EU STRATEGY FOR THE BALTIC SEA REGION

Support to the strategy – involving actors from all Baltic Sea Region Countries
Norwegian regions are actively involved in Baltic Sea Region co-operation – through different Baltic Sea organisations, through participation in cross-border and transnational cooperation programmes (Interreg) and by taking part in projects as well as bilateral cooperation measures. Eastern Norway County Network strongly supports the development of an EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and will like to contribute to the consultation process with some views from the side of Norwegian regions.

Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Area is characterised by multilevel and multidimensional participation as well as by involving actors from both EU and Non-EU countries. States, regional authorities, local authorities, academia, non-governmental organizations, CBC structures and private actors interact in different fields like politics, economy, culture, environment etc.

Norway is closely linked to Baltic Sea Region (BSR) and has taken active part in BSR cooperation on national, regional and local level for many years. Norway is also closely linked to EU through the EEA agreement and supports the economic, social and sustainable development of the BSR among others through the EEA and Norwegian financial instruments. Norway and Norwegian regions have been active in the territorial cooperation programmes and in projects in the Baltic Sea region since many years. The Eastern Norway County Network holds the chairmanship of the BSSSC (Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation) in the period 2006 – 2008.

The EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region needs to our mind to be developed in close cooperation with all Baltic Sea Region Countries – also Norway and Russia as non-EU members. We therefore urge the European Commission to included stakeholders from Norway as well as Russia actively in the process.

The Baltic Sea Strategy should be coordinated across state borders local, regional and state authorities as well as political institutions and the civil society (vertical integration). Improved coordination between sector policies such as business, education, environment, R&D, labour market as well as infrastructure (horizontal integration) will be of outmost importance.

Main focus should to our minds be on:
- Improving the environmental state of the Baltic Sea – implementing the Helcom Baltic Sea Action Plan
- Climate Change – reduce emission from transport on sea and land
- Sustainable energy – focus on renewable energy sources
- Young people – education/knowledge, young entrepreneurship, culture and mobility
- Maritime Safety
1. Making the Baltic Sea Region and environmental sustainable place

Improving the environmental state of the Baltic Sea Region, especially of the sea

The health of the Baltic Sea is seriously damaged due to excessive pollution, such as untreated human waste, agricultural fertilizers, toxic materials, and metals, which have resulted in eutrophication of the Baltic Sea. The Baltic Sea's biodiversity is threatened and the pollution is causing severe damage to the sea, which is an important source of economic, transport and recreational value for the countries along the coast including the catchment areas of Skagerrak/Kattegat.

The Baltic Sea Strategy should be directly linked to the EU Maritime Policy, the EU Marine Directive and support the implementation of the HELCOM Action Plan - an integrated ecosystem-based approach to the management of human activities and to the protection of the whole Baltic Sea area.

Growth opportunities of the region are dependent on a healthy environment. Tourism in the Baltic Sea Region must be based on sustainable principles, as the increasing human activities can harm marine and coastal areas.

Areas of action:

- Initiatives for establishing a structure of BSR coastal zone planning for a healthier water environment with a focus on the large hot spots of pollution on land as well as discharge from small diffuse sources
- Strengthen effective response to environmental disasters
- The Baltic Sea Region as a pilot-testing area for some of the sustainability principles formulated in the report from the Tourism Sustainability Group (TSG)

Sustainable Energy and Climate Change

The access to secure and cost-effective energy is essential for the development of the Baltic Sea Region. It is vital to promote the development of competitive energy markets, renewable and sustainable energy sources, and an infrastructure of energy production and supply that fosters competition. A more integrated regional energy market will also help solve important questions related to energy security. Greenhouse gases by the energy sector must be considerably reduced over a number of years. The use of renewable energy and other environmentally friendly types of energy must therefore continue to grow.

The Baltic Sea regional authorities play an important role in the solutions to combat climate change as their tasks include public transport, transport infrastructures, energy production and networks, physical planning, energy efficiency and communication with the citizens. The Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation, under the Norwegian Chairmanship, launched the idea of joint coordination of activities in the field of energy and climate change. A common platform of nine BSR organisations was endorsed in February 2008. The platform will help the organisations to move in one common direction and avoid duplications in their activities. More information exchange and cooperation is needed in order to speak with one voice when it comes to the European and global challenges in the field of energy and climate change.
**Areas of action:**

- Increase the investment in research, development and demonstration of new energy-efficient and environmentally friendly technologies across the Baltic Sea Region
- Political focus on the provision of stable energy supplies
- The Baltic Sea as a model region for EU’s goals for reducing the overall energy use
- A common strategy to adapt to climate change
- Focus on lowering emissions from transport on sea and land – support to clean ship measures and to development of better rail connections in the BSR and to Europe.

2. Making the Baltic Sea Region a more prosperous place

**Education, knowledge and mobility – especially focus on young people**
The Baltic Sea Region is among one of the world’s most competitive regions. The region is capitalising on its strengths and making the most of its diversity to stimulate innovation, increase the skilled labour force and foster entrepreneurship and investments. It is important to focus on the continued improvement of competences and skills related to the cross-regional strengths in the Baltic Sea Region.

The rising demand for labour and the decline in unemployment rates across the Baltic Sea make it important also to focus on the attraction of foreign labour if the economic growth is to continue. At the same time the Baltic Sea Strategy should also include issues such as integration, equality and demographic change.

**Areas of action:**

- Joint efforts/investments to increase the supply of skills and human capital - focus on young entrepreneurship
- Further development of a mutual system of recognition of especially vocational education
- Improving cross border mobility through procedures of visas issues

3. Making the Baltic Sea Region a more accessible and attractive place to live, work and visit

**Youth, intercultural dialogue and identity building**
In order for the Baltic Sea Region to develop in a harmonious and cohesive way, it is essential that culture and civil society are addressed. Regional cooperation and intercultural dialogue is a contributing factor to the sustainable development of the Baltic Sea States, and to a better functioning of democratic institutions and the efficient promotion of human rights, including gender equality issues, the rights of the child and the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

Improving the intercultural dialogue is a precondition for an improved social and economic integration, characterised by respect for cultural diversities, improved co-existence and encouraging to an active European citizenship based on openness to the globalised world and on common values.
The intercultural dialogue is an part of our youth cooperation as well as in education and lifelong learning, culture, citizenship, sport, gender equalities, employment, labour market, social inclusion, migration, media policies and human rights issues. Developing and (re)building the Baltic Sea area’s regional identity demands continuous communication and dialogue on all levels between both internal and external partners.

Areas of action:
- More cross-border cooperation between schools, academies and other educational institutions
- Increased youth mobility and exchange activities, including use of the European Voluntary Service for young people
- More focus on cultural diversities and intercultural dialogue in cooperation on migration policies and programmes for labour mobility and entrepreneurial cooperation
- Initiatives to promote the Baltic Sea Region to internal and external partners and regions

Transport and infrastructure
An important element in making the Baltic Sea region competitive and ensure economic growth is a coherent transport system as well as an effective and sustainable infrastructure. Accessibility within and between the countries in the region is essential both in relation to economic growth and development as well as the domestic and foreign trade opportunities. Also import/export from Asia has great potential for further development in the region.

The key tasks are better use of existing transport infrastructure (e.g. better logistics, better intermodality) removing certain bottlenecks, better connecting transnational and regional networks, paying more attention to specific elements of BSR transport system such as rail, air and ferry transport and ports. Improving the control function of transports and developing an early warning system against accidents is needed.

Areas of action:
- Support of strategic initiatives and projects aiming at improved cooperation between all modes of transport in competitive and sustainable logistic chains – integrating the TEN-T corridors and the Motorways of the Sea in the Baltic Sea Region by East-West as well as North-South links.
- Integration of the legal and administrative transport conditions in the region
- Development of the physical land and sea infrastructure – especially railroad.

4. To make the Baltic Sea Region a safe and secure place

Maritime safety
The development of a Baltic Sea Strategy should be closely connected to the implementation of the EU’s Integrated Maritime Policy as an integrated, inter-sectoral approach to the maritime policy in the Baltic Sea Region is necessary. The region can be promoted as a maritime best practice region in Europe and globally due to not only the unique geographic conditions but also the experiences with joint approaches to the challenges of maritime transport in the Baltic Sea.
Areas of action:
- Bringing together the maritime stakeholders and actors of the region in order to coordinate the implementation process of the European Maritime Policy in the BSR
- Measures to intensify the monitoring of ships movement in the Baltic Sea
- Support to projects strengthening maritime safety in general as well as education within maritime transport and safety and security.

Northern Dimension Policy Framework
The Northern Dimension offers a special platform for cooperation between the European Union, Norway, Iceland and Russia, and this cooperation is vital to the further development of the Baltic Sea Region. The Northern Dimension activities should complement a Baltic Sea Strategy, in order to provide a common approach of all Baltic Sea actors to mutual objectives and challenges.

Areas of action:
- Integration of the Baltic Sea Region can be further strengthened by emphasising and utilising the knowledge and experiences from CBC structures to reduce cross border barriers
- Since the regional and local levels are the practical actors in the implementation of most of the measures followed by the Northern Dimension a “regional dimension” inside the Northern Dimension should be created
- The inclusion of a “maritime strand” in the action plan of the Northern Dimension to tackle common problems of the Baltic Sea and to make the Baltic Sea Region a maritime model region

Governance
The Baltic Sea Region consists of many different organisations and actors, but it is only through joint efforts and cooperation that the region will fully develop its potential. All levels need to be included in the implementation process to ensure the anchoring of the strategy. Local and regional authorities have extensive experience with implementation of other EU-strategies and also private actors can play an important role in the implementation process.

The Eastern Norway County Network underline the necessity to make a strategy that not only points to the needed actions as such but also name the responsible authorities and institutions and the method of implementation. A plan for implementation of the Baltic Sea Strategy is essential in order to specify the roles and responsibilities of the different actors in the region and thus make the strategy effective and relevant. The strategy should also include a timetable. Norwegian regions will be happy to make their contributions to a successful implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.