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At the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission General Assembly in Berlin, a year ago, the organisation decided on a two-year Work Plan for 2017-2019. In this Activity report you can read about the progress made since then, along with our policy and project work for 2017-2018.

Our vision: being the united voice of the Baltic Sea Region

In a challenging context both in Europe and in the Baltic Sea Region, our cooperation within the Baltic Sea Commission and the CPMR has been more important than ever to jointly address common issues. Coming from different countries, our shared interests, mutual trust and understanding have provided a strong foundation for our successful cooperation. Throughout the year, we have spoken in the united voice of the Baltic Sea Region.

At European level, we have made our position clear to the EU institutions and decisions-makers. We have taken an active role in the institutional debate regarding the future of the EU budget and policies and we will continue to do so in the coming months. We have successfully worked to ensure a Baltic perspective in the overall positioning of the CPMR, as an influential European network of regions.

At Baltic Sea level, we have continued our work in line with the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Our activities have helped foster the objectives of the Strategy: saving the Sea, and increasing accessibility and prosperity in the Baltic Sea.

Our mission: being a platform of policy-related project development

Within the Baltic Sea Commission’s Working Groups on Accessibility and Transport, Maritime Affairs, and Renewable Energies and Climate, we continued to develop and take part in projects benefiting the Baltic Sea Regions. Alongside Policy Area Transport and Policy Area Innovation of the EUSBSR, we were involved in the development of, and support for two applications for the first call for project platforms of the Interreg V B Baltic Sea Region programme. The partnership of the platforms involves several CPMR Regions and will be a base for our continuous work on Transport and our newly established Task Force on Smart Specialisation.

Demonstrating the value of a regional perspective, we have strengthened our collaboration with other pan-Baltic organisations in the EUSBSR. Supporting the Process of the Baltic 2030 Action Plan, we organised a regional stakeholder dialogue with Euroregional Baltic and the Council of the Baltic Sea States.

In the year ahead, we hope to engage our Members in a more in-depth dialogue on how to best ensure that we are a strong organisation that helps Regions to enhance their interregional cooperation. To conclude, thank you for all your valuable contributions, enabling us to be a well-established and forward-thinking organisation. We must continue to shape and build the future of regions and the EU together!
EUROPE

Future of European discussion

Europe is at a turning point and faces numerous challenges: globalisation, digitalisation, climate change, a migration crisis, the threat of terrorism, and the rise of nationalism. These developments offer an opportunity for the EU to rethink itself. The European Commission has launched a reflection process, setting out a number of scenarios for the reform of the European project. For the Baltic Sea Commission, it is crucial that Regions hold a central place in a reformed EU. Regions are the bridge between citizens and the European institutions and must be co-authors of the next stage of European cooperation.

Debate on the future of the EU budget for the post-2020 period

The year 2018 marks an important year for the future of the EU and the Baltic Sea Region. In May, the European Parliament and the Council will officially begin to negotiate the EU budget for the post-2020 period. Brexit and new priorities, such as migration and defence, will make the negotiations difficult. At the CPMR Political Bureau in March 2018 in Patras, the Member Regions adopted the CPMR vision for a post-2020 EU budget. The CPMR calls for a post-2020 MFF reflecting the ambition of the EU and its priorities, while providing Regional Authorities sufficient flexibility to realise the ambition of the European Union on the ground.

2019 political changes at EU level

The mandates of the current European Parliament and European Commission have entered their last phase. In May 2019 a new European Parliament will be elected which will be followed by a new European Commission in November 2019.

What future for Cohesion Policy after 2020?

The role and place of post-2020 Cohesion Policy is still unclear. EU budgetary constraints are putting pressure on the financial envelope for Cohesion Policy. There is a risk of Cohesion Policy covering only a limited number of EU regions. The CPMR Regions made clear that Cohesion Policy must remain the main EU investment policy, covering all European Regions as it plays a fundamental role in fostering regional development across Europe. The CPMR adopted proposals for a strong and reformed post-2020 Cohesion Policy at its June Political Bureau in Stavanger in June 2017.

Ongoing administrative and regional reforms in the Baltic Sea Region

The Estonian Municipality reform came into action in January 2018 and has abolished the regional administrations. Instead, the country of Estonia will be represented in the BSC and politicians at sub-national level, selected by the Association of Estonian Cities, will be the representatives. Swedish County Councils have merged into regions over the last 10 years, taking over responsibilities from the national regional authorities and enlarging the mandate of the BSC members. In Finland, negotiations are taking place on regional reform that will also change the mandate of the regions, and the regional politicians be directly elected in future.

New EU priorities

New priorities are high on the EU agenda. The EU has stepping up its action in defence, security, management of the migration flow, border control, measures against terrorism threats.
Political and Thematic Priorities
For 2017 - 2019

1. Accessibility and Transport
2. Maritime Affairs
3. Renewable Energy and Climate
4. Interregional cooperation in the field of Smart Specialisation in the Baltic Sea Region
5. Sustainable Development Goals, the Baltic 2030 and the role of regions
6. Supporting the goals of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
THE VOICES OF THE MEMBERS

Our Members explain the benefit of being part of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission

Lorenz Caffier, Minister of the Interior and for Europe of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany

Baltic Sea cooperation works, and it produces good results for Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. In the Baltic Sea Commission, we find competent and reliable partners. And we all know that decision making at regional level is heavily influenced by the European Union. Therefore, it is quite useful that our common interests are also represented by the Baltic Sea Commission in the CPMR in Brussels.

Anders Öberg, County Council Commissioner, Region Norrbotten, Sweden

For Region Norrbotten, the Baltic Sea Commission helps to influence sustainable development, infrastructure and living conditions for the inhabitants of our part of the Baltic sea region.

Jari Nahkanen, Member of the Board, Council of Oulu Region, Finland

The TEN-T network strengthens the cohesion of the Union and demonstrates European added value by contributing to accessibility and connectivity of all Regions of the Union, including remote, peripheral and sparsely populated areas. A parallel request by Finland and Sweden to extend the Scandinavian-Mediterranean corridor to northern Sweden and the North Sea-Baltic corridor to northern Finland and joining them in the northern axis is an example of the strength of the Baltic Sea cooperation.
Although Podlaskie is not a maritime Region, it definitely is peripheral. As a rural Region with vast green and protected areas it is not very competitive, but rather underestimated and marginalised. That is why it is so important for us to be a part of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission and a bigger community of regions which face similar challenges.

As a platform of information exchange, the Baltic Sea Commission enables its Members to pursue common goals and work together by sharing knowledge, know-how and best practices. Podlaskie, as a Member of the Baltic Sea Commission, is particularly interested in sustainable development and territorial cohesion, and participates in the on-going discussions on the future EU budget.

We are pleased that the common voice of the Regions, which have to deal with the restraints of their peripheral location, is heard and taken into account in EU institutions. Transport accessibility is another big issue for Podlaskie. The BSC is a fantastic tool for lobbying regional interests as regards the development of the TEN-T networks, such as Via Baltica and Rail Baltica.

For a small Region such as Region Gotland, in the middle of the Baltic Sea, being a part of European networks such as CPMR is crucial. Regions need to meet, learn, exchange, cooperate more than ever to face and solve the demands of the future. Doing so in networks is the way forward.

In the Baltic Sea Commission, Region Gotland can identify good examples of effective work in other regions which we can bring back to our own Region. We are inspired and also contribute with ideas and good practices. It brings the development of the Baltic Sea region as a whole forward.
HIGHLIGHTS OF THE TRANSPORT WORKING GROUP

2018 is a crucial year for the future of European Transport Policy. The European Commission will present its legislative and financial framework proposals for the post-2020 programming period. Over the year, the Transport Working Group (WG) has worked on the revision of the regulation of the Connecting Europe Facility, the Trans-European Transport Network corridors and Motorways of the Sea. There was also a strong focus on aviation and the enhancement of connections with third countries.

Trans-European Transport Network

In June 2017, CPMR adopted the position “TEN-T core network corridors: amendments proposed under the review of the CEF”. This integrates the proposals of the BSC Transport Working Group to extend the North Sea Baltic Corridor to northern Finland and the Scandinavian-Mediterranean Corridor to northern Sweden, and along the section Stockholm-Oslo.

Aviation

Regions Stockholm and Västerbotten, have been selected to work with the CPMR to develop a position on three themes that have emerged as priorities for the overall work of the CPMR:
- Connectivity/PSOs/State Aids/slots allocation;
- Sustainable aviation and climate;
- European funding for airports

Enhanced cooperation with the CPMR

Topics discussed during the joint meeting of the North Sea Commission and BSC Transport Working Groups included third countries connection, clean transport and aviation.

Committed partner of the Transport platform of the EUSBSR

The Transport WG is an associated partner in the project-platform application “Access to clean, efficient and multimodal transport corridors in the Baltic Sea Region” under the first Call for Project Platforms on Transport of the Interreg BSR Programme.

If approved, the project will start in Autumn 2018. Partners involved are: NSB CoRe, Scandria2Act, TENTacle and EMMA project and Kvarken Council.

The main objective of the Platform is to improve the development and implementation of policies related to TEN-T in order to better connect Baltic Sea Regions to the EU and third countries.
HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MARITIME AFFAIRS WORKING GROUP

Throughout the year, the Maritime Working Group (WG) has pursued its focus of promoting Sustainable Blue Growth, monitoring the Baltic Blue Growth Agenda and supporting regional stakeholders to be part of its implementation. This work is related to our priority to create a Smart Specialisation Financial Platform. Furthermore, the group has stepped up its action on the sustainable developments goals in the Baltic Sea Region.

Sustainable Blue Growth
The Maritime WG participated in a stakeholder dialogue leading up to the launch of the Report “Towards an implementation strategy for the Sustainable Blue Growth Agenda for the Baltic Sea Region” by DG MARE in Summer 2017. Tiina Perho presented the mapping exercise on Blue Growth Value Chains carried out by the Maritime WG, together with the CPMR Secretariat, at the CPMR General Assembly in Helsinki.

Sustainable Tourism
The Maritime WG is an associated partner in the project ‘From the SDGs towards a Sustainable Tourism in the BSR.’ This gave us the opportunity to participate in the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum in November. The WG has also shared experiences from different Sustainable Tourism Projects during its meetings.

Reflection on post-2020 EMFF
The Maritime WG has contributed to the CPMR Policy Position on the future on the EMFF post-2020. Tiina Perho spoke at the high level Conference “Beyond 2020: Supporting Europe’s Coastal Communities” in October in Tallinn, reflecting on the future of the Maritime Policy for post-2014-2020. She stressed that macro-regional strategies can provide a framework for integrated approaches to maritime issues and promote common solutions.

SDGs Baltic 2030
The Maritime WG is contributing to the BSC’s key work on Sustainable Development Goals. It also participated in the event ‘Transforming our Baltic Sea Region’ in Stockholm in March 2018.

HELCOM
The BSC is an observer member of the HELCOM. Helsinki-Uusimaa has been selected to follow this work closer and reports back to the Maritime WG.

CBSSS Expert Group on Maritime Policy
The BSC is a member of the CBSS Expert Group on Maritime Policy. The mandate of this Expert Working Group has been updated during the past year and has strong links to our work on Sustainable Blue Growth. More information here.

Baltic Sea Future
The BSC has attended the forum for the last two years. Our aim is to get involved in closer dialogue on how to contribute to the programme for upcoming events.
HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ENERGY WORKING GROUP

The Baltic Sea Commission Working Group (WG) on Energy and Climate has focused its work on the Interreg Baltic Sea Region project “Learning Among Regions on Smart Specialisation”. The Energy WG has also taken an active role in the CPMR Task Force on Climate, ensuring a Baltic Regional perspective in the overall positions of the CPMR.

About the LARS project

The LARS-project aims to help the public sector in leading smart specialisation processes in their regions and to connect innovation networks across regions. It helps to find solutions to tackle the fragmentation of regional innovation systems looking for entrepreneurial discoveries within such topics as blue growth, bio and circular economy, advanced production methods and technologies for energy efficiency.

The kick-off for the LARS-project was held in October 2017 in Vaasa. The work has continued by narrowing down the fields of intervention for the project to energy, advanced production methods and bio- and circular economy. The project has worked towards mapping the value-chains of the participating regions in the selected fields. The mapping will stand as a basis for future learning.

How will the working group relate to LARS?

The political work of the Energy WG will be able to draw on the experience of the work of the LARS project. The project format has designed an analytical format for transnational learning that could form a part of future macro-regional strategy for the Baltic Sea Area. The Energy and Climate working group functions as an advisory group to the LARS project, discussing relevant findings and converting them into political messages which are disseminated by the CPMR.
SMART SPECIALISATION PLATFORM -
CREATING AN INNOVATION ECO-SYSTEM IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION

The idea to establish a Smart Specialisation Platform emerged from a stakeholder conference on S3, co-organised by the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission and PA Innovation in 2016, and was further developed throughout 2017. At the 2017 General Assembly, the Baltic Sea Commission members decided that supporting the creation of a Smart Specialisation platform was a priority for 2017-19. Here are the actions taken since then.

1. Need for enhanced interregional cooperation in S3
   Discussion between Baltic Sea Regions, PA Innovation and S3 projects shows that smart specialisation requires effective interregional collaboration in order to boost innovation, competitiveness and growth in Regions, Baltic Sea and Europe.

2. BSC Task Force to support creation of a S3 financial platform
   Established in 2017 and led by Region Västerbotten, the Task Force consists of the partnership of an on-going Interreg Seed Money project «New joint funding models by alignments of funding, increasing geographical flexibility of ESI funds within the BSR».

3. Objectives of the platform
   - To foster interregional smart specialisations cooperation
   - To elaborate financial support mechanisms, including the opportunities arising from the ERDF MA Network.
   - To improve capacity building in Regions and create opportunities for more efficient innovation value chains.

4. Partnership and the role of Regions in the platform
   The partnership is based on relevant Interreg Projects where the enhancement of Smart Specialisation and the role of the regions has been explored. This platform should be steered and governed by the authorities responsible for Smart Specialisation. Regions participating in the Steering Group do not have to be partners of the project.

5. Commitment from the BSC
   The Baltic Sea Commission has committed to support the mobilisation of regions to get involved in the platform if the application is approved. We have communicated our willingness to support the planning and recruitment of a specific leadership programme for smart specialisation experts that PA-Innovation is discussing with the Swedish Institute.

ERDF Managing Authorities
Network of the EUSBSR
The Baltic Sea Commission, together with the EUSBSR Policy Area Innovation, and working closely with innovation actors in the Regions, developed first pilots transnational collaboration proposals to help regions implement S3. The BSC was invited to attend all the meetings of the ERDF MA Network. Member Regions of the Baltic Sea Commission are involved in all the pilot areas: Clean Tech, Digitalisation, Blue Growth.

Meeting of the ERDF Managing Authority network Copenhagen, December 2017
REGIONAL TAKE ON THE BALTIC 2030
AND THE UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

For 2017-2019, the Baltic Sea Commission is prioritising the need to enhance capacity and opportunities for member regions to increase their knowledge of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and relate them to their regional development strategies. It is also working on the development of pan-Baltic partnerships for the implementation of the Baltic 2030 and SDG’s at the regional level and throughout the Baltic Sea Region. In this new area of work, the following actions have been taken.

1. CBSS Expert Group on Sustainable Development

The BSC is a member of the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) Expert Group on Sustainable Development. In Spring 2017, the BSC ensured the role of the Regions was reflected in the proposal for the Baltic 2030 Action Plan; adopted by the Foreign Ministers of the Member States in the CBSS.

2. Endorsement of the Baltic 2030 Action Plan

The Baltic 2030 Action Plan is specifically tailored for the Baltic Sea Region to guide macro-regional stakeholder’s through the implementation of the SDGs: The Baltic Sea Commission is committed to this work.

3. Enhanced cooperation with Euroregion Baltic

The BSC and Euroregion Baltic engaged in a joint project to explore the role of Regions in relation to the SDG’s and the Baltic2030 Action Plan.

4. Initiation of a Baltic Leadership Programme

The Swedish Institute organised a Baltic Leadership Programme focusing on Baltic 2030. The BSC supported the recruitment of local and regional stakeholders to the programme and participated in it. Through this programme the BSC has further strengthened connections with the CBSS, National Coordinators of the SDG’s and Policy- and Horizontal Area Coordinators of the EUSBSR.

5. Stakeholder Dialogue March 7, 2018

The BSC Task Force on Baltic 2030, led by Region Norrbotten, initiated a Stakeholder Conference on 07 March 2018, together with Euroregion Baltic, CBSS and Baltic Sea Future, to discuss the need for multilevel cooperation in the implementation of SDGs. The meeting was hosted by Stockholm County Council. The Swedish Presidency of the CBSS launched a gap-analysis on SDG implementation in the Baltic Sea Region at the Conference, enabling participating Regions to provide feedback and recommendations.
The Baltic Sea Commission co-organised the 8th Annual Forum of the EUSBSR in Berlin in June 2017, taking part in several important discussions with key stakeholders and ensuring that the voice of Baltic Sea regions was heard. Over 800 participants attended the successful forum, which the BSC organised with the German Federal Foreign Office, in close cooperation with the European Commission.

In preparation for the forum, the BSC formed a Task Force to support engagement with local and regional stakeholders. The Task Force developed a communication handbook to help regions improve their interaction with EUSBSR stakeholders, which was presented at the session ‘Policy as driver for Regional Development’.

Over 100 representatives of regional authorities attended the forum, illustrating an increased commitment to the implementation of the EUSBSR.

The BSC also co-organised the seminar, ‘Looking towards 2030, next steps for preparing the Baltic Sea Regions Future’.

The seminar on ‘Macro-regional strategies, What is in for Cohesion Policy?’ discussed how macro-regional cooperation structures can provide collaborative solutions across territories. The seminar involved Marc Lemaître, Director General of DG REGIO, who welcomed the idea of an ERDF Managing Authority network. The BSC also presented its policy position ‘Connecting the Baltic with the Arctic’. This position was presented at a seminar attended by the Finnish Ambassador of the Baltic Sea Region, the Director of NDP- TL and representatives of OECD and Nordregio.

The BSC will be attending the 9th Annual Forum of the EUSBSR on 4–5 June in Tallinn. The theme this year is the ‘Baltic Sea Region After 2020’. The Forum will focus how to improve the implementation of the EUSBSR in relation to the future EU Cohesion Policy. The BSC will be organising a seminar on ‘Designing and orchestrating a BSR wide Smart Specialisation Strategy Ecosystem’ and will continue to ensure the perspective of regions is presented at the forum.
BALTIC SEA COMMISSION’S COMMITMENT TO THE EU STRATEGY FOR THE BALTIC SEA REGION

The BSC Member Regions support the goals of the EUSBSR: Save the Sea, Increase Connectivity and Prosperity of the Baltic Sea Region. The BSC contributes to the EUSBSR by promoting multi-level governance and supporting regional stakeholders in engaging in the implementation of the strategy.

Troughout the year...

- **PA INNOVATION:** has played an instrumental role and worked together with the BSC Task Force on creating of a Smart Specialisation Platform and the LARS-project of the BSC Energy Working Group
- **PA TRANSPORT AND PA SHIP:** have engaged discussions with the BSC the Transport Working Group
- **HA CLIMATE AND HA ENERGY:** have invited the BSC to ensure a a regional perspective in their discussions.
- **PA TOURISM:** is engaged with the BSC Maritime Working Group in the framework of a sustainable Tourism Project, which is lead by PA Tourism
- **PA HAZARD:** is planning an event, together with the BSC on hazardous substances in the Baltic Sea Region at the European Parliament in September 2018 in Brussels
- **HA CAPACITY:** has engaged in discussions on how to best utilize the communication handbook that the BSC developed prior the annual forum in June 2017

What has been the contribution of the Baltic Sea Commission regarding the EUSBSR?

The BSC has worked closely with the EUSBSR Policy Area innovation on ways to better align funding from different sources to support transnational cooperation on Smart Specialisation. In addition to this, the BSC played a key role in organising the 8th Annual Forum of the EUSBSR in Berlin. Several Members spoke at various seminars and sessions.

How do you see the role of the Baltic Sea Commission regarding the EUSBSR?

The EUSBSR provides pan-baltic organisations such as the BSC with a wider strategic and institutional framework. In turn, the EUSBSR benefits immensely from the experience and expertise of such organisations. We are pleased that the BSC, as the voice of the regions in the Baltic Sea, supports and promotes the goals of the EUSBSR and contributes to its implementation. The involvement of regional level is essential for the design and implementation of effective policies. The overall ambition of the EUSBSR is to strengthen ties and deepen the dialogue between different stakeholders at all levels of governance.

What is the role of pan-Baltic organisations regarding the EUSBSR?

Pan-Baltic organisations play a very important role which is reflected in the Action Plan of the EUSBSR. The Baltic Sea Commission is involved in several projects led by its member Regions. It played an important role in the organisation of the last EUSBSR Annual Forum in Berlin. It is vital that the Baltic Sea Commission and other organisations engage member regions in promoting the EUSBSR’s goals.
MEETINGS OF THE CPMR AND BALTIC SEA COMMISSION

CPMR 45TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Helsinki Uusimaa hosted the 45th General Assembly of the CPMR on 19-20 October 2017. The event gathered more than 200 representatives from regions across Europe, including representatives of the EU institutions and Mr Kimmo Tiilikainen, Minister for Housing, Energy and Environment, Finnish Government.

Discussions focused on the future of Europe, Cohesion Policy post-2020, the future of the EU budget, Transport Policy and maritime affairs. During the CPMR General Assembly, Members of the Baltic Sea Commission took an active part in the discussions. Ms Annika Sandström, Stockholm County Council, gave a keynote speech on the Future of Europe. Ms Tiina Perho, South West Finland, participated as a speaker in the session on maritime affairs. Prior to event, Members of the Baltic Sea Commission had a preparatory meeting chaired by Mr Jari Sainio.

BALTIC SEA COMMISSION EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

At the General Assembly 2017, the Baltic Sea Commission instructed the Executive Committee to provide a proposal for a sustainable long-term structure for the Secretariat of the organisation.

The discussions on the future of the Secretariat spurred analyses and debate on the added value of the Baltic Sea Commission and how its structure and work processes can be further improved. This discussion was initiated at BSC Executive Committee meetings and further expanded at the Baltic Sea Commission General Assembly in Oulu and throughout 2018/2019.

Meetings: October in Stockholm, January in Brussels, March in Umeå

CPMR BALTIC SEA COMMISSION GENERAL ASSEMBLY, BERLIN, JUNE 2017

The Baltic Sea Commission held its General Assembly on 12 June, hosted by the Federal State of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, in its federal representation, in Berlin. Over 70 regional representatives gathered for the event which took place ahead of the 8th Annual Forum of the EUSBSR. Discussions focused on Transport and Accessibility, Maritime Affairs, Climate, Future of Europe. The General Assembly adopted the policy position «Connect the Artic with the Baltic». 
THE YEAR IN PICTURES
SNAPSHOT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITIES

Peter Berkowitz @PeterBerkowitz1 · 15 mars
Excellent discussion with @S34Growth and colleagues from @VI_Brussels @CPMR_Europe about the future of interregional cooperation, value chains and smart specialisation @AlisonH29

CPMR/BSC @CPMR_BSC
Now starts the second session of #S34growth seminar in the @EU_CoR: What Next for S3’s Interregional Cooperation Focus

John Kostet @JKostet · 15 févr.
Today we’re celebrating @Euroregion_ERB 20th anniversary with Erik Bergkvist representing @CPMR_BSC on the panel trying to solve the Rubik’s Cube of Balt Sea Cooperation, as well as building strong macro regional partnerships for the future. #EUSBSR

PA Innovation @inno_pa · 7 nov. 2017
Project platforms, to enhance S3 use! Building synergies between projects multiple programs @baltic_sea_prog, @NPA2014_2020 etc.

CPMR/BSC @CPMR_BSC
Today: Development seminar for project platforms. @CPMR_BSC supporting the creation of a #S3 platform the #EUSBSR

@TiinaPerho chairing the @CPMR_BSC Maritime working group in #Berlin backtoback #eusbsr Annual Forum @VSliitto

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More information about the activities mentioned in the Activity Report can be found in the news section of the Baltic Sea Commission website and on our twitter @CPMR_BSC