

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region from Germany's perspective

Marta Zawilska-Florczuk

Germany is one of the eight EU member states which participate in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region along with Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden. Germany had a positive approach to the EUSBSR strategy (see Appendix 1) right from planning stage. This project contributed to the continuation of Germany's co-operation with the countries in this region, which has been conducted since the mid 1980s mainly by German federal states. Germany is playing a major role as part of this strategy because it is the coordinator of its three priority areas. However, the German federal government sees the EUSBSR as a project to be implemented at the level of federal states. This has been proven by the great activity of three German federal states participating in the strategy (Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Schleswig-Holstein) and at the same time the low level of engagement from the Bundestag, the federal government and expert circles. Furthermore, federal states more often formulate evaluations of the effects of co-operation achieved so far as part of the EUSBSR. Still, the relatively low level of Berlin's engagement does not mean that it is not interested in co-operation in the Baltic region as such. Germany actively participates in the work of such bodies as the Council of the Baltic Sea States or the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM). All German entities engaged in the strategy make its future attractiveness and the success of individual projects as part of it dependent on including Russia in the EUSBSR. As long as Germany has the opportunity of regional co-operation with Russia at other forums (for example, the Council of the Baltic Sea States), it is unlikely to become more engaged in developing the strategy and enhancing co-operation as part of this project.

The significance of the Baltic region for Germany

The Baltic Sea region is not a priority area within the EU from Berlin's point of view. The northern German federal states, Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, for which Baltic co-operation offered opportunities of economic development, the establishment of trade partnerships and – last but not least – a guarantee of security in the region, were the forerunners of German engagement in this region. The federal govern-

ment became involved in the co-operation much later, seeing it primarily as a chance for resolving ecological problems.

The political engagement of German federal states in the co-operation with countries from the Baltic Sea region dates back to the 1980s. The idea of a 'new Hansa', i.e. the creation of a network of economic, cultural and institutional connections between the countries and regions situated by the Baltic Sea, which had belonged to the Hanseatic League, appeared in 1987 upon the initiative of Björn Engholm, former prime minister of Schleswig-Holstein. This co-operation was to be aimed at the rapid development of this federal state, which was among the poorest in Germany, and at intensifying trade with Scandinavian countries. This was also a response to the small role the Baltic Sea was playing in German foreign policy at that time¹. Schleswig-Holstein initiated a number of transborder initiatives in the areas of economy, science, culture and youth exchange. In the 1990s, it was the most active German federal state in terms of co-operation in the Baltic Sea region.

The other two federal states located by the Baltic Sea (Hamburg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) joined this co-operation in the 1990s and later², when as a consequence of the fall of communism the spectre of potential co-operation partners in this region broadened³ and the possibility of using European funds as part of the neighbourhood policy emerged.

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The goals of joint action in the Baltic Sea region at that time, in addition to economic co-operation, also included ensuring security in the region and supporting Eastern European countries in their system transformation and efforts to integrate with the EU and NATO structures. Initially, the Baltic policy was conducted by the federal states (especially Schleswig-Holstein) independently of Germany's

foreign policy and even in opposition to it⁴. The federal states have been successful in their consistent activity and lobbying for federal politicians to develop a greater interest in the Baltic Sea region since Germany joined the Council of the Baltic Sea States in 1992 and later on other organisations were established to improve the co-operation between the countries in the region (including the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference and the Union of the Baltic Cities). Berlin attaches especially great significance to issues of environmental protection, including combating the pollution of the Baltic Sea and maintaining its biodiversity. For this reason Germany is active in the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM). One of the effects of the federal government's noticing the significance of the Baltic Sea region was the appointment of a commissioner for the Baltic Sea at the Chancellor's Office in 2000–2005. This position has been replaced by that of a Federal Government Coordinator of the Maritime Industry at the Ministry of Economics, whose function is reduced solely to coordinating and supervising Germany's activities supporting the development of the maritime economy (primarily the shipbuilding and port industries). Although Germany officially joined a number of regional organisations at the federal level, the individual federal states are still much more active in them than the central government. It needs to be admitted that Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Schleswig-Holstein grant various degrees of priority to Baltic co-operation; they still coordinate their activity, for example, by appointing their representative, each time from a different federal state, at the Council of the Baltic Sea States. Before the EU enlargement of 2004, when Central and Eastern European countries joined it, regional organisations were the only bodies which enabled co-operation between countries in this region. Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein in 2000–2006 used the EU structural funds, INTERREG, to a much greater extent than

¹ Cf. N. Werz, J. Bonin, J. Edler, U. Fabricius, Ch. Krüger, H. Saldik, Kooperation im Ostseeraum, in: *Rostocker Informationen zu Politik und Verwaltung*, no. 24, Universität Rostock Institut für Politik- und Verwaltungswissenschaften, Rostock 2005.

² Hamburg started co-operation after 2000, when the Baltic states had been assured of their accession to the EU.

³ Mecklenburg-Vorpommern could not become engaged earlier since this federal state was part of East Germany. Hamburg, one of the wealthiest federal states, became open to co-operation with countries from the Baltic Sea region motivated by the potential offered by new Eastern European markets.

⁴ This primarily concerned the support offered by Schleswig-Holstein to the aspirations of the Baltic states to join the EU and NATO, which in the opinion of the federal government could lead to tension in relations with Russia.

in the later period. Furthermore, before the EU was enlarged to include Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia along with other new member states, a network of well-functioning organisations and also partnerships at the local and non-governmental levels had been created, owing to which most of the tasks the federal states assigned themselves were fulfilled (for example, ensuring security in the region and establishing economic co-operation). Before 2004, the federal states' activities were closely linked to the central government's policy aimed at establishing the closest possible bonds between the Central and Eastern European countries and the European Union. After the EU's enlargement, the priorities which the interest of German federal states in co-operation with other Baltic Sea regions and countries depended on changed. The main focus of interest shifted to ecological and energy issues and the closest possible co-operation with Russia. Co-operation with Russia is seen as a precondition for the success of projects implemented in the region, mainly in the areas of environmental protection and energy.

The engagement in planning and the implementation of the strategy at the federal level is low

Plans for creating a macro-regional strategy in the region have met with ambivalent reactions in Germany. The federal states were actively engaged in its planning, while the central government was showing significantly less interest. This was due to the relatively low attractiveness of the strategy – which did not have a budget of its own – in comparison to other co-operation forums in the region. Berlin's lack of enthusiasm has also resulted from the fact that the EUSBSR is an internal EU strategy, which does not guarantee Russia the possibility of participation on equal terms.

Central institutions joined in the development of the German stance on the first planned EU macro-regional policy at a very late stage. The issue of establishing closer co-operation in the Baltic Sea region has been raised on just a few occasions during Bundestag sessions. However, what was being discussed was not the strategy itself but Germany's activity as part of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, the Council of the Baltic Sea States and HELCOM. MPs emphasised the need to narrow down the profile of activity, especially of the former two institutions, in order to focus on specific projects. The excessively broad range of activity and the fact that the goals of these initiatives had been formulated in overly general terms were criticised. The government did not take an official stance on this strategy, as it did with the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, which was developed two years later.

The fact that the national coordinator's office has been located at the Foreign Ministry proves that Germany is not attaching great significance to this strategy, since the European policy is coordinated primarily by the Chancellor's Office.

Only the three interested federal states brought their contribution to the consultations conducted by the European Commission. The political parties in Germany at the federal level were not particularly interested in the EUSBSR at the phase of its planning, either. The Green Party was the most active (which was manifested, for example, through questions addressed

by MPs to the federal government) because of ecological problems, which are of key significance for Germany in the context of co-operation in the Baltic Sea region. Shortly before the strategy was adopted, factions from the CDU/CSU and the SPD, which then were members of the grand coalition, brought a motion at the Bundestag forum appealing for the federal government to grant its full support to the strategy and to become engaged in the project⁵. At the planning stage, this strategy was not a subject of public debate in Germany, in the media and even in expert circles. With the exception of the Berlin-based Science and Poli-

⁵ <http://dipbt.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/16/131/1613171.pdf>

tics Foundation, which published a text devoted to the EUSBSR in 2009⁶, German analytical circles did not publish any papers devoted to this strategy⁷.

At the central level, Germany is in charge of the priority area 'To preserve natural zones and biodiversity, including in fisheries' as part of Pillar I of the strategy 'To make the Baltic Sea Region an environmentally sustainable place.' This area of priority is coordinated by the Ministry for the Environment. The function of the EUSBSR contact point in Germany, which acts as a national coordinator between units in charge of implementing individual projects, is performed by the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs⁸. The fact that the national coordinator's office has been located at the Foreign Ministry proves that Germany is not attaching great significance to this strategy. According to the unwritten distribution of competences within the German government, European policy is coordinated primarily by the Chancellor's Office. The Baltic Sea region is not a priority for the federal government. Much more significant in terms of internal security, immigration and economy are the southern federal states⁹, which are richer and keep trade contacts with the Balkan states, which Germany sees as promising markets. With the exception of Hamburg, the federal states participating in the EUSBSR are among the poorest and delegate a small number of representatives to the Bundesrat (the house of German parliament which co-decides on issues pertaining to the federal states)¹⁰.

The priorities of the federal states: ecology, energy, tourism and education

The German federal states located on the Baltic Sea coast enthusiastically responded to the EU Council's proposal to create a strategy for the Baltic Sea region and became actively engaged in the process of developing it. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Schleswig-Holstein were the most active. Two years since the implementation of this strategy, their enthusiasm has somewhat waned. This is so because the co-operation between the countries and organisations in this region, which had already been well-developed, has not been significantly enhanced. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is the most active federal state at present because, being one of the poorest federal states in Germany, it has the most to gain from regional co-operation.

Although **Schleswig-Holstein** was strongly engaged at the stage of strategy planning, it was not entrusted with coordinating any of the priority areas as part of the EUSBSR. Nevertheless, this federal state takes part in numerous projects, primarily in the area of ecology. It positively evaluates the combination of the existing forms of co-operation in the region.

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The political goals of the strategy, according to the government of Schleswig-Holstein, include primarily preventing the emergence of an economic divide between the eastern and western parts of the region during the economic crisis and improving the ecological condition of the Baltic Sea. In the opinion of Schleswig-Holstein,

the most important project is Clean Baltic Shipping, which covers, for example, the creation of a network of power plants to supply ships with power at ports and introducing charges for using port infrastructure and maritime routes, the rates of which would depend on the level of emissions¹¹. Schleswig-Holstein is also engaged (at the level of the federal state's prime minister) in the development of regional identity and supports the idea of creating a common history handbook for all the countries participating in the strategy. The most important partners for Schleswig-Holstein in this region are southern Denmark, the Pomerania

⁶ P. Krumrey, C. Schymik, EU-Strategie für den Ostseeraum, SWP Arbeitspapiere, no. 5, 2009, http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/arbeitspapiere/Diskussionspapier_KS_Gesamtentwurf03_final.pdf

⁷ One of the few opinions regarding this issue was the speech given by Kurt Bodewig (SPD), the federal minister for transport, construction industry and urban development in 2000–2002, and the president of the Baltic Sea Forum, just before the strategy officially came into force. Bodewig emphasised that the strategy was the first initiative of this kind to offer a chance for combining the already existing actions in the region at the European, national and regional levels. He saw it as an opportunity to strengthen co-operation in the region and to avoid the danger of isolating Russia as the only Baltic state which is outside Europe. In Bodewig's opinion, economic and energy issues (especially securing stable supplies of energy to the region) and improving the region's competitiveness should play the most important role in the strategy.

⁸ Division E 07 (its tasks include regional co-operation in Northern Europe) as part of the EU Coordination Group.

⁹ This has been proven by the fact that the federal government has been engaged much more in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region.

¹⁰ Hamburg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern delegate three representatives each and Schleswig-Holstein delegates four.

¹¹ Cf. for example: <http://www.schleswig-holstein.de/STK/DE/Schwerpunkte/EuropaOstseepolitik/OstseeNordseeangelegenheiten/Ostseekooperation/ostseestrategie.html>

province in Poland and north-western Russia. Schleswig-Holstein's government emphasises the need to allow Russia to participate in the EUSBSR to the greatest extent possible by using the instruments available as part of the Northern Dimension and the Council of the Baltic Sea States. It has also emphasised that Russia's non-engagement in the development of the goals and priorities of this strategy may lead to conflicts and the failure to achieve satisfactory effects of the actions taken, especially in the field of ecology.

Mecklenburg-Vorpommern became engaged in concept work and the implementation of the guidelines of the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region at a very early stage. Many debates have been devoted to co-operation as part of this strategy in the local parliament. The office of the prime minister of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and the ministries directly involved have also prepared and issued many publications concerning this subject.

Linking the previous lines of policy adopted by Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in the region and the strategy guidelines is the most important thing for this federal state. This is also playing a great role in the context of financing EUSBSR projects. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is the coordinator of the Tourism programme as part of the priority area 'To maintain and rein-

force the attractiveness of the Baltic Sea Region in particular through education, youth, tourism, culture and health' under the third pillar of this strategy, 'To make the Baltic Sea Region an accessible and attractive place.' Tourism is at the same time the most important branch of this federal state's economy. Ecological and infrastructural issues are also of great significance for Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. It is engaged in projects aimed at protecting the natural environment and improving transport connections, especially 'green'

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ones (railway, bicycle paths, tram connections, etc.). Energy issues, especially in the area of 'green' energy sources, including wind and geothermal energy, are also important. Over 33% of the energy produced in this federal state already originates from wind power plants. The government of this federal state is expecting that the EUSBSR will first of all help to open a network of connections between wind farms in the Baltic region. This fits in with its energy strategy since it aims to derive all its energy from renewable sources in the future. In the opinion of the government of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, one of the most significant tasks of the EUSBSR is to strengthen co-operation with Russia.

Hamburg was the last to become interested in co-operation in the Baltic Sea region because it is not situated immediately on the Baltic shoreline. As part of the EUSBSR, this federal state coordinates the Education and Youth programme as part of the priority area 'To maintain and reinforce the attractiveness of the Baltic Sea Region in particular through education, youth, tourism, culture and health' (third pillar). This way it combines the two areas of regional co-operation which are the most important from its point of view: economy and science. As part of the priority it coordinates, Hamburg wants to build a network of co-operation and exchange between schools, vocational training centres and higher education institutions (see Appendix 2). Hamburg is also involved in promoting the possibilities of co-operation between small and medium-sized firms and higher education institutions. One of its goals is to create a science and culture space, including the Baltic Society and a chair dealing with the harmonisation of law in the countries from the Baltic Sea region¹², and also by supporting Slavic and Scandinavian studies at universities as well as projects devoted to history, geography, sociology and the economy of the region. Hamburg would

¹² Cf. <http://www.fdp-hamburg.de/wp-content/documents/lpt/2011-08/12-11-ostsee.pdf>

act as a coordinator and intermediary in this project. Hamburg's government expects that the strategy will contribute to economic development and will boost employment levels in the region, as well as develop infrastructure and improve security in maritime transport. It also expects support for the development of the Hamburg port. Furthermore, it wishes to strengthen the co-operation of metropolitan regions, which is partly an effect of the great significance which the partnership of the city of Hamburg and St. Petersburg has for this federal state. As with the governments of the other federal states, it also emphasises the need to make Russia more involved in the strategy¹³.

The negative evaluation of the effects the strategy has brought so far

The German federal states have provided various evaluations two years after the launch of the EUSBSR. On the one hand, they positively perceive the activation of the EU member states from this region, which the strategy has encouraged. They are, however, criticising the overly optimistic goals of the strategy, the excessive number of projects and the lack of coherent coordination, and especially the insufficient level of engagement from the non-EU Baltic countries in the projects being implemented as part of the strategy.

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The German evaluation of the results the EUSBSR has brought so far is to a great extent an effect of the experiences of the federal states engaged in it. As during the consultations before its implementation, the central government is not participating in the discussion on the implementation of this strategy. The Berlin-based Science and Politics Foundation, an advisory body to the German government, is criticising the imprecise definition of the means by which the goals of the strategy are to be achieved

and emphasises the need to introduce a system for controlling the effects on the basis of specific, measurable indicators¹⁴.

The federal states can see many positive changes which have been achieved since the implementation of the strategy. The most important one, in their opinion, is the activation of the states participating in the EUSBSR, whose level of engagement in the work of regional institutions was different before. On the other hand, the federal states are criticising the central government for its insufficient engagement in individual projects and its delayed and tardy implementation of the priorities set by the strategy. They are also pointing to problems with appointing the units in charge of individual projects. The federal states are also complaining about the imprecise definition of the goals and criteria for project choice. Last but not least, critical opinions have also been expressed about the insufficient (according to the federal states) engagement by non-EU member states from this region and organisations such as the Council of the Baltic Sea States, HELCOM, etc. in the implementation of the EUSBSR. They are also pointing to the lack of a separate budget for financing individual projects and also the too slow and insufficient inclusion of Russia in them. In their opinion, it will be necessary to develop long-term projects in the future, i.e. projects whose financing would not be limited to funds already available within the current EU budget. To improve the strategy's effectiveness, it will also be necessary to reinforce the parliamentary aspect of co-operation in the Baltic Sea region through constant engagement of national and regional parliaments in the implementation and evaluation of EUSBSR projects.

¹³ Cf. <http://www.hamburg.de/ostseeraum/2835784/eu-ost-seestrategie.html>

¹⁴ C. Schymik, *Modellversuch Makroregion, SWP Studien*, 2011, http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/studien/2011_S01_shy_ks.pdf

Conclusions

1. The Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is treated by the German government mainly as a regional project. This has been proven by Berlin's relatively low level of engagement in its implementation, which at the same time was much more active in the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the priorities and projects of which partly overlap with the EUSBSR. The possibilities of the co-operation with Russia are a reason for this since this is of key significance for Germany in the context of co-operation in the Baltic Sea region. Common projects are much easier to implement as part of the CBSS, which Russia is a full member of. The significance of co-operation with Russia is also emphasised by all the German federal states participating in the strategy. Therefore, it may be expected that they will be making efforts to combine the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region with the EU Northern Dimension to create a basis to allow Russia to participate more fully in projects as part of this strategy.
2. Closer co-operation with Norway and Belarus is not likely to be sought as part of this strategy. No such suggestion has been made in the German stances at the level of the central government or the federal states. Co-operation with Norway is good within the framework of other bodies, while Belarus is not seen by Germany as a trustworthy partner (one proof of which was the speech given by Werner Hoyer, secretary of state at the German Foreign Ministry, on the occasion of the official inauguration of the German presidency of the CBSS to be held in 2011–2012¹⁵).
3. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is currently the most active federal state involved in the EUSBSR. This is because this federal state joined regional co-operation later than the other two and, being the poorest federal state, relies more heavily on EU subsidies. Consequently, it is more ready than the other federal states to participate in regional projects aimed, for example, at improving its own infrastructure. The fact that it is in charge of the Tourism programme serves its interests because tourism is the most important branch of industry in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. This offers the chance for the development of tourism in this region and also competition to Polish tourism by the Baltic Sea.
4. The federal states are likely to push through projects in the area of energy, first of all from renewable sources. Energy is mentioned among the priorities of all the federal states and in expert commentaries. Since Germany has withdrawn from the use of nuclear energy completely, 'green energy' is gaining significance. Germany is likely to make efforts to develop energy networks in the region in order to ensure the possibility of transmitting the energy produced by it and better access to outlets for itself.
5. Despite the ambivalent evaluations of the effects the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region has given so far, Germany will still support other EU macro-regional strategies. Following the adoption of the Strategy for the Danube Region in April 2011, Germany is likely to support the creation of a strategy for the North Sea region. Schleswig-Holstein is already supporting its adoption¹⁶. This strategy, according to Germany, would be based to a great extent on the experiences gained during the implementation of the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, since similar problems which need closer co-operation exist in both regions: the maritime economy, protection of the natural environment, combating the consequences of climate change and, last but not least, energy policy. Criticism of the present manner of financing macro-regional strategies gives grounds for the conclusion that in future Germany will support the creation of a separate fund for financing the projects it envisages.

¹⁵ http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Infoservice/Presse/Reden/2011/110829-ST_Hoyer_BSPC.html?nn=581864

¹⁶ Speech by Member of European Parliament, Hermann Kuhn (Green Party) during the session of the Parliamentary Commission for European Affairs on 12 January 2011. http://www.landtag.ltsh.de/infothek/wahl17/aussch/europa/niederschrift/2011/17-023_01-11.html

APPENDICES

1. European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

The European Council adopted the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region in October 2009. This is the first pilot EU macro-regional strategy to bring together several member states located in one geographical area. The implementation of the EUS-BSR was intended to contribute to a more efficient resolution of the region's problems, such as the pollution of the waters of the Baltic Sea, economic imbalance, infrastructural differences and security problems. This strategy was to bring about closer co-operation between EU member states located on the Baltic Sea coast and at the same time to enable the inclusion of Russia, Norway and Belarus as essential countries in this region in this co-operation (especially in the context of resolving ecological problems). The assumption is that EU macro-regional strategies do not involve additional institutions, funds and legal acts. Thus the EUSBSR is a platform which brings together the already existing economic, cultural and environment protection initiatives at intergovernmental, regional, NGO and other levels. This strategy encompasses four pillars:

- I. To make the Baltic Sea region an environmentally sustainable place,
- II. To make the Baltic Sea region a prosperous place,
- III. To make the Baltic Sea region an accessible and attractive place,
- IV. To make the Baltic Sea region a safe and secure place.

This strategy has been treated from the very beginning as a test in closer regional co-operation for EU member states which – if passed – could also be transferred to other regions. Although the effects of the EUSBSR have not been evaluated positively in all cases, another strategy, for the Danube region, was launched already in the first half of 2011. Additionally, more strategies are being considered, for example, for the North Sea, the Adriatic and the Ionian Sea regions.

2. Selected projects coordinated by Germany

Project name	Content	Coordinator
Creation of protected marine areas	Determining the Natura 2000 network within the Baltic Sea area	Germany (Ministry for the Environment)
Baltic Sea Labour Network	Improving the management of the common labour market in the Baltic Sea region and its harmonisation with the use of transnational strategies	Hamburg (Office for Science and Scientific Research)
BSR-Quick	Improving the qualifications of the owners and employees of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) through academic education and vocational training	Hamburg (Hanse Parliament e.V. association)
Developing strategies for sustainable tourism	Improving the accessibility of the natural, cultural and historical legacy of the countries from the Baltic Sea region for tourism and indicating the features of shared identity of the Baltic Sea region	Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (University of Greifswald)
Promoting the exchange of school students and developing a ring of partner schools around the Baltic Sea	School exchange aimed at language learning and promoting mutual knowledge and understanding among young people in the region	Hamburg
Sustainable Production through Innovation in Small and Medium sized Enterprises	Improving the innovativeness potential of SME in order to reinforce sustainable production processes and to boost profits at firms, while reducing their economic and environmental costs	Germany



Centre for Eastern Studies
Koszykowa 6A,
00-564 Warsaw
e-mail: info@osw.waw.pl

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Editors: Olaf Osica,
Anna Kwiatkowska-Drożdż

Katarzyna Kazimińska

Translation: Ilona Duchnowicz
Cooperation: Nicholas Furnival

DTP: Wojciech Mańkowski