIDA Baltic Sea Unit conference on 7-8 July 2008 during the Almedalsveckan

Baltic Gateway Quick Start Programme, www.balticgateway.se

East West TC Action Plan, www.eastwesttc.org

Baltic Master Action Plan, www.balticmaster.org

ERB Joint Development Programme, www.euroregionbaltic.eu

SEB Trans-Link Final Report, www.sebtrans.com

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