

During the past year, one Region, Region Västernorrland, has left the CPMR and the Baltic Sea Commission.

The Executive Committee has emphasised the work on attracting new members and developed an Action Plan, opening up all meetings in 2016 to all Regions around the Baltic Sea in order to help them understand the added value of being a Member. The Action Plan, adopted by the Executive Committee in Visby in September 2015 states that:

- Denmark, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are the first concern and highest priority;
- Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania could, if they find it valuable, become Members of the CPMR and BSC on a country-wide basis. This is because these countries do not have a political sub-state level in the form of Regions. This is currently being discussed with the countries and the CPMR Secretariat;
- The Working Groups will be opened up to non-members during 2015/2016.

A special project for this task has been developed and approved by the Swedish Institute for 2016.

Through the Project "BSC goes Baltic", the organisation is able to cover travel and accommodation costs for Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian actors to attend the meetings. Simultaneously, we have initiated a close dialogue with actors in Latvia and Lithuania on how membership in the Baltic Sea Commission could be of relevance for them, both politically and in the everyday work of the Regional and Local Authorities.

If actors involved in this project choose to become members, this will be clear towards the end of 2016.

BALTIC SEA COMMISSION EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2014-2016

During the year, following a suggestion from the Swedish national delegation, the Executive Committee has confirmed changes among the Swedish Members in the Executive Committee. This is the list of the Members of the Baltic Sea Commission Executive Committee, including the changes:

President - Mr **Jari Sainio** (Helsinki-Uusimaa, FI)

Vice-President - Mr **Jens Sundström** (Norrbotten, SE) until November 2015 then Ms **Annika Sandström** (Stockholm, SE) since January 2016

Full Members

Finland - Mr **Antti Räsänen** (Päijät-Häme, FI)

Germany - Mr **Wolf Born** (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, DE)

Sweden - Mr **Erik Bergkvist** (Västerbotten, SE)

Alternate Members

Finland - Mr **Richard Sjölund** (Ostrobothnia, FI)

Germany - Mr **Merten Barnert** (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, DE)

Sweden - Mr **Mikael Freimuth** (Stockholm, SE) until March 2015

Sweden - Mr **Anders Öberg** (Norrbotten, SE) since November 2015

The Executive Committee has held three meetings since the General Assembly in Vaasa.

- Visby, Gotland (SE) on 22-23 September 2015;
- Brussels (BE) on 14 January 2016;
- Helsinki, Helsinki-Uusimaa (FI) on 16-17 March 2016.

The organisation also held a pre-CPMR General Assembly meeting in Tuscany, on 4 November 2015 (open for all Members of the BSC). President Jari Sainio has attended all the CPMR Political Bureau meetings held during this period, representing the Baltic Sea Commission.

SECRETARIAT

In January 2015, Ms Åsa Bjerling was recruited as the Executive Secretary. She works 100% for the organisation and with the change in the hosting Region from Helsinki-Uusimaa to Norrbotten County Council and Region Västerbotten, the BSC Secretariat is now based in Brussels, currently at the North Sweden EU Office. The purpose of basing the Secretariat in Brussels was to have closer links with the EU institutions and the CPMR Secretariat. Most of the meetings of the Baltic Sea Commission have, as in the past, been based in the Baltic Sea Region, hosted by different Regions. Back-to-back with other meetings taking place, the Executive Secretary has set up additional meetings with key persons back home in the Regions in order to get a better understanding of each Region's specific characteristics and broadening the contact base of experts and senior officials working on regional development within the different Regions.

Being based in Brussels, the Secretariat has also met with delegations from the Regions that visit and work in Brussels. The link to the Regions, other pan-Baltic organisations and state actors based in the different Member States in the Baltic Sea Region has remained strong even if the Secretariat is now based outside of the Region.

MAIN FIELD OF ACTIVITIES - WORKING GROUP REPORTS

The BSC Work Plan, adopted at the General Assembly 2015 includes four thematic Working Groups with the purpose of taking forward key issues identified by the BSC General Assembly or Executive Committee. These Working Groups focus on Energy, Maritime Issues, Transport and Multi-level governance. The decision was made not to continue with the Multi-Level Governance Working Group, but instead work in different ways to address the regional perspective in the discussion on multi-level governance, as explained below. During the year, the organisation has moved forward our positions and continued our good relations within the structure and work of the EU Strategy for Baltic Sea Region, DG REGIO, DG MOVE, CoR and the European Parliament.

Transport Working Group

The Chair of the Transport Working Group is Mr Kai Holmberg, Regional Council of Kymenlaakso, Vice-Chairs of the Working Group are Mr Erik Johansson from Region Örebro County and Johan Söderling, Region Västerbotten.

The Transport Working Group has held three meetings during the year:

- 7 June 2015 (back-to-back with the TEN-T days), Riga;
- 27-28 October 2015, Kymenlaakso;
- 10-11 March 2016, Region Örebro County.

The BSC Transport Working Group has followed EU Transport Policy and informed its Members about current affairs. Regions participating in the meetings have been Kymenlaakso Region(FI), Region Örebro County (SE), Region Västerbotten (SE), Norrbotten County Council (SE), Region Gävleborg(SE), Helsinki-Uusimaa Region (FI), Riga Planning Region(LV), Kurzeme Planning Region(LV), Vidzeme Planning Region (LV) and Harju County Government (EST).

The Baltic Sea Commission has been represented by the Executive Secretary, Region Kymenlaakso and Region Örebro County during the CPMR Inter-Commission Working Group on Transport.

The CPMR and BSC was represented in a panel discussion during the TEN-T days in Riga, June 2015, by Erik Bergkvist, Region Västerbotten. He highlighted a position first adopted in EFNS (a cooperation body made up of the four northern Swedish Regions) and later adopted by the CPMR Political Bureau (June 2015) highlighting that the EC should appoint a Special Coordinator for the grey areas of the TEN-T Network.

During the year, the BSC Transport Working Group has put special emphasis on compiling, disseminating and sharing best practice across Member Regions. Creating strong joint action, the BSC needs to better understand the specific and common interests of its Member Regions. The meetings of the Working Group have also included study visits in the hosting Regions. This has been appreciated by the participants.

Issues of concern during the year have been the Work Plans for the relevant Core Corridors in our Region and relevant and possible action linked to the corridor foras. During the meeting in Örebro in March 2016, the Working Group prepared a General Message on "A Baltic Regional Perspective on the Implementation of the TEN-T (Trans-European Transport Network)", later adopted by the Executive Committee in March 2016.

In the first Call of the Baltic Sea Interreg programme, three projects on transport where BSC Member Regions were involved were submitted. The BSC has written letters of support and advocated for the importance of the projects to the Monitoring Committee. The three projects were approved and the Transport Working Group is currently holding discussions on how to best cooperate with them. The three projects are:

- TEN-Tacle "Capitalising on TEN-T Core Transport Network for prosperity, growth and cohesion", Lead: Region Blekinge;
- Scandria2Act "Sustainable and multimodal transport actions in the Scandinavian Adriatic Corridor", Lead: Berlin;
- NSB CoRe "North Sea Baltic Connector of Regions", Lead: Helsinki-Uusimaa Region.

The Transport Working Group is in contact with PA Transport in order to create a dialogue between Regions and the Steering Committee, primarily consisting of State-level actors. The next Transport Working Group meeting will be held back-to-back with the TEN-T days in Rotterdam and the Transport Working Group is currently looking into the possibility of organising a workshop during the Conference.

Energy Working Group

The Chair of the Energy Working Group is Mr Richard Sjölund, Region Ostrobothnia. During the year the Energy Working Group has had 2 regular meetings and one meeting preparing the project application for a joint Interreg project:

- 7 May 2015 (back-to-back with the BSC General Assembly), Vaasa;
- 10 December 2015, Arlanda;

On 10 December 2015, the Energy Working Group organised a workshop for experts on Smart Specialisation and Energy from the Region. This was in order to further develop a project--concept. There were 14 participants from nine Regions. The concept paper has been submitted to the Interreg Baltic Sea Programme.

The overall objective of the project is to improve existing and create new policy instruments and innovation systems through coordinated transnational/trans-regional learning between green innovation leaders, between innovation followers, and between leaders and followers. This project will supplement the new S3 energy platform and the political work within the CPMR by providing long-term coordination of transnational learning, through the development of locally adaptable, "translated" solutions.

If the project is approved, The BSC Energy Working Group will function as the political Steering Group of the project and the CPMR will be a partner, mainly responsible for the Work Package on communication of results. Region Ostrobothnia is the lead partner of the project.

The project is designed to assist the CPMR Energy Working Group by drawing on the participants' experience of EU structural fund policies. The Working Group is open to all participants and they may discuss the project and contribute to the objectives by being a part of the political dissemination network.

Maritime Working Group

Until January 2016, the Chair of the Maritime Working Group was Mr Jaakko Mikkola, Helsinki-Uusimaa Region. Since January, Ms Tiina Perho, Southwest Finland has taken over as Chair. Mr Gustav Hemming, Stockholm County Council is the Vice-Chair of the Working Group.

During the year the Maritime Working Group has had four meetings.

- 7 May 2015 (back-to-back with the BSC General Assembly), Vaasa;
- 8 September 2015, Stockholm;
- 13 January 2016, Brussels;
- May 2016, EMD, Turku - The next meeting is scheduled to take place in Turku, in May 2016, back-to-back with the European Maritime Days.

The Maritime Working Group held a meeting during the General Assembly in Vaasa where they decided to focus more on Blue Growth. During the meeting in Stockholm on 8 September 2015, several Regions were invited to share planned transnational/macro-regional projects.

During spring 2015, the CPMR Secretariat conducted a survey on investments made in the maritime field at regional level with the support of ESI funds. The CPMR gathered information about the Regions' smart specialisation strategies and operational programmes, making contact with experts from the Regions who could help to understand the content of these documents, and help to identify ideas to structure the work. The main objective was to understand how the ESI funds are used and can contribute to initiatives/projects developed at sea basin level. The BSC Maritime Working Group, together with Helsinki-Uusimaa Region, organised a Blue Growth Seminar during the BSSSC Annual Conference.

During autumn 2015, the Working Group invited the CPMR Secretariat and the EP Intergroup on Seas, Rivers, Islands and Coastal Areas to co-organise a Seminar on developing the blue economy in the Baltic. The Seminar took place in the European Parliament in Brussels in January 2016 and had a high level of speakers and over 80 participants.

Back-to-back with the seminar in the European Parliament, the Maritime Working Group had an internal meeting in Brussels. During this meeting it was concluded that some of the Regions involved in the Maritime Working Group have an interest in participating in an EMFF Call that DG MARE later published on 4 April 2016. The Baltic Sea Commission and CPMR Secretariat are currently involved in a preparatory process for this Call. The preparatory action is due by the beginning of June 2016 and will consist of three reports and two workshops with the relevant stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Region. The reports are:

- an in-depth analysis of the full value chain in Blue Growth in the Baltic Sea Region with a regional perspective;
- policy intelligence and suggestions in concrete areas in which to further develop regional involvement in the development and implementation of joint roadmaps in key blue growth domains;
- suggestions on how to work in order to mobilise and align public and private investments in a Trans-Baltic setting.

Regions that have shown interest at this stage are: Nordjylland, Ida-Virumaa, Southwest Finland, Mecklenburg Vorpommern, Kurzeme, Klaipeda, Pomorskie, Skåne, Västerbotten, Helsinki-Uusimaa, Kymenlaakso, Östergötland, Stockholm and Västra Götaland. The European Maritime Days were held in Turku 18-20 May 2016. The BSC Maritime Working Group co-organised a workshop together with South West Finland, Pomorskie Voivodeship and Submariner Network on the topic of Blue Growth Value Chains and Smart Specialisation.

“The CPMR and the Baltic Sea Commission are, amongst other things, for their own part also aiming to enhance the investments in the Blue Economy,” stated Tiina Perho during the SEARICA Seminar in the European Parliament in January 2016.

Multi-Level Governance - formal cooperation with HA Capacity within EUSBSR

The Multi-Level Governance Working Group has not had any meetings during the year and no Member Region has shown an interest in taking on the responsibility as Chair or Vice-Chair. Instead, the Baltic Sea Commission Secretariat has worked to get formal cooperation with Horizontal Action Capacity within the EUSBSR. The main responsibility of HA Capacity is to build capacity among existing and potential stakeholders that can contribute to the realisation of the goals inherent in the EUSBSR.

Baltic Executive Programme - a pilot with the potential to be a flagship of HA Capacity

During autumn 2015, the Baltic Sea Commission signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Horizontal Action Capacity in order to support the recruitment process of a Pilot Programme called “Baltic Executive Programme”. The Baltic Sea Commission was responsible for recruiting politicians and senior officials from one Region per country from the EU countries surrounding the BSR. The Union of Baltic Cities was responsible for the recruitment of Cities.

The aim of the programme is to enhance the regional and local authorities’ voices in the discussion on the implementation of the EUSBSR, as well as to discuss how to better build on the results of on-going or completed transnational projects. The participating Regions are: South West Finland (FI), Region Gävleborg (SE), Harju County Government (EE), Riga Planning Region (LV), Klaipeda Municipality Network (LIT), Pomorskie Voivodeship(PO), Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (DE).

This is a pilot programme and as such it should be evaluated after the three modules. The Baltic Sea Commission is involved in discussions on future steps and possible future programmes.

Special workshops of HA Capacity for local, regional and NGO’s

With the adoption of the revised Action Plan for the EUSBSR, HA Capacity has decided to have a formal process to get input from various stakeholders with multilevel governance as a guiding principle of the EUSBSR, integrating different perspectives for consistency and synergies and the most effective use of available resources. The Baltic Sea Commission has, through the Executive Secretary, attended the two workshops arranged by HA Capacity during spring 2016. We have also supported HA Capacity with contacts at regional level.

The two workshops will support HA Capacity with input for their future development of the Action Plan.

The Baltic Sea Commission has indicated an interest in continuing the dialogue and cooperation with HA Capacity.

Other activities of importance

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region aims at joint possibilities and challenges, affecting the lives of the Region's 85 million inhabitants, in need of joint solutions. The Strategy outlines joining forces and working in macro-regional cooperation as a necessity in order to face our Regions' challenges. Against this background, the Strategy leads the way to increasing the levels of environmental sustainability, prosperity, accessibility, attractiveness and safety and security in the Baltic Sea Region. In June 2015, a revised Action Plan for the strategy was adopted.

During the year, the Secretariat of the Baltic Sea Commission has worked intensely on positioning the BSC within the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

- The revised Action Plan from June 2015 includes a new chapter on pan-Baltic organisations that are important for the implementation of the Strategy, and the BSC is mentioned as one of the Pan-Baltic Organisation.
- During the EUSBSR Annual Forum in Jurmala June 2015, the BSC organised a back-to-back event with Members participating in the Forum. Representatives from DG REGIO attended the session and future cooperation with HA Capacity was founded.
- MoU with HA Capacity. As described above, the BSC is supporting HA Capacity in conducting a pilot programme for Regional and Local Authorities. This lays the ground not only for participating Regions to get more involved in the implementation of the strategy, but also for the Baltic Sea Commission as an organisation.
- Contacts with the National Contact Points of the EUSBSR. The Baltic Sea Commission was invited by the Chair of the National Contact Points to attend the joint meeting of the representatives of the CBSS, EUSBSR and European institutions that was held on 13 April 2016 in Brussels. During the meeting, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed participants about the choice to co-host the EUSBSR Annual Forum, June 2017, together with the Baltic Sea Commission as their co-organiser. This was earlier decided by the Baltic Sea Commission Executive Committee.
- In order to best prepare for the EUSBSR Annual Forum in 2017, a special task-force made up of interested Member Regions of the Baltic Sea Commission will be set up. Over the coming year, this task-force will support the Secretariat in carrying out responsibilities and tasks leading up to the Annual Forum in June 2017.
- The Baltic Sea Commission has initiated the appointment of *Rapporteurs* to the different Steering Groups of the Priority Areas within the EUSBSR. This needs to be further developed and the plan is that the people appointed as *Rapporteurs* also should be part of the above-mentioned task-force.
- The BSC Executive Committee and Region of Gävleborg initiated a Stakeholder Conference on Smart Specialisation Strategies in the Baltic Sea Region to be held back-to-back with the Annual General Assembly 2016. This Conference has been planned in cooperation with PA Innovation within the EUSBSR.
- The Baltic Sea Commission is participating as an Associated Partner in a project application called "Let's Communicate", submitted to the Interreg Baltic Sea Programme in March 2016. If the project is approved, the Baltic Sea Commission will support the development of communication on EUSBSR targeted to regional and local actors.

During the year, the BSC also participated as an observer in the meetings of the Baltic Sea Intergroup of the CoR, the Informal Baltic Sea Group of BSR regional offices in Brussels and the Informal MEP Action Group on BSR in the European Parliament.

As of March 2016 the Secretariat of the Baltic Sea Commission functions as the Secretariat of the Baltic Sea Intergroup of the CoR.

Website and graphic design.

The CPMR is under-going an overhaul of its brand image, and as part of this process the logos and websites of the CPMR and all its Geographical Commissions are being harmonised. The websites will be unveiled after the BSC General Assembly in order to avoid a changeover during an important time in the BSC calendar.