

## EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region National Coordinators Group

### 2nd Meeting under the Latvian Presidency, 2023-2024

**Date:** 29/11/2023  
**Time:** 09:30-13:30 EET  
**Location:** Microsoft Teams

#### MINUTES

##### 1. Opening of the meeting and approval of the agenda

The meeting was opened by the Presidency at 9:33.  
The agenda was approved without amendments.

##### 2. Monitoring and evaluation framework

BSP presented the M&E Framework document. The purpose of the document is to explain the rationale and the methodology of the monitoring and evaluation in the EUSBSR. NCG noted the progress with the development of the framework and the effort to consolidate the reporting processes in the Strategy. NCG recommended for the document to be further simplified and made more accessible. In the meantime, BSP shall proceed with the reporting for the year 2023 according to the previous year's questionnaire template, pending minor adjustments that will be agreed with the NCs. There must be no delay in the collection of the reporting data for 2023 from the PAs, and the reporting data can then be re-used by the PACs when reporting to the European Commission later in the spring. BSP shall distribute the questionnaire at the latest in January 2024.

##### 3. PAC reporting to SG and NCG for the year 2022

NCG discussed the PAC reporting results for the year 2022 and the possible forms of delivering a response to the PACs. NCG agreed that the reporting is to be discussed more in depth between NCG and PACs at the PAC-NC live meeting in February 2024.

NCG also discussed the possibility of sharing the reports data in the future between the PACs for information. The Presidency proposed to discuss this matter in full at the next NCG meeting and to consult on the matter with PACs during the next live PAC-NCG meeting. NCG highlighted that the main priority of the PAC reporting to the SG and NCG remains providing a safe space for PACs to openly and frankly report on the state of implementation of the Policy Area activities, and on the implementation-related challenges.

#### **4. Guidelines for the EUSBSR Communication**

BSP presented the changes to the EUSBSR guidelines for communication since the adoption of the draft guidelines in June 2023. The document has been amended on the basis of extensive consultation and commenting rounds with the NCG and PACs during the autumn.

The NCG approved the guidelines with the aim to put them to test by the EUSBSR stakeholders. It agreed that if necessary further changes could be made later in the light of experience.

#### **5. Annual Forum 2024 in Sweden**

Sweden presented the next Annual Forum organisation plans. The next Annual Forum will take place in Visby, Gotland, on 30-31 October 2024, with a probable meeting day already on 29 October with side events. The Forum organisation consortium will include The Prime Minister's Office, Gotland County Administrative Board and the Nordic Council of Ministers Secretariat. The Forum will be a continuation of the Swedish Presidency priorities 2022-2023. Further details on the main theme and the Programme will be disclosed at a later stage.

The NCG approved the proposed content of the Letter of Support. Therefore, the Presidency will submit the Letter of Support on behalf of the NCG to the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Secretariat for the Annual Forum 2024 organisation support.

#### **6. BSP Work Programme 2023-2024**

BSP presented the BSP Work Programme for the period 2023-2024. NCG highlighted the need for enhanced targeted communication and success stories in the next period. NCG agreed to hold a separate discussion on the format of providing guidance on the work to the BSP during an NC- only meeting. The next NC-only meeting will be held online in January 2024. Another such meeting may possibly be organised in the margins of the PAC-NC live meeting in February.

It was decided that the BSP Work Programme 2023-2024 will be adopted by silence procedure after receiving proposals from LT and final remarks by the NCG.

#### **7. Interreg BSR PAC support projects**

The Interreg BSR Secretariat presented the current status of and the timelines for its technical support to the EUSBSR governance structures. This consists of Interreg BSR Programme support to the PACs, to the BSP and to the Annual Forums. A total of 12,6 million euro was allocated for this technical support for the 2021-2027 period, out of which 5,2 million euro have already been committed. As an update of the EUSBSR Action Plan is foreseen, the Interreg BSR Secretariat will require feedback from the NCG in case there are any changes affecting its support to PACs and the BSP. Such feedback will need to be available latest by spring 2024 and autumn 2024 respectively.

Poland noted that Polish PAC of PA Nutri would be willing to join the PAC assistance after the end of the current PAC assistance project period.

#### **8. Terminology and timeline for the EUSBSR Action Plan changes**

The BSP presented the two proposed timelines for the Action Plan change and requested NCG for the clarification of the appropriate terminology for this process. In case of the first scenario, the new Action Plan would be ready to come into force in January 2026; in the event of the second scenario - in June 2026. The NCG considered that the first scenario would be feasible, provided that

the PACs are given sufficient time to develop and get agreement on the proposed actions and indicators of their respective PAs.

Regarding the terminology, NCG agreed that the appropriate term for this process would be “the Action Plan update” to reflect the fact that the process is not expected to lead to changes in basic the EUSBSR governance structure.

Regarding a possible update of the Commission Communication on the EUSBSR, the NCG considered that it was unlikely that the updating of the Action Plan would make this necessary.

The Presidency requested the BSP to adjust the first scenario timeline in line with the NCG discussion and to send it to the NCG for comments. The timeline is to be approved by written procedure.

## 9. MRS Trio Presidencies Guidelines

The Presidency presented the agenda point and the state of play of the cross-MRS cooperation. The last version of the guidelines for cross-MRS cooperation will be sent out to the NCG for final opinions. The Presidency will inform MRS Trio Presidencies group of the NCG decision.

## 10. Updates from the BSP

BSP presented the latest news and updates regarding the EUSBSR. The topics included news from the Policy Areas, updates on the guiding document for the Annual Forum organisers, MRS Support Units’ cooperation on the future of the Cohesion Policy and a process / activities aiming for a “Macro-regional Civil Strategy”. Further information was provided in the Annex.

NCG noted the information on the “Macro-regional civil strategy in the making” event in Stockholm on November 9<sup>th</sup> and the upcoming event in Budapest on December 7<sup>th</sup> and highlighted that while civil society engagement is important within the EUSBSR, the relevance and added-value of a cross-MRS level initiative is less clear. Furthermore, the issue of the EUSBSR external representation at the event was discussed.

NCG welcomed initiatives such as the PA Safe and PA Ship Operational Groups as a good way to engage a wider set of stakeholders.

## AOB and date for next meeting

AOB:

- The Presidency informed of the progress regarding the cooperation with Norway. Following the meeting with the Norwegian counterpart, the Norwegian representative will come back to the Presidency with proposals for cooperation.
- Poland organised a two-day capacity building session in Warsaw on 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of November for the Polish EUSBSR stakeholders, as well as for the potential new stakeholders among the Polish regional authorities and organisations. The main themes of the second day of the programme were the EUSBSR as the tool for international relations and utilising funding possibilities within the EUSBSR (both Interreg and the EU structural funds). Some PACs from Sweden and Poland, as well as the BSP, took part in the event. Poland recommended this event format nationally to the NCs. The Commission supported this initiative as a good example of how to promote embedding.
- Lithuania requested to discuss at a later meeting the 2023 Council Conclusions on MRS and how these may be followed up by the NCG. The Presidency requested support from Sweden in providing input to facilitate this discussion and to provide information on the Council Conclusions.

- The Commission informed that the 2024 MRS Week will take place on June 12-13<sup>th</sup> in Brussels. Finland informed that the CBSS Ministerial in Helsinki is planned for June 13-14<sup>th</sup> 2024. Problem of overlapping of both events was identified.
- BSP informed that BSP project manager is on parental leave until mid-January.

The next meeting of the NCG was scheduled for Wednesday, January 17<sup>th</sup> 10:00 CET online in the “NCs only” format.

The next NCG meeting in the regular configuration was scheduled for Wednesday, March 13<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 CET online.

The Presidency closed the meeting at 14:10.

## PARTICIPANTS

Denmark	Anders Henriksson (NC)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Estonia	Tõnis Nirk (NC) Andreas Sepp (Deputy NC)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Finland	Helena Tuuri (NC) Kaisa Arkkila (Deputy NC) Heta Hassinen (Deputy NC)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Germany	Maurice Gajan (NC) Winfried Maier (Deputy NC)	Federal Foreign Office Federal Foreign Office
Latvia	Andra Kuzmina (NC, Chair) Skaidrīte Zarāne (Deputy NC)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Lithuania	Robertas Bružilas (NC) Modesta Vanesa Viskontė (Deputy NC)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Poland	Ewa Dębska (NC) Monika Langiewicz (Deputy NC)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Sweden	Anna Hagström (NC) Anna Tofftén (Deputy NC)	Prime Minister’s Office Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation
	Juhani Ailio Viktoriiia Hladii Anja Karppinen Tom Schumacher Kirsi Ahlman Stefanie Wodrig	Baltic Sea Strategy Point Baltic Sea Strategy Point
	Petri Koistinen	European Commission, DG REGIO
	Elena Kolosova	Interreg Baltic Sea Region Secretariat