



Memo

**4th Coordination Group meeting of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region HA Neighbours
12 June 2017, at 16-00-18.00
Finnish Embassy, Rauchstrasse 1, 10787 Berlin**

Invited: Nominated HA Neighbours Coordinating Group members, NCs and Focal Points (as listed in the Strategy web pages). The GC is in principle open to stakeholders which are interested and relevant in the field of HA Neighbours.

Present: **Janis Berzins**, Latvian Embassy in Germany
Kari Hyppönen, Baltic Sea Region University Network, BSRUN
Kristiina Isokallio, Ministry of the Environment Finland, PA Nutri
Reiner Kneifel-Haverkamp, Brandenburg Ministry of Justice, for European Affairs and Consumer Protection
Talis Linkaits, Spatial Planning Initiative VASAB, HA Spatial
Marek Maciejowski, NDPHS Secretariat, PA Health
Ann Irene Saeternes, Eastern Norway County Network
Jacek Sladewski, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Eastern Department
Alexander Somoza, EU Commission, DG Regio
Janne Tamminen, BSSSC
Erja Tikka, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
Marlene Riedel, CBSS Secretariat (photographer)
Daria Akhutina, CBSS Secretariat, HA Neighbours
Mikko Lohikoski, City of Turku, HA Neighbours, *Chair of the CG*
Jaana Kerttula, Centrum Balticum Foundation, City of Turku, HA Neighbours, *Secretary of the CG*

The meeting was opened with welcoming words from the Chair of the Coordination Group, Mikko Lohikoski from the City of Turku. A presentation round was held to introduce all the participants and their organizations.

Report from Alexander Somoza, DG Regio

- Alexander Somoza from EU Commission, DG Regio, presented the **Commission's report on the implementation of EU Macro-regional strategies (MRS)**. (PP Attached)
- The main idea of the report was to present recommendations for the development of the MRS.

- EUSBSR is the oldest of the MRS and has strong project activities. It is hoped that the EUSBSR would move more towards policy impact.
- EUSDR (Danube) witnesses weaknesses in cooperation between member countries.
- EUSAIR (Adriatic and Ionian) has 4 non-EU countries involved in the strategy, strong participation in neighbouring countries.
- EUSALP (Alpine) has strong regional representation and the strategy is very much guided by regions.
- MRS need a robust monitoring system. An example of monitoring systems could be taken from VASAB or ESPON, for instance.
- There is still a gap between funding opportunities and MRS.
- Communication strategies are needed. EUSBSR is ahead in this respect.
- MRS and links with future cohesion policy: increase in impact through synergies between MRS and regional funding programmes; improvement of MRS government; transnational programmes alignment with MRS?
- **As a conclusion:** DG Regio was hoping for a stronger mandate from the Commission report, thinking about the post 2020 life. The Commission report and conclusions slightly vague.
- Erja Tikka backed Somoza's thoughts on Commission conclusions and shared the desire for the Commission conclusions to have been clearer.
- A positive sign is also that other DG's such as DG Near has taken EUSBSR into consideration in their work.
- The participants of the CG were reminded that there is a joint seminar in the Annual Forum programme on MRS on Wednesday 14th June, organized by the HA Capacity.

Country tracks: Russia

- Lohikoski recapped Stockholm's EUSBSR Annual Forum where HA Neighbours organized an EU-Russia seminar and the last CG meeting took place.
- Daria Akhutina told about **Baltic Sea Science Day** which was organized in St. Petersburg on 8 February 2017. The Science Day was devoted to cooperation in Science and research to promote the Baltic Sea Region in innovation and Science.
- The Baltic Science Day received a positive response with 150 participants representing universities, institutes etc.
- **The next Baltic Sea Science Day** will be combined with the Baltic University Programme's Rectors meeting. It will take place in **Turku Finland on 24 January 2018**.
- Mikko Lohikoski reminded that this year's Annual Forum the HA Neighbours will organize in cooperation with the Interreg BSR programme a thematic seminar on project cooperation with Russia. It will take place on Tuesday 13 June.
- Lohikoski continued telling about a **cooperation seminar** which HA Neighbours organized on 22 May in Turku, in cooperation with the city of Turku: "**Cooperating with Russian partners – Building on the past, Looking to the future**". The event took place as a back-to-back meeting with the Finnish-Russian twin city meeting 23-24 May in Turku.
- The idea of the seminar was to map project proposals and look for potential cooperation possibilities.
- The cooperation seminar was participated by approx. 30 specialists from Russia and Nordic countries, mainly Finland and Sweden. The initiative to organize the seminar came from Swedish partners who are interested in reviving the project connections with NW Russian partners.
- The cooperation seminar's topics ranged from labour market issues and Arctic cooperation but also a wide variety of possible project cooperation initiatives were discussed. These proposals will be followed and advanced in further meetings.

- Daria Akhutina reminded that the **Arctic issues** are very much in the limelight now since Finland has taken the chairmanship in the Arctic Council and Sweden takes on the Arctic-Barents Chairmanship.
- Erja Tikka reminded about the thematic seminar “Artic meets Baltic” which will take place on the second day of the EUSBSR Annual Forum. Tikka will act as one of the seminar’s speakers. In her speech, Tikka will highlight the cooperation on project levels and also the role of the HA Neighbours in Arctic cooperation.
- Akhutina continued telling about the Baltic Sea Labour Forum Round Table which will take place on Thursday 15th June in Berlin, back-to-back with the EUSBSR Annual Forum. The Round Table begins with Labour Ministers’ meeting and there will be three Russian representatives present.
- Akhutina also mentioned that there is a new project approved by SI, the “Baltic Sea Labour Partnership”.
- Kari Hyppönen from Baltic Sea University Network (BSRUN) told about the network’s upcoming **event “Universities as the Bridge Between the East and the West”**. The event will take place in the **University of Riga, on 19 October 2017**.
- The general situation in the BSRUN network is good and Latvian partners have become more active lately. BSRUN also recently received a big Erasmus+ project.
- There was discussion about the **situation in Russian involvement in Interreg BSR funding programme**. Somoza replied that the funding agreement is close to be finalized between EU Commission, Russia and Germany. Russian partners can already be involved in Interreg BSR projects and they can accumulate costs in the projects already even though the agreement has not been signed yet.
- Ann Irene Saeternes pointed out that Russian partners will be active in the next Interreg BSR call in autumn 2017 since there are funds available for them.
- Daria Akhutina told about the **situation with the North West Russian Strategy**. It may well be after the Russian presidential election 2018 when the NW Russian Strategy will be written. In any case, the situation has not evolved lately.
- Akhutina also stressed that there is still a need to continue working along the mutually agreed five thematic areas, the so called “5 fiches”.
- It was discussed that an informal “liaison group” of working level representatives could be useful in discussing EU-Russia practical cooperation and project world.
- Reiner Kneifel-Haverkamp told about the **thematic week the German regions organized in St. Petersburg** and that there was new interest towards Baltic Sea Region cooperation on both sides. This promises good for the lower level, practical cooperation.
- **Kristiina Isokallio from PA Nutri** made an update on Nutri’s recently accepted wastewater and sewage projects, which have Russian partners involved. PA Nutri has high expectations for the projects and looks forward for the implementation phase.
- **Talis Linkaits from HA Spatial** told that cooperation with VASAB and Russian partners has improved now that Interreg BSR has accepted Russian partners to the programme.

Country tracks: Belarus

- On Tuesday afternoon 13th June HA Neighbours will organize a thematic session about Belarus cooperation in the Annual Forum. This will be organized in cooperation with the German Foreign Office.
- Kari Hyppönen told about **BSRUN’s seminar in Minsk** in March 2017. BSRUN cooperation has been good in Belarus and a similar event will be organized in March 2018. The seminar will focus on project currently working.
- **VASAB will organize a committee meeting in Minsk along with a Spatial Planning workshop on 13-14 September 2017**.

- Lohikoski asked the participants to inform HA Neighbours about all activities they have in the neighbouring countries to enhance the possibilities in joint forces and promote the EUSBSR and Baltic Sea Region cooperation.
- Daria Akhutina will travel to Minsk in June as a part of CBSS meeting. CBSS' project facility funding is available for Belarussian partners, currently there are especially maritime, and youth projects active.
- PA Nutri has two potential Seed Money and flagship projects, which have partners from Belarus, but currently unfortunately, they do not get funding from Interreg.
- As a conclusion, it was stated that there is cooperation and projects with Belarus but problems are present, especially concerning project funding possibilities.

Country tracks: Norway

- **Ann Irene Saeternes** from Eastern Norway County Network shared news from Norway's point of view:
- Norway is a **partner in the Let's communicate project**. This offers a possibility for Norwegian actors to hear more about the EUSBSR and PAC/HAC work, for example the project took part in the PAC/HAC Spring meeting in April.
- In the past, before the EUSBSR, Norwegian participation in Baltic Sea Region cooperation was far greater but it vanished after the strategy came along and it was an "EU" strategy, leaving Norway out.
- **27 April 2017 the project organized a thematic meeting on Culture** together with PA Culture in Oslo. The interest was high (80 pax) and a similar meeting with a different theme is in the pipeline. Possibly maritime themes with Safe and Ship. These events are used to tell about cooperation possibilities and funding opportunities in the Baltic sea region.
- Saeternes also told that there will be an EUSBSR website opening in Norwegian language soon.
- **Norway is currently chairing the BSSSC as well as the Nordic Council of Ministers.**
- in 2019 Norway will hold the CBSS presidency.
- **BSSSC's Annual Conference will take place in Potsdam on 20-22 September 2017.**

Country tracks: Iceland:

- Daria Akhutina told about the **CBSS Maritime policy expert group's meeting** on 14 March. The meeting attracted specialists and academics. Next meeting will take place in Donsö, Sweden on 5 September 2017.
- **The Baltic Sea NGO Forum** was organized in Iceland on 19-20 May 2017. The event attracted around 40-50 participants and they discussed issues such as democracy and youth.
- on 20 June the **CBSS will organize a 25 anniversary meeting**. Foreign Ministers will be present but it is not an official ministerial meeting.
- Ann Irene Saeternes added that Norway and Iceland could enhance the cooperation in youth issues.

Discussion:

- It was mentioned that in Oulu Finland there will be an Arctic meeting on Thursday and Friday 15-16 June.
- Jaana Kerttula told that she will be leaving the HA Neighbours at the end of the summer and thanked the Coordination Group for the good cooperation. The Coordination Group members thanked Jaana for her dedication and good work for the HA Neighbours and wished her well in her future MBA studies in Scotland.

Closing the meeting:

- The chair ended the meeting at 18:15 after lively discussions.
- The next Coordination Group will take place back-to-back with the Annual Forum 2018 in Tallinn.

Mikko Lohikoski
Chair of the Coordination Group

Jaana Kerttula
Secretary of the Coordination Group