



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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COVER NOTE

from:	Friends of the Presidency Group (European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region)
to:	Coreper/Council
Subject:	Council Conclusions on the completion of the review of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

Delegations will find attached the draft Council Conclusions on the completion of the review of the European Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region as finalised by the Friends of the Presidency Group.

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

"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. **REITERATING** the conclusions of the General Affairs Council of 15 November 2011 calling on the European Commission to review the EUSBSR by early 2012 in light of the recommendations in these conclusions and to assure the review of the EUSBSR Action Plan shortly thereafter.
3. **WELCOMING** the Commission's Communication on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) of 23 March 2012 (hereinafter: the Commission Communication) constituting the basis for the present Conclusions as well as the efforts done by the Member States, regional, local and civil society stakeholders to develop the Strategy in cooperation with the Commission.
4. **RECALLING** the debates and consultations on EUSBSR review conducted within the framework of the Danish Presidency of the Council and **WELCOMING** the commitment of the European Parliament, national parliaments of the Member States concerned, the Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee, representatives of Baltic Sea regions as well as other interested stakeholders.
5. **RECOGNISING** that an overall assessment of the macro-regional strategies and evaluation of their added value is to be undertaken by the Commission in mid-2013.

6. **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 EU and other financial instruments and funds.
7. **RECOGNISING** the contribution of the EUSBSR implementation experience towards achieving common EU goals inter alia completing and deepening of EU internal market and competitiveness, in particular building the missing energy infrastructure links, as well as towards addressing the shared challenges of the macro-region and providing regional implementation of the integrated maritime policy and **ACKNOWLEDGING** the need to make the Strategy more effective and result oriented for further attaining the Strategy's objectives and thus continue its success.

Based on this, the Council:

8. **ENDORSES** the revised EUSBSR as presented in the Commission's Communication with its improved strategic focus, including the three overall objectives which are mutually reinforcing, clarification of responsibilities, alignment of policies, funding and improved communication and **TAKES NOTE OF** 1) the proposed indicators and targets on strategic level¹ and 2) the definition of roles and responsibilities of the main implementing stakeholders² as the current status subject to regular adjustment by the Commission with assistance of the High Level Group.
9. **RECOGNISES** the serious environmental state and fragility of the Baltic Sea Region and **AGREES TO** the objective "Save the Sea", supporting the various efforts to obtain good environmental status of and biodiversity in the sea such as reduction of nutrient inputs and clean shipping and **STRESSES** the importance of regional cooperation, including cooperation with HELCOM, with a view to providing, *inter alia*, for maritime safety and security and facilitating sustainable growth.

¹ See Addendum 1.

² See Addendum 2.

10. **RECOGNISES** the insufficient integration in the Baltic Sea Region and **AGREES TO** the objective "Connect the Region", noting that a deeper regional integration not only relies on a good transport and reliable energy infrastructure but includes important aspects of people to people connectivity and increasing cooperation to combat cross-border crime such as trafficking.
11. **RECOGNISES** the economic disparities and the specific conditions of different Member States in the Baltic Sea Region and **AGREES TO** the objective "Increase Prosperity", recognising that this not only calls for the deepening and fulfilling of the Single Market and the objectives of smart, inclusive and sustainable growth of the Europe 2020 strategy but also includes a wider range of issues ranging from climate change adaptation to the very important social dimension.
12. **RECOGNISES** that the indicators, targets and clearer roles will improve the functioning and monitoring of the EUSBSR and **INDICATES** that the system of indicators and targets should stand as reference point marking the progress by the strategy stakeholders and will provide a basis for a comprehensive evaluation system that will enable the Strategy and its governance structure to become more operational and result oriented.
13. **UNDERLINES** the need for the Member States concerned to align and adjust existing and future sources of funding, including cohesion policy, as outlined in the Commission Communication with view to maximising the impact of the EUSBSR.
14. **EMPHASISES** the benefit for the Baltic Sea Region of reflecting the Strategy in the future programming period 2014-2020 by providing links and interconnections with the policies thematically relevant to EUSBSR at EU and national level.

15. **CALLS** on the Commission and Member States concerned to intensify actions to further enhance existing political support for EUSBSR implementation at all levels (EU, transnational, national, regional, local), particularly by making the EUSBSR a reference point for all adequate fora. **RECOGNISES** the territorial dimension of the EU sectoral policies and 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. **NOTES** the recently declared commitment of the city networks of the Region to the long-term implementation of the Strategy in co-operation with other networks representing various administrative levels of general public powers.
16. **WELCOMES** the proposal of promoting awareness of the Strategy among the wider public of the macro-region and to improve communication channels between key EUSBSR stakeholders as well as between them and administrators of funding sources, *inter alia* by establishing an interactive web based tool for sharing experiences and good practices further developing the on-going work of the Commission and the Member States concerned.
17. **ENCOURAGES** intensification of dialogue between all relevant stakeholders and in particular the private sector in developing and implementing the Strategy and its Action Plan in order to ensure that the Strategy brings added value to them all and thereby engaging them in joint efforts to achieve the objectives of the Strategy.
18. **WELCOMES** all the efforts made so far in cooperation with third countries in the region to attain the objectives of the Strategy as well as the progress in cooperation with Russia and through CBSS³ and **UNDERLINES** the need to further enhancing such cooperation. **TAKES NOTE** of efforts by Russia to strategically address common challenges in the region, in particular the urgent environmental challenges of the Baltic Sea. **INVITES** the Commission to further develop the potential of joint work in these efforts.

³ Discussed *inter alia* at the recent 9th Baltic Sea States Summit in Stralsund, Germany, on 31 May 2012 (see the Presidential Communiqué of the Summit).

19. **INVITES** the Commission to explore in detail how concrete cooperation on Baltic Sea Region Strategy with third countries can further be intensified using e.g. the Northern Dimension Structures, the CBSS, and HELCOM as cooperation platforms.
20. **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 and sea basin strategies by securing exchange of relevant 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 inter alia coherence in implementing infrastructure and energy projects.
21. **NOTES** that the present conclusions mark the end of the review process of the EUSBSR started by the Polish Presidency, which should be followed by a review of the Action Plan to be completed by the end of 2012 and with reflection of the changes agreed upon, including the three new objectives and proposed indicators and targets. **UNDERLINES** the importance to safeguard that all levels, including local and regional as well as non-governmental, are represented in the consultation procedure and to take into account the discussions, reflections and comments made at the Annual Forum in Copenhagen on 18 and 19 June 2012 by the respective stakeholders.
22. **EXPECTS** that this new framework provides an integrated and sustainable contribution to economic, social and territorial cohesion in the Baltic Sea, and to the objectives of smart, inclusive and sustainable growth of the Europe 2020 strategy and the implementation of the integrated maritime policy (IMP)."
