

## Baltic Science Network

### Policy Paper regarding the FP 9

#### Introduction

Science and innovation are essential in terms of Europe's future. **The Baltic Science Network (BSN)**<sup>1</sup>, which is acting in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) - one of the most competitive and innovative science regions in the world with a first class higher education, researchers, research infrastructure and innovative businesses - is willing to make a major contribution to shape science and innovation in Europe.

The BSN as a transnational forum for science and research cooperation in the BSR would like to contribute with a discussion paper **focussing on the macro-regional aspects** to the debate of the next European Union (EU) Research and Innovation Framework Programme (FP 9).

Due to the notable scope of BSN membership, the network's reflections bring an added value to the European debate. The BSN includes regional and national science ministries from EU-15, as well as from EU-13 countries. Furthermore, national, Nordic and EU research funding organisations are active in the BSN. The views of the universities are represented by the two BSR-wide active university networks (Baltic University Programme and Baltic Sea Region University Network) and individual universities, nominated by their ministries. Also Norway, Russia and the key multilateral fora of the BSR (Council of the Baltic Sea States and the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region) are involved in BSN.

One aim of BSN is to make the potential of the science region BSR more visible in Brussels. Furthermore, BSN serves as a test bed for innovative solutions supporting the implementation of the European Research Area (ERA). This document is based on current reflections among partners and stakeholders and findings of BSN working papers<sup>2</sup> on research cooperation, researchers' mobility and widening participation in the BSR. BSN wishes to highlight 8 areas, relevant in relation to the FP 9, that have been identified as challenges to macro-regional research cooperation and at the same time are considered relevant for all of the EU as such.

The views of this paper do not necessarily correspond to, nor compete with, national positions.

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<sup>1</sup> More information about the Baltic Science Network can be found on our website: [www.baltic-science.org](http://www.baltic-science.org)

<sup>2</sup> More information on BSN working papers: <http://www.baltic-science.org/index.php/publications>

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#### **(1) Invest into the future – sufficient funds to match our grand European challenges**

Horizon 2020 (H2020) has strengthened transnational cooperation between national research and innovation systems, and thus consolidates Europe's global position in this field. The added value of European cooperation stems from the clear success criteria of a European research and innovation policy: European research cooperation must aim to achieve scientific excellence and impact that cannot be achieved at national level alone. Every Euro invested in knowledge, research and innovation is therefore an investment in Europe's future.

Therefore, BSN suggests:

- As H2020 interim evaluation reveals, the current Framework Programme is highly oversubscribed, resulting in the possibility to fund less than 1 in 4 high-quality proposals. Therefore, sufficient funding should be allocated to the FP 9 in order to tackle the ambitious challenges being addressed by the EU research and innovation agenda.
- Grants should remain the primary funding instrument of FP 9.

#### **(2) Equal opportunities for excellent research – simplification and support**

There is still much more untapped research and innovation potential across the BSR, which could benefit from European support and could contribute to tackling the challenges addressed by the EU research agenda. The administrative complexity of applying and managing EU funded research projects poses a substantial challenge for researchers to participate. In particular, it leads to a disadvantage for excellent researchers from institutions that are not able to provide sufficient background support to their researchers.

Therefore, BSN suggests:

- FP 9 should continue to simplify regulations and procedures for applying and managing FP 9 projects, and thus reduce the administrative burden for researchers and their institutions and provide equal opportunities for excellent researchers.
- FP9 should help to facilitate the exchange of best practices among administrative staff and National Contact Points, etc.

#### **(3) Tap into Europe's talent pool – New ideas in the field of 'Widening Participation'**

Excellent researchers may be found across the EU. However, despite serious efforts by the EU and its Member States, not least the 'Widening Package' in H2020 and the use of structural funds for transnational research projects, significant gaps remain among European regions in terms of research and innovation performance and participation. These gaps should be also addressed in the FP9 – while maintaining excellence as the main criterion.

Therefore, BSN suggests:

- Like H2020, the next Framework Programme should include measures like the 'Widening Package' to help promote access from all countries across Europe, while maintaining excellence as the main criterion for participation.

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- In order for Europe to fully tap into the potential of the entire ERA, the next Framework Programme should be an open and inclusive programme, allowing for new approaches and participants.
- Targeted information activities and sharing experiences at all levels, including the macro-regional level, could help overcoming the research and innovation (R&I) divide in the Framework Programme and other cooperation mechanisms.
- Increased effectiveness, coherence and openness of joint initiatives and partnerships, including clear principles for creating, monitoring and phasing out thematic partnerships from the Framework Programme funding, reducing ineffective ones and promoting a more inclusive approach towards new topics and networks should be promoted.
- Simplification and streamlining of the rules in the funding programmes is necessary.
- While both H2020 and European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) aim at maximising synergies, there is a need to achieve such synergies easily and systematically on the project level. Overcoming the difficulties would enable low-performing countries to enhance their R&I capacities and successfully enter in the competitive funding arena.

#### **(4) Attract best talents – Increasing mobility for a competitive ERA**

Attracting the best talents and increasing a brain circulation on equal basis among them is crucial in contributing to the competitiveness of ERA, hence suitable framework conditions and mobility schemes remain important.

Therefore, BSN suggests:

- EU should support mobility of researchers within macro-regions, for example structural mobility programmes for researchers in the BSR.
- EU should introduce targeted mobility schemes for the EU-13 which are experiencing 'brain drain'. Supporting mobility of researchers to those regions could on the one hand expand scientific networks in Europe and, on the other hand, create pressure on R&I systems in those regions to reform and provide better framework conditions.

#### **(5) Enhance synergies of EU funding programmes for the BSR**

A better interaction between EU Research and EU Cohesion policies and better realising their potential synergies, should be one of the goals of our work preparations towards the FP 9 implementation. For the research and innovation landscape in the BSR not only the Framework Programme but also ESIF programmes like INTERREG are highly relevant. Experience suggests that the administrative requirements of INTERREG are overly burdensome and that there is untapped synergetic potential between the Framework Programme and ESIF.

Therefore, BSN suggests:

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- Synergies between FP 9 and other EU funding programmes should be maximised. A coherent support out of several funding programmes for projects following one leading idea should be possible with lean and simple procedures.
- The participation opportunities of macro-regional networks in EU funding programmes should be increased, e.g. by formulating calls and actions in a way which allows for applications from macro-regional networks.
- ESIF programmes should support research, innovation and education to a larger extent.

#### **(6) Support and expand existing research funding structures of the Baltic Sea Region**

The benefits of macro-regional Research, Technological Development and Innovation (RTDI) co-operation for increasing scientific excellence and improved policies have been clearly demonstrated by BONUS, the ongoing joint Baltic Sea research and development programme. The existing BSR networks and in particular, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, provide a multitude of yet undiscovered opportunities for cross-sectoral co-operation - scientific outcomes have a great potential for creating new, sustainable solutions for the future prosperity of our societies.

Therefore, BSN suggests:

- BONUS should be continued and financed as part of the FP9 and as such strongly supported by the EU Member States.
- The best practices of BONUS could serve as a model for implementing new macro-regional funding programmes in other relevant scientific fields.
- In the BSR a wide variety of research funding programmes exist, located at regional, national, Nordic or EU level. Incentives to support a closer cooperation should be developed, a better common marketing of the existing opportunities and streamlining those instruments should be encouraged.

#### **(7) Facilitate better transnational utilisation of research infrastructures**

Distribution and interconnectedness of research infrastructures in the BSR and in Europe require long-term and large investments, with flexible mechanisms for providing access to the existing infrastructures on short and mid-term basis.

Therefore, BSN suggests:

- FP 9 should offer incentives for the development of a suitable mechanism for providing researchers better access to the existing and future research infrastructures (e.g. mobility grants, flexible cooperation models).
- The potential for co-funding of the creation and exploitation of research infrastructures should be continuingly explored.

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#### **(8) 'Open to the World' - Facilitate an inclusive research cooperation in the BSR**

Scientific collaboration in the BSR should be taken into account and supported vis-à-vis implementing Commissioner Moedas' political concept 'Open to the World' as important part of the EU science diplomacy.

Russia, Belarus and Ukraine are important scientific partners in the BSR. Incorporating the whole of the BSR in research cooperation is an important mean to strengthen research in Europe and especially research within the macro-region. However, various challenges like differences in scientific and administrative traditions and regulations, lack of funding and political issues hamper the cooperation across the BSR with universities, researchers and research institutions from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine.

Therefore, BSN suggests:

- Research collaboration with universities, researchers and research institutions from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine should be taken into account already from the beginning when designing the rules for FP 9. Rules need to be clear and flexible.
- International cooperation based on equal terms should be promoted by encouraging universities, researchers and research institutions from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine to participate with matching funds and thus also ensuring full commitment of these countries.
- More information on research opportunities in the EU should be provided directly to universities, researchers and research institutions from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. For the dissemination of information and building wider awareness about the on-going work, existing networks and organisations should be engaged more actively, for example, Russian Academy of Science, AVRIR (Association of Vice-Rectors for International Relations of the Northwest Higher Education Institutions), BUP (Baltic University Programme), BSRUN (Baltic Sea Region University Network) and the CBSS Baltic Sea Science Day as a gathering of the previously outlined stakeholders.

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**Annex**

**Members and associate organisations of the Baltic Science Network**

**Denmark**



Ministry of Higher Education and Science, Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education

**Estonia**



Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Estonia

**Finland**



University of Turku



Åbo Akademi University



Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture

**Germany**



Ministry of Science, Research and Equalities, Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg



Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Land of Schleswig-Holstein



Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Land of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

**Latvia**



Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia

**Lithuania**



Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania



Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre MOSTA

**Norway**

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The Royal Norwegian  
Ministry of Education and  
Research

**Poland**



University of Gdansk



Ministry of Science and  
Higher Education of the  
Republic of Poland

**Russia**



St. Petersburg State  
University of Economics

**Sweden**



Swedish Research Council

**International**



Baltic Organisations' Network  
for Funding Science EEIG  
(BONUS)



Baltic Sea Region University  
Network (BSRUN)



Council of the Baltic Sea  
States Secretariat



Baltic University Programme



EU Strategy for the Baltic  
Sea Region – Policy Area  
Education



NordForsk