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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**concerning the inclusion of Norway in the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea
region**

INCLUSION OF NORWAY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION STRATEGY FOR THE BALTIC SEA REGION

1. Introduction

On 14 December 2007, the European Council in its Presidency conclusions invited the Commission to present a European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea region. Following this request, the Commission consulted stakeholders extensively. On 10 June 2009, it adopted the Communication on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region¹ (hereinafter ‘the Strategy’), the EU’s first macro-regional strategy. The European Council endorsed the Strategy in its conclusions of 29-30 October 2009², calling upon ‘all relevant actors to act speedily and ensure full implementation of the Strategy’.

The Commission subsequently published a progress report in June 2011. In its conclusions of 15 November 2011, the General Affairs Council invited the Commission to review the Strategy by early 2012. On 23 March 2012, the Commission adopted a communication³ responding to this request by proposing (i) improvements to the strategic focus and the alignment of policies and funding, (ii) to clarify the responsibilities of the different actors involved and (iii) to improve communication.

The Strategy is implemented by eight Member States (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden) and is structured around three overarching objectives: *Save the Sea*, *Connect the Region* and *Increase Prosperity*. The objectives address various common, interconnected challenges in the region, such as climate change adaptation, maritime safety, energy, transport, connectivity, competitiveness and civil protection.

To achieve the objectives of the Strategy, the governments of the participating countries have committed to aligning their national and regional priorities and to mobilising relevant EU and national funding to implement the action plan. Since 2013, the action plan of the Strategy has been updated four times to reflect regional and EU priorities as well as emerging needs. The current action plan, adopted in February 2021⁴, further aligned the Strategy with the EU’s objectives and streamlined its structure by reducing the number of actions, grouping them into 14 policy areas, and creating a dedicated support unit.

The Strategy focuses on the Member States that border the Baltic Sea but welcomes cooperation with neighbouring non-EU countries, including Norway. On 7 November 2025, Norway submitted a formal request to the Estonian Presidency of the Strategy to join the Strategy as a full member. On 28 November 2025, the eight Member States participating in the Strategy and represented in the National Coordinators Group endorsed this request. The Presidency of the Strategy transmitted the National Coordinators Group’s decision to include Norway in the Strategy to the Commission on 5 December 2025. It subsequently submitted the

¹ COM(2009) 248 final of 10 June 2009.

² Conclusions of the European Council of 29 and 30 October 2009 (EUCO 15265/1/09 REV 1).

³ COM(2012) 128 final of 23 March 2012.

⁴ SWD(2021) 24 final of 15 February 2021.

Decision to the Council on 24 March 2026, inviting the Council to take the necessary step to include Norway in the Strategy as the ninth participating country.

In its conclusions of 5 May 2026, the Council welcomed and accepted the request of the countries participating in the Strategy. It invited the European Commission to take the necessary steps to include Norway in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, to amend the Strategy accordingly, and to submit it to the Council.

2. Inclusion of Norway in the Strategy

1. Political background

Norway is a long-standing partner in the Baltic Sea region. Over the years, it has contributed to the work of the policy areas and to several projects run under the framework of the Strategy. Norway participates as an observer in the National Coordinators Group, the Strategy's highest decision-making body, and takes part in the Interreg Baltic Sea region programme, the principal source of funding. The programme and the Strategy are closely connected because they operate in the same geographical area and mutually reinforce each other. The Strategy sets out the strategic framework and objectives, while the Interreg programme provides funding for projects that implement the objectives and support the Strategy's governance.

Following the start of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the Strategy suspended cooperation with Russia and Belarus, which has further reshaped the political and geopolitical landscape of the region. While this change has somewhat constrained the Strategy's scope to tackle shared regional challenges such as pollution, climate change mitigation, biodiversity loss and maritime risk management, stakeholders have nevertheless intensified their cooperation, including in practical, day-to-day contacts across different levels and policy areas.

In this context, and in light of the significant geopolitical, environmental and economic developments in the Baltic Sea region, together with Norway's long-standing engagement in the Strategy and its increasing interest in deeper cooperation within the macro-region, it is appropriate to formalise Norway's participation on an equal footing with the eight Member States that already implement the Strategy.

2. Norway's participation in the Strategy

This addendum to the original Communication on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region of 10 June 2009 sets out Norway's roles and responsibilities in the multi-level governance of the Strategy and its relationship with other participating countries.

With its inclusion in the Strategy, Norway will have the right to participate in all governance structures of the Strategy, including the Annual Forum, the National Coordinators Group, the Steering Groups of the policy areas and any other governance bodies. It will also take on the role of a policy area coordinator. Norway will engage with stakeholders at different levels (regional and local authorities, civil society, business and academia), reflecting the multi-level governance principles of the Strategy.

3. Conclusions

The formal inclusion of Norway in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region will further strengthen the Strategy's regional dimension and the link between the Strategy and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme. It will also increase the pool of expertise and resources, deepen inter-state cooperation in the region and ensure that common challenges are addressed more effectively. Participation on an equal footing with the other participating countries will allow Norway to deepen its cooperation in a macro-regional context and support the achievement of the Strategy's objectives for the benefit of the entire region.