

ORIENTATION PAPER

Transnational Cooperation Programme

Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2021-2027



Executive Summary

This Orientation Paper is a document of the Commission aimed at launching a discussion on the **Baltic Sea Region 2021-2027 (future BSR)** with partner countries concerned. It does not represent the negotiating position of the European Commission, but is destined to provide ideas, options and orientations on the thematic focus of the future programme.

This Orientation Paper should be considered alongside the paper on cross-border cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region area that have been produced by DG Regional and Urban Policy to prepare the future cross-border cooperation programmes both among Member States and with third countries (including ENI-CBC programmes) in the region. Transnational cooperation programmes, even with limited resources, are playing a catalytic role to address transnational challenges, which often require significant resources. Moreover, given the importance and nature of the specific challenges and needs at both transnational and cross-border level, it is important to ensure coherence and complementarity. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen the coordination among all relevant programmes: transnational, cross-border cooperation (including ENI CBC) and mainstream programmes. This coordination should take place during the whole life cycle of the programmes: from planning, to programming and implementation.

The guiding principles for drawing this Orientation Paper are the following:

1. **Coherence with Macro-Regional Strategies:** The future Baltic Sea Region programme is closely linked to the European Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), and has therefore to comply with Article 15 (4) of COM(2018)374¹, requiring programming of 70% of the ERDF contribution on the objectives of that strategy. Macro-Regional Strategies such as the EUSBSR are an integrated political framework endorsed by the European Council, the implementation of which may be supported by the Cohesion Policy funds among others. The objective is to address common challenges and opportunities faced by a defined geographical area including both Member States and third countries together, to achieve of economic, social and territorial cohesion.
2. **The Functional Area principle:** A functional area is generally characterised by interdependencies or links within territories, where functional connections either unite or isolate territories and areas influenced by them. For transnational cooperation, functionalities represent joint characteristics accompanied by common challenges and development potentials. Transnational cooperation is reaching its full potential when there is a strong will to address those challenges jointly.
3. **The Thematic Concentration principle:** In view of the limited budgetary resources and the requirement to focus support in areas where EU funds can achieve the highest value-added, the programme should concentrate on a few key areas where joint actions can have the biggest impact. In doing so, the EU funds would focus on a limited set of objectives and policy areas, thus achieving the highest possible impact in terms of efficiency of funding and result orientation.

The main objectives of the EUSBSR are: 1. Save the Sea, 2. Connect the Region and 3. Increase Prosperity.

¹ Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments COM/2018/374 final - 2018/0199 (COD)

Based on these principles, the European Commission recommends concentrating the available ERDF contribution on:

Policy Objective 1 (a smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation),

Policy Objective 2 (a greener, low-carbon Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, low-carbon/climate neutral circular economy, climate adaptation and risk prevention and management). PO2 is the strongest focus for the programme as the environmental status of the sea is still weak and needs urgent action,

Interreg-specific objective (a better Interreg governance, with a specific focus (on continued support to the governance of the EUSBSR² and) on enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement macro-regional strategies). The **future BSR** should continue to support the implementation of the EUSBSR, considering its potential of leveraging a large spectrum of investments from different sources, including from relevant national and regional EU funded programmes. These objectives comply with the strategic framework of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) and with European Union (EU) priorities.

Under the current architecture the Baltic Sea region is covered by:

- 1 EU Macro-regional strategy (EUSBSR)
- 2 Transnational programmes (Baltic Sea Region and Northern Periphery and Arctic(NPA))
- 5 CBC maritime programmes (Botnia-Atlantica, Central Baltic, South Baltic, Öresund-Kattegat-Skagerrak (ÖKS), the maritime part of Germany-Denmark) and several land border programmes in the area (e.g. Estonia-Latvia, Latvia-Lithuania, Germany (Mecklenburg Vorpommern)/Poland, Nord)
- 5 ENI CBC programmes with a maritime dimension (Kolarctic, South East Finland-Russia, Estonia-Russia, Lithuania-Russia, Poland-Russia) and 3 land-based ENI CBC programmes (Karelia-Russia, Latvia-Russia, Poland-Belarus-Ukraine)

Therefore, the BSR programme does not operate in isolation but is part of a larger complex set of programmes and strategies in the Baltic Sea region, which need to be taken into account when designing the transnational cooperation programme.

The preparation for the new programming period 2021-2027 is a good moment for reflection on the current set up of the different Interreg programmes in the Baltic Sea region. For this purpose DG Regional and Urban Policy organised a roundtable discussion on 12 September 2019 with the Member States around the Baltic Sea for an open discussion. Taking into account a probably smaller budget for the future and the need for a stronger strategic focus, the question is if the current set up is the most efficient one and if certain changes are required.

There was general agreement in the meeting that stronger coordination is required between the different strands of the Interreg programmes not only during implementation but also especially during preparation of the programmes to avoid negative overlaps in the design of investment priorities and to identify optimal complementarities (“positive overlaps”).

² Specific area proposed for this programme.

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A. Introduction

1. This document together with the relevant country reports of the European Semester process set out key characteristics of the transnational Baltic Sea Region programme. It outlines options and recommendations for the programming of future Baltic Sea Region maritime programme (BSR). It will serve as a basis for discussion and to trigger constructive dialogue with Member States, programme authorities and the European Commission. It will also provide point of reference for the Task forces planning the forthcoming programmes (2021-2027). The paper is based on territorial analysis, lessons learned and the evaluation of the previous periods.
2. The paper should be considered alongside the NPA and Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) in the Baltic Sea area paper that has been produced by DG Regional and Urban Policy to prepare the future CBC Interreg programmes that will be active in the same sea basin.
3. This Paper will serve as a basis for discussion between Participating countries, programme authorities and the European Commission on the Transnational Cooperation Programme for the Baltic Sea Region 2021-2027 (**future BSR**). It does not represent the negotiating position of the European Commission, but is providing ideas, options and orientations on the thematic focus of the future programme. The paper relies on the profound analysis of relevant studies and other documents, and takes into account lessons learned from the previous and current programming periods 2007-2013³ and 2014-2020⁴.
4. According to the legislative proposal for European Territorial Cooperation in the 2021-2027 programming period⁵, where a component 2B programme supports a Macro-Regional Strategy, 70% ERDF allocation shall be programmed on the objectives of that strategy. The geography of the **future BSR** shall entirely align with the **European Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region Region (EUSBSR)** comprising eight EU Member States (Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland) and having cooperation with neighbouring non-EU countries (Russia, Norway and Belarus), and should serve priorities where future BSR funds can achieve the highest EU benefit. Moreover, it is important to take account of activities of all national, regional Cohesion policy programmes and other Interreg programmes in the area concerned, and of the European Semester Country Reports 2018 including their respective Annex D for the eight Member States concerned to ensure appropriate coordination and synergies between different programmes. Country Reports are produced yearly during the European Semester process and they need to be taken into consideration also in the future, especially in 2019 when the programming exercise is still ongoing.
5. A functional area is generally characterised by interdependencies or links within territories, where functional connections either unite or isolate territories and areas influenced by them. For transnational cooperation, functionalities represent joint characteristics accompanied by common challenges and development potentials. Transnational cooperation is reaching its full potential when there is a strong will to address those challenges jointly.
6. The paper will cover governance issues as well, with particular focus on how to improve the support to the EUSBSR governance, taking stock of lessons learned from the current programming period.

³ CCI 2007CB163PO020.

⁴ CCI 2014TC16M5TN001.

⁵ Article 15 (3) of Proposal for a Regulation COM(2018)374 of 29.5.2018.

7. In the document *“Reflection Paper towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030”*⁶ the EU confirms its full commitment to implementation of United Nations 2030 Agenda: *“The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), together with the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, are the roadmap to a better world and the global framework for international cooperation on sustainable development and its economic, social, environmental and governance dimensions. The EU was one of the leading forces behind the United Nations 2030 Agenda and has fully committed itself to its implementation.”* Therefore, these commitments need to be reflected in the preparations of the future BSR.

B. Challenges and foundation of the macro-regional functional area of the Baltic Sea Region

8. The cooperation area of the 2014-2020 BSR has remained the same as for the 2007-2013 programming period. The programme area is geographically fully aligned with the EUSBSR area.

9. The participating countries are:

DENMARK
 ESTONIA
 FINLAND
 GERMANY: Berlin, Brandenburg, Bremen, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Schleswig-Holstein and Niedersachsen (only NUTS II area Lüneburg region)
 LATVIA
 LITHUANIA
 POLAND
 SWEDEN
 NORWAY
 RUSSIA: St. Petersburg, Arkhangelsk Oblast, Vologda Oblast, Kaliningrad Oblast, Republic of Karelia, Komi Republic, Leningrad Oblast, Murmansk Oblast, Nenetsky Autonomous Okrug, Novgorod Oblast and Pskov Oblast

10. The BSR programme⁷ covers eight EU Member States as well as Norway, Russia and Belarus. The Baltic Sea is geographically at the centre of programme area and the uniting factor of the programme. The programme area is around 3.8 million km² with a population of more than 101 million inhabitants. It stretches from central parts of Europe up to its northernmost periphery. Even though the programme area comprises a number of European metropolitan areas such as Berlin, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Oslo, Stockholm, Warsaw and St. Petersburg, major parts of the programme area are characterised as rural. Settlement structures in the south are denser with most rural areas being in close proximity to a city, but in the northern, and to some degree also in the eastern part of the region, rural regions are often characterised as remote. The Arctic regions in the northernmost part of the programme area represent specific challenges and opportunities in respect of remoteness, geographic and climate conditions.
11. The Baltic Sea in the centre of the programme area is the uniting element for the region: it serves as a source for common identification across the region and constitutes a joint environmental and economic asset. At the same time the Baltic Sea brings about transnational challenges, e.g. in relation to environmental protection and transport flows passing the sea. The programme area comprises a large amount of coastal areas and islands with high residential attractiveness but, at the same time, high biodiversity vulnerable to economic uses and to climate change.

⁶ European Commission, 2019: *“Reflection Paper towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030”*

⁷ Interreg Baltic Sea Region, 2015. Interreg Baltic Sea Region Cooperation Programme 2014-2020

12. The programme can build on a strong tradition of pan-Baltic cooperation. In particular, after the political transitions in the early nineties, a wide range of cooperation networks between national, regional and local authorities, but also between other organisations such as NGOs, research funding organisations and academic institutions, business sector associations and environmental groups, has been established, many of them organised in umbrella organisations on a pan-Baltic level. These networks and institutions have played an important role in previous transnational cooperation programmes and are expected to promote cooperation and further integration also in this funding period
13. The territory shows various territorial commonalities and differences⁸. Cooperation usually either focuses on commonalities – where places or players face similar issues – or on aspects which require joint responses – where a challenge or potential cannot be addressed by just one place or player singlehandedly but require cooperation of several places or players concerned. Aspects requiring joint responses are usually related to some sort of functional areas.
14. The primary functionality of the area is what is at its very centre: the environmental situation of the Baltic Sea. The Baltic Sea, physically uniting and separating function in the area in terms of transport, remains one of the most polluted seas in the world (European Commission, 2017b⁹). This highlights the important environmental links in the Baltic Sea Region.
15. The river catchment areas of the Baltic Sea spread across 14 countries of which the majority (nine) border the Baltic Sea (Nilsson, 2006). For the Baltic Sea, river catchment areas are of relevance because they transport pollutants from industrial or agricultural activities into the Baltic Sea. Areas of extensive industrial and agricultural use are situated in the Baltic Sea catchment area, resulting in environmental problems such as nutrification or littering (HELCOM, 2018a¹⁰).
16. Additionally, the different sub-basins of the Baltic Sea are interlinked. This means that pollution either due to runoff or dumping in one basin has impacts on the other basins. A relatively clean sub-basin at the coast of one country can thus be polluted by the actions of another country. This aspect was recognised and corresponding measures are taken (HELCOM, 2007¹¹; Rispling et al., 2016¹²). The river catchment areas thus constitute an environmental functional link for the Baltic Sea. The programme is well placed for this as its area covers the vast majority of the Baltic Sea river catchment areas (Nilsson, 2006¹³)

⁸ <https://territorial-review-espon.eu>.

⁹ European Commission, 2017b. Commission staff working document. European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea. Action Plan

¹⁰ HELCOM, 2018a. State of the Baltic Sea - Second HELSOM holistic assessment 2011-2016.

¹¹ HELCOM, 2007. HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan. HELCOM Ministerial Meeting, Krakow.

¹² Rispling, L., Grunfelder, J., Norlén, G., Wang, S., Randall, L., Lindberg, G., Hanell, T., Schürmann, C., Zaucha, J., 2016. Trends, challenges and potentials in the Baltic Sea Region. EUSBSR EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, Turku, Finland.

¹³ Nilsson, S., 2006. International river basins in the Baltic Sea Region. Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), Department of Land and Water Resources Engineering.

Lessons learned from previous programming periods:

17. The **BSR 2007-2013** was centred on four **thematic priorities** (allocation in brackets)¹⁴:

1. Fostering of innovations across the BSR (27%)
2. Internal and External Accessibility of the BSR (19%)
3. Management of the Baltic Sea as a Common Resource (28%)
4. Attractive and Competitive Cities and Regions (20%)
5. Technical Assistance (6%)

Projects were implemented under four specific programme objectives:

- ad 1. To advance innovation-based regional development of the BSR
- ad 2. To increase the area's external and internal accessibility
- ad 3. To achieve better environmental state of the Sea
- ad 4. To ensure co-operation of metropolitan regions, cities and rural areas to share and make use of common potentials

18. The **BSR 2014-2020** centres on **four thematic objectives (priority axes)** (allocation in brackets)¹⁵:

1. Capacity for innovation (32%)
2. Efficient management of natural resources (32%)
3. Sustainable transport (25%)
4. Institutional capacity for macro-regional cooperation' (5%)
5. Technical Assistance (6%)

Projects are implemented under seven specific objectives (investment priorities):

- ad 1. Research and innovation infrastructures
- ad 1. Smart specialisation
- ad 1. Non-technological innovation
- ad 2. Clear waters
- ad 2. Renewable energy
- ad 2. Energy efficiency
- ad 2. Resource-efficient blue growth
- ad 3. Interoperability of transport modes
- ad 3. Accessibility of remote areas and areas affected by demographic change
- ad 3. Maritime safety
- ad 3. Environmentally friendly shipping
- ad 3. Environmentally friendly urban mobility
- ad 4. Seed money
- ad 4. Coordination of macro-regional cooperation

19. In the 2007-2013 programme period, eligible beneficiaries comprised public authorities from national, regional and local level as well as public equivalent bodies (such as research and training institutions, business development institutions and other non-profit organisations). Public authorities – regional public authorities in particular –, academic institutions, and NGOs were the most frequently involved types of partners. Participation of public authorities in the Baltic Sea Region programme decreased in comparison with the previous programme period (Interreg IIIB) (from 75%

¹⁴ European Territorial Cooperation 2007-2013 - Baltic Sea Region Programme. Total ERDF allocation EUR 216.8 million.

¹⁵ Baltic Sea Region Programme – Cooperation programme 2014-2020. Total ERDF allocation EUR 263.8 million.

to 58%). This is primarily on the account of a more active involvement of academic institutions (24%), which were predominantly involved as lead partners. NGOs made up 18% of partners. Private (commercial) organisations could be involved as additional partners with own financing, and their participation was encouraged, however they could not receive funding under the programme but only take part in their own capacity. 80% of project partners were from Germany, Sweden, and Finland, showing a quite high geographical concentration (DeaBaltika, 2011¹⁶ and Rambøll, 2015¹⁷).

20. In 2014-2020, the participation of beneficiaries and target groups is more diverse and balanced, both as project partners and as associated partners. The diversity of partner types corresponds to the different target groups envisaged by the cooperation programme for different Specific Objectives. Nonetheless, a certain over-representation of academic and research institutes has been identified as a challenge.
21. Private partners and NGOs find it often difficult to engage in Interreg, due to administrative requirements, which do not fit their way of administration and financial reporting. The continuous efforts of the programme to include private partners and NGOs as beneficiaries are well noted. However, the role of public bodies which can target their project actions towards private players and NGOs should not be underestimated. It might indeed be a better way to reach out to these players.
22. The slight over-representation of academic and research institutes should be carefully monitored and as far as possible avoided in the future programme. As the main purpose of Interreg is not research funding, the role of beneficiaries from academia and research should focus more on supporting beneficiaries from the public, private and NGO sector to reach better results.
23. More involvement of Interreg 'first timers' might help to avoid that the programme becomes a club of usual suspects. To further encourage the involvement of new partners, one programme indicators and target could even be linked to the share of 'first time Interreg applicants'.
24. Looking at the 2014-2020 period, given that the programme's main objective is the development of institutional capacities, evaluation has focused on analysing changes in them. The state institutional capacity development in the region has been assessed by specific studies (Rambøll, 2015 and Haarich et al., 2018b¹⁸). These have shown that, between 2014 and 2018, the institutional capacity level in the region has improved in all analysed capacity dimensions, except for the capacities related to the accessibility of remote areas and areas affected by demographic change.
25. The involvement of policy makers, especially at the regional and local level, has also been reported as a powerful tool to achieve the goal of increasing institutional capacity in the region (Haarich et al., 2018b). Local public authorities perceived relatively high benefits from learning about new methods, practical examples, from other regions and from access to new contacts. National public authorities see a slightly higher benefit from better knowledge of specific needs of end users and insights regarding new rules and procedures. Regional public authorities widely benefit from learning, but

¹⁶ DeaBaltika, 2011. Strategic Evaluation in the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013. Final Evaluation Report.

¹⁷ Rambøll, 2015. Baltic Sea Region Programme: Analysis of projects in 2007-2013 and setting baselines and targets for the indicators 2014-2020

¹⁸ Haarich, S., Zillmer, S., Böhme, K., Toptdisou, M., Salvatori, G., 2018b. Interreg Baltic Sea Region. Mid-term evaluation of Programme impact.

also from insights into new rules and procedures, new contacts and in debates with other stakeholders.

26. **Main Strengths of the current and previous BSR programmes;** The focus on institutional capacity development and the involvement of a wide set of stakeholders, found in both programme periods, have been, in their combination, powerful success factors of the programme in both programming periods. Among other types of target groups, the involvement of policy makers has been particularly effective in fostering institutional learning in the region.
27. The capacity building and the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders are a strength of the programme that should be maintained in the future.
28. The evolution of the programme shows that the focus developed for the BSR programme works well. This would indeed suggest that there is no need for radical changes, from organisational/managerial point of view. However, the targeting of the future programme should benefit from a clearer thematic focus.
29. **Main Weaknesses of the current and previous BSR programmes.** Large size of the projects cutting out smaller applicants, high reporting burden, and difficulties in retrieving co-funding resources have been cited among the main issues encountered by projects in the 2007-13 period (DeaBaltika, 2011). High geographic concentration of project partners has also been observed in that period. Within Interreg there is also a risk that local and regional authorities are trying to address very important and too large issues for them, while national authorities are not so active in Interreg projects. In 2014-2020, obstacles have been identified in the insufficiency of links between public institutions and academia, together with an over-representation of academic institutions among project partners, potentially impairing the transmission and diffusion of knowledge. Administrative constraints, and especially State Aid rules, continue being cited as problematic (Haarich et al., 2018b).
30. The risks of geographical concentration of project partners should be carefully monitored in future to ensure that the programme has also geographically a wide spread of beneficiaries.
31. The relatively high share of academic partners should be monitored to ensure a sound mix of different types of beneficiaries.
32. The Baltic Sea Region have a long-lasting tradition of cooperation under the framework of ETC Programmes. Partnerships are consolidated, but due to the high number of coexisting Interreg programmes, the risk of overlapping and fragmentation is high, to the detriment of effectiveness, notably on maritime cooperation. The priority axes of the maritime CBC programmes in the area largely correspond to and contribute to a different extent to the objectives of the EUSBSR. This requires a coordinated approach at sea-basin level. Coordination and joint planning between mainstream programmes has been started via networks of managing authorities. This should continue for the post 2020 aiming at more coherence, coordination and efficiency, starting from the planning phase of new programmes. Coordination should also be extended to all relevant ETC programmes. To this aim, the orientation paper for maritime cross border programmes in the Baltic Sea Region issued by DG REGIO should be duly taken into account alongside the present orientation paper in the preparation of the future Baltic Sea transnational programme.

C. Investment objectives linked to the challenges

33. In this section, orientations are presented with respect to the five policy objectives and two Interreg-specific objectives, under which funding of the future BSR can take place.
34. A more strategic focus for the future programmes will imply a stronger thematic concentration of investments under the 2021-2027 BSR. This cannot be done in isolation but alignment with the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (as strategic framework) and its three priorities: 1) Save the sea, 2) Connect the region and 3) Increase prosperity needs to be ensured.
35. Secondly, close coordination with the investment priorities under the NPA and cross-border cooperation programmes for the Baltic Sea region will also be of key importance. The proposed investments for trans-national BSR programme will also have consequences for the choice of investment priorities under the NPA and cross border programmes in the region. Investments under the same Policy Objectives will need to show clear complementarities with the NPA and the CBC programmes.

PO 1: A smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation

36. Economic patterns across the world will change, as new technologies lead to what is called the fourth industrial revolution of production systems, characterised by a fusion of technologies and blur the lines between physical, digital and biological systems. This trend continues the digital revolution since the 1990s in includes characteristics such as the Internet of Things, use of big data, robotics, cybersecurity and artificial intelligence. In general, it is assumed that 4th industrial revolution is accompanied by economic concentration tendencies and the emphasis on new technical solutions which are rolled out globally, increasingly create economies where the 'winner takes it all' both in terms of companies leading the way to change as well as in terms of locations where these companies and key players are located. (ESPON, 2018a¹⁹, 2017b²⁰)
37. Another trend to consider is blue growth, i.e. the sustainable exploitation of the potential of the sea and coastal areas. Blue growth stimulates innovation in various fields such as blue energy, e.g. wave and tidal energy and off-shore wind parks, aquacultures, marine mineral resources and blue biotechnology (Zillmer et al., 2014²¹).
38. The Baltic Sea region's specific characteristics provide it with the opportunity to combine responses to environmental challenges, including climate change and single use plastics, with extraordinary assets, such as competitive and innovative research and business sectors and a strong tradition of cooperation that has been strengthened through the EUSBSR, including its maritime component.

¹⁹ ESPON, 2018a. Possible European Territorial Futures. ESPON, Luxembourg.

²⁰ ESPON, 2017b. European Territorial Review. Territorial Cooperation for the future of Europe. ESPON, Luxembourg.

²¹ Zillmer, S., Lüer, C., Toptsidou, M., 2014. Transnational perspectives for green and blue growth. How municipalities and regions can promote sustainable growth and use marine resources in the context of INTERREG IV B, BBSR Special Publications. Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung, Bonn.

39. The Sustainable Blue Growth Agenda for the Baltic Sea Region²², adopted by the European Commission in 2014 highlighted the potential for developing the maritime economy in the Baltic Sea Region. Furthermore, the European Commission has published a report in 2017 titled “Towards an implementation strategy for the Sustainable Blue Growth Agenda for the Baltic Sea Region²³,” which presents the results of a systematic stakeholder dialogue in the region with the aim to identify and discuss the processes necessary to realise the Baltic Blue Growth Agenda in the coming years. This dialogue focused on f.ex. shipping, blue bio economy and environmental and monitoring technology. These are activity areas that offer opportunities for new value creation and which can benefit from coordinated action and joint investments.
40. The region’s innovation and competitive levels illustrate mainly differences between urban and rural regions as well as between between the North-West of the area (the regions of Denmark, Germany, Sweden, Finland and Norway) and the South-East of the area (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the regions of Poland). A region’s competitiveness level depicts the ability to offer an attractive and sustainable environment for firms and residents.
41. Challenge-driven innovation addresses challenges that cut across academic disciplines, regional and national boundaries, and even industrial sectors. Examples of such challenges could be climate change, low-carbon/climate neutral circular economy, the eutrophication of the Baltic Sea, or the stress placed upon national and regional welfare systems by demographic conditions. No single academic discipline or institution can bring about the innovations to meet these challenges, making it critical for experts from different disciplines to work together. However, for such co-operation to be efficient, all partners involved must be referring to the same challenge and be able to understand it. There may not be a ready market for a solution that emerges from a challenge-driven innovation; a market may need to be created, which will often involve public sector intervention.
42. The starting point for co-operating on challenge-driven innovation in the BSR must be shared challenges, i.e. specific challenges that are common to the BSR. Such challenges includes for example:
- The eutrophication, nutrient and plastics pollution of the Baltic Sea, which draws attention to the importance of innovation for sustainable cities and rural communities.
 - The cold climate, which creates a need for heating buildings and puts innovations to tackle inefficient energy use (or design improvements to reduce environmental impacts and increase the durability and recyclability of components), the use of fossil fuels and climate change.
 - Low density populations, which challenge innovation for more efficient and sustainable Information and Communications Technology (ICT), communications, and infrastructure.
 - Digital transformation of bioeconomy/circular economy
43. The EU’s proposed post-2020 direction emphasises the role that collaborative innovation plays in enabling SMEs to gain a foothold in international markets through connecting industry to value chain opportunities. Regions across the BSR are already playing an active role here through a number of EU initiatives such as Thematic Smart Specialisation Platforms, the Vanguard Initiative

²² https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/content/delivering-sustainable-blue-growth-agenda-baltic-sea-region_en

²³ https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/content/delivering-sustainable-blue-growth-agenda-baltic-sea-region_en

and European Strategic Cluster Partnerships. In addition, a number of highly successful and ‘flagship’ BSR projects have shown that the macro-region has particular strengths in mobilising joint efforts from innovation stakeholders across science, technology, academia, industry and public policy.

44. The EU’s post-2020 proposals for innovation and economic growth offer the stimulus to build the foundations of a BSR innovation ecosystem, where regions (and their industries) can draw on their collective strengths to carve out new innovation-focused value chain opportunities. Existing efforts across the BSR demonstrate that regions are supporting their businesses to connect with other innovation actors to generate new innovation investment opportunities. Outcomes are already taking shape in key, emerging areas of strength (such as digitalisation, bio and low-carbon/climate neutral circular economy and blue growth).

The ‘next wave’ of the EU’s policy framework for Smart Specialisation is widely expected to focus on interregional collaboration through aligning regional S3 priorities and innovation investment efforts. Strengthening the BSR’s industrial performance through an innovation ecosystem and connection to global value chains. This ‘value chain’ orientation across the BSR enables improved targeting of efforts to connect companies to both EU and global chains, and to strengthen the expertise and ambitions of the BSR’s industry base.

45. Open innovation is increasingly used especially by big companies, but it is a growing opportunity also for BSR SMEs, which tend to focus mostly on short term gains due to limited resources. Co-creation is a concept closely linked to open innovation. It is a process, which brings different parties, including customers and other stakeholders together in order to jointly produce a mutually valued outcome through new forms of interaction, service and learning mechanism. Co-creation can lead to better, quicker and less risky innovations that are beneficial to customers and companies.”
46. Most of BSR SMEs lack the process, culture and skills on how to design cases for co-creation, and implement projects with external partnerships. BSR economies are dominated by SMEs and thus their capacity for co-creative innovation is crucial for business renewal and BSR competitiveness.

47. Orientation: Many places in the Baltic Sea Region have a strong RDI profile and RDI is certainly an important element of the economy in the Baltic Sea Region. In order to avoid an unnecessary duplication of funding, PO1 in the future BSR should be targeted very carefully to niche areas that benefit especially from transnational cooperation. To concentrate the RDI investments to limited, carefully chosen, challenge driven topics that are in line with the main priorities of the programme should be promoted (i.e. related to PO2). Actions to be supported should be closely coordinated with investments under other programmes, with specific attention to NPA and CBC programmes in region.

48. Orientation: To continue and bring to the next phase the work on innovation ecosystem in BSR.

49. Orientation: Open innovation and co-creation are key methods for developing the innovation related themes/investments in the future BSR. To scale up the use of co-creation among BSR SMEs through improving their capabilities and absorptive capacities to efficiently turn market demand driven ideas into innovations. To connect innovation systems across BSR through developing and piloting systematic models and practices to engage BSR SMEs, researchers, test facilities and end users in co-creation activities.

50. **Orientation:** The future BSR should focus especially to “Save the Sea” objective of the EUSBSR. The support for innovation activities should be mainly targeted to challenge driven themes related to PO2 and sustainable blue growth. In addition the work on innovation ecosystem should be continued in order to safeguard the competitive advantage of the region. The proposed re-orientation is based on the diminishing resources of cohesion policy and the need to focus on the most important challenge in relation to the Baltic Sea, namely the environmental status of the Sea and the global challenge in relation to climate change.

PO 2: A greener, low-carbon Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate adaptation and risk prevention and management

51. A greener, low-carbon Europe demands rethinking energy production, consumption storage and distribution as well as general economic value chains. This is closely linked to UN Sustainable Development Goal number 7 on affordable and clean energy. Changing energy production and consumption habits supports dealing with climate change.

52. In the context of the Baltic Sea Region, the focus is also on the economic model linked to a greener and low-carbon Europe, i.e. on circular economic models focusing on prevention of waste, repair, re-use, and recycling products and on green and clean tech industries. A region’s green economic performance illustrates to what degree it is prepared to adopt new economic models in favour of a green and low-carbon Europe (ESPON, 201324).

53. In support of the green economy, regions may support the circular economy via strategies, platforms and other activities. Finnish regions are among the most active regions in Europe to promote and implement the circular economy. The Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform by the European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee depicts a concentration of good practices and strategies in Finland. Other initiatives are ongoing in Denmark, Germany Sweden and Norway. In the future, more circular economy strategies are expected in Poland, for example in the Pomorskie and Lodzkie regions.

54. The debate about green energy and more sustainable economies is linked to the overall climate change objectives (UN Sustainable Development Goal number 13) and the state of the environment, i.e. SDG 14 on life below water and SDG 15 on life on land, Helsinki Convention and HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan. In particular, when it comes to life below water, the environmental state of the Baltic Sea is improving only slowly. Objectives set for the Baltic Sea have not been reached yet (HELCOM, 2018a). Different aspects pressure the ecological values of the Baltic Sea. Eutrophication is one of the main issues in the Baltic Sea (ibid.). The levels are still high particularly in southern areas of the Baltic Sea. Only a few coastal areas in the Bothnian arc are unaffected by eutrophication. Marine litter means any persistent, manufactured or processed solid material disposed, or abandoned in the marine environment (Böhme et al., 201625). Biodiversity in the sea is increasing the environmental impact on species in the Baltic Sea are far-reaching and not restricted to certain geographic areas or certain parts of the food web (HELCOM, 2018a)

²⁴ ESPON, 2013. GREECO – Territorial Potentials for a Greener Economy. Final Report. Luxembourg.

²⁵ Böhme, K., Antikainen, J., Zillmer, S., Hans, S., Pyykkonen, S., 2016. Looking towards 2030: Preparing the Baltic Sea Region for the future. Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket), Stockholm.

55. **Orientation:** The shift to a green economy is important to the Baltic Sea Region and some locations in the region are leading centres for the transition to a low-carbon/climate neutral circular economy. Initiatives for circular economy, greener and low-carbon Europe need to be included in the future BSR. They also support the EU's commitment to the Paris Agreement and UN Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, actions to be supported should be closely coordinated with investments under other programmes, with specific attention to NPA and CBC programmes in region.
56. **Orientation:** The development of transnational low-carbon/climate neutral circular economy systems could be a relevant feature of a future programme further accelerating and upscaling developments (like in relation to waste management) already taking place in the region and ensuring that the region remains in an internationally leading position.
57. **Orientation:** The Baltic Sea is one of the most polluted seas in the world. The most serious environmental challenge is the continuing eutrophication. Improving this situation demands cooperation between all cities, regions and countries around the Baltic Sea. Accordingly, measures to reduce the pollution of the Baltic Sea should be a main concern of the BSR programme.
58. **Orientation:** Climate change is covered under 2014-20 programme by four objectives: (a) water management for reduced nutrient inflows and decreased discharges of hazardous substances to the Baltic Sea and the regional waters (objective 2.1); (b) increase production and use of sustainable renewable energy (objective 2.2); (c) increase energy efficiency (objective 2.3), and (d) advance sustainable and resource-efficient blue growth (specific objective 2.4). The programme also has a number of horizontal principles including one related to adaptation - sustainable development. These investments need to be continued in the future BSR.
59. **Orientation:** Climate change was also a priority since the very first Action Plan of the EUSBSR in 2009. As the SDGs together with the Paris Agreement on Climate Change underline the importance to continue the work in this field, it is proposed that BSR puts focus on these issues. Achievements so far have targeted environmental challenges in the region, especially connected to the reduction of nutrient loads and the increase of water quality, and succeeded in setting up activities including all EUSBSR countries. These activities, aiming at the improvement of the environmental status, will generate indirect benefits under changing climate conditions as eutrophication will generate higher negative impacts with increasing temperatures. The investments to climate change need to be continued.
60. **Orientation:** Measures to reduce nutrients/pollution and improve the water quality of the sea could also be a field for better cooperation between the Interreg programmes (transnational and cross-border), mainstream programmes and the EUSBSR. While the coordination of policies, development of strategies and new approaches suit Interreg projects, concrete investments in infrastructures etc. to waste water treatment/water networks are better suited for mainstream programmes. Furthermore, in order to optimise the uptake of co-financed environmental investments, synergies and complementarities

should be ensured with projects funded under the LIFE programme for the Environment and Climate Action.

61. **Orientation:** The future BSR should focus especially to “Save the Sea” objective of the EUSBSR. The support for innovation activities should be limited to challenge driven themes related to PO2. In addition the work on innovation ecosystem should be continued in order to safeguard the competitive advantage of the region. Deployment of research, development and innovation results should be supported under PO2, where appropriate. The proposed re-orientation is based on the diminishing resources of cohesion policy and the need to focus on the most important challenge in relation to the Baltic Sea, namely the environmental status of the Sea and the global challenge in relation to climate change.

PO 3: A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility and regional ICT connectivity

62. For a long time the preparation of transnational transport strategies and plans have been the focus of the cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region. However, increasingly the transnational transport strategies have moved from the policy and planning phase to the implementation phase. This also means that the focus should be moving away from Interreg funding to more substantial investment funding provided through CEF, mainstream ESIF or EIB financial instruments.

63. **Orientation:** As the focus in the transport sector is moving from the planning and preparation phase to investment phase, it is proposed that transport investments should target the CEF, EIB instruments and mainstream (where available) programme funding. As transport support is proposed for CBC programmes (except South Baltic) it is not proposed for the future BSR due to the limited resources available.

PO 4: A more social Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights

64. Demographic trends and life style changes are drivers for increasing territorial diversity. Current trends such as urbanisation, ageing, migration, changing family & household structures are continuing and affect a growing number of places. These social trends influence the accessibility to services of general interest and are closely linked to UN Sustainable Development Goal number 3 on good health and well-being.

65. The Baltic Sea Region is one of the most diverse areas in Europe regarding population dynamics. Regions in Eastern Germany, Lithuania and Latvia are among the regions with highest emigration rates and population decline in Europe, whereas many urban areas in Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Poland are growing (European Commission, 2017a). Between 2014-2030 this imbalance is expected to further increase (ESPON, 2018a). These population trends are one of the reasons for increasing challenges to provide services of general interest

66. **Orientation:** Challenges in relation to population dynamics and social issues are best tackled by ESF+ funding, in particular within the national and regional programmes under PO4. Furthermore, PO4 is a regular feature in future maritime CBC programmes and provides synergies and complementarities.

PO 5: A Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of urban, rural and coastal areas and local initiatives

67. The Baltic Sea Region includes a variety of regions with different socio-economic developments and different geographic specificities, namely sparsely populated areas in Northern Europe and in Latvia and Estonia, mountainous areas on the borders between Sweden and Norway as well as Southern Poland and islands. Many of these geographical specificities can be considered as inner peripheries, areas with low accessibility to services in addition many areas are at risk of becoming an inner periphery, mainly in.
68. Place-sensitive approaches would help to bring initiatives closer to citizens. This implies building linkages between the territorial trends and dynamics described above as well as considering a territory's specific needs. Moreover, links could be established between the UN Sustainable Development Goal number 11, making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
69. **Orientation:** Although the PO5 is not specifically targeted to transnational cooperation programmes it might be an option to further explore the possibilities for that in relation to sparsely populated areas or islands cooperation. It is suggested that PO5 is addressed preferably within the context of cross-border cooperation programmes and not with the future BSR programme. Furthermore, in the round table discussions the representatives of the Member States did not support inclusion of PO5.

INTERREG-specific objectives: Better INTERREG governance and safer and more secure Europe

70. According to the Commission proposal for a 2021-2027 ETC Regulation²⁶, 15% of the ERDF funding for an Interreg programme shall be allocated to the Interreg-specific objective of 'a better Interreg governance'. In particular, the programmes aligned with Macro-Regional Strategies (MRS) should support the governance of such strategies.
71. The legislative proposal aims at strengthening the transnational cooperation of Interreg programmes covering the same functional areas as the existing macro-regional strategies by increasing the alignment between funding and the MRS priorities²⁷. It is important to simplify cooperation in the governing structures of the EUSBSR and to foster the very implementation of the strategy by leveraging funds both at the EU level (direct and shared management) and at international, national and private level. BSR should not be seen as the only or even the main funding instrument of the EUSBSR, but it should facilitate the implementation and support the governance of the EUSBSR.
72. The already existing transnational governance system of the EUSBSR has the potential to enable the continuation and reinforcement of multi-level participation of different stakeholders and promotion of policy integration and cross-sectoral coordination. However, the current EUSBSR governance and annual forum support mechanisms are too time consuming and administratively cumbersome. Therefore, the support mechanisms need to be simplified.
73. The role of Interreg-specific objective "safer and more secure Europe" is relevant as the programme includes cooperation with third countries. Where actions in the fields of border crossing management and mobility and migration management, including the protection of

²⁶ Articles 14 and 15 of the Proposal for a Regulation COM(2018)374 of 29.5.2018.

²⁷ ETC Regulation EC proposal art. 15 (3) – See footnote 1.

migrants (as described in the ETC regulation proposal) are relevant in macro-regional level this Interreg specific objective should be considered.

74. Orientation: There is a need to continue to provide support for the EUBSR governance from the future BSR programme and to start encouraging cross-MRS cooperation even more.

75. Orientation: BSR should help with coordination between programmes operating in the region and on capitalisation of project results (Thematic platforms).

76. “Safer and more secure Europe” specific objective should be considered to be included [the contents of this specific objective needs to be defined once Russian participation is agreed with Russia and EEAS and Russian own funding has been confirmed for the programme].

D. Conclusions for the 2021-2027 period for the cooperation area, including strategic orientations and relationship to macro-regional strategies/sea-basin strategies

77. Based on the considerations elaborated in the previous sections for transnational cooperation topics, the following thematic focus of the **future BSR** is proposed:

PO1

- Promote RDI activities in the challenge driven fields related to PO2
- Continue the successful work on the RIS3 ecosystem in BSR.
- Open innovation and co-creation are key words for developing the innovation related themes/investments in the future BSR.

PO2 (strongest focus)

- Development of transnational circular economy systems
- Develop measures to reduce the pollution of the Baltic Sea
- Promote climate change related investments

Interreg-specific objective of better governance (15%)²⁸

- Support governance of and coordination with EUSBSR
- Foster cooperation between regions and programmes
- Explore the possibility to include Interreg-specific objective “Safer and more secure Europe”

78. The BSR should continue to be geographically fully aligned with the EUSBSR territory.

79. **Orientation:** The future BSR should focus especially to “Save the sea” objective of the EUSBSR. The support for innovation activities should be limited to challenge driven themes related to PO2. In addition the work on innovation ecosystem should be continued in order to safeguard the competitive advantage of the region. The proposed re-orientation is based on the diminishing resources of cohesion policy and the need to focus on the most important challenge in relation to the Baltic Sea, namely the environmental status of the Sea and the global challenge in relation to climate change. Actions to be supported should be closely coordinated with investments under other programmes, with specific attention to NPA and CBC programmes in region.

²⁸ See Recital 19 and Articles 14 and 15 (2) of the Proposal for a Regulation COM(2018)374 of 29.5.2018.

Annex 1

PO 2021/2027 Programmes 2014-2020	1 A smarter Europe	2 A greener, low-carbon Europe	3 A more connected Europe	4 A more social Europe	5 A Europe closer to citizens/ Interreg-specific objective
Transnational					
Baltic Sea	TO1	TO6	TO7		TO11
Northern Periphery and Arctic	TO1,3	TO4,6			
North Sea	TO1	TO5,6	TO7		
Cross-border					
Interreg V-A SV-FI-NO (Nord)	TO1,3	TO4,6			
Interreg V-A SV-FI-NO (Botnia-Atlantica)	TO1,3	TO6	TO7		
Interreg V-A FI-EE-LV-SV (Central Baltic)	TO3	TO6	TO7	TO10	
Interreg V-A SV-DK-NO (ÖKS)	TO1	TO4	TO7	TO8	
Interreg V-A SV-NO	TO1,3	TO6	TO7	TO8	
Interreg V-A PL-DK-DE-LT-SV (South Baltic)	TO3	TO6	TO7	TO8	TO11
Interreg V-A DE-DK	TO1	TO6		TO8	TO11
Interreg V-A LT-PL		TO6		TO8,9	TO11
Interreg V-A DE (MVB)-PL		TO6	TO7	TO10	TO11
Interreg V-A DE (Brandenburg)-PL		TO6	TO7	TO10	TO11
Interreg V-A LT-PL		TO6		TO8,9	TO11
Interreg V-A LT-LV		TO6		TO8,9	TO11
Interreg V-A EE LV	TO3	TO6	TO7	TO8	
Interreg V-A LV-LT		TO6		TO8,9	TO11
Mainstream					
Denmark	TO1,3	TO4			
Estonia	TO1,3	TO4,5,6	TO2,7	TO8,9,10	TO11
Finland	TO1,3	TO4		TO8,9,10	
Germany	TO1,3	TO4,6		TO9	
Latvia	TO1,3	TO4,5,6	TO2,7	TO8,9,10	TO11
Lithuania	TO1,3	TO4,5,6	TO2,7	TO8,9,10	TO11
Sweden	TO1,3	TO4	TO7	TO8,9,10	TO11
Poland	TO1,3	TO4,5,6	TO2,7	TO8,9,10	TO11
ENI-CBC					
FI-RU (3 programmes)	TO1,3	TO4,5,6	TO7	TO10	TO11
EE-RU	TO3	TO4,5,6	TO7		TO11
LT-RU				TO9,10	TO11
LV-RU	TO3	TO6		TO10	TO11
PL-RU		TO6	TO7	TO10	TO11
LV-LT-BL				TO9,10	TO11
PL-BL-UE			TO7	TO10	TO11

NB: The allocation of the Thematic Objectives (TO) of the 2014-2020 programming period to the proposed Policy Objectives for 2021-2027 has been approximately done based on the following definitions:

- TO1:** Strengthening research, technological development and innovation
- TO2:** Enhancing access to, and use and quality of, information and communication technologies
- TO3:** Enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs
- TO4:** Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy
- TO5:** Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management
- TO6:** Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency
- TO7:** Promoting sustainable transport and improving network infrastructures
- TO8:** Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility
- TO9:** Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination
- TO10:** Investing in education, training and lifelong learning
- TO11:** Improving the efficiency of public administration

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