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Dear Member Regions and Partners,

In this newsflash, we are pleased to provide highlights of the activities of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission from September to December 2023 contributing to a more connected, sustainable and prosperous Baltic Sea Region. The Autumn was marked by discussions among the working groups on relevant EU legislations, as well as both the CPMR and its Baltic Sea Commission General Assemblies and the adoption of policy messages to the EU institutions ahead of the EU elections.

As we are soon heading to a break, the BSC Secretariat warmly thanks all the Members and partners for a fruitful cooperation for 2023 and wish you all a resting Christmas break.

Sincerely,

Lucille Ehrhart, Executive Secretary
Clare Booth, Policy Assistant
Guglielmo Migliori, Policy Officer
50th Anniversary and 51st General Assembly of the CPMR

In a symbolic move, the CPMR convened its 51st General Assembly in Saint-Malo, the town where the organisation was founded in 1973. Hosted by Brittany Region, this event also marked the 50th anniversary of the CPMR. For five decades, the association has championed a forward-looking vision for the European project, enhancing and empowering the crucial role of peripheral maritime regions.

Against the backdrop of the impending renewal of EU institutions in 2024, the General Assembly in Saint-Malo served as a platform to reflect on past successes, articulate a future vision, and deliver a powerful political manifesto. The agenda included sessions with leading figures engaging in discussions on topical EU issues.

Of utmost importance is the adoption of the CPMR Manifesto, crafted with the consensus reached during the Political Bureau meeting in Florence on 9 June and outlining the organisation’s key priorities. It will be addressed to the new EU institutions set to take office in late 2024.

The CPMR General Assembly furnished a distinctive occasion for the BSC to hold a plenary session and a meeting of the BSC Arctic Task Force. Region Lapland was presented during the CPMR General Assembly plenary on 17 November. The event also saw Västernorrland officially join the Baltic Sea Commission as a new Member Region.

Furthermore, the Political Bureau elected Mr Loïg Chesnais-Girard, President of Brittany Region, as the new CPMR President.

Find more information HERE. All pictures from the event HERE.
28th BSC General Assembly | September
At the invitation of BSC President Tomas Mörtsell and BSC Vice-President Richard Sjölund, regions Västerbotten (Sweden) and Ostrobothnia (Finland) hosted jointly the 28th CPMR Baltic Sea Commission General Assembly on 19-20 September in Umeå and Vaasa. The highlight of the event was a ferry journey crossing the Kvarken bay from Sweden to Finland. The Assembly gathered more than 60 representatives from BSC Member Regions, as well as guest speakers from the EUSBSR Policy Areas Transport and Innovation, CBSS Finnish Presidency, and VASAB Secretariat.

Discussions focused on the consequences faced by regions due to the geopolitical context, the future of the EU budget and Cohesion Policy post-2027, regional innovation collaboration, and building resilient transport and energy systems in the Baltic Sea Region. The BSC Resolution 2023 will be shared with EU institutions and presented to the Members of the European Parliament in January 2024 by the BSC Executive Committee.

Learn more about the General Assembly [HERE](#). Find all pictures from the event [HERE](#).

BSC Executive Committee | September
On 8 September, the Executive Committee met online to discuss the contribution of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission to current EU policy developments of interest for Baltic Sea Regions.

The meeting aimed to finalise the policy messages of the BSC Resolution to be put for approval to the General Assembly. The Chairs and Vice-Chairs gave an update of recent policy work, such as a joint discussion that the Working Groups held in June on how to strengthen sustainable logistics chains in the Baltic Sea Region.

Read the documents adopted:

- [BSC ACTIVITY REPORT 2022-2023](#)
- [BSC RESOLUTION 2023](#)
- [BSC WORK PLAN 2023-2025](#)
Focus: the BSC at the CPMR General Assembly

BSC Plenary Session

On 16 November, Member Regions of the Baltic Sea Commission held a plenary session within the framework of the 50th anniversary and the 51st CPMR General Assembly in Saint-Malo.

Chaired by BSC President Mr Tomas Mörtsell (Västerbotten), the plenary session started with a summary of the impact, engagement, and effort of the CPMR Baltic Commission in fostering multilateral cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region.

Part of the session was dedicated to the discussion of the CPMR Manifesto, its participatory process, and the amendments proposed by BSC Member Regions.

During the meeting, the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of all the BSC thematic Working Groups provided a comprehensive update of the past and future activities of their groups.

The plenary offered a moment of reflection for BSC regions towards the key issues at stake in the Baltic Sea Region, and the relating key messages and actions to be developed and delivered collectively to the renewed EU institutions after the European elections in June 2024.

BSC Arctic Task Force

During the 51st CPMR General Assembly in Saint-Malo, the Arctic Task Force of the Baltic Sea Commission gathered on the morning of 16 November to address pressing issues affecting the Arctic and Baltic regions.

Chaired by Ms Sari Nurro (Oulu Region), the session featured elected politicians and civil servants from Oulu Region, Helsinki-Uusimaa, Västerbotten, Norrbotten, Lapland, Jämtland Härjedalen, Central Ostrobothnia, Brittany Region, and Québec.

In a Tour de Table, each participant provided an update on recent regional developments related to the Arctic. Among the issues raised were the on-going potential and challenges relating to the green industrialisation in the European Arctic, skills supply, climate change, and the need to reinforce transport accessibility in the Arctic. The reorientation of Arctic cooperation structures in light of the new geopolitical context and the need to reinforce regional cooperation for a safe and prosperous Arctic were highlighted.

Member Regions discussed the Arctic Task Force Action Plan for 2024, including the elaboration of a new Position Paper to highlight the potential and challenges in the European Arctic faced by regions. The objective is to raise awareness on Arctic matters during the upcoming EU elections and future renewed European Parliament and College of Commissioners. Participants also agreed to reinforce dialogue on Arctic matters with national parliamentarians.
The BSC Transport Working Group discussed the EU Drone Strategy 2.0

On 18 October 2023, the BSC Transport Working Group met online to discuss the EU Drone Strategy 2.0 and the opportunities that the initiative can provide for peripheral maritime regions. The meeting was an opportunity to explore the content and next steps of the EU Drone Strategy 2.0, as well as for drones to foster further regional development.

Led by Vice-Chair Mr Jan Owe-Larsson (Region Östergötland) and Mr Pekka Komu (Region Päijät Häme), the meeting brought together BSC regional representatives and civil servants with the European Union officials (from DG MOVE) and local realities such as UIC2 and CITYAM Finland. Therefore, the seminar served as a forum for presenting experiences from stakeholders and member regions that are working with drones.

The CPMR Baltic Sea Commission and Scandria Alliance call for strengthening the resilience of the transport system in light of the new geopolitical context

On 6-7 November, Helsinki-Uusimaa hosted an event, together with the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission Transport Working Group and Scandria Alliance, to highlight the impact of the new geopolitical context on the Baltic Sea Region transport system. The event, comprising approximately 50 participants, resulted in a Joint Resolution urging EU and national support to improve cross-border connections. Additionally, both organisations advocated for a robust Connecting Europe Facility (CEF III) in the post-2027 EU budget.

One of the key focal points of the gathering was the acceleration of decarbonisation efforts within the transport sector. Aligning with EU climate objectives and the Green Deal, participants recognised the urgency of adapting transport infrastructure to be both sustainable and resilient. The event also shed light on the economic challenges faced by Finnish regions bordering Russia due to the border’s closure. Ensuring traffic and robust connections in these areas emerged as a critical priority. The European Coordinator of the ScanMed TEN-T Core Network Corridor, Mr Pat Cox, emphasised the growing strategic importance of the ScanMed corridor, particularly in light of Finland and Sweden’s NATO memberships and the region’s abundant rare earth materials and biomass. During his intervention, BSC Transport Working Group Vice-President, Mr Pekka Komu, stressed Finland’s new position on the world scene due to its recent NATO membership, and pointed out the importance of increasing investment R&I for the development of new innovative technologies.

Highlighting the significance of the North and the European Arctic, the gathering underlined the need for continued cooperation to navigate the changing environment. The meeting concluded with a visit to the new light train crossing Helsinki and discussions on the revision of the TEN-T regulation, including a presentation on the green freight package by the CPMR General Secretariat. The joint efforts of the Scandria Alliance and the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission reflect a commitment to strengthen the transport systems amid geopolitical shifts and foster sustainable development in the Baltic Sea Region. Find more information HERE.

Read more about the seminar HERE.

Click HERE to read the Joint Resolution!
CPMR Energy Working Group

On 5-6 October, the CPMR Energy Working Group met for the second time. Hosted by the Basque Country, regional representatives gathered in Bilbao to discuss energy-related work plans and priorities. The proposed Net-Zero Industry Act was also analysed. If you are interested in joining the CPMR Energy Working Group, please contact the BSC Secretariat.

Read HERE the CPMR note on the ‘Fit for 55’ package.

CPMR Transport Working Group

On 27 October, the CPMR Transport Working Group met in Zaragoza to discuss hot topics in transport policy. Hosted by Region Aragón, the event gathered regional representatives and administrators to identify priority focuses and identify new actions, for instance on the green freight package and maritime security. Read HERE the CPMR note on TEN-T.

CPMR Cohesion Core Group

On 14 September, the CPMR Cohesion Core Group gathered in Brussels to discuss the proposal for a Mid-Term Review of the Multiannual Financial Framework. If you are interested in joining the CPMR Cohesion Core Group, please contact the BSC Secretariat.

More information HERE.

CPMR Climate Working Group

On 29 September, the CPMR Climate Working Group gathered in Brussels to discuss their upcoming Action Plan and next steps.

Key points on the agenda were, amongst others, National Adaptation Plans, climate action, and sustainable tourism.
BSC promotes sustainable coastal tourism at the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum

On 11 October, the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum organised by Policy Area Tourism of the EUSBSR discussed promoting sustainable tourism despite post-COVID-19 and geopolitical issues. BSC Executive Secretary Lucille Ehrhart emphasised the importance of coastal tourism for regional development, highlighting the need for cooperation and EU support in addressing issues such as safety, digitalisation, season extension, skills development, and sector recovery. Read more HERE.

BSC provides a regional perspective at the “Our Baltic” Conference

On 29 September, BSC President Tomas Mörtsell participated in the "Our Baltic" Ministerial Conference at the invitation of European Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius. In his intervention, Mr Mörtsell emphasised the Baltic Sea as a unifying element for coastal regions, stressing joint responsibility to improve the state of the Baltic Sea. Mr Mörtsell also noted regional contributions to a sustainable blue economy, including promoting coastal tourism, decarbonising maritime transport, ports, deploying offshore wind energy, and supporting blue skills development. Read more HERE.

The Baltic Sea Commission takes part in the BSSSC Annual Conference

BSC President Tomas Mörtsell (Västerbotten) was invited by Chairman of the BSSSC and Marshall of Westpomeranian Region, Olgierd Geblewicz, to take part in the Annual Conference that took place on 12 September in Szczecin (Poland). The BSSSC Annual Conference focused on “Building a resilient Baltic Sea Region – 30 years of BSSSC as a driver for strong regional involvement.”

In his intervention, the BSC President highlighted the on-going green industrialisation in the north of Sweden and the regional challenges related to the energy transition.

The BSC engages within the BSR S3 Directors Network

On 21 November, in Oulu, the Baltic Sea Commission engaged in discussions on interregional innovation collaboration with the Baltic Sea Region S3 Directors’ Network (BSR S3 DN) meeting. The BSR S3 DN is a voluntary network of Regional Development Directors committed to working together on issues concerning S3.

The topics treated stemmed from the future of EU Cohesion Policy to Regional Innovation Valley, joint innovation and project opportunities.
European Ministers endorse the Palma Declaration for a Sustainable Future

On 31 October, European Tourism Ministers in Palma endorsed a declaration for greener, digital, and sustainable tourism aligned with the EU Agenda for Tourism 2030.

The declaration emphasises technology’s impact, resource efficiency, SME support, and collaboration through the EU Pact for Skills.

The commitment includes fostering competitiveness, responsible tourism, and prioritising the well-being of local residents, ensuring a sustainable future for the European tourism sector.

News from the Baltic Sea Region

The BSC participates in the 2023 EUSBSR Annual Forum

The 2023 Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) was held on 4-5 October in Riga, Latvia. The event convened the EUSBSR community to discuss safety and sustainability in the Baltic Sea Region. On 4 October, the BSC co-organised a workshop (Co-creating BSR Innovation Valley) on the macro-regional approach to the new Regional Innovation Valley concept with Västerbotten, Southwest Finland, and EUSBSR Policy Area Innovation.

The workshop explored the concept of a macro-regional innovation valley, leveraging the strengths of the Baltic Sea Region. Presentations from regional, network, and EU initiatives aimed to foster interest and commitment to Regional Innovation Valleys (RIVs) while identifying strategies to enhance engagement within the Baltic Sea Region.

Ms Sari Nurro, Chair of the BSC Maritime Working Group was part of the panel and welcomed the EU initiatives to promote regional innovation collaboration, such as the RIVs. She noted that obstacles still prevent regions from working together in a strategic way. Most collaboration takes place on a project-by-project basis and does not allow for a long-term approach in the macro-region. She called for adapted EU instruments for the regions in the future post-2027 period.

Read more HERE.
Invitation to the 29th General Assembly of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission

22-23 May 2024
Kymenlaakso (Finland)

At the invitation of Ms Henna Hovi, the 29th General Assembly of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission will be hosted by Region Kymenlaakso, on 22-23 May 2024.

Ahead of the European elections, the event will represent a valuable opportunity to discuss the latest EU policy developments related to Cohesion Policy, EU budget, energy and climate, transport, and maritime affairs.

More information will be circulated to Members in the next weeks.
Finland has a common external border with Russia totalling 1309km. Finland has already faced different kinds of hybrid influences both in its neighbouring areas and on its borders. Therefore, Finland has decided to close its entire eastern border until 13th December. The Kymenlaakso border crossing point Vaalimaa, has been closed since 18th November 2023.

In addition to comprehensive security issues, Kymenlaakso is one of the Finnish regions next to the Russian border whose economic outlook has sharply weakened since the Russian aggression in Ukraine. The risks for increased regional disparities have significantly risen. Collapse of exports to Russia and availability of raw materials and increased costs has directly affected companies leading to lay-offs in the region. There is also growing concern about the attractiveness of Kymenlaakso and other eastern regions in terms of future investments. Shifting a course of the regions’ outlook and future prospects is not only a Finnish challenge but issue of the entire EU.

Why CPMR and its Baltic Sea Commission?
In Kymenlaakso we value particularly the fact that CPMR promotes the voice of the EU’s peripheral regions. CPMR’s good connections are especially appreciated in the region, e.g., to the Commission’s Structural Funds Expert Group, Regional Cohesion Network meetings and the EU’s informal Cohesion Council. In addition, it has a long-term working relationship with the European Parliament. These channels ensure that the voices of the regions are heard.

Kymenlaakso is in the heart of a geopolitical challenge
EU Member States and their regions bordering Russia and Belarus, as well as those bordering Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, are facing a specific set of economic, social and security of supply challenges due to Russia’s on-going war of aggression against Ukraine. Kymenlaakso is one of these regions. These exceptional challenges and changes faced by regions on the Russian borders should be appropriately addressed at EU level.
Kymenlaakso calls for a new cross-border programme
Increased regional disparities caused by the geopolitical situation have to be seen as a risk at EU level. Cohesion Policy is the main policy focusing on the socio-economic development of EU regions and striving to decrease disparities among them and should be adapted to the needs of these territories. The objective of social, economic and territorial cohesion is at the heart of the European project.

“That is why we, in the Regional Council of Kymenlaakso call for the EU and other regions to start cooperating towards a new cross-border programme. Especially the areas bordering Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, that are facing a specific set of challenges due to Russia’s on-going war against Ukraine”, said Jaakko Mikkola, Regional Mayor of Kymenlaakso. “The preparation of the new programme should start immediately,” he continued.

Clean technology needs clean energy
Kymenlaakso is investing heavily in promoting investments in solar energy and the hydrogen economy. The utilisation of geoenergy is also actively studied, as the soil of Kymenlaakso is considered the best possible in Finland.

The challenge for Kymenlaakso in the production of fossil-free energy is to solve the restrictions caused by the radar monitoring of the Finnish Defence Forces on the construction of wind power. Currently almost all realised and planned investments in wind power are located in Western and Northern Finland. This situation leads to considerable regional inequality, and solutions must be found at national level. This already affects the location decisions of energy-intensive industries and the competitiveness of traditional industry in Southeast Finland.

Two battery material factories are currently being developed in the region and the Kymenlaakso battery cluster has been designated as one of the region’s key projects. In collaboration with other regions, the aim is to create the world’s best battery cluster conditions in Finland.

"Despite the challenges, Kymenlaakso has numerous opportunities and on-going development initiatives to produce fossil-free energy," concluded Jaakko Mikkola.
# BSC & CPMR Upcoming Events

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<tr>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>BSC Energy &amp; Climate Working Group meeting</td>
<td>7 DECEMBER 2023</td>
<td>ONLINE</td>
<td>Seminar: “Which role for hydrogen in the green transition of the Baltic Sea Region?” (More information and registration link <a href="#">here</a>)</td>
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<td>BSC Maritime Working Group meeting</td>
<td>11 DECEMBER 2023</td>
<td>ONLINE</td>
<td>Seminar: “Skills supply in the maritime tourism sectors” (More information and registration link <a href="#">here</a>)</td>
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<td>BSC Executive Committee</td>
<td>17 JANUARY 2024</td>
<td>STRASBOURG, FRANCE</td>
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<td>CPMR Political Bureau</td>
<td>21-22 MARCH 2024</td>
<td>PATRAS, GREECE</td>
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<td>BSC Arctic Task Force Meeting with national parliamentarians</td>
<td>APRIL 2023</td>
<td>HELSINKI, FINLAND</td>
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<td>29th General Assembly of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission</td>
<td>22-23 MAY 2024</td>
<td>KYMENLAAKSO, FINLAND</td>
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**External events:**
- **2-5 APRIL 2024**: Connecting Europe Days - Brussels, BE
- **14-15 MAY 2024**: EU Arctic Forum and Indigenous Peoples’ Dialogue 2024 - Brussels, BE
- **30-31 MAY 2024**: European Maritime Day 2024 (#EMD2024) - Svendborg, DK
- **29-30 OCTOBER 2024**: EUSBSR Annual Forum in Gotland, SE

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- [CPMR Baltic Sea Commission](#)
- [cpmr-baltic.org](#)

The Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) represents more than 150 regional authorities from 24 countries across Europe and beyond. Organised in Geographical Commissions, the CPMR works to ensure that a balanced territorial development is at the heart of the European Union and its policies. One of these Commissions is the Baltic Sea Commission, made up of 20 Regions from Sweden, Finland, Estonia and Germany. For more information on the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, please contact Lucille Ehrhart, BSC Executive Secretary (lucille.ehrhart@crpm.org)