

Strategy for the Swedish Institute's activities concerning cooperation in the Baltic Sea region for the period 2016–2020



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of Sweden**

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1. Introduction

This strategy governs the use of funds under expenditure area 5, International cooperation, appropriation 1:11, item Cooperation in the Baltic Sea region, in the appropriation directions for the Swedish Institute for each budget year. The strategy encompasses approximately SEK 500 million for the strategy period.

The purpose of the Swedish Institute's activities within the framework of this strategy is to develop Sweden's relations in the Baltic Sea area by contributing to sustainable development and strengthened global competitiveness in the region, as well as strengthened democracy, respect for human rights, gender equality and respect for the principles of the rule of law in Sweden's neighbourhood. The strategy will cover the countries in the framework of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), i.e. Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. Russia and the countries in the EU's Eastern Partnership, i.e. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, are included in this cooperation.

On the basis of the common challenges facing the countries around the Baltic Sea and the close vicinity – linked to environment and climate, security, democracy, gender equality, human rights, the rule of law and freedom of expression, as well as social divides, the economy and welfare – there is a great need for increasing and developing cooperation in various areas. Cooperation in the Baltic Sea region is key to promoting the EU's overarching objectives for the Baltic Sea region: saving the sea, connecting the region and increasing prosperity. Activities are also justified by the need to strengthen Baltic Sea cooperation and strengthen integration

between the EU Baltic states and countries in the EU's Eastern Partnership, on the basis of Sweden's interests. Contacts with Russia, primarily through people-to-people cooperation and information campaigns, are also an important objective. It is in the interests of Sweden and the rest of Europe that Russia and the Eastern Partnership countries develop in a democratic direction towards a sustainable and inclusive market economy. Although developments in these countries vary, as do their approaches concerning closer ties with the EU, it is relevant to identify areas in which regional cooperation is of interest and benefit to these countries' own development. Activities are to be designed so that they promote gender equality and women's and girls' rights, and so that they include measures aimed at influencing men's and boys' attitudes and approaches in these issues. Activities within the framework of this strategy are to supplement – and not replace or duplicate – the aid-financed activities carried out through the Government's strategy for reform cooperation with Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey (UF2013/31802/UD/EC).

Activities are to be conducted in the following areas:

1. Sustainable development and strengthened global competitiveness in the region.
2. Greater integration between EU Member States and the countries in the EU's Eastern Partnership and Russia.

2. Activities

Area 1: Sustainable development and strengthened global competitiveness for the Baltic Sea region

The overarching aim of activities in area 1 is to contribute to sustainable, inclusive development and strengthened global competitiveness in the region. Activities are to meet the objectives in the EU Cohesion Policy and contribute to macroregional integration in the Baltic Sea region, in line with the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), in which the main objectives are to save the sea, connect the region and increase prosperity. Stronger Swedish participation in the implementation of the

EUSBSR, more developed cross-sectoral collaboration in the region and greater confidence between citizens within and between countries are to help achieve the EUSBSR objectives. To achieve the EUSBSR objectives, non-EU countries – primarily Russia and in certain cases Belarus – also need to be part of this cooperation.

Activities are to help promote integration of minorities and Russian-speaking individuals in the EU Member States and enable more levels of society to take part in the implementation of the EUSBSR. Regarding cooperation with Russia, activities are to be supplementary to the objectives in the Government's strategy for Sweden's support to democracy, human rights and the environment in Russia.

Activities in area 1 are expected to contribute to:

- Swedish actors taking part to a greater extent in cooperation that helps implement the EUSBSR, including EU-financed projects, with a focus on long-term, sustainable cooperation and cross-sectoral collaboration.
- Increased participation in Baltic Sea cooperation by non-EU countries, with a focus on Russia and also Belarus.
- Increased inclusion of vulnerable groups, minorities and Russian-speaking target groups in Baltic Sea cooperation.
- Increased exchange and cooperation between actors for change and opinion-formers from various sectors who are working for sustainable development, democracy and gender equality, and decision-makers from politics and business.

Area 2: Increased integration between EU Member States and the countries in the EU's Eastern Partnership and Russia

The overarching objective in area 2 is increased integration between EU Member States and the Eastern Partnership countries, i.e. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, with the aim of

promoting democracy, respect for human rights, the rule of law, gender equality, freedom of expression and sustainable development. Activities are to focus on people-to-people cooperation and knowledge-building in areas such as gender equality, independent media, environment, culture, academia and social, economic and environmental sustainability in the business sector and administration. One important aspect in promoting integration is also making available from independent sources information about current issues in the region, with a focus on Russian-speaking target groups. Activities are to be conducted in accordance with the objectives in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Wherever possible and relevant, Russia should also be included in cooperation. Increased people-to-people cooperation – with a special focus on young women and men – is expected to enable activities to contribute to mutual understanding, increased confidence and positive developments in the countries and the region.

To achieve increased integration, it is crucial to promote cooperation concerning areas that are of mutual interest and where there are clear points of contact and potential synergies between priority areas in the Eastern Partnership's multilateral platforms and the EUSBSR, for example.

Activities in area 2 are expected to contribute to:

- Increased exchange between the public sector – including regional and municipal level – in the Eastern Partnership and cooperation structures in the EU.
- Enhanced conditions for entrepreneurship and innovation, with a focus on women's entrepreneurship and corporate social responsibility.
- Diversity in the media sector and greater freedom of expression, with a focus on promoting free and independent media, above all Russian-language media, and information and media know-how among selected target groups, and the general public's access to objective and independent information.

- Strengthened academic and cultural cooperation and exchange, and increased mobility between Eastern Partnership countries and EU countries, as well as between the academic sector in the Eastern Partnership region and actors in other sectors, including the business sector and the innovation system.
- Increased confidence and exchange between young people in the region.

3. Implementation of activities

On the basis of its comparative advantages, the Swedish Institute (SI) will work towards improved relations around the Baltic Sea and deeper cooperation in the EU and other international bodies in the Baltic Sea region, as well as between EU Member States and the Eastern Partnership countries, and Russia. Activities are to be cohesive and goal-oriented, with a focus on long-term results in accordance with the overarching strategies for the EU's and Sweden's policies in the region, including the EUSBSR, the EU's Eastern Partnership and national strategies, such as the Government's Policy for Global Development and the feminist foreign policy.

Activities are to be designed so as to strive for synergies between Baltic Sea cooperation and aid to the Eastern Partnership region, where the various initiatives by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the Swedish Institute (SI) are to effectively complement each other. SI's initiatives, with a focus on regional cooperation and people-to-people contact, can prepare, supplement and develop the impact of Sida's information and communication campaigns, meeting places or networks in specific areas or for specific groups, such as women. Activities are to be conducted in line with SI's general remit and in collaboration and partnership, based on reciprocity and long-term thinking, and also on the basis of Sweden's relevance and the needs of different target groups. To achieve the strategy's results, Swedish added value in the form of experience, know-how and credibility is to be harnessed. Implementation of the strategy is to be carried out in close cooperation with the Swedish embassies in the region.

Collaboration with relevant organisations in the newer EU Member States, such as the Baltic States and the Visegrad countries, etc. that are active vis-à-vis the Eastern Partnership countries, is to be sought with the aim of harnessing experiences of transition and thus creating credibility and added value. Collaboration may also be required with international organisations active in the region, such as the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers, with the aim of utilising synergies and networks.

Activities within area 1: Sustainable development and strengthened global competitiveness for the Baltic Sea region

Within area 1, the focus is on supporting implementation of the EUSBSR and contributing to deeper cooperation between the EUSBSR countries and greater confidence between inhabitants. For Sweden to contribute to a greater degree to achieving the objectives in the EUSBSR, Swedish skills and experience need to be utilised to a greater extent. SI should therefore reach out to a broader audience and lower the threshold for actors to initiate transnational cooperation and participate in EU-financed projects, through information campaigns, advice and continuing professional development, for example. The target groups are primarily civil society, small and medium-sized enterprises, authorities and academia, and local and regional level.

SI's initiatives in this area should be directed at promoting long-term, broad partnerships that include actors from several sectors, social groups, levels and countries, and promoting increased collaboration between initiatives that work towards similar objectives. The aim is to contribute to synergies between the existing results and stimulate new project ideas. Through new meeting places, relations between different types of actors can be strengthened, laying the foundation for long-term cooperation and sustainable project results. For the project results to last, it is also important that cooperation and project results are integrated into the actors' regular activities. SI should work to maintain the contact networks that have been built up through various collaborations and ensure that they contribute to the promotion of Sweden abroad.

Deeper cooperation with relevant organisations active in the Baltic Sea region is essential to achieving the objectives in the EUSBSR. Through its activities, SI should help to foster synergies with other financing instruments to achieve long-term financing structures. Cooperation should strive to include non-EU countries, with a focus on Russia and, in some cases, also Belarus, primarily in the environmental area.

Increased confidence between citizens in the Baltic Sea region is essential to development and stability in the region, and to promoting regional integration between the countries included in the EUSBSR and with Russia. This requires initiatives that support greater inclusion of vulnerable groups and minorities, as well as Russian-speaking target groups in the EU Member States. This area can be enhanced through initiatives to improve independent media actors' capacity to produce and communicate qualitative and inclusive media content. Through support from SI that was established in 2015, the missions abroad in the Baltic countries have been able to participate in initiatives that contribute to an improved media landscape and integration of Russian speakers; it is desirable for this cooperation to continue.

Exchange between young people, opinion-formers and decision-makers from politics and business are priorities, as is increased exchange between officials and politicians, primarily at local and regional levels in different countries. Important actors for change for democracy and freedom of expression are also present in the culture and media sectors. SI can support training and leadership programmes, expert visits, project collaborations and common meeting places and platforms.

SI's activities should also strive to establish stronger ties between the countries around the Baltic Sea, particularly Nordic-Baltic ties, for example through cultural exchange and other measures aimed at greater understanding, tolerance of different ways of thinking, freedom of expression, diversity, accessibility and gender equality. The missions abroad are key cooperation partners in this work.

Activities within area 2: Greater integration between EU Member States and the countries in the EU's Eastern Partnership and Russia.

Within area 2, SI should work to strengthen people-to-people contact in areas that can contribute to deeper cooperation and greater confidence in the region, and to increased EU integration for the countries in the Eastern Partnership. Russia should also be included in cooperation when deemed appropriate. As far as possible, cooperation should be based on areas of mutual interest. Both SI's comparative advantages and Sweden's interests should be expressed in activities. Three-way cooperation that includes the EU's newer Member States in Eastern Europe is encouraged, with the aim of making use of their experiences of transition and the credibility and skills that above all the Baltic States have in this area.

The EU places great importance on institution-building in the Eastern Partnership countries, as strong institutions contribute to more efficient administration and positive, sustainable and inclusive economic development. Alongside aid from the EU and Sida, among others, there is a need for supplementary support aimed at strengthening capacity among individuals in institutions, at both regional and national level, to promote the rule of law. Activities are to contribute to creating conditions for knowledge exchange, skills and capacity enhancement, models to inspire mutual interest in common issues, and networks and relationship-building. An important focus is strengthening the networks between actors for change in key institutions and relevant organisations in the EU by supporting the participation of officials from Eastern Partnership countries in existing cooperation structures in the EU. It is also important to engage civil society to promote the reform processes taking place in several of the Eastern European partnership countries. Activities should focus on cooperation on anti-corruption efforts, accountability, transparency, gender equality and environmental sustainability, e.g. in public administration. SI's initiatives in these areas should complement, not duplicate, the initiatives carried out within the framework of the Government's aid strategy for reform cooperation with Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey (UF2013/31802/UD/EC).

SI is to work for increased cooperation in the private sector to contribute to a competitive, inclusive and sustainable business sector. The implementation of seminars, training and leadership programmes and expert visits, and the establishment of new and existing meeting places should focus on development of the private sector and the promotion of business and entrepreneurship, and above all promote knowledge and interest in the business sector concerning corporate social responsibility. Activities may also include measures to increase cooperation in the creative sector. It is important to design initiatives in a way that stimulates sustainable entrepreneurship and innovation in the Eastern Partnership countries in the long term too. Possibilities for women's entrepreneurship also need to be strengthened to promote development in the private sector. Women who run their own business or plan to start a business can be supported through leadership programmes and the design of meeting places and networks, for example. Synergies should be sought with the existing initiatives that Sweden is supporting in the area, partly through international financial institutions (IFIs) and partly through Sida's Women in Business programme.

There is a great need to strengthen free and independent media in the region. It is important to contribute to greater plurality in the media and create conditions for independent media to have a greater impact, above all Russian-language media, through both analogue and digital channels. SI's activities within the framework of the coming strategy period are to target capacity- and knowledge-enhancing measures, project support and the creation of meeting places for greater regional cooperation between free and independent media, including initiatives to combat threats and violence against journalists, particularly women journalists. Capacity support should target management issues, in order to strengthen the capacity of independent actors to run successful media companies, and increased quality in the independent media. It is also important to contribute to increased media and information literacy among actors for change and intermediaries. Leadership and training programmes and expert visits should target specially selected groups active in leadership functions in media, PR and communications, such as journalists, bloggers and representatives of industry organisations. SI should also help to

adequately counter the spread of disinformation and increase access to topical information and news from independent sources on Sweden and the region, in Russian.

It is desirable for SI's and Sida's support for freedom of the media and freedom of expression to be more closely linked, through SI supplementing initiatives with the participation of representatives of the Baltic countries and Poland, in order to create regional networks that strengthen the results of Sida's activities.

The academic and cultural cooperation between the Eastern Partnership and the EU countries needs to be strengthened, with the aim of contributing to increased integration in the region. SI is to contribute to the internationalisation of selected universities in the Eastern Partnership countries by promoting academic mobility and language teaching, and supporting capacity-enhancing measures, such as scholarships, meeting places and cooperation projects. It is also important to equip key individuals in academia in the Eastern Partnership countries with tools and knowledge that provide the conditions for cross-sectoral collaboration, including with the international business world.

SI is also to design initiatives that contribute to increased confidence and exchange between young people in the region, including initiatives that promote gender equality and can influence the attitudes of young men and boys concerning gender roles and rights. Exchanges could be enabled within school, sports and culture, with a special focus on including young Russians.

4. Risk management and follow-up of the strategy

In connection with the planning and implementation of activities within the framework of the strategy, SI is to assess and take account of strategic risks, not least corruption, but also potential risks that individuals may be subjected to when taking part in cooperation projects. SI is to conduct a risk analysis for each area in the strategy to identify, evaluate and give a priority level to relevant risks. SI is also to analyse how the risks can be minimised and managed to achieve the activity objectives.

On the basis of the strategy's activities, SI should build up methods for following up objectives, indicators and performance measurement at relevant levels. Both performance-related effects and effects in the medium and long term should be followed up and evaluated. Follow-up of all projects carried out and/or financed by SI is key. When SI is only the financier, requirements must be set out for the conducting party to carry out follow-up and in some cases auditing. In addition to follow-up and evaluation of activities, SI is to follow developments in the strategy's areas and ensure that the strategy's activities and objectives are relevant given developments in the region.

SI is to report – on an annual basis, coherently and per country/region – the volume and cost of initiatives and follow up their direct effects and any indicators. In addition, prior to consultations with the Government Offices (Ministry for Foreign Affairs), SI is to write an annual strategy report containing an assessment of the activities' and strategy's implementation, the realisation of objectives, and conditions for achieving the desired results by the end of the strategy period. The report should also contain details about synergies and complementarity vis-à-vis Sida's activities in the region. At the end of the strategy period, ahead of the Government's decision on a new strategy in the area, an evaluation of activities is to be carried out by an external party in order to guarantee quality and objectivity. In addition to the annual consultations with the Government Offices (Ministry for Foreign Affairs), SI is to have a continuous dialogue with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, relevant missions abroad and Sida about implementation of the strategy.