



Weekly Briefing

**Latvia external relations briefing:
Latvia Set to Take the Helm in the
EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region**
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Latvia Set to Take the Helm in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

Summary

Latvia has taken over the Presidency of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) from Sweden. The activities of the EUSBSR's National Coordinators will be presided over by Latvia from July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024. The 14th Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) will be hosted by Riga, Latvia, on the 4th and 5th of October this year. As the first of the four Macro-Regional Strategies in Europe, the EUSBSR has been a frontrunner in promoting innovation, sustainability, and energy security. The Forum aims to achieve four main goals: exchanging best practices of cooperation, strengthening integration within and beyond the Baltic Sea Region, forming synergies between priority areas, and creating links with the general public. Special attention will be given to climate affairs and green energy, and youth engagement will play a vital role in shaping the region's future. The Forum will feature workshops and a networking village, offering opportunities for meaningful discussions and collaboration. Jointly organized by the Riga City Council, Union of the Baltic Cities, and VASAB¹, in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia and the Baltic Sea Strategy Point, the Forum will bring together stakeholders committed to advancing the EUSBSR's objectives and creating a more prosperous and sustainable Baltic Sea Region.

Introduction

The European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) is a groundbreaking initiative aimed at promoting balanced development in the region. The Strategy is divided into three main objectives: saving the sea, connecting the region and increasing prosperity. Each objective relates to a wide range of policies and has an impact on the other objectives. It was approved by the European Council in 2009 as Europe's first-ever Macro-regional Strategy. The EUSBSR mobilizes EU funding and policies, coordinating efforts between the European Union, member states, regions, pan-Baltic organizations, financing institutions, and non-governmental bodies.

¹ VASAB – Vision & Strategies Around the Baltic Sea. VASAB is **intergovernmental multilateral co-operation of the Baltic Sea Region in spatial planning and development.**

Currently, Latvia holds the Presidency from July 2023 to June 2024, leading efforts to enhance regional prosperity, environmental sustainability, and collaboration. Encompassing eight EU Member States, the strategy impacts around 85 million inhabitants from Lapland to the north of Germany. By focusing on better coordination, increased prosperity, and a cleaner environment, the EUSBSR aims to foster a more harmonious and integrated Baltic Sea Region, standing out as one of the most diverse macro-regional strategies in the EU. [6]



Latvia to Assume Chairmanship for the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

The EUSBSR extends from Lapland to the northern part of Germany and spans the entire Baltic Sea basin, including its hinterlands. A total of eight EU member states - Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Sweden - and almost 85 million people call it home. Among EU Member States, it is the second-largest and most varied macro-regional strategy. The Strategy is also welcoming cooperation with EU neighbouring countries (Iceland and Norway). [5].

Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

The 14th Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) is set to take place on the 4th and 5th of October this year, with Riga, the capital city of Latvia, playing the host.

As the first of the four Macro-Regional Strategies in Europe, the Baltic Sea Region Strategy has consistently been at the forefront of innovation ecosystems, sustainability-oriented initiatives, and energy security goals. The collaborative efforts of countries in the Baltic Sea Region have led to notable progress in developing renewable energy sources and enhancing energy efficiency. Moreover, considerable strides have been taken to promote regional trade and investment, as well as to improve connectivity and cooperation within the region and beyond. [7]

The Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is a platform for project beneficiaries, policy area coordinators, and EU and regional stakeholders to discuss how Interreg Baltic Sea Region projects help implement the EUSBSR. The Forum provides an opportunity to exchange experiences, learn from each other, and discuss the future of the Baltic Sea Region. The forum is organized by the European Commission and the host country of the Presidency of the EUSBSR [5].

Main Objectives of the 14th Annual Forum are following:

1. **Exchange of Best Practices of Cooperation:** The Forum will facilitate the sharing of successful cooperation models and strategies among participants, fostering greater collaboration in the Baltic Sea Region.
2. **Stronger Integration within the Baltic Sea Region and Beyond:** Efforts will be directed towards enhancing integration among the participating countries and exploring opportunities for broader cooperation beyond the region's boundaries.
3. **Forming Synergies between Various Priority Areas:** The Forum will encourage the convergence of different priority areas, allowing for the development of comprehensive and coordinated approaches to regional challenges.
4. **Creating Links between the Strategy and the General Public:** Special attention will be given to engaging the general public, ensuring wider awareness and understanding of the EUSBSR's objectives and impact.

Focus on Climate Affairs and Green Energy

Given the paramount importance of climate action and sustainable practices, the Forum will place particular emphasis on climate affairs and green energy. Discussions and debates on these critical topics will be encouraged to foster innovative solutions and commitments to environmental sustainability.

Youth Engagement

Recognizing the pivotal role played by young people in driving change, the Forum will actively involve youth representation and encourage their active participation in decision-making processes. Their insights and perspectives will be valued in shaping the region's future.

Workshops and Networking Opportunities

The 14th Annual Forum will host workshops to facilitate meaningful discussions on topics pertinent to the EUSBSR. These workshops will provide a platform for exchanging views, generating new ideas, and promoting initiatives for the region's advancement.

Additionally, a Networking Village will offer extensive networking opportunities, housed in the historically significant building of an Old Riga artisans' guild, further enriching the Forum experience.

The event is jointly organized by the Riga City Council, Union of the Baltic Cities, and VASAB, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia and the Baltic Sea Strategy Point.

Better Coordination for a More Balanced Development of the Baltic Sea Region

One of the sub-objectives of the EUSBSR is improved coordination. The Strategy is built on an original, holistic approach that incorporates many levels of governance and policy sectors. Four policy areas—the environment, the economy, accessibility, and security—are used to carry out the strategy. 13 thematic areas with their respective coordinators are further grouped into the policy areas. The coordinators are in charge of planning and carrying out initiatives associated with their particular subject areas. The objective of the EUSBSR is to make sure that all parties collaborate effectively to realize the joint objectives of the Strategy. The EUSBSR can help to reduce duplication of efforts, discover synergies, and maximize the impact of the actions taken by encouraging improved coordination.[1, 6]

Finally, the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) seeks to encourage a more equitable development of the Baltic Sea Region by mobilizing all pertinent EU funding and policies and coordinating the actions of the European Union, EU countries, regions, pan-Baltic organizations, financial institutions, and non-governmental organizations. One of the sub-objectives of the EUSBSR is better coordination, which is carried out through a novel and integrated strategy that incorporates several policy areas and levels of governance. The EUSBSR can assist in more effectively and efficiently achieving the joint aims of the Strategy by encouraging better coordination [1, 4, 5, 6.]

Conclusion

The European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) stands as a visionary initiative aimed at promoting sustainable development in the Baltic Sea Region and strengthening cooperation between the countries bordering the Baltic Sea in order to meet the common challenges and to benefit from common opportunities facing the region. Latvia's assumption of the EUSBSR Presidency from July 2023 to June 2024 signifies its commitment to advancing regional prosperity, environmental sustainability, and cooperation among the eight EU member states. With a strong focus on better coordination, increased prosperity, and a cleaner environment, the EUSBSR aims to foster a more integrated and harmonious Baltic Sea Region, serving as a model for other macro-regional strategies within the EU.

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