Setting steps for building a prosperous and resilient Baltic Sea Region in a challenging geopolitical context

Adopted by the BSC General Assembly, 19-20 September 2023
Hosted by Västerbotten (SE) and Ostrobothnia (FI)

The CPMR Baltic Sea Commission Member Regions:

ASSOCIATION OF ESTONIAN CITIES AND MUNICIPALITIES
GÄVLEBOR
GOTLAND
HELSINKI-UUSIMAA
JÄMTLAND HÄRJEDELEN
KYMENLAAKSO
LAPLAND
MECKLENBURG-VORPOMMERN
NORRBOTTEN
ÖREBRO
OSTROBOITHIA
OULU REGION
ÖSTERTÖDLAND
PÄIJÅT-HÄME
SKÅNE
SOUTH-WEST FINLAND
REGION STOCKHOLM
VÄRMLAND
VÄSTERBOTTEN

Gathered together in Umeå and Vaasa on 19–20 September 2023 for the 28th General Assembly,

- reiterate in the strongest possible way their condemnation of the illegal and unjustified aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and express their full solidarity with the Ukrainian people;

- warmly welcome the adhesion of Finland in NATO and strongly support Sweden’s application for NATO membership;

- express their continuous willingness to foster regional collaboration with democratic partners around the Baltic Sea Region to build a sustainable, resilient, well-connected, prosperous and secure area for its citizens.
The CPMR Baltic Sea Commission Members call on the national representatives in the Baltic Sea Region and EU decision-makers to:

1. **Focus more than so far on tackling the burning grand societal challenges to reach the Sustainable Development Goals** by increasing regional collaboration and European partnerships in co-creating new innovative solutions and increasing investments in research and development;

2. **Involve regional authorities in the design, governance and implementation of the future generation of EU policies for post-2027** in line with the principles of multi-level governance and subsidiarity to build a prosperous and resilient Europe;

3. **Ensure strong territorial, social and economic cohesion in the Baltic Sea Region now and for the future** by preserving an ambitious Cohesion Policy for post-2027 that fully involves local and regional authorities in the design, management and implementation of the policy while introducing reform measures to strengthen even more the effectiveness of the policy, and therefore support CPMR proposals on simplification;

4. **Safeguard that Cohesion Policy serves its primary function of long-term investments to reduce economic, social and territorial disparities between regions**, while the recent European Commission’s proposal to review the EU’s multi-annual financial framework foresees increasing use of Cohesion Policy resources to cover the financial needs of the new Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP) initiative. This follows a trend of cases using Cohesion Policy for other specific sectors or challenges which will most likely lead to increasing regional disparities;

5. **Reinforce European Territorial Cooperation in the future Cohesion Policy post-2027** with its added value for people and territories in fostering cooperation beyond borders, stressing in particular the added-value of cross-border cooperation, including maritime and land borders;

6. **Strengthen a resilient, green and well-connected transport system in the Baltic Sea Region and Europe** by pursuing a joint approach to transport planning across national borders and the improvements of cross-border connections as well as the removal of bottlenecks to facilitate mobility of goods and people in the Baltic Sea Region;

7. **Strengthen local resilience and improve local communities’ capacity to face emergencies**, protect citizens and support developing local economies towards sustainable growth;

8. **Foster the development of clean mobility** with the further deployment of clean fuels and the promotion of new innovative transport solutions in order to optimise the sector;

9. **Continue to promote regional innovation collaboration in the Baltic Sea Region and Europe** by supporting various EU initiatives promoting regional innovation collaboration such as the partnerships for Regional Innovation, Interregional Innovation Investments, that address societal challenges, highlighting the importance of keeping the place-based approach of innovation-driven industrial or societal transformation;

10. **Support competitive and sustainable maritime industries in the Baltic Sea Region while protecting and restoring marine and freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity** in line with HELCOM recommendations;
11. Promote a sustainable blue economy, making it carbon neutral and circular in the Baltic Sea Region, with a focus on support for sustainable coastal tourism, small-scale commercial fishing, sustainable shipbuilding and the green transition of ports;

12. Accelerate the fight against climate change in the Baltic Sea Region by increasing the deployment of clean energies, regional energy security, and independence from Russian fossil fuels. It also requires increased and upscaled energy production from renewable sources, energy diversification (wind power, solar power, hydrogen), a smarter use of natural resources (via adapted regulatory frameworks and funding instruments), and enhanced measures for regional climate adaptation;

13. Intensify efforts for a fair and just green transition in the Baltic Sea Region while guaranteeing that no region is left behind;

14. Encourage industry to invest in carbon handprint solutions and recognise and support the early adopters of sustainable practices since these pioneers can help to pave the way for new and innovative development pathways that benefit not only their own regions, but also the wider European community;

15. Ensure a just, fair, and secure green transition built upon further collaboration at all levels and enable the removal of obstacles to the development of joint or cross-border sustainable projects;

16. Build on local value-chains, including multi-functional forestry, regenerative farming, energy storage, critical raw materials, and offshore power generation etc. The BSC therefore supports for example deeper cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region to develop joint sustainable cross-border projects of offshore wind energy, as foreseen in the Berlin Declaration on Baltic Offshore Wind adopted by CBSS Foreign Ministers on 9 May 2023;

17. Ensure a transition towards an innovative circular economy in the Baltic Sea Region built upon the EU Circular Economy Action Plan;

18. Promote further cooperation in skills, qualifications, and vocational training for a more integrated labour market in the Baltic Sea Region and to foster transnational labour mobility, in line with the ambition of the European Year of Skills initiative for 2023;

19. Ensure strong EU support for a sustainable economic, territorial and social development in the European Arctic, in line with the EU Arctic Policy and the recently adopted Kiruna Declaration of the Committee of the Regions, “Achieving a green, just and fair transition with and in all European regions;

20. Support the green industrialisation of the European Arctic that contributes to deliver the EU Green Deal goals, with a focus on increased support to territorial accessibility, to interregional cooperation as well as continued investments in building resilient and attractive communities in the European Arctic.

Regarding cooperation in the Region, the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission Members:

21. Call on the National Coordinators Group of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region to consider the revision of the Action Plan in 2024 and to continue its effective support for the implementation process of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, in close cooperation with local and regional authorities and cooperation organisations in order to give full support to the speedy adaptation of the Baltic Sea Region to the current massive challenges it is facing;
22. Support the goals set in the new VASAB Vision for the territorial development of the Baltic Sea Region in 2040 and commit to its implementation by promoting regional cooperation across borders and multi-level cooperation with a variety of actors in the Baltic Sea Region;

23. Express their solidarity with regions in Finland, the Baltic States and Poland that face major challenges related to the complete stop of interaction with Russia and Belarus and offer the cooperation network and the competences of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission to support their process of reorientation in international cooperation.