28th GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE CPMR BALTIC SEA COMMISSION
19-20 SEPTEMBER 2023 | UMEÅ AND VAASA
Hosted by Region Västerbotten (Sweden) and Region Ostrobothnia (Finland)

Navigating to a sustainable, resilient, innovative and well-connected Baltic Sea Region

MINUTES
Approved by the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission General Assembly
21-23 May 2024, Kotka (Kymenlaakso Region)
List of participants available here

TUESDAY 19 SEPTEMBER 2023

In the morning, BSC members were invited to participate in a visit of Umeå Energi, during which CEO Jan Ridfeldt presented the organisation.

Session 1: Opening Session and Institutional Welcome
In his opening remarks, CPMR Baltic Sea Commission President Mr Tomas Mörtsell (Västerbotten):
- Welcomed BSC Members and guest speakers to the event and emphasised the strong symbolism of two regions hosting together the General Assembly. He highlighted the strong cross-border cooperation between Västerbotten and Ostrobothnia. He gave as an example of this cooperation the establishment of the Aurora Botnia ferry, one of the most environmentally friendly ferries in the world, that participants will be invited to take later in the day.
• He highlighted the current challenges faced in the Baltic Sea Region, such as the negative consequences of the war in Ukraine and the climate and energy crises. He stressed the importance for the regions to address together these joint challenges, and the key role of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission to facilitate this cooperation. He then recalled some highlights of the BSC lobbying work over the last year.

• He warmly welcomed Lapland Regional Council, as a new member region of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission.

In his opening remarks Mr Davide Strangis, Deputy Secretary General of the CPMR:
• Highlighted recent CPMR and BSC achievements. For example, in March 2023 there was a meeting with the EU Commissioner for Budget and Administration, Mr Johannes Hahn, involving two BSC Member Regions (Skåne and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) in delivering important messages for the EU budget 2021-2027. He praised the important contribution of the BSC members in CPMR lobbying work on the revision of the TEN-T regulation, as well in other sectorial policies.

• Extended his warm welcome to Region Lapland, emphasising its important contribution in CPMR work related to EU Arctic and energy policies.

• Mentioned the EU elections and on-going negotiations on key legislative files, emphasising the CPMR’s role in shaping the future of the EU budget and key policies.

• Explained the upcoming steps towards the shaping of the CPMR Manifesto to be put for vote during the 51st CPMR General Assembly in St Malo, Brittany, also marked by the celebration of CPMR 50th anniversary.

• Mentioned the resignation of CPMR President Cees Loggen, and the Interim Presidency of Ms Gunn Marit Helgesen. The new CPMR President will be elected during the CPMR General Assembly in St Malo.

Mr Erik Bergkvist, Member of the European Parliament, delivered a video message in which he stressed the importance of high cooperative standards in the Baltic Sea Region for addressing EU-level challenges. He highlighted the BSC’s potential to offer advanced green technologies and materials for energy and climate transition of the EU.

Statutory issues
• The Agenda of the 28th Baltic Sea Commission General Assembly was unanimously approved.
• The Minutes of the 27th Baltic Sea Commission General Assembly held in Helsinki in September 2022 were unanimously approved.

Session 2: Meeting regional challenges under a different geopolitical landscape in the Baltic Sea Region
Since 2022, the global geopolitical landscape has fundamentally changed, and with it also the framework conditions for cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region. This session highlighted the impact of these changes on regional authorities and which role pan-Baltic organisations, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the EU can play to better meet these challenges. The session also discussed how best to jointly promote the Baltic Sea Region’s interests in view of a renewed European Parliament and College of Commissioners in 2024.

The session was moderated by Mr Wolf Born (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern), who welcomed two guest speakers.
Ms Helena Tuuri, Finnish Ambassador for Baltic Sea Affairs presented Finland priorities as Chair of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) from July 2023 to July 2024:

- Finland took over the CBSS Chairmanship from Germany from 1 July 2023. She highlighted that the work of the CBSS has been impacted by the new geopolitical situation. As a result, Russia chose to withdraw from the CBSS. Since then, the organisation has transformed and now comprises more like-minded member states. This new dynamic allows for more direct and effective problem-solving and discussions.

- Finland's CBSS Presidency is organised around three key priorities: Baltic Sea Region safety and security, sustainable development, and the promotion of Baltic identity.

Ms Alda Nikodemusa, Head of Secretariat of VASAB, presented the VASAB vision 2040 for a vibrant, resilient and well-connected Baltic Sea Region, emphasising the significance of stakeholder involvement in shaping territorial development of the Baltic Sea Region. See her presentation here.

Q&A session with the panellists:

Mr Jouni Jussinniemi (Oulu Region): Highlighted rising political tensions in the Baltic Sea Region due to Russia’s aggression towards Ukraine. Baltic countries, like Finland, are now facing challenges they were not fully prepared for. The key lesson learned is the need to strengthen solidarity between Baltic regions and the importance of an effective Cohesion Policy.

Mr Mats Brandt (Ostrobothnia): Expressed interest in offshore wind energy and the need to implement it in the Baltic Sea Region at a rapid pace, similar to the North Sea Region. He also inquired about strategies for achieving this, such as industrial interlinkages or other solutions.

Ms Helena Tuuri: Emphasised that CBSS is an organisation for cooperation, and all its members are aware of the geopolitical cooperation and socio-economic challenges in regions sharing a border with Russia. Interest groups can play a role in finding solutions. Regarding offshore wind energy, the CBSS has had discussions about it.

Ms Alda Nikodemusa: Addressed the challenges faced by border regions, suggesting that national governments and regions with borders with Russia can seek help from VASAB to identify topics to work on. Regarding offshore wind, VASAB has a Maritime Spatial Planning Working Group that has been active for 30 years, providing a platform for practitioners and decision-makers to exchange views.

Mr Wolf Born: In view of the EU elections approaching in June 2024, and the appointment of a new College of EU Commissioners at the end of 2024, he asked the panellists about key EU policies that can position the Baltic Sea Region at the forefront of the EU agenda.

Ms Helena Tuuri: Mentioned that the CBSS has plans to activate Baltic Youth to engage in shaping EU policy.

Ms Alda Nikodemusa: Highlighted that Cohesion Policy is key for the Baltic Sea Region, not just for its eastern part, due to various challenges, including demographic decline.
Session 3: Defending cohesion through reforms... but what kind of reforms mid-term and long-term?

Due to geopolitical changes, financial pressures on the EU budget and rigidities of Cohesion Policy, there is a growing risk that reforms weaken the territorial dimension of the policy for the period post-2027. The CPMR and its Member Regions have been engaged in developing constructive reform proposals to ensure that Cohesion Policy retains its territorial dimension in line with the subsidiarity principle and multi-level governance while improving the policy performance on the ground. (Cf. CPMR proposals on simplification, and CPMR proposals on Interreg).

Mr Jorge Núñez Ferrer, CPMR Director for Regional Policy and EU Budget, presented the state of play in Cohesion Policy and the revision of the mid-term EU budget. His presentation can be found here.

- Cohesion Policy is facing an identity crisis, with its original purpose being to reduce regional disparities and promote multilevel governance and subsidiarity.
- Developments such as limited EU budget resources and the use of Cohesion Policy to finance various EU objectives have caused challenges.
- The creation of a separate recovery programme was partially due to issues within Cohesion Policy.
- There are on-going institutional discussions within the European Commission, including trends towards mission orientation and centralisation.
- Managing changes and risks for Cohesion Policy:
  - There are concerns about how to manage changes and milestones within Cohesion Policy.
  - Questions arise about who will prepare the strategy and how regions will create pockets for projects.
  - Specific directives may be needed for technology-specific or geographical indications.
- Roles of the CPMR and Stakeholders:
  - The CPMR aims to develop a counternarrative, defend multilevel governance, and propose solutions that align with regional needs and interests.
  - Solutions to improve performance and impact are essential.
  - Public financial management, capacity building, and civil service modernisation are also crucial.
  - The CPMR seeks input from stakeholders to shape proposals and advocate for Cohesion Policy.

Q&A Session for Member Regions and Mr Jorge Núñez Ferrer:

1. **Mr Jan Owe-Larsson (Östergötland)**: raised concerns about the upcoming programming period and how to anticipate changes in Cohesion Policy.

   **Response (Jorge Núñez Ferrer)**: Typically, the European Commission prepares proposals. Currently, there are drafts and sketches of proposals that are influenceable before being published. The focus is on being present and influencing the Commission, especially DG ECFIN, to highlight the efficiency of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). DG REGIO is supportive. It is important to influence other DGs as well to improve the reputation of regional policy and acknowledge successful reforms in certain countries.

2. **Ms Päivi Ekdahl (Lapland)**: Raised concerns about the Sovereignty Fund diverting 10 billion Euros from Cohesion Policy to regions that can invest in hi-tech industries, potentially harming regions struggling with balance.
Response (Jorge Núñez Ferrer): Addressed the challenge of creating a joint message against the Sovereignty Fund and suggested advocating for transforming cohesion funding into indirect state funding.

3. Ms Tarja Nuotio (Southwest Finland): Mentioned a bias against Cohesion Policy, as highlighted by Ursula Von der Leyen, and the need to preserve its funding instruments.
   Response (Jorge Núñez Ferrer): Emphasised the mission to defend the bottom-up approach of Cohesion Policy.

4. Mr Jerker Johnson (Ostrobothnia): Discussed growing disparities between EU regions and the need to secure more state funding for Western Finland.
   Response (Jorge Núñez Ferrer): Acknowledged the challenge of finding a common position and encouraged exploring solutions.

5. Mr Filip Reinhag (Region Gotland): Noted the need to communicate the achievements of Cohesion Policy, advocated for a place-based approach, and mentioned the desire for an Island Pact.
   Response (Jorge Núñez Ferrer): Underlined the importance of a new Cohesion Policy that aligns with regional needs.

6. Ms Anna-Riikka Karhunen (Kymenlaakso): Highlighted challenges faced by South-East Finnish regions due to Russia’s aggression and the need for alternative Interreg Programmes.
   Response (Jorge Núñez Ferrer): Recognised the difficulties and the importance of taking into account border regions and energy as new topics in Cohesion Policy.

7. Mr Erik-Widar Andersson (Jämtland Härjedalen): Expressed the desire for Cohesion Policy to actively promote investment in key policy areas.
   Response (Jorge Núñez Ferrer): Agreed that the focus should be on results rather than paperwork.

8. Mr Jouni Jussinniemi (Oulu): Asked about how to make Cohesion Policy more effective.
   Response (Jorge Núñez Ferrer): Noted that with good control systems in countries, EU monitoring is usually not necessary. He emphasised the need for a strong Commissioner in the next European Commission to prioritise Cohesion Policy and acknowledged the importance of addressing borders and energy as new topics. He also noted the challenge of making platforms sustainable.

Session 4: Membership – Welcome Lapland!

Ms Tanja Joona, Member of the Board of the Regional Council of Lapland, presented Lapland, as a new Member of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission since March 2023. See her presentation here.

Session 5: Strengthening innovativeness and regional innovation collaboration in the Baltic Sea Region – perspectives and challenges

Session 5 of the conference centred on the pressing need for regions and cities within the Baltic Sea Region to enhance their innovativeness. This objective requires a concerted effort involving both top-down and bottom-up approaches. The session aimed to shed light on new European instruments and regional experiences, with a focus on the enhanced role of innovation. Key insights were shared regarding the prospects of developing regional innovation ecosystems.

Mr Markku Markkula (Helsinki-Uusimaa), Chair of the BSC Energy and Climate Working Group, set the stage with an opening statement:
- He emphasised that regional innovation demands an integrated approach that encompasses both learning and collaboration. He underlined the crucial role of learning in fostering innovation.
The importance of regional collaboration was highlighted, along with the challenges and limitations inherent in this endeavour.

At EU level, innovation hinges on the enhancement of learning and cooperation, forging new partnerships, and creating fresh coalitions. The EU Innovation Agenda was presented as a pivotal document guiding these efforts.

The session emphasised the significance of place-based approaches, with smart specialisation, particularly in the energy sector, as an illustrative example of how it can drive innovation.

**Dr Johan Stierna**, Senior Policy Officer, Joint Research Centre Seville, European Commission, delivered insights on the PRI initiative and its strategic approach. See his presentation here:

- The presentation explored the European Union’s interest in innovation and transformation due to global environmental challenges.
- The contemporary era was described as one of historic change, marked by a convergence of digital and energy transformations alongside climate change concerns and threats to planetary boundaries.
- Key drivers for transformation included the New Industrial Policy and a security dimension, presenting diverse impacts on regions and cities within the Baltic Sea Region.
- The imperative for transformation was stressed: regions and cities were positioned as drivers of Europe's transformation toward competitive sustainability.
- Transformative EU policies, combining resources, regulations, reforms, infrastructure, and trade, were highlighted, with a focus on the Digital Agenda and the European Green Deal.
- The PRI Pilot initiative involves 6 Member States, 7 cities, and 63 regions and is a driving force for learning and innovation in the Baltic Sea Region.
- Principal features of the PRI initiative were detailed, including its directionality, synergies of funding, governance structures, experimentalism, the promotion of pan-European value chains, and the establishment of a scientific framework.
- The PRI initiative’s commitment to addressing trade-offs and fostering place-based and transformative innovation was emphasised.
- Prospects for future initiatives included the development of regional innovation valleys, further pilot projects in collaboration with the European Parliament, increased collaboration, heightened awareness, and capacity building.

**Dr Jukka Teräs**, CEO of Norrum Oy, provided insights into the S3 Västerbotten Roadmap, which focuses on smart economic regional transformation missions. See his presentation here:

- The roadmap's complementarity with regional innovation and development strategies was emphasised.
- The roadmap was presented as an amalgamation of smart specialisation and the PRI initiative, with a keen emphasis on international cooperation.
- The significance of international collaboration, particularly with Nordic and Baltic Sea Region partners, was highlighted as central to the roadmap's success.

**Regional Views on the Partnership for Regional Innovation (PRI):**

**Ms Talvikki Jori**, Deputy Board Member, Southwest Finland, CPMR Vice-President in charge of maritime affairs:

- Highlighted that 20% of Southwest Finland's business is in the food chain sector, including wheat, vegetable plants, proteins, meat, and fishing.
- Key industries in Southwest Finland include maritime (shipbuilding), automotive, among others, all of which have international significance and are open to collaboration within the Baltic Sea Region.

- Emphasised the importance of lobbying and advocacy for enhancing cooperation within the Baltic Sea Region and promoting regional industries. This effort involves active participation in organisations such as the CPMR, CPMR BSC, Baltic Sea Regions S3 Directors Network (chaired by Västerbotten), and the European Commission’s Partnership for Regional Innovation (PRI).

- Cooperation with PRI has been profitable, but it also poses challenges, particularly regarding the alignment of resources and funding and the promotion of public-private dialogue.

- Southwest Finland aims to become a Regional Innovation Valley in global food security and is open to committed cooperation in food systems.

- Southwest Finland will be present at the EU-Baltic Sea Region Annual Forum in Riga in October 2023 and invites CPMR BSC Member Regions to join this collaboration.

**Mr Jerker Johnson**, Coordinator International Affairs (Ostrobothnia):

- Shared the experience of Ostrobothnia with the PRI initiative, noting that Ostrobothnia joined the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) in 2014 due to its interest in energy technology and renewable energy generation, emphasising a place-based approach.

- The energy transition in Ostrobothnia is thriving, thanks to Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) in offshore wind power and renewable fuels.

- Mentioned a partnership between Umeå, Vaasa, and the Patagonian city of Magallanes in a joint project. These cities face the challenge of FDIs, the majority of which come from multinational corporations. This poses risks to local businesses. Smaller regions like Ostrobothnia need to cooperate to create a critical mass, as they are the most vulnerable to large amounts of foreign direct investment.

- Suggested the need for a reflection on whether to unlock all regulations and open up everything or focus on unlocking the institutional framework within regions.

- Suggested the publication of relevant findings and insights.

**Ms Kajsa Sundström Van Zeveren**, Head of Region Värmland European Office in Brussels, presented the experience of the Mid-Sweden Pilot Consortium in PRI. See her presentation [here](#).

- Results and plans for the PRI initiative include engagements at all levels of administration, from civil servants to Directors and politicians in the regions.

- A high-level meeting on PRI is planned in Dalarna within the framework of the Swedish Presidency.

- The Consortium aims to foster an improved regional dialogue and closer cooperation with the European Commission and the Joint Research Centre (JRC).

- Policy development through position papers on regional innovation and co-financing issues is a part of their strategy.

- An on-going application from North Middle Sweden seeks to become a Regional Innovation Valley (RIV).

**Mr Jonas Lundström**, Head of Enterprise, Innovation, and Social Development Region Västerbotten:

- Presented the Network of Directors for the Baltic Sea Region, focusing on addressing dynamic targets in the region. Currently, 10 Regions are part of this new network, and they welcome additional participation.

- He mentioned former Interreg project LARS (Learning Among Regions on Smart Specialisation).
Debate Session:

1. Mr Johan Stierna (JRC):
   -Expressed JRC’s commitment to helping regions to the best of their ability.
   -Emphasised that the lead in regional innovation should come from the regions themselves. Nordic regions, in particular, have favourable conditions, including common mindsets, similarities, similar challenges, and a cooperative culture. These regions should play a role in connecting with other regions in Europe that have different institutional frameworks and mindsets.
   -Highlighted the food system as an interesting field to create value in local supply chains.
   -He pointed out the importance of distinguishing between science and technology, as Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) can vary in different industrial sectors.
   -Emphasised that one of the key challenges is societal transformation related to transformative innovation, and it is a shared responsibility to manage it effectively.

2. Ms Päivi Ekdahl (Lapland):
   -Mentioned the participation in the Directors Network for the Baltic Sea Region and expressed the interest of Northeast Finland (N/E Finland) in becoming a Regional Innovation Valley (RIV). Lapland has also pursued this goal individually.
   -Highlighted the potential of the cooperation network with Nordic neighbours and stressed the importance of strengthening cooperation within the Nordic region.
   -Expressed a need for clearer messages from the JRC, European Commission (EC), and managing authorities of Regional Development Funds regarding how regions can practically combine different funding sources.

3. Mr Glenn Berggård (Norrbotten):
   -Proposed that the working methods introduced with the Partnership for Regional Innovation (PRI) should be complemented with simplification. Simplification would enable regional administrators to participate in the shaping and implementation of PRI initiatives more easily, ultimately creating greater consensus. Mr Berggård emphasised that the existing rules are very difficult and represent a barrier, highlighting the need for simplification.

Presentation by Mr Esa Kokkonen (Coordinator of Policy Area Innovation, EUSBSR):

- Discussed the importance of taking a macro-regional approach to regional innovation in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR).
- Emphasised the role of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission as a pan-Baltic consortium of regions that successfully lobbies for regional development policies in the Baltic Sea Region.
- Highlighted that the CPMR BSC, being well-established and EU-wide, possesses technical expertise on policy, making it an optimal platform for improving macro-regional cooperation, especially in the Baltic Sea Region.
- Underlined the significance of innovation in the Baltic Sea Region, particularly for smaller players in the global context. These regions need to create a critical mass and scale up innovation and collaboration to effectively address common challenges specific to the Baltic Sea Region.
- Presented the EUSBSR Policy Area Innovation’s perspectives and challenges to take a macro-regional approach to regional innovation, as well as the relating Actions: (1) challenge-driven innovation, (2) digital innovation and transformation, and (3) co-creative innovation.
Welcome on the Aurora Ferry

In his welcome remarks, Mr Rickard Carstedt (Chair of the Regional Development Committee of Region Västerbotten) highlighted North Sweden’s focus on fossil-free steel, batteries, and electric aviation. He stressed that cooperation is viewed by Region Västerbotten as a long-term issue.

Session 6: Building resilient transport systems in the Baltic Sea Region

The moderator of the session, Ms Lotta Rönström (Senior Advisor at North Sweden EU Office), highlighted the aim of the session to discuss the new geopolitical context and its implications on transport, infrastructures and connections and how to create a resilient transport system.

She recalled the final step of the revision of the TEN-T (Trans-European Transport Network) Regulation in EU Transport Policy. The Port of Vaasa is noted as not yet included, despite being considered a key link for East-West connections, and it is suggested that it should be recognised as a TEN-T harbour.

Mr Mathias Lindström (Director of Kvarken Council):
- The Baltic Sea Region is impacted by Russia’s aggression in Ukraine and the green transition.
- It is important to consider the long-lasting closure of the Russian border and the need for Critical Raw Materials (CRMs) for the energy transition.
- Emphasis is placed on analysing all divisions, including East-West (E/W) and North-South (N/S) dynamics.
- Infrastructure investments in Europe are necessary, as well as ensuring military mobility and security of supply.
- There is a call for the EU to prioritise investments to advance the green transition and military mobility.

Ms Sari Nurro (Chair of the BSC Maritime Working Group, Oulu Region):
- Transport and logistics strategies in northern regions need to consider long-term instability due to Russia's war.
- Anticipated programmes in Northern Finland and Northern Norway require a logistic and transport infrastructure plan.
- There is an emphasis on the strategic importance of North Finnish and North Swedish ports, particularly in the context of military mobility.

Mr Tarmo Ots (Coordinator of Policy Area Transport, EUSBSR, Estonian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications):
- Transport in the Baltic Sea Region is influenced by various factors, including the EU Green Deal, changing energy networks, challenges in adopting new fuels for trucks, aviation issues, the war in Ukraine, old infrastructure, and evolving technologies.
- Cooperation between pan-Baltic organisations is viewed as crucial, and discussions include topics such as green shipping corridors.
- Challenges related to financing and the difficulty of removing Ostrobothnian ports from the TEN-T Core Network are mentioned.
- The importance of drones and electric aviation is highlighted, with a call for more projects dedicated to these areas.
Ms Åsa Ågren Wikström (Vice-Chair of the Regional Development Committee of Region Västerbotten and Vice-Chairperson of the Scandria Alliance):
- The increasing importance of recognising interconnections between North/South and East/West regions was stressed.
- Infrastructure development, especially in railways and roads, is crucial for sustainable transport.
- Nordic cooperation is seen as a positive advancement, allowing for coordinated actions and planning.
- Sustainable transport solutions are attainable through innovative approaches, such as the environmentally friendly Aurora Bothnia ferry.

Mr Magnus Lagergren (Chair of the BSC Transport Working Group, Örebro Region):
- The importance of links, including the Stockholm link, was highlighted.
- Challenges include the need for regional involvement in decision-making and the necessity of having a solid infrastructural foundation.
- The on-going discussions within CPMR BSC include topics related to military mobility, infrastructure, and logistics.
- Planning for drone areas and their integration into transport systems is essential.

Discussion:

Mr Wolf Born:
- Emphasised the need for realistic time horizons in infrastructure planning and development.
- Called for the mobilisation of funding instruments from EU and national levels for faster solutions.
- Advocated for the restoration of cooperation among Energy Ministers in the Baltic Sea Region.

Mr Richard Sjölund:
- Expressed concerns about the possible removal of "comprehensive ports" from the core network.
- Highlighted the importance of funding for railroads and other transport dimensions, particularly in the context of the energy transition and offshore energy potential.

WEDNESDAY 20 SEPTEMBER 2023

Session 7: Towards a more energy resilient Baltic Sea Region

The second day of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission’s General Assembly was opened by Mr Richard Sjölund, Vice-President of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission and Vice-Chair of the Board of Ostrobothnia:
- Emphasised the paramount importance of sustainability when discussing the transport system.
- Pointed out that the Kvarken environment is a shared heritage but is also environmentally fragile. He underlined the collective responsibility to take every measure to protect this sensitive ecosystem.
- Collaboration among Västernorrland, Västerbotten, and Ostrobothnia was highlighted as essential to safeguarding the Kvarken archipelago. The protection and preservation of this unique natural environment are a shared objective.
- Expressed appreciation to the CPMR for the assistance provided in bringing Ostrobothnia's port back into the TEN-T core network. This acknowledgment reflects the significance of regional and international cooperation in addressing transport infrastructure challenges.

Ms Elsi Katainen, Member of the European Parliament delivered a video address message.
Moderation by Ms Britt Karlsson Green, Strategist at Region Skåne:
- Implementation of Fit for 55 must be discussed attentively.
- Importance of energy security and sustainability in the Baltic Sea Region was stressed.
- Factors with the greatest impact on regional development: (1) technology, (2) society and environment, (3) political environment. We have the power to change things by enhancing positive cooperation.
- The BSC is increasingly a hotspot for energy (security) due to many factors.
- Regions can play a key role in energy for both transition and security.

Mr Joakim Strand, Member of Finnish Parliament and Chairman of the Board of the Regional Council of Ostrobothnia:
- Ostrobothnia is the 2nd Finnish region for wind power capacity.
- In Vaasa, more than 200 companies work with energy (mostly export-oriented).
- Ostrobothnia has a history in identifying innovative energy and marine engineering solutions. Here, companies are working together at the systemic level, already from the R&D stages. Fighting climate change is possible if our companies work together and perform well with the support of regional academic facilities.
- Synergies (public-private, industry-research, local-Union level) are key.
- Education: Finland has an Energy Education Programme that stimulates interest in youth since an early age. It helps to develop the national potential for skills and compensates for the lack of investment by motivating and inspiring students and teachers.
- Developing energy storage capacity and hydrogen capacity can be good answers to balance the energy system. District heating at city level can also be developed as an alternative solution to cope with security of supply concerns.
- When it comes to financing, the transition should tackle energy challenges at the systemic level.
- Green hydrogen plants are already active in Finland (e.g., in Kristinestad). This hydrogen is stored and/or reprocessed into methanol or ammonia.
- Public-private partnerships allow developing small-scale industrial pilots that can lead innovative solutions and R&D that is beneficial for everyone.
- Sustainable maritime fuels are a path to be explored and implemented.
- At national level, Finland is trying to enhance the Sweden-Finland energy connection and, among other initiatives, is aiming to build an undersea cable connecting Vaasa and Umeå (to be turned into a fixed link later).

Ms Henna Hovi, Member of the Board, Regional Council of Kymenlaakso:
- The biggest challenge for Kymenlaakso in the production of fossil-free energy is the military build-up in the region; budget for energy production is allocated to Northern and Eastern regions, creating big regional disparities.
- A challenge for our industry consists of the lack of convenient roads.
- Kymenlaakso has plenty of opportunities for economic and regional development (hydro, solar PV despite the northern geographical location), with peak production areas available.
- Kymenlaakso is well placed to attract investments and accelerate the development of hydrogen production.
- Deployment of hydrogen solutions in different industries.
- From the perspective of development, a potential Kymenlaakso Regional Hydrogen Valley is important. Hydrogen transmission pipelines combining (a) production and consumption and (b) production and refining are being evaluated.
- Also, the development of electricity products is within the potential of Kymenlaakso.
- Implementation of wind power projects in Eastern Finland may improve during the upcoming government.
- Kymenlaakso is searching for national solutions to develop energy capacity despite defence imperatives, promote investment in solar technology and hydrogen, and boost regional manufacturing by developing batteries clusters.
- The need for energy storage is emphasised with the development of greater production of intermittent renewable energy.
- Public-private partnership for regional development in the RES field.
- Kymenlaakso is a historically industrial region.

Mr Pontus Lindberg, Vice-Chair of the BSC Energy and Climate Working Group (Region Skåne):
- There is a difficult situation in Skåne; as Sweden is divided in 4 electricity areas and Skåne is in the Southernmost one, where electricity prices are way more expensive than elsewhere in the country during peak hours. People in Skåne manage to save a lot of energy (last year, -13% per year), possibly during peak hours.
- Skåne produces most of its electricity from oil, with high environmental impact.
- “Sun map”, a digital tool to develop rooftop solar appliances through easy software.
- Investing in solar energy is a developing trend in Skåne.
- Unstable electricity means less investment and opportunities in the territory.
- The economy is export-driven, having positive international relations and good interconnection with neighbours is the best way to be stronger together.
- We need to look at the regulation of the energy system, with a focus on both the systemic level and the individual/consumer level.
- All import/export in Sweden passes through Skåne. For this region, sustainable maritime transport and sustainable maritime fuels are of extreme importance. We need to keep working on the production of these fuels. We must start the work against climate change regionally, or it will be impossible to develop global solutions.

Session 8: BSC Activity Report 2022-2023

Ms Lucille Ehrhart presented the BSC Activity Report 2022-2023. She informed participants that Västernorrland applied in September 2023 to become a member of the CPMR and its Baltic Sea Commission. She stressed that the strength of the BSC lies in the commitment of both political and technical representatives. Politicians set overarching visions, while civil servants build the essential technical framework for the BSC’s activities. She stressed that effective cooperation is fundamentally relying on people. The BSC should serve as a dynamic platform facilitating the efforts of Member Regions, fostering an extensive network of individuals, collaborators, and allies.

Session 9: BSC internal matters

Financial reports

- Ms Hanna Honkamäkilä, Oulu Region (Host of the BSC Secretariat for 2023-2024) presented the BSC Intermediary Financial Report for 2023. She also presented a proposal from the Executive Committee to the General Assembly of a Forecast Budget for 2024.
- The Forecast Budget for 2024 was approved by the BSC General Assembly.
**CPMR Baltic Sea Commission Work Plan 2023-2025**

Ms Lucille Ehrhart presented a proposal from the Executive Committee of a BSC Work Plan 2023-2025. The BSC Work Plan 2023-2025 was unanimously approved.

**Session 10: BSC Resolution 2023**

Mr Tomas Mörtsell, BSC President, and Ms Lucille Ehrhart, BSC Executive Secretary, presented the consolidated BSC Resolution 2023, taking into account the amendments submitted by BSC Member Regions.

Mr Wolf Born (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) proposed a final amendment (“solidarity with Regions in Finland and the Baltic Sea”), that was accepted by the Member Regions.

The Resolution was unanimously approved.

**CPMR Manifesto**

Mr Davide Strangis, CPMR Deputy Secretary General provided information about the CPMR Manifesto, including a new procedure that provides more time, more clarity and more involvement of CPMR Members. He presented the draft content of the Manifesto and the calendar.

**Closing session**

Ms Lucille Ehrhart informed participants of the upcoming statutory meetings for the CPMR and its Baltic Sea Commission. The next Plenary meeting of the Baltic Sea Commission will be held in the framework of the 2023 CPMR General Assembly (15-17 November, Saint-Malo).

Lastly, Ms Henna Hovi (Kymenlaakso) invited BSC Regions to participate in the upcoming 29th BSC General Assembly hosted by Kymenlaakso on 22-23 May 2024 in Kotka.

**Closing speeches by the President and Vice-President of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission**

To conclude the General Assembly, Mr Richard Sjölund (Ostrobothnia), Vice-President of the Baltic Sea Commission, and Mr Tomas Mörtsell, President of the Baltic Sea Commission, shared their concluding remarks and thanked regional representatives and civil servants for their fruitful participation in the 28th General Assembly of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission.

**End of proceedings**

Participants were then invited to visit Wärtsilä Sustainable Technology Hub.