

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

### 3rd Meeting under the Polish Presidency, 2024-2025

**Date:** 12/12/2024

**Time:** 09:00-16:00 CET

**Location:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs, J. Ch. Szucha 23, Warsaw

#### MINUTES

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

The agenda was approved with no amendments.

##### NC only part

##### 2. Action Plan update

The BSP presented this agenda point and asked the NCG for further guidance on the matters.

###### A. Status update on the PA templates progress

The process of working on the PA template has been going well, consultations were provided by the BSP along the process both collectively via the EUSBSR Monthly meetings, and via the individual consultations. Most of the doubts related to the process were clarified on that occasion, however indicators still remain a challenge for some PACs. The work should be completed by the end of January 2025.

The NCG discussed the importance of effective communication and cooperation between the PACs and the respective SGs also during the Action Update process and how the NCG and the BSP could further support the PACs in this. Active involvement of the above-mentioned will strengthen the ownership of the Action Plan and thus improve the involvement at the later stages of the Action Plan implementation. More active and direct communication between the PACs and the SG members could also enhance the activity and engagement of the SG members. An active attitude of PAC initiating contacts with the Steering Groups may be a certain solution to the problem (there are some good practices in that field in PA Inno, PA Safe, PA Secure and PA Energy)

###### B. Non-EU cooperation

The NCG agreed that in the updated Action Plan the category of “neighbouring country” would be maintained, however without indicating specific countries. The Group discussed the importance of the involvement of Ukrainian entities into EUSBSR activities. The PACs are encouraged to continue elaborating and seeking ways to support Ukraine, if feasible and where such cooperation is mutually beneficial for both sides. NK PL informed that the Presidency’s bilateral talks regarding possible Ukraine’s interest in EUSBSR had not resulted in any formal initiative of the Ukrainian authorities in this matter.

Concerning Norway, the NCG was informed that NO representatives in the CBSS CSO had informally communicated to the Polish Presidency that NO would not apply for full membership in the EUSBSR, but would consider an application for observer status in the NCG. NCG decides to maintain the current framework for cooperation in the updated Action Plan. Further clarifications to the PACs are to be provided.

The attention was also drawn to the need to coordination of activities between PAs and regional organisations in regard of cooperation with on-EU countries in order to avoid unnecessary duplication of initiatives.

### **C. Youth involvement in the Strategy**

The NCG reiterated that the question of youth engagement and participation in the Strategy work is important. The Group decided that the framework for such cooperation should not be overly formalized. The EUSBSR remains open to youth initiatives, especially in the practical dimension at the level of PAs. The focus should be on the effective use of existing cooperation structures in the region, without creating new structures. It was also agreed that the CBSS Secretariat will be contacted with a request to present relevant information on the Baltic Sea Region Youth Forum’s activities, which could be presented during one of the next NCG meetings.

### **D. Outcomes of the Round Table on Stakeholder Involvement in the Update of the EUSBSR Action Plan in Visby on 29 October 2024**

The NCG took note of the outcomes of the event in Visby and the suggestions provided by the pan-Baltic organisations, namely CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, BSSSC and the UBC, regarding the Action Plan update process and the closer involvement of the above-mentioned in the EUSBSR. The NCG appreciated the organisations’ proactive approach and agreed to consider those recommendations that do not require changes to the governing structure of the Strategy. Although the formal inclusion of pan-Baltic organizations in the preparation of the EUSBSR annual forums would be problematic, there is a good practice in this matter and the organizers of the Annual Forum in 2025 have already been in contact with the BSSSC regarding the Engagement Day.

PL presidency proposed that PACs could participate from time to time in pan-Baltic organisations’ meetings to exchange information on current activities and projects.

## **3. Updates from the Policy Areas**

The BSP presented the agenda item. The NCG took note of the information provided regarding the PA implementation activities. BSP informed that more than half of the PACs reported communication problems with steering group members. However, the BSP admitted that they had not had the opportunity to discuss this issue in the SGs. The next round of consultations

will be held in 3-4 months; the BSP plans to hold regular talks with the PACs 3-4 times a year. BSP gave up participation in meetings of all the SGs because they considered this solution too costly and time-consuming.

#### **4. EUSBSR governance financing**

The BSP presented the agenda point. The presentation included an overview of the governance funding currently available in the Strategy and what it is based on, points of reference on what can be expected from the PAC work with the current resources available, and input for reflection relevant for the Strategy governance in the future. The NCG took note of the current status of the governance funding of the Strategy in relation to the scope of the Strategy goals and the tasks the PAs are set to perform. Further discussion on the matter will continue in the next NCG meetings.

#### **5. EUSBSR embedding**

The BSP presented the agenda point. The presentation touched upon the concepts and impact channels that EUSBSR currently has on funding; available information on the MFF process as of now, as well as input for reflection on potential ways to impact the funding for the EUSBSR implementation in the next MFF. Currently the work with funding in the Strategy takes place either via embedding or pooling of funding. The scope of embedding includes the EU Structural Funds, including the relevant Interreg programmes. The current impact of the EUSBSR on Interreg programmes is largely defined by the legislative framework (Interreg regulation) and the cooperation with the programme secretariats is appreciated. The link to the mainstream funds via legislation is weaker, although majority of the financial resources relevant for the Strategy implementation lie there. Finally, the upcoming MFF planning is bringing in the uncertainty regarding how the next EU budget will look like and which funding programmes will remain or get transformed.

The NCG took note of the information provided. It was noted that better coordination with the funds requires a well-built Action Plan. In order to ensure that the Action Plan update process progresses well, close collaboration between the NCG, PACs, Steering Groups needs to be maintained. The NCG noted also the importance of functioning MA Networks in the region and maintaining the contact with them. Further discussion on the matter will continue in the next NCG meetings.

#### **6. AOB and date for next meeting**

- BSP informed that the NC-PAC event will take place in Turku in the first week of April 2025.
- The next NCG meeting is planned to take place tentatively end of February - beginning of March 2025.



## PARTICIPANTS

Denmark	-	-
Estonia	Tõnis Nirk (NC) Andreas Sepp (Deputy NC)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Finland	Helena Tuuri (NC)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Germany	Sven Freitag (NC) ( <i>Agenda points 1, 2,3,4,5</i> )	Federal Foreign Office
Latvia	Andra Kuzmina (NC)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Lithuania	Robertas Bružilas (NC) Modesta Vanesa Viskontė (Deputy NC)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Poland	Katarzyna Barcikowska (NC, Chair) Monika Langiewicz (Deputy NC)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Sweden	Anna Hagström (NC) ( <i>Agenda points 1, 2,3,4,5</i> )	Prime Minister's Office
	Juhani Ailio ( <i>Agenda points 2,3,4,5,6</i> ) Viktorii Hladii ( <i>Agenda points 2,3,4,5,6</i> ) Svea Horn ( <i>Agenda points 2,3,4,5,6</i> ) Kirsi Ahlman ( <i>Agenda points 2,3,4,5,6</i> )	Baltic Sea Strategy Point Baltic Sea Strategy Point Baltic Sea Strategy Point Baltic Sea Strategy Point
	Petri Koistinen ( <i>Agenda points 2,3,4,5,6</i> )	European Commission, DG Regio