



**EUSBSR Policy Area Innovation
Steering Group Meeting**

Venue: Ministry of Education and Science, Wspólna street 1/3, 00-529 Warsaw, Poland

Time: Tuesday 16 April 2024, from 09:30 to 12:30 CET (10:30 to 13:30 EET)

Participants:

EUSBSR PA Innovation Coordinators (PACs):

Esa Kokkonen, The Baltic Institute of Finland, Finland
Jenny Uusikartano, The Baltic Institute of Finland, Finland
Kristi Aruküla, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, Estonia
Zuzanna Kozłowska, Ministry of Education and Science, Poland
Karolina Pawłoś, Ministry of Education and Science, Poland

EUSBSR PA Innovation Steering Group (SG) Members:

Kaarel Lehtsalu, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications of Estonia (online)
Lucille Ehrhart, CPMR Baltic Sea Commission
Felikss Bikaunieks, Ministry of Economics of the Republic of Latvia
Gytis Puišė, Ministry of Economy and Innovation of the Republic of Lithuania
Nina Perret-Pogorzelec, Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, Republic of Poland
Jessica Mattisson, Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (online)
Petri Koistinen, European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy

Other participants:

Nadija Afanasieva, Director, Ukrainian Institute for International Politics (UIIP)
Elena Kolosova, Senior Advisor for External Cooperation, Interreg Baltic Sea Region - Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat
Marta Ślężak-Warszycka, Project Unit Team Leader, Interreg Baltic Sea Region - Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat
Beata Hulinka, Rzeszow Regional Development Agency, Poland
Mr. Marcin Grądzki, Deputy Director of the Office for Clean Air and Climate Policy, The City of Warsaw, Poland

Meeting minutes:

1. Opening, introduction of participants

The meeting was opened by Ms. Kozłowska at 9:35.

2. Welcome speech

Welcome speech was delivered by Mr. Maciej Gdula, Undersecretary of State at the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education. Mr. Gdula emphasised the importance of this EUSBSR PA Inno event in



Warsaw (SG meeting and event on Ukraine) amidst the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. He highlighted the important role of innovation cooperation initiatives for the promotion of prosperity and peaceful development in Europe.

Item 1: Approval of the meeting agenda

The meeting agenda that was unanimously approved.

Item 2: Update on Policy Area Innovation activities

- Mr. Esa Kokkonen provided an update on the activities of PA Inno, including summaries of submitted progress reports to the EUSNSR National Coordinators Group, Interreg BSR and DG Regio. The main focus the second half of 2024 will be on the EUSBSR action plan revision. In Spring 2024, PA Inno has actively supported the preparation of a large number of BSR cooperation projects on innovation in connection with the 3rd call of the Interreg BSR programme. He expressed gratitude for the positive collaboration with the Interreg BSR programme in implementing the strategy. In addition to the project preparation support, PA Inno has actively supported ongoing projects in their implementation phase. In addition to the transnational Interreg BSR programme, there is also a high interest towards cross-border Interreg programmes, Interreg South Baltic and Interreg Central Baltic, as instruments for BSR innovation cooperation. In those programmes, aligned with and supporting EUSBSR, there are already 10 projects running under the PA Inno umbrella and with its support, and the new ones have been prepared this Spring with the PA Inno support. Through its three workshops prepared this Spring, PA Inno will be actively involved in EUSBSR Annual Forum 2024

Questions & Comments:

- Mr. Koistinen: Events such as the Macro-Regional and Sea Basin Strategy Days in Brussels in June and EUSBSR Annual Forum 2024 in Visby in October are good opportunities to connect with the Commission and relevant DGs in innovation topics. For the Commission, one of the topics with major relevance and EUSBSR/PA Inno cooperation potential is artificial intelligence.

Item 3: Policy Area Innovation focus topic presentation: Innovative climate actions in BSR cities – the case of Warsaw

Mr. Gradzki gave an update on the implementation of the city level climate policy in Warsaw. Warsaw is one of the EU's NetZero cities network participants. The aim of the Green City and Climate Action Plan, a roadmap for Warsaw, is to reduce 40% of greenhouse gas emission by 2030.

Questions & Comments:

- As to which extent Warsaw city utilises Interreg or other EU programmes as funding instruments for climate related actions, and does the City of Warsaw cooperate with other BSR cities in climate issues, Mr. Gradzki replied that, in Warsaw, European/BSR cooperation mainly concerns sharing of good practices, developing practical solutions and supporting policy implementation. The City is open for new collaboration opportunities in the Baltic Sea region and in the framework of EUSBSR.



Item 4: Project case presentation (15 min)

Beata Hulinka from Rzeszow Regional Development Agency presented their PA Inno-linked/supported Interreg BSR programme project “BSI_4WOMEN - The Baltic Sea Initiative for the Development of Business Activity of Refugee Women”. The project supports refugee women from Ukraine to start their own business to increase their economic independence. Partners are from Norway, Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Sweden.

Comments & Questions:

- On the question if the project cooperates with Ukrainian institutions, Ms. Hulinka informed that the main aim and focus of the project is to help Ukrainian refugees in BSR countries, and Ukrainian institutions are not directly involved in the implementation.
- Mr. Kokkonen reminded that, in connection with its agreed role and tasks related to supporting the preparation and implementation of PA Inno-linked Interreg BSR projects, PA Inno is committed to contribute especially to transfer activities of the project (also cross-macro-regionally), as well as to dissemination and strengthening the policy impact and learning also through PA Inno steering group.
- Ms. Afanasieva proposed that she could share the results of the project in relevant networks in Ukraine.

Item 5: Revision of the EUSBSR Action Plan – overview of the revision process (2024-2025), discussion on revision needs from the Policy Area Innovation perspective

- Adjustment to agenda: Due to the time management issues it was decided to change the order of the item 5 and 6, so that Item 6 will be presented after the coffee break and item 5 after that.

Item 6: Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme update and discussion on Interreg post-2027

Ms. Kosolova from the Interreg Baltic Sea Region - Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat gave an update of the programme status:

- Total of ERDF 250,9 million for this programme period.
- The programme support is mainly focusing on transition activities towards green and resilient societies and economies.
- The programme is divided into 4 priority areas, where innovation is an overarching topic.
- In the first two calls, already 86 cooperation projects financed, with altogether 900 partners involved, and in total 164 meuros of ERDF financing allocated.
- From the approved projects, as many as 20 projects directly contribute and are supported by PA Inno, most of them with a strong cross-sectoral/policy area approach.

Questions for participants:

- In which areas/sectors of innovation, should we focus on in the next programme period: social innovations, business sector, public sector, research and development, digital/green innovations?
- Stakeholder consultation: Looking towards EU 2021-2027, what are the stakeholders’ needs and expectations related to Interreg BSR and the Cohesion policy in general?



Comments from the participants:

- What would be the position and role of Interreg BSR in the post 2027 EU Cohesion policy is a key question. A strong alignment and coordination (also in related communication) is important, ref. the overall EU Cohesion policy 2027+ preparation process.
- Related to future priorities, relevance and BSR cooperation potential in the development of data-driven, digital innovations, economy and governance remain very high.
- With its strong focus on resilience and solid structure and priority areas (including strong alignment and cooperation with EUSBSR), the current programme has been very successful in responding to topical needs, challenges and opportunities in the region. The programme is highly popular and well-known among BSR innovation stakeholders. As the awareness and experience of the programme is strong among BSR stakeholders, and the promotion of the programme sufficient, now, important to focus on exchange, dissemination and transfer of pilot experiences and results, synergies and cooperation between the projects, and on scaling up and securing the policy impact of the project results.
- BSR is already a strong hub of innovations, but there is still unutilised cooperation potential and assets in the region, and a lot of experience, knowledge and good practices to be shared and capitalised in the MRS cooperation context. Development of skills and competences on transnational cooperation, also related to finding of and matchmaking with potential partners, is still relevant topic/task (also for EUSBSR).
- Tackling of common BSR challenges through joint actions and innovative solutions remains a key focus and objective of Interreg BSR and PA Inno.
- Social and public services are in key role, something that Europe has vast experience. Social and public systems are different in BSR, but the challenges are very similar. How to utilise the potential issues in the programme? Why is it not working as efficiently as it could?
- The 2027+ programme preparation includes open public consultation.
- Smart specialisation strategies and next steps in developing closer transnational S3 implementation remain as an important policy framework, theme and objective for BSR innovation cooperation.
- The SG also raised the improvement of infrastructure and transport connections in the region as important topics and a basis for the BSR competitiveness.
- Themes such as resilience, security and preparedness (food, etc.), investments on skills, demographic challenges and their impact on BSR labour market were also discussed (labor market imbalances – unemployment vs. shortage of labor, availability of skills and talent, talent attraction). What is next in the programme funding after the 3rd call?

Ms Ślęzak-Warszycka from the Interreg Baltic Sea Region - Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat requested comments from the SG about the programme's sectoral focus: Is the programme too sectoral now?

Answers from participants:

- In principle, sectoral division is good, it provides a framework for key joint BSR priorities and strategic/effective allocation of funding for them. However, increased flexibility could be used. Not good to narrow the sectoral division down as it could limit too much.
- Comment to PA Inno to work in line with EU innovation policies and not to build a separate agenda. Take a closer look where the innovation solutions are needed (health care, environment, businesses, etc.). This would help the project developers to build up on BSR challenges and aims.
- Important to integrate and align all BSR innovation cooperation activities closely with the overall EU innovation agenda and policies, not to implement or create any separate 'BSR innovation agenda'.



- Could there be a need for a SWOT analysis to see where BSR is standing now in different innovation policy areas/sectors, to provide important baseline/state of play analysis for the new programme preparation?

Ms Ślęzak-Warszycka informed that there is an open online survey on the future programme priorities, and encouraged the SG members to share the survey in their networks.

Adjustment to agenda: Due to the time management issues it was decided to drop the Item 6 and continue the discussions in the next steering group meeting.

Item 7: Next Steering Group meeting (5 min)

Next meeting will focus on the updating of the EUSBSR action plan. Proposal for the next meeting: 1,5 days live meeting in Brussels in Autumn. 1st half-a-day for the Steering Group meeting, and 2nd day for a workshop on the updating the action plan, including presentations/contributions from external experts, European Commission and MEPs.

Decided: proposal on the dates will be delivered to SG members after the meeting.