



# EU STRATEGY FOR THE BALTIC SEA REGION – ONE YEAR ON

The publication in October 2010 of the first annual report on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUBSRS) provides an excellent opportunity for examining what has been achieved so far and for considering the way forward.

Having a direct impact on over 100 million people in eight Member States, the Strategy is crucial for the well-being of almost one-fifth of the EU's population. We examine its origin, its goals and how it sets about meeting them. We also take a look at four projects which, although in their infancy, provide a window on how the region's needs are being addressed and its ambitious targets met.





## HOW DID IT COME ABOUT?

The degradation of the Baltic Sea, and a range of issues including vulnerable energy supplies and potentially hazardous shipping conditions, became so pressing that in December 2007 the Member States asked the European Commission to come up with a strategy to deal with the region's imperatives. The Commission's Directorate-General for Regional Policy steered the discussion process, which included intensive public consultation, and in October 2009 the European Council endorsed the strategy.

No one country can deliver these alone and so, for the first time, a strategy that covers a macro-region is up and running. But the work goes on beyond the EU: the Northern Dimension, a common policy of the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland, provides the basis for external cooperation.

An Action Plan sets out what is to be done, outlining 80 projects, covering 15 priority areas which are kicking off to address the four challenges outlined above (referred to as 'pillars'). One year in and the Strategy's cross-sectoral, cross-border framework is already producing results. Considering just the environmental challenges, results include: BalticDEAL, working with farmers to stop nitrates seeping into the sea; BALTADAPT, paving the way for a climate change plan; InnoShip, using innovation to reduce ship and port emissions; and CleanShip, which, among other ambitions, aims to introduce a 'Clean Baltic Sea Shipping' flag that certified ships will be able to fly.

## WHAT'S COVERED?

Four key challenges, which affect the region as a whole, have been identified, along with the steps that need to be taken to alleviate them.

### THESE ARE:

- > **To promote a sustainable environment**
  - > Reduce nutrient inputs
  - > Preserve biodiversity
  - > Cut back use of hazardous substances
  - > Promote clean shipping
  - > Mitigate and adapt to climate change
- > **To enhance the region's prosperity**
  - > Cut red tape and help people move around to work
  - > Boost research and innovation
  - > Promote entrepreneurship
  - > Make forestry, agriculture and fisheries sustainable
- > **To increase accessibility and attractiveness**
  - > Secure energy markets
  - > Improve transport links
  - > Make the region an attractive place for residents and tourists
- > **To ensure safety and security in the region**
  - > Focus on maritime safety
  - > Cut back cross-border crime
  - > Work on protection from maritime and land disasters

## SHARED KNOW-HOW FOR A SHARED VISION

No new institutions, no new funding and no new legislation – the Strategy is a light, flexible framework that makes the most of existing cooperation and resources in the most effective way possible. It establishes what the key needs are, identifies what activities should be supported in response, strengthens existing legislation and institutions, and makes funds go as far as possible. It means that, for example, fledgling sea rescue services in Estonia can work with their Finnish counterparts across one of the busiest shipping channels in the world – it's about pooling know-how to make the region work.





## SO WHO'S DOING WHAT?

In close partnership with other elements of the Commission, DG Regional Policy is in charge of day-to-day coordination; it monitors progress and reports back to a Council High-level Group responsible for broader policy development.

On the ground, the eight member countries involved have National Contact Points which work with each other to implement the Strategy.

The Plan outlines 15 priority areas concentrating on the environment, prosperity, accessibility, and safety and security. Each priority area has a Coordinator responsible for action and getting the flagship projects up and running. From the Nordic Council of Ministers to farmers' organisations, the projects are being run by people who want results. The Strategy focuses the attention of policy-makers and other bodies – offering a framework for effective action.

## WHERE'S THE MONEY COMING FROM?

The Strategy mobilises money from existing sources such as Structural and Cohesion Funds and other EU funding, e.g. research and environment funding. Other than the EU there are also national, regional and local sources and funding from banks, international financial institutions and NGOs. The actions and projects outlined in the Strategy are then matched to existing funding.



## FLAGSHIP PROJECTS STARTING UP

### BALTIC CRUISING – PROVIDING WELCOME REVENUE BUT UNWELCOME WASTE

Cruise ships and ferries provide vital services but generate a lot of oily water from machine spaces, sewage and garbage. As things stand, major ports on the Sea still do not have the facilities needed to process this waste water, so it is discharged untreated. A flagship project promotes measures to collect ship-generated waste through free port reception facilities.

Helsinki, Stockholm and St. Petersburg have already arranged facilities. When the remaining large passenger ports of Tallinn, Rostock, Copenhagen, Riga and Gdynia also agree to make the necessary investments, 95% of cruise ship and ferry sewage discharge will be avoided. 2015 is the deadline for reviewing this project.

### CLEANER FARMING – AVOIDING AGRICULTURAL RUN-OFF

One of the biggest dangers facing the Baltic Sea is eutrophication (lack of oxygen). This happens when large algal blooms cover areas of the Sea, suffocating marine life in the process. The blooms are often caused by agricultural nutrients, like nitrates, which run off the fields into water courses that find their way to the Sea. These often expensive fertilisers, aimed at boosting crop growth, end up feeding algae.

A flagship project aims to put best practices in agriculture to work by improving agri-environmental services and information activities which target farmers and their advisors. One suggestion is to set up a network of specialist advisors on environmental issues and agriculture from all Baltic Sea countries.

### THE BALTIC SCIENCE LINK

Pooling access to research infrastructure and improving networks is needed to help the region move further to the forefront of innovation. A flagship project establishes links between industry, universities and research institutes throughout the region. The goal is to organise exchange programmes and deepen cooperation that could lead to joint ventures and investment.

### PROMOTING BIOENERGY IN THE REGION

This flagship project makes the region's use of bioenergy sustainable, competitive and integrated by emphasising a joint effort across the region to boost use of renewables and generate more cross-border cooperation.

Good practices will be chosen among 44 pilot-studies in order to promote bioenergy at a regional level. Meetings with businesses will also be held in order to increase trade of bioenergy among countries around the Baltic Sea.



## REACHING THE WIDER PUBLIC

Letting the people of the region know what is under-way is vital: public opinion can help keep authorities focused and motivated. DG Regional Policy has developed the EUSBSR website, launched a bimonthly newsletter and published a Background and Analysis brochure to make sure people are in the know.

## WHERE WE ARE UP TO NOW...

All the Priority Area coordinators are in place and connections have been made between people and organisations that share common goals across the region. New ways for people to meet and discuss common issues have been established. A number of key projects have started.

## ... AND WHERE WE ARE GOING

Strong political involvement is necessary. Every opportunity is being used to get leaders talking on the subject: meetings of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Baltic Development Forum and new events are all being harnessed to keep the impetus high and the Strategy in the spotlight.

There will be a fundamental review of the Strategy under the Polish Presidency of the European Council in the second half of 2011.

## MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGIES, THE WAY AHEAD?

It is clear that the one key element in a macro-regional strategy is resulting action. Strategies that consist of words in documents, and nothing more, will not achieve their objectives.

This Strategy and its ideas have generated interest in applying a macro-regional approach to other parts of the EU such as the Danube basin.

