During its meeting on 1-2 February 2023, the BSC Executive Committee approved:

- The **Agenda** of the Executive Committee meeting;
- The **Minutes** of the Executive Committee meeting held on 15 September 2022;
- The **Chairs and Vice-Chairs** of the Baltic Sea Commission Working Groups and Task Force for 2023-2024
  
  - **Maritime Working Group**
    - Chair: Saari Nurro (Region Oulu)
    - Vice-Chair: Harry Bouveng (Region Stockholm)
  
  - **Transport Working Group**
    - Chair: Magnus Lagergren (Region Örebro)
    - Vice-Chair: Pekka Komu (Region Päijät-Häme)
    - Vice-Chair: Jan Owe-Larsson (Region Östergötland)
  
  - **Energy and Climate Working Group**
    - Chair: Markku Markkula (Region Helsinki-Uusimaa)
    - Vice-Chair: Pontus Lindberg (Region Skåne)
  
  - **Arctic Task Force**
    - Chair: Jari Nahkanen (Region Oulu)

- The BSC Executive Secretary will present at the next Executive Committee meeting in May a draft BSC Work Plan 2023-2025 elaborated based on the inputs of the BSC Executive Committee and the Working Groups. The draft will be put for approval to the 2023 BSC General Assembly.
- The Working Groups Chairs will present the draft Action Plans of the thematic BSC Working Group for 2023-2025 at the next Executive Committee meeting in May.

**WEDNESDAY 1 FEBRUARY 2023**

A welcome lunch was served and provided an opportunity for networking and mingling between Regions.
Opening of the BSC Executive Committee meeting

Tomas Mörtsell, President of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission (Region Västerbotten) welcomed regional representatives and opened the meeting. He informed participants about:

- a BSC Presidium meeting that took place end of 2022 to exchange priorities and orientation of the organisation;
- a meeting he had with CPMR Secretary General in January 2023;
- a meeting he had with CPMR North Sea Commission (NSC) President Tjisse Stelstra (North Netherlands) that took place online in January 2023 to exchange about increased cooperation between the NSC and BSC. A meeting in January 2023 in Berlin with Ms Bettina Martin, Minister for Federal and European Affair, Ministry of Science, Culture, Federal and European Affairs, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern;
- to provide a BSC perspective in the reviewed Baltic Sea strategy of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

He also informed participants about upcoming events he will participate in and represent the BSC:

- the EU Arctic Forum in Nuuk in Greenland on 8 February;
- a CPMR/BSC study visit to Lapland on 23-26 February.

He welcomed guests to the BSC Executive Committee meeting, in particular:

- Ms Eleni Marianou, CPMR Secretary General;
- Ms Jeanette Lund, Councillor at the Swedish Permanent Representation of Sweden to the EU;
- Ms Kirsi Ahlman, Deputy Director from Centrum Balticum and Ms Stefanie Wodrig from the city of Hamburg;
- Ms Marianne Chesak, Vice-President of the CPMR North Sea Commission and Vice-Present of Rogaland.

The meeting Agenda was unanimously approved.
The Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting, 15 September 2022 were unanimously approved.

Tour de table

Executive Committee members introduced themselves and gave a brief update from their Region.

Wolf Born (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) informed participants that Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is working on a strategy for Baltic Sea cooperation in light of recent changes to the geopolitical situation. He thanked Tomas Mörtsell and Lucille Ehrhart, as well as representatives from Region Skåne and Southwest Finland for their participation in a meeting in Berlin in January 2023 on this issue and acknowledged the need to work faster and more effectively to achieve tangible results in Baltic Sea cooperation.

Otto Meri (Helsinki-Uusimaa) stated that Finnish parliamentary elections will be held in April 2023, so this has affected recent national discussions.

Markku Markkula (Helsinki-Uusimaa) presented the 3 targets that have been defined for Helsinki-Uusimaa region to reach by 2030: 1/climate neutrality 2/research and development investments over 5% of GDP 3/employment rate over 80%. He explained also the added-value of innovation camps organised by the Region in cooperation with other actors.
**Richard Sjölund** (Ostrobothnia) provided feedback from the study visit of the Regional Council of Ostrobothnia end of January in Brussels to discuss with various EU representatives the green and digital transition. He introduced Mats Brandt, Regional Mayor of Ostrobothnia to the Executive Committee Members.

**Mats Brandt** (Ostrobothnia) presented the 3 main priorities of the Region Ostrobothnia for this Spring 2023. Firstly, the main political priority is the inclusion of the ports of Pietarsaari and Kaskinen in the TEN-T network. The regulation is currently being revised by the EU co-legislators. Secondly, the massive deployment of renewable energies and investments in wind power in Ostrobothnia Region (Vattenfalls projects). The Region is now looking towards offshore wind power for the next 5-10 years. Thirdly, the European innovation agenda is also a priority, and the region will be active in that area this spring.

**Pekka Komu** (Päijät-Häme) introduced himself and the other representatives from Region Päijät-Häme, Niina Pautola-Mol (Regional Mayor), and Antti Kalliomaa (Director of Public Relations and International Affairs). He noted his region is experiencing the same issues as other Finnish regions, Finnish industry is rising again after a decline over the last few years. The region is addressing how can it get energy, how can it get people to work for local industries, but not so much how can it get investment. He then provided information on the current investments.

**Niina Pautola-Mol** (Päijät-Häme) indicated that the Region is aiming to double its investments in research and innovation. The Region has a few clusters, including relating to the food industry, and electrification of transport, which is a growing sector. Challenges of the Region include achieving reasonable employment levels, and at the same time a huge shortage of skilled labour.

**Marianne Chesak**, (Vice-President of the CPMR North Sea Commission and Vice-Present of Rogaland) pointed out the major potential for cooperation between the North Sea Commission and the Baltic Sea Commission, as they face many of the same challenges and goals. She stressed that several Members of the North Sea Commission are eligible to the Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme. She informed participants that the President of the North Sea Commission will join the meeting the next day.

**Pontus Lindberg** (Skåne), informed participants that following the election last September there is a new Swedish national Government. He mentioned the future adhesion of Sweden and Finland in NATO. He alerted participants to the energy crisis in Sweden due to the gas problem in Europe which has increased electricity prices. Region Skåne’s lack of energy production was also mentioned. Some investment for industry has been postponed as supply cannot be guaranteed from the grid. He highlighted that the Region is very interested in developing bilateral cooperation for example with Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and other regions around the Baltic Sea.

**Harry Bouveng** (Region Stockholm), informed participants he was covering for Tiina Perho responsible for the BSC Maritime Working Group. He apologised on behalf of Gustav Hemming who was also unable to participate in the Executive Committee meeting. He provided feedback on the recent elections, and the new coalition in Region Stockholm.

**Eleni Marianou** (CPMR) stated that she will follow the activities of Baltic Sea Commission and North Sea Commission closely. The CPMR has a way of working together in geographical sea basins, which makes it unique. She stressed the importance to combine efforts together and work towards a more cohesive Europe. Regions are natural partners for a cohesive Europe. She invited participants to contact her for more in-depth information or any specific issues.

1-2 February 2023
**Romek Kosenkranius** (AECM Estonia) pointed out that Estonian parliamentary elections will take place in early March. He stressed that it is essential to discuss European unity and that the development of green energy is also crucial. He provided information on the current energy situation in Estonia and that there are interests in solar energy and wind power. He also talked about the war in Ukraine.

**Tomas Mörtsell** (Västerbotten) indicated that the Swedish presidency of the Council of the EU kicked off in Kiruna in Norrbotten, which was an opportunity to highlight the green industrial revolution happening in the north of Sweden. He informed participants that the Region will co-host this year’s Baltic Sea Commission General Assembly with Ostrobothnia. He emphasised that a lot of things are happening especially in relation to the green transition, even with the dark cloud of the war in Ukraine, which has brought the regions closer together, and strengthened cooperation around the Baltic Sea.

**Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU – what priorities?**

**Jeanette Lund** (Counsellor at the Permanent Representation of Sweden to the EU, EU Cohesion Policy and Structural Funds, Industry Policy, Competition, State Aid, Better Regulation, Tourism) introduced the priorities of the Swedish Presidency of the Council of EU (see [presentation](#)). She introduced the 4 Presidency priorities:
1. Security-unity;
2. Competitiveness;
3. Green and energy transition;
4. Democratic values and rule of law.

She then introduced the planned work in the Council during the spring, including the:
- Commission’s report on the programming exercise 2021-2027;
- 4th report on the implementation of the macro-regional strategies, which can be flexible tools;
- Commission’s Communication “Harnessing talents in all EU Regions”;
- Critical raw material Act.

**During the discussion with Executive Committee Members, the following issues were raised:**
- nature restoration EU legislation;
- EU support to critical raw materials;
- EUSBSR and the Swedish presidency of the EU and the role of regions in the implementation of the EUSBSR;
- Baltic Sea Region and security issues // defence policy;
- Future of Cohesion Policy in the future MFF.

**Opportunities of the newly established EUSBSR Strategy Point**

**Kirsu Ahlman**, Deputy Director Centrum Balticum and **Stefanie Wodrig**, City of Hamburg, introduced the Baltic Sea Strategy Point (see [presentation](#)). Key facts of the EUSBSR were presented:
- the added value provided, such as aligning EU funding with the implementation of the Strategy;
- the important role of regions in the Strategy;
- the interconnection of the fourteen policy areas was described, as well as the three main objectives.

The governance of the EUSBSR was then explained, including the work of Policy Area Coordinators; National Coordinators and Steering Groups.
Main missions of the EUSBSR Baltic Sea Strategy Point:
- communication and events;
- support for policy areas in mainstreaming;
- technical support to National Coordinators and Policy Area Coordinators.

Possible cooperation between the Baltic Sea Strategy Point and the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission:
- establishing communication channels and identifying strategies with pan-Baltic organisations (including a “jour fixe” concept);
- including BSC Working Groups and the EUSBSR Policy Area Coordinator contacts, for example in Policy Area Steering Groups. This would be a way to include the regions in the work, they would be represented and therefore would have the opportunity to say how the Action Plan should be developed further.

The presentation was followed by a discussion with Member Regions.

Wolf Born (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) welcomed the opening up to other stakeholders. The Strategy depends on political support, and he noted that as the BSC Working Groups have political leadership, it could be win/win if the BSC works closer with the Policy Area Coordinators, as the Working Groups and the Policy Area Coordinators can both benefit. The proposal for a “jour fixe” is a good idea and could work well with the regions. Regarding communication, in the past the concept of a flagship project was very useful, and he asked how communication can be maintained in the region without flagship projects.

Update from the BSC Working Groups

The Chairs/Vice-Chairs of the BSC Working Groups / Task Force provided an overview of recent activities.

Pekka Komu (Päijät-Häme), Vice-Chair of the Transport Working Group gave an update on the Transport Working Group. He provided feedback on the latest meeting hosted by Region Stockholm on 23-24 November 2022. The event included the discussion on a BSC report on alternative fuels and a study visit of the port of Norvik. (More information here - agenda, list of participants, presentations). Mr Komu gave examples of pilot projects from Päijät-Häme Region including autonomous vehicles. The use of data in traffic is extremely important and together with technology developments offers lots of possibilities, including rerouting in the event of traffic jams and finding free parking spaces. He noted that the meeting was the last meeting for Bosse Andersson as Chair of the group for several years and thanked him.

Harry Bouveng (Region Stockholm), Vice-Chair of the Maritime Working Group apologised on behalf of Tiina Perho who could not participate. He provided feedback on the last meeting held in Turku in December 2022 which included a study visit of the Meyer Turku Ltd shipyard. More information here (agenda, list of participants, presentations). He noted that the meeting was the last meeting for Tiina Perho after 7 years chairing the group and he thanked her warmly.

Markku Markkula (Helsinki-Uusimaa), Chair of the Energy and Climate Working Group provided an update about the last Working Group meeting dedicated to EU Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters” that took place online in December 2022 and informed participations about a future energy seminar co-organised with the European Parliament’s SEArica Intergroup and MEP Nils Torvalds on 2 February in Brussels. He suggested there be more synergies between the BSC Working Groups in order to learn from each other.
Wolf Born (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) asked all the Working Group Chairs and Vice-Chairs if they envisaged a perspective to take the activities to another level, to help the regions make more progress faster. He highlighted the problem of attracting people from his region to participate in the Working Groups and asked if there were any prospects for more concrete actions of the Working Groups.

Markku Markkula (Helsinki-Uusimaa) agreed there is an issue to get members more interested and active, and recognised that it takes time for the members to understand what the targets are. He pointed out that the groups try to share responsibilities in order to consider who is interested and motivated to work on which topics, to ensure meetings are on topics of interest to the regions. Whilst experts are important, there is a need to ensure political decision-makers are more involved. The groups need to start concretely, to have a small team, get regional experts involved, and have more visibility on Regional Council social media. He also noted the importance of meeting with European Commission experts in order for them to hear what happens on the ground.

Pekka Komu (Päijät-Häme) agreed, and gave the example of the BSC report on alternative fuels as concrete output of the work of the BSC Transport Working Group, to which only 8 BSC member regions replied.

Eleni Marianou (CPMR) explained there are several ways to do this:
- through a project - project development activities could be useful to share experience;
- through a report - how can this be used to make a difference;
- use the European Parliament’s SEArica intergroup, which has meetings and discussions with high level stakeholders, the conclusions of which are delivered to MEPs;
- hold direct meetings for example with European Commissions services;
- develop position papers to use for lobbying purposes.

Wolf Born (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) agreed with the path which is the focus for lobbying purposes, which makes sense if there is an on-going process that you can influence. He highlighted the importance of what the CPMR BSC can do, not only developing Policy Papers but also problem solving within the Baltic Sea Region, getting results faster, and learning from each other.

Eleni Marianou (CPMR) agreed and mentioned that study visits and bilateral meetings are also important.

Harry Bouveng (Region Stockholm) agreed with the comments and the need to work more together.

Lucille Ehrhart (Baltic Sea Commission) stressed the importance to provide added value for the regions in all CPMR/BSC activities. Regions can attend meetings to obtain targeted and first-hand information, get information and visibility by taking part in a report or study visits. All activities have to be result oriented. The regions should propose themes that they want to address, and there is a need for double commitment from the political level but also from the civil servants. Regions that put the effort in, reap the benefits. She reflected that whilst it is useful to have the information, the participants need to consider what to do with the information, and how to share the information back in the regions. She confirmed it is important for experts to participate in the Working Group meetings, and that the Working Groups want to have more cross-border cooperation.

Tomas Mörtsell, Chair of the Task Force (Region Västerbotten) gave an update from the Arctic Task Force. He commented that the illegal war in Ukraine has had an impact on Arctic cooperation. However, the issues faced in the Arctic are still the same, and it is essential that regional cooperation must continue. He provided feedback from the Barents Cooperation meeting in December.

1-2 February 2023
He informed participants that he has been invited by the European Commission to participate as a speaker at the EU Arctic Forum and Indigenous Peoples’ Dialogue in Greenland on 8 February, and that there will be a study visit in Lapland in February with the CPMR President and Secretary General (23-26 February) to discuss sustainable development in European Arctic regions and the new membership of Lapland in CPMR.

Decision on the positions of Chairs and Vice-Chairs of BSC Working Groups (2023-2024)

Four nominations were received for the position of Vice-Chair of the Transport Working Group. It was agreed that the BSC Transport Working Group would continue to have 2 Vice-Chairs. The Executive Committee decided to nominate the following representatives:

- **Maritime Working Group**
  - Chair: Saari Nurro (Region Oulu)
  - Vice-Chair: Harry Bouveng (Region Stockholm)

- **Transport Working Group**
  - Chair: Magnus Lagergren (Region Örebro)
  - Vice-Chair: Pekka Komu (Region Päijät-Häme)
  - Vice-Chair: Jan Owe-Larsson (Region Östergötland)

- **Energy and Climate Working Group**
  - Chair: Markku Markkula (Region Helsinki-Uusimaa)
  - Vice-Chair: Pontus Lindberg (Region Skåne)

- **Arctic Task Force**
  - Chair: Jari Nahkanen (Region Oulu)

Lucille Ehrhart (Baltic Sea Commission) informed participants that the BSC 2021-2023 Work Plan is coming to an end and therefore a new Work Plan for the 2023-2025 period has to be elaborated and presented for approval to the BSC General Assembly 2023. The Secretariat will be developing a draft Work Plan 2023-2025, based on the input of the BSC Executive Committee and the Working Groups. She invited all participants to submit their ideas and asked the Chairs and Vice-Chairs for input to include in the Work Plan by the next Executive Committee meeting. The Working Groups Chairs will present the draft Action Plans of each Working Group for 2023-2025 at the next Executive Committee meeting.

Update on EU Transport Policies

Lucas Bosser, CPMR Director for Transport, provided an update on EU Transport Policies (see presentation):

- the fit for 55 package has many points linked to transport that will impact CPMR Member Regions;
- a new CPMR Working Group on Energy will be established. The CPMR could not achieve what it achieves if the regions did not participate in the Working Groups, Political Bureau meetings, and General Assemblies, and help to develop Policy Papers;
- the TEN-T timeline for the CPMR for 2022-2023 was introduced. All the amendments are on the table, and it should be adopted in one month, in the meantime the co-Rapporteurs are holding informal meetings with the Council to negotiate some elements so they can have a final deal by the end of this year that will enter into force early in 2024;
- maps were shared to demonstrate the amendment proposals of the BSC regions and the Commission’s proposals, as well as the general approach of the Council and the amendments proposed by the European Parliament.
Discussion

**Pekka Komu** (Päijät-Häme) commented that the issue for Member States is important. There should be something for Nordic countries, and the ambition level should be high. He also mentioned that there should be coherence with the policies in place and that he hoped the ambition level is high enough.

**Lucas Bosser** (CPMR) agreed that the European Parliament wants it to be highly ambitious and will put all its energy in this regard. The Council however has more conservative position.

**Richard Sjölund** (Ostrobothnia) provided information from Region Ostrobothnia, which has one port back on the map, and he acknowledged the choice was made on a national level. He informed participants that offshore energy is expanding at a fantastic rate and there are great plans and projects that are likely to be realised so ports can operate as energy hubs. He commented that many people consider Finland now like an island. He reiterated that the Region relies on the support of the CPMR.

**Markku Markkula** (Helsinki-Uusimaa) asked if it is possible to find out the amount of EU money that has already been spent on railroads, so regions can know how much has been invested in railroads for example in Finland. He agreed Finland is really an island, only connected to Europe by rail through Sweden. He reflected on the comparison of taking a flight rather than taking a train.

**Lucas Bosser** (CPMR) agreed it would be interesting to see the EU funds since the Connecting Europe Facility exists, and how much is at least mobilised. It would be good to have a comprehensive vision of what has been done across all Members States.

**Lotta Rönström** (North Sweden EU Office) commented on the high speed railway which has been removed from maps, and expressed her hope that discussions on this will continue.

Chartering the future of CPMR – contribution of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission

**Eleni Marianou**, CPMR Secretary General, commented on the answers of BSC Member Regions to the CPMR questionnaire about the future of the CPMR. The CPMR will continue to consult its members every 5 years to make sure it remains relevant. The CPMR will not expand too much, but rather focus on the key areas of cohesion and budget, transport, and maritime issues including the work with the SEArica intergroup and the European Parliament:

- the BSC has been very active regarding climate and energy, and she reiterated that a specific Working Group on energy will be created at CPMR level that will need input and leadership;
- the work on the Arctic is of interest to a lot of members, including regions that are not in the Baltic Sea Commission. She informed participants that the CPMR is looking at how to get more resources to work on this, and there will be a new recruit that will work 50% on Arctic issues;
- a CPMR Presidium has been established, made up of all the Presidents and Vice-Presidents of the CPMR and Geographical Commissions. They will meet to discuss various issues including how to involve the membership in defining the work priorities of the CPMR and how to ensure there is input from all Geographical Commissions and the General Secretariat. The next meeting of the CPMR Presidium is scheduled on 10 February 2023;
- there will be a new CPMR Director for Cohesion, who will be starting soon.
Discussion

Tomas Mörtsell (Västerbotten) reiterated the importance for the CPMR to remain a political organisation, and he thanked Eleni Marianou on a personal level for her commitment and passion. All the regions are very impressed with the reputation of the CPMR.

Richard Sjölund (Ostrobothnia) welcomed the Presidium meeting that will be held on 10 February 2023. This is a new element in the activities of the CPMR, that will be fine-tuned to maximise the potential of the Presidents and Vice-Presidents.

A networking reception was held on the evening with external guest speakers from regional, national and EU level to discuss Baltic Sea Region cooperation and reinforce contacts in Brussels with key partners.

THURSDAY 2 FEBRUARY 2023

Development in the Baltic Sea Region – what way forward?

Niklas Nienass, Member of the European Parliament (Germany, Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance) addressed key issues for the development of the Baltic Sea Region:

- Cohesion Policy (challenge of the bureaucracy);
- mobility and digitalisation were also addressed;
- cross-border cooperation should be enhanced; working together to build up energy for example, fosters solidarity and makes us stronger in the end;
- he addressed the European Court of Auditors report on Cohesion Policy;
- pending question what to do with Russia in the future.

Discussion

Tomas Mörtsell (Västerbotten) commented on the importance of Cohesion Policy, and that all regions agree that the energy issue is always on the agenda from the regions’ point of view. He reminded participants that the CPMR BSC Energy and Climate Working Group, together with the European Parliament’s SEArica Intergroup were organising an energy seminar that afternoon. He stressed the importance of enhancing cross-border cooperation.

Niklas Nienass (Member of the European Parliament) mentioned the European Commission proposal to change regarding State Aid guidelines. He invited the participants to contact him with any points for him to take into the European Parliament, as they would be interesting for the current discussion.

Wolf Born (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) mentioned the revision process in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern about the regional strategy of cooperation between democratic partners in the Baltic Sea Region. What is happening in the EU arena is important, and he addressed what the regions can do in Brussels and also in the regions regarding cooperation. He also stressed opening new ways to be faster is needed.

Markku Markkula (Helsinki-Uusimaa) commented on the high-level group on Cohesion Policy and the members from the Baltic States that are in the Committee of the Regions (CoR). He stated that the CPMR needs good links with this group and with the European Parliament, the CoR and the Expert Group. He asked Niklas Nienass how important he considered the Expert Group.
**Jerker Johnson** (Ostrobothnia) raised a question on how to reform Cohesion Policy and asked what the regions need to do. The green transition, which is moving very fast, can be a mixed blessing. He indicated that smaller companies need to get together and cooperate more, they need more financial muscle and cooperation, otherwise there will be no value chains in the regions.

**Richard Sjölund** (Ostrobothnia) recalled the great importance of the Baltic Sea. No-one knows what to do about Russia, but all regions need to help Ukraine in all ways possible. He provided feedback from the meeting held the day before to discuss the future of the EU and regions and this issue was discussed. He agreed there is cause for simplification, a simplified system is needed to work properly for all member regions of the EU. He expressed great concern regarding changing the rules for State Aid and many see it could have fatal consequences for the internal market in the EU.

**Niklas Nienass** (Member of the European Parliament) agreed on the huge consequences for the Baltic Sea. The Baltic States have the biggest fear of Russian invasion, and it is crucial that Ukraine wins the war. He noted that if there is to be cooperation in Russia, it needs to be done not only on an economic level but also on a civil society level, for example to show students how liberal society can work. He agreed it would be interesting to hear from the regions how to change and simplify the system as a whole, and he invited participants to share information with him and the high-level Working Group.

**Markku Markkula** (Helsinki-Uusimaa) reminded participants that Finland has the longest land border with Russia and needs action points. He referred to the comment by Jerker Johnson on industry and recalled that Europe will be putting a lot of money into REPowerEU targeting companies which is good as it focuses on energy and climate but in really it is not that clear and the regions should have a lot to say on how to spend that money. The regions are willing to do certain things but do not want to get tied up with bureaucratic never ending processes.

**Lucille Ehrhart** (Baltic Sea Commission) informed participants that the CPMR will organise a Cohesion Seminar in March in Östergötland, to collect views so the regions can come together to influence and find a strong position.

---

**Development in the Baltic States and reinforcing Baltic Sea Region cooperation**

**Agita Kaupuza**, Head of Brussels Office for the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments introduced the LALRG (Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments) and explained the developments in Latvian municipalities (see presentation):

- the representation office in Brussels fulfils the functions of Secretariat for the Latvian delegation to the European Committee of the Regions;
- topics of common interest that could be worked on include:
  - renewable energy and climate issues, including the renovation of buildings, renewable resources, waste management, green and blue infrastructure, and eco-tourism;
  - digitalisation, including cooperation on digital transition and the creation of Fab Labs;
  - support to Ukrainian municipalities, including bilateral support between twinning municipalities and support at State level;

**Tomas Mörtsell** (Västerbotten) highlighted that a lot of the issues are in common with other Baltic regions and raised the possibility to have a discussion on how to further develop cooperation between Baltic and Latvian municipalities.

**Markku Markkula** (Helsinki-Uusimaa) noted important topics for Latvia had also been discussed the previous day and reflected on how to facilitate membership for Latvia. He stressed that becoming a CPMR member would be one way to ensure collaboration and many items on the agenda are the same.
Agita Kaupuza (LALRG) agreed that it would be interesting to know the arguments that Estonia used to become a member, as Latvia is one region, like Estonia. She shared the idea that an external meeting could be organised in Latvia, for example an Executive Committee meeting, and this could be the beginning of good collaboration.

Wolf Born (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) found the presentation very interesting with a broad range of issues covered. He asked if the focus of their work was policy work or was it also project orientated. He also thought that promoting mutual learning could be good idea. He mentioned the CPMR questionnaire on Ukraine, and suggested it would be good to have a comprehensive view on what members do with Ukraine, is there twinning on a local or regional level, etc.

Agita Kaupuza (LALRG) agreed this could be beneficial for both sides, to exchange experience, to advance on a topic important for the region, but at same time open new horizons to politicians. She agreed it would be excellent to work together on specific projects, in the framework of Interreg or other programmes. She mentioned that Latvia is considering how to be involved in the reconstruction of Ukrainian municipalities, and it would be useful to have one place with all information in order to work out what they need to help with reconstruction, do they need advice, expertise, etc. It is difficult to do it for Ukraine as whole, whilst it is easier to send clothes or medicine for example to one municipality. Comprehensive information is needed to help cooperation and to help in a more comprehensive way.

Lucille Ehrhart (Baltic Sea Commission) informed participants that the CPMR has a Task Force dedicated to Ukraine, to collect experience and actions in place to foster the welcoming of refugees and help in any way possible. She invited participants to contact the Secretariat if they were interested, as the more contributions received, the more information can be shared.

Romek Kosenkranius, Mayor of Pärnu (Estonia) and Rait Pihelgas, Deputy Director of the Association of Estonian Cities and Rural Municipalities (AECRM) introduced the development in the Baltic Sea and reinforcing Baltic Sea cooperation (see presentation).

Rait Pihelgas (AECRM) addressed the following issues:

- the BSC and CPMR offer the opportunity to directly discuss the situation without being political;
- islands are very important and are a good way to collect information, bring it back and share it;
- offered to explain the benefits of membership to Latvia and provide information so they can also become a member;
- the importance for the Baltic regions to hold together for freedom was stressed;
- information was provided on Baltic cooperation and how the governments and parliaments of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania work together;
- joint activities will focus on foreign and security policy, defence cooperation, energy and transport, and economic cooperation;
- in 2023 Estonia hold the Presidency of the Baltic Cooperation. Priorities for the Year of Coordination were introduced:
  - security and defence of the region;
  - energy security and security of supply;
  - support for Ukraine;
- Rail Baltic was introduced, which is a planned railway connecting Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Finland.

Romek Kosenkranius (Estonia) addressed the following issues:

- the challenges faced were introduced and it was highlighted that the political and economic situation is delicate;
• connections and railroads are needed, and the region strongly supports the Rail Baltic project, the airport provides good connections for businesses;
• the economic situation in Pärnu which is the second Estonian tourist destination was introduced;
• energy security and being able to produce low cost energy for own use is important, and solar panel parks and wind energy plans are being developed;
• the nature of Pärnu and the importance of it for tourism was explained;
• forestry issues were addressed;
• Ukraine and security and defence issues that impact society were discussed, and a major challenge is finding housing and additional places in schools for refugees;
• the economic situation since the start of the war is big challenge for citizens and municipalities, including how to manage the budget.

Discussion

Pekka Komu (Päijät-Häme) reminded participants that Region Päijät-Häme has a border with Russia and support and collaboration with each other is very important. There are very interesting possibilities with Rail Baltica and the tunnel between Helsinki and Tallinn, and he considered the realism, and what this group can do to make it a reality.

Rait Pihelgas (AECRM) gave an update on Rail Baltica and agreed that the Helsinki and Tallinn tunnel is good idea. Although it is needed, the big problem is money, and especially shipping companies, and he raised the issue of how it will affect shipping.

Romek Kosenkranius (Estonia) agreed there is a need for connections between Estonia and Finland and other Baltic countries.

Richard Sjölund (Ostrobothnia) asked if there is a timeline and funding, or EU money for Rail Baltica.

Rait Pihelgas (AECRM) replied that 2030 is the deadline and the problems are that it is separating nature, the technology is not new, old ways of building are being used as well as old technology.

Richard Sjölund (Ostrobothnia) highlighted that this railway will be important for Finland once it is in place and connects all the way to Poland and Europe.

Markku Markkula (Helsinki-Uusimaa) agreed that despite the challenges to get the connection from Finland, Rail Baltica need to be up and running as soon as possible. A tunnel between Helsinki and Tallinn is perhaps the future.

Tjisse Stelpstra (President of the CPMR North Sea Commission) agreed that efforts have to be combined, it is important that northern Europe has a bigger say in the European context and to the European Commission. It was acknowledged that the current situation is hurting the Baltic regions more than his own region and stressed the importance of working together. He stated that the regions have to stay positive and can help each other a lot in the future.

Markku Markkula (Helsinki-Uusimaa) noted that this discussion can continue in the EU Mission Ocean and Waters, and he reiterated the importance for the regions to get the most out of the EU missions, and that work can be increasingly integrated especially relating to energy and climate.
Report from the BSC Secretariat

Lucille Ehrhart, BSC Executive Secretary, provided an update on the activities of the BSC Secretariat:

- EUSBSR update – the EUSBSR Forum will be held in Riga on 4-5 October 2023;
- CBSS update - they are reviewing how they will work now that Russia is no longer a member;
- Internal matters - the BSC is hiring a young professional to work 50% on BSC Arctic issues and 50% with the CPMR on energy issues starting in April based at the CPMR office in Brussels; the person will be paid 50% by CPMR and 50% by Region Västerbotten under a French VIE contract. The recruitment process is on-going. The person will start in April 2023;
- CPMR update – the CPMR Presidium will meet on 10 February, there will be meeting of the Political Bureau in March, and a Cohesion seminar in Sweden at the end of March. Feedback was provided on the recent meeting of a CPMR delegation of politicians with MEPs on the Common Fisheries Policy;
- participants were reminded to contact the BSC Secretariat with any issues to be addressed by the next Executive Committee meeting, or if they wished to host a meeting.

Preparation 2023 General Assembly of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission

Tomas Mörtsell (Västerbotten) proposed that the 2023 General Assembly be hosted in September by Västerbotten (in Umeå) and Ostrobothnia (in Vaasa), and on the ferry in between these two host regions. Decisions are to be made whether the start will be in Umeå or Vaasa, and on the exact dates. He invited participants to contact the BSC Secretariat with any themes they would like to address or speakers they would like to invite.

Richard Sjölund (Ostrobothnia) informed participants that the Finnish delegation would prefer the General Assembly to be held during week 38 (18-22 September 2023).

Future of the BSC Secretariat

Tomas Mörtsell (Västerbotten) reminded participants that during the previous Executive Committee online meeting in September 2022, Evert Kroes on behalf of Region Stockholm had asked for a reflection on the pros and cons of using the same system as most other CPMR Geographical Commissions with regard to the employment of the Executive Secretary by the CPMR, compared with maintaining the same system of having the Executive Secretary employed by a BSC Region. He acknowledged that the current system works well and his wishes to continue the same system with the Executive Secretary being employed and hosted by a BSC Region.

Richard Sjölund (Ostrobothnia) added that the Finnish delegation also discussed this issue and are content with the current system and see no need to change at all. He fully agreed with Tomas Mörtsell.

Harry Bouveng (Region Stockholm) gave information on the position from Region Stockholm, which can see the advantages in both systems. He highlighted that it would be easier when recruiting new personnel and that Region Stockholm consider there would be more advantages if the Baltic Sea Commission used the same system as other Geographical Commissions, but they would agree to continue with same system.

Pontus Lindberg (Skåne) also agreed to keep the current system and suggested working closer with the CPMR General Secretariat whilst maintaining the current system for the employment of the BSC Executive Secretary.
Tomas Mörtsell (Västerbotten) provided feedback on a recent meeting with Eleni Marianou, Secretary General of the CPMR hold in January 2022 about the work between the CPMR and the BSC as well as the process of the CPMR Final Declaration.

### Financial documents

Tomas Mörtsell, as representative of Region Västerbotten that hosted the BSC Secretariat for 2020-2022, presented the final Financial Report 2022. He commented on the budget table for 2022 that Executive Committee Members received ahead of the meeting.

For 2022, in total €159,180 was spent, while the BSC had an income of 140,000 EUR. There is therefore €19,180 more that was spent compared to the BSC 2022 forecast budget. The three exceeding budget lines concern “travel and accommodation”, “Executive Secretary and administrative costs”, “equipment and office costs”.

As regards the exceeding budget line “Executive Secretary and administrative costs”, Tomas Mörtsell indicated that the costs include the Executive Secretary’s salary, PwC-Vialto (Belgium-based-organisation handling the contract) and the administrative costs for the Host Region of the BSC Secretariat. He pointed out that there have been financial implications of change of host Region for the BSC Secretariat.

Given the employment of the BSC Executive Secretary with Region Västerbotten terminated at the end of December 2022, there is a legal Belgium obligation for the employer to include some additional settlements that generated extra costs for the end of the year 2022. These additional settlements are the payment of the holiday days the employee has earned during the current year (X) and that she will not be able to take the next year (X+1) with the same employer.

Tomas Mörtsell indicated that however this extra cost could not have been foreseen when adopting the forecast budget, since it was decided only at the end of September that there will be a new Host Region.

However, the exceeding budget of €19,180 for 2022 is compensated by the accumulated surplus of the BSC, which amounted to €38,884 as of January 2022.

As of January 2023, the surplus amounts to €19,704.

There were no comments from the Executive Committee Members.

With regards to the forecast budget 2023, Tomas Mörtsell suggested a revision in the income table since it will include for 2022 the membership fee of Lapland.

Hanna Honkamäkilä, Regional Council of Oulu (Host Region 2023-2024), excused the absence of Tiina Rajala who was unable to attend and shared information on the Region of Oulu (see presentation) as well as key matters concerning the hiring of the Executive Secretary by Oulu Region as the new hosting region from January 2023 to December 2024. Oulu Region has used the same company than the previous host region to handle the contract of the Executive Secretary (PwC/Vialto). She provided information about the financial agreement agreed between the host region, the Baltic Sea Commission and the CPMR.

1-2 February 2023
**Membership**

Tomas Mörtsell (Västerbotten) announced that Lapland has applied in December 2022 for membership of the CPMR and its Baltic Sea Commission. Lapland is interested in particular in transport issues, Cohesion Policy and Arctic issues. A delegation from the Baltic Sea Commission will visit Lapland in a couple of weeks, together with Cees Loggen and Eleni Marianou representing the CPMR.

Markku Markkula (Helsinki-Uusimaa) provided feedback on a recent exchange he had with the Marshall of Pomorskie and West Pomorskie about potential CPMR Membership.

**Closing session**

Tomas Mörtsell (Västerbotten) presented upcoming events:
- CPMR Political Bureau, 10 March 2023, Murcia;
- CPMR Political Bureau, 8-9 June 2023, Florence;
- CPMR General Assembly, 15-17 November 2023, Saint Malo;
- BSC Executive Committee to be hosted by Mecklenburg Vorpommern in May 2023;
- BSC General Assembly to be hosted by Västerbotten and Ostrobothnia in September 2023.

Tomas Mörtsell (Västerbotten), thanked the organisers for the good meeting and invited participants to join the SEArica seminar on energy resilience in the Baltic Sea Region that afternoon.
List of Participants

President
Tomas MÖRTSELL, Region Västerbotten (also represented the BSC Arctic Task Force)

Vice-President
Richard SJÖLUND, Regional Council of Ostrobothnia
Romek KOSENKRANIUS, Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (Estonia)

Full Members
**GERMANY:** Wolf BORN, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern
**FINLAND:** Otto MERI, Helsinki-Uusimaa

Substitute Members
**FINLAND:** Pekka KOMU, Päijät-Häme (also represented the BSC Transport Working Group)
**SWEDEN:** Pontus LINDBERG, Region Skåne

BSC Working Group Chairs and Vice-Chairs
Energy and Climate Working Group, Chair Markku MARKKULA, Helsinki-Uusimaa Region
Maritime Working Group, Harry BOUVENG, Region Stockholm

Invited Guests
Kirsi AHLMAN, Deputy Director, Centrum Balticum
Lucas BOSSER, Transport Director, CPMR
Marianne CHESAK, Vice-President of the CPMR North Sea Commission
Jeanette LUND, Counsellor, Permanent Representation of Sweden to the EU
Eleni MARIANOU, Secretary General, CPMR
Niklas NIENASS, Member of the European Parliament
Johan SCHOLTE, Assistant Executive Secretary of the North Sea Commission
Tjisse STELPSTRA President of the CPMR North Sea Commission
Stefanie WODRIG, City of Hamburg
Agita KAUPUZA, Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments

Regional Representatives and supporting officers
Mats BRANDT, Regional Mayor, Ostrobothnia
Hanna HONKAMÄKI, Regional Council of Oulu
Paula HOLST, Region Stockholm
Jerker JOHNSON, Ostrobothnia
Antti KALLIOMAA, Päijät-Häme
Britt KARLSSON-GREEN, Region Skåne
Niina PAUTOLA-MOL, Regional Mayor, The Regional Council of Päijät-Häme
Liisa PERJO, Helsinki-Uusimaa Region
Carin PETERS, Region Skåne
Rait PIHELGAS, Association of Estonian Cities and Rural Municipalities
Lotta RÖNSTRÖM, North Sweden EU Office
Janne TAMMINEN, Helsinki-Uusimaa Region

BSC Secretariat
Lucille EHRHART, Executive Secretary
Clare BOOTH, Policy Assistant

1-2 February 2023