



# Presidency Report

Polish Presidency of the National Coordinators Group

01/07/2024 - 30/06/2025

## Introduction

Between 1 July 2024 and 30 June 2025, Poland held the rotating Presidency of the National Coordinators Group (NCG) of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR). Taking over from Latvia, Poland steered the Strategy in a challenging time, defined inter alia by the repercussions of the Russian aggression on Ukraine. Another important factors influencing the work of the Polish Presidency, was the preparations for the new EU Multiannual Financial Framework post-2027, and the critical mid-term process of updating the Action Plan.

The Presidency focused on four strategic priorities:

- Ensuring the smooth implementation of the Action Plan and adapting it to current challenges.
- Increasing Ukraine's involvement in the Strategy's activities.
- Continuing well-functioning governance and measurability of the Strategy.
- Enhancing external communication and visibility of the Strategy.

The Presidency worked closely with DG REGIO, Policy Area Coordinators (PACs), Steering Groups (SGs), the Baltic Sea Strategy Point (BSP) and various pan-Baltic organisations to ensure continuity and impact.

## Presidency priorities and achievements

### Action Plan update process

Under the Polish presidency, the Action Plan update process launched by the Latvian Presidency was further advanced, the new impact pathway approach further developed, and Policy Area Action templates refined, to make the Strategy more measurable and relevant to emerging challenges. The BSP in coordination with the Presidency organised Action Plan-focused EUSBSR Monthlies and helped desk consultations for Policy Area Coordinators. Policy Briefings with the European Commission Directorates-General and the respective Policy Areas were also launched, ensuring that Policy Area Actions were closely aligned with the EU's strategic priorities such as the Green Deal, digitalisation, and resilience. Finally, the NC-PA individual dialogues, held during April 2025 with the support of the BSP helped to extensively assess and refine the focus for the updated Strategy Actions.

### Increasing Ukraine's involvement

During its Presidency, Poland worked to further develop the cooperation of the EUSBSR MS with Ukraine in different dimensions of the Strategy operations. Already the kick-off event agenda for the Polish Presidency in Warsaw (10.09.2024) emphasised the importance of the issue as well as the discussion among the Policy Area Coordinators, National Coordinators and invited experts on the repercussions of Russia's war of aggression for the region. Involvement of Ukrainian stakeholders in the mutually beneficial way has been also promoted in the context of the Action Plan update process and planning of the Strategy Actions. Finally, Poland initiated a letter of support, issued by the National Coordinators Group to the Ukrainian counterparts: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry for Communities, Territories and Infrastructure Development of Ukraine. In the letter NCG reaffirmed continued support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its



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SEA REGION

Polish Presidency  
2024-2025

internationally recognized borders and reconfirmed unwavering commitment to providing continued political, financial, economic, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support to Ukraine and its people for as long as it takes and as intensely as needed. Strengthening cooperation between the EUSBSR countries and Ukraine was pointed as one of the crucial components of this effort that should be further developed within the Strategy, also as an useful tool of gaining experience on the road to European integration.

### **Norway**

The raising importance of the EUSBSR has been proved by the growing interest of external stakeholders in enhancing the cooperation within the Strategy. Also Norway declared an official will to engage into the EUSBSR at national level, sending the official letter by Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs Espen Barth Eide to Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland Radosław Sikorski and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia Margus Tsahkna.

### **Governance and Measurability**

Throughout its Presidency, Poland chaired five formal and one informal NCG meeting and facilitated several silence procedures to ensure efficient decision-making. The institutional memory was advanced through further development of the EUSBSR Collaboration Platform, which now serves as the central archive of governance materials. The annual reporting process for all Policy Areas, which took place during November-February 2025, supported the governance and strategic development discussions and thereby strengthening the Strategy's evidence base. Tailored onboarding sessions coordinated and delivered by the BSP for new Policy Area Coordinators and National Coordinators ensured continuity despite personnel turnover.

### **Communication and Visibility**

The Polish Presidency implemented the EUSBSR communication guidelines and strengthened both internal and external messaging across the Strategy. Visibility was increased through monthly newsletters, and through consistent LinkedIn activity. The Presidency represented the Strategy at high-level external events, including BSSSC Engagement Day in Visby (back-to-back with the EUSBSR AF) and Interreg Baltic Sea Region Conference in Tampere.

### **Alignment of funding**

During its Presidency, Poland devoted particular attention to strengthening the alignment of funding for the Strategy. The Presidency worked closely with the BSP, Policy Area Coordinators, and Managing Authorities of EU funding programmes to ensure that the EUSBSR priorities could be better linked with available financial instruments.

In March and April, a dialogue was launched with the representatives of Interreg programmes in the Baltic Sea region. The initial discussions held set a foundation for finding a ground for collaboration between the Policy Area Coordinators and the Programme Secretariats, and eventually for clarifying how Policy Area Actions could be shaped in a way that corresponds to funding opportunities. In addition, the BSP renewed its cooperation with EuroAccess, providing tailored alerts to Policy Area Coordinators on relevant funding calls. This service improved the preparedness of stakeholders to apply for funds and increased their awareness of the timing and requirements of different programmes.



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FOR THE BALTIC  
SEA REGION

Polish Presidency  
2024-2025

Poland also promoted the active role of the Managing Authorities Networks, supporting the development of guidelines on how to strengthen cooperation between these networks, in particular via active participation and coordination in the ESF+ Managing Authorities Network, and the Strategy's governance structures.

Furthermore, discussions on funding facilitated by the BSP during EUSBSR Monthly meetings with the Policy Area Coordinators underlined the need for each Policy Area to consider financing aspects when designing or updating their Actions. These efforts ensured that the ongoing Action Plan update was not only about adjusting content to current challenges, but also about ensuring that Actions were realistically fundable.

## **Annual Forum**

The highlight of the Polish Presidency is the 16th EUSBSR Annual Forum, which will take place in Sopot, Pomorskie region, on 29-30 October 2025.

The theme of the Forum is "Securing the Future: Stronger Together - Building Stability in Times of Uncertainty." This theme reflects the growing geopolitical turbulence, including Russia's continued aggression, and underlines the increasing necessity of resilience, stability, and solidarity across the Baltic Sea region.

The Forum will channel discussions around the core EUSBSR objectives: Save the Sea, Connect the Region, and Increase Prosperity. Sessions will address environmental health, energy security, climate action, innovation, youth engagement, and regional identity. The programme will combine high-level plenaries, thematic workshops, and networking opportunities, bringing together policy makers, experts, business leaders, youth organisations, and civil society.

The Annual Forum is co-organised by the Pomorskie Voivodeship, the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) Secretariat, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, and the Baltic Sea Strategy Point, with support from the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme. On 28 October 2025, the BSSC Day of Cities and Regions will precede the Forum, offering municipalities, youth, and cultural actors a dedicated space for engagement.

## **Reflections and way forward**

The Polish Presidency marked significant progress in consolidating the governance of the Strategy, modernising its Action Plan, and increasing visibility and stakeholder engagement. The Presidency's efforts to improve communication, strengthen institutional memory, and prepare the Strategy for future funding opportunities will provide a strong foundation for its long-term sustainability.

The one-year discussion also highlighted that to create a better response to the dynamically changing geopolitical situation, non-schematic solutions and activities are welcomed, also in the area of cooperation with Ukraine, as well as in the crucial sphere of including youth perspective into the work of every PA on a very practical level. The role of regular consultations with relevant EU institutions has also been recognized.



Key lessons include:

- Governance effectiveness thrives through inclusion, continuity, and clarity of impact.
- More systematic cooperation with funding programmes remains essential for effective implementation.
- Strengthening **institutional memory** and onboarding is vital to sustain continuity amidst high staff turnover.

Poland extends its gratitude to the National Coordinators, Policy Area Coordinators, Steering Groups, European Commission Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy, Interreg BSR, pan-Baltic partners and the Baltic Sea Strategy Point for their constructive collaboration. The Presidency hands over to Estonia with confidence that the Strategy will continue to evolve as a strong and relevant platform for regional cooperation.