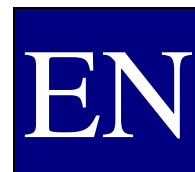




**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Council conclusions on the review of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

*3125th GENERAL AFFAIRS Council meeting
Brussels, 15 November 2011*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

1. RECALLING the Commission's Communication on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) of 10 June 2009 ENDORSED by the General Affairs and External Relations Council of 28 October 2009 and the European Council of 30 October 2009.
2. RECAPITULATING the European Council conclusions of 30 October 2009 calling on the European Commission (hereinafter: the Commission) to submit to the Council the progress report by June 2011 and RECALLING the Commission's Interim Report on the EUSBSR of December 2010 indicating that: "*The political discussions foreseen under the Polish Presidency of the EU Council in the second half of 2011 will constitute an opportunity for a more fundamental review of the Strategy.*"
3. WELCOMING the Commission's Report on the Implementation of the EUSBSR of 22 June 2011 that constitutes the basis for the present Conclusions.
4. RECALLING extensive debates on EUSBSR implementation as well as the review related consultations conducted within the framework of Polish Presidency of the Council and WELCOMING the commitment of the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions, representatives of Baltic Sea regions as well as other interested stakeholders.

P R E S S

5. RECOGNISING that an overall assessment of macro-regional strategies is to be undertaken by the Commission in mid-2013¹.
6. STRESSES that the EUSBSR constitutes an integrated framework to address common challenges in the macro-region benefiting from strengthened co-operation between its stakeholders and that it is contributing to economic, social and territorial cohesion of the EU.
7. REITERATES that the Strategy is based on the principle of no new EU funds, no additional EU formal structures and no new EU legislation, while relying on a coordinated approach, synergy effects and more effective use of the EU and other financial instruments and funds.
8. STRESSES that successful implementation of the EUSBSR for the benefit of the macro-region requires involvement of all Baltic Sea States as well as relevant stakeholders at transnational, regional and local levels, following a multi-level governance approach.
9. RECOGNISING the contribution to date of the EUSBSR implementation experience towards achieving common EU goals as well as towards addressing the shared challenges of the macro region, it ACKNOWLEDGES the need to make the Strategy more effective and result oriented for further attaining the Strategy objectives and therefore ENDORSES the following recommendations resulting from the Commission's Report on the Implementation of the EUSBSR as well as from consultations with relevant stakeholders. Based on this, the Council:

Political commitment

- a) CALLS on the Member States concerned to intensify actions to further enhance existing political support for EUSBSR implementation at all levels (EU, national, regional, local), particularly by making the EUSBSR a reference point for all adequate fora.
- b) RECOGNISES the territorial dimension of the EU sectoral policies and therefore the need to include the EUSBSR on the agenda of the Council in its different formations as and when appropriate in order to promote effective involvement of, and closer links to, relevant EU policies in the Strategy implementation.

Integrated approach, coordination of policies and alignment of funding

- c) INVITES the Commission and the Member States concerned to follow an integrated approach to the EUSBSR by strengthening coordination between policies with a territorial impact and thematically relevant to the EUSBSR at EU and national level² and to closer align the Strategy with the Integrated Maritime Policy and the Europe 2020 Strategy, also with facilitation of EUSBSR national coordination committees in order to provide increased effectiveness, more synergy and sustainability of results achieved.

¹ General Affairs Council Conclusions on the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) of 13th April 2011.

² Such as environment, transport, agriculture, fishery, maritime spatial planning, innovation, research and development, information and communication technologies, climate action etc.

- d) INVITES the Commission and the Member States concerned to better align existing sources of funding in the macro-region with the EUSBSR objectives. INDICATES, without prejudice to the results of the negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial

Framework, that future alignment of funding should be facilitated in the new 2014-2020 programming period, inter alia by taking account of the EUSBSR when designing programmes, including the transnational, national and regional ones and those with third country involvement, where appropriate and with respect to subsidiarity principle.

- e) INVITES the Commission and the Member States concerned to cooperate on enhancing possibilities to create EUSBSR projects' pipelines and to consider the possibilities for establishing the Implementation Facility framework in cooperation with international financial institutions as a means to support the preparation of key EUSBSR projects based on a thorough needs analysis coordinated by the European Commission.

Governance

- f) INVITES the Commission to strengthen its role in EUSBSR strategic coordination, in facilitation of information flows internally and towards Member States and in safeguarding an added value of the macro-regional concept. ENCOURAGES the Commission to reinforce the role of the EUSBSR High Level Group, meeting on a regular basis, as the main operational forum for key steering debates and INVITES all Member States to actively take part in its sessions.
- g) INVITES the Member States concerned 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.
- h) INVITES the Member States concerned to explore the potential of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation as a tool for the Strategy implementation at appropriate levels.

Clarification and strengthening roles of key stakeholders

- i) UNDERLINES the need for cooperation between the Commission and the Member States concerned on clarifying the roles and responsibilities of key EUSBSR implementing stakeholders¹ in order to provide transparent guidance on their functions and facilitate their work on strategy implementation as more efficient. At the same time, the Council RECOGNISES the need to strengthen the roles of National Contact Points in national coordination as well as Priority Area Coordinators and Horizontal Action Leaders in thematic and transnational implementation.

¹ National Contact Points (NCPs), Priority Area Coordinators (PACs), Horizontal Action Leaders (HALs), Flagship Project Leaders (FPLs).

- j) **UNDERLINES** the need to set up a stable and more effective link between the key EUSBSR implementing stakeholders and administrators of funding sources, in order to deepen the dialogue on access to financial solutions and **STRESSES** that cooperation possibilities with the private sector in this regard should be explored.
- k) **ENCOURAGES** the key EUSBSR implementing stakeholders, the Commission and the Member States concerned to continuously ensure their own adequate internal capacity in order to undertake their work.

Monitoring system and introducing targets and indicators

- l) **INVITES** the Commission to report every two years on the EUSBSR progress and results achieved, including reference to the contribution of relevant sectoral policies.
- m) **INVITES** the Commission to propose by early 2012 a system of realistic and feasible targets and indicators (quantitative and qualitative), worked out in cooperation with Member States concerned, taking into account targets and indicators already set by multilateral cooperation structures in the macro region, i.a. HELCOM (Helsinki Commission) and the need to avoid unnecessary duplication. **RECOGNISES** that this will strengthen monitoring of the EUSBSR and provide a basis for a comprehensive evaluation system aimed at the Strategy becoming more operational and result oriented. The Council therefore **WELCOMES** the works of the EUSBSR Task Force on Targets and Indicators.

Improving communication system and visibility

- n) **RECOMMENDS** the Commission and Member States concerned to jointly develop a "Communication Initiative"¹ improving communication channels between key EUSBSR stakeholders as well as between them and administrators of funding sources, i.a. by considering the establishment of an interactive web based tool for sharing experiences and good practices, resulting in better access to funding information, increased partners' matching and projects' clustering.
- o) **ENCOURAGES** the Member States concerned and the Commission to increase efficiency of information dissemination and promotion of EUSBSR activities as well as to foster communication channels towards wider public of the macro-region, stimulating involvement of a broad range of actors at various levels.
- p) **RECOMMENDS** that the Commission continues the good practice of holding the EUSBSR Annual Forum to provide a stable platform for debates on progress, results, challenges and solutions for implementation between a wide range of actors at all possible levels.

¹ Commission's Report on the Implementation of the EUSBSR of 22 June 2011.

Integration with multilateral structures and links with the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

- q) INVITES the Member States concerned to look for synergy effects between the EUSBSR and multilateral cooperation structures and networks within the Baltic Sea Region¹ as well as with international financial institutions through better coordination and effective use of communication channels and fora related to EUSBSR and Baltic Sea Region to provide increased efficiency of intervention within macro region.
- r) ENCOURAGES the Member States concerned and the Commission to strengthen links between the EUSBSR, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and possible future macro regional strategies by securing exchange of experiences and good practices, leading to increased quality of implementation solutions for those strategies as well as to added value in strengthening European territorial cohesion, including i.a. coherence in implementing the infrastructure and energy projects.

Cooperation with third countries

- s) WELCOMES cooperation with interested third countries in EUSBSR projects and initiatives of mutual interest and ENCOURAGES 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. Specifically, the Northern Dimension, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Nordic Council of Ministers and HELCOM should serve as cooperation platforms, involving relevant partners, in particular the Russian Federation.
10. CALLS on the Member States concerned and the Commission to incorporate the recommendations listed above into the EUSBSR implementation practice in the course of 2012. CALLS on the European Commission to review the EUSBSR in the light of the above recommendations by early 2012 and to assure the review of the EUSBSR Action Plan shortly thereafter. UNDERLINES that the scope of implementation of these recommendations should be reflected in the overall assessment of macro-regional strategies and evaluation of their added value by the Commission in 2013."

¹ Such as Northern Dimension, Council of the Baltic Sea States, Nordic Council of Ministers, HELCOM, VASAB (Visions and Strategies around Baltic Sea), Baltic Sea States Sub regional Cooperation.