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Joint position on the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

With reference to the Council conclusions on the review of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), adopted on 15 November 2011, the Baltic Sea Organisations listed below, stressing the importance of the EUSBSR, its role as the first pilot project of its kind and the need to preserve the momentum of its implementation process :

1. welcome the invitation to the European Commission and the Member States concerned to facilitate EUSBSR national coordination committees in order to provide increased effectiveness, more synergy and sustainability of results achieved.

To this end, the following is recommended:

- a. All actors of governance should be considered while facilitating EUSBSR national coordination committees. In order to develop a real multilevel governance system, there should be more focus on involvement of these actors in the overall design and review as well as in each priority areas (where applicable) and in the projects (where relevant).
- b. Local and regional levels should also be given the opportunity to constructively contribute to the formulation of objectives and the actions needed to realise them in relation to the Strategy. Thus, the feeling of the ownership of the Strategy will be improved.

2. welcome the invitation to the member states to consider the EUSBSR objectives in specific development strategies at national level as well as to encourage regional and local authorities to reflect EUSBSR activities in their development strategies where territorially adequate.

To this end, the following is recommended:

- a. The Strategy objectives should be taken into consideration while designing European Territorial Cooperation Programmes for 2014-2020 with the participation of the countries of the Baltic Sea Region so that these programmes become more efficient tools to implement the Strategy.
- b. Given the heterogeneousness of the Baltic Sea Region, the EUSBSR and the instruments financing its implementation, especially the European Territorial Cooperation programmes, should take into consideration diverse development needs of the whole area.
- c. In the Cohesion Policy in the next period, the role of the Strategy should be clarified when it comes to objective 1 and 2 programmes.

- d. Baltic Sea regions should embed the EUSBSR in their own regional action programmes and development strategies.
3. agree that a stable and more effective link needs to be set up between all the EUSBSR implementing stakeholders and administrators of funding sources in order to deepen the dialogue on access to financial solutions, and that cooperation possibilities with the private sector in this regard should be explored.

To this end, the following is recommended:

- a. The EUSBSR approach should be more targeted towards strengthening competitiveness and developing initiatives attractive for the private sector. There is a need for joint public-private platforms in support for European growth initiatives. The EUSBSR and Europe2020 should be closer related and coordinated in relevant areas. Small funding should be earmarked to target pilot projects aiming at exploring new public-private cooperation opportunities in the BSR.
- b. The “Connecting Europe” initiative proposed by the European Commission should be actively promoted in order to support development of physical and digital infrastructure in the BSR

In addition, Baltic Sea Organisations also believe that non-governmental organisations and civil society should be better involved in the EUSBSR implementation set-up, as requested in the report from the European Commission published on 22nd June 2011.

4. welcome the encouragement to the Member States concerned to search for the most relevant instruments and forms of third country involvement in order to tackle challenges in the macro-region effectively.

To this end, the following is recommended:

- a. Baltic Sea Region networks involving relevant regional partners from the third countries, in particular the Russian Federation, should be encouraged and supported in the process. Engaging Russia in the implementation of the Action Plan via the Northern Dimension, the Council of the Baltic Sea States or the Nordic Council of Ministers should be complemented by practical activities of other actors, especially cities, regions, universities, NGO's and private business partners.
- b. European Territorial Cooperation programs are important funding instruments for the EUSBSR implementation. Accordingly, implementation rules for the European Territorial Cooperation and the forthcoming European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) programmes should be unified to support the full participation of partners from the third countries in the implementation of the EUSBSR. It should be stressed that the ENI regulations should be in accord with the ETC practices.

5. welcome the invitation to the Commission to propose a system of realistic and tangible targets and indicators to monitor the implementation of the EUSBSR.

To this end, the following is recommended:

- a. Concerning policies and alignment of funding, strategic quantitative targets should be used to reflect the main coordinative goal of the EUSBSR, e.g. number of EU policies implemented in the Baltic Sea Region.
 - b. Concerning each priority area, qualitative targets should be identified. In order to avoid a duplication of work, reference should be made to existing monitoring and evaluation systems in the respective sectors.
6. welcome the recommendation to jointly develop a "Communication Initiative" improving communication channels between key EUSBSR stakeholders as well as between them and administrators of funding sources, specifically by considering the establishment of an interactive web based tool for sharing experiences and good practices, as well as by continuing the good practice of holding the EUSBSR Annual Forum.

To this end, also the following is recommended:

- a. Communication responsibilities of the Commission, the National Contact Points, Priority Areas Coordinators and Horizontal Action Leaders should be clarified.
- b. Information should be made available on-line for the stakeholders involved in the EUSBSR, including access to documents, publication of newsletters and news of important stakeholder meetings at all levels (MS, EU, sub-regional and NGO etc.).
- c. Such interactive web-based tool should also include information on when the High Level Group (HLG) meets, what the main issues for discussion are and minutes after the meetings should be made available to increase transparency.
- d. All information related to the reviewing of the EUSBSR and updating of its Action Plan should be easily attainable in order to make the process more transparent, which in turn will result in a better involvement of local and regional actors in developing and implementing the Strategy and Action Plan.
- e. The new information strategy should be re-thought in such a way that it provides easy access for all kinds of potential actors to contribute to the EUSBSR implementation. In addition, local organisations and/or groups, should be offered manageable opportunities to support concrete targets in some key areas such as environment. This will broaden the scope of participation and help to promote the common goals.
- f. An exchange service could be established communicating news from all the countries in the Baltic Sea Region, including Kaliningrad, Leningrad Oblast and St. Petersburg, to the general public, all the actors involved in the EUSBSR implementation and those seeking to be part of it in the future.
- g. The task of branding of the Baltic Sea Region should be continued and conducted both internally towards the "Baltic Sea Region citizen" and externally towards the outside world. This process should involve a variety of relevant actors, among others branding specialists and tourist organisations.

Signatures