

BSSSC Work Plan 2013–2015

1. Introduction

The Uusimaa Regional Council will hold the BSSSC Chairmanship in 2013–2015. The Helsinki-Uusimaa Region is situated in Northern Europe on the south coast of Finland. It's the capital region and home to around 1.5 million inhabitants, which is more than a quarter of the country's total population. The region has, during the past two decades, developed into a dynamic knowledge hub and innovation centre. Rich and unpolluted nature combined with a modern infrastructure and high living standards offer excellent opportunities for business development in the region, as well as for recreation and leisure. The Helsinki-Uusimaa Region will chair the BSSSC in co-operation with 18 other Finnish regions that are members of the BSSSC.

The strong inter-regional co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) today stems from the Hanseatic League and the legacy of the 13th–15th centuries. The importance of regional co-operation has in recent years increased even more, as the Baltic Sea became an inland sea in the European Union. The BSR consists of stable democracies with developed institutional structures and infrastructure, a high level of education and strong industrial traditions. The area is partly poorly endowed with natural resources, which is why it relies on its human resources and a knowledge-based economy.

For the whole potential of the BSR to be utilised, further action is still required. In addition to the economic development, the quickly changing region faces challenges like youth unemployment, an ageing population and environmental questions concerning the Baltic Sea. The prosperity of the regions in the area heavily depends on the wider development of the region, which is why international and inter-regional co-operation is of great importance.

The BSSSC has during its 20-year existence developed into one of the most important and active political networks in the region. The organization is open to all regions around the Baltic Sea and it is considered as a framework, where regions can build and enhance relations with other regions within the BSR. As a political organization and regional partner of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), BSSSC's purpose is to promote and advocate the interests of the sub-regions of the BSR to decision makers on different levels, such as national governments and EU institutions. BSSSC can also provide expertise, best practice examples and implementation capacity.

The BSSSC has since its foundation been based on the fundamental values:

- to be a credible organization representing the views of sub-regions in the BSR
- to be a knowledge based organization
- to be a visible and recognizable organization
- to be an organization, which is flexible and receptive to changes

The themes and policy priorities for the 2013–2015 Helsinki-Uusimaa Chairmanship are described in the following.

2. Cross cutting themes and policy priorities in 2013-2015

During the 2013-2015 period the Finnish Chairmanship will carry on the work the previous Chairs have created. Traditional BSSSC policy areas such as maritime policy, energy and climate, youth, the northern and arctic dimension and cohesion policy will be supported and developed. The **EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), entrepreneurship and innovation** will be cross cutting themes that will be addressed during the Chairmanship. The Chairmanship will continue to promote co-operation between the EU and neighboring regions Norway, the Russian Federation and Belarus. BSSSC will continue to strengthen the involvement of Russian sub-regions and actors in the work of the organization.

Co-operation with other Baltic Sea organizations has traditionally been very important for BSSSC. A Joint position on the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region was established in 2012 in co-operation with B7 Baltic Islands Network, Baltic Development Forum (BDF), CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, Euroregion Baltic (ERB) and Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC). The renewal of the Declaration of common interest by the Committee of the Regions (CoR), B7, UBC, Euroregion Baltic (ERB) and Euroregion Pomerania was also signed in 2012.

The Helsinki-Uusimaa chairmanship will do its utmost to continue the fruitful co-operation BSSSC has established with other policy formulating organizations in the BSR. The Chairmanship will promote co-operation and strive to find synergy between the work and working groups of the different organizations such as the CBSS, CoR- Intergroup Baltic, Northern Dimension, BDF, B7, UBC, Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC), CPMR Baltic Sea Commission (BSC), ERB and the Network of the Northern Sparsely Populated Areas (NSPA). While Uusimaa Regional Council also holds the secretariat of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission until the end of 2014, the secretariats of the two organizations will be combined during the Chairmanship. The Region holds the Presidency of CPMR Baltic Sea Commission during the period May 2014 – May 2016.

The EUSBSR has since its establishment guided the actions of the BSSSC and its regions. BSSSC has since the very beginning participated as a key stakeholder in the planning and implementation of the strategy. The European Commission's consultation on the EUSBSR was e.g. launched during the BSSSC Annual Conference in Kaunas 2008, and the first Annual Forum of the EUSBSR was organized back-to-back with the BSSSC Annual Conference in Tallinn in 2010. BSSSC will continue to promote and support the strategy also in the future. The EUSBSR is a very important macro-level tool for finding solutions for problems like pollution of the Baltic Sea and poor transport connections in the BSR. It's extremely important that regional networks like the BSSSC and its sub-regions participate in the planning and execution of the strategy as they can facilitate and participate in the implementation on the ground. This way the regions in the BSR including Russia can benefit from the achievements of the strategy.

Considering the current economic situation, entrepreneurship and innovation are important issues for the BSSSC to promote during the next two years. Entrepreneurship and

innovation are especially important when recovering from economic downturn and focus must be laid on how to improve economic growth, competitiveness, job creation and sustainable development in the regions. The aforementioned are also some of the priorities in the Europe 2020 Strategy - the EU ten-year growth strategy aiming to create smart, more sustainable and more inclusive growth in the Union. In addition, the BSR is an important testing site for internationalisation for many small- and medium-sized enterprises because the business environment is quite similar in the whole area. In the near future, new Baltic Sea entrepreneurs will be required in all of the BSR countries.

3. BSSSC Resources 2013-2015

As BSSSC is a non-fee political network, it relies on the commitment and activity of its member regions. A functioning organization requires active participation of regions from all of the BSR and participation of any kind is warmly welcomed.

The BSSSC working bodies set the organization's policy goals and objectives. They are also responsible for implementing the goals and objectives in the member regions. During the 2013-2015 period the BSSSC consists of the following actors:

- The BSSSC Chairperson – Regional Mayor of Helsinki-Uusimaa Mr. Ossi Savolainen
- The BSSSC Board – consisting of two representatives per each Baltic Sea country and two youth board members
- The BSSSC Secretariat – situated at Uusimaa Regional Council
- The BSSSC Working Group on Maritime Policy
- The BSSSC Working Group on Youth Policy
- The BSSSC Rapporteur on Cohesion Policy
- The BSSSC Rapporteur on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
- The BSSSC Rapporteur on Baltic Sea Region Programme
- The BSSSC Rapporteur on the Northern and Arctic Dimension
- The BSSSC Rapporteur on Transport and Infrastructure
- The BSSSC Rapporteur on Culture & Regional Identity
- The Brussels Antenna – Helsinki EU Office

To ensure continuity, a Troika is established by the former Chair, the Westpomeranian Region, the current Chair, Helsinki-Uusimaa, and the chair region to be designated for 2016–2017.

To keep the BSSSC member regions and other stakeholders informed, the BSSSC website (<http://www.bsssc.com>) will actively be updated. The Chairmanship will also publish the BSSSC newsletter “BSSSC News” two to three times per year.

4. BSSSC Policy Areas 2013–2015

During the Finnish BSSSC Chairmanship seven policy areas will be highlighted. The policy area work will be done in different working groups, which the Chairmanship will support and develop actively.

4.1. Maritime Issues

Maritime issues contain a vast field of different policies varying from maritime spatial planning to maritime safety. The BSSSC has since 2007 been advocating the development of a common maritime policy of the BSR and in 2008 the BSSSC Working Group on Maritime Policy was established.

Maritime spatial planning and maritime safety are topical issues during the Finnish BSSSC Chairmanship. The European Commission approved the proposal for a common directive on Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) in summer 2014.

The risk of accidents at sea has grown despite implemented measures including improved oil spillage prevention facilities. Construction, consumption and traffic also create a burdensome load on the nature and the whole environment of the BSR. The Baltic Sea is currently viewed as one of the most polluted waterways in the world, which is why the BSR must attach particular attention on the environmental protection of the sea and on sustainable development of the surrounding regions. The BSSSC plays an important role as a platform and facilitator in this co-operation.

Many of these maritime issues have already been focused on in the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission Maritime Issues Working Group that the Uusimaa Regional Council currently chairs. The Chairmanship sees combining the work of these two working groups as a great opportunity of synergy effects and added value for both organizations and their member regions.

BSSSC will:

- formulate political requirements of the regions towards decision-making bodies at the national and European level in maritime issues
- continue its commitment to an ambitious implementation of the European Maritime Policy in the Baltic Sea Region and to develop the BSR into an European maritime best practice region by 2015
- continue to contribute to the implementation of the Clean Baltic Shipping Project, a BSSSC initiative, which was included to the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan as a result of the EU Commission's consultation process
- support the implementation of IMO and EU Directives on the reduction of sulphur emissions from shipping in the BSR from 2015
- search for co-operation with other Baltic Sea policy formulating organizations and projects like the CBSS, BSPC, HELCOM, CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics (NDPTL), BONUS, Baltic Sea Forum (BSF) and VASAB in order to reach synergy effects and join forces for an integrated maritime policy

Main responsibility within the BSSSC Board lies Helsinki-Uusimaa, Finland.

4.2. Energy and Climate Issues

Energy and Climate Issues are important factors when it comes to the sustainable development of the BSR. The use of renewable energy solutions and bioenergy has become more and more important due to the changing climate and the decreasing energy resources.

The BSR faces big challenges as global climate change continues. The Baltic Sea countries have a large number of possibilities to cooperate and share good practice in adaptation and mitigation activities. On the other hand, each Baltic Sea country still has a great need to look after its own measures related to climate change as particularly different weather disturbances are estimated to increase and strengthen. Rising sea levels and powerful winter storms can cause damaging floods and storm damage to normal life already on a short time scale.

The economic crisis has hit the public finances, which calls for innovation and ingenuity in creating sustainable and resource efficient energy and climate friendly solutions. The BSR is known for its know-how and efforts in the fields of research, development and innovation. This should be exploited efficiently when planning energy and climate policies, creating clean tech and developing the regions into centers of innovative green technologies.

BSSSC will:

- formulate political requirements of the regions towards decision-making bodies at the national and European level on energy and climate issues
- promote the development and use of renewable energy sources such as wind, hydro power and bio mass
- support and contribute to the implementation of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan
- continue co-operation with Baltex and Baltic 21
- co-operate closely with other BSR organisations and contribute through networks and forums for dialog
- continue to support climate change combating projects such as Clean Ship and Cool Bricks as well as new project initiatives relevant to the regions around the Baltic Sea

Main responsibility within the BSSSC Board for BSSSC's cooperation with Baltex and Baltic 21 lies with Hamburg, Germany. Central Finland and Helsinki-Uusimaa are responsible for the Energy and Climate Issues.

4.3. Youth Policy

The BSSSC Working Group on Youth Policy was established in 2006. The Helsinki-Uusimaa Chairmanship will in the field of youth policy continue the strong efforts the Westpomeranian Chairmanship carried out during the 2011–2012 period.

Chairmanship also wishes to focus on e.g. tackling youth unemployment and promotion of entrepreneurship education and youth guarantee schemes on the regional level.

The BSR youth is also well represented in the BSSSC organization. The Youth Network representatives are elected as the BSSSC Board members and hold full membership of the BSSSC Board. Each BSSSC Annual Conference is preceded by a youth event gathering young people from countries of the BSR. The event is prepared and organized by joint effort of the host region and the youth.

BSSSC will:

- formulate political requirements of the regions towards decision-making bodies at the national and European level in youth policy
- help tackling youth unemployment, promote entrepreneurship education and youth guarantee schemes on the regional level
- support the youth in their will to comment on and contribute to the BSSSC policy in all fields that are of youth interest
- support the efforts of the working group on youth policy to establish solid co-operation with other organizations dealing with youth issues
- encourage youth to take part in the BSSSC working groups
- organize a youth event along the BSSSC Annual Conference

Main responsibility within the BSSSC Board lies with the West Pomeranian Region, Poland.

4.4. The Northern and Arctic Dimension

The Arctic Dimension contains many policies dealing with the northernmost part of the BSR. Northern Dimension - that first was introduced in 1997 – is still a relevant policy in Northern Europe. The new concept of Arctic Dimension comprises the northernmost areas of the BSR and the transport passages to the North-East and North-West. The Barents Sea and the Norwegian Sea issues, the new concept of the North-East Passage leading from the BSR along the Siberian coasts towards the Far East will have an important role in future transport policy and operations. There is currently a lot of research work about the arctic regions and seas, also because of the climate change.

The area of interest would cover Iceland and the northernmost parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Russian Federation. Russia's economic and political development is one of the key factors in the development of the BSR and Russian participation is extremely important for a successful implementation of the EUSBSR. The Northern and Arctic

Dimension should thus be seen as a regional reflection of the overall EU-Russia co-operation framework.

The BSSSC will:

- take part in the Northern Dimension Steering Group meetings on behalf of sub-regional level in the BSR and report back to the other cooperating organisations
- formulate political requirements of the regions towards decision-making bodies at the national and European level concerning the Northern and Arctic Dimension
- encourage co-operation between EU and the Russian Federation in the Northern and Arctic Dimension
- continue to participate in the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS)
- continue to follow the Northern Partnership on Culture (NDPC), ND Business Council (NDBC) and Northern Dimension Institute (NDI)

The main responsibility within the BSSSC Board lies with Eastern Norway County Network (ENCN).

4.5. Cohesion Policy

The Finnish Chairmanship will continue the work related to the EU programming period for 2014–2020. In the beginning of Finnish Chairmanship the regulations on the future Cohesion Policy were still negotiated by the European Council and the European Parliament simultaneously with the negotiations on the EU Multi-Annual Financial Framework for 2014–2020.

In the autumn of 2011 a BSSSC statement on ‘Cohesion Policy in the Multi-Annual Financial Framework 2014-2020’ established and sent to the European Commission, the Council of the EU, the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions. In addition to this, a letter on BSSSC’s views on the legislative proposals for the cohesion policy was sent to the Commission. BSSSC supports the Commission’s proposal to focus the Cohesion Policy within the Europe 2020 Strategy.

The Chairmanship will lay focus on ensuring that the principles of subsidiarity and multi-level governance will be taken into account when preparing, implementing and monitoring the new Partnership Contracts and Structural Funds Programmes. Taking these principles in account is a prerequisite for a successful implementation of the strategies on the ground.

The BSSSC will:

- promote the principles of subsidiarity and multi-level governance in the implementation of the cohesion policy
- provide a platform for exchanging experiences on how cohesion policy schemes are implemented in the regions
- support the development of regional and transnational projects and function as a thematic platform for project development

- promote regional innovation strategies for smart specialization and the implementation of the objectives of the EUSBSR through relevant Operational Programmes

Main responsibility within the BSSSC Board lies with Danish Regions. ENCN is responsible for the rapporteurship on the Baltic Sea Region Programme while Pomerania, Poland is responsible for the rapporteurship on the EUSBSR.

4.6. Transport and Infrastructure issues

Functional international transport connections are fundamental for the competitiveness of companies located in the BSR. In order to have good accessibility, the BSR needs to have well-functioning road and rail connections which are, in turn, interconnected with harbours and airports.

As the European Commission states in its Communication concerning the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (COM(2012) 128 final): *“Research, innovation and trade links need to be reinforced, while transport and energy connections have big gaps – the eastern and northern parts of the Region are still too often isolated from the rest of the EU.”* Promoting the development of functioning transport corridors is thus a topical and important issue for the BSSSC.

The BSSSC will:

- formulate political requirements of the regions towards decision-making bodies at the national and European level in transport and infrastructure policies
- focus on improving sustainable connectivity, strengthening accessibility and promoting the transport corridors of the BSR
- follow the Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics (NDPTL)
- support the implementation of relevant recommendations from transnational projects, such as the TransBaltic Macroregional Transport Action Plan and corresponding political resolution

Main responsibility within the BSSSC Board lies with Vest-Agder, Norway.

4.7. Culture and Regional Identity

Culture plays a crucial role in integrating the region and in developing and strengthening the BSR’s regional identity. Promoting culture and creative industries contributes to the region’s image as an attractive place for living and working. The BSR has a highly attractive and diverse culture which is an asset we would be well advised to make it much more visible.

Culture and creative industries are of growing importance for the European economy. The sector produces a growing share of the gross value added in the EU. The number of

employees in this sector has grown significantly in the last years. Furthermore, culture and creativity are important drivers for social and economic innovation.

These are some of the reasons why region Schleswig-Holstein, together with Poland, has taken over responsibility for the Priority Area Culture (PA Culture) of the EUSBSR. The BSSSC strongly supports objectives and projects of PA Culture.

BSSSC will:

- formulate political requirements of the regions towards decision-making bodies at the national and European level in cultural issues
- support projects suitable to visualize the rich and diverse culture and cultural heritage of the Baltic Sea Region and to develop cultural and creative industries
- support projects suitable to develop and strengthen the BSR's regional identity
- support efforts taken to increase coherence and co-operation between BSR cultural-policy bodies of the local, the regional and the national level

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

BSSSC Work Plan Appendix

List of abbreviations and acronyms

BALTEX The Baltic Sea Experiment is a Regional hydroclimate project that focuses on research on e.g. regional climate change, water management and biogeochemical cycles and transport processes.

<http://www.baltex-research.eu/>

Baltic 21 The Baltic 21 consists of the CBSS Expert Group on Sustainable Development and a network of ca 200 partners from different levels and sectors. The goal of the Baltic 21 is to advance sustainable development in the region and to function as a co-operation forum for stakeholder groups.

<http://www.cbss.org/Environment/baltic-21>

BASREC Baltic Sea Region Energy Cooperation comprises of the Nordic and the Baltic countries, Germany, Poland, Russia and the European Commission. It supports competitive, efficient and well-functioning energy markets in order to achieve sustainable growth, security and prosperity in the region.

<http://basrec.net/>

BDF Baltic Development Forum is a networking organization comprising of large companies, cities, investors and business associations in the Baltic Sea Region. The BDF strives to facilitate contact building in the region in order to stimulate growth, innovation and competitiveness.

<http://www.bdforum.org/>

BONUS Bonus is a joint research and development programme that combines the work of marine, maritime, economical and societal researchers in order to address the challenges of the Baltic Sea Region.

<http://www.bonusportal.org/>

BSF The Baltic Sea Forum is a private organization that organizes events on economic and political developments within the region and functions as a co-operation forum for different stakeholders including representatives of the business world, politics and administration.



<http://www.baltic-sea-forum.org/>

BSPC The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference is a co-operation forum for parliamentarians in the Baltic Sea Region. It consists of members from 11 national parliaments, 11 regional parliaments and 5 parliamentary organizations. The goal of the BSPC is to raise discussion on topical political issues, promote a sustainable environmental, social and economic development of the region and increase the visibility of the region in a wider European context.

<http://www.bspc.net/>

B7 The B7 Baltic Islands Network is a network between the seven largest islands (Bornholm (DK), Gotland (SE), Hiiumaa (EE), Rügen (DE), Saaremaa (EE), Åland (FI) and Öland (SE)) in the Baltic Sea. The network's goal is to promote the strategic goals of the islands.

<http://www.b7.org/>

CBSS The Council of the Baltic Sea States is an inter-governmental political forum that serves as a coordinator of the co-operation between the eleven Baltic Sea Region States and the European Commission. The member states are represented by their Ministers for Foreign Affairs. The Presidency of the Council rotates among the member states.

<http://www.cbss.org/>

CoR The Committee of the Regions is an EU advisory body that functions as the voice of the local and regional authorities by presenting reports on the European Commission's proposals. The Commission, the Council and the Parliament must consult the CoR before decisions on issues concerning local and regional government are taken. In the CoR there is also a Baltic Sea Regions Interregional Group.

<http://cor.europa.eu/>

CPMR BSC The Baltic Sea Commission is one of the six geographical commissions of the Conference of the Peripheral Maritime Regions. The BSC consists of 24 regions in Estonia, Finland, Germany, Norway, Poland and Sweden. The BSC's main goal is to ensure that the opinions of its member regions are taken into account when EU policies are being shaped.

<http://www.balticseacommission.info/>



ERB Euroregion Baltic is a co-operation in the south-east Baltic Sea Region. It consists of eight regions in Denmark, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden. The goal of the ERB is to facilitate political dialogue in the region and promote sustainable, economic, social and environmental development. Local and regional authorities, the private and public sector and NGOs are represented in the co-operation.

<http://www.euroregionbaltic.eu/>

Euroregion Pomerania The Euroregion Pomerania comprises of Northwest Poland, South Sweden and Northeast Germany. The members consist of the Association of Polish Local Authorities of the EUROREGION POMERANIA (PL) the Association of Local Authorities Euroregion POMERANIA e.V. (DE) and the Scania Association of Local Authorities (SE). The co-operation aims at supporting joint activities to develop the region in fields such as business, environment and education.

<http://www.pomerania.net/>

EUSBSR The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is the first European macro-regional strategy. The purpose of the strategy is to reinforce cooperation within the region and promote a balanced development in the area. The strategy is a framework for tackling challenges like the environmental condition of the sea, transport bottlenecks and energy interconnections. It also strives to build cross border markets and research and innovation networks.

<http://www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu/>

HELCOM The goal of the Helsinki Commission is to protect the marine environment of the Baltic Sea. HELCOM is the governing body of the "Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area" (Helsinki Convention) and functions by intergovernmental co-operation between Denmark, Estonia, the European Community, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden. The HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) aims to restore a good ecological status of the Baltic marine environment by 2021.

<http://www.helcom.fi/>

ND The Northern Dimension policy is a co-operation between the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland. Geographically the ND comprises of the Baltic Sea and Barents Regions, North-West Russia, Iceland and Greenland. In addition to



the participating states, regional councils and other international organizations and financial institutions may participate in the co-operation. The goal of the policy is to support stability, well-being and sustainable development in the region.

<http://www.northerndimension.info/>

NDBC The Northern Dimension Business Council supports the inclusion of the business sector in the ND policy. The NDBC promotes co-operation between government and business in order to increase the competitiveness of the region.

<http://www.northerndimension.info/component/content/article/10-innerpage/9-ndbc>

NDI The Northern Dimension Institute is the academic partner of the ND structure. NDI generates, gathers and disseminates information, organises workshops and conducts research related to the policy.

<http://www.ndinstitute.org/>

NDPHS The Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being is a co-operation between ten governments, the European Commission and eight international organizations. The forum addresses challenges concerning health and social well-being in the ND area.

<http://www.ndphs.org/>

NDPC The Northern Partnership on Culture focuses on improving the conditions for the cultural and creative industries in the ND area. The NDPC promotes bridging the gap between public and private funding and strengthens co-operation between the industries and the business communities in the region.

<http://www.ndpculture.org/>

NDPTL The Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics covers co-operation within the transport and logistics sector in the ND policy. The Transport Ministries of 11 countries and the European Commission form the partners of the NDPTL. The NDPTL coordinates and supervises the sectoral co-operation both on the regional and national level.

<http://www.ndptl.org/>



NSPA The Northern Sparsely Populated Areas Network consists of 14 regions in Finland, Norway and Sweden that share common circumstances such as a sparse population, harsh climate and long distances. The network aims to provide a platform for best practice and to raise awareness of the region and its particularities in order to promote its objectives.

<http://www.nspa-network.eu/>

UBC The Union of Baltic Cities is a network consisting of over 100 member cities in the Baltic Sea Region. The Union aims to promote cooperation among the member cities, advocate for common interests and represent the cities and local authorities in relation to regional, national, European and international bodies.

<http://www.ubc.net/>

VASAB Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea 2010 is an intergovernmental co-operation of 11 countries in the Baltic Sea Region in the fields of spatial planning and development.

<http://www.vasab.org/>