

## **HA Neighbours – Creating added value to the Baltic Sea cooperation by working with neighbouring countries and regions**

*Coordinated by: City of Turku (Finland) and the Council of Baltic Sea States Secretariat*

Although EUSBSR is a strategy of the European Union (EU), it is clear that many of the issues can only be addressed in constructive cooperation with non-member neighbouring countries in the region. This applies to both common challenges and to the mobilisation of the development potential of the Baltic Sea region.

The Council Conclusions on the governance of macro-regional strategies (October 2014) *'stressed that macro-regional strategies are of interest to all EU Member States and contribute – inter alia – to further promote economic, social and territorial cohesion as well as integration of the internal market, to the stability of certain areas, to foster cooperation between EU and non-EU countries, and to assist participating candidate and potential candidate countries on their path towards the EU, and recognised that the macro-regional strategies should maintain their focus on the development of EU countries and may contribute to European integration where the participation of non-EU countries constitutes an added value towards achieving the goals of the macro-regional strategies.'*<sup>81</sup>

However, the Strategy cannot dictate action to third parties. Instead, it indicates issues on which cooperation is desirable and proposes platforms to this discussion and cooperation. These include the Northern Dimension, a common policy of the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland, international bodies such as the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) and the Nordic Council of Ministers as well as the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC). In addition, regional non-state organisations such as the Union of Baltic Cities (UBC), the Baltic Sea Region University Network (BSRUN), the Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation (BSSSC), the Baltic Sea NGO Network and others are providing useful platforms for dialogue and cooperation. In times of international tension, the role of people-to-people contacts can gain in importance.

Horizontal action 'Neighbours' was included in the EUSBSR Plan of Action in February 2013. It was based on two independent but parallel streams of activities: the extensive work of CBSS to promote regional cooperation between its Member States, and the 'Turku process', a joint initiative by the cities by Turku/Regional Council of Southwest Finland, St. Petersburg and Hamburg (Secretariat by the

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<sup>81</sup> Council Conclusions on the governance of macro-regional strategies of 21 October 2014.

Centrum Balticum Foundation) to promote practical cooperation between EU and Russian partners, building on the trust and experience accumulated during over six decades of twin city cooperation.

The main goal of horizontal action 'Neighbours' is to promote dialogue and cooperation between multilevel stakeholders in the EU and the North Western territories of the Russian Federation, Belarus, Norway and Iceland, in a mutually advantageous manner. It works especially to facilitate cooperation 'across the borders' in the policy areas where such cooperation is needed and improves the efficiency of the EUSBSR or addresses the interests of both, the EU and non-EU participants.

Accordingly, the horizontal action 'Neighbours' works in close cooperation with the relevant policy areas to identify potential partners for joint action in neighbouring countries. The same applies in reverse: by promoting knowledge about the EUSBSR and its potential for joint action in neighbouring countries, the horizontal action 'Neighbours' encourages interested stakeholders to get involved with EU partners. Thus, it brings added value to the EUSBSR by mobilizing new stakeholders into mutually advantageous cooperation.

Experiences from such events (for example, seminar in Oslo in May 2014 for Norwegian stakeholders, joint event with policy area 'Education' in October 2014 in St. Petersburg) have proved very useful, and similar initiatives are planned with other EUSBSR stakeholders. The horizontal action 'Neighbours' can also help to introduce good initiatives – such as the Baltic Sea Challenge working to 'Save the Sea' – to new countries (co-organising a promotional event in St. Petersburg).

The horizontal action 'Neighbours' promotes also dialogue and exchange of experiences with other neighbouring regions, thus enabling Baltic Sea region actors to find common solutions to mutual challenges and to seek synergies and links between various regions. For example, the Arctic region has strong links with the Baltic Sea region through its interaction with the Barents Euro-Arctic region. Likewise, dialogue and sharing of experiences with representatives of other EU macro-regional strategies can be beneficial for everyone. Such joint events are under planning.

With time, the list of current neighbouring countries – Belarus, Iceland, Norway and Russia – could in the future be expanded depending on the topic and related needs.

Additionally, the horizontal action 'Neighbours' implements selected projects contributing to the EUSBSR objectives led by the horizontal action coordinators, in cases where these can bring added value to the goals of the horizontal action 'Neighbours' and the EUSBSR. Examples of such initiatives are the CBSS Secretariat's Baltic Sea Youth Dialogue and the ROMINT projects, and the seed-money supported projects by the 'Turku process'.

The coordination of horizontal action 'Neighbours' is done in close contact and full transparency with relevant involved actors such as, for example, the Baltic Sea Region and the European Neighbourhood Instrument Cross-Border Cooperation programmes, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Northern Dimension partnerships, the Swedish Institute and other relevant actors, which are funding many projects involving BSR non-EU actors.

**The main objectives of the horizontal action:**

**1. Ensuring good horizontal action 'Neighbours' coordination and governance:**

- a. confirming representation of Member States and relevant stakeholders in the Coordination Group; close contact with Member States, European Commission/EEAS etc.;
- b. ensuring broad participation in and proper functioning of the Coordination Group through active communication;
- c. defining targets and indicators;
- d. regular coordination (teleconferences, face-to-face meetings etc.) between both horizontal action coordinators.

**2. Encouraging partnerships between EUSBSR stakeholders and neighbouring countries:**

- a. joint events with policy areas to inform non-EU stakeholders about EUSBSR and possibilities of cooperation (1-2 similar events annually, upon agreement with coordinators of policy areas);
- b. the horizontal action 'Neighbours' will reach out to relevant policy areas and assist them in finding project partners especially in North-Western Russia but also in other non-EU countries.

**3. Promoting dialogue and cooperation along 'neighbouring country tracks':**

- a. continue dialogue and cooperation with Russian partners to enable practical and mutually beneficial cooperation in the framework of the overall guidelines of the EUSBSR;
- b. continue dialogue and cooperation with Belarus;
- c. country meetings with Norwegian stakeholders;
- d. consultations/country meetings with Icelandic authorities and partners about potential joint activities.

**4. Following developments and liaising with neighbouring regions and other macro-regions:**

- a. follow developments in Arctic and Barents regions, and seek possible synergies;
- b. follow developments and pursue exchange of experiences with other macro-regions and their strategies; joint events.

5. **Promoting knowledge about the EUSBSR and the possibilities it offers to coordinated action:**
  - a. participation in major international BSR events (EUSBSR Annual Fora, BSPC meetings, BDF Summit, UBC General Assembly, BSSSC Annual meeting, Baltic Sea NGO Forum etc. and in other relevant events;
  - b. participation in Russian events dealing with Baltic Sea cooperation, links between the EUSBSR and Russian NW Strategy; relevant events of EU-Russia relations etc.;
  - c. liaising with European institutions (Commission, European Parliament, Committee of the Regions, Committee for Economic and Social Affairs) to inform the about developments and engage these institutions and their members;
  - d. liaising with Member States and their decision makers to make EUSBSR better known and actively supported.
  
6. **Improving communication about ‘cooperation across borders’:**
  - a. updating the horizontal action ‘Neighbours’ promotional materials in key languages;
  - b. improving visibility in the internet;
  - c. enhancing media presence.
  
7. **Project facilitation and financing:** initiating a small number of new flagships of relevance to horizontal action ‘Neighbours’ and supporting existing ones/ensure good impact of project results.
  
8. **Fulfilling the tasks of the horizontal action coordinators (as defined in the Plan of Action)**
  - a. monitoring development and implementation;
  - b. proposing updates when necessary;
  - c. facilitating policy discussion in the BSR region;
  - d. conveying relevant results and recommendations of the horizontal action to the policy level, when relevant, etc.

### **Targets and indicators**

The main target of the horizontal action ‘Neighbours’ is to broaden cooperation between EU and non-EU countries in the Baltic Sea region in fields where this is mutually advantageous. This is done especially by providing useful services for the EUSBSR stakeholders.

The success of this work can be measured by various indicators. These can include, among others:

- reports on implementation of the horizontal action ‘Neighbours’ ‘Objectives and activities’ and other agreed plans;
- activities and events organised by horizontal action ‘Neighbours’ and their attendance;
- response by relevant policy area coordinators;

- number of joint projects with neighbouring country stakeholders and their success;
- number and quality of stakeholders involved in cooperation;
- sectoral diversity (including MLG aspects) and geographical spread of cooperation, etc.

While evaluating the results of the horizontal action ‘Neighbours’ and, more general, development of cooperation with the neighbours, it is important to remember that this dimension of the EUSBSR is to a significant degree dependent on the overall development of international political climate.

### **Actions**

#### **1. Continued dialogue and coordination with key partners of the EUSBSR on development of the horizontal action ‘Neighbours’**

Cooperation with neighbours shall be developed in constant dialogue with the Member States and other relevant Baltic Sea region states, policy areas coordinators, DG REGIO and the EEAS, other European Union institutions as well as interested multilevel stakeholders to identify common priorities and opportunities for mutually advantageous cooperation. Regular contacts with relevant funding instruments will be pursued.

#### **2. Joint promotion of the added value of BSR cooperation ‘across the borders’**

Participation in key Baltic Sea region events to promote practical achievements and potential of cooperation with neighbouring countries and their stakeholders. Active communication about the EUSBSR and the horizontal action ‘Neighbours’

#### **3. Mobilising awareness and potential stakeholders in neighbouring countries**

In order to mobilize potential partners in neighbouring countries – Belarus, Iceland, Norway and Russia – the horizontal action ‘Neighbours’ representatives, when relevant together with policy areas coordinators – will participate in various national events. Also specific information/mobilization events shall be organised together with national partners, such as a successful mini-seminar in Oslo, May 2014.

#### **4. Developing dialogue and exchange with other macro-regions/neighbouring regions and relevant organisations**

The EUSBSR is the first EU macro-region of its kind, but since its adoption, other strategies have been adopted and prepared. The Russian Federation has adopted its own Strategy for Social and Economic Development of the North-western Federal District for the period until 2020. Regional cooperation in the Barents and Arctic regions has strong links with the BSR. For the future success of the EUSBSR it is important to build dialogue, exchange experiences and seek synergy between all these regional strategies and initiatives. In addition there is a need to communicate, learn from and cooperate also with

other regions in Europe having similar strategies and institutional set-ups, e.g. the Danube, Adriatic – Ionian and Alps regions.

**5. Developing and implementing practical cooperation processes and flagships beneficial for the development of EUSBSR/ horizontal action ‘Neighbours’ goals**

While the main direction of the horizontal action ‘Neighbours’ is horizontal and cross-cutting, towards supporting and facilitating policy areas/horizontal actions in their efforts to involve neighbours, the horizontal action ‘Neighbours’ and its coordinators shall develop and implement processes and flagships which are deemed beneficial for the achievement of overall goals of the horizontal action ‘Neighbours’ and the EUSBSR.