



Union of the Baltic Cities
General Conference, Mariehamn 1.-4.10.2013

Resolution on European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

The European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) arose from a wish for a collective response to environmental deterioration of the Baltic Sea, and for a concerted action on challenges and opportunities of our region. It was adopted in 2009. After this, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) has been adopted (2011) and a Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region is under preparation. Other regions are considering the merits of such a macro-regional or sea-based approach.

The European Council asked the Commission to “clarify the concept of macro-regional strategies, to evaluate their value added and submit the outcomes to the Council and the European Parliament by June 2013.”

The Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) thanks the Commission for its Report, which also includes recommendations for future action. UBC stresses the great political and strategic importance of the macro-regional approach to achieve a coordinated response in issues better handled together than separately. This goal to approach issues in a multilateral setting, and to reach out beyond current EU borders to work as equals with neighbours has the full and active support of the UBC and its more than hundred member cities.

The macro-regional approach creates a common framework and defined common goals, creating sense of common responsibility and enabling better mobilization of human and material resources in the region. However, as the Commission states, the value of this approach has to be judged by its results. Although the EUSBSR and its Action Plan have been operational only for a relatively short time, it is already possible to observe positive outcomes.

UBC shares the conclusions of the European Commission that the EUSBSR strategy work has resulted in more effective use of existing resources, improved coordinated policy development for example in complex environmental issues as well as fostered cooperation and coordination between and within countries. UBC’s own experience proves, that the Strategy has encouraged BSR organisations to seek closer coordination and cooperation, while much still remains to be done in this respect.

The concept of multi-level governance is among the key principles of the EUSBSR. It aims at bringing different levels of policy-making to work better together, without creating new tiers of administration. The full potential of the EUSBSR can only be achieved if there is a strong cooperation between regional, national and local levels to plan and implement together common goals and actions. Positive steps have been taken in this respect – a number of regional organisations, cities and other non-state actors serve as EUSBSR coordinators – but they are still inadequate and much more should be done in this respect in each country as well as on macro-regional level.

While the EUSBSR is a strategy of the European Union it is clear that many of the goals can be only addressed in constructive cooperation with non-EU partners in the Region, and in particular Russia. Discussions between the EU and the Russian Federation on finding common understanding and approach in BSR cooperation issues are progressing in good atmosphere, taking also full use of the existence of the Strategy of social and economic development of the North-Western Federal District of the Russian Federation. Also Norway and Iceland have been actively involved in BSR cooperation, which also included partners from Belarus.

Thus, it can be stated that the macro-regional approach has brought added value to the social, economic and regional cohesion of Northern Europe. UBC will actively support the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region so that it will gain more high-level political commitment to ensure that the decisions are followed through as horizontal responsibility of national governments as a whole and at all levels. In addition to national governments, also parliamentarians as well as regional and local decision-makers should be more involved. Much more efforts should be given to informing and mobilizing the public about the goals and practical achievements of the Strategy.

Keeping up the political momentum for years to come is a precondition for the success of EUSBSR. Therefore, the issue of leadership is, as the Commission states, of central importance. UBC, as the leading organization of BSR cities, reiterates its readiness to actively participate in this review process, which will culminate in the 2014 Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea, to be organized in Turku 3 and 4 June, 2014.

The Union of the Baltic Cities thanks the European Commission for the report on the added value of macro-regional strategies. UBC supports its conclusions, which are based on realistic assessment of the current situation and the road travelled so far, and which provide a good basis for further work.

Based on this, the General Conference of the UBC in Mariehamn would like to draw the attention the following in further development of the UBSBSR:

Leading and governing the EUSBSR

Implementation of macro-regional strategies is a long-term process, requiring active engagement of all stakeholders. The goals of the Strategy have been agreed upon as a result of wide, bottom-up consultation and reflect existing priorities of the Baltic Sea Region. Therefore, implementation of the Strategy and its Action Plan should not be seen as some additional burden, to be attended when and if extra resources are available. The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region must be mainstreamed and integrated into day-to-day work.

Stronger political leadership is needed to achieve this mainstreaming. On European level, issues linked to the Strategies should regularly be discussed in relevant sectorial European Councils; important role of European Parliament, original initiator of the EUSBSR, should also be kept in mind. The Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee and their members can significantly contribute to the promotion and success of EUSBSR.

On national level, EUSBSR and its Action Plan should be integrated in all relevant Government policies. This requires political leadership at the highest level. Also Parliaments and parliamen-

tarians should be activated to debate the EUSBSR and its implementation. Government reports, special thematic sessions of various Parliamentary Commissions and oral questions by MP's can all contribute to increased understanding about the potential of EUSBSR.

In order to ensure continued and active commitment to the EUSBSR, regional stakeholders must feel ownership to it, must feel that it is their own process to promote their own goals and interests. This can be achieved by improving the practices of multi-level governance, by ensuring that this principle is fully implemented, without heavy or costly practices. At the same time, functioning of the Strategy coordination functions (PACs and HALs) should be materially supported to ensure that they can pay enough attention to their important tasks.

Communicating the EUSBSR

Communicating the EUSBSR gains in importance, both internally and externally. In addition to measures aimed at ensuring political support, also communication with present and potential stakeholders should be developed. While some countries already have taken active steps in this direction, others are lagging behind. It is important, that each country works out its own EUSBSR Communication strategy and ensures resources for its implementation. In addition to creating up-to-date internet sites on national government level, also communication channels of other stakeholders such as cities, regions, NGOs etc. should be fully utilized.

National EUSBSR foras can prove to be useful for dialogue, match-making and presentation of concrete results, allowing discussion in national language and thus lowering the threshold of participation. Road shows in various cities, meetings with special target groups by representatives of respective line ministries etc can help to expail the potential to stakeholders which have not yet participated in EUSBSR activities. Special attention should be paid to cities (including potential of twin city networks), businesses and their organisations, universities and research institutions as well as with the mass media.

Assigning practical communication and networking tasks to expert organisations outside ministries could be a good and cost-effective solution.

Funding the EUSBSR

Funding of EUSBSR related activities is of central importance. EUSBSR must be incorporated in 2014-2020 programming by providing explicit references in Partnership Agreements as well as in programme texts. All available financial resources, especially transnational programmes but also international financial institutions and national sources, should be mobilised towards EUSBSR implementation. Participation of non EU countries, in particular Russia, should be made earlier and actively promoted, while also seeking to engage them more in co-financing of joint activities.

UBC continues to promote EUSBSR

The UBC Strategy states that the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and its implementation is central in all its plans and activities. In the period of 2013 – 2015, the UBC shall, among others,

- discuss EUSBSR developments in its Board meetings, and encourage its Commissions to take an active part in developing projects and initiatives to implement its goals.
- actively work with the European Commission, the Committee of the Regions as well as the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee ...to promote the EUSBSR and its goals.
- lobby national governments and all relevant decision makers to devote attention to the EUSBSR and its possibilities.
- Continue to work with its BSR partners, such as the Council of Baltic Sea States CBSS, the Baltic Development Forum, BaltMet and others, to develop new initiatives and activities, such as the Baltic Sea Forum for Smart Cities, launched together with the BDF to “break silos” and bring together cities and businesses to find smartm cost-effective solutions for the benefit of our citizens.
- Continue to support practical initiatives to include neighbouring countries and cities in equal cooperation for the benefit of the BSR and its inhabitants, by supporting and participating in joint “across the borders” such as the “Turku process” and the St. Petersburg “Baltic Sea initiative”.
- inform about the state of play of the EUSBSR, its projects and achievements through our enhanced communication activities.

;Mariehamn, 3.10.2013