



Presidency Report

Estonian Presidency of the National Coordinators Group

01/07/2025 - 30/06/2026

Introduction

Estonia assumed the Presidency of the National Coordinators Group (NCG) of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) on July 1, 2025, and held it until June 30, 2026.

Taking over from Poland, Estonia emphasized the principle of continuity and built on the achievements and successes of previous Presidencies in implementing the Strategy's three overall objectives: "Save the Sea", "Connect the Region" and "Increase Prosperity".

The main priority of the Estonian Presidency was the update the Action Plan, with the objective of effectively finalising this process while keeping in mind the importance of ensuring a smooth start to the implementation phase immediately following its approval by the European Commission.

Given the security environment in the Baltic Sea region, particular emphasis was placed on resilience and sustainability, taking into account that strengthened cooperation across policy areas is a critical factor in supporting these objectives.

Ensuring increased Ukrainian involvement in relevant actions and projects was another key priority. The Presidency also placed strong emphasis on effective governance and the external communication of the Strategy.



Estonian Presidency kick off event in Tallinn, September 2025. Photo: Anja Karppinen

Update of the Action Plan

Estonia continued to advance the update of the Action Plan, which was initiated during the Latvian Presidency and continued by the Polish Presidency. The update was necessitated by several factors:

- The changing geopolitical and security environment in the Baltic Sea region, which requires a stronger focus on resilience across sectors,
- Updated EU strategic priorities (competitiveness, energy transition and resilience, emphasis on strategic and results-oriented cooperation) and preparations for the next EU financing period,
- The need to align the implementation practices of the Policy Areas and introduce clearer impact pathways and indicators.

The update involved regular exchanges between PACs, NCs and the BSP throughout the process. The PACs and Steering Groups played a key role in defining the updated Actions, with strong support from the BSP.

The update process also incorporated contributions from a wide range of stakeholders across different governance levels and sectors, including national and sectoral authorities of the EUSBSR Member States and regional networks such as the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission and the Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation (BSSSC). The strategic priorities of major pan-Baltic organisations, including the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), HELCOM and VASAB, were analysed to ensure alignment with wider regional cooperation frameworks.

The resulting Action Plan provides a clearer and more structured framework for macro-regional cooperation. It clarifies priorities, governance roles and impact, introduces a clearer logic across the Actions and is supported by more consistent indicators. Together, these improvements help explain more clearly the Strategy's role as a coordination framework linking ministries, stakeholders and cooperation initiatives across the region and secure a strengthened and more structured collaboration across the Policy Areas.

The NCG approved the updated Action Plan on 3 March 2026, with a slight amendment added on 5 June 2026. The European Commission will finalize the approval process by the official publication of the Action Plan as a European Commission Staff Working Document in the coming months. Nevertheless, planning for the implementation of the new Actions has already started on the basis of the NCG-approved version.

Norway

Norway submitted an application for full membership in the EUSBSR by letter dated 7 November 2025 from the Foreign Minister H.E. Mr. Espen Barth Eide. The NCG of the EUSBSR decided, by a silence procedure concluded on 28 November 2025, to support Norway's application for full membership.

The Council of the European Union approved Norway's application on 5 May 2026 by adopting the Conclusions on the inclusion of Norway in the EUSBSR. Following this, the European Commission adopted a Communication formalising Norway's inclusion in the EUSBSR on 18 May 2026. As of that date, Norway is the 9th Member State of the Strategy.

Norway's accession demonstrates the political attractiveness of the Strategy and confirms its continued relevance and openness as an effective framework for cooperation in the Baltic Sea region.



Representatives of the Norwegian and Estonian Foreign Ministries at the Annual Forum in Sopot. Photo: Viktoriia Hladii

Norway's membership strengthens the Strategy and enhances its capacity to address shared challenges.

Norway already participates in the work of the NCG and is in the process of appointing representatives to all 14 Steering Groups, ensuring that the Strategy and its activities reflect the perspectives and needs of all Member States.

Ukraine

Supporting Ukraine's recovery and EU accession process has been a priority of the Strategy since December 2022, when closer cooperation with Ukrainian stakeholders began. The updated Action Plan further strengthens cooperation between the Baltic Sea region countries and Ukraine through projects and policy dialogue.

Russia's war against Ukraine has shifted the priorities of the Baltic Sea region countries, strengthening the focus on resilience, civil protection, health preparedness, energy security and North-South transport corridors connecting Ukraine with the Baltic Sea region. Ukrainian experience is increasingly seen as valuable for the whole region, especially in crisis management, infrastructure protection, cooperation between volunteers and authorities and societal resilience.

The Strategy's cooperation with Ukraine has become broader and more practical, covering, among other areas, the environment, civil protection, health, education, transport, energy and maritime safety. Ukraine's links to the Baltic Sea catchment, especially via the Lviv region and the Vistula River, make environmental cooperation highly relevant, particularly on wastewater treatment, nutrients, hazardous substances and PFAS. Policy Areas Nutri, Hazards, Ship, Bioeconomy, Secure, Education, Health, Transport, Energy and Maritime Safety have engaged with Ukrainian partners in recent years and included them in their successful projects.



Olha Tomkiv (Cities4Cities initiative), one of the Ukrainian stakeholders sharing experiences and cooperation needs at the Annual Forum 2026 in Tallinn. Photo: Andras Kralla

Communication

The Estonian Presidency continued implementing the EUSBSR communication guidelines to strengthen visibility and stakeholder engagement. Various communication channels were used, including the website, social media, newsletters and press releases. Monthly meetings with internal stakeholders proved extremely useful.

A new Strategy logo was introduced to reflect the increased number of Member States.

Engagement and exchange of information with funding programmes, including Interreg BSR and Managing Authority networks was strategically important for contributing to alignment of funding in the next EU MFF.



In May 2026, the Strategy logo was updated to reflect the number of member States.

Governance

Estonia chaired 11 NCG meetings during its Presidency and facilitated a number of written and silence procedures to ensure efficient decision-making. The EUSBSR Collaboration Platform, developed and supported by the BSP, continued to serve as a valuable tool for information-sharing and institutional memory. Effective implementation of the Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines further aligned and strengthened Policy Area reporting, supporting the Strategy's governance and development. Continued onboarding sessions ensured continuity despite personnel changes in NCG, PAC and steering group organisations. The BSP provided invaluable support to the Presidency, the NC-s, the PAC-s, steering group members and other stakeholders if needed. Weekly Presidency-BSP meetings ensured effective planning and implementation.

Annual Forum

Estonia hosted the EUSBSR Annual Forum 2026: Resilience Edition in Tallinn on 12-13 May, preceded by the BSSSC Day of Cities and Regions on 11 May. The Forum focused on strengthening resilience in the Baltic Sea region by enhancing the capacity not only to withstand shocks but also to adapt, collaborate and thrive in an era where crises are becoming the new normal. It addressed four interlinked challenges: security and geopolitical uncertainty, demographic shifts and regional competitiveness, climate change and the Baltic Sea environment, governance, implementation gaps and financing.

The program included four plenary sessions and 19 breakout sessions, with 686 participants over three days. A networking village enabled Policy Areas and other stakeholders to engage actively with partners throughout the Forum.



Networking Village at the Annual Forum 2026 in Tallinn. Photo: Andras Kralla

Concluding remarks

Macro-regional strategies offer a valuable framework for aligning regional priorities with EU funding programs. However, effective alignment requires strategic dialogue with programs and proactive advocacy, an approach the EUSBSR has already pursued, with the strong support of the BSP.

Successful implementation of the Strategy depends on the committed participation of steering groups, which serve as an important link to national administrations. Their active engagement and contribution are instrumental to increasing the Strategy's impact.

The Estonian Presidency extends its sincere appreciation to colleagues from the BSP, NCG, DG REGIO, Interreg BSR, the PACs and steering groups for their support and cooperation and wishes our Danish colleagues a very successful Presidency.