Opening of the BSC Executive Committee meeting

Tomás Mörtsell, President of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission (Region Västerbotten) opened the meeting by highlighting the symbolic of having a meeting at the border between France and Germany. He stressed that 2024 will be an important year in shaping the future of the European Union with the European Parliament elections in June 2024. The meeting in Strasbourg aims at conveying to MEPs some messages arising from the BSC Resolution 2023 and also to meet with Catherine Trautmann to discuss the recently approved provisional agreement on the TEN-T regulation and its implications for BSC regions.

- The meeting agenda was unanimously approved.
- The draft minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held online on 8 September 2023 were unanimously approved.

Tour de table

Richard Sjölund, BSC Vice-President (Region Ostrobothnia), explained that one of the main concerns in Ostrobothnia is healthcare. There has been an extensive reform, and it is not sufficiently financed so there are cuts which are a big issue, and citizens are concerned whether they will be able to get the care they need in the future. On a national level there is the problem with Russia and the Finnish border. He mentioned the upcoming Finnish presidential elections. He shared a message from Mats Brandt, Regional Mayor, on the importance of the role of ports and offshore wind, and the need to support ports in this endeavour, and also on developments relating to the hydrogen economy.
Wolf Born, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, mentioned the unrest in Germany, due to discontentment with measures that the government wants to implement, that will impact on agriculture and transport. He indicated that Mecklenburg-Vorpommern had just approved a Baltic Sea cooperation Strategy. A partnership agreement was to be signed the next day with Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and a region in Ukraine to give a framework for humanitarian support and cooperation for the future.

Sari Nuro, Oulu Region, welcomed that the port of Oulu is now included on the TEN-T core network, which is very important for the development of the whole Region. The region is waiting to move forward with offshore wind farms and investment is very important at this stage. There are concerns on the economic slowdown due to geopolitical instability which effects investments.

Tiina Rajala, Oulu Region, added that there is a new Regional Mayor that will take up office soon.

Hanna Honkamäkilä, Oulu Region, informed participants that the new Finnish government has in its programme the establishment of a northern agenda focusing on accessibility, security and growth in the north of Finland.

Harry Bouveng, Region Stockholm, noted the recession in Sweden and the struggles with inflation. The situation in Ukraine gives opportunities for Sweden to develop its military and civil defence. This effects the regional economy and now it is the worst economic situation for 30 years. Regarding issues relating to offshore wind farms, the process is very long, and the government needs to do something to simplify permissions.

Pekka Komu, Päijät-Häme Region, stressed 3 points: 1. The war in Ukraine is an important topic in Päijät-Häme and Finland. He welcomed NATO membership and hoped Sweden can join soon. 2. The war and military issues have an impact on transport and discussions have been held on the possibility of CEF funding, as Finland has a lot of land and not a lot of people, so CEF funding is difficult to implement. He also addressed links to military mobility. 3. Regarding energy issues, Päijät-Häme does not have wind power, and there are no meaningful big plans for green power. No permission is granted for wind power due to radar, so the possibilities are hydrogen, solar panels, and small nuclear reactors. He noted the work of Päijät-Häme with the CPMR Energy Working Group. On a personal level he informed participants that he is being nominated for the Committee of the Regions so might not be able to continue in the Executive Committee next year.

Joanna Ekman, Päijät-Häme Region, introduced herself and her interest in the work of the CPMR. She highlighted that with the changing situation in Europe, these topics have even more value and impact than before. She looked forward to working with the BSC and its member regions.

Antti Kalliomaa, Päijät-Häme Region, added that his region looks forward to welcoming the BSC Executive Committee for a meeting in September 2024.

Pontus Lindberg, Region Skåne, noted the high level of inflation has impacted on retirement funding. Due to fluctuations of inflation, calculations on how much money will be available to pay in the future is very unstable and rather extreme arrangements have had to be made. Regarding the energy sector, Skåne is experiencing the same problems as other regions, there is a need for more energy, and also an interest in solar energy in southern Sweden.

Janne Tamminen, Helsinki-Uusimaa Region, informed participants that the new Regional Mayor started in her position a few months ago and will join in future BSC meetings, and apologised on behalf of Otto Meri who was unable to participate in the meeting.
The region is working on a Memorandum of Understanding with the Estonian county Harju on possibilities to increase cooperation in the future. They share several common issues including maritime safety and damaged cables under the sea. A Memorandum of Understanding is also planned with Brandenburg and visits have been held with the Minister of EU Affairs. He also provided details of recent contact with the Chinese province of Zhejiang, and cooperation with other regions in southern Finland, especially those that are members of the CPMR. Regarding transport, the small port of Inkoo is now included in the TEN-T network. Helsinki-Uusimaa Region is interested in alternative fuels, as they also have no wind power due to security reasons.

**Tomas Mörstell**, Region Västerbotten, commented on the interesting issues on links between Sweden and Finland and discussions on Cohesion Policy after 2027. He mentioned investments in Region Västerbotten and especially in the battery factory in the region.

**Jerker Johnson**, Region Ostrobothnia, noted it is big companies and Chinese companies that are investing in Vaasa, which is a mixed blessing. He also addressed the issues of attracting labour force.

**Ramona Dolan**, Region Västerbotten, highlighted the need to have diversity in solutions and recent hydrogen development in Västerbotten.

**Presentation of CPMR lobbying activities for 2024 and BSC contribution**

**Eleni Marianou**, CPMR Secretary General, highlighted that 2024 is a year of elections, not just European elections. Given the unrest, and the problems with inflation, people are sometimes lost how to vote. She highlighted the risk of a more Eurosceptic European Parliament.

She addressed enlargement and noted that whilst it is good and everyone wants it, there are questions on the consequences for the EU budget. She informed that the CPMR Secretariat is working on a report of the impact of a possible enlargement of the EU on Cohesion Policy, and a presentation will be made during April in the REGI committee of the European Parliament.

She discussed the future of Cohesion Policy in the context of enlargement and the multitude of crises, as well as the involvement of Regions. She stressed that whilst Cohesion Policy is an old policy, it is not an old fashioned policy, and it is the only policy that is visible on the ground. She reiterated that the crises are here to stay, and it is necessary to address how to deal with them without creating more sectoral funds. Reserves can be there, but at regional level not European level, as the crises hit the regions directly, and she shared the example of migration and erosion, which come to the shores of the regions. She emphasised the importance for regions to be involved in the design and implementation of the policy.

**Discussion with BSC Members**

**Tomas Mörstell**, noted that the question is not should the regions be involved in the future cohesion policy, but how the regions should be involved.

**Pekka Komu**, Päijät-Häme Region, raised the question of Ukraine, and noted that people understand that helping Ukraine is defending Europe. He mentioned that NATO is not about values per se, but the European Union is about values.

**Sari Nurro**, Oulu Region, expressed concerns that the current geopolitical volatility is poison for investment throughout Europe. With the upcoming EU elections, there is risk of the EU becoming a lame duck. A second issue is the importance of the north for the whole EU.
One of the important focus points is raw materials and how to implement and diversify EU imports and strategic dependencies. Another important point is the evolution of ports as sustainable energy hubs, connected to both TEN-T and TEN-E. As mentioned in St Malo during the CPMR General Assembly, using the European Investment Bank to kick-start investment should be addressed in more detail.

**Wolf Born**, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, reflected on the remark by Pekka Komu on Ukraine and agreed. Germany is now the biggest contributor to Ukraine, and the population could say that it gives money to another country, when it needs to look at its own country. Regarding Cohesion Policy, it should not be understood as a mercy for poor regions. There is a need to compare the situation with and without the regions, to provide examples on what has worked well, and instruments that regions do not have access to, how the money is spent and absorption rates.

**Update from the BSC Working Groups**

**Arctic Task Force**

**Hanna Honkamäkilä**, Oulu Region, shared a greeting from Jari Nahkanen and apologised on his behalf, as he was unable to attend the meeting. She shared information and objectives of the recent Arctic Task Force meeting in St Malo. The future activities of the Task Force for 2024 include: 1/elaboration of a position paper 2/organisation of a dialogue with national parliamentarians.

**WEDNESDAY 17 JANUARY**

**Meeting at the European Parliament**

Exchange about challenges and perspectives of the Baltic Sea Region in light of the upcoming EU elections with the following MEPs:

- **MEP Niklas Nienass** (Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance), Germany
- **MEP Emma Wiesner** (Renew Europe Group), Sweden
- **MEP Rasmus Andresen** (Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance), Germany
- **MEP Ville Niinistö** (Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance), Finland
- **MEP Ilan De Basso** (Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats), Sweden

This meeting was hosted by MEP Niklas Nienass and aimed to address the topics of building resilient energy and transport systems in the Baltic Sea Region, ensuring a secure Baltic Sea Region, and working towards an ambitious and reformed Cohesion Policy and EU budget post-27. The meeting included introductions, examples and questions from BSC regional representatives and reactions from MEPs, followed by an open discussion on these issues.

**Meeting with the Secretary General of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities**

Exchange with **Mathieu Mori**, Secretary General of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities about the situation in Ukraine and its reconstruction in terms of local government.
### Perspectives and challenges of the transport system in the Baltic Sea Region

**Magnus Lagergren**, Region Örebro and **Pekka Komu**, Region Päijät-Häme, Chair and Vice-Chair of the BSC Transport Working Group, introduced the session and welcomed Ms Trautmann, European Coordinator for the North Sea Baltic Corridor.

**Magnus Lagergren** welcomed the agreement reached on the TEN-T regulation found in December 2023 and especially the inclusion of the Oslo-Stockholm link in the ScanMed-corridor. The Baltic Sea Region encompasses a diverse range of countries, and to harness their full potential efficient transportation corridors both north/south and east/west must be established to facilitate the smooth movement of goods, raw materials, and people across the region. The TEN-T is the backbone of a collective vision for interconnected Europe and the embodiment of the Baltic Sea Regions’ commitment to a cohesive, efficient, and sustainable transportation system. A functional TEN-T is not just about roads, rails, and ports; it is also the free and efficient movement of goods, services, and people across borders, fostering economic growth, facilitating cultural exchange, and upholding the values that make Europe unique. The Baltic Sea Region can serve as a vital link, and involving cities and regions in the design, governance and implementation of the future generation of European transport policies is crucial. It is now time to move towards the continued implementation of the TEN-T, and the importance of funding in order to reach common goals was stressed.

**Pekka Komu**, Region Päijät-Häme, stated that one of the main issues discussed is Ukraine, and the unfortunate events that have negative effects on transport, not only in Finland but across the entire Baltic Sea Region. East/west connections are now even more important. When it comes to security, it is essential to secure ports. All borders are now closed completely. He asked three questions on these issues, 1. Is there something the EU can do to ensure transport and accessibility in the Baltic Sea despite the situation with Ukraine? 2. Can any insights be shared into what kind of EU policies there can be concerning transport after the elections? 3. Are there ways to get CEF funding? This is a national issue in Finland which has encountered difficulty to get TEN-T related funding, and perhaps this is the same in other countries.

**Catherine Trautmann**, European Coordinator for the TEN-T North Sea-Baltic Corridor, thanked the BSC for the wonderful welcome and felt it was good to see such active regions. She noted this crucial period, with the extension of the corridor to Ukraine. Work is beginning and Ukraine wants to move fast to have the capacity for freight and goods to reach cities and strategic places. She noted what is happening on the border with Finland, where there are plans for demolition to protect the people near the border. She also addressed the Arctic dimension and discussions with Finnish stakeholders that share the same preoccupations. She highlighted the support for some ships, and the need to have a good fleet of ice-breakers in the zone. Digital capacity and actions with Ukraine were also addressed, including communications and work with countries such as France and Germany. She informed participants that she is aware of the different aspects, the war is on land, in the sky, in electro-magnetic waves, in different situations, is it very complicated. Politicians were not cautious enough about Russian spies. In this period, solidarity between regions is essential and it is vital to have secure ports for the future. It is important that the railway around the Baltic Sea Region is on the same gauge, and she discussed the need to cut the link completely to make it possible to advance quickly on the issue of economic compensation. The importance of knowing where the money will go, in order not to fund Russia, it essential.
A way to compensate needs to be found, and this can be done in the exchange between regions, through rail, sea, etc., such as Rail Baltica for certain transport. There needs to be exchanges with Ukraine when it is feasible and possible. Ukraine continues to produce what it can, the people need to have their national economy. It is hoped that more attention can be paid to strategic aspects in the evolution of the corridors. Next May the new TEN-T regulation will be in force. The TEN-T North Sea-Baltic Corridor is considered strategic and special attention is therefore given to this corridor. She noted that if the regions have concrete demands or aspects, the Coordinators can see and listen to them and then take action step by step.

Exchange of views

Richard Sjölund, Region Ostrobothnia, agreed that Baltic Sea ports are very important, and in his region the port of Jakobstad is no longer included, which is a disappointment. Ports should be seen as energy hubs, and this is very much the case with Baltic Sea ports. There is potential for offshore energy production, and there are very important investments being made. He acknowledged that the railway gauge is another issue that must be addressed in more serious discussions. He explained the reason why Finland has a different gauge due to its history with Russia.

Catherine Trautmann, European Coordinator for the TEN-T North Sea-Baltic Corridor, mentioned that it is important to understand why there is this priority and why it can be a priority in the CEF. Connections to ports is always a priority, so it is important to understand that projects connected to ports will have the chance to be in the first rank of projects. Initiatives will be taken for both projects with the corridor as it is and projects with the new corridor. She highlighted good opportunities to share the Regions’ views and situations.

Magnus Lagergren, Region Örebro, raised a question on the Poland and Lithuania border, as they have Russia and Belorussia in the east, these regions need to be added to the team. He stressed the need to close the gap between Germany and Lithuania and for the regions to work together on this issue. He noted the need to be strategic all around the Baltic Sea, to be flexible to move troops etc.

Pekka Komu, Region Päijät-Häme, mentioned trying to build resilience in the Baltic transport area. He noted the dependence on the fixed link between Denmark and Sweden. At the same time commercial ferries are not interested in new ferries with rail connections, the interest is on a strategic level for nations. He addressed the possibility to move goods by rail using ferries.

Sari Nurro, Oulu Region, expressed gratitude for the Coordinators’ understanding of the severe geopolitical realities and the need for a heavier envelope to support the change in the situation. In Oulu, in addition to ports, the road network is of strategic importance to get more investments in the future. She welcomed the inclusion of Oulu port in the core network. She referred to the electricity grid, and asked if Ms Trautmann envisaged some kind of interface between TEN-T and TEN-E?

Catherine Trautmann agreed this is an evolution that needs to be addressed. Investments, and what is needed to help investments, will be discussed with businesses, although the date remains to be fixed. Two topics will be especially addressed, firstly how the infrastructure of transport can help to protect from climate catastrophes like floods, and resilience will be one of the objectives, and secondly, the connection between energy and transport. There is always the need for examples, and if regions need to connect new grids to railways, she expressed her willingness and availability to look in detail for the preparation of the next work plan so that contributions can be made to reflections on this topic.
**Tomas Mörstell**, Region Västerbotten, stressed that it is important to complete the core network corridors connecting Norwegian ports with Sweden and Finland. He also addressed military aspects that are of key importance.

**Tiina Rajala**, Oulu Region, highlighted that the situation is very different to two years ago. She emphasised the importance of sending a firm signal to Russia that the countries are strong and are getting stronger, they are defending the whole of Europe.

**Lotta Rönström**, North Sweden European Office, referred back to the implementation of TEN-T, which is very ambitious but no good if Member States do not implement it. Yesterday her region received a report from transport administration, and it does not include the same direction as the government, so it is important that it is connected with the work plan. She asked how that could work, perhaps through bilateral meetings with Member States?

**Catherine Trautmann** mentioned that more topics are under surveillance, and it is important to take on board geopolitical aspects, as governments do not always listen. She agreed to propose a special meeting to have momentum for reflection and review the situation. It is better if we have the maps, the people and the capacity needed at the beginning of the work, as it is possible to forget some aspects, whereas the regions are on site, know and understand what is happening and what can be done. Contributions from the regions can be very good. She agreed that she could support a joint agreement between the 2 governments of Finland and Sweden.

**Wolf Born**, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, asked if there are sufficient resources.

**Catherine Trautmann** replied that there are not enough resources, and there needs to be help and support to foster the activities, it is not always easy with the ecological aspects, but priorities need to be discussed clearly. She gave the example that in France, although they agree the war in Ukraine is terrible, they do not feel war is at the door and therefore do not understand it could be risky. She explained this is why she tries to share information with people. The French government is not sufficiently cautious, this is the reality.

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**Update from the BSC Working Groups continued**

**Transport Working Group**

**Magnus Lagergren**, Chair of the Working Group (Region Örebro) provided feedback on the 2 recent meetings of the Working Group in October about drones and November 2023 about the geopolitical impact on transport, hosted by Helsinki-Uusimaa Region, the BSC and Scandria Alliance. He presented the upcoming activities, including a meeting about the implications of the new TEN-T regulation for the Baltic Sea regions in March, and the Connecting Europe Days in April in Brussels.

**Maritime Working Group**

**Sari Nurro**, Chair of the Working Group (Oulu Region) informed participants that she participated on behalf of the Working Group in a panel on “Building a competitive and resilient marine renewable energies sector: the challenges of the reindustrialisation” during the seminar “Offshore renewable energy sector at the heart of the cooperation and development strategies of the Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe”, which was organised in parallel with the CPMR General Assembly in St Malo on 15 November.
She shared details of the past activities of the group, including the online meeting held on 11 December and then presented the upcoming events and activities including the European Maritime Day 2024 in Svendborg, Denmark on 30-31 May, the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum in Oulu on 4-5 June and the next meeting of the Working Group which will be held in connection with the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum.

Energy and Climate Working Group

Pontus Lindberg, Vice-Chair of the Working Group (Region Skåne) provided feedback on the Working Group meeting held online on 7 December which focused on the topic of the role for hydrogen in the green transition in the Baltic Sea Region. The Working Group is now going to develop a Position Paper on hydrogen. Regarding the next meetings, the Working Group will hold an online seminar on electrification of the society as an enabler for reducing CO2 emissions.

Wolf Born, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, raised the point that Interreg is investigating this question in a project called HyTruck, which aims to support public authorities in steering the development of a transnational network of green hydrogen refuelling stations (HRS) suited for large trucks. This issue will also be addressed in the Baltic Sea Business Day on 18 April.

Gustav Hemming, Region Stockholm, felt that the possibilities should be raised regarding the synergies between offshore wind energy and possible solutions when it comes to the maritime environment in the Baltic Sea. This is not completely grasped by any policy as yet. In Sweden there have been several research projects to give oxygen to the dead sea bed for maritime life and some of the offshore wind farm cooperations could be part of that solution as oxygen is a side product of hydrogen production from windmills. Perhaps this is an under-developed area for cross-sector policies.

Report from the BSC Secretariat

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

BSC representation in external events
- Tomas Mörtzell, BSC President, took part in the “Our Baltic” Ministerial Conference on 29 September 2023 in Palanga (Lithuania);
- Lucille Ehrhart, BSC Executive Secretary, participated in the Baltic Sea Region Directors’ Network for Smart Specialisation Strategies on 21 November 2023, in Oulu (Finland).

Communication
- A BSC newsflash for September-December 2023 including an interview with Henna Hovi, Member of the Board, Regional Council of Kymenlaakso was published in December 2023.

EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and future of Interreg
- The 2023 EUSBSR Annual Forum was held on 4-5 October 2023 in Riga, Latvia. On 4 October, the BSC co-organised a workshop on the macro-regional approach to the new Regional Innovation Valley concept with Västerbotten, Southwest Finland, and EUSBSR Policy Area Innovation;
- The 2024 EUSBSR Annual Forum will be held on 29-30 October in Visby, Gotland (Sweden). BSC Member Regions interested in having a speaking slot or organising a workshop, were invited to contact the BSC secretariat;
- The Action Plan of the EUSBSR will be revised in 2023-2024 and the Executive Committee members were invited to discuss how the BSC can contribute to this upcoming revision and if a Task Force should be established and led by a volunteering BSC region;
The Council of the Baltic Sea States’ Project Support Facility Fund’s Call will be opened in spring 2024;

The Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme’s 3rd Call for Core Projects will open on 17 January 2024 until 21 June 2024. Priority areas are innovative societies and climate neutral societies.

**BSC internal matters**

The BSC Executive Secretary Lucille Ehrhart reminded the Executive Committee about the following:

- Guglielmo Migliori has been working for the BSC at 50% of his time, which is partially funded by Region Västerbotten, from April 2023 until now. His contract will end of March 2024. Therefore, it should be decided by Västerbotten if they continue to pay for one year more of the contract. CPMR Secretariat is funded the other half.
- Oulu Region is hosting the BSC Secretariat for 2023-2024. It is necessary to keep this in mind for the upcoming discussion on the future hosting of the Secretariat to ensure plenty of time, to know whether or not a new host Region should be found after 2024.

**Discussion**

**Wolf Born**, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, asked how the question of hosting the Secretariat should be dealt with and if the matter had been discussed by the Presidium? It is important to tackle this issue without delay, and to provide more insight during the March Executive Committee meeting. He understood that there are complicated labour laws for regions, and the Executive Committee should make things as simple as possible.

**Tomas Mörstell**, Region Västerbotten, replied that the Presidency had discussed this issue with Oulu Region, and this topic will be addressed during the next Executive Committee meeting in March.

**Richard Sjölund**, Ostrobothnia, noted that this will be discussed in the Finnish delegation as soon as possible.

**Tomas Mörstell**, Region Västerbotten, replied that this issue will be included in agenda for the March Executive Committee meeting.

**Magnus Lagergren**, Region Örebro, raised the issue of security, and questioned whether the BSC should create a Task Force to work on this issue together, to collect information so that special information can be shared.

**Richard Sjölund**, Ostrobothnia, suggested holding a joint meeting of all BSC Working Groups to discuss this as it is a shared issue.

**Tiina Rajala**, Oulu Region, agreed with the proposal to hold a meeting of all Working Groups and to include security of supply in the agenda, as that issue connects all Working Groups.

**Lucille Ehrhart**, BSC Executive Secretary, suggested holding a joint meeting of all the BSC working groups to discuss the topic of security of supply in the Baltic Sea Region. The idea was approved by the Members.
**Membership**

**Tomas Mörstell**, Region Västerbotten, noted that perhaps things are changing for the better with the new polish government, so it is now timely to consider how to create interest and take it forward with Polish regions.

**Magnus Lagergren**, Region Örebro, provided feedback on his discussions with Darlana, the region wants to join but membership is not a priority at the moment. He proposed to address the possibility to invite them as an observer member.

**Richard Sjölund**, Ostrobothnia, agreed that inviting non-members to meetings as observers should be considered as an option.

**Lucille Ehrhart**, BSC Executive Secretary, suggested including Uppsala and Häme regions in the invitations to participate as observers.

**Pontus Lindberg**, Region Skåne, pointed out that there are possibilities to have connections with smaller regions especially for events, but the problem is that although they are very interested in the CPMR, they do not have the funds available to cover the membership fees.

**Tiina Rajala**, Oulu Region, remarked that regions are also interested in seeing results, what has been achieved and what the CPMR, its BSC and the Working Groups can offer them. She proposed drafting one or two papers that can share this information.

**Wolf Born**, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, asked if Estonian regions are active in any Working Groups, and invited participants to the 2nd Baltic Sea Business Day that will take place in Rostock on 18 April 2024.

**Antti Kalliomaa**, Päijät-Häme Region, suggested also contacting South Karelia, as it is the only region in south Finland that is not a member.

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**BSC General Assembly**

**Invitation to the 29th BSC General Assembly hosted by Kymenlaakso**

**Lucille Ehrhart**, BSC Executive Secretary, shared an invitation from Henna Hovi to the 29th General Assembly of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, which will take place on 22-23 May 2024, in Kotka, Kymenlaakso.

She presented the list of Working Papers to be prepared for the General Assembly:

- Draft Agenda of the General Assembly - on 22 May, there will be the General Assembly meeting, and a study visit on 23 May, either to a check point or military field, and maritime museum. More detailed information will be available for the Executive Committee meeting in March;
- Draft BSC Resolution 2024 – participants were invited to submit ideas and comments;
- Financial Reports;
- Draft Activity Report 2023-2024;
- Position Paper on hydrogen.
Participants were reminded that this year’s General Assembly will include the election of the BSC President and renewal of the BSC Executive Committee for a two-year mandate period. She stressed the importance for all Member Regions to have a role in the Baltic Sea Commission, either within the Executive Committee or a Working Group.

Feedback from the 28th General Assembly hosted by Västerbotten and Ostrobothnia

Pontus Lindberg, Region Skåne, commented that this year’s General Assembly was a great success and worked very well.

Financial Reports

Tiina Rajala, Development Director, Oulu Region (BSC Secretariat Host Region for 2023-2024) provided an update on the final Financial Report 2023 and a presentation of a revised Forecast Budget for 2024.

Presentation of the final Financial Report 2023

Tiina Rajala informed that the final financial report for 2023 includes the expenses of the Baltic Sea Commission from January to December 2023. The BSC budget for 2023 is based on 20 Member Regions (including the membership fees of Lapland). It is a total income of 140 000 EUR. (Each Region pays 7 000 EUR membership fees).

She presented the results for 2023. For the year 2023, in total, 143 696 EUR were spent, which represents 3 696 EUR more compared to the BSC 2023 approved budget. However, the exceeding budget is compensated by the accumulated surplus of the BSC, which amounted to 12 704 EUR as January 2023. So as January 2024, the surplus amounts to 9 008 EUR.

She also reminded the Executive Committee that the Council of Oulu Region has decided not to invoice the costs to handle the BSC Secretariat. Therefore, Oulu Region has not invoiced any of its own expenses to the BSC budget, such as salary, system, etc.

Discussion

Pekka Komu, Region Päijät-Häme, raised the question of raising membership fees to take into account inflation.

Pontus Lindberg, Region Skåne, agreed inflation has influenced all prices, and there should be a in-depth discussion on this next year or the year after to increase BSC membership fees.

Lucille Ehrhart, BSC Executive Secretary, reminded participants that the CPMR fees have increased for 2024 (3,7°%) to take into account the inflation of costs, but that the BSC fees have remained the same.

Magnus Lagergren, Region Örebro, agreed that there should be a decision soon on the increasing of membership fees to ensure stability of the BSC.

There was a consensus that proposal could be made at this General Assembly to increase the fees for 2025, or the new Executive Committee could look into the questions to raise membership fees for 2026. It was decided that this question of raising the membership fees should be addressed first with the national delegations and then at the next Executive Committee in March.
Presentation of the revised Forecast Budget for 2024

Tiina Rajala reminded participants that in September 2023, the BSC General Assembly approved a forecast budget for 2024 based on 19 Members Regions with a total budget of 133 000 EUR.

However, in November 2023, the CPMR Political Bureau approved the application of Region Västernorrland to join the CPMR and its Baltic Sea Commission as from 2024. This means that for 2024, the Baltic Sea Commission will count on 20 Member Regions, with a total income on 140 000 EUR.

Therefore, the Host Region and BSC President are suggesting to the Executive Committee to discuss and vote a revised forecast budget for 2024 to take into consideration the adhesion of Västernorrland in the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission. She presented the budget allocation.

The BSC Executive Committee approved the revised forecast budget for 2024.

Closing session

Any other business

Wolf Born, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, invited any region that works on gender equality issues to contact him.

Executive Committee meetings
  o 15 March 2024, Online
  o 10-12 September 2024, Päijät-Häme

CPMR statutory meetings
  o CPMR Political Bureau, 23 January 2024, Online
  o CPMR Political Bureau, 22 March 2024, Patras (Greece)
  o CPMR Political Bureau, June 2024 (Albania)
  o CPMR General Assembly, 2-4 October 2024, Gozo (Malta)

Closing remarks

Tomas Mörtsell, President of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, thanked all participants for their active participation and welcomed the very interesting programme. He expressed his appreciation for the discussions in the European Parliament and the willingness from the MEPs to organise a follow-up online meeting.

Richard Sjölund, Vice-President of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, also thanked Tomas Mörtsell for his excellent work in Chairing the meeting.