

HA Neighbours Coordination Group meeting
June 5, 2014
Memo by CBSS, Anthony Jay

The first Coordination Group meeting of the EUSBSR Horizontal Action Neighbours took place in the afternoon of Thursday 5th June 2014 in Turku, Finland as part of the Baltic Sea Days, back-to-back with the 5th Annual Forum of the EUSBSR. The Coordination Group was preceded by an HA Neighbours workshop devoted to project presentations and discussion. The Coordination Group meeting was opened by the Finnish Chair of the Strategy's National Contact Points, Ambassador Erja Tikka. The two meetings gathered 30 stakeholders with representation from eight Baltic Sea region countries. Stakeholder representation was broad and multi-level, including Horizontal Action leaders (HA Involve and HA Spatial), Priority Area coordinators (PA Agri, PA Health, PA Inno, PA Nutri and PA Secure), ministry officials representing National Contact Points and National Focal Points of the Strategy, national authorities and ministries (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Environment, Rural Affairs), as well as regional and local representation (German Federal State representation from Hamburg (Hamburg Senate Chancellery), and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (State Chancellery), the City of Turku, and the Regional Council of South-West Finland. Three pan-Baltic organisations (Baltic Sea Region University Network, VASAB, and Union of the Baltic Cities) were present alongside representatives from the University of Tartu and St. Petersburg State University of Economics.

During the workshop five presentations were given, including one on a new initiative called Baltic Sea Youth Dialogue where Gabriele Woidelko from the Körber Foundation in Hamburg and Katri Raik from Narva College, alongside Iris Kempe from the CBSS Secretariat, outlined future prospects for new ways of discussing identity in the region. Dr. Julia Fredriksson from the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, representing Priority Area Secure, gave numerous examples of good cooperation with Norway and Russia, as well as the potential of a new project which will be co-led by Iceland, pending funding. Dr. Anna Karpenko outlined the developments in the Vystynets/Vystutis project on the tri-border of Lithuania, Poland and the Russian Federation (Kaliningrad). Kristiina Isokallio from the Ministry of the Environment of Finland, representing PA Nutri, gave a thorough presentation of the identification of priority investments to reduce nutrient pollution from Belarus to the Baltic Sea as another example of cooperation with third countries. This was complimented by a further presentation by Hannamaria Yliruusi from the Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC). The Coordination Group meeting was chaired by Mr. Mikko Lohikoski Director of External Affairs of the City of Turku and Secretary General of Centrum Balticum Foundation, and Mr. Jan Lundin, Director General of the CBSS Secretariat. The European Commission was represented by DG Regio. All parties recognised the willingness and mutual interest of working closely with Norway, Iceland, and Russia, especially North-West Russia and the St. Petersburg region. The recent meeting organised in Norway for Norwegian stakeholders by the Baltic Sea States Sub-Regional Cooperation representative was specifically highlighted here as an example of good practice. The importance of the inclusion of Chambers of Commerce, city and local administrations, universities and civil society actors was stressed. It was suggested that two meetings a year would be convened, one of which would be tied with the Annual Forum of the EUSBSR. A balance between initiatives and support to PAs, HAs and other actors in the region would be struck to advance interaction with the neighbours on case-by-case basis to bring added value.

HA Neighbours has potential to enrich experiences and ensure gains on both sides.