



Work Plan of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2017-2019

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1. Vision and Mission Statement – CPMR Baltic Sea Commission – The United Voice of the Baltic Sea Regions

Introduction: The power of a pan-Baltic organisation in Europe

The Baltic Sea Commission is an international, independent organisation of Regional Authorities at sub-national level in the Baltic Sea region. The Baltic Sea Commission has a strong emphasis on territorial work, and each Member Region is represented by leading elected politicians. The Baltic Sea Commission is one of six Geographical Commissions that make up the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions (CPMR). Members of the Baltic Sea Commission are also Members of the CPMR.

Both the CPMR and the Baltic Sea Commission regularly partner with European institutions, Member States and other key actors of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. The main focuses are strengthening territorial cohesion, enhancing the European maritime dimension and boosting the accessibility of Europe's territories.

Since its foundation in 1996, the Baltic Sea Commission has established itself as a forum for policy-oriented cooperation and a platform for cooperation amongst Regional Authorities in the Baltic Sea region.

Vision: A united voice of the Baltic Sea regions

The basis of successful cooperation in the Region is promoted by a mutual understanding of cultural differences, sensitivity for each other's interests and trust. Regional Authorities are at the crossroads of cooperation, able to bridge efforts at local, national, pan-Baltic and EU levels.

The Regions serve as a reference point for a broad spectrum of sectoral activities. Citizens need Regional Authorities to voice their interests and perspectives to Member States and EU institutions.

Mission: A platform for policy-orientated cooperation

Thematic political priorities

The Members of the Baltic Sea Commission have identified three thematic areas in which the organisation has established long-term Working Groups. The Working Groups are made up of politicians, officials and experts from the Member Regions.

Long-term thematic Working Groups cover the policy areas of:

- Accessibility and Transport;
- Maritime Affairs;
- Renewable Energies.

The Working Groups develop general and specific policy positions that highlight the Member Regions' common ambitions. These positions are then adopted in consensus by the Executive Committee of the Baltic Sea Commission.

Shaping policies from a regional perspective

Each Working Group develops a Work Plan of deliverables and actions. A Work Plan can, for example, consist of formulating new positions based on surveys or mappings that provide more in-depth argumentation and concrete examples from Member Regions.

Working Groups also organise workshops and seminars as well as participate in processes that provide grounds for policy discussion and development.

Positions formulated by the Baltic Sea Commission also directly feed in to the CPMR's overall political actions to improve European policy.

Platform for cooperation

The Working Groups and Member Regions may also be involved in the practical implementation of projects within the thematic areas. Close cooperation among territories remains a solid pillar of integration, and many of the regional challenges require transnational coalitions. Successful cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region includes not only the EU Member States but also has to involve Norway and Russia, and relate to the stakeholders that are active in the Eastern Partnership action and the Arctic dialogue.

Through thematic Working Groups and events, the Baltic Sea Commission initiates and forms partnerships between Member Regions and other stakeholders.

The meetings of the Working Groups provide an opportunity for Member Regions to share their experiences of specific issues or methods. Many of the Regions are involved in transnational projects that are in line with the themes of the Working Groups.

2. Overall priorities 2017 – 2018

2.1 Supporting the process of creating a Smart Specialisation Financial Platform

Alignment of funding – Transnational cooperation on Smart Specialisation Strategies in the Baltic Sea Region

“Smart Specialisation” is a key part of the EU's work to support Member States and help regions recover from the economic downturn. It is a strategy for site-based economic transformation and the regions are responsible for designing and implementing the Smart Specialisation Strategies in close cooperation with stakeholders within their regions.

Over the course of the next two years, the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission wants to create better conditions for strengthening the business areas in the regional smart specialisation strategies through pan-Baltic cooperation.

To maximise the benefits of the transnational co-operation process, the financial instruments supporting it have to take this into account and be equipped with the necessary flexibility.

Alignment of funding from different sources is crucial in this work. The regional funds are the basis for interaction.

An ERDF Managing Authority Network (MA-network) was established on the 19 May 2016 in the Baltic Sea Region. The MA-network aims to fund the alignment of activities between regional stakeholders by working within the thematic scopes of respective Regional Smart Specialisation Strategies.

The MA network explores the opportunity for transnational collaboration funded by the ERDF structural funds programmes. Clean Tech, Sustainable Blue Growth and Digital Transformation are three themes on which the Baltic Sea Commission's Member Regions are focused. This work is carried out in close cooperation with PA Innovation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

The ambition of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission Member Regions and partners in this work is to:

- Increase the geographical flexibility of ESI funds allocated to national and regional Operational Programmes (OPs);
- Support joint financial capital (both private and public) for the matching of regions working on smart specialisation strategies, or for enhancing business areas of the regional smart specialisation strategies;
- Provide a regional Baltic perspective on the on-going discussions with the European Commission to reform EU Territorial Cooperation (ETC) and its programmes within Cohesion Policy, particularly the relationship between ETC programmes and the development of macro-regional strategies.

For 2017-2019, the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission has set a key organisation priority to support the process of creating a Smart Specialisation Financial Platform for Regional Authorities and other stakeholders, with the purpose of aligning existing funding sources that will support the development of cross-regional Smart Specialisation areas in the BSR.

This includes a process of developing a vision, identifying the place-based areas of greatest strategic potential, developing multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms, setting strategic priorities and using smart policies to maximise the knowledge-based development potential of a region, regardless of whether it is strong or weak, high-tech or low-tech. The regional economies are the beneficiaries of such initiatives. Therefore, there needs to be a clear rationale for building inter-regional cooperation.

The CPMR Baltic Sea Commission General Assembly instructs the Executive Committee to set up a Task Force for 2017-2019.

The main purpose of the Task Force is to:

- Set up a network of the strategic management level of participating regions and partners;
- Conduct a mapping and analysis, identifying the regional development needs and challenges in discussion with both strategic management and innovation-managers within the regions;
- Support and strengthen the on-going thematic processes within Clean Tech, Sustainable Blue Growth and Digitalisation by engaging and involving the thematic Working Groups of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission;
- Perform a joint feasibility study for an inter-regional Smart Specialisation Financial Platform, discuss and develop regional models and structures that link up to this work, and initiate a pilot-phase for test and implementation.

2.2 A Regional and Pan-Baltic take on the UN Sustainable Development Goals

CPMR Baltic Sea Commission focuses on the Sustainable Development Goals

The CPMR Baltic Sea Commission has identified the priority to enhance capacity and opportunities for Member Regions to increase their knowledge of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the period of 2017-2019. SDGs will be related to their regional development strategies, as well as creating partnerships for the implementation of the goals at regional level and throughout the Baltic Sea Region.

The ratification of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the UN General Assembly in September 2015, composed of 17 goals and 169 targets, set a global agenda for achieving environmental sustainability, social inclusion and economic development by 2030.

The SDGs provide a set of ambitions and all countries must contribute to the realisation of these ambitions. One of the challenges is adjusting the focus, looking beyond national approaches to the powerful role that Regions play. The global agenda will require regional data, the engagement of many stakeholders and all levels of government, and improved institutional capacity to steer and manage the delivery of regional policies and strategies for inclusive and sustainable growth.

In November 2016, the European Commission published a Communication (COM (2016) 739 final) entitled “Next steps for a sustainable European future - European action for sustainability” that commits the EU to be a frontrunner in implementing the SDGs, together with its Member States and in line with the principle of subsidiarity.

The Baltic Sea Region (BSR) cooperation on sustainable development dates back to 1996, when the Prime Ministers of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) initiated the “Agenda 21 for the Baltic Sea Region”, a process to link national and regional stakeholders in promoting sustainable development. This is continued in the work of Baltic 2030, where BSC holds a place in the CBSS Expert Group.

Inclusive growth, attractive living environments and sustainable regional development are core priorities for the Member Regions of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission. Complex challenges require broad collaboration between participants at multiple levels with several different perspectives.

For example, many of the environmental challenges in the Baltic Sea Region need an enhanced macro-regional approach if they are to be addressed successfully. Also, knowledge and innovation transfer between different sectors and across borders are essential for Regions to create sustainable growth. The Baltic Sea Commission's role as a platform for regional cooperation can therefore become central when the SDGs are to be carried out.

The CPMR Baltic Sea Commission Executive Committee Proposal

The CPMR Baltic Sea Commission General Assembly instructs the Executive Committee to set up a Task Force for 2017-2019, with the main purpose to:

- develop a webinar that highlights the linkages between regional growth, sustainable development and internationalisation;
- identify areas of cooperation relevant to the Baltic with a strong territorial approach where Regions can take part in multi-stakeholder partnerships for the implementation of the SDGs in a pan-Baltic setting;
- seek cooperation with other pan-Baltic organisations or participants, to bring stakeholders together and initiate cooperation;
- monitor the action of the EC and compile suggestions or responses towards a possible action plan;
- promote the voluntary country reports to be based on regional statistics and examples;
- enable Member Regions to participate in the process Baltic 2030;
- take an active role in the CBSS Expert Group on Baltic 2030.

3. Policy Priority of the Working Groups

The Members of the Baltic Sea Commission have identified three thematic areas in which the organisation has established long-term Working Groups. The Working Groups are open to elected representatives and officers from all Member Regions of the Baltic Sea Commission and meet on average three times a year. Politically, they are led by a Chair and two Vice-Chairs and supported by an Advisor who is an Officer from a Member Region.

Groups can also include external experts invited by the Chair. The experts may, for example, come from non-Member Regions, institutions, companies or national and local authorities. The Baltic Sea Commission initiates and forms partnerships between Member Regions and other stakeholders through thematic Working Groups and special events.

Reporting back from the Working Groups should include:

- Thematic area (based on decision at the General Assembly);
- Objectives (based on positions adopted by the Executive Committee);
- Deliverables (based on activities carried out by the Working Group and the Secretariat).

The positions of the different work plans, as well as the latest version of the working document for each work plan, is available on the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission's website.

The General Assembly of the Baltic Sea Commission has decided on the following focus areas of each Working Group for the period of 2017 – 2019:

3.1 Accessibility and Transport

The Working Group on Accessibility and Transport has identified four main thematic areas of substantial significance for the Member Regions of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission.

The thematic areas are the revision of both the “Connecting Europe Facility” and the TEN-T Corridors, the support for state aid for regional airports, and the enhancement of connections with third countries.

These are areas that the Working Group has monitored for a longer period.

3.2 Maritime Affairs

The Working Group on Maritime Affairs will pursue its main focus of promoting Sustainable Blue Growth, monitoring the Baltic Blue Growth Agenda and supporting regional stakeholders to be part of its implementation. This work will be related to the current overall priority for CPMR Baltic Sea Commission on creating a Smart Specialisation Financial Platform, as well as thematic processes on Sustainable Blue Growth, currently coordinated by the Smart Blue Region Project, where many of our Member Regions are partners.

The Working Group also intends to initiate discussions on sustainable blue growth, as well as a closer dialogue with the ports of the Baltic Sea. Maritime Spatial Planning is an area of interest for many of the Regions and we will continue the exchange of best practices and bringing forward a Baltic perspective to the overall work of the CPMR.

3.3 Renewable Energies

The core of the Working Group on Renewable Energies is the “Learning Among Regions on Smart Specialisation” (LARS) project. Through this project, Regions across the Baltic Sea will have the opportunity to share information, best practices and action plans for policy development. As a result, LARS will enable Regions to share, compare and enhance their smart specialisation strategies, resulting in a more integrated Baltic Sea region.

Smart Specialisation is also prioritised in the Working Group with regard to the Circular Economy and Clean Tech. The Working Group has identified strong capacity in these economic sectors among its Members. The Group will also take an active role in the CPMR Task Force on Climate, ensuring a Baltic Regional Perspective in the overall positions of the CPMR.

4. Future Secretariat of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission

Region Norrbotten and Region Västerbotten are hosting the Secretariat of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission in the period 2015 – 2018.

According to the Internal Rules, the Executive Secretary should be appointed by the General Assembly. This needs to be in accordance with the wishes and the financial contributions of one or more hosting regions, as the membership fees do not cover the cost of the Secretariat.

With Region Norrbotten and Region Västerbotten hosting the Secretariat until December 2018, a future hosting solution must be presented at the General Assembly 2018.

The General Assembly instructs the Executive Committee to provide a suggestion for a hosting Region and a proposal for a sustainable long-term structure for the Secretariat of the organisation.

The proposal should be sent out to Member Regions not only two weeks as stated in the Internal Rules, but one month prior to the next General Assembly.



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