



Implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

A position paper developed by European Forum for Northern Sweden and an input to a revision of the Strategy.

European Forum for Northern Sweden (EFNS) is a network comprising local and regional politicians from the four northernmost regions in Sweden, Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland and Västernorrland. The main objective for EFNS is to increase knowledge and awareness about European policy but above all increase the engagement in designing EU-policies that are affecting northern Sweden.

With this position paper EFNS wants to give input to the Commission on a revision of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

1. Reflections on the two first years with EUSBSR

30th October 2009 the European Council adopted the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) as the first strategy for a geographic macro region. During 2010 a strategy for the Danube Region is also adopted and a strategy for the Atlantic Arc is expected during autumn 2011.

EUSBSR was received with a great deal of engagement from stakeholders at different levels also in northern Sweden and the communication with all stakeholders at all levels during the making of the strategy was highly appreciated. A first report of the implementation of the EUSBSR is published by the Commission as a start up process to a possible revision of the EUSBSR during the Polish Presidency 2011. The EUSBSR has been in place for just 2 years and it seems too hasty to draw conclusions that will lead to dramatic changes.

EFNS has supported the idea of macro regions as an important step for developing territorial cooperation and cohesion and sees the 4 strands and the 15 priorities as relevant for the region. Our regions, local authorities and communities are all also contributing to the implementation of EUSBSR and EFNS therefore welcomes the initiative to appoint a task force to develop indicators for measuring the implementation pace of the EUSBSR.

One of the main messages was that no new funds, no new structures and no new legislation should be in place for the implementation of the EUSBSR. Instead existing structures and funds should be more aligned. The alignment of funds has however been hampered by the fact that the implementation of the EUSBSR has been “squeezed” in to the programmes when project activities has been well underway.

From a Swedish perspective it has been valuable that the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth has had a coordinating role for national state agencies and it has been positive the Agency on a regular basis has invited Swedish stakeholders to share their experiences.



2. Recommendations for the future

Without any dramatic changes in the EUSBSR there are a few points that EFNS will draw the attention to; The Northern Dimension, multi level governance, securing the political dialogue and to more deeply involve the Russian Federation in the cooperation.

2.1 The Northern Dimension

EUSBSR is a common strategy for the entire Baltic Sea Region, including the sparsely populated areas in the north and including the cooperation in the Barents Region. EFNS has the strong opinion that the Northern Dimension perspective also for the future is integrated in the EUSBSR.

2.2 Multi level Governance

EFNS pointed out already in its initial reaction to the EUSBSR the need to develop an evolved dialogue between different levels of governance and also with different stakeholders within different levels to secure the implementation of the EUSBSR. It is therefore satisfactory that the both Regional Councils in Västerbotten and Kalmar are appointed to work specifically with developing multi level governance issues in the Baltic Sea Region. Developed methods for multi level governance also contribute to create a transparent implementation structure where the different roles for the Commission, National Contact Points, Priority Area Coordinators and Horizontal Action Leaders can be made clearer. EFNS also like to emphasise the role regional and local actors can have in both leading and taking part in flag ship projects and other projects of strategic interest. Most of these local and regional actors are engaged in different transnational networks that can add important strengths to the EUSBSR.

2.3 Securing the political dialogue

The EUSBSR has not yet achieved the local and regional political priority needed to secure a successful implementation. EFNS has the strong opinion that an increased dialogue on EUSBSR and its contribution to local and regional development is needed and it is also utterly important that local and regional levels feel an ownership of the strategy. EFNS is of the opinion that developed methods for multi level governance are important to secure this kind of dialogue and to create ownership. Without a strong involvement also from local and regional levels the EUSBSR is lacking the most important implementation tools.

2.4 Aligning funds and resources.

When the EUSBSR was introduced the message was the there should be no new funds, no new structures and no new programmes. By aligning the available resources the implementation of EUSBSR should be secured and the targets obtained. This main idea has not really been the focus and EFNS recommends that in coming programming period that the macro regional perspective and territorial cooperation is made visible in all funds and financing sources to demonstrate strong incentives for the implementation of EUSBSR. It is important that the role of the EUSBSR is made clear also in the convergence- and competitiveness programmes for coming programming period. This is also the case for the territorial cooperation programmes; to create more effective tools for the realisation of the targets in the EUSBSR. EFNS does not see a need to change the present division in cross border (A), transnational (B) and interregional (C) strands. EFNS sees the need for an



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interregional cooperation structure, like the C programme, targeted at the Baltic Sea Region to have a simplified system for exchange of experience between the programmes and actors to facilitate a faster spread of best practice.

2.6 Securing cooperation with the Russian Federation

To get the most from the EUSBSR it is very important to secure the involvement of the Russian Federation. As regional actors the partners in EFNS work very focussed with creating a smart, sustainable and inclusive development in the Baltic Sea Region where the cooperation in the Barents area is one important factor. EFNS calls for relevant financing possibilities to involve our Russian partners in the Barents area in a future Kolarctic programme and a Baltic Sea Programme. EFNS also sees the need for a developed congruence on the Swedish side between the Barents cooperation geography and the Kolarctic programme so that Västerbotten region is also involved.

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