1. Opening of the Executive Committee

Jari Nahkanen, President, CPMR Baltic Sea Commission welcomed all participants and opened the meeting. He reflected on the activities of the BSC since the last Executive Committee meeting end of January, and especially noted the discussions with the EU institutions on various topics including sustainable tourism, energy and climate, Arctic issues, S3 and the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. He thanked the Vice-Presidents, Members of the Executive Committee, politicians and civil servants, Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Working Groups, for their hard work to strengthen the cooperation among regions. He stressed that in these challenging times it is crucial to work together and acknowledged the trust and strong ties that the BSC has built.

Approval of the Agenda

Wolf Born, Head of Unit "Baltic Sea Cooperation", Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, asked to discuss the better involvement and visibility of the BSC in the EUSBSR implementation process. The Agenda was unanimously approved with the addition of a new agenda item 4.5.

Approval of the Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting, 27 January 2021

The minutes were unanimously approved.

2. Update from the European Parliament on key issues for Regions

Erik Bergkvist, Member of the European Parliament (REGI Committee) thanked the BSC for the invitation to address the Executive Committee. He reminded participants that the new programming period has started, a lot is now happening, and noted that the BSC had identified the most important topics for the Baltic Sea Region. He addressed taxonomy which is connected to the Forest Strategy and noted the European Commission’s suggestions were not what the Commission’s own expert group had suggested and were not the same as what was decided in the European Parliament but were much narrower. If this is not changed it will have great negative implications for forestry which is an important area of enterprise throughout the Baltic Sea. The further north you go, the more negative implications will be. It will not only have implications on funding from the EU but also on global pension funds and investments. It is hoped that the Commission’s upcoming report will include changes as at the moment it is not acceptable. Regarding the EU Forest Strategy, it is good that the Commission is thinking about forestry, which is very important, and will be even more important when it comes to the Green Deal.
He expressed his hope that the Forest Strategy will point out all the possibilities and that it will remain a national competence as actual forestry is very different in different countries, it is not possible for one strategy to suit everyone.

Mr Bergkvist also discussed the major revisions underway, including TEN-T and TEN-E. He noted that the work carried out by the CPMR BSC is very important, and there are big possibilities for the regions to influence the Arctic Strategy. There is currently a lot of interest, and although the European Commission has started to highlight the importance of Arctic regions as a geopolitical interest and as sensitive area, it needs to be pointed out that it is also a place where people live ordinary lives and work, it should not be considered as exotic. He stressed this is a dimension that is often forgotten.

Other important issues that will have big implications for the Baltic Sea area were also mentioned, including the issues of lead, when it comes to munition for hunting and sport shooting. Today hunting is a national competence, but the environment isn’t, and of course it is not good to spread lead in nature. There are suggestions that lead should be totally forbidden to use in munitions when it comes to hunting birds, moose etc. This is not good, as there are no good substitutes. He pointed out that if we do not have the hunters that work for free, there would be severe problems with moose, boars and other animals that would be dangerous to traffic, crops, and to people in many aspects.

He concluded by mentioning the vote on the Next Generation EU, the fund to get Europe on its feet again. He stressed that it is important this is not delayed as we are in the deepest recession since the second world war and not all countries have the ability to get back on their feet on their own. We are very much dependent on each other and the pandemic has shown we are even more dependent when it comes to cooperation about health care and vaccine production and distribution for example. He stressed that the great challenge is to vaccinate the whole world, as otherwise there will even more aggressive and contagious mutations. It is important to get poorer countries vaccinated quickly.

Jari Nahkanen thanked Erik Bergkvist for his extremely enlightening speech. He welcomed the work on issues such as TEN-T and TEN-E, and the COVID and vaccine situation. He agreed there are big possibilities in Arctic matters and the BSC will work on this in the near future also. He noted that the issues of hunting and sport shooting had also been discussed in Finland. He asked Mr Bergkvist how much this issue is being discussed in the European Parliament.

Erik Bergkvist replied that is has been discussed a little in the Parliament, hunting is regarded differently in different countries, for example in Baltic Sea countries there is equal hunting, and it is natural, whereas in southern European countries it is class that decides if someone has the possibility to hunt.

Discussion with the Executive Committee

Romek Kosenkranius, Mayor (Local Government), Estonia, noted that all these issues are also very topical in Estonia, including the hunting issue.

Marku Markkula, Chair, BSC Energy and Climate WG, Helsinki-Uusimaa, asked about the recovery funds, noting that much of the funds should be targeted to the new EU Climate Adaptation Strategy announced by the European Commission. He wondered whether more should be done in Baltic Sea collaboration so that some activities which are planned for the energy new solutions or the electricity grids could be organised more together with the Baltic States. He asked if the Parliament can influence this so every country is not doing something on their own but broadening that to share good practices and knowledge at European level.
**Erik Bergkvist** agreed this is important and noted that even though the Nordic countries are really close, they do not cooperate, and acknowledged there is a lot to gain through increased cooperation.

**Pontus Lindberg**, Chairman, Human Resource Committee, Region Skåne, thanked Mr Bergkvist for his speech and asked if he could explain what is happening and what could be a problem with biogas in connection with the TEN-E.

**Erik Bergkvist** pointed out that the main thing is that biogas is fossil. In too many countries coal is still used for district heating, electricity production etc, and it would be difficult to go straight from coal to totally fossil-free. It would be much better to use biogas than coal, and even if it is looked upon as a temporary solution, temporary solutions - especially when a lot of money is invested in them - tend to be very long-term. He addressed whether to allow for biogas in the TEN-E revision, and whether to invest EU money in biogas distribution, or for hydrogen and fossil free gas. These issues will be discussed in the TEN-E revision, and he reminded participants that it is also important that the new TEN-E will be fossil free, but it won’t be if there is biogas.

**Update from the BSC Secretariat**

**Lucille Ehrhart**, Executive Secretary, CPMR Baltic Sea Commission gave a brief update on the BSC Secretariat. She provided information on the EUSBSR and key elements of the newly approved Action Plan, the BSC Working Groups as well as the implication of the CPMR BSC and the next steps to be undertaken.

**Wolf Born** provided more detailed information on the “New perspectives to territorial development and innovation in the Baltic Sea Region” event held on 11 March.

**Lucille Ehrhart** continued with a brief general update on issues relating to policy areas and communication, SEArica, membership and contact with external organisations. She reminded participants that the CPMR Political Bureau will take place later in the week.

**4. Report on the policy areas of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission**

**Jari Nahkanen** introduced and moderated the session. He noted that each Working Group has been tasked to develop a new two-year Action Plan, defining policy priorities of the Working Group. He thanked the Chairs and Vice-Chairs for their active work during February and March and stressed the importance of synergies between the Working Groups and welcomed the idea to plan an annual joint meeting of all the Working Groups.

**Bosse Andersson**, Chair, BSC Transport Working Group, noted that the draft Action Plan of the BSC Transport Working Group and the draft policy messages on TEN-T had been sent to participants prior to the meeting. He provided an update on the BSC Transport Working Group and provided feedback on recent meetings held in February and March and welcomed the very good attendance from both politicians and transport experts. He noted that almost all BSC Member Regions were represented in the March meeting. He also gave information on the draft Action Plan of the BSC Transport Working Group and the working methodology. He confirmed that two sub-groups would be established at technical level for greater effectiveness of the work to help to support the two policy priorities which are to promote functional TEN-T network in the Baltic Sea Region and to promote smart, sustainable and climate neutral transport for all. He concluded by giving feedback on the discussions held on the contribution of the working group to the on-going TEN-T public consultation, open for feedback until early May. The BSC Transport Working Group will submit its own contribution, and also provide input to the CPMR contribution.
Jari Nahkanen thanked Bosse Andersson and the Vice-Chairs for their work. He noted transport is a key issue for our Member Regions and the two policy priorities of the TEN-T and smart mobility are very important.

Markku Markkula, Chair, BSC Energy and Climate Working Group, gave an update about recent activities of the Energy and Climate Working Group. He explained the draft Action Plan for the 2021-2023 sets policy priorities and is a framework to clarify the potential activities of the Working Group, to explain to all member regions what the benefits and added value are if they join this Baltic collaboration. He stressed it is a flexible document so that the BSC can react quickly if something urgent occurs. He also discussed the importance of the circular economy with concrete links to business activities. He noted that in many activity areas, BSC member regions, industries and small companies are the forerunners. He expressed the need to link BSC work with the Green Deal and noted that four focus areas had been identified in the Action Plan.

Jari Nahkanen thanked Markku Markkula and the Vice-Chair for their work. He agreed it was good news that the Working Group will participate in the Public Consultation on a new EU Forest Strategy, as an important topic, but also explore opportunities in the new European Bauhaus.

Lucille Ehrhart, on behalf of Tomas Mörtsell, leader of the BSC Arctic Task Force, gave an update on the BSC Arctic Task Force which was recently established to follow and influence the revision process of the EU Arctic Policy. She provided feedback on the inaugural meeting of the Task Force on 16 March, including key messages from the speakers. She noted that there will be a session on Arctic issues during the next CPMR Political Bureau, and one of the next steps will be to organise a meeting with the Arctic Friendship Group at the European Parliament. The European Commission is expected to publish its Arctic Communication in November.

Lucille Ehrhart on behalf of Tiina Perho, Chair of the Maritime Working Group, continued with an update on the Maritime Working Group’s activities, including feedback from the meetings held in February and March. She explained details of the draft Actions Plan of the Working Group which will keep two main policy priorities, Maritime Industry and Sustainable Tourism. She noted that the issue of Maritime Spatial Planning had been raised and it will be included in the Action Plan.

Lucille Ehrhart then gave a brief update on activities regarding Smart Specialisation Strategies. The BSC Executive Committee decided in January to set up a Working Group on Smart Specialisation Strategies. As there is no Chair for the Working Group yet, it was suggested to have meetings on a technical level to continue the work until a region is available to hold the position of Chair.

Pontus Lindberg supported the idea to continue working on this issue at technical level under a Chair is appointed.

Wolf Born also agreed it was a good proposal to have it as technical group and need to consider how to have input into the work programme.

Jari Nahkanen also agreed with this idea.

Presentation and comments from Members on the draft BSC Work Plan for the 2021-2023 period

Lucille Ehrhart introduced the BSC Work Plan for the 2021-2023 period. She explained why the Work Plan is being drafted, and that it will set out the main goals, policy priorities and activities. She noted the process for drafting and approving the document, which will be finally put for approval to the BSC General Assembly 2021. Regarding the content, she mentioned it will include different policy focuses and present
the key actions. She noted that input from the Executive Committee will be needed regarding the structure and content of the document. She asked the Executive Committee members if they had any specific comments on the structure or content of the Work Plan. She reminded participants that the previous Work Plan included specific target figures and she asked if a specific number of regions to attract as new members should be included in the new Action Plan. She then asked the Executive Committee what the position of the CPMR BSC should be regarding projects, and whether it should participate in projects. She asked the Executive Committee members to provide feedback on the overall document.

Wolf Born noted that the targets set in the previous plan are unrealistic. The regional level does not exist in the same way in each country, and he suggested that the unrealistic targets be dropped. Regarding projects, the BSC does not have a legal capacity to join projects so legally it is difficult. With regard to support given by the BSC to Member Regions to join projects, the Working Groups have a key role to play and are an excellent format to spread news on Calls for Proposals, or to share good project ideas and to look for partners.

Jari Nahkanen asked the members if unrealistic targets should be dropped or changed.

Lucille Ehrhart noted that the Work Plan would be presented at the General Assembly so the Executive Committee members have the possibility to send comments and input until the next the Executive Committee meeting. She invited members to read through the document and provide feedback on the document.

The role of regions and the CPMR in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) – new agenda item proposed by Wolf Born

Wolf Born noted that although the BSC Working Groups do excellent work and work well with Policy Area Coordinators, there is no link to the policy level, or governance level. To solve this gap, he proposed considering a new meeting format. There are currently a lot of meeting formats and to start a new format, it must have good justification. We are now in a situation where we have online meetings which are relatively easy to participate in, but when we have physical meetings it will be another aspect to consider. An alternative to a new meeting format could be targeted initiatives towards the National Coordinators Group. He noted the BSC should better promote itself and BSC work needs to be communicated better.

Maria Lindbom, Advisor Regional Dev International Affairs, Region Skåne, agreed that there are many meeting formats in the Baltic Sea Region, and it is really crucial to form an agenda and to know why and in what context the BSC is there. She asked if anyone knew of the structure of flagships and noted that an overview of who is involved in flagships is needed. It could be helpful to know who is involved in what so that specific initiatives can be targeted.

Wolf Born replied that the EUSBSR Task Force carried out an analysis on which regions were involved in flagship projects, and the figures found by the Task Force should still be quite relevant. He expressed his belief that more could be done with platform projects that receive funding from the Baltic Sea Region Programme. He questioned how to better address the political level in the Baltic Sea Region and how to pass on this message to other organisations.

Jari Nahkanen thanked Wolf for raising these issues.

Lucille Ehrhart commented on the meeting on 11 March, which had good attendance and worked well with other organisations. She highlighted that the BSC has political muscle and wondered how to promote the BSC better.
Membership
State of play of CPMR BSC Membership

Lucille Ehrhart reminded participants that information had been sent prior to the meeting. The two main issues are how to consolidate current membership and how to recruit potential new members. Although contact has been made with some regions, more can be done. She addressed how to attract new regions and asked members what actions should be more developed to attract new members and how the Executive Committee members can work as BSC ambassadors.

Jari Nahkanen agreed it is important that the BSC focuses its efforts on both consolidating the current membership and recruiting new members. The Executive Committee Members have a key role to play and can act as ambassadors to promote the BSC and the cooperation between the regions. He opened the floor for discussion on three questions:

➔ What actions should be developed to recruit new Members?
➔ What potential Members should be targeted?
➔ How can the Executive Committee Members help to recruit with potential new Members?

Discussion with Members

Sami Virtanen, Member of Executive Committee, Region of Kymenlaakso noted that he would discuss with his colleagues the possibility for his neighbouring region as soon as possible.

Toivo Riimaa, Deputy Director, Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities mentioned his discussions with national associations in Latvia and Lithuania and the membership fee is a problem for them. He reminded participants that they are also not members of BSSSC even though there are no membership fees.

Jari Nahkanen wondered if they could have observer status without paying membership fees.

Wolf Born added that for Germany there is currently no interest from neighbouring Länder. The strengths and added value of the BSC should be taken into consideration. He reminded participants that in Denmark the regional level does not exist in the same way.

Financial Papers

Lucille Ehrhart presented the Financial Report 2021 and the draft Forecast Budget for 2022. There were no comments on the financial papers.

Preparation of the 2021 BSC General Assembly
Information from the hosting Region Helsinki-Uusimaa and the BSC Secretariat

Lucille Ehrhart noted that the BSC Secretariat is in contact with the hosting region to discuss the options of the General Assembly.

Otto Meri, Member of the Board, Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council, noted that the pandemic situation is currently critical in Helsinki. Nothing has been confirmed but planning options have started. It is too early to make a final decision, but preparations will continue.

Jari Nahkanen agreed that everything depends on the COVID-19 situation.
Lucille Ehrhart mentioned that the BSC Secretariat and host region are considering both options. She pointed out that a date needs to be set to make the decision on the format. She suggested the Executive Committee decide during its meeting in June if the General Assembly will be an online or a physical meeting. The format and date of the meeting was discussed.

Otto Meri agreed that the final decision on the meeting format should be made during the June meeting.

Wolf Born noted that the last week of September would not be possible, and slightly earlier in September would be ideal.

Hanna Honkamäkilä, Manager of International Affairs, Council of Oulu Region, confirmed that the EUSBSR Annual Forum will be held online.

Jari Nahkanen confirmed that the decision will be made at the end of June.

Communication

Lucille Ehrhart presented the Communication Strategy and noted that it is to serve as a guide to ensure a strategic and effective internal and external communication. Due to the pandemic, the CPMR BSC needs to find new ways to communicate.

Wolf Born pointed out that quality goes before quantity and mentioned would be interesting to have analytics and feedback on who uses the BSC website, twitter, whether the BSC has the right followers and if it follows the right people.

Pontus Lindberg stressed the importance for the regions to spread good news, and that all regions should communicate good news about the Baltic Sea for the BSC to share.

Jari Nahkanen agreed the regions need to work together and cooperate to spread news to stakeholders.

Lucille Ehrhart provided information on social media. She invited all members to share events and news with the BSC secretariat, so that the BSC can promote what is happening in the regions to increase their visibility.

Decision on a CPMR BSC Communication Strategy

The communication strategy was unanimously adopted.

Closing session

Any other business
No other issues were raised.

Calendar of the year
There were no comments on the timetable of events.

Next Executive Committee meeting

Jari Nahkanen suggested the next meeting of the Executive Committee be organised on Tuesday 15 June 2021. The suggested was unanimously agreed.

Jari Nahkanen thanked all participants for a successful meeting.
CPMR Baltic Sea Commission Executive Committee

Wednesday, 24 March 2021

List of Participants

Bosse Andersson, 2nd Vice-President Regional Council, Region Stockholm
Erik Bergkvist, MEP, European Parliament, S&D Group
Clare Booth, Policy Assistant, CPMR BSC
Wolf Born, Head of Unit "Baltic Sea Cooperation", Mecklenburg-Vorpommern
Lucille Ehrhart, Executive Secretary, CPMR BSC
Hanna Honkamäkilä, Manager of International Affairs, Council of Oulu Region
Sandra Hult, EP
Pia Hurtta, Communication Specialist, Regional Council of Kymenlaakso
Britt Karlsson Green, Strategist, Region Skåne
Daniela Kober, Clerk, Ministry of the Interior and for Europa, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern
Romek Kosenkranius, Mayor (Local Government), Estonia
Evert Kroes, EU Coordination Officer, Region Stockholm
Jonas Larsson, Senior Adviser External Relations, Region Västerbotten
Pontus Lindberg, Chairman, Human Resource Committee, Region Skåne
Maria Lindbom, Advisor Regional Dev International Affairs, Region Skåne
Markku Markkula, Chair, BSC Energy and Climate WG, Helsinki
Otto Meri, Member of the Board, Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council
Tomas Mörtsell, Vice-President, Regional Development Committee, Region Västerbotten
Jari Nahkanen, President of Baltic Sea Commission, Oulu
Sonja Palhus, Manager of International Affairs, Regional Council of Southwest Finland
Toivo Riimaa, Deputy Director, Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities
Isak Sidestam, Adviser External Affairs, Region Västerbotten
Davide Strangis, Executive Director, CPMR
Janne Tamminen, Senior Adviser, Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council
Sami Virtanen, Member of Executive Committee, Region of Kymenlaakso