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Euroregion Baltic Informal Discussion Paper **Input to the 2011 Report on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region**

This informal discussion paper has been drafted by the secretariats of Euroregion Baltic and is thought to serve as input to the European Commission and the National Contact Points in the implementation process of the Strategy and in the drafting of the EUSBSR 2011 Report.

The discussion paper focuses on the following:

- Communicating the Strategy
- 2nd EUSBSR Annual Forum
- Input to the revision of the Strategy
- Funding of the Strategy
- Cooperation with Russia

Established in 1998 Euroregion Baltic (ERB) is a politically solid and well-anchored cross-border cooperation platform in the south-east of the Baltic Sea region, consisting of nine member organisations from eight regions of Denmark, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden. ERB was the first euroregion to have formally included a partner from Russia.

ERB was an early supporter of establishing an EU macro-regional strategy that would facilitate the development of the Baltic Sea Region, and actively participated in the drafting of EUSBSR by organising seminars, drafting the ERB position on the Strategy, as well as the joint position paper prepared together with five other Baltic organisations.

Euroregion Baltic has taken part in the implementation of the EUSBSR by initiating Strategy related projects like Moment (Priority Area 1), Baltic Master II (Priority Area 4), LED (Priority Area 5), DISKE (Priority Area 8) and YC3 (Priority Area 12). Four of these projects have been implemented through the South Baltic CBC Programme and ERB played a crucial role in its establishment.

Based on the experience collected from the Moment project a new EUSBSR horizontal action is being currently developed under strengthening multi-level governance, place-based spatial planning and sustainable development. In addition, ERB Youth Board, an official ERB body representing young people from all ERB member organisations, has been proposed to be included as a flagship as an example of a youth network within the EUSBSR Priority Area 12.

As an effective cross-border cooperation structure politically anchored in its member regions, ERB will continue to contribute to the enhanced integration in the Baltic Sea Region. We also believe that the Euroregion Baltic 2020 Agenda, which has been recently adopted as a result of broad political consultations in the ERB member regions, will constitute significant contribution to the successful implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

Communicating the Strategy

It has only been a short time since the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region was launched but it is already clear that it has served as a catalyst for cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region on different levels and in different sectors. However, one important challenge remains to improve the communication of the Strategy. The ambition for all stakeholders of the EUSBSR on EU, macro-regional, cross-border, national, regional and local level should be to strive for good information flows, as well as multilevel and intersectoral communication and dialogue.

Positive examples from the EU level

- A good dialogue between the DG Regio and the stakeholders in the region was facilitated during the public hearing, the four round-table conferences, the two stakeholder conferences and the youth stakeholder conference in the drafting phase. The openness from DG Regio to input from different stakeholders at different levels of society, including different BSR organisations in the drafting and implementation phase has been vital in the process.
- The 2010 EUSBSR Report including the annexes was extensive and gave the reader both an overall picture as well as detailed reports on all Priority Areas (PA).

Positive examples from the national level

- The communication in Denmark managed by the Danish National Contact Point (NCP) is a good example on how to create good information flows and multilevel dialogue. It includes frequent updates by e-mail and regular meetings in the Danish EUSBSR Committee where the Regional Municipality of Bornholm (one of ERB member organisations) is directly involved. The EUSBSR Committee ensures good information flows between the Danish Priority Area Coordinators (PAC), NCP, main stakeholders from different sectors, as well as the local and regional level. The Danish model has offered a good approach to ensure multilevel and intersectoral communication.
- Furthermore the Danish national annual stakeholder conference organised by the NCP in close cooperation with the European Commission, the Association of Danish Regions, Nordic Council of Ministers and Baltic Development Forum was a good arena for information, discussion and dialogue with the Danish stakeholders.
- The Swedish National Growth Agency has created a network of EUSBSR the stakeholders from relevant national authorities and regional level (represented by all three Swedish member organisations in ERB) which could be further developed.

Areas where communication can be improved

In general there is a need for promotion and information activities of the Strategy, with particular focus on its aims, activities and results, both in English and in the national languages in the Baltic Sea Region. It seems necessary to improve the communication of

the Strategy, both vertically and horizontally. This is not an easy task, but none the less it is crucial for the success of the Strategy. One tool for the Commission together with the NACs and PACs could be to develop a communication and dissemination plan for the Strategy.

- *European Commission*

The European Commission has an important role as a coordinator and facilitator in the implementation process of the Strategy. It is an important task for the DG Regio to communicate the status of the Strategy concerning its implementation, monitoring and governance. The different roles of the Commission, NCPs, PACs, Horizontal Action leaders and the High-Level Working Group (HLWG) should be clarified and communicated. Information on when the HLWG will meet, what the main issues for discussion are and minutes after the meetings should be made available to increase transparency. It is also important that the Commission stimulate and take part in discussions with each Priority Area on the definition of criteria for selecting and eliminating flagship projects.

- *National Contact Points*

The NCPs have an important role in promoting and communicating the Strategy, as well as stimulating active involvement in the implementation in the Strategy in their respective countries. There is a need to strengthen and clarify the role of the NCPs and make them more visible. It could be beneficial for the NCPs to exchange experiences on how to improve the anchoring, the multilevel and intersectoral communication, with reference to the Danish example above.

- *Priority Area Coordinators*

The experience so far from the 15 Priority Areas is that the intensity and quality of information dissemination and communication differs a great deal between the PAs. Some PACs and flagship project leaders have been hard to come in contact with. There is therefore a need to define responsibilities of the PACs and flagship project leaders when it comes to communicating their activities within each PA. Generally, the role of the PACs should be strengthened and clarified, and the coordinators themselves need to be more visible.

- *Flagship projects*

To ensure the involvement of stakeholders, particularly from the regional level, in the different flagship projects which are being developed it is important to improve information flows. This is very much related to the issue of the PACs' responsibility for informing about activities within the PA. The Annual Report from the Commission gives a good overall picture, but this kind of information needs to be updated on a more regular basis to simplify partner search and match making for specific projects.

- *Information available online*

A lot of information can be made available online on the DG Regio web page and web pages for each PA. To make these web pages good communication tools more frequent updates are needed, including the event calendar and information from the implementation of flagship projects. One suggestion is that the DG Regio web site gathers all flagships which are preparing project applications in a database to simplify match making and partner search.

Input to the 2nd EUSBSR Annual Forum

The Annual Forum should be a main event in the monitoring process of the EUSBSR and, equally important, serve to boost the implementation process and to inspire all stakeholders. Good organisation and smooth logistics of the forum is important to create a positive atmosphere and creative meetings.

- The aim of the forum should be to attract input from the participating stakeholders. This process demands both meetings in plenum and in smaller groups, allowing a maximum number of stakeholders to contribute actively. The Annual Forum gathers stakeholders from different levels of society and areas of expertise in the BSR which should be utilized better by creating more room for dialogue and interactivity.
- Instead of having all PACs reporting in seminars on the progress of each PA an exhibition could be held for all Priority Areas to show their main challenges and activities. Such an exhibition would also serve as an arena for networking, match making, sharing experiences and also making the strategy more visual and tangible.

Input to the revision of the Strategy

The European Commission highlights in the Annual Report from 2010 that during the upcoming Polish EU presidency in the second half of 2011 there “[...] is an opportunity for a more fundamental review of the Strategy”.

- Since the Strategy is relatively new it is too early to draw conclusions on the potential for success of the Strategy. In general, the current architecture of the Action Plan should be kept, although smaller adjustments might be needed. Changes to the Strategy and Action Plan should therefore be moderate and only initiated to improve the implementation.
- It is also important to ensure coherence with the Europe 2020 Strategy, especially in formulating strategic actions and in selection of new flagship projects. The relation between macro-regional strategies and Europe 2020 should be clarified.
- To be able to evaluate the Strategy clear objectives and indicators should be developed. Relevant experience could be drawn from the Danube Strategy.

- With reference to the discussion on communication it is also important in the revision of the Strategy to strengthen and clarify the role of the PACs, the NCPs and the leaders of the Horizontal Actions.

Funding of the Strategy

- The basic idea of the Strategy on alignment of EU funds has not been implemented yet, as the Strategy seems to have been primarily discussed under the Cohesion Policy programmes. It should be analysed how to ensure a better alignment of EU funding in the Baltic Sea Region that are managed by other DGs than DG Regio, such as programs for R&D, TEN-T, Intelligent Energy, Lifelong Learning, Life etc.
- The role of the Strategy in the Cohesion Policy seems still unclear in many operational programmes. This seems especially to be the case in objective 1 and 2 programmes.
- The Strategy should be closely linked to the BSR Interreg programme. The Strategy should be the strategic basis for the European Territorial Cooperation programmes in the Baltic Sea Region, both Interreg A and B, including ENPI. On the other hand, it is important to ensure that new initiatives and projects that are beneficial for the development of the Baltic Sea Region (or for example in the South Baltic area), but that are not mentioned in the Strategy, will continue to have the possibility of getting financial support by the different Interreg programs in the region.

Cooperation with Russia

- It is of great importance to ensure good cooperation with Russia and its Baltic Sea regions in the implementation of the Strategy. One positive example of how the EU could support the external dimension of the EU Baltic Sea Strategy is the recent launch of the €20 million action programme intended to finance activities and projects in the framework of the Northern Dimension Policy, HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan, and Non-State Actors and Local Authorities in the Baltic Sea Region.
- As a stakeholder of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, ERB will go on with its initiatives to the benefit of the growth of the whole region involving the Kaliningrad Region of the Russian Federation, a neighbour to the EU and an important partner of the ERB cooperation.