

EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region National Coordinators Group

1st Meeting under the Latvian Presidency, 2023-2024

Date: 14/09/2023

Time: 11:00-13:30 EEST

Location: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, Kr.Valdemara street 3, Riga, Latvia

MINUTES

1. Opening of the meeting

The meeting was opened by the Presidency at 11:05.

2. Approval of the agenda

The agenda was approved without amendments.

3. EUSBSR implementation

For discussion: status of the Action Plan implementation from the NC perspective, and strategic planning ahead.

NCG discussed the current version of the Action Plan and its implementation, as well as the next steps for the Strategy in the view of the mid-term evaluation and beginning of the post 2027 programming of the EU long-term budget.

Shortly upcoming finalisation of the communication and monitoring and evaluation frameworks for the Strategy allows to concentrate on the strategic planning ahead, such as possible revision of the EUSBSR Action Plan. Previous Strategy Action Plan revision was late in terms of the embedding into the EU financial programmes. For the post-2027 EU financial programming cycle, which already begins now, it means that the new Action Plan should be finalised towards the end of 2025, latest in February 2026. It is essential to obtain, analyse and base the revision on the PA results and evaluations from 2022, 2023 and 2024. Previous Action Plan revision was heavily focused on the governance, as there was not a functioning governance structure in place. The new Action Plan revision shall be based on added value and achievements.

The Presidency informed that it would focus on the launch of the Action Plan revision process in the second half of the Latvian Presidency mandate. NCG highlighted the need for BSP involvement since the start and throughout the revision process, and, as the next step,

requested from the BSP to begin drawing an orientation paper and a tentative timeline concerning the possible Action Plan revision.

4. EUSBSR funding

For discussion: NCs navigating the landscape of the EU funding.

NCG discussed status of the EUSBSR funding nationally in the Member States and shared the existing practices and knowledge regarding current collaboration with the funding bodies and Managing Authorities.

Several Member States shared their experience of working with the funding bodies and the Managing Authorities within their national administration. Having the connection established with the Managing Authorities of the EU funds is complex, as it requires participation in the working groups across different Ministries. However, certain funding programmes, such as Interreg Baltic Sea Region, are already closely connected to the Strategy by including PACs in its funding calls assessment and advise to the applicants. In general, every Interreg programme that is covering the territory of the Strategy has to report on the contribution to the implementation of the Strategy.

It would be very useful to see data on how much funding was pooled for the implementation of the EUSBSR overall in the region, but BSP alone cannot perform such monitoring and would need the support from the Member States for that.

BSP, acting as a knowledge centre of the Strategy, is able to redirect PAs to the right place in terms of obtaining the funding. In the future, the PA Actions are to be focused and clear - forming the actions by the lowest possible denominator will not be acceptable.

NCG will continue the discussion at the next meeting of the group.

5. BSP Work Plan 2023-2024

For discussion: draft timeline of activities.

BSP presented the overview of the planned activities and processes envisioned for the upcoming year, including, among others:

- Onboarding sessions of PACs and SG Presidencies
- Climate cooperation
- Continued support to the ongoing and new initiatives towards Ukraine
- Sustainable and resource-sensible cooperation with MA Networks
- Continued support to the Annual Forum organisers and preparation of the Annual Forum guidebook
- Ongoing work on Communication guidelines to be completed in time to allow the NCG to approve the guidelines before the end of 2023
- Finalisation of the first version of the Monitoring & Evaluation Framework in time to allow the NCG to approve this framework before the end of 2023
- Intranet type storage platform for maintaining the institutional memory relevant files for the internal stakeholders

NCG acknowledged the list of activities and highlighted the importance of finalising the communications guidelines and testing and piloting the Monitoring and Evaluation system. The latter needed to be stabilised as soon as possible in order to provide predictable deadlines, especially in the view of the importance of collecting the results and achievements as the basis for the next revision of the Action Plan; coordination support in the view of the upcoming bi-annual MRS reporting to the European Commission (expected in the first part of 2024); developing a concept for possible modes of interaction and cooperation with the Networks of Managing Authorities.

BSP will deliver the elaborated BSP Work Programme 2023-2024 to the NCG for approval in October 2023.

6. Cooperation in the framework of the EUSBSR with Norway and Iceland

For discussion: views on the prospects of cooperation with Norway and Iceland in the EUSBSR.

NCG discussed status quo and prospects of cooperation with Norway and Iceland within the EUSBSR. The discussion has focused mainly on the cooperation with Norway, as Iceland has not participated in the EUSBSR on the NCG level before. Norway's participation in the EUSBSR is based on the European Commission's Communication concerning the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (2009) as well as the EUSBSR Action Plan. Over the years, Norway has participated in the EUSBSR NCG meetings on and off, last time being during the Finnish Presidency of the EUSBSR 2019-2020.

NCG welcomed the idea of continuing collaboration, especially on the practical level, letting Norwegian partners to contribute where they wish to and have the capacity. NCG concluded that there are no objections to inviting Norway to the NCG for collaboration. The Presidency is to initiate the process with the counterparts at the Norwegian MFA in due time.

7. MRS Trio Presidencies

For discussion: MRS Trio Presidencies meeting on 19/09/2023 in the framework of the Mediterranean Coast and Macro-regional Strategies Week 2023 in Izola and the message that the EUSBSR wishes to convey.

NCG discussed the updated guidelines for cooperation proposal put forward by the Croatian Presidency of EUSAIR and reiterated the need for constructive cooperation without excessive institutionalisation of it. The updated version of the guidelines is improved and more concise, however, certain formulations in the guidelines are still unclear and subject to interpretation, thus would need clarification. It was suggested that meetings back-to-back with the Macro-Regional Strategies Week in Brussels would be the most appropriate format for such a cooperation.

8. Status update on PAs

For information: updates of the Policy Areas activities.

Due to time constraints, BSP provided the updates to the NCG in writing via email. BSP has proposed to have BSP and PA updates as a standing point of the NCG meeting agendas in the future.

AOB and date for next meeting

The next meeting will take place online on 29th of November in the first part of the day.

AOB:

- NCG will hold an informal lunch meeting during the Annual Forum in Riga.
- Lithuania's NC informed about Lithuanian NGO initiative - a hiking expedition around the Baltic Sea Region countries in 2024. The initiative aims to raise awareness of the Baltic Sea pollution, thus contributing to the Save the Sea and Connect the region EUSBSR objectives.

PARTICIPANTS

Denmark	Anders Henriksson (NC)	Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Estonia	Tõnis Nirk (NC)	Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Finland	Helena Tuuri (NC)	Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Germany	Maurice Gajan (NC)	Federal Foreign Office
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