

 **Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation**

**BSSSC WORK PLAN 2017 - 2018**

DATE: Adopted 9th February 2017

**1.0 Introduction**

The Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation (BSSSC) is a political network organisation for decentralised authorities in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). BSSSC acts as an open, non-party political platform, which represents the interests of all sub-regions around the Baltic Sea ─ stressing common political ideas with a common regional approach.

Over the past decades, the cooperation between actors in the Baltic Sea Region has been growing rapidly and it got additional momentum in 2009 when the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) was adopted and put into action.

On a global scale, the Baltic Sea Region is a small, prosperous macro-region, largely characterised by the small open economies that make up its Nordic and Baltic core. It is home to close to 60 million people. Within the region, political dynamics at the national level as well as the structures for sub-regional collaboration affect the development perspectives.

Today we face a difficult political landscape in the BSR with challenges such as; citizens lack of trust in the political system, refugee crisis, reintroduction and intensification of border controls, EU-Russia relations, weak economic growth, extremism and xenophobia. These challenges can only be overcome by working together! Bottom-up cooperation involving local and regional level is more important than ever - maintaining networks and people-to-people contact in challenging times.

Cooperation must be based on common and shared values of democracy, human rights, peace, social dimension and rule of law.

Peace and democracy are Europe's greatest achievements and should not be taken for granted. All political actors have to take responsibility and to involve and interact with the citizens. Among others, we need to involve young people in the visions and values of the BSR/Europe. BSSSC believes in a permanent dialogue with the young generation of the BSR as they are at the core of social and political change - and the key to any region’s future economic success.

The Chairmanship of Eastern Norway County Network (ENCN) 2017 - 2018 will focus on strengthening cooperation and the voice of the BSR sub-regions. ENCN will continue the good work of previous chairmanships and further develop the BSSSC political network - keeping regions involved and active in BSSSC as well as attracting the interest of new regions. Information and communication will be core tools to achieve these goals.

The Chairmanship will also strengthen the dialog and cooperation with other organisations, networks and structures in the Baltic Sea area. In addition, actions will be taken to renew the cooperation perspective with Committee of the Regions (CoR) as well as to continue the dialog with European institutions and networks in Brussels.

**2.0 BSSSC Strategy 2016-2020**

The BSSSC vision is

To facilitate partnerships and strengthen interregional cooperation in support of a more competitive, better accessible and more sustainable Baltic Sea Region – putting local and regional policy makers and the young generation at the heart of its work.

BSSSC's strategic objectives towards 2020

* become a strong and recognised platform to coordinate the voice of the regions in BSR
* be a link between the EUSBSR and regional and local authorities – making use of its Annual Conferences
* be actively engaged in policy discussions and lobby work on topics of particular relevance for the regions
* be a platform for project development, partner search and dissemination of project results
* be a networking arena for exchange of best practices and governance models
* continue to be a platform for young people in the Baltic Sea Region and to strengthen youth participation in all its policy work and beyond.

Important policy areas towards 2020

* Cohesion policy and programmes post 2020 - especially the future of Interreg
* Sustainable development – environment, climate and circular economy
* Transport and accessibility – transport corridors and clean transport
* Culture and identity
* Growth, jobs and innovation - including creative sectors
* Youth, education and employability

**3.0 Work Plan 2017 - 2018 under the Norwegian Chairmanship**

**3.1 Cross cutting themes**

* The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) and involvement of local and regional authorities and young people in the implementation

The EUSBSR constitute an important basic for the actions of the BSSSC and its regions, and BSSSC has since the very beginning participated as a key stakeholder in the planning and implementation of the strategy. The BSSSC strives to advocate the interests of the regions and promotes its implementation and ownership on all levels of governance.

BSSSC will:

* Promote the principles of subsidiarity and multi-level governance in the

implementation of the EUSBSR

* Voice the need to actively cooperate with neighbouring countries
* Keep close contact with the National Coordination Group of the EUSBSR and relevant Policy Area and Horizontal Action Coordinators
* Take actions and contribute to the programmes of the Annual Forums of the EUSBSR in Berlin 2017 and Tallinn 2018
* Connect the BSSSC annual conferences to the work of the strategy - offering a platform for local and regional actors to interact with the EUSBSR structures
* Cooperate with Union of Baltic Cities (UBC) and EuroRegion Baltic (ERB) as well as the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) with regard to youth participation and involvement in the EUSBSR
* Take active part in the "Let's Communicate project" (Interreg BSR programme) via ENCN and Pomeranian Region (project partners)

*Responsible rapporteurs: BSSSC Chairmanship and Pomeranian Region, PL*

* Cohesion Policy post 2020

The prominent role of cohesion policy for the regions around the BSR require a constant focus from the side of BSSSC. The work in the European Commission with regard to Cohesion Policy and the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) beyond 2020 as started. BSSSC must be ready to feed in and respond to proposals as well as to monitor the development and inform its network of regions. Cohesion policy is an effective investment policy that contributes strongly to growth and jobs in Europe and BSR, and the policy has benefitted the citizens of all EU Member States and supported them during difficult economic times

BSSSC will:

* Promote the interests of the BSR sub-regions towards the European Commission and others with regard to Cohesion Policy beyond 2020
* Develop position papers and formulate political requirements as input to the process
* Collect the input/views from sub-regions around the BSR and forward them to the EU-institutions and national authorities.
* Follow the process constantly and monitor the development
* Emphasise the need for territorial cooperation and that this policy should be further strengthened and well-resourced post 2020 - among others in view of the EUSBSR
* Promote the cooperation with neighbouring countries and a smooth system for project development and implementation
* Lobby for radical simplification for better delivery of results from Cohesion Policy.

*Responsible rapporteur: Land Brandenburg, Germany in cooperation with the ad hoc Working Group on Cohesion Policy*

* Youth involvement/youth empowerment

The young inhabitants of the Baltic Sea Region are important stakeholders when discussing the BSR today and tomorrow. The BSSSC underlines the importance of a continuous and permanent dialogue with the young generation in the BSR - as they are at the core of social and political change and the key to any region’s future economic success.

BSSSC will:

* Strengthen the work of the youth network/working group youth policy (WGYP) and better integrate the youth voice in all BSSSC policy areas. Support the youth in their will to comment on and contribute to the European as well as BSSSC policy
* Continue to organise a youth event along the BSSSC annual conferences as well as a yearly spring meeting
* Formulate political requirements towards decision-making bodies at the national and European level on youth policy.
* Continue the close cooperation with CBSS, UBC, ERB and other relevant organisations and actors.
* Start a dialog with Committee of the Regions (CoR) on youth policy and youth involvement - include the issue in the revision of the Cooperation perspectives with the CoR.
* Take part in the ERB youth governance project (CaSYPoT) funded by Interreg South Baltic Programme - as an associated partner.

*Responsible rapporteur: West-Pomerania, Poland*

* Northern Dimension (ND) and cooperation with Russia

BSSSC recognises the importance of dialogue and cooperation with Russia on local and regional level despite the problematic political situation.

BSSSC has at all times advocated for better involvement of the sub-regional level in the Northern Dimension, and is committed to use its role as observer in the ND Steering Group - to facilitate information exchange between ND structures and sub-regional actors in the BSR.

BSSSC will:

* Participate in the ND Steering Group meetings as observer
* Keep up and develop the contact to ND partners and to the relevant partnerships
* Follow-up the dialog with Kaliningrad Region - established by the Finnish Chairmanship - and work to encourage Russian regions to re-join the BSSSC Board and work of BSSSC

*Responsible rapporteur: Eastern Norway County Network and Helsinki-Uusimaa Region, FI*

**3.2 BSSSC Policy Areas 2017 - 2018**

* Sustainable development and climate change - Baltic 2030

There is a need to further mainstream sustainable development at all levels, integrating economic, social and environmental aspects and recognizing their inter-linkages - to achieve sustainable development in all its dimensions.

The BSR is highly vulnerable to climate change and the capacities of all stakeholders must be used to design effective policies on mitigation and adaptation through a bottom-up and multi-sector approach.

BSSSC will:

* Cooperate with the Baltic 2030 unit in CBSS and take part in the Expert Group on Sustainable Development (EGSD). Take part in the development of an action plan for the Baltic Sea Region 2030 - to be finalised by June 2018.
* Connect BSSSC to the work of the Horizontal Action Climate in the EUSBSR - a.o. to follow up the local and regional actions with regard to Paris agreement.
* Establish contact and cooperate with the Baltic Sea Commission WG on Energy - to join forces
* Follow the work and contribute to relevant projects in the Interreg BSR - among others Scandria2Act on green transport

*Responsible rapporteur: BSSSC Chairmanship*

* Transport and accessibility – transport corridors

BSSSC will:

* Cooperate with the WG Transport in the Baltic Sea Commission to join forces
* Follow the work and contribute to the Interreg BSR programme projects Scandria2Act, TENTacle and NSB CoRe.
* Link up with EUSBSR Policy Area Transport and the Northern Dimension Partnership in Transport and Logistics.
* Follow the work in the relevant TEN-T (Trans European Network - Transport) core corridors and take actions when relevant (policy paper and lobby work). Keep the regions updated.
* Support the project MAMBA (“MAximised MoBility and Accessibility of Services in Regions Affected by Demographic Change”) as an associated partner

*Responsible rapporteurs: Vest-Agder County and Akershus County, Norway*

* Culture, creative industries and regional identity

The Baltic Sea Region has an outstandingly diverse and attractive cultural life and a valuable cultural heritage. The EUSBSR focuses on strengthening and integrating BSR policy co-operation, with a view to develop synergies and to join forces. The Policy Area Culture in the EUSBSR focuses on intensifying the dialogue and cooperation between the main BSR cultural players in order to strengthen intercultural networking, to improve the ecosystem for cultural and creative industries in the BSR and to strengthen regional identity. The positive impacts of culture and creativity on economy, employment, regional development, social integration and cohesion are proven. Culture builds bridges across borders and across social and political differences. The force of culture as a catalyst for social and technological innovations has to be better used and promoted.

BSSSC will:

* Cooperate closely with and take part in the work of EUSBSR Policy Area Culture.
* Establish dialog with the Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture.
* Advocate for better possibilities for the funding of cultural projects in the upcoming EU funding period post 2020
* Cooperate with the UBC Cultural Cities Commission, Ars Baltica and other relevant organisations and networks to join forces and look for synergies
* Support the Interreg BSR project BalticRIM („Baltic Sea Region Integrated Maritime Cultural Heritage Management“) as an associated partner
* Support the Interreg BSR project Creative Ports as an associated partner.

*Responsible rapporteur: Schleswig-Holstein, Germany*

* Growth, jobs and innovation - smart specialisation (bio-economy, blue growth, digital agenda)

The concept of smart specialisation has proven to be successful in fostering innovation by strengthening the competitive advantages and development potentials of regions.

Bio-economy offers great opportunities for accelerating growth and sustainable development in the Baltic Sea Region. The crosscutting nature of bio-economy calls for new ways of working and cooperating, as well as new processes, services and products that can contribute to a greener future.

BSSSC sees a huge potential for sectors covered by the Blue Growth initiative in the BSR. It is important to continue encouraging an integrated and holistic approach to blue growth, identifying synergies and symbioses that give added value to maritime space and waterways and at the same time contributing to the protection of the Baltic Sea.

The BSSSC believes that the digital future with its tools and methods will offer tremendous opportunities within education and lifelong learning as well as support to science, creativity and innovation in the BSR regions. At the same time, the digitization of private and economic spheres carries substantial risks, e.g. for the social cohesion of our societies and the security of data and digitized infrastructure.

BSSSC will:

* Cooperate with the relevant Policy Area Coordinators in the EUSBSR.
* Establish a dialog with the Baltic Sea Commission Maritime WG and Energy WG and join forces when relevant
* Formulate political requirements of the regions towards decision-making bodies on the topics concerned
* Provide meeting places and be a platform for stakeholder engagement and share of good practises and disseminate best practise examples from projects and governance models
* Use its platform to share best practises and disseminate results from the Interreg BSR project RDI2Club (Rural RDI milieus in transition towards smart Bio-economy Clusters and innovation ecosystems). Be an associated partner
* Support the Interreg BSR project Smart-Up BSR (“Improving smart specialisation implementation of the Baltic Sea Region through orchestrating innovation hubs) as an associated partner

*Responsible rapporteur(s):*

*Smart Specialisation*

*Bio-economy -*

*Blue growth - Pomeranian Region, PL*

*Digital Agenda - Estonia*

**4.0 Rapporteur-ships to other policy areas, programmes and organisations**

* Maritime Policy/Helcom - *Helsinki-Uusimaa Region, Finland*
* Baltic Sea Commission/CPMR - *Helsinki-Uusimaa Region, Finland*
* Interreg BSR programme - Matti Lipsanen, *Häme Region, Finland*
* CoR Intergroup Baltic Sea - *Jan Edøy (Brussels Antenna)*
* UBC - *Toivo Riimaa, Estonia*

**5.0 Implementation structure 2017 - 2018**

* The Chairman and the Secretariat (Eastern Norway County Network)
* The Board
* The Youth Network/WG Youth Policy
* Rapporteurs for policy areas - and in some cases ad hoc working groups
* Cooperation with BSR organisations and programmes
* Brussels Antenna