

Environmental Statement

1. Introduction

During the years 2012- 2014 the Cooperation Programme 'Interreg Baltic Sea Region' has been prepared for funding transnational co-operation during the funding period 2014-2020. 'Interreg Baltic Sea Region' is financed from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Norwegian national funding and the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI)¹. In projects financed from the programme partners from eleven countries around the Baltic Sea will work together in transnational projects to address common key challenges and opportunities related to the topics innovation, natural resources and sustainable transport.

In parallel to the programming process, the programme has been subject to a strategic environmental assessment in accordance with the requirements in Directive 2001/42/EC (in the following referred to as 'SEA directive'). This resulted in a draft environmental report in January 2014.

A draft version of the BSR Programme together with the draft environmental report was subject to a public consultation in the period 31 January 2014 to 11 April 2014.

One comment on the draft environmental report was received through the public hearing (offering agreement with certain aspects of the draft environmental report). The hearing did thus not lead to any changes in the environmental assessment.

The public consultation did result in a number of comments on the 'Interreg Baltic Sea Region' Cooperation Programme. On this basis, a draft final version of the Cooperation Programme was prepared on 23 April 2014. The revisions of the draft programme document did not lead to any changes in the environmental assessment. Thus, a final environmental report was provided on 29 April 2014.

The Cooperation Programme was approved by the Joint Programming Committee on 21 May 2014, submitted to the EU Commission on 4 September 2014 and adopted on 18 December 2014. During the adoption process smaller modifications had to be implemented, but no major content-related changes that would have required an amendment of the environmental assessment.

¹ The availability of ENI funding will be subject to Financing Agreements between the Governments of Russia and Belarus and the European Commission, which are not yet concluded.

2. Environmental assessment

The aim of the strategic environmental assessment was to ensure that environmental considerations were taken into account in the development of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme.

The assessment was conducted at two levels: 1) The level of overall objectives and horizontal principles of the programme and, 2) The level of activities supported by the programme.

The assessment at the level of overall objectives and horizontal principles shows that the objectives and horizontal principles of the programme emphasise sustainable development as an intrinsic part of the programmes objectives. This indicates that the programme is drafted under due consideration to the possible environmental impacts flowing from the proposed programme initiatives.

The assessment at the level of individual activities shows that two main characteristics of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region have important implications for the environmental assessment.

First, the programme is focused on building the capacities of key actors and thereby, achieving higher-level objectives, such as environmentally friendly urban mobility or resource-efficient blue growth. Capacity building is to be achieved through types of support such as development of strategies or plans, training, networking, etc. These types of support, which can be characterised as 'process designs', do not in themselves have a significant direct environmental impact. However, if successful, they can lead to activities later on, which can potentially have significant environmental impacts. Therefore, the assessment recommended that selection criteria to ensure that capacity building activities build on principles of sustainable development and resource-efficiency are included in the programme or in the Programme Manual.

Secondly, the Interreg Baltic Sea Region is characterised by providing general objectives and directions for support, which will subsequently be implemented through financing concrete projects. This means that the precise nature of the activities implemented under the programme will depend on the funded projects.

The criteria for the assessment of projects are not included in the programme, but are defined in Annex 1 of the Programme Manual, which was published in its first version for the 1st call for proposals on 2 December 2014. According to the assessment criteria the projects' contribution to sustainable development will be assessed under the category 'relevance of the proposal' together with other horizontal principles of the European Union as referred to in Article 8 (7) Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 (equal opportunities and non-discrimination, equality between men and women). Under this assessment

criterion not only the references to the horizontal principles will be checked, but it will also be evaluated whether the applications present practical approaches to implement these in the project context.

In addition, the Programme Manual provides in chapter C.4.1 'Sustainability of projects on operational level' proposals how projects can be implemented on a day-to-day basis in line with the principles of sustainability, e.g. in relation to organising environmentally-friendly meetings and travelling or 'green' public procurement.

3. Monitoring and Evaluation

According to Article 10 of the SEA Directive, significant environmental effects of implementation of plans and programmes shall be monitored in order to identify at an early stage unforeseen adverse effects, and to be able to undertake appropriate remedial action.

In accordance with the recommendations in the environmental report, monitoring will take place at two levels:

- At programme level in connection with interim and ex-post evaluations of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region.
- At project level for those projects considered to have significant environmental effects identified during the environmental assessment procedure of project applications.

Evaluations on programme level will be defined in an evaluation plan, which will be submitted to the monitoring committee no later than one year after the adoption of the operational programme as defined in Article 114 of EU Regulation 1303/2013. In addition to the evaluations of the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the programme, also its impact on horizontal principles, including sustainability, will be addressed.