



Contribution from EuropaForum Norra Sverige to the open consultation on EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

EuropaForum Norra Sverige is a co-operation between the local and regional political level in Jämtland, Västernorrland, Västerbotten and Norrbotten in northern Sweden. EuropaForum Norra Sverige expresses a common European voice in EU policy matters for the most northern sparsely populated region in Europe.

EuropaForum Norra Sverige welcomes a strategy for the Baltic Sea Region but want to express our concern over the focus on the southern part of the Baltic Sea Region which we can see from many of the national governments. We see a risk that the view of Baltic Sea Region stops at the capital cities. It is vital that the whole geography of Baltic Sea Region, including the most sparsely populated areas in the north which EuropaForum Norra Sverige represents, is included in the EU strategy for Baltic Sea Region.

EuropaForum Norra Sverige are looking forward to a EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region which will speed up the integration process and co-operation between local, regional, national and EU-level. Let EU Strategy for Baltic Sea Region be a policy which put positive pressure on transnational co-operation in the Baltic Sea Area for the aim of whole Europe. Let EU strategy for Baltic Sea Region be a policy which gives Europe methods for advances and successful transnational implementation of EU policies and regulations with the principle of subsidiarity kept in mind.

EuropaForum Norra Sverige would also emphasis Gender equality and Gender issues in all areas in the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

Northern Sweden is a vital part of the Baltic Sea Region and is a region with strong RnD capacity and a large extent of natural resources contributing to whole EU. Northern Sweden is a region with borders to Norway and Finland and close links to Russia. Northern Sweden has a high extend of border co-operation and integration with our neighbouring regions which today hampers by national non integrated regulations which does not work according to the inner market and a vision of a single Europe.

Please see the contribution from EuropaForum Norra Sverige on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. EuropaForum Norra Sverige has chosen to follow the question asked by the Commission in the open consultation.

Part 1. Key questions on the general framework

What are the main topics to develop?

EuropaForum Norra Sverige thinks the main topics for the EU strategy to develop are better co-operation and strategic transnational planning between national levels, in cooperation with regional level. Today there is for example a crucial need for transnational strategic transport and logistics planning in the Baltic Sea Region. It is important that the ongoing work under the Northern Dimension is integrated with the Baltic Sea Strategy.



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All four themes under the EU strategy for Baltic Sea Region have already a framework of EU and national initiated policies which all have good purposes but which not work properly due to lack of transnational and vertical governance and underdeveloped transnational cooperation. EuropaForum Norra Sverige would therefore put the question of governance on highest agenda and to keep the EU strategy for Baltic Sea Region as an EU-strategy for whole EU (27). The implementation of the policy must therefore be led and followed on EU level by the Commission.

Part 2.

What are the main environmental challenges?

EuropaForum Norra Sverige would like to:

- *Integrate environmental concern in all four objectives of the BSS*

The Baltic Sea is a vulnerable ecosystem and a highly polluted sea. The Helsinki Commission, Helcom, states that almost 90% of the unique and typical biotopes of the Baltic Sea are under some kind of threat. An environment in balance is a precondition to future possibilities and further exploitation of potential of the Baltic Sea Region. Environmental concerns therefore have to be integrated in all of the four objectives of the Baltic Sea Strategy, BSS, and consequences on the environment of proposed measures and actions must be considered.

- *Implement the BSAP and the marine directive*

The environmental threats of the Baltic Sea have been in focus for a long time and the Helcom Baltic Sea Action Plan, BSAP, is a program to tackle these problems with the aim to reach a good ecological status of the Baltic marine environment by 2021. In addition, the European Union adopted the Marine Strategy Framework Directive in June 2008 in order to protect more effectively the marine environment across Europe. It aims to achieve good environmental status of the EU's marine waters by 2021 and to protect the resource base upon which marine-related economic and social activities depend. The BSAP must be carried out and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive implemented in all member states.

- *Acknowledge that the main environmental challenges differs across the Baltic Sea*

In order to tackle the environmental problems it is important to recognize that the environmental threats in the northern parts of the Baltic Sea, Kvarken and the Bothnian Bay, differs from those in the southern parts. Low salinity, land uplift geology and sweet water outlets of numerous rivers all adds to an ecosystem with a low numbers of species and a high sensitivity to disturbances. Different threats need different measures and this must be acknowledged in order to gain a sea in balance all over the Baltic Sea Region.

EuropaForum Norra Sverige thinks the main environmental challenge in Kvarken and Bothnian Bay is hazardous substances. Eutrophication is one of the major environmental



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problems of the Baltic Sea and the external input of nutrients needs to be drastically reduced. However, in the northern Baltic Sea, Kvarken and the Bothnian Bay, the problems with eutrophication are only local. The major threat to an environmentally sustainable Baltic Sea in these areas is the impact of hazardous substances such as heavy metals, toxic organic compounds and dioxins. Although emissions from metal and forest industries in the region have been significantly reduced, there are still high levels of toxins in water and sediments. Many of these substances are long lived, remain in sediments and accumulate in organisms and there are several examples where the levels of toxins in fish are much over recommended limits for food use.

The number of fishermen in northern Sweden is low and the major threat to fish population is regulated rivers. Many of the rivers and creeks with outlets in the Bothnian Bay are regulated due to water power. This causes obstacles in form of dams and turbines which reduce migration, survival and the possibilities to reproduce for migrating salmon populations.

EuropaForum Norra Sverige also would like to focus on another environmental problem, which the northern basin shares with the rest of the Baltic Sea, the introduction of foreign species, both marine and terrestrial. The ecosystem has naturally low species richness and the effects of a foreign species can be a threat to the whole system.

Climate change is already happening and represents one of the greatest environmental, social and economic threats facing the planet and the Baltic Sea Region is no exception. Energy efficiency and the further development and increased use of renewable energy must be the focus of the BSS and action plan. The effect of climate change differs across the Baltic Sea Region. A high degree of forested areas in the region is a potential both for carbon capture but also for the continued development and usage of bioenergies. Climate change is expected to increase rainfall which will lead to higher waters in rivers and creeks in this region. This will in turn result in increased transport of sediments and organic material and a following risk for oxygen depletion.

How are they best addressed?

In order to achieve an environmentally sustainable Baltic Sea Region, EuropaForum Norra Sverige thinks it is necessary with a cross-sector and ecosystem based process including all countries, sectors and relevant actors. A coordinated cooperation between Baltic Sea States also includes the regional and local authorities in the formation and implementation of the BSS and action plan.

The knowledge of what to do is high in most areas so the focus must be on the collaborative process. Language and cultural barriers needs to be acknowledged and efforts to improve communication and exchange of experiences between sectors and countries must be carried out. The dialogue process in the implementation of the Water Framework Directive is a good example of a successful cross-sector and transnational co-operation process from our region.



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What actions are needed and by whom? In order of priority

In addition to the realization of the BSAP and the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, EuropaForum Norra Sverige suggests the following actions:

- Measures to deal with contaminated areas and sediments including surveys and the development of relevant methods must be performed across the Baltic Sea Region including third countries. Businesses, trade and industry responsible for emissions already contribute and finance measures and must continue to do so. In addition, international funding and supervision is necessary.
- Measures to eliminate or overcome obstacles that hinder or reduce migrating fish are necessary to sustain a vital population of migrating salmon. Within the implementation process of the Water Framework Directive management plans and connected action plans are being put forward and can include such measures. Local and regional actors such as communities, hydropower industry and local fishing groups in collaboration should all contribute in these actions.
- The problem with invasive and foreign species on local ecosystems is global. Several different measures depending on species must be considered. Existing legislation and international agreements to manage the release of ballast water must be implemented.

Part 3.

What are the main challenges for the BSR if it is to remain competitive in the future?

The nations and regions in the Baltic Sea Region have different prerequisites and need different types of measures. Common for them all is the need for exchange of knowledge and excellence to stay world class competitive. Sustainable development and the horizontal aspects of equality, environmental issues and integration are also crucial for the development of the Baltic Sea Region. An important aspect is also to support entrepreneurship and SME-development.

The main challenges for the BSR are underdeveloped infrastructural system, both in the capacity on rail and weak east-west connections. Existing trade barriers to neighbouring countries, Norway and Russia, is also a hamper for the development of the Baltic Sea Region. Fulfilling the inner market is also an important challenge to be solved.

A challenge for the BSR is progressive internationalisation of businesses and research and the education on all levels. Therefore international mobility of businesses, students, researchers, experts and labour should be promoted within the EU Strategy for Baltic Sea Region. Make it also easier for actors from third countries to participate in EU-programmes and networks.



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Part 4.

Answers on key questions on “To make the BSR an accessible and attractive place”

Northern Sweden is a powerful global player in the forestry, paper and mining industry. 95% of the total iron mining industry in EU is located in northern Sweden. The high export dependent industry put strong pressure on the freight transport systems on rail and sea and it needs to be developed.

The Bothnian Corridor is of uttermost importance for freight cargo in northern Sweden and Finland and connects the Northern Axis with the Nordic Triangle. The Bothnian Corridor must be prioritized in the future TEN-T and the Baltic Sea Strategy. Northern Axis is of greatest interest of northern Sweden. E12, the NECL corridor and the sea traffic over Kvarken are other important east-west linking transport corridors of great importance for the Baltic Sea Region which also need support and development.

Interreg is, and can be, a useful tool for co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region. The proposed Interreg IV B projects TransBaltic and Northern Axis is a necessary tool for closer strategic planning and co-operation in the transport area in the Baltic Sea region.

EuropaForum Norra Sverige represents the most sparsely populated area in EU with long distances between the towns and small cities. The urban areas in the region are essential in both economic and social terms and the spatial context holds innovative assets, for example in telemedicine, renewable energy linked to forest, tourism development, and space technology.

Northern Sweden is a peripheral area, but what differ northern Sweden from other rural areas in EU is the high RnD capacity and the developed innovation systems linked to the region's high performing business sector. RnD and IT infrastructure is necessary for spatial development and the perspective must be put in mind when it comes to attractiveness also for sparsely populated areas over national borders. It is important that funding from the Structural funds and other EU-funding are integrated with the EU Baltic Sea Strategy.

The region has a close relationship to north-east Russia. EuropaForum Norra Sverige appreciates the ongoing work in Northern Dimension but it is also essential that Russia is taken in to consideration when it comes to the Baltic Sea Strategy and is integrated in the work. The relationship with North East Russia is for northern Sweden crucial when it comes to regional development policy, environmental issues and public health in the whole Barents region.

Should more attention be paid to creative/alternative solutions, given the large distances/sparsely population/peripheral nature a major parts of the region? (If so, which topics? Which ideas?



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Accessibility, to the large industrial production and natural resources, in northern Scandinavia is of great importance for the prosperity and growth of both this region and for the rest of Europe. The accessibility part of BSR is therefore strongly linked to the issue of prosperity.

Northern Sweden is a border region with both Norway and Finland and has a strong tradition in transnational co-operation. But the national planning systems do not work transnational today. Europa Forum Norra Sverige suggests that Baltic Sea Strategy mainstream transnational thinking and implementation in to national governmental bodies and make them start co-operate and work over national borders in a much higher sense than today. Local and regional level must be involved in the work. For example in land planning, transport planning, health care, employment and social security issues.

The most powerful tool to make the BSR a stronger region is to build closer network between people in all areas. The Nordic Council of Ministers has successfully implemented programs for exchange in for example culture and school exchange; let them be role models for the Baltic Sea Strategy implementation.

***In addressing certain concerns can challenge be turned into potential opportunity?
What are the opportunities for the Region?***

Please see above.

Can better co-operation help realise this potential?

Please see above.

What are the priority actions?

- Improved accessibility for freight rail and sea transport and intermodality.
- Transnationality must be mainstreamed to national authorities. National implementation must take transnational functional regions in to consideration in planning and implementation.
- Better connectivity and faster border passages to Russia and Norway.
- Make the BSR world leading in renewable energy and biofuels from forestry.



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Part 5. Key questions on a Safe and Secure place

What are the main security concerns for the future? What specific regional measures should the Baltic Sea countries and other relevant stakeholders undertake to effectively respond to these concerns?

Example of problems that threaten the security on regional level:

- The organized crime of/with prostitution and trafficking and trade with illegal drugs but also alcohol and tobacco.
- Corruption.
- Border-crossing illegal activity on the internet.
- Natural catastrophe, terrorism and other major accidents.
- Racism and prejudice between and within countries.
- Men's violence against women including honour related violence.

Are the structures that exist today sufficient to meet the safety and security requirements of the future?

To increase the safety in the Baltic Sea region, Europaforum Norra Sverige suggests that:

- the regions are given mandate to co-operate across nations boundary concerning security questions,
- co-operation take place on a wide front,
- the authorities co-operate to protect those who are exposed for trafficking,
- the cooperation among crisis emergency increases.

One organisation alone can not change the fact that women are used for trafficking. EuropaForum suggests that organisations also work with these questions when they are dealing with other kind of organised crimes on a structural level. The international cooperation is determining and for this work to continue and intensify, it is needed that questions around prostitutions and trafficking are being made visible in the Baltic Sea strategy.

What forums could be most effectively used to deepen safety cooperation in the region?

- Europol
- CCPE, Consultative Council of European Prosecutors (Council of Europé, Europarådet.)
- Interpol
- UBC
- CPMR BSC
- Barents Regional Council



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What steps could be taken to better inform the citizens of the fruitful cooperation in this sector, so as to increase the general sense of security?

Dissemination of information is an important but difficult activity in this context. A positive method to inform the citizens can be through events that is carried out concurrently or successive accordingly to the relay baton method, among several regions around the Baltic Sea. There has to be some events that catch attention. The events should be carried out in cooperation with above mentioned organizations. Europaforum Norra Sverige also suggest that a collective campaign are carried out in schools around the Baltic Sea to prevent gender stereotypes and prejudices between countries and change attitudes to prostitution and men's violence against women, including honour related violence. Workings with schools are important because they can inform the children in many ways about gender equality.

The problem that we have with prostitution and trafficking can in some extent be explained by the fact that women are looked at as objects and not subjects. This way of looking at women needs to be changed.

Europaforum Norra Sverige holds the opinion that also more generally public health campaigns can contain sub targets to increase the general/public feeling of security in the Baltic Sea region.

What are the priority actions?

Europaforum Norra Sverige believes that one of the first steps should be to carry out a collective mapping/survey of the situation in terms of for example organized crime, prostitution, trafficking and smuggling. The survey shows how prostitution and trafficking is a part in a bigger structure of crimes. This step can also be a ground for the establishment of long term platforms for authority cooperation's both across the nation's boundary and across boundaries of different fields of responsibility. Through increased knowledge more people will be aware of how prostitution and trafficking are connected and how central it is to put the complex of problems in a structural context. Change attitudes should be the main aim with campaigns and event of different kinds.

Europaforum Norra Sverige argues that a collective program to support women that has became victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation should be investigated. Such a program shall aim to long-term change the view on and the support of these women. Concrete examples of activity within the project could be: safehold places and specialized service, compensation and financial help, protection of the victim, reflection period and safe return¹.

Courage is one component needed to make these difficult questions about prostitution, trafficking and men's violence against women visible. Cooperation is absolutely necessary to cope with these problems. A checklist or a collective action plan could be a way to get further and intensify the work.

¹ European Womens Lobby has been chosen from Nordic-Baltic Taskforce to work within a project for three years according to these guidelines. The project closes in September 2008 and experiences can be used from that project.



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It is needed that questions around prostitution and trafficking are being made visible in the Baltic Sea strategy.

Women and men should have the possibility to be in public space, such as squares, around the clock. Some places/cities in our countries are defined as unsafe but can be solved with better city planning with gender perspective. Baltic Sea Region can be a model for safer cities for both women and men.

Part 6.

Key questions on Governance – Answer from EuropaForum Norra Sverige:

1. Could the strategy be implemented without any additional organization (body)? If not, what type of organization, existing or new, would be appropriate?

EU has to take full responsibility for the implementation of the strategy for the Baltic Sea region and also for the action plan.

The principle for “multi level-government” should also be realized in this strategy and, for that reason, the local, regional and national level will be the given partners - both in policymaking and the implementation. Moreover, it is of great importance that national authorities in member states cooperate in a transnational way.

EuropaForum Norra Sverige also wants to point out that it is of great importance that both Russia and Norway are secured as partners in both implementation and evaluation of the strategy.

2. If funding is to be aligned, how should it be implemented, reviewed and monitored?

EuropaForum Norra Sverige thinks it is of crucial importance that the principle of governance admits a non-sector approach to planning and implementation. This is to guarantee synergism between contributions for, in example, environment, accessibility, security and growth. To attain that, there is a demand for multi level-governance as well as a horizontal co-operation. It is of great importance that the funds will be restructured into flexible, easy understandable and easy administrated, thematic development funds. In all instruments for finance there must be a horizontal goal for climate, health and gender perspective. Both national and regional levels have to be involved in the construction of the coming financial instruments for the Baltic Sea Region.

The financial instruments should be designed in a way that allows all regions and member states to use them as tools in order to reach common political targets. A tool like



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that creates a local and regional commitment to develop both the territorial region of the Baltic Sea and the Union.

We suggest that the Baltic Sea Region will be the arena where a new way of governance and finance will be implemented in different political areas (like employment, health and wealth, education, infrastructure, culture and tourism).

3. How can better policy design be facilitated? What currently hampers better coordination? How can this be improved?

- Please see answer above.

4. If implementation EU-legislation is an issue, how can this be improved? (On voluntary basis? On local/regional basis?) In which field could this best be tested?

- Implementation of EU-legislation is a matter for the member states. The EU Commission ought to take responsibility for the strategy and for the follow up-work.

5. Who are the key actors concerned?

The key actors on the implementation of a Baltic Sea strategy are all stakeholders involved. That demands a sophisticated system for cooperation - between member states, between national and regional/local level and regional /local level and the EU level. All the stakeholders involved are responsible for cooperation with business, social sector, trade unions and associations.

6. How would the priority actions/Key projects identified in the action plan be monitored? (Periodic reports to the EU Council? If yes which periodicity?)

- Periodic reports to the EU Council (once a year)

Europa Forum Norra Sverige, 28th of December 2008

Jens Nilsson
Chairman of EuropaForum Norra Sverige