

Sweden's Presidency of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region 2022-2023

Introduction

Between 1 July 2022 and 30 June 2023, Sweden chaired the rotating one-year Presidency of the EUSBSR. By developing new forms of cooperation, spreading knowledge of how the Strategy contributes to societal development, creating better conditions that enable more people to take part in cooperation within the Strategy, the region will become better at developing solutions to various societal challenges. This is something the Swedish Presidency has wanted to contribute to. The Swedish Presidency has focused on starting up the operational work within the Strategy after the pandemic, as well as developing and implementing the Strategy's action plan, which has undergone a comprehensive revision. In addition, particular focus has been put on the issue of the Strategy as a platform for support to Ukraine.

A two-day kick-off meeting in Stockholm, initiated by the Presidency at the beginning of September, a total of eight meetings of the National Coordinators' Group have been held (out of which two physical meetings), the Policy Area Coordinators and some Steering Group members have taken place. In December, a conference on and with Ukraine was held in Stockholm, which became the starting point for a number of concrete collaborations within the Strategy.

At the beginning of June, a final event was held in Visby, which also largely focused on cooperation with Ukraine. Sweden has represented the Strategy at the High-Level Group on EU Macro-regional Strategies meeting that took place in April, in connection with the macro-regional strategy week organised annually by the European Commission in Brussels. Sweden has also represented the Strategy in the circle of Trio Presidencies meetings of the four macro-regional strategies during the year. In the spring of 2023, the role as Presidency of both the Strategy and the EU Council of Ministers, has given Sweden special responsibility for the EU's four macro-regional strategies, led by the Swedish Minister for EU Affairs and for Nordic Cooperation, Ms Jessika Roswall. As a result of the European Commission's latest report on the implementation of the EU macro-regional strategies, Council conclusions were adopted at the General Affairs Council in June.

This report describes the background and focus areas of the Swedish Presidency of the EUSBSR National Coordinators Group. Furthermore, the implementation of the Swedish Presidency programme 2022/2023 will be described.

The Swedish Presidency – background and objectives

Focus areas

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is one of four macro-regional strategies, based on cross-sectoral, transnational and multi-level cooperation. It offers a platform for cooperation between public authorities and organisations from the Baltic Sea region. The Swedish Presidency has therefore promoted cooperation on all levels by focusing on strengthening implementation, increasing exchanges of experience, improving communication and offering more professional development.

One important focus of the Swedish Presidency has been to ensure that the Action Plan is put into practice and implemented in all Policy Areas to the greatest possible extent. Another important issue for the Swedish Presidency has been to improve the visibility of the Strategy and to communicate it externally. Developing a communication plan at the NC level has therefore been a focus area. Sweden has not only chaired the NC group but also the newly established Steering Groups. The Swedish Presidency finalized the work on empowering the Steering Groups which begun during the previous Presidency of Lithuania. A third issue that the Swedish Presidency particularly has focused on has been to provide support and awareness-raising initiatives. The Swedish Presidency has been taking into account that both institutional and individual capacities must be enhanced as well as that public authorities and organisations must cooperate to jointly achieve targets and indicators. Lastly, the Swedish Presidency has focused on exploring how the Strategy can contribute as a platform to support Ukraine.

The Swedish Presidency would like to note the professional and flexible support of the Baltic Sea Strategy Point (BSP) to the Presidency, as coordinated by the Centrum Balticum Foundation and the City of Hamburg, in achieving these goals.

New prerequisites

At the Government Offices, the chairmanship has been led by the Prime Minister's Office in close cooperation with the Ministry of Rural Affairs and Infrastructure. Within the framework of its existing activities, the Norden Association in Sweden has cooperated closely with the Prime Minister's Office and provided administrative support during the Presidency's year. The Government Offices have also worked closely with the Swedish Institute, which initiated the project to investigate the possibilities for the Strategy to establish forms of cooperation with Ukraine. The Swedish Institute has also assisted in arranging mini-sessions for presentations of various Policy Areas, with the aim of strengthening the implementation of the Strategy. The previous Presidencies of the Strategy in Sweden (2009 and 2016/2017) had coincided with the organisation of the Strategy's Annual Forum. This was the case this time, given that Sweden will host the Forum in 2024.

Implementation of the Swedish Presidency Programme

EUSBSR achievements

- National Coordinators Group
 - 8 meetings
 - 15 decisions (7 at the meetings, 8 via silence procedures)
 - Endorsed 2 Rules of Procedure (PA Health and PA Spatial Planning)
 - Issued clarification on the double roles within PA and SG
 - Modified Annual Fora rotation to align the organisation with the EUSBSR Presidency rotation and updated NCG Rules of Procedure to reflect the changes.
 - Appointed lead PACs of PA Transport (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, Estonia, presently Ministry of Climate) and PA Bioeconomy (Nordic Council of Ministers Secretariat).
- Ukraine support
 - Organised a conference on the ways of supporting Ukraine on December 8th 2022, which has resulted in at least three ongoing initiatives of: supporting Ukrainian maritime students (PA Ship/Safe), development of wastewater treatment initiative (PA Nutri/Bioeconomy/Hazards) and supporting remote education (PA Education). News piece: <https://www.eusbsr.eu/news-room/news/591412-ukraine-conference-summary>
 - Organised support for Ukraine workshops as part of the Swedish Presidency closing conference. News piece: <https://www.eusbsr.eu/news-room/news/591513-the-closing-event-of-the-swedish-eusbsr-presidency>
- Council Conclusions
 - EU Council SMOR Working Group adopted the new Council Conclusions on macro-regional strategies, setting strategic recommendations for the 4 macro-regional Strategies for the next 2 years (June 2022). News piece: <https://www.eusbsr.eu/news-room/news/591528-council-conclusions-on-report-from-the-commission-on-the-implementation-of-eu-macroregional-strategies>
- Launch of the EUSBSR Monthly with the support of the Baltic Sea Strategy Point (the BSP) – kick off in March 2023
 - EUSBSR Monthly has built on the Coffee with Presidency concept first initiated by the German EUSBSR Presidency (2020-2021).
 - The concept foresees regular monthly meetings (excluding summer holiday season) primarily targeted at the policy area coordinators and including national coordinators, the BSP and invited experts, both online and offsite. The aim is to facilitate network building among PACs (across countries and PAs), to support the development of a community

spirit among PACs and improve flow of information between PACs and NCs.

- Four EUSBSR Monthly meetings took place during SE Presidency + one Coffee with the Presidency.
- First draft of the EUSBSR communication guidelines
 - The first draft of the EUSBSR communication guidelines was finalised.
 - The document presents long-term strategic objectives and tools to plan and target communication activities around the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. It is designed mainly for the use of groups within the Strategy's governance structure: National Coordinators, Policy Area Coordinators, Steering Groups members and the Baltic Sea Strategy Point. The document paints a big picture of the necessity for the Strategy's communications and addresses key stakeholders as well as their respective and/or shared responsibilities.
- Monitoring and evaluation
 - The BSP launched the process of development universal framework for monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy. The aim is to combine different multiple strands of the reporting duties for PACs (financial reporting to Interreg, bi-annual reporting to the European Commission, Strategy reporting to the NCG), at the same time ensuring that essential results and achievements of the Strategy implementation are collected with the reporting. The framework is to be finalised by the end of autumn 2023.
- EUSBSR representation externally
 - MRS Trio Presidencies meeting in Trento, Italy (November 2022)
 - MRS Week (April 2023): MRS Trio Presidencies meeting, High Level Group meeting
 - EU Council SMOR meetings
- Baltic Sea Strategy Point (the BSP)
 - The BSP has kicked off its operations as a support unit to the Strategy's implementation, governance, communication, cross-sectoral cooperation and development.

Summary

The Swedish Presidency in cooperation with the BSP devoted a great deal of time and effort in putting the new Action Plan to practice and communicating it. Following the substantial period of setting up the governance structure of the Strategy and to address high personnel turnover in stakeholder groups, the Swedish Presidency has been committed in providing support to the stakeholders focused on the Strategy implementation. Several National Coordinators and Policy Area Coordinators have changed in the course of the Presidency, which has resulted in the need for governance

and operational support to be able to fully contribute to the implementation in accordance with the new Action Plan.

The Swedish Presidency has also contributed to resuming the operational work within the Strategy after the pandemic. The kick-off meeting in Stockholm in September, the Ukraine conference in December and the final event in Visby in June are concrete examples of this. The total of eight meetings of the National Coordinators' Group during the year also speaks for itself; The activities have succeeded each other, and the establishment of the cooperation with the BSP has been important. In addition, the Swedish Presidency held coordinating positions in five Policy Areas of the Strategy and had expert Steering Group representatives in all 14 Policy Areas Steering Groups, steering the implementation of the Strategy actions.

The Strategy is under constant development, to which Sweden had contributed during its Presidency. The specific initiative to use the Strategy as a platform to support Ukraine is an example of this. The efforts and hard work that was focused on investigating possible collaboration forms with Ukraine in order to support the country now and in the future, is now being managed by the Latvian Presidency.

The political presence at previous Swedish presidencies has mainly been centred around the Annual Forum for the Strategy, but for this Presidency, the political presence has instead been centred around seminars and the Strategy's concluding events. In addition, the coincidence of the Presidency of the Strategy and the Presidency of the EU Council of Ministers in the spring 2023, also meant presence and commitment from the political level.

Sweden's work on the EU's Baltic Sea Strategy is progressing. Cooperation in the Baltic Sea region continues to be strongly marked by the Russian aggression against Ukraine and its consequences. Sweden will host the Annual Forum in late October 2024, and the Swedish Presidency 2022/2023 will of course be duly reflected in the programme of the forum. In cooperation with the County Administrative Board of Gotland and the Nordic Council of Ministers, Sweden will once again welcome participants at all levels; from organisations, businesses, regions, municipalities, government agencies and ministerial level to Visby for good discussions and networking about the Baltic Sea Strategy and its future.