INTRODUCTION

Dear Member Regions, Dear partners,

In this spring Newsflash, you will get an update on recent activities of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, related to its key areas of work, namely transport, maritime affairs, energy and climate, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, and Arctic issues.

We thank Member Regions and partners for their active participation in the work, and wishing you a peaceful and healthy Easter!

Lucille Ehrhart, Executive Secretary of CPMR BSC
Clare Booth, Policy Assistant

This February-March Newsflash includes news on
- Maritime, Energy and Climate, and Transport Working Groups’ recent activities
- Arctic Task Force 1st meeting
- BSC Executive Committee and CPMR Political Bureau meetings

Also discover in the Newsflash:
- Spotlight on Värmland, Interview with Ola Persson, Regional Councillor and Second vice Chairman of the Regional Board
- A calendar about future activities
- CPMR Contribution to the 8th Cohesion Report available HERE

...some Easter eggs!
On 2 March, the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission Energy and Climate Working Group chaired by Markku Markkula (Helsinki-Uusimaa), supported by Vice-Chair Pontus Lindberg (Skåne), met online to agree on the policy priorities of the Working Group for the two coming years, linked to regions interests, EU policy developments and the new Action Plan of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Member Regions decided to focus the work on the promotion of clean energies, the promotion of forestry, the transition towards an innovative circular economy and support to the development of Sustainable Smart Specialisation Strategies.

Member Regions also finalised a written contribution from the Working Group to the EU Public Consultation on the EU Forest Strategy, open for feedback until mid-April (See BSC draft available HERE). The meeting included an informative session about opportunities of the New European Bauhaus Initiative, presented by a representative from the European Commission, and presentations of good regional examples on the use of wood in the constrution sector.

Read the full article HERE

On 10 March, the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission Maritime Working Group discussed regional experiences to promote recovery and sustainable tourism around the Baltic Sea Region. Chaired by Tiina Perho (SouthWest Finland), supported by Vice-Chair Harry Bouveng (Stockholm Region), representatives from Estonia, Stockholm Region, Oulu Region and Gotland presented their experiences to foster sustainable tourism in a recovery context.

A representative from the European Commission also gave an outlook on EU support to Tourism ecosystem in the light of COVID-19. The tourism opportunities in the new Interreg Central Baltic Programme were also presented by the Swedish National Contact Point. The outcome of the recent report carried out on the ways of adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic in the North Sea Region was presented. Andrea Krabbe, Policy Area Tourism, highlighted the three actions related to tourism in the new Action Plan of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, and how regions can find opportunities of transnational cooperation in the new Action Plan.

Read the full article HERE
TRANSPORT WORKING GROUP

Chaired by Bosse Andersson (Stockholm Region), supported by Vice-Chairs Kristiina Hämäläinen (Päijät-Häme) and Magnus Lagergren (Örebro), the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission Transport Working Group discussed on 17 March the on-going revision of the TEN-T, in the presence of guest speakers, including Policy Area Transport of the EUSBSR.

On this occasion, Lucas Bosser, CPMR Transport Director, provided participants with an update on EU Transport Policy. Until early May, there is an open EU Public Consultation on TEN-T, to which both the CPMR and the Baltic Sea Commission will contribute. In view of the publication of the TEN-T Regulation proposal in September (or autumn at the latest), by the European Commission, the Working Group developed policy messages on TEN-T.

During the meeting, Member Regions also agreed to focus the work for the two coming years on promoting a functional TEN-T network to strengthen connectivity and accessibility whilst fostering smart, sustainable and climate neutral transport modes in the Baltic Sea Region.

Read the full article HERE

ARCTIC TASK FORCE

On 16 March, the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission Arctic Task Force, chaired by Tomas Mörtsell, Vice-President of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission (Västerbotten), held its first meeting. Gathering around 50 participants, the meeting aimed to discuss from a regional perspective the future EU Arctic Policy, currently under revision.

Michael Mann, EU Special Envoy for Arctic matters at European External Action Service, emphasised that the new EU Arctic Policy should help to promote a stable, sustainable, and prosperous Arctic, not just for the Arctic itself but for all the EU and the world. He stressed that the EU has an important role to play in supporting successful Arctic cooperation and helping to meet the challenges now facing the region.

The Arctic Task Force, open to all CPMR interested Regions, also welcomed representatives from Nordland, the Faroe Islands, Scotland, Iceland, and Oulu to share their views on the key issues of the future EU Arctic Policy, and on how to develop the Arctic in a sustainable way, whilst ensuring it is an attractive place. Punchlines of speakers included: “Making sure the Arctic is in the EU and EU in the Arctic”, “Arctic is cold, but Arctic is cool”, “What happens in the Arctic, doesn’t stay in the Arctic”.

Read the full article HERE
New perspectives to territorial development territorial development and innovation in the Baltic Sea Region

On 11 March, the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission organised an online meeting to discuss from a regional perspective the recently approved Action Plan of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, the new Interreg Baltic Sea Programme in its final stage of preparation, and also the growing role of Smart Specialisation Strategies on the EU Agenda, including the new Interregional Innovation Instrument, and how they will contribute to the resilience of the Baltic Sea Region. Around 70 participants from the Baltic Sea Region attended the event. (Agenda here)

The meeting was opened by Romek Kosenkranius, Vice-President, CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, Mayor of Pärnu, who stressed that the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region was a very good political platform of cooperation that had helped regions to connect with actors and inspirational people from all around the Baltic Sea to find joint solutions for common challenges. He welcomed on behalf of the CPMR BSC, the revised EUSBSR Action Plan, approved in 2021 by the European Commission, being more focused, and stressed the importance that in the implementation phase regions should be fully involved.

During a first panel discussion, moderated by Wolf Born (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern), the contribution of the new EUSBSR Action Plan and new Interreg Baltic Sea Programme post-2020 to regional development were discussed with guest speakers Francesco Molica, Director for Cohesion Policy at CPMR Secretariat, Simon Stermann, German Foreign Office, Chair of the EUSBSR National Coordinators Group, and Eeva Rantama, from Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme. As Chair of the CPMR BSC Maritime Working Group, Tiina Perho, (SouthWest Finland) explained that the Working Group should serve as a platform to further connect the Strategy and the regions and is an appropriate interface to work with the EUSBSR policy areas, either at project or policy level.

The second panel focused on discussing macro-regional approaches to smart specialisation and investments in a post-2020 context. Policy Area Innovation of EUSBSR, Esa Kokkonen, presented the main elements of the new Action Plan regarding innovation and investments, and explained how regions can work with it. Peter Berkowitz noted that in the area of innovation cooperation, the Baltic Sea Region is one of the leading macro-regional areas in Europe. He presented the opportunities of the new inter-regional investment initiative on its way, based on two strands. The idea of helping the less developed or lower capability regions to strengthen their capacity to engage with value chains and innovation activities with more developed actors is important. Jonas Lundström from Region Västerbotten, warmly welcomed the growing role of S3 in the new Cohesion Policy and the focus on interregional cooperation and explained how the Region is taking a new approach to S3 interregional collaboration.

The new EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region Action Plan in a nutshell

-14 policy areas covering 44 actions
-Horizontal themes: Climate change and cooperation with 3rd countries
-Establishment of a Baltic Sea Strategy Point (provides administrative and technical support for the EUSBSR management, development, and implementation)
-The main objectives of the strategy -Save the Sea, Connect the Region, and Increase Prosperity - are not modified.

Read the EC’s press release: HERE
Revised action plan can be read HERE
On 24 March, 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 new BSC Work Plan for 2021-2023, as well as the new Action Plans of the Working Groups were also discussed.

Chaired by President Jari Nahkanen (Oulu), the meeting welcomed Member of the European Parliament, Erik Bergkvist, who provided an overview of policy developments about the EU Forest Strategy, and the TEN-T and TEN-E revisions. Addressing the Executive Committee, Erik Bergkvist highlighted the key role of regions to shape EU policies.

At the meeting, Chairs of the CPMR BSC thematic Working Groups on Transport, Maritime Affairs, and Energy and Climate, provided an update of recent work and policy developments. During the meeting, the Executive Committee talked about the limited role of regions in the design and implementation of the national Recovery and Resilience Plans, currently under preparation.

Read the full article [HERE](#)
Dear Ola, can you, in a few words, describe your region - Värmland?

Värmland’s location with a densely populated area in the south and a sparsely populated area in the north is a challenge. That is why it is especially important to have a good infrastructure and access to broadband. The Värmland business community consists of everything from creative small business owners to high-class industry with production in international top class. The tourism industry has for decades grown stronger and contributes to the fact that more and more people fall for both culture and nature as experiences. Well-developed clusters and networks linked to research and innovation are also a contributing factor to new business start-ups and initiatives. Värmland is a dynamic and vibrant region that contains many different qualities that complement and strengthen each other. From skiing and outdoor activities in the north to scenic archipelago in the south, and everything in between.

What are the most important issues for Värmland?

Above all, to have a functioning infrastructure so that we become a more integrated part of both Sweden and Europe. For example, we have an industry that is dependent on exports. Having the right competence is also an important issue. In Värmland, we want to raise the level of education and skills and act to influence intra-regional differences.

What is the focus of Värmland in the terms of EU Transport Policy to improve the connectivity of the region?

It is about improving our ways of communication, both roads and railways. For example, the work with Oslo-Stockholm 2.55 is very important. It is an opportunity to shorten the travel time between two capitals. Our labour market is in both the east and the west. It is necessary that we shorten the travel time. Värmland is located between Oslo and Stockholm along an expansive growth corridor with many opportunities on the Swedish and Norwegian side. The strategic location and unique proximity to Oslo give us one competitive advantage in the form of proximity to employers and skills as well as trading opportunities and investments.

A faster railway connection between Oslo and Stockholm with stops in Värmland would connect the county even more closer to the metropolitan regions and contribute to sustainable travel, development and growth along the route.
The TEN-T core network (as a part of the comprehensive network) is of highest importance for major international transport flows and for a balanced interconnection of all EU regions. It interconnects the major cities and transport nodes as economic centres and key transhipment hubs, and it features higher quality and capacity standards than the comprehensive network. It is of great importance to Värmland. The CPMR network plays an important role within this area. It gives us an opportunity to work together with other regions that have the same goals.

**How has Värmland been impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak and what are the perspectives to overcome the crisis?**

We're in the middle of a pandemic but we're planning for the time after. It is important to find ways to deal with the pandemic itself at the same time, but also to get the business going. It is equally important for the whole of Europe, we are dependent on exports, where it is required that all countries in Europe must function. We also need to continue working to increase the trust that might has been affected in the border region.

**How are you involved in the CPMR and what are your experiences so far?**

I am part of the Transport Working Group in the Baltic Sea Commission. We chose to be part of the Baltic Sea Commission because the transport sector is very important to us. We have common interests in the work with Oslo-Stockholm 2.55. together with Stockholm and Örebro. The work involves constantly looking for common denominators and contacts and taking it step by step. The CPMR is an important tool for realising our regional plan and our regional development plan and our involvement within the EU.

**Which projects are the most important for Värmland?**

In Värmland we are surrounded by forest - and we have learned how to take care of it. The availability of wood raw material, long experience and innovative power, has made us a leading region in forest bioeconomy. In the transition to a fossil-free society and a circular economy, we are willing to take the lead and inspire others. Among other things through unique pilot and test environments and advanced research in the field.

For circular bioeconomy and smart specialisation, we have received attention within the CPMR, and it is important that we strengthen our opportunities. The forest is very important in Värmland.

**Is there anything that would need to be added to the regional development strategy?**

“Mer Värmland på tallriken” is an initiative that deals with food production and that keeps our arable land alive. We need to take a step forward in this. One thought is that it might be under Smart Specialisation to find new ways and opportunities. Smart specialisation works with circular bioeconomy so it might be possible to find a symbiosis.
INSIGHT ON INTERREG SWEDEN-NORWAY PROGRAMME FROM VÄRMLAND’S PERSPECTIVE

Interreg Sweden - Norway 2021 - 2027

The EU programme Interreg Sweden-Norway provides support for joint Swedish-Norwegian projects that develop society and business in various areas of action.

Region Värmland coordinates the work of developing the EU programme for the new programming period 2021 - 2027.

The programme area includes 8 regions, the regions of Dalarna, Jämtland-Härjedalen, Värmland, Västernorrland and Västra Götaland region as well as the Norwegian regions Innlandet, Trøndelag and Viken. The regions will together develop a programme proposal that is based on common challenges, areas of strength and specific conditions, with a focus on border regional added values.

EU investment priorities of the programme: We have chosen to continue working in three areas, PO1, PO2 and PO4

**PO1:** A smarter Europe thanks to innovation, digitalisation, economic transformation and support for small businesses

**PO2:** A greener, carbon-free Europe that invests in energy conversion, renewable energy sources and climate work

**PO4:** A more social Europe that follows the principles of the European pillar of social rights and supports good jobs, education, skills, social inclusion and equal health care

Work process and communication

A Working Group is responsible for the on-going programme writing work, which is coordinated by Region Värmland. The Working Group reports to a Joint Programming Committee consisting of political representatives from the 8 regions and representatives of responsible ministries in Sweden and Norway as well as the EU Commission.

"An important work, which will hopefully lead to many innovative and exciting projects and collaborations", says Coordinator Camilla Tellås, Region Värmland

The Working Group has recently published a consultation and received around 70 responses from municipalities, universities, regions, county administrative boards, clusters, corporate groups, and civil society. The material will be compiled, and a new programme draft will be produced. The programme proposal will be submitted to the Ministry of Trade and Industry in Sweden in June and then adopted by the EU Commission.

About Värmland

Population: 281 482 (2019)
Size: 17 591 km²
Biggest city: Karlstad

For more information

Website Region Värmland European Office
Interreg Sweden-Norway programme
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>21 MAY 2021</td>
<td>European Maritime Day CPMR workshop on Sustainable tourism: Key actions towards a smart and resilient recovery, (Registration HERE)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAY-JUNE 2021 – dates to be confirmed</td>
<td>BSC Working Groups meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 JUNE 2021</td>
<td>BSC Executive Committee Online</td>
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<td>24 JUNE 2021</td>
<td>CPMR Political Bureau Online</td>
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- https://cpmr-baltic.org (website)

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 18 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)