



10 Questions on the implementation of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)

A survey made by iBSG to its members

Answers were collected during July and end of August 2011

iBSG received 26 contributions

Some results are summed up in this resumé

**The original answers and the resumé will be made available to DG Regio, the Polish EU
presidency**

**This resumé will also be presented in the EUSBSR annual forum in Gdansk 24-26 October
2011**

On behalf of the iBSG

Brussels October 2011

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General

This document is a summary of responses from 26 regional offices or organizations related to the Baltic Sea Region and members of the Brussels based network informal Baltic Sea Group (iBSG). The total amount of contributions was 26. Due to different answering techniques and different functions in relation to EUSBSR the biggest amount of specific answers on an individual question varied from 15 to 17 and these were mostly representing local and regional authorities.

1. What concrete activities have you undertaken to implement EUSBSR?

The EUSBSR has worked as a catalyst and activated regions, especially those which already were prepared for international co-operation. Many organizations think that the EUSBSR has created a clear focus on the Baltic Sea region as an entity of its own. EUSBSR has helped to define common problems which need a joint effort to be solved. It has also helped to define areas with a development capacity to increase inter alia the competitiveness and attractiveness of the area.

Most of the answers confirm that EUSBSR has increased activity on all levels. The strategy has been considered when creating regional strategies (10 strategies within 8 regions out of 17), it has initiated regional conferences and seminars (15 seminars within 7 regions out of 17) or activated projects (26 projects in 9 regions). The most striking observation is the clear difference in activity levels between regions. It seems that some regions have not responded to the EUSBSR at all in their daily businesses, while others are very active.

2. Which financial sources have you used?

Financial support deriving from European territorial cooperation (ETC) seems to be the strongest financial source, of 16 answers 11 had referred to it. Different Interreg programmes were mentioned, although they are not fully aligned with EUSBSR. This is also confirmed in an answer from the Central Baltic INTERREG IV A Programme 2007-2013. It is stated that the EUSBSR relevance of a project application is now included in the application format, but not a formal selection criterion. The second strongest financial means came from the regions themselves, for technical reasons often coinciding. State resources and ERDF were also mentioned as supplementary sources. It is striking result that few organizations mentioned in their answers the involvement of private funding:

ETC	11/16
Regional resources	10/16
ERDF	4/16
State resources	4/16
Private	4/16
FP7	1/16
ESF	1/16

3. Which funds have helped you the most when implementing EUSBSR?

The most helpful funding systems according to 16 answers were the following:

Interreg	10/16
ERDF	6/16
Domestic sources	4/16
ESF	3/16
ENPI	1/16
FP7	1/16

No quantitative measures were asked for concerning these funding systems, but in certain cases good availability of cohesion money and consequent alignment of the regional programming has enabled some actors to implement a huge amount of projects closely related to EUSBSR.

4. Which are your proposals to improve the implementation of EUSBSR?

The most important conclusion that can be drawn from this survey is that multilevel governance should be improved. Altogether 12 out of 26 questionnaires stated that they could see an improvement in the communication, cooperation and coordination between regions, national governments, and the European Commission. One recurring proposal is to strengthen the National Contact Points or introduce an official body that is in charge of the implementation.

Secondly, answers from the questionnaires suggest that the funding mechanisms available for the implementation of the EU - Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region should be better aligned in the future. Altogether 7 out of 26 participants propose to make cross-border cooperation programs more available to the implementation of macro-regional strategies, e.g. through earmarking a share of the CBC funds for this purpose. Other proposals include introducing an additional budget for the implementation of the horizontal actions as well as simplifying the application process for technical assistance from the European Parliament.

Thirdly, 3 out of 26 participants see need to develop the targets, evaluation methods and the monitoring throughout the implementation.

5. Does your organization have further cooperation goals or plans with other actors within the Baltic Sea Region in the future?

All of the participants want to maintain or even extend their current cooperation activities within the implementation of EUSBSR in the future. To achieve this more extensive cooperation the majority of regions seeks to apply for new territorial cooperation projects or even set up new flagship projects in the EUSBSR action plan. Several regions plan to cooperate with non-EU member states, such as the Russian Federation and Norway in the future.

6. Are there any specific challenges in the future for this kind of cooperation plans? What?

9 out of 26 participant regions are concerned about financing the implementation of EUSBSR in the future. This assessment stems mainly from the fact that the ETC-programs in the current funding phase are depleted and ETC-programs in the next funding period won't be available until 2015. Secondly, regions find it still difficult to involve private actors and private companies in the implementation of EUSBSR.

7. Has your organization had other activities and cooperation directed towards the Baltic Sea Region?

The majority of responses confirm other activities and cooperation towards the Baltic Sea Region. The main countries involved into different cooperation are: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Estonia and Latvia although there are also projects that involve Germany (especially Hamburg), Russia (especially St. Petersburg) and even Belarus.

The main aims of all projects are: promotion of regions, integration among people and institutions, student's exchange programs, researches and cross-border cooperation.

8. Which information channels worked best to get information on EUSBSR?

Most frequently mentioned are: Interact Point Turku, Stakeholder events, internet and websites, personal contact and seminars or conferences.

9. Other thoughts and remarks?

There are only few feedbacks, but they all include different thoughts.

- Horizontal action leaders at local and regional level must have the same financial means as the Priority Area Coordinators.
- It is important to search for goals for the implementation of EUSBSR where impact can be measurable and traceable.
- BSR is often heterogeneous area, the point is to have cooperation in whole Europe while the North part is forgotten.
- Aims to set up concrete measurable targets are a good idea as long, as those targets are easy to handle and add value to the implementation of the EUSBSR.

10. In case you have written a statement or paper on how you implement EUSBSR, would you share it with us? You can attach it to this questionnaire.

- Program's Annual EUSBSR Report 2010
- Contribution from Europe Forum Norra Sverige to the open consultation on EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
- Progress report for PA12
- Report of Hamburg PAC

General conclusions

EUSBSR;

- has generally been welcomed by the regions
- rich and/or politically strong regions have been able to engage themselves more easily than poor regions or regions without strong political commitment towards international co-operation
- all actions are not well adapted for the regions but more for the actors on a national level
- collected a holistic view on the Baltic Sea region and therefore filled an existing gap
- has it really been welcomed by all MS?
- the MLG has been said to be a good working tool to involve all levels in the implementation phase.
- MLG is a new administrative tool, not necessarily accepted and if so, not fully understood by administrations which are used to a more centralized and sectoral thinking
- to be successful MLG is about a two way learning process on all levels and demands a lot of mutual trust, responsibility and commitment on all concerned levels.