Dear Member Regions and Partners,

As 2024 marks the year of European elections, the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission has focused its work in engaging with EU representatives to convey regional views related to the future of Cohesion Policy, energy transition and the importance of increased accessibility in the Baltic Sea Region. The highlight of the work was the visit of the Executive Committee to the European Parliament in Strasbourg to meet with various Members of the European Parliament.

On a more sad note, early 2024 was marked by the loss of two dear friends of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, Mr Jari Nahkanen and Mr Erik Bergkvist. Two strong figures of the European construction and committed to the Baltic Sea Region, that are deeply missed.

Sincerely,

Lucille Ehrhart, Executive Secretary
Clare Booth, Policy Assistant
Guglielmo Migliori, Policy Officer
In Memoriam

Jari Nahkanen

We were deeply saddened to hear of the passing of our dear friend, Jari Nahkanen.

Genuinely pro-European, Jari Nahkanen was an active Member of the CPMR and promoted Oulu Region and Finnish issues across Europe and towards European institutions.

Jari was a loved and respected politician within the CPMR family.

Jari Nahkanen was President of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission from 2018 to 2022.

He was strongly committed to promoting regional cooperation across the borders and to improving the life of people in the northern parts of Finland and the whole Baltic Sea Region.

Since 2023, he chaired the BSC Arctic Task Force, a group promoting Arctic issues and interests in European policies.

His legacy, kindness and diplomatic abilities, together with his warm and unique personality will be remembered and deeply missed.

Erik Bergkvist

It is with great sadness that we learn that our friend Erik Bergkvist has passed away.

Member of the European Parliament, former Member of the CPMR and its Baltic Sea Commission, he was a driving force of our organisation. A pillar of the CPMR, he held the Vice-Presidency for Transport in 2018-2019 and he was the President of the Baltic Sea Commission from 2010 to 2012.

Erik Bergkvist was profoundly attached to his territory, Västerbotten, and a genuine and convinced pro-European. Building a better and more just future for his fellows was at the heart of his local action and European engagement.

Active, respected and loved politician within CPMR for many years, he acted as an ambassador of the north of Sweden towards the European institutions.

As fervent supporter of European integration, he bravely continued his political battles in the European Parliament. Forward thinking in his ideas, he brought wisdom and optimism to the political debate.

He will be missed dearly by the CPMR family, and always remembered for his kind, compassionate heart.
On 16-17 January 2024, Members of the BSC Executive Committee met in Strasbourg to exchange with Members of the European Parliament (MEP Niklas Nienass, MEP Emma Wiesner, MEP Rasmus Andresen, MEP Ville Niinistö and MEP Ilan De Basso) on topics related to the future of Cohesion Policy, infrastructure and transport connections, and energy security in the Baltic Sea Region.

The meeting was also an opportunity to visit the European Parliament in Strasbourg and to become more familiar with the EU parliamentary work.

BSC Members also met with Mr Mathieu Mori, Secretary General of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe to discuss the role of municipalities and regions in the administrative reconstruction of Ukraine.

The Executive Committee exchanged with Ms Catherine Trautmann, Coordinator of the North Sea Baltic Sea corridor about the provisional agreement on the TEN-T Regulation and its implications for BSC Regions.

In light of the new geopolitical context, BSC Members highlighted to EU Coordinator Catherine Trautmann the growing importance of military mobility in the Baltic Sea Region, the need for further investments in transport infrastructure and better cross-border connections in the future.

The BSC Executive Committee gathered online on 15 March to discuss the preparations for the upcoming BSC General Assembly in Kotka, Kymenlaakso.

During the meeting, the BSC Executive Committee appointed Ms Tanja Joona, Deputy Board Member of Region Lapland, as the new Chair of the BSC Arctic Task Force.

In addition, the Executive Committee approved the nomination of Ms Johanna Ekman from Region Päijät-Häme as new Vice-Chair of the BSC Transport Working Group.

Finally, it was agreed that the BSC Secretariat will launch an Open Call for interest to establish a brand new BSC EUSBSR Task Force, aimed at influencing the revision of the Action Plan of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR). All BSC Member Regions that are interested in contributing to the upcoming revision of the EUSBSR Action Plan are invited to join the newly established BSC Task Force.
On 15 March, the BSC Executive Committee appointed Ms Tanja Joona, Deputy Board Member of Region Lapland, as the new Chair of the BSC Arctic Task Force.

Regarding her nomination, Ms Tanja Joona said:

“I am delighted to Chair the BSC Arctic Task Force that plays an important role in fostering collaboration between Arctic regions for a fair and sustainable development of the area.

This position provides the opportunity for Lapland to create even stronger alliances with partners around the Baltic Sea Region. We believe that united efforts can yield greater strengths and impacts for people living in the Arctic.

As a researcher living in the Arctic, I will be committed to promote in particular the green transition in a just manner. This requires expertise in local culture and world views, and a holistic understanding.”

Read more HERE.

On 15 March, the BSC Executive Committee voted for the appointment of Ms Johanna Ekman, Member of the Regional Board, Region Päijät-Häme, as new Vice-Chair of the BSC Transport Working Group and Member of the Executive Committee, replacing Mr Pekka Komu.

Concerning her appointment, Ms Ekman declared:

“I’m really looking forward to participating in the BSC Executive Committee’s work. The war in Ukraine has also put the Baltic Sea Region in the spotlight.

Cooperation in the region is needed to highlight and promote the key questions especially around transport, energy, security of supply and military mobility to raise awareness.

These mutual special needs will be taken into account in the EU’s decision-making, and I am committed to advancing this cause.”
The BSC Arctic Task Force held a seminar on the European Arctic at the Parliament of Finland

On 9 April, the Council of Oulu Region and the BSC Arctic Task Force held a joint seminar entitled “Harnessing the potential of the green transition and securing the stability of the European Arctic for an attractive and resilient Europe”. The event was hosted at the Parliament of Finland in Helsinki in collaboration with the Finnish Delegation to the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region (CPAR).

Moderated by Mr Ilari Havukainen (Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities) and opened by Ms Olga Oinas-Panuma, Finnish MP and Chair of the Finnish Delegation to the CPAR, the seminar continued with a keynote speech by Mr Raphaël Goulet (European Commission - DG MARE) on harnessing the full potential of the European Arctic in the green transition. A panel discussion made up of Mr Eric Palmqvist (Swedish MP), Ms Tanja Joona (Region Lapland), and Mr Glenn Berggård (Region Norrbotten) discussed the question of a just green transition in the Arctic.

Security and stability in the Arctic region was addressed in the second session of the seminar, which was opened by a keynote address by Ms Clara Ganslandt (EU Special Envoy for Arctic Matters) and enriched by a stimulating panel discussion featuring Ms Tytti Tuppurainen (Finnish MP), Ms Alexandra Anstrell (Swedish MP), Ms Pirita Näkkäläjärvi (President of the Sámi Parliament of Finland), and BSC President Mr Tomas Mörtsell (Region Västerbotten). The conference concluded with Ms Mari-Leena Talvitie, Finnish MP and Chair of the Council of Oulu Region, who outlined the path forward on these critical issues facing the European Arctic.

**Highlights and key takeaways:**

- The EU plays a key role in fostering sustainable development in the Arctic through its policies and instruments. Participants advocated for further strengthened EU support to the European Arctic (eg. Cohesion Policy, CEF etc).
- The European Arctic is at the forefront of the EU’s green transition, with pioneering solutions for decarbonisation.
- A balanced and sustainable Arctic development requires the inclusion of local and indigenous communities in policy-making for a just green transition.
- Investment in infrastructure (ports, railways), and cross-border transport connections are crucial for the Arctic’s development.
- Investments in public services, and attracting and retaining residents, are vital for the Arctic’s future.
- Climate change poses the biggest threat to the Arctic.
- The Arctic has become a geopolitical hotspot. The changing security landscape requires preparedness and resilience.
- Continued efforts are needed to raise awareness of the Arctic as a region with residents, culture, opportunities, and a place for living, studying, and working. Investment in people is key.

Overall, the seminar gathered over 60 participants, demonstrating the importance of strengthening the relevance of Arctic issues within the EU agenda in view of a renewed European Parliament and College of Commissioners.
The BSC Transport Working Group discusses the implications of the TEN-T Regulation’s review

On 12 March, the BSC Transport Working Group met online to discuss the provisional agreement on the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) Regulation reached in December.

The Working Group Chair, Mr Magnus Lagergren (Region Örebro), congratulated BSC members for their active engagement in the Regulation’s revision, referring to 6 BSC amendments integrated into the agreement.

In addition, Vice-Chair Mr Pekka Komu (Päijät-Häme) emphasised the significance of TEN-T corridors with regard to the new geopolitical context and the rising importance of military mobility.

Mr Marcin Wójcik, Advisor to the TEN-T Coordinator at the European Commission (DG MOVE), provided insights into the Regulation’s features, emphasising sustainability and efficiency, while national perspectives were provided by Ms Kaisa Kuukasjärvi (Finnish Ministry of Transport and Communications) and Mr Siamak Jalali (Swedish Ministry of Rural Development and Infrastructure).

Finally, the Vice-Chair, Mr Jan Owe-Larsson (Östergötland), stressed the importance of enough CEF III funding in the future EU budget.

Read more about the seminar HERE.

The BSC Maritime Working Group discusses ways to promote a Sustainable Blue Economy

On 25 March, the BSC Maritime Working Group met online to discuss how to promote a Sustainable Blue Economy to protect and restore the Baltic Sea environment.

Under the direction of Chair Ms Sari Nurro (Oulu Region) and Vice-Chair Mr Harry Bouveng (Region Stockholm), the event focused on the harmonious development of offshore wind in the Baltic Sea Coasts, and small-scale fisheries. It was raised that Maritime Spatial Planning is a crucial tool to plan various maritime activities. The meeting started with a presentation by Mr Rüdiger Strempel, HELCOM’s Executive Secretary, about the status of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan. If the Baltic Sea remains one of the most polluted Seas, the knowledge about its status is growing and enables actions to be taken.

Moreover, promoting sustainable locally-based fishing for marine environment protection was highlighted by Mr Gustav Hemming (Region Stockholm), while Mr Michael Hagström (Alliance for Fisheries Associations in the Bothnian Bay) addressed fisheries and offshore wind power deployment and Ms Mari Pohja-Myrä (SouthWest Finland) emphasised maritime spatial planning’s role in fostering a sustainable blue economy.
The BSC Energy & Climate Working Group shapes its position on hydrogen

On 7 December, the BSC Energy & Climate Working Group met online to explore hydrogen’s potential in the Baltic Sea Region’s green transition. Through engaging presentations, attendees learned about Sweden’s hydrogen initiatives from Mr Pawel Seremak (Vätgas Sverige) and the EU’s hydrogen strategies and funding opportunities from Ms Ruta Baltause (European Commission - DG ENER).

At regional level, Ms Jatta Jussila (CLIC Innovation) presented the BalticSeaH2 project, aimed at creating the first inter-regional hydrogen valley. Ms Jenny Sackner Christensen (Trelleborgs Energi) shared how Trelleborg Municipality (Region Skåne) is integrating hydrogen into its energy plans, while Mr Glenn Berggård (Region Norrbotten) showcased Norrbotten’s green investments, including on hydrogen.

The BSC ECWG developed a BSC Position Paper on hydrogen to voice regional perspectives and demands to EU and national decision-makers, especially with the upcoming European elections in June.

For this purpose, on 27 February, the Working Group met again to review the initial draft of the Paper. During the meeting, BSC ECWG Chair and Vice-Chair Mr Markku Markkula (Region Helsinki-Uusimaa) and Mr Pontus Lindberg (Region Skåne) emphasised the importance of recognising regional contributions, establishing a clear regulatory framework that values Regions and their citizens, and adapting legislation and funding to territorial needs and specificities.

The Position Paper is currently under development by BSC ECWG Coordinating Regions and is set for approval at the General Assembly in Kotka (Region Kymenlaakso) on 22 May.

The Paper will be enriched by an Annex showcasing pioneering hydrogen projects and initiatives in the Baltic Sea Region.

Consult HERE the consolidated draft BSC position paper on hydrogen.
The CPMR held its spring Political Bureau meeting in Patras to discuss the latest EU policy developments of interests for the regions. The highlight of the event was the exchange with Ms Elisa Ferreira, EU Commissioner for Regional Policy, about the future of Cohesion Policy. CPMR Members expressed their views on future reforms needed while preserving this policy as ambitious.

The CPMR Political Bureau approved **two key Policy Positions:**

The meeting also featured a presentation by Ms Talvikki Jori (SouthWest Finland) on the state of play in Maritime Policy, where she emphasised the importance of Maritime Spatial Planning, a strategy for managing the use of maritime space, as human pressure on our seas continues to grow.

With the European elections approaching in June, the CPMR meeting reaffirmed the vital role of regions in the European project. Regional leaders participated in intense discussions about strengthening Cohesion Policy to better reflect the needs of individual regions and support their full potential.

The CPMR took part in the 10th EU Summit of Regions & Cities, which took place in Mons, on 18-19 March 2024.

The CPMR Delegation was led by CPMR President Mr Loïg Chesnais-Girard, who participated in a series of high-level discussions on key issues affecting regional development.

The Summit focused on three main themes: **macro-regional strategies**, the Cohesion Alliance (a coalition of stakeholders committed to strengthening Cohesion Policy in the EU), and **public services**.

The CPMR's participation in the 10th EU Summit of Regions & Cities was a valuable opportunity to showcase the work of CPMR Regions and to advocate for their interests.
The CPMR has recently conducted an in-depth study examining how different enlargement scenarios might affect funding for various regions across Europe. The EU is contemplating enlarging its membership, which raises concerns about the financial sustainability of EU initiatives, particularly given the economic challenges faced by potential new member states, such as Ukraine. The CPMR's study delved into the financial implications of expansion for Cohesion Policy, assuming no accompanying reforms.

Surprisingly, the study found that expansion would not necessarily increase the cost of the policy compared to the current situation. Instead, the budget would likely decrease regardless of whether expansion occurs. Several factors contribute to this outcome. Firstly, expansion won't happen overnight, and the economic landscape of existing EU regions will evolve over time. Secondly, the economic challenges faced by new Member States would influence how funds are distributed. Lastly, the allocation formula is designed to mitigate significant changes, often resulting in budget reductions.

The study highlights that the current method of distributing funds is not optimal and fails to align with the objectives of the European Union or the needs of its regions. Moreover, the budget for Cohesion Policy should not decrease at a time when regional disparities are widening, even within current member states.

Presenting the findings at the Committee of Regional Development (REGI) of the European Parliament on 9 April 2024, Mr Filip Reinhag, Member of the CPMR Political Bureau and the Regional Council of Gotland (Sweden), emphasised the importance of prioritising the needs of regions and focusing on areas where European cooperation can make a difference. He expressed the ambition to make Europe the most prosperous and livable continent globally.

"Together with my CPMR colleagues across Europe, we believe that we need to put the needs of the Regions at the forefront, put focus on what we need European cooperation for, and unleash the potential to make Europe the most livable and prosperous continent in the world."

Filip Reinhag (Region Gotland)

Discussions with members of the REGI Committee and the European Commission underlined the need for a broader discussion on EU cohesion that goes beyond mere numbers and constraints. The CPMR remains committed to developing policy proposals for the future of Cohesion Policy and the EU budget.

Consult [HERE](#) the CPMR study: "Furthering Cohesion in an Enlarged Europe"
Ms Henna Hovi, Member of the Board of the Regional Council of Kymenlaakso and Mr Tomas Mörtsell, President of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, have the pleasure to invite BSC Members to the 29th General Assembly of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, which will take place on 21, 22, 23 May 2024 in Kotka, Kymenlaakso (Finland).

The event will take place close to the Baltic Sea at the Maritime Museum of Finland. It will be an opportunity to learn more about Kymenlaakso Region, as a maritime region but also a region bordering Russia. In light of the challenging geopolitical context, the theme of this year’s event will be security and cooperation for a prosperous Baltic Sea Region.

The tentative agenda and programme of the event are now available HERE.

As a teaser for the General Assembly, we invite you to watch a VIDEO about Kymenlaakso Region.
Anna Sundberg, 1st Vice-President of the Regional Board of Gävleborg

SPOTLIGHT ON GÄVLEBORG
Trying to defend small-scale fisheries, Cohesion Policy and transport!

Ms Anna Sundberg represents Region Gävleborg in the CPMR, having been elected for the term spanning 2022-2026. With a profound dedication to advocating for small-scale fisheries at regional, national, and European levels, Ms Sundberg aims to shed light on the pressing challenges faced by the Baltic Sea and its small-scale coast fisheries. Actively engaged in various bodies including the CPMR, its Baltic Sea Commission, and the relating CPMR and BSC Maritime and Fisheries Working Groups, Ms Sundberg also holds membership in a Swedish network for regional politicians championing Sustainable and Locally Anchored Fishing initiatives. Serving as an elected member of the Regional Assembly of Gävleborg and assuming the role of Vice-Chairman in the Regional Executive Committee, Ms Sundberg further extends her action to the City Council of Gävle, where her efforts are concentrated on fostering a thriving countryside and coastal environment. Additionally, she is the Vice-Chair of the Board of Central Sweden, representing the joint interests of Region Gävleborg, Dalarna, and Örebro at their Brussels Office.

Welcome to Gävleborg!
On the East Coast of Sweden, about one hour North by train from the national Airport, Stockholm Arlanda, you enter the county of Gävleborg. You are now in Norrland, the Northern land of Sweden, at least according to geographers and the weather report. Asking someone on the streets of the urban capital Gävle, with 100,000 inhabitants, you might get a different answer. It is not uncommon to hear people in Gävle say “I’m going to Norrland!”, suggesting that Gävle is not Norrland. Further North in the cities of Bollnäs, Ljusdal, or the ski-resort of Järvsö, such comments are rare. The elected representative in CPMR, Anna Sundberg, puts it this way:

“We cannot deny being close to Stockholm, but large parts of Gävleborg are sparsely populated forests with long winters and snow, which is typically how people picture Swedish Norrland. For example, until recently, my father was running a wilderness lodge and tourists from all over the world came to see wild bears. Gävleborg is near, but something else than Stockholm.”

The relatively open coastline helps shipping and the county capital Gävle, recognised as a city in the 15th century, was one of the first cities in Sweden with international trading rights. The entrepreneurial tradition is strong in the region and innovative companies of different branches are prevalent from the North to the South. Many of the most innovative companies stem from more sparsely populated areas.

Fisheries policy is a priority for Gävleborg in CPMR
When giving a story of the economy in Gävleborg one must not forget to say something about fish and small-scale fisheries. A majority of the population live close to the coast or in river valleys and the local fish and fisheries always had great importance culturally and economically. Of all the important fish (salmon, whitefish, perch), the herring is one of the most important. Once a staple food along the coast, herring’s collapse has made it a luxurious specialty for festivities. For example, last year a small can of "surströmming" (sour herring) could fetch over ten times the price of tuna. The once prevalent fishing community with hundreds of fishermen is now almost counted on two hands.

The location and geography of Gävleborg are a good start to tell a story of its modern economy. Rich natural resources in iron and forest lay groundwork for powerful iron and pulp industries. The rivers running across the county from the West to the East were natural waterways for timber transport while also powering sawmills and iron hammers on their way to the sea.
In 2023, the European Commission proposed a zero quota for herring in the sea basin outside Gävleborg, but in the end, the Council agreed on a quota at 55,000 tons.

Although a step in the right direction, we were very disappointed with the quotas for 2024. We would like to see regulation that allows small-scale fisheries along the coast to survive but closes the door for large-scale trawling.

A bright future ahead

In the context of EU policy, Ms Anna Sundberg prefers to speak of Gävleborg as part of North Middle Sweden, the EU NUTS-2 construct comprising three Swedish counties: Dalarna, Värmland, and Gävleborg. Due to its GDP below the EU average, North Middle Sweden is the only Swedish area classified as a “Transition Region” for EU programming period 2021-2027.

Of course, we are not happy that economic activity in North Middle Sweden is below average in the EU. However, we are glad that Transition Regions are given extra support in the regulation. We want to see a Cohesion Policy where Regions have the power to prioritise what they consider important.

North Middle Sweden’s regional development efforts focus on investments for transition. The University of Gävle and Gävleborgs’ S3 are specialising in sustainable work life, the industrial investments are focused on industrial symbiosis, and the ports are at the forefront of sustainable transport. North Middle Sweden is part of EU-wide initiatives coining the region both as a “Hydrogen Valley” within the Vanguard Initiative and as a “Circular Economy Valley” in the Horizon Europe programme for Innovation Valleys.

Transport is the third priority for Gävleborg’s engagement in the CPMR. For a long time, different actors in Gävleborg have been lobbying for the extension of the TEN-T corridor along the Baltic Sea all the way to Northern Scandinavia. This goal was achieved when the corridor was extended in the 2015 revision of TEN-T. Now, Gävleborg’s influencing strategy has turned its attention to the national level, trying to make the Swedish Government prioritise rail and road investments along the Baltic coast.

Gävleborg is part of Sweden’s waist. Our ports and geography connect Southern and Northern Sweden as well as the inland forests with the Baltic coast. The infrastructure in Gävleborg is important for our inhabitants, but also for raw materials and high value industrial products, not only in Sweden, but also in Europe.

The Port of Gävle, conveniently located just two hours from Stockholm, is the largest logistics hub in Central Sweden. It serves the region’s steel, wood, and paper industries by both exporting their goods and importing fuel, project cargo, consumer goods, and raw materials.

“Gävleborg is part of Sweden’s waist. Our ports and geography connect Southern and Northern Sweden as well as the inland forests with the Baltic coast. The infrastructure in Gävleborg is important for our inhabitants, but also for raw materials and high value industrial products, not only in Sweden, but also in Europe.”

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BSC & CPMR UPCOMING EVENTS

**BSC Energy & Climate Working Group meeting on electrification**
(More information and registration link [HERE](#)).

23 APRIL 2024 | ONLINE

21-22-23 MAY 2024 | KOTKA, KYMENLAAKSO (FI)
BSC General Assembly
More information [HERE](#).

11-12 JUNE 2024 | SHKODËR, ALBANIA
CPMR Political Bureau

3-4 JUNE 2024 | OULU, OULU REGION (FI)
BSC Maritime Working Group meeting
More information [HERE](#).

10-11 SEPTEMBER 2024 | LAHTI, PÄIJÄT-HÄME (FI)
BSC Executive Committee meeting
More information [HERE](#).

25 SEPTEMBER 2024 | ONLINE
BSC Transport Working Group meeting
More information [HERE](#).

3-4 OCTOBER 2024 | GOZO, MALTA
52nd CPMR General Assembly

28 NOVEMBER 2024 | REGION SKÅNE (SE)
BSC Energy & Climate Working Group meeting
More information will be published [HERE](#).

External events

- 18 APRIL 2024: Baltic Sea Business Day 2024 - Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (DE)
- 14-15 MAY 2024: EU Arctic Forum and Indigenous Peoples’ Dialogue 2024 - Brussels, BE
- 30-31 MAY 2024: European Maritime Day 2024 - Svendborg, DK
- 4-5 JUNE 2024: Baltic Sea Tourism Forum 2024 - Oulu, Oulu Region (FI)
- 29-30-31 OCTOBER 2024: EUSBSR Annual Forum in Visby, Gotland (SE)

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- [Twitter](#): @CPMR_BSC
- [Facebook](#): CPMR Baltic Sea Commission
- [Website](#): 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)