



## Welcome by Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for Regional Policy



Dear readers.

Since November 2009, the European Commission and national and regional actors from across the Baltic Sea Region have been joining their efforts to achieve a greener, more prosperous, accessible and safe region. Seven months on, results are starting to show. As the Commissioner responsible for this new macro-regional approach, it is important to me that information about ongoing developments are made available swiftly and widely. It is with this aim in mind that I am pleased to welcome you to the first newsletter for the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

This bimonthly newsletter aims to keep you updated on what is happening: it provides information about results on the ground, about new projects and key policy developments, and about public events. In this first edition, you will find background information about the Strategy, a snapshot view on status so far, and a one paragraph introduction to a Priority Area. Your comments and ideas are very welcome: [regio-eu-baltic-sea-strategy@ec.europa.eu](mailto:regio-eu-baltic-sea-strategy@ec.europa.eu).

## Background information



The EUSBSR was adopted by the Commission in June 2009 and endorsed by the European Council in October 2009. The overall roles and responsibilities of the multiple actors involved in the Strategy are described in the joint declaration signed by ministers from the eight EU Member States of the Baltic Sea Region in Stockholm in September 2009, and in the General Affairs Council Conclusions adopted on 27 October 2009.

The Declaration and Conclusions confirm the strong commitment by the Member States to the implementation of the Strategy. The Commission is invited to coordinate, to facilitate, to disseminate and to report on the actions undertaken by the Member States and the associated stakeholders, in accordance with the subsidiarity principle. The Strategy documents and more information about its preparation and the implementation process can be found on the EUSBSR website: [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/cooperation/baltic/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/baltic/index_en.htm).

In May, the Commission published the comprehensive background analysis of the Baltic Sea Region that served as inspiration during the design of the Strategy. By setting out main strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats, the document serves to underline the rationale for the EU macro-regional strategy. It can be downloaded from the EUSBSR website.

### **Where are we right now**

In the seven months that have passed since the EUSBSR was endorsed by the Council the focus has been on laying solid foundations for its implementation. Today, the Coordinators for each Priority Area have assumed their responsibilities, kick-off meetings have been held, and steering groups and other supporting structures have been established. A large number of project leaders and partners are now working hard to provide concrete results on the ground. There has been great stakeholder participation throughout the Strategy process, ensuring that the work undertaken reflects the priorities of the Region. The services of the Commission are also actively participating in the different activities, giving support and advice.

### **Updated Action Plan**

Important developments have taken place since the adoption of the Commission's Action Plan in June 2009. Most importantly, the Priority Area Coordinators have taken ownership of their areas and we have all gained valuable experience. This process has made it possible to see how the Action Plan could be made even more operational and relevant. As a result, a number of updates have been considered and discussed with the Coordinators, the Commission services and the High Level Group of Member State officials. The result of this exercise now constitutes the 2010 version of the Action Plan. This Action Plan has now been translated into the languages of the Baltic Sea Region countries.

## **Alignment of funding**

A meeting concerning the alignment of funding with the EUSBSR took place in Riga on 11 March 2010, with participants from the Managing Authorities of the Structural Funds programmes and EUSBSR Priority Area Coordinators. At the meeting, the Commission was asked to draft a reference document on labelling, selecting, financing and reporting on projects. The resulting document aims to give clarifications and advice in order to help Managing Authorities and their partners in the implementation of their programmes. On the request of the Member States, the Commission is also arranging follow-up meetings at national level to elaborate on these issues.

The Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Lithuania is hosting a half-day international own-initiative workshop on 31 May focusing on “Implementing the EUSBSR”. This pre-meeting to the Baltic Development Forum 2010 in Vilnius aims to bring together Structural Funds Managing Authorities in the region and other actors involved in facilitating the use of EU funding. Together with the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Ministry has invited speakers who will discuss different aspects of the EUSBSR’s horizontal action regarding flexible funding.

## **Priority area in focus: To improve internal and external transport links (PA 11)**



The Priority Area on transport has as its main aim to overcome the transport bottlenecks that are still, 20 years after the end of the Cold War, hampering the flow of goods among countries in the region. One way of achieving this is better coordination of infrastructure and transport planning. The work coincides with the update of the EU's TEN-T Guidelines that has just been initiated, and there is a strong link between the two processes. Priority Area 11 also focuses on achieving smarter transport through a better interaction between different modes of transport, like rail, road and sea. It is coordinated jointly by Lithuania and Sweden - full contact details can be found on the EUSBSR website.



This agenda is for the convenience of readers. Events listed here are not necessarily endorsed by the European Commission and are the responsibility of the respective organisers.

**31 May**

Implementation of the EUSBSR. Seminar organised by SIDA and the Lithuanian Ministry of Finance at the Holiday Inn from 1 pm to 4:30 pm (Vilnius, Lithuania)

**1-2 June**

Baltic Development Forum - Annual Summit (Vilnius, Lithuania)

**29 June**

Realising the EUSBSR through Nordic-European synergies in cooperation. Seminar co-organised with the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Informal Baltic Sea Group. Please follow link (click on the date) for details about registration. (Brussels, Belgium)

**13-14 October  
2010**

XVIII Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Co-operation (BSSSC) Annual Conference 2010: "Qualifying the Region for the Future - Implementing the EU Baltic Sea Strategy" (Tallinn, Estonia)

**14-15 October  
2010**

Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region - save the date! (Tallinn, Estonia)