

## **Latvian Presidency of the National Coordinators Group**

**1 July 2023 – 30 June 2024**

### **Presidency Report**

#### **Introduction**

Latvia assumed the Presidency of the National Coordinators Group (NCG) of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) on July 1, 2023, and led until June 30, 2024. Taking over from Sweden, Latvia built on prior efforts by focusing on the implementation of the Action Plan for the EUSBR (Action Plan), enhancing both internal and external communication, and supporting Ukraine. This was implemented by fostering cross-sectoral, transnational, and multi-level cooperation among various authorities and organizations throughout the Baltic Sea Region. During its Presidency, Latvia prioritized the practical implementation of the Action Plan and initiated the process of updating the Action Plan. Latvia hosted the Annual Forum, a successful event characterised by cooperation, development and sustainability.

#### **Action Plan update**

Inspired by interconnection of the NCG and communication with other stakeholders the implementation process of the Action Plan eventually developed into a slightly different project aimed at revising the Policy Areas to improve the efficiency of the Strategy – the Action Plan update. To do that, a new framework for Policy Area Actions is being created considering the contributions and opinions of the National Coordinators (NC) and Policy Areas Coordinators (PAC).

The update is planned to be approved and published by January 2026. There are several steps until then, all processes divided into time periods as follows:

|                                  |                                                             |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Step 0: Start-up, 4 months       | • 1-4/2024 BSP, NCG and PACs prepare a feasible timeline    |
| Step 1: Preparations, 4 months   | • 5-8/2024 BSP prepares the template for PA Actions         |
| Step 2: First Drafting, 4 months | • 9-12/2024 PAs prepare their first drafts                  |
| Step 3: Pre-approval, 1 month    | • 1/2025 NCG decides on PAs which prepare final Actions     |
| Step 4: Final Drafting, 4 months | • 2-5/2025 PAs prepare their final Actions                  |
| Step 5: Final Approval, 2 months | • 6-7/2025 AP is approved within the NCG                    |
| Step 6: EC Process, 5 months     | • 8-12/2025 AP goes to the EC internal consultation process |
| Step 7: Publication              | • 1/2026 AP is approved and published                       |

A significant amount of preparatory steps had been taken work was done during the Presidency's closing event in Riga on May 30, where NCs, PACs and the Baltic Strategy Point (BSP) gathered to identify key improvements necessary to elaborate concrete and more realistic Action Plan.



## **EUSBSR Communication guidelines**

During the Presidency, the efforts initiated by Sweden to develop communication guidelines were finalized. The guideline's aim is to effectively convey the Strategy's mission and vision to relevant stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Region. It is structured into four external communication objectives and one internal objective, ensuring that different target groups are appropriately addressed.

The external objectives focus on raising awareness of the Strategy, securing political support, obtaining funding for cross-border cooperation, and engaging external stakeholders. The internal objective emphasizes building a strong network among key stakeholders for knowledge exchange.

Primary target audiences were identified, and communication channels such as social media, newsletters, webinars, workshops, official websites, public events, and press releases were suggested, highlighting the importance of tailored messaging and effective engagement. Understanding these audiences is essential for monitoring and improving future communication efforts to enhance support for regional cooperation. Conclusions of these efforts had been reflected into the guidelines.

## **Embedding the framework of Monitoring & Evaluation**

During the Latvian Presidency, significant progress was made in developing a comprehensive and universal Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework to support all governance levels of the Strategy. The M&E Framework aims to provide essential tools and information for decision-making while building institutional memory to enhance performance and increase the Strategy's impact. To facilitate this, a new procedure was adopted, and the 2023 reporting questionnaire was updated based on the change requests agreed upon by the NCG.

Following the approval of the revised M&E Framework, annual reporting for Policy Areas (PAs) was conducted to collect and evaluate the work and progress of the 14 PAs. By the end of April, nearly all PAs had become fully active in their implementation efforts and were aligning with the established objectives. Notably, pan-Baltic organizations played a crucial role in fostering connections and engaging in activities. However, some Policy Areas expressed challenges in convincing stakeholders to view the EUSBSR as a genuine opportunity for change, particularly due to the absence of a dedicated financing mechanism.

## **Annual Forum 2023**

Latvia was proud to be a second-time organizer of the Annual EUSBSR Forum – so significant for the region. The first time Latvia hosted the Forum during the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2015. The Annual EUSBSR Forum *Safe and Sustainable Baltic Sea Region for Future* was held on 4-5 October, 2023 in Riga. The Forum was organised by Riga City Council in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Union of the Baltic Cities, Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea. It was a platform for gathering a broad range of actors from different policy levels and sectors – national and regional stakeholders, sectorial ministries, managing authorities, academia, research, and non-governmental organisations. Among the speakers at the Forum were Latvian Foreign Minister *Krišjānis Kariņš*, Minister of Climate and Energy *Kaspars Melnis*, Deputy Director General of the



European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy *Normunds Popenis*, State Secretary and Plenipotentiary of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg to the Federation, to the European Union, and for Foreign Affairs *Almut Möller*, Ukraine's Ambassador to Latvia *Anatolii Kutsevol*, and the State Secretary of the Ministry of Climate and Energy *Līga Kurevska*.

The main topics addressed included sustainability, climate change, digitalisation, mobility and connectivity, youth engagement, and health and well-being. The forum successfully achieved its goals: facilitating the exchange of best practices, enhancing integration within the Baltic Sea Region and beyond, fostering synergies across various priority areas, and strengthening connections between the Strategy and the general public. The 14th EUSBSR Annual Forum was considered a success, featuring productive and forward-looking discussions on issues vital to the prosperity, empowerment, security, and sustainability of the region. Key focus areas included prosperity, green energy and climate action, and youth engagement.

#### **Annual Forum 2023 in numbers:**

575 participants

6 Parallel Sessions:

- Oceans, Seas and Waters
- Harnessing the Power of Wind Energy in the Baltic Sea Region
- Youth and Empowerment 2.0 in the 21st Century – Trends and Policy Solutions
- Driving Innovation and the Green Transition: Exploring Hydrogen and Other Clean Technologies in the Baltic Sea Region
- Climate Neutral and Smart Cities
- Interreg Funding for the Macro Region

9 Workshops, such as:

- Offshore Energy and Safety of Maritime Traffic – Adoption of Interests
- All Hands-on Deck: Safe and Secure Baltic Sea Region Through “Whole of Society” approach
- Strengthening and Developing Cooperation with Ukraine to Empower Sustainable Rebuilding
- The Economy of Wellbeing of People. A Multipolicy Area Flagship for a Prosperous and Sustainable Region
- Co-creating the Vision and Foundations of a BSR Innovation Valley
- Submerged Munitions in the Baltic Sea – Environmental, Security and Other Challenges
- Youth and Culture Driving Resilient Communities in the BSR

#### **Macroregional & Sea-basin Days in Brussels**

During the Macroregional & Sea-basin Days in Brussels, a milestone event that brought together representatives from various Macro-regional and Sea-Basin strategies between June 12-15, 2024, the Latvian Presidency represented the EUSBSR in a panel discussion titled “Synergies Among Strategies” and the high-level meetings. Latvian NC Andra Kuzmina emphasized the importance of taking joint actions to tackle cross-border challenges such as the



climate crisis and sea pollution, as well as the necessity to adapt in the face of geopolitical uncertainties.

During the Presidency terms interconnection with other macro regional strategies continued. On June 15, the Strategy was represented at the Trio Presidencies meeting, hosted by the Austrian Presidency of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. The discussion highlighted the main priorities and strategic processes outlined in the Action Plan, emphasizing the connection between EU policies and the need for the Action Plan to align more effectively with embedding processes. Furthermore, the EUSBSR along with other strategies should be viewed as a valuable opportunity to translate both common EU goals and the individual objectives of member states into shared regional objectives, serving as a platform for turning these aspirations into reality.

### **Governance of the EUSBSR**

The support provided by the BSP has been invaluable during the Presidency. The BSP has not only functioned as a support structure but also as a custodian of institutional memory. Weekly meetings of the Presidency with the BSP, alongside monthly meetings with the NCG, PACs, and Steering Group (SG) members, laid a solid foundation for ensuring practical progress.

Over the course of the year, the evaluation of the BSP highlighted significant advancements and reaffirmed the necessity and importance of such a structure.

### **Concluding remarks**

The Latvian Presidency team extends deep appreciation for the support, collaboration, and progress achieved by all stakeholders involved, particularly our colleagues from the NCG, the BSP, the European Commission, Interreg BSR, and other organizations and institutions.

Despite the highly intense geopolitical landscape, the parties involved have successfully collaborated and made noteworthy progress, reflecting the value and impact of the Strategy.

Looking back, the Latvian team feels a sense of gratitude and satisfaction and wishes our Polish colleagues a productive year ahead, filled with impactful cooperation, communication, and progress towards our shared goals for growth in the region.