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2015/2016 WORK PLAN OF THE BALTIC SEA COMMISSION

(Adopted by the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission General Assembly, Vaasa, Finland, 7 May 2015)

The Baltic Sea Commission (BSC) is one of the six Geographical Commissions that make up the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR). Members of the CPMR that see a relevance of a deepened cooperation between the Regional Authorities in the Baltic Sea are welcome. In May 2015, 21 Regions are Members of the Baltic Sea Commission. Through dialogue and formal partnerships we seek to promote common interests, especially in relation to European Union institutions, national governments and other organisations dealing with issues that are relevant to the Baltic Sea.

Current BSC Working Groups address the following issues:

- Maritime affairs;
- Transport;
- Renewable Energies;
- Multi-Level Governance.

This document presents the main lines of action for the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission for the period from May 2015 to May 2016.

Focus for 2015/2016 - An initiative to elaborate on the strategic role of the Baltic Sea Commission

During 2015-2016, the Baltic Sea Commission has decided to initiate a bottom-up process involving stakeholders from across the Baltic Sea Region. The aim is to emphasise and increase the importance of macro-regional cooperation and the Baltic Sea Commission's contribution towards the implementation and further development of the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

The process is to be carried out by the Baltic Sea Commission's secretariat and the Executive Committee will function as Steering Group throughout the year. The process is carried out through close cooperation with the existing Working Groups of the Baltic Sea Commission, consultations with the Member Regions and specific seminars for Member Regions and other stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Region during the year.

Throughout this process the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission will seek dialogue and cooperation with other pan-Baltic organisations. Cooperation will be increased and initiatives shall be taken to organise joint events and adapt joint papers. Specific contacts will be made with the CBSS, BSSSC, UBC and BDF.

The result is to be presented to the 2016 BSC General Assembly as a strategy and roadmap ahead for the Baltic Sea Commission.

External relations with EU Institutions and PAC and HAC of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

With the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission Executive Secretary based in Brussels as of February 2015, the Baltic Sea Commission aims to further strengthen its regular interaction with EU institutions in the framework of all its activities. With close cooperation with regional EU offices based in Brussels, the BSC will further our relations and work with the informal Baltic Sea Intergroup and the European Parliament Intergroup on Seas, Rivers, Islands and Coastal Areas as well as with other Members of the European Parliament when relevant. With the European Commission, the BSC shall continue its dialogue with DG REGIO, DG MARE, DG ENERGY and DG MOVE.

The Baltic Sea Commission aims to have a closer relationship and cooperation with the Policy Area Coordinators and Horizontal Action Coordinators of the EUSBSR. During the year, the BSC will explore the possibilities of special *Rapporteurs*, observers and special task-forces in the policy areas of the revised Action Plan relevant for our Member Regions. As of today we have a special *Rapporteur* to PA Culture and Creative Innovation and one of our Member Regions holds the position as Coordinator of PA Tourism. It is very important that the Regional Authorities take part in the development and implementation of the different Action Plans and we aim to achieve better visibility for the projects the Regions are issuing and taking part in. In the framework of the EUSBSR, the BSC will also continue to strengthen its relations with representatives from the national authorities of the States of the Baltic Sea Area.

This work is mainly carried out through the different working groups and the secretariat, and addresses the issue of links with the EUSBSR and the role of Regions within this strategy.

Working Groups

The Baltic Sea Commission has a number of thematic Working Groups to take forward key issues identified by the BSC General Assembly or Executive Committee.

Each Working Group has a Chair, who need not necessarily be drawn from the Executive Committee, but who shall be a regional elected politician from a Member Region.

Members of the Working Groups consist of officers and politicians from Member Regions, but groups can also include external experts by invitation of the Chair. The experts may, for example, come from non-Member Regions, institutions, companies or national/local authorities.

The overall tasks of the Working Groups – in relation to issues that are specific to the Baltic Sea area – are to:

- Follow the political agenda and monitor relevant policy developments at EU and national level;
- Formulate policy positions and statements in response to consultations on relevant EU policies and instruments;
- Arrange joint seminars with MEPs, the European Commission and other stakeholders in order to highlight the regional perspective with regard to relevant EU policies;
- Actively participate in the relevant CPMR Working Group(s);
- Organise thematic events with the participation of projects partners and industry stakeholders, e.g. ports, shipping lines, transport operators and infrastructure managers;
- Serve as a shared platform for project development.

Each Working Group develops its own annual Action Plan in the form of a Working Paper, which is confirmed and reported on to the BSC Executive Committee, and action is coordinated with activities developed in the framework of the CPMR in general.

Current BSC Working Groups address the following issues:

- Maritime affairs;
- Transport;
- Renewable Energies;
- Multi-Level Governance.

Maritime Affairs

The focus for the Baltic Sea Commission's work on Maritime Affairs are the following thematic areas:

- Sustainable maritime economy

The Working Group will focus on maritime industries, in connection with the CPMR activities in this field (Maritime Industries for Blue Growth initiative). There will be special interest on issues related to sustainability and environmental innovation issues.

- o Regarding the upcoming review of the blue growth strategy the Baltic Sea Commission wishes to take on a more active role both when it comes to analysing and expressing the needs and potential that the Blue Economy is bringing and can bring to the Baltic Sea;
- o In line with the initiative aiming at setting up a platform on maritime investments at regional level, the Working Group will perform a desk-top analysis on how the Smart Specialisation plans link to maritime industries with a focus on priorities that are shared by Baltic Sea Regions, and throughout the year explore the possibilities to initiate joint projects in the area of blue growth in both a regional and pan-Baltic perspective.

- Coastal management and marine environment

Implementation of Maritime Spatial Planning and Integrated Coastal Zone Management. The Working Group will focus on the trans-national and cross-border dimensions of the implementation of the MSP Directive.

- Education and training

The Working Group will examine the possibility to develop a Vasco da Gama project at the level of the Baltic Sea area.

- Environmental issues

In the EUSBSR the overall aim of Save the Sea outlines the environmental and other challenges of maritime affairs in the Baltic Sea Region. During 2015/2016, the Working Group will intensify discussions on which Priority Areas of the EUSBSR the Regions want to work with through the Baltic Sea Commission. In areas of relevance we will create a better relation and interaction with stakeholders within the Priority Area.

The Baltic Sea Commission is currently an observer in HELCOM and in the CBSS Expert Group on Sustainable Development.

Transport

During the coming year, the BSC Transport Working Group will put special emphasis on compiling, disseminating and sharing best practice across Member Regions. Creating strong joint action, the BSC needs to better understand the specific and common interests of its Member Regions.

The next three years are crucial in the field of transport and the activity of the Baltic Sea Commission and CPMR as a whole.

- In 2015, the Commission will publish a mid-term review of the 2011 Transport White Paper. Putting accessibility back at the heart of this Policy is an objective for the CPMR;
- The Commission will carry out a partial review of TEN-T. This will be an opportunity to rectify the 2013 maps;
- Maritime Transport will be the focus of attention for the EU: the "greening" of this activity, which has already started with the 2012 Sulphur Directive, and consultation on the Motorways of the Sea;
- EUSBSR has been revised. Transport is kept as a Priority Area. During 2015 the Action Plan of the PA Transport will be updated. The BSC has a clear objective to be a dialogue partner in this work.

The Core Network Corridor fora will continue in 2015 and 2016 as well as certain Working Groups of the Regions, linked to the Core Network Corridors. It will be important to provide information in relation to this to the Corridor Coordinators.

The focus for the Baltic Sea Commission's work on Transport are the following areas:

Accessibility

The CPMR Accessibility Campaign, launched during 2015, aims to put accessibility back at the centre of the EU's Transport Agenda.

- **TEN-T & CEF:**

While welcoming the opening up to the Regions of the governance of the Core Network Corridors there is concern that some peripheral Regions are neither located along any Core Network Corridor nor represented in the Corridor Forum. In the Baltic Sea territory, the Bothnian Corridor is not part of any of the Core Network Corridors but it is connected to both the Scandinavian-Mediterranean and the North Sea – Baltic Corridor. Oslo–Stockholm was earlier part of the European priority project “Nordic Triangle” but is now not part of any Core Network Corridor. The Baltic Sea Commission will work to ensure that the Bothnian Corridor, the Iron Ore Line and Oslo–Stockholm are seriously considered in the discussions to develop the Scandinavian-Mediterranean and North Sea-Baltic Core Network Corridors.

Well-functioning interconnections, also in an East-West direction, between the Core Network Corridors throughout the Baltic Sea Region should be highlighted. This benefits cohesive growth for all CPMR BSC Members that are not situated along the corridors and provides incentives for attracting new Members from countries on the southern and eastern shores of the Baltic Sea.

- **Airports:**

Accessibility of remote areas will be high on the agenda. The future of airline services is in particular a crucial question for several BSC Member Regions.

Clean Transport

Maritime transport issues will be addressed in more depth in the future shaping of the group. The Working Group will look into the possibility to propose a Baltic scheme for MOS, in connection with the EU Coordinator and CPMR activities in the field of promotion of sustainable maritime transport.

- **The Sulphur Directive – SECA**

The BSC will follow the implementation year of 2015 and meet the consequences with policy actions if needed.

The BSC aims to further develop cooperation with the Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics (NDPTL); BEATA and PA TRANSPORT in the EUSBSR and to express the willingness to participate in different ways – events, seminars etc or to provide input through our views.

Renewable energies

During 2015/2016, the BSC Working Group on Renewable Energies will actively:

Monitor Energy Policy

The Working Group will monitor the EU's Policy on Renewable Energy and how it affects investments in renewable energy in the Baltic Region. The intention is also to increase knowledge of how regional and local decision-makers can influence development towards a larger share of renewable energy and higher security in energy supply. Energy from biomass is of particular interest.

Create sharp positioning on Energy Policy that affects renewable energy in the Baltic Sea Region

The Working Group will work on positions regarding energy issues – positions that can be communicated in the processes that shape the future of Energy Policy in the EU, which can be used by the Regions themselves or as input to the CPMR.

Create a project to strengthen the work of the Working Group

The Working Group has started work on these issues and the Chair has been commissioned to create a project that allows for enhanced efforts on the above tasks. The Working Group now has to consider the direction of such a project, gather broader partnerships around the ideas of the project and find a model for financing.

Multi-Level Governance

The focus of the BSC Multi-level Governance Working Group is to introduce a multi-level governance perspective in the EUSBSR, together with a pan-European perspective on multi-level governance as a method for implementing EU policies and strategies. Initiatives are currently being taken for the development of European projects in relation to these issues.

COOPERATION WITH RUSSIA

Cooperation and relations with Russia is an important issue for the Baltic Sea Region. In the light of recent developments, the cooler relations between EU and Russia are likely to continue for a period of time. The Member Regions of the Baltic Sea Commission expressed the wish to further develop the dialogue with potential Russian Partners. Close cooperation at national, regional and local level is vital to jointly tackle many of the challenges in the Baltic Sea Region, and to fully utilise its development potential.

During 2015/2016, relations with Russia will be a specific issue during the stake-holder dialogue that the Baltic Sea Commission is initiating.

For the future, specific interaction with the HA Neighbours in the EUSBSR and with CPMR North Sea Commission could be organised in this perspective.

NEW MEMBERS AND OBSERVERS

Full members and associated members of the CPMR are welcome as members in the Baltic Sea Commission. Regions who, due to their geographic, economic or political situation are considered part of the Baltic Sea area.

The Baltic Sea Commission brings together the Presidents or persons exercising an equivalent function, of the Member Regions. The Presidents, who may delegate their own representative, should be appointed by the Regional Authorities immediately below the level of Central Government.

During 2015/2016 the Executive Secretary will focus its contact with Regional Authorities in countries where the Baltic Sea Commission is not well represented.

AN UPDATED CALENDER FOR THE BALTIC SEA COMMISSION IS TO BE FOUND ON
<http://www.balticseacommission.eu/en/agenda.html>