CPMR Baltic Sea Commission General Assembly

MINUTES

23 SEPTEMBER 2021

Approved by the 2022 CPMR BSC General Assembly, 26-27 September 2022

Morning Session

Ms Lucille Ehrhart, Executive Secretary, CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, introduced the General Assembly and explained the technicalities.

Opening session of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission General Assembly

Mr Jari Nahkanen, President of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, Member of the Board, Oulu Region, gave an opening speech. He welcomed participants, reviewed the work carried out over the last year on key policy areas and relating to the EU agenda, and introduced the General Assembly agenda. He thanked Mr Markku Markkula and Helsinki-Uusimaa for hosting the online General Assembly, which also marked the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission.

Mr Markku Markkula, Chair of the Board, Helsinki-Uusimaa, gave a welcome address on behalf of the host Region Helsinki-Uusimaa. He also welcomed and introduced the guest speakers and presented a video on Helsinki-Uusimaa – a metropolis by the sea.

Mr Cees Loggen, CPMR President, Regional Minister of Noord-Holland Province, addressed participants and congratulated the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission on its 25th anniversary, the long-standing cooperation which has made a significant contribution to the development of the Baltic Sea Region, and also to CPMR work. He stressed his willingness as CPMR President to reinforce the link between the Geographical Commissions and the CPMR as a whole. He emphasised the need for CPMR Member Regions to play a prominent role in tackling climate change, and that Baltic Sea regions are frontrunners in terms of promoting sustainability.
**Statutory issues**

*The Agenda of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission General Assembly 2021 was unanimously approved.*

Mr Gustav Hemming, Region Stockholm, informed participants that the Region has decided that BSC Membership provides added value and will continue their membership of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission. He invited the Executive Committee to Stockholm for the next meeting in November 2021.

*The Minutes of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission General Assembly held online on 22 October 2020 were unanimously approved.*

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**Let’s celebrate 25th years of BSC cooperation!**

Mr Jari Nahkanen, President of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, provided background information on the history and development of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission since 1996. He highlighted some milestones in Baltic Sea cooperation, such as the establishment of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. He pointed out that over the years, the CPMR BSC has become a well-established organisation in the Baltic Sea and EU arenas. The CPMR BSC Member Regions cooperate together to address joint challenges and to ensure a united voice towards the CPMR and the European Union. On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the organisation, he announced the publication of a 25th celebratory photo album. He introduced the prominent speakers of the session.

Mr Alexander Stubb, Director of School of Transnational Governance, European University Institute of Florence, gave a speech on the challenges and opportunities of Baltic Sea Region cooperation. He discussed how the Baltic Sea Region has changed over the years and highlighted the 3 main challenges that the Baltic Sea region faces: environment, climate and biodiversity; economics; and security politics.

Mr Jesper Skalberg Karlsson, Gotland, asked about the pandemic and outdoor activities, in particular the link between outdoor life and Baltic Sea Region, and whether it could be a driving factor to strengthen cooperation in the Region and an opportunity for branding on a global scale.

Mr Lyly Rajala, Oulu, asked if Mr Stubb sees the world in a different way when talking about the Baltic Sea area and Mediterranean, now that he lives in Italy, has he found new issues.

Mr Alexander Stubb replied that yes, it has made him appreciate the roughness and beauty of the Baltic Sea archipelago which is beyond imagination. He stressed the Baltic Sea Region is an unknown pearl that should be cherished and nurtured. He emphasised his support for cultural diversity and multi-culturalism.

Mr Nils-Olov Lindfors, Norrbotten, addressed forestry, carbon storage, active forestry and asked what more can be done at EU level regarding the Boreal ecosystem.

Mr Alexander Stubb noted that the Fit for 55 is a legislative proposal package that is the first global answer to climate change targets that have been put forward, and 3 things are needed, regulation, finance and innovation. It is important that the Regions lobby and make sure their interests are defended.
Mr Gustav Hemming, Region Stockholm, noted the collapsing stocks of cod and the dwindling stocks of herring, in spite of the EU’s ambition to be more knowledge-based in the management of quotas for fisheries. There is concern that the pelagic industrial fisheries seem to be one of the problems. He asked Mr Stubb what the Baltic Sea Commission could do, how can top-down and bottom-up politics be combined and how can higher priority be given to human consumption.

Mr Alexander Stubb gave 2 observations, on the substance and on lobbying. He felt it was not so much about quotas but about sea pollution and that lobbying is key.

Ms Annika Annerby Jansson, President of the Regional Council of Skåne and former CPMR President (2013-2014), reflected on the development of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission over the years, from its establishment in 1996, to the current situation 25 years later. She discussed the outlook for the Baltic Sea Region through the eyes of the Baltic Sea Commission and the major challenges relating to climate change, digitalisation, migration, and the COVID-19 outbreak. She stressed that the CPMR BSC Members have a strong position in research & development, industry & trade, entrepreneurship & well-developed welfare states. She highlighted that the BSR has paved the way for the implementation of the macro-regional approach marking a new beginning for the territorial cooperation policy of the European Union. She concluded by pointing out the importance of supporting and working with the force of the youth.

Mr Erik Bergkvist, Member of the European Parliament and former President of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission (2010-2012, Region Västerbotten), reflected on security issues and climate issues, and how they have changed. He explained that making democracy stronger is key to solving critical issues and stressed that the work of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission and the regions is extremely important.

Fostering territorial cooperation to build a stronger Baltic Sea Region – key issues at stake

This session was moderated by Mr Jari Nahkanen, President of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, and introduced by Mr Romek Kosenkranius, CPMR Baltic Sea Commission Vice-President, Mayor of Pärnu, Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities.

In his introduction, Mr Romek Kosenkranius asked Ms Simona Manova what is the European Commission’s approach to foster the role of regions in the implementation of the new Action Plan of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), and also what is the European Commission’s approach to strengthen the link between mainstream programmes and the Strategy? He then asked Mr Olav Berstad to explain more about the place of Arctic issues during the Norwegian Presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, and how the CPMR BSC can contribute to that agenda.

Ms Simeona Manova, Member of the Cabinet of the EU Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, gave a keynote speech and highlighted that the regions of the Baltic Sea Commission regions are trailblazers and pioneers with regard to sustainability and digitalisation in a socially inclusive way. She stressed that sustainability must go hand in hand with prosperity and also introduced the New European Bauhaus.
**Mr Olav Berstad**, Senior Adviser, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, Chair of the Committee of Senior Officials, Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), gave a keynote speech on the Presidency of the CBSS. He also addressed the green transition and presented an invitation for increased cooperation. He concluded that cooperation and cohesion cannot be mandated from above, they need to develop naturally; and emphasised the importance for the Arctic to continue to be a peaceful and stable region.

**Mr Pyry Niemi**, President, Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC), emphasised that trust, solidarity and long-standing experienced engagement form the stable ground as a pre-condition to reach common goals and sustainably increase the regions prosperity. He welcomed the opportunities to exchange information on each other’s activities and deepen cooperation between the BSPC and CPMR BSC organisations and expressed his wish to continue working together.

**Debate with CPMR BSC Members**

**Ms Åsa Johansson**, Vice-President of the Regional Development Committee, Regional Council of Värmland, gave a presentation on cross-border cooperation from the perspective of Sweden-Norway and in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequences of the crisis on the border. She also introduced the cooperation opportunities in the new Interreg Sweden-Norway programme 2021-2027. She stressed the importance of Interreg programmes for regional development and highlighted the importance of timely adoption of the programmes.

**Mr Jaakko Mikkola**, Regional Mayor, Kymenlaakso Regional Council, addressed cross-border cooperation from the Finland-Russia perspective and provided information on the objectives of the South-East Finland-Russia Interreg programme 2021-2027 and the Central Baltic Interreg programme. He asked Ms Simeona Manova what is the European Commission’s approach to the final agreement to maintain maritime cross-border programmes and if the European Commission may attempt to merge these programmes with transnational programmes after 2027?

**Mr Wolf Born**, Head of Unit Baltic Sea Cooperation, Ministry of the Interior and for Europe, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, acknowledged that a lot of activities take place at the local and regional level, and he reacted to 3 points made by Mr Berstad, on Russia, on sustainability and how to better involve society in this transition period, and on industrial competitiveness in the Baltic Sea Region. He also highlighted the issue of Baltic literacy. He concluded by asking Mr Berstad to elaborate on the CBSS Expert Group on Sustainable Development.

**Ms Simeona Manova** reacted to the speeches by the regional representatives. She noted the importance to focus on the here and now and stressed the importance of the tourism sector in developing regions, noting that it could empower local communities. She acknowledged that ocean literacy is not only for citizens but also for visitors.

**Mr Olav Berstad** explained that economic and social interaction across the border has been a big issue during the COVID-19 pandemic which also had an impact on mobility in the area. He stressed the importance of working at different political and administrative levels and addressed the issue of how to involve Russia. He highlighted that a lot can be achieved at expert level.
Virtual Networking Village

Participants were invited to attend one virtual stand according to their interests. This session was interactive and enabled participants to discuss one specific topic in three parallel virtual stands addressing:

- The impact of the recovery plan on Cohesion Policy and implications for Regions, by Mr Francesco Molica, Director for Regional Policy, CPMR. The presentation is accessible [HERE](#).
- The new Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme and opportunities for BSC Member Regions, by Mr Jozsef Attila Darabos, Project Officer, Joint Secretariat of Interreg Baltic Sea Programme. The presentation is accessible [HERE](#).
- Maritime cooperation supported by Interreg, by Mr Philipp Schwartz, Interact, Knowledge of the seas network. The presentation is accessible [HERE](#).

Afternoon Session

Fostering the sustainable development of the Baltic Sea Regions via blue economy

Mr Jari Nahkanen, President, CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, introduced the session and stressed that promoting a clean Baltic Sea is essential for the sustainable development of the Baltic Sea Region and has been a core priority of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission since its establishment in 1996. He stressed the economic, environmental, and social aspects of the Baltic Sea. In addressing Ms Charlina Vitcheva, he welcomed the organisation of the “Our Baltic” conference last year by DG MARE, and that Commissioner Sinkevičius mentioned the momentum to foster joint efforts between EU, national and regional levels to enable healthy marine ecosystems and to preserve biodiversity in the Baltic Sea Region.

Ms Eleni Marianou, Secretary General of CPMR, moderated the session.

Ms Charlina Vitcheva, Director General, Directorate General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, European Commission, gave a keynote speech. She reflected on her collaboration with the CPMR and BSC over the years, noting that her first public appearance as a Director in DG REGIO was in Visby for the launch of the new macro-regional strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. She stressed that the Baltic Sea is extremely good at cooperation, which is underpinned by a tradition of cooperation, and research and innovation. The Sustainable Blue Growth Agenda for the Baltic Sea Region highlighted the extraordinary potential of the region to drive sustainable development. Referring to the Ministerial Conference held last year, she informed participants that work on the basis of the Declaration has continued and the commitment is clear towards sustainability. She noted that the Commission has been working closely with stakeholders to ensure that the maritime dimension is featured in the newest, most up to date, revised Action Plan of this EU strategy for the Region. She remained convinced that the Region has huge potential to become one of the world’s leading regions in green growth and sustainable development. She then discussed the current health and climate change crises, and the need to step up efforts and for cooperation in the
region to be even more strategic, more horizontal, and more coordinated. She emphasised the importance for all groups and sectors to unite around a single vision. Entire value chains should also continue to be looked into. Challenges come with huge potential for new development, new business opportunities and new jobs and skills. She stated that there is space in the sea for everyone, and the most important thing is that there are investments in the transformation towards sustainability in all sectors, in parallel to the economic recovery and the blue economy, which has a lot to offer and is driven by smart solutions and innovation. Information was provided on relevant ambitious projects to demonstrate the good track record, for example the pan-Baltic Scope project. She invited the Baltic States to mobilise mainstream funding opportunities in support of blue economy. She concluded by mentioning the very important Communication on the sustainable blue economy launched in May 2021 which embeds the blue element of the blue economy into the Green Deal objective.

**Debate with BSC Member Regions**

**Ms Tiina Perho**, SouthWest Finland Region, Chair of the BSC Maritime Working Group, welcomed the new Sustainable Blue Economy Strategy (SBE) recently published by the European Commission and noted that the BSC Maritime Working Group has closely followed its development. She stressed that involving regional and local authorities will be essential to deliver on a sustainable blue economy. She discussed blue skills and coastal tourism and concluded by asking Ms Charlina Vitcheva how the European Commission foresees the role of regions in the Blue Forum, as indicated in the SBE communication.

**Ms Eleni Marianou** asked how can we boost sustainable coastal tourism?

**Ms Charlina Vitcheva** acknowledged that one of the main engagement elements will be the Blue Forum, which is to engage with all the stakeholders, as they all have a key role to play. Regarding tourism, the European Commission has launched a public consultation on a staff working document outlining possible scenarios for a transitional pathway to a more resilient and sustainable tourism ecosystem, where regions can submit their views to help to shape future EU policies related to tourism.

**Mr Tomas Mörtsell**, Region Västerbotten, Chair of the BSC Arctic Task Force and Vice-President of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, discussed the future EU Arctic Policy. He highlighted the ever-increasing global focus on the Arctic and stressed the accelerating environmental strains and economic interests must not change the sound conditions for cooperation. The need for more enhanced multi-lateral and multi-level cooperation to tackle challenges and seize opportunities for sustainable development is greater than ever and there needs to be a change of focus when making policy for the EU Arctic. He stressed there are key EU instruments that can be tailored by the regional level to overcome Arctic challenges and realise potential, such as structural and investment funds, which requires regions to work with smart specialisation strategies and bottom-up approaches to sustainable development.

**Ms Eleni Marianou** asked Ms Charlina Vitcheva how she sees this multi-level governance actually taking place in the future planning on the EU Arctic Strategy.
Ms Charlina Vitcheva replied that the Arctic has a crucial role from the point of view of the impact of climate on its environment and on the other hand the return impact of the Arctic on climate for the whole planet. She noted that every partner at all levels of multi-level governance will be relied on to do their job. Participants were invited to several events that demonstrate that the dialogue is in the DNA of what the European Commission wants to do and that one of the pillars continues to be the indigenous people and strengthening the engagement to work with them. The European Commission will continue with an inclusive approach at all levels and will publish its new EU Arctic Policy early in October.

Mr Markku Markkula, Helsinki-Uusimaa Region, Chair of the BSC Energy and Climate Working Group, addressed EU instruments especially the EU Missions. He stressed the need to create a joint roadmap for all Baltic Sea Regions to reach climate neutrality as European forerunners, and the need to increase Baltic Sea regional collaboration to strengthen the Baltic Sea macro-regional policy. He asked how important the collaboration is between the different missions and the use of cohesion fund.

Ms Eleni Marianou asked for further details on the blue economy platform and how can the CPMR be involved in it, and also on the energy hub in the Baltic.

Ms Charlina Vitcheva replied that the platform is in the making, it has a lot of potential and there is much interest in it. She invited the CPMR to put forward ideas and engage in future workshops. She then provided further information on the energy hub. She explained the importance of marrying funds at the level of the programming exercise.

Mr Bosse Andersson, Region Stockholm, Chair of the BSC Transport Working Group, focused on ports as hubs of the Sustainable Blue Economy. He provided information on positive success stories in the Baltic Sea Region to decarbonise maritime transport, and stressed it is important to focus on innovation, research and technology in support of decarbonisation. He asked how the European Commission will further support the development of green technologies for maritime vessels, and if Ms Vitcheva had any reflections to share on how the EU could support this smart development, in order to pursue the transition.

Ms Eleni Marianou asked how can the clean technology that exists be used as much as possible to ensure the vessels are decarbonised.

Ms Charlina Vitcheva agreed that decarbonisation at sea is critical. She provided information on a recent report which shows the potential of change. She explained that the good examples given need to be replicated and scaled up and discussed how technologies have improved.

BSC Activity Report 2020-2021 and Work Plan 2021-2023

Ms Lucille Ehrhart, Executive Secretary, CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, presented the BSC Activity Report for 2020-2021 (see presentation). She provided an update on CPMR BSC activities in various policy areas (transport, energy and climate, maritime, Arctic and EUSBSR) and regarding communication and membership issues.
Ms Lucille Ehrhart presented the BSC Work Plan for 2021-2023, and provided information on the vision, mission, goals, and action plans of the CPMR BSC Working Groups and Task Force, as well as the political priorities.

*The Activity Report and Work Plan were unanimously approved.*

### 2021 Resolution of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission

**Mr Jari Nahkanen**, President of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, presented the 2021 CPMR BSC Resolution and explained the amendments that had been submitted.

*The 2021 CPMR Baltic Sea Commission Resolution was unanimously approved.*

### Financial Papers

**Mr Tomas Mörtsell**, Region Västerbotten, CPMR Baltic Sea Commission Vice-President and representative of the host Region of the BSC Secretariat, presented the Financial Reports 2020 and up to August 2021, and the Forecast Budget 2022 (these papers are available upon request from the BSC Secretariat). He noted that the BSC Secretariat is now funded only by membership fees since July 2020. All Members have paid their membership fee for 2020. He stressed that for 2020, there is a surplus of 34 399 EUR, mainly due to the fact of lower costs for travels and the Executive Secretary post. He stressed that the Executive Committee has decided that the surplus budget will be kept to deal with possible annual variations in income, or to be used for special events/projects. It is the Baltic Sea Commission’s own reserve and capital, that can be used in a strategic way. Now this surplus is in the CPMR account, earmarked for the Baltic Sea Commission.

He kindly reminded participants that the 2020 BSC General Assembly decided, on the proposal of the Executive Committee, to raise the membership fee as from 2021 to 7 000 EUR, so the BSC Secretariat costs could be covered only by membership. He explained the Financial Report 2021 up to August, with a total revenue based on 19 Members, amounting to 133 000 euros. He then presented the proposed Forecast Budget for 2022 based on 18 Member Regions. The Executive Committee has proposed to forecast 140 000 EUR expenses by using 14 000 from the surplus. It is proposed to forecast 140 000 EUR expenses to be able to keep the ambition of actions for the BSC as a normal year, which includes travel.

*The Financial Reports were unanimously approved.*

*The Forecast Budget 2022 was unanimously approved.*

### Closing session

Ms Lucille Ehrhart presented the upcoming meetings of the CPMR and the CPMR BSC during the autumn 2021.

**Mr Jari Nahkanen**, President of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission thanked all the speakers and the participants and concluded the Baltic Sea Commission General Assembly.
CPMR Baltic Sea Commission General Assembly

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Paulina Aleksander, Sub-Inspector, BSSSC Secretariat
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Bodo Bahr, Secretary General, Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC)
Erik Bergkvist, MEP, European Parliament
Olav Berstad, Senior Adviser, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
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