



BALTIC SEA STATES SUBREGIONAL CO-OPERATION (BSSSC)

PRIORITIES FOR THE WORK PLAN 2009 – 2010

Introduction

The Baltic Sea Region (BSR) is marked by a special economic dynamism and a rich tradition of urban culture on a polycentric basis. It is endowed with centres of international services and the knowledge economy, networks of trade routes, and attractive destinations for tourism. The economies of the BSR countries are growing faster than the EU average. Furthermore the BSR has the potential as a global research centre. More than 100 universities and research institutes are located in its catchment area. Thus, the BSR constitutes a strategic and economic area of European and global importance.

At the same time, the region is faced with enormous economic challenges due to its geographical extent, low population density, and the differences in development of the various states and regions. These challenges can only be mastered by acting together. Co-operation between countries and regions is a major driving force to ensure favourable economic and social development in the region, increase trade between the countries, focus on environmental issues and sustainable development, broaden cultural contacts and exchanges and promote stability and security for all of the region's inhabitants.

Over the last decade co-operation between regional actors in the Baltic Sea region has been growing rapidly and got additional momentum in effect of the EU enlargement. Collaboration across the borders already includes many thematic fields, and there is a high level of convergence in economic co-operation and investments.

BSSSC considers itself as a framework to improve the close relations of the regions within the BSR. It is one of the most important and active networks in the region with a remarkable tradition of co-operation in the common interest. BSSSC acts as a Pan-Baltic organisation open to all regions around the entire Baltic Sea area, bringing added value to regional co-operation on every side of the Baltic Sea. Using its task as a political organisation and a regional partner to the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), BSSSC promotes and advocates the interests of the sub-regions of the Baltic Sea area to decision makers, such as national governments and EU institutions. As a regional platform BSSSC can also provide expertise, best practice examples and implementation capacity.

The Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg is one of the leading centres in the Baltic Sea region. It has built up close co-operation with the other Baltic Sea states in commerce, science, transport and the environment, on the basis of many centuries of trade relations. 70% of the consumer goods imports for the Baltic Sea area are handled via Hamburg, and trading with the Baltic Sea states accounts for 10% of Hamburg's external trade (7.7 billion euros in 2006).

The Hamburg Chairmanship intends to continue working on the sound basis which previous chairs have created by their work. To ensure continuity, a Troika is established with the former chair Norway, which provides support in the initial phase, and the region of West Pomerania, the designated chair for 2010 – 2012.

BSSSC will continue to act as a political network organisation open to all regions in the Baltic Sea area bringing added value to regional co-operation on every side of the Baltic Sea. BSSSC will be a co-operation partner to other BSR organisations at the national, regional and local level and will continue to advocate the views of sub-regions to national authorities and EU institutions.

The key objectives for the Hamburg Chairmanship are described in the following. Furthermore, BSSSC will reflect in its work current developments and challenges.

Policy areas 2009 – 2010

1. Science and Education

BSSSC supports the aim of the Lisbon Agenda to “develop the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment by 2010.”

BSSSC regards education and science as key elements for the further development of the Baltic Sea Region. The BSR is home for a number of world-class universities and research institutions. BSSSC will support all efforts to strengthen European research within the BSR by supporting bordercrossing co-operation in the field of science.

BSSSC shall:

- Continue to advocate the co-operation within science based issues as transport and logistics, maritime policy, climate protection and public health.
- Advocate academic co-operation in the BSR promoting the European instruments of funding. The exchange of students as well as that of scientists will be according to the objectives of the Bologna process a main starting point for the creation and the further development of knowledge based societies in the BSR.
- Strongly support co-operation in the field of education. Exchange programmes for pupils and teachers as well as those for apprentices and trainees are important preconditions for mobility within the Baltic Sea Region. BSSSC therefore appreciates the extension of European programmes for regional Co-operation within the field of education.
- Support the exchange of experiences within the field of school management and school organisation hereby using European programmes of funding like Comenius regio.
- Support all efforts to stress the importance of life long learning as a key method of creating knowledge based societies. Being supportive in this field will mean to offer various opportunities and promote the possibilities of the broad diversity of education offered by the partner regions represented by BSSSC.

Main responsibility within the BSSSC Board lies with the Chairmanship.

2. Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Strategy of the EU

BSSSC welcomes the decision of the European Council to charge the European Commission with the preparation of a draft strategy for the Baltic Sea Region to be adopted under the Swedish Council Presidency in the second half-year of 2009. BSSSC already played an active role in the course of the consultation process, so far. BSSSC recalls the common preparatory work already conducted within the network during the last months and presented to the public on 8 September 2008 in a position paper entitled "A Competitive Region in a Globalised World". The common position paper of BSSSC and other organisations of the Baltic Sea Region indicates concrete areas of action in order to improve the environmental state, to foster prosperity, to enhance accessibility and attractiveness and to ensure security within the Baltic Sea Region.

In the BSSSC Annual Conference 2008 in Kaunas, Lithuania, the discussion on the Baltic Sea Strategy played an important role. As expressed in the Kaunas Resolution, the participants called upon the European Commission to mainstream maritime policy as well as energy and climate policy into the draft strategy. They underlined the importance to identify the authorities and institutions in charge as well as the methods and financial instruments for the implementation of the future EU Strategy. Furthermore, they hold that neighbouring countries such as Norway and Russia should be involved at a rather early stage of the preparations. All contributions of BSSSC to the ongoing consultation on the EU Baltic Sea Strategy will be based upon the BSSSC position paper and the Kaunas Resolution.

As one of the four roundtables along the four pillar structure of the consultation, the first roundtable on "How to make the Baltic Sea Region an Accessible and Attractive Place" took place during the BSSSC Annual Conference in Kaunas. The discussion concentrated in particular on challenges relating to transport and logistics, sufficient and sustainable energy supply, information society and quality of life. BSSSC is convinced that a future EU Baltic Sea Strategy has to give concrete answers in order to tackle these challenges.

BSSSC shall:

- Continue to accompany the drafting and the implementation of the EU Baltic Sea Strategy actively and constructively. In particular, BSSSC will offer a forum for its member regions and other stakeholders involved to discuss content and implementation. The results of the discussion will be transmitted to the EU institutions.
- Organise a board meeting in Brussels during the Swedish Council Presidency in order to assess the possibilities how the EU Baltic Sea Strategy may be made operational through the activities of BSSSC. In this BSSSC will continue to co-operate with the Committee of the Regions under the terms of the co-operation agreement signed in December 2008.
- Help to give young people a voice on the consultation on the EU Strategy. BSSSC promotes the position paper of the BSSSC Youth Network and organises a conference in Hamburg from 3 to 5 February 2009. Young people from all over the Baltic Sea Region including Russia will come to Hamburg in order to express their needs and feelings, since it is their future we are planning for. Delegates will convey the Hamburg Conference outcome to the 2nd Stakeholder Conference in Rostock on 5/6 February.

Main responsibility within the BSSSC Board lies with the Danish Regions.

3. Maritime Policy

In December 2007 BSSSC submitted an opinion on the EU Commission's Blue Book on European Maritime Policy and its attending Action Plan. BSSSC welcomed the ambitious scheme, stressed the relevance of the integrated approach of the maritime policy and at the same time claimed that greater significance should be given to the restoration and conservation of the marine environment which is vital for the sustainable prosperity of the Baltic Sea Region. BSSSC considers the development of an EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region to be a suitable framework for the regional implementation of the European Maritime Policy.

In spring 2008 BSSSC established a Working Group on Maritime Policy, chaired by Schleswig-Holstein/Germany, with currently members from Denmark, Germany, Norway, Poland, Russia and Sweden. The working group sees its task in bringing together the maritime players of the region, formulating a 'regional maritime voice' and initiating or giving support to maritime pilot projects.

BSSSC will continue its commitment for an ambitious implementation of the European Maritime Policy in the Baltic Sea Region and to develop the BSR into Europe's maritime best practice region by 2015.

BSSSC shall:

- Formulate political requirements of the regions towards decision-making bodies at the national and European level in maritime affairs.
- Continue the dialogue with the EU Commission on an appropriate implementation of the European Maritime Policy in the Baltic Sea Region matching the needs and consulting the expertise of the regions.
- Contribute to the implementation of the European Maritime Policy with its Working Group on Maritime Policy at the regional level.
- Support and initiate projects of an integrated maritime policy suitable to mitigate the environmental effects of maritime activities in the region (e.g. the introduction of land-based power supply for ships in all relevant ports of the Baltic Sea region and the introduction of environmentally differentiated fair-way and/or harbour dues, in order to set incentives for the usage of low-sulphur fuels, for a voluntary ban of waste-water discharges, for the usage of land-based power supply and in general for environmentally friendly practice and technologies in BSR shipping).
- Advocate and support the development of an action-oriented plan "Clean Baltic Sea Shipping" as 'flagship project' in the framework of the EU Baltic Sea Strategy.
- Bring together the maritime INTERREG actors of the region in order to support and initiate exemplary maritime INTERREG projects on the occasion of the BSSSC Annual Conference 2009.
- Contribute to raise a common Baltic Sea maritime identity by means of public awareness activities (e.g. on the occasion of the European Maritime Day on 20 May).
- Support the development of a maritime Cluster for the BSR in the framework of INTERREG IV B.
- BSSSC accompanies the project "Baltic Master" which was supported by BSSSC in its realisation phase.

Main responsibility within the BSSSC Board lies with the Schleswig-Holstein Land, Germany.

4. Climate Change and Sustainable Development

4.1 Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development is the overarching long-term goal of the European Union as well as for countries and regions. The principles and objectives of sustainable development are economic prosperity, social equity, environment protection and international responsibilities. Sustainable development cannot only be about what governments can do. All stakeholders, regional and local authorities, businesses and citizens in particular, need to be empowered and encouraged to come up with new and innovative ways to address the challenges and seize the opportunities.

BSSSC welcomes the efforts of HELCOM in developing a Baltic Sea Action Plan as an integrated ecosystem-based approach to the management of human activities and to the protection of the whole Baltic Sea area, and calls for a stronger involvement of sub-regions in the action plan.

It is the declared aim of BSSSC to focus on sustainable development in the BSR and to encourage all ongoing activities at the regional and local level.

BSSSC shall:

- Support and contribute to the implementation of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan.
- Support constructive co-operation between Baltic 21 and BSSSC, in particular through the lighthouse projects of interest to BSSSC and Baltic Sea sub-regions.
- Act as a sub-regional representative in the Senior Official Group of Baltic 21.

4.2 Sustainable Energy and Climate Change

The future energy - in connection with the serious climate situation – needs to continue to be one of the major challenges for the Baltic Sea Region and call for intensified co-operation. Based on the results from the Annual Conference 2007 in Turku (Finland), BSSSC took the initiative to establish a *Joint Platform on Energy and Climate* in the BSR in February 2008.

Together with other BSR organisations representing the national, regional and local level, BSSSC:

- Underlines the need to coordinate and co-operate on strategies to achieve at least a 20% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. To reach such a goal for the BSR, the involvement of local and regional actors is of big importance.
- Recommends strengthening the capacity to support and coordinate Baltic Sea regional energy co-operation and supply security in developing an integrated and optimized regional approach to the energy issues in the Baltic Sea Region, taking into account the various energy mixes of the countries in the Region. For instance by strengthening the commitment to the BASREC co-operation and allocating the appropriate resources to the work.
- Stresses the importance to speed up – by means of e.g. economic and political instruments – the promotion and actual implementation of renewable energy, energy efficiency and energy savings in all sectors in the Baltic Sea Region, and underlines the positive research, job and business potentials of environmentally friendly technologies.
- Regards special attention to safe conduct and transport of energy via the Baltic Sea of utmost importance to protect the fragile ecosystems of the Baltic and invites all partners involved to implement energy-transport-strategies acceptable for all littoral states of the Baltic Sea.
- Will intensify its cooperation with BALTEX.

The supply of energy as well as the use of energy in relation to climate change will be one of the major challenges in the decades to come. Predicted and prioritised by many, the seriousness of this topic gained adequate attention in Europe and at a global scale only recently. Sustainable energy and the threats of climate change were main topics at the BSSSC Annual Conference 2007 in Turku, Finland.

The acceptance of energy policy by EU institutions as one of the most pressing priorities reflects this development. The different forms of energy supply, the great variations in the use of energy as well as the technological innovation in the energy sector in the European countries contributes to the fact that the EU members and other European countries are forerunners in the process to achieve sustainable production and consumption of energy.

BSSSC welcomes the decision taken by the European Council in March 2007 to undertake major efforts in Europe to cope with climate change until the year 2020 and underlines that the necessary changes will not occur by themselves but must be addressed at a political level – also by regional and local authorities.

BSSSC shall contribute to the further development and implementation of this process. Thus, the annual conference in 2009 in Sealand, Danmark will focus on how regions cope with the challenge of climate change. It will serve to give a special regional input to the following UN climate summit in Copenhagen.

BSSSC accompanies the project “New Bridges” which was supported by BSSSC in its realisation phase.

Main responsibility within the BSSSC Board for the Joint Platform on Energy and Climate lies with the Eastern Norway County Network.

5. Youth

Being a cornerstone of future development in the Baltic Sea Region, youth policy is given high priority by BSSSC. Youth exchange and youth initiatives are important factors for creating a common space of successful co-operation in the BSR. The main goals of the Working Group Youth Policy (WGYP) are: Solidarity and co-operation, democracy and participation, mobility and full growth of young persons.

Objectives in 2009-2010 are:

- Realize the influence of young people to the EU Baltic Sea Strategy in a real “Nothing about us, without us” way
- Development of a youth view as part of the EU Baltic Sea Strategy
- Including a youth dimension / youth mainstreaming into the EU Baltic Sea Strategy
- Using the Structured Dialogue as tool for including stakeholders from the local, regional, national and supra-national level into the process

BSSSC shall:

- Plan and carry out a youth conference in Hamburg in February 2009 which involves participants from:
 - BSSSC- Working Group on Youth Policy and the BSSSC-Youth Network
 - UBC- Commission on Youth and UBC-Youth Network
 - CBSS-Working/Expert Group on Youth Affairs (meaning the national ministries dealing with youth policy of the Baltic Sea states)
 - the National Youth Councils of the Baltic Sea states and the Baltic Youth Forum (as the Forum of international co-operation of the Baltic Sea Youth Councils)

- the National Agencies for the EU-Youth in Action Programme of the Baltic Sea countries
- The EU - DG Education and Culture
- Participate and support the CBSS Conference on Youth Empowerment in Copenhagen, Denmark, in May 2009
- Plan and carry out a youth workshop on youth participation and sustainable lifestyles in Region Zealand, Denmark, 12-14 October 2009
- Encourage the youth network to plan and organize the campaign to fight against racism, xenophobia and discrimination. Racism, xenophobia and discrimination are Phenomenon still present in Europe. BSR representatives shall actively contribute to the EU policy in that aspect (EU Youth Ministers Declaration on racism and intolerance) and BSSSC youth Policy (BSSSC paper on Integrated Youth Policy for the Baltic Sea Region).
- Apply for the “Youth in Action” EU programme. The project will give young participants the possibility of actively using their voice at political meetings and seminars, at the BSSSC Board meetings and the BSSSC Annual Conferences.

Main responsibility within the BSSSC will be on the WG Youth Policy and the youth coordinator (West Pomeranian Region, Poland).

6. Better use of EU Programmes for projects in the BSR

EU funding has an important function in achieving the policy goals for the Baltic Sea Region. EU financial programmes successfully stimulate economic growth, scientific progress and social change in the Baltic Sea Region. Therefore, BSSSC will promote the more effective use of structural funds and action programmes. At the same time, BSSSC will develop strategies to influence the contents and goals of EU programmes and thereby support the interests of the Baltic Sea regions

BSSSC puts its emphasis on:

- The structural funds programmes have to remain closely linked to the Lisbon strategy and the Gothenburg agenda and continuously focus on improved sustainable economic growth, competitiveness and job creation. In this respect, BSSSC welcomes that the whole EU territory remains eligible for structural funds support. Outside the Convergence regions, the Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective aims at strengthening competitiveness, attractiveness and employment through innovation, the promotion of the knowledge society, entrepreneurship, the protection of the environment, improved accessibility of the programmes and investments in the human workforce.
- In particular on the programmes covered by the European Territorial Co-operation Objective which offers the potential to enhance economic growth, exchange best practices and to benefit the whole Baltic Sea Region. Challenges of geographically handicapped areas, like the sparsely populated northern areas, are to be taken into account through the territorial cohesion concept. Active participation in the Baltic Sea Region Programme remains therefore an important task for the region.
- EU programmes have to take into account the need to co-operate with all states bordering the Baltic Sea. Due to the existing links, the Baltic Sea Region could function as a model region regarding projects between EU-members and non-member states, e. g. Russia. In order to allow such co-operation to be intensified, EU funding programmes should be opened to non-member states step by step. Interoperability between ERDF and ENPI continues to be a crucial factor for the functioning of this co-operation.

- The establishment of networks and cluster structures should be promoted to generate growth, synergy effects and a high competitiveness.
- Projects to be supported shall include the co-operation between metropolitan regions, the co-operation between rural areas and the co-operation between metropolitan regions and rural areas.
- EU funding programmes should take up a more project-oriented approach.
- The user friendliness of EU funding programmes should be improved, especially for transnational projects.
- Public awareness for innovative projects should be raised in order to stimulate the regional and European identity of the Baltic Sea region.

Main responsibility within the BSSSC Board lies with the Chairmanship and the Brussels Antenna.

7. Public Health and Quality of Life

Europeans value quality of life. They want to enjoy prosperity, a clean environment, good health, social protection and equity. They want this not only for themselves, but for the generations to come. Along with the rest of Europe, the Baltic Sea Region is facing big challenges when it comes to an ageing population, migration of young people from rural areas to the cities, unemployment, increase in alcohol and drug abuse, mental illness and lifestyle diseases. Sustainable development is closely linked to quality of life and to the wellbeing of people.

To meet these challenges joint and co-ordinated actions, involving national and regional authorities and international organisations, are strongly needed.

BSSSC has become a partner in the NDPHS (Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being), and intends to establish a Working Group on Public Health. Through this BSSSC would like to intensify co-operation in the field of social and health development in each particular region to improve capacity to set priorities in public health and social well-being, encourage participation in the international activities in the whole Northern Dimension area and get access to the specific tools designed by NDPHS (Pipeline and Project Data Base), which will contribute to improved opportunities in partner search and donors funding for those initiating and implementing projects in the field of Public Health and Social Well-being in BSSSC's sub-regions.

Another field of co-operation shall be communicable diseases and antibiotic resistance. BSSSC plans to establish a working group for this topic.

Main responsibility within the BSSSC Board lies with Stockholm County Council

The Baltic Sea Network for Product Safety will work closely together with BSSSC during the Hamburg Chairmanship. Being an organisation of market monitoring authorities set up at the initiative of Hamburg, the Baltic Sea Network for Product Safety is intended to help continue and improve the establishment of equal competitive conditions and the implementation of EU consumer protection policy goals in the BSR. The Network is creating a "best practice example" in the framework of an EU funded project for co-operation with the customs authorities, and thus contributing to harmonised and effective market monitoring, consumer protection and competitive conditions for the economy. Additionally the Baltic Sea Network for Product Safety aims at an improved exchange of relevant information in order to warn consumers and trade institutions of unsafe products and to update them about changes in law.

Main responsibility within the BSSSC Board lies with the Chairmanship.

8. Co-operation with Russia

BSSSC underlines that the potential of the Baltic Sea Region can only be fully developed in co-operation with Russia, as Russia participates in the positive development of the Region. Russia plays a significant role in the practical regional and cross-border co-operation as a close neighbour, and therefore is an integrated part of the Baltic Sea Region Strategy.

Co-operation on equal terms and mutual understanding are crucial for a good neighbourhood in the BSR. BSSSC has successfully focused on strengthening the involvement of Russian sub-regions and actors in the work of the organisation. The Hamburg Chairmanship wants to emphasise this again and offers longtime experience with Russian partners. A special effort will be made – making use of the Hanse-Office in St. Petersburg - to involve the Russian partners in the Northwest Region in co-operations, projects and the shaping of opinion in the Baltic Sea Region.

BSSSC shall:

- Encourage and support concrete actions or projects involving regional and local levels with regions in North West Russia using the new ENPI programs as operational tools means to implement regional development projects.
- Support the involvement of Kaliningrad region into the BSR co-operation.

Main responsibility within the BSSSC Board lies with the Chairmanship.

8.1 Northern Dimension

BSSSC advocates the development of a "regional dimension" within the Northern Dimension Policy Framework and contribute to a consultation process on how to integrate the regional/sub-national level into the Northern Dimension concept and encourage the Steering Group to conduct such a process.

The Political Declaration on the Northern Dimension Policy and the Northern Dimension Policy Framework Document gave the Northern Dimension a new platform of co-operation between the EU member states, Russia, Norway and Iceland.

Based on the intention of the Northern Dimension (ND) to involve as many actors and stakeholders as possible in the co-operation, BSSSC has advocated a regional dimension within the ND framework. As a result of BSSSC's engagement, a questionnaire was developed to find out what forms of co-operation are taking place at the regional level in North-east Europe today and, even more important, what objectives and priorities would regional actors appreciate to follow and realise. The Steering Group ND asked BSSSC to help conducting this consultation process on behalf of the Steering Group.

9. Transport and Infrastructure

BSSSC continues to support the development of the project "TransBaltic – Towards an integrated transport system in the Baltic Sea Region" as a flagship-project in the framework of the EU Baltic Sea Strategy.

Main responsibility within the BSSSC Board lies with the region of: Skane.

Contribution from Hamburg:

The *Amber Coast Transport Initiative* (ACTI) aims to open up the untapped hinterland transport potential of the Baltic States, Kaliningrad Oblast and Poland towards Belarus (including Western Russia and Northern Ukraine). In close co-operation of the policy level (e.g. Transport Ministries), administrative structures (e.g. Port Authorities, Customs), supported by commercial entities (e.g. private multi-modal transport operators) the initiative

will organise an exchange of best practice based on a round table approach including institution building. It will transfer the know how gained to the transport communities of the above-mentioned transit and hinterland destinations by publishing guides, establishing an e-platform, organising workshops, exhibitions, etc.. By integrating the main transport generating regions from Germany and Scandinavia, ACTI will create added value to the dynamic BSR economic development. Hamburg will take over the lead partnership, defining itself as a turntable of trade and transport in the overall region.

Main responsibility for the ACTI within the BSSSC Board lies with Hamburg.

In this context BSSSC will explore the possibilities of a co-operation with Belorussian partners.

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