



SUOMEN ITÄMERI-INSTITUUTTI
THE BALTIC INSTITUTE OF FINLAND

Contribution of the Baltic Institute of Finland to the preparation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

The Baltic Institute of Finland in brief

The Baltic Institute of Finland is one of Finland's leading collaborative bodies for the Baltic Sea region and nearby areas. Since its launch in 1994, the institute has promoted collaboration in the Baltic Sea region and contributed actively to the international network of collaborators in the Baltic Sea region.

The central aim of the Baltic Institute of Finland is to promote the launch of tangible collaboration projects in the Baltic Sea region and to facilitate the participation of Finnish organisations in these initiatives. The Baltic Institute of Finland is a network-based organisation, and its principal focus is on planning and coordinating tangible collaborative projects and maintaining an extensive network of collaborators in the Baltic Sea region. In 2007 and 2008 alone, the institute has coordinated more than twenty collaborative projects in the Baltic Sea region and organised dozens of events in the Baltic Sea region and in Brussels.

The institute's geographical operating area covers the entire Baltic Sea region – the Nordic Countries, the Baltic States, Northwest Russia and the northern parts of Poland and Germany. As for the scope of activities, the key themes featured in the institute's projects include the development of the information society, environmental cooperation and the promotion of innovation and export.

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, which is currently under development, marks a significant step in Baltic Sea-related collaboration, and the institute hopes to have input on the planning process from the perspective of tangible collaborative projects in the Baltic Sea region. The institute has kept a close eye on the preparation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region since its conception in the 2005; the *'Strengthening the EU Agenda for Baltic Sea Cooperation'* seminar, held at the European Parliament in November 2005, is a good example of this (for more information on the seminar, please see http://www.baltic.org/events/previous_events/2005/).

For more information on the Baltic Institute of Finland, please visit our website at www.baltic.org.

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region – project facilitator's perspective

The key focus areas of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region – the environment, economic development, accessibility and attractiveness, safety and security – are directly linked to each other and should not be approached as separate entities. All of these considerations should be factored into collaborative projects in the Baltic Sea region – for example, the environmental challenges facing the Baltic Sea region and the related environmental collaboration can also be seen as opportunities for environmental business, technology and project exports. The strategy should aim for more efficient coordination of the different initiatives and European, Nordic and other funding instruments so as to enable collaboration and interaction between different projects and themes, and to avoid overlaps. Strategic planning should be based on the knowledge and experiences of existing collaborative

networks.

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and EU funding

The scattered nature of the current funding programmes is a major obstacle for the strategic and comprehensive development of the Baltic Sea region. Only one of the EU funding programmes included in the current programming period of 2007–2013 – the Baltic Sea Region Programme – addresses the collaborative aims and development needs of the entire region and also covers the objectives of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region in terms of its focus areas. The Baltic Sea region is divided into numerous cross-border cooperation zones the boundaries of which are often artificial. The majority of EU funding is currently targeted at these cross-border cooperation projects that only benefit a small proportion of the interested parties.

One of the most important objectives of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region must be to ensure that during the next programming period, appropriations from the funds for European Regional Cooperation are targeted at development projects that benefit the entire Baltic Sea region and that the focus is on transnational cooperation programmes. The strength of the small countries and the small sub-regions of the Baltic Sea region lies in the strong networks and collaborative structures that stretch across the entire region – not in the various isolated cross-border cooperation zones. The Baltic Sea region must be seen as a macro-area, a single homogeneous zone for regional cooperation. The ENPI component also gives Russia an important role in this collaboration.

Innovation-related collaboration, which is a key focus area of EU funding programmes, is a major factor as regards the region's economic and environmental cooperation. The Baltic Institute of Finland has just launched a new project fostering the competitiveness of the Baltic Sea region, and increasing recognition of the Baltic Sea region as an attractive and dynamic macro region in the EU. The project "*BSR InnoReg: Strengthening Innovation Governance in Baltic Non-metropolitan Regions through Transnational Cooperation*" was approved in the 1st call of the EU Baltic Sea Programme 2007-2013. BSR InnoReg aims to develop competitive innovation environments in Baltic Sea Region medium sized regions. The project partners include regional and local authorities and development organizations representing 19 organizations in seven Baltic Sea Region countries. BSR InnoReg will be implemented during 2009-2011 with a total budget of approximately 2,4 million euros. The Baltic Institute of Finland is the Lead Partner of the project.

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region should also factor in the significance of research and education collaboration for promoting the region's development and innovation. Research and education collaboration in the Baltic Sea region is still relatively undeveloped despite the many cutting-edge universities that operate in the region. Further goals should include promoting the movement of students and skilled labour both within the region and from the outside by increasing the region's attractiveness, and facilitating the employability and relocation of foreign professionals through tangible projects.

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and Russia

Tying Russia more closely to Baltic Sea-related collaboration is critical to the development of the entire region. Cooperation with Russia should be a natural element of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, and not seen as a tangential factor. The strengthening of the Baltic Sea region hinges on the Baltic Sea cooperation of the European Union and on Russia having a strong Baltic Sea policy of its own as well as on securing considerably stronger commitment and economic investment than what currently exists. However, the long-term development of comprehensive collaborative structures that cover the entire Baltic Sea region – since the 1970s as regards HELCOM – is also an important asset in terms of the challenges facing the cooperation between the EU and Russia today. The Northern Dimension Policy does not come even close to covering all of the focus areas of the Baltic Sea

collaboration and strategy, which is why it cannot be relied upon to address the Russia dimension of the Baltic Sea policy of the EU.

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is being prepared at an interesting time, as the EU policies and collaboration of other European macro regions are also under active development. The increased co-ownership and improved institutional governance between the EU Member States and non-EU countries on the southern borders of the Mediterranean Sea, which are highlighted in the recently ratified Union for the Mediterranean, provides an interesting comparison for the preparation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the deliberation of its Russian dimension.

Cooperation with Russia should also focus on the long term, and good results depend on several years of collaboration. The Baltic Institute of Finland has good tangible experiences of projects where Northwest Russia has participated in multilateral collaborative projects in the Baltic Sea region. The projects have helped to promote the development of an innovation system in St Petersburg, for example, by making use of the experiences of other countries in the Baltic Sea region. Other key themes of projects coordinated by the institute have included the development of an intellectual property rights system and anti-piracy measures in St Petersburg, which will ultimately have a significant impact on economic cooperation with Russia.

Examples of new projects prepared by the Baltic Institute of Finland to support the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

Closer cooperation between the countries of the Baltic Sea region as regards IPR issues (training for SMEs, anti-piracy measures, customs collaboration) is a good example of a collaborative theme that supports the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and combines both economic and security-related objectives. The Baltic Institute of Finland is currently coordinating the preparations of an extensive IPR project for the second call for applications for the Baltic Sea Region Programme of the EU, which will make use of the lessons learned in the course of the *'Enhancing Intellectual Property Rights Competence and Cooperation in St Petersburg, Finland, Denmark and Sweden'* project, which is funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy and coordinated by the institute.

The Baltic Sea region is known as a model area as regards the development of the information society and ICT know-how in Europe. The Baltic Institute of Finland has participated in several successful collaborative projects involving the development of eGovernment and eServices, for example. Some of the projects have been extensive EU initiatives, and some have involved neighbourly cooperation between Finland and Russia in St Petersburg. The information society commission of the Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC), which is coordinated by the Baltic Institute of Finland, has built an efficient network for supporting project preparation and implementation. The institute is currently in the process of preparing an extensive development project for eGovernment between European cities called *'eCitizen II – towards Citizen-centred eGovernment in European Cities and Regions'* for the second call for applications for the Interreg IVC programme of the EU. The participants of the eCitizen II project will include cities and regional governments from all over Europe, and the project is an excellent example of the exchange of best practices and experiences between European macro regions.

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and other European macro regions

Collaboration between European macro regions is a potential future trend in European regional cooperation. The EU's evolving Mediterranean policy and increasing cooperation in the Black Sea region as the EU expands generate increasing interest in the Baltic Sea region and its collaborative models around Europe. The collaborative models introduced in coastal regions have many themes and focus areas in common – as regards the environment, transport or immigration issues, for example – and the different macro regions could benefit from the exchange of best practices and experiences

regarding these. Collaboration between the different macro regions also provides an interest frame of reference for attracting investment and promoting tourism. Cooperation and the branding of the Baltic Sea region are rapidly evolving form of regional cooperation as regards these themes, and it should also be factored into the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

The Baltic Institute of Finland has played an active role in the discourse surrounding the cooperation of European macro regions and networked with the leading developers of collaboration in the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions. In June 2008, the institute co-hosted the prestigious *'Baltic and Mediterranean – Shared Future in Action, a Euro-Mediterranean Gathering under the Midnight Sun'* conference in Tampere, Finland.

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region should specify clear, tangible objectives as well as deadlines, procedures and responsibilities for achieving these. The diversity of the organisations operating in the Baltic Sea region should be considered more as a strength than a weakness. The strategy should strive to intensify interaction between different organisations and to promote increasingly harmonised goal-setting and the development of more extensive and more productive projects and forms of collaboration in the Baltic Sea region.

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