

For the territorial dimension of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

A non-paper by the Committee for Spatial Development in the Baltic Sea Region - VASAB

Introduction

VASAB¹ (Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea 2010) is a cooperation of ministers responsible for spatial planning and development in eleven Baltic Sea Region (BSR) countries, including Belarus, Norway and Russia. The main mission of this interministerial cooperation is to prepare policy options for the territorial development of the Region and to provide a forum for exchange of know-how on spatial planning and development between the Baltic Sea countries.

In 2005 the Council of the Baltic Sea States encouraged VASAB to update the vision of long-term territorial development of the Region. This postulate was fulfilled by the decision of the spatial planning and development ministers, taken at the 6th Ministerial Conference in Gdansk in September 2005, to prepare a long-term perspective for the territorial development of the Baltic Sea Region (LTP) with active participation of the regional authorities and in a dialogue with relevant pan-Baltic organisations.

This non-paper reflects on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region seen from the perspective of the work in VASAB done so far based on the outcomes of analytical work during the preparation of the LTP (especially deliverables of three working groups dealing with: urban networking and urban-rural partnership, accessibility and development zones, and sea use planning and integrated coastal zone management) and on first draft versions of the LTP document.

Relations between the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the VASAB Long Term Perspective

LTP aims to identify the most important assets, development trends and challenges affecting the long-term development of the Baltic Sea Region and to initiate necessary actions for a better BSR integration, including instruments to guide and coordinate policies with territorial impact. Special attention in that respect is paid to socio-economic and territorial development disparities between the "old" and "new" EU member states and their neighbouring countries and regions, such as North-Western Russia and Belarus.

In that respect the preparation and implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is a unique way to promote the Region as a pilot area for the European Cohesion Policy and as a best practice case for cooperation across regional and national borders as promoted by the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion.

From the LTP perspective the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region should aim to:

- advance the socio-economic and territorial integration of the whole Region, including the EU neighbouring countries of Belarus, Norway and Russia;
- set an example of how the EU may deal with a Region's challenges in a transnational and cross-sectoral context;
- take stock of the success stories in existing regional and sub-regional programmes, and in the transnational Interreg programme in particular;

The EU BSR Strategy will match the VASAB LTP in:

- acknowledging the role of spatial planning systems, tools and methods in coping with territorial cohesion challenges in the Baltic Sea Region, including socio-economic development disparities between the

¹ www.vasab.org

countries and regions;

- regarding VASAB as an observatory of territorial cohesion processes in the Region, which through the implementation of the LTP can be monitored and evaluated;
- using the intellectual potential of VASAB as an animator of actions related to spatial planning within the Region, especially in the field of maritime spatial planning.

Baltic Sea as our shared resource

Sea space gains importance as a development asset. Growing user demands and contradictory interests of different stakeholders in the Baltic Sea resources require a comprehensive multi-level and multi-sector approach, based on a clear vision, goals and principles for planning and management of the sea resources.

The EU BSR Strategy will match the VASAB LTP in:

- providing measures to make the Baltic Sea Region a macroregion of maritime excellence in Europe, specialised in sustainable management of sea resources, and a model region for the implementation of the Integrated Maritime Policy.
- facilitating the introduction of Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) as an important component of the Integrated Maritime Policy and a common Integrated Coastal Zone Management practice of the BSR countries. This could include an arrangement of a BSR conference on Maritime Spatial Planning in order to look into the need for an agreement on Baltic Sea MSP, as proposed by the VASAB working group responsible for the analytical part on 'Sea use planning and integrated coastal zone management';
- promoting the development of intelligent sea transport corridors in the BSR by encouraging pilot projects for environmentally sensitive areas with high traffic volumes;
- increasing human capacity of the maritime spatial planning by encouraging Baltic universities to insert MSP to the spatial planning curricula.

Accessibility challenges

The BSR should make use of its competitive advantage, which is the geographical location bridging together the EU, Russia, Belarus and Norway, and forming a functional connection to the developing economies of Asia. Therefore, accessibility infrastructure is an important precondition for integrating the BSR internally as well as with the rest of Europe and the world. In this context special attention should be put on:

- insufficient transboundary connections and low interoperability of national transport networks between the BSR countries, especially between metropolitan areas as well as between coastal areas in the eastern part of the Region;
- availability of modern ICT solutions in remote and peripheral areas in the Region;
- role of the Region's territorial capital of own renewable energy resources (including wind power and municipal and industrial waste) in pursuing an integrated energy network in the BSR.

The EU BSR Strategy will match the VASAB LTP in:

- supporting investments in such transport links and facilities, which through hindering smooth mobility of persons and goods across the borders and impeding the development of larger cross-border labour-markets are a key obstacle for functional integration of the Region:
 - the Rail Baltica corridor of the TEN-T network, as it builds the backbone for the integrated railway system in the eastern part of the BSR,
 - transport axes between the TEN-T and Russian networks in the context of EU – Russia – Far East transshipments, which may enhance integration of North West Russia to the Baltic Sea Region,

- East-West routes in the Northern Periphery area to connect the natural resources-rich regions of northern Russia to the large markets of North America,
- road connections in some key cross-border areas, which suffer from low accessibility and connectivity to main metropolitan areas,
- border crossing bottlenecks and other administrative problems at the eastern EU borders as a significant disturbance for the interoperability between the TEN-T and Russian and Belarusian transport networks and consequently for the territorial cohesion of the whole Region;
- addressing the essential role of airborne and maritime connections on one hand for the Region's global connectivity and global trade integration and on the other - in securing freight flows and people-to-people contacts within the Region; in that respect - to pinpoint the following BSR cohesion challenges:
 - east-west air connections in the Nordic peripheries (including the city of Murmansk), the scarcity of which reduces the potential for interaction between peripheral regions,
 - low air connectivity of Hamburg and Berlin to other BSR metropolises,
 - low frequency of air services between metropolises in the eastern part of the BSR, including Kaliningrad,
 - extension of the Baltic Sea Motorways system by connections to Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg
- addressing a necessity for public-private partnerships in establishing modern ICT solutions in remote and peripheral areas in the Region;
- considering the idea (or a feasibility study) of a BSR Energy Supergrid to interconnect power plants producing renewable energy in the BSR sea areas as a possible component of actions towards a fully integrated BSR transmission grid.

Urban networks and urban-rural cooperation

In fostering the territorial cohesion of the Region it is necessary to tackle limitations related with insufficient performance of BSR metropolitan regions, especially in its eastern part, as drivers and gateways of global economic processes. Also, socio-economic polarisation between metropolitan regions and other regions calls for policies oriented to the role and potentials of small and medium-sized cities. In the context of demographic and migration trends it is of utmost importance to enhance the role of small and medium-sized cities, as serving centres and potential 'hubs' for surrounding rural areas and endeavour to integrate these urban centres in the knowledge economy.

The EU BSR Strategy will match VASAB LTP in:

- promoting 'partnerships for growth' among the BSR metropolises in order to enhance innovation and entrepreneurship environments in less developed metropolitan areas, especially in the eastern part of the Region; through this strategic cooperation the Baltic metropolises may build transnationally complementary elements in their development actions and may create a strong Baltic Sea Region brand;
- promoting the potential of small and medium-sized cities to act as international centres of innovation and specialised services (e.g. higher education, research and development, or fairs and exhibition), and thereby to efficiently connect the Baltic Sea Region into the global networks;
- exploiting the opportunity of transnational networking between business support organisations to facilitate targeted localisation of foreign direct investments in small and medium-sized cities;
- highlighting the need for a dialogue at the BSR level on demographic trends and policies to cope with polarisation between metropolitan regions and other regions, migration, service provision and the development of labour markets;
- considering policy incentives to stimulate better involvement of the private industry in cluster cooperation initiatives on cross-border scale.