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2021



POMORSKIE
VOIVODESHIP

Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation
c/o Pomorskie Voivodeship
Chairmanship 2020-2021





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Introduction

The Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Co-operation (BSSSC) met online and in a physical mode in Kaliningrad, Russian Federation on October 7-8th. This hybrid model has been chosen due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and concerning sanitary restrictions and travelling limitations between Baltic Sea Region (BSR) countries in this demanding time. BSSSC met to discuss the cooperation for a more sustainable Baltic Sea Region with new opportunities ahead of us. To highlight the role of regions and cities as drivers of green and digital transition in the Baltic Sea Region and to take a closer look at programmes and financial tools of the EU in support of sustainable cross-border cooperation and green transformation. BSSSC also focused on culture and sustainability, supporting green businesses, green mobility and transport. One of the key subjects was also the ecological situation of the Baltic Sea.



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Main Messages:

Regarding COVID-19 pandemic:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a huge toll on Europe and the Baltic Sea Region. Millions of people have been infected, hundreds of thousands have died. Our economies have suffered and large parts of our lives have been transferred to the digital sphere. Vaccines have been developed quickly, but their use varies strongly across the Baltic Sea Region;
- While the pandemic is not yet over BSSSC shares the EU vision behind the Next Generation EU recovery plan and sees it as a chance to emerge stronger from the pandemic, transform our economies and societies, and design Europe that works for everyone, as the plan foresees.

Regarding the Europe:

- BSSSC finds it of vital importance to take an active part in the Conference on the Future of Europe and intends to be a platform to voice the regional perspective being an important part of this future. BSSSC looks forward to the outcomes of the Conference to make Europe and the Baltic Sea Region an even more democratic, inclusive, safe, economically stable and climate-friendly place for us and future generations to come.

Regarding Climate, Environment and Energy:

- BSSSC shares the opinion that the climate change is the biggest challenge of our times. And at the same time, it is an opportunity to build a new economic model for the Europe and the Baltic Sea Region. The European Green Deal sets the blueprint for this transformational change, and BSSSC regions are deeply involved in driving this change;
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in its recent report has stated again that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean, soil and land. The report underlines that global warming of 1.5°C and 2°C will be exceeded during the 21st century unless deep reductions in CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions occur in the coming decades;





- BSSSC recognises the serious threats to the Baltic Sea Region’s climate and its significant influence on society, environment, economy, and culture around the sea; it therefore calls on all stakeholders to design effective policies on mitigation and adaptation through a bottom-up and multi-sector approach as well as through in depth information campaigns;
- The upcoming UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, will bring parties together to accelerate actions towards the goals of the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. BSSSC urges all parties to significantly increase its efforts to address the climate challenges with concrete measures taking into account the role of cities and regions;
- BSSSC calls on EU institutions and national governments to secure funding instruments and resources to support regional and local authorities in their efforts to combat climate change and implement a green transition in their societies as a majority of measures and regulatory provisions are implemented at the local level;
- BSSSC encourages all regions, cities and other actors in the Baltic Sea Region to share good practices and to strengthen cooperation across borders making use of the EU programmes for 2021-2027. We need all on board and working together to meet the challenges of climate change;
- BSSSC welcomes HELCOM’s Baltic Sea Action Plan update to be finalised by the end of 2021. BSSSC shares the vision of a healthy Baltic Sea environment connected with a wide range of sustainable economic and social activities, also addressing and taking into account emerging issues. For example, the long-standing problem of ammunition, sunken ships, plastic, and chemical weapons abandoned in the Baltic Sea during World War 2;
- BSSSC still focuses its work on the need to further mainstream the UN-Sustainability Goals at all levels as a mix of a bottom-up and top-down approach, involving all levels of government and relevant stakeholders. BSSSC stresses that all EU programmes and instruments should be in line with and support the SDG implementation.





Regarding the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) and involvement of local and regional authorities in the implementation:

- The EUSBSR constitutes an important basis for the actions of BSSSC and its regions. BSSSC works in close cooperation with the Union of Baltic Cities (UBC) and the Euroregion Baltic (ERB), The Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), and Northern Dimension to voice the main issues to the Baltic regions and their local authorities and to be a crucial part of European and national policies;
- This close cooperation between the Baltic Sea Region stakeholders closes the link between regional, sub-regional and local actors, from policymaking to implementation.

Regarding Innovation Transfer in the Baltic Sea Region:

- BSSSC strongly believes that the Baltic Sea Region can become more competitive on a global scale through deeper collaboration, the definition of joint agendas and supporting the innovation development in mature and upcoming promising industries across the macro-region;
- BSSSC encourages innovation actors across the BSR to stop wasting resources that can be shared, exchanged, transformed and fully re-used by strengthening the exchange of knowledge and expertise, sharing and opening research and innovation infrastructures, transforming wasted raw materials and side streams into new products and rapidly digitalizing the industries;
- BSSSC invites national and regional governments across the BSR to bring high-level expertise to the regions by organizing conferences, seminars and training for actors involved in the innovation management, innovation transfer and digitalization of the industries;
- BSSSC supports macro-regional bodies to create space for well-developed and potential innovation actors from various sectors and fields of expertise to network, co-create, experiment, exchange knowledge and learn from each other;
- BSSSC invites governments across the BSR to work towards knowledge management patterns, and base funding schemes to support the real current and upcoming needs of the innovation actors across the regions.





Regarding Youth involvement and empowerment - supporting the establishment of Baltic Sea Youth Platform and intergenerational dialogue:

- BSSSC welcomes the support expressed for youth involvement by the recent Foreign Ministers' meeting of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and calls on CBSS, its Member States, regions and cities to secure long term support and financing for the Baltic Sea Youth Platform. A permanent and coordinated development of youth participation and youth involvement in all Baltic Sea networks, activities and programs is crucial for the future of a democratic and sustainable Baltic Sea Region;
- The last year's initiative to implement regional youth hubs is in a very good way and has already produced productive results. We support the youth initiative and call upon the regions to install step by step as many regional youth hubs as possible;
- As a result of this year's youth activities at the local, regional and BSR-level we want to emphasise the need for new ideas on how to connect the SDGs, Baltic Sea issues, and modern forms of participation with youth involvement on every political level. We especially promoted the idea of installing local and regional Citizens' assemblies around the Baltic Sea Region;
- Moreover, we support the Conference for the Future of Europe and will participate with our ideas from young people of the Baltic Sea Region;
- We suggest that young entrepreneurs with sustainable ideas should get as much support as possible. Progressive education approaches and best practice examples for sustainable entrepreneurship should be disseminated for changing citizens' and politicians' attitudes;
- All the small things we do can change our mindsets and give us the energy to convince others. We are looking forward to the BSSSC Youth Event and Baltic Sea Youth Platform next spring, which hopefully will be held physically in one of the BSR states.

Regarding Cohesion Policy and programmes:

- BSSSC appreciates the new perspectives of the INTERREG framework and the treatment of the member states, third countries and partner countries on an equal footing;





- BSSSC welcomes the approval of the Multi-annual Financial Framework and the Next Generation EU recovery package by all EU-Institutions and the EU member states. This vigorous political impulse must be translated into a swift approval of operational and cooperation programmes. It should not be jeopardized by attempts to micro-manage the implementation on the ground i. a. by a rigid interpretation of the regulations;
- BSSSC regrets that EU-co-financing rates have not for all regions and programs been kept at the level of the funding period 2014 – 2020. This does not facilitate a quick recovery in the view of national, regional and local budgets strained by the pandemic-driven expenditure;
- BSSSC urges the Commission to extend the deadline for the expenditure of REACT-EU support as approval of programmes started only in the summer of 2021. It is challenging for regions to implement REACT-EU in the remaining time until the end of 2023. As it was the objective of the REACT-EU initiative to financially support the regions affected by the COVID crisis the Commission should consider giving regions the time to implement the resources towards beneficiaries such as the vulnerable groups of the society;
- Boosting sustainable regional development by a forceful and well-resourced cohesion policy requires taking into account regional peculiarities and needs. This is particularly important concerning cross-border, trans- and interregional cooperation. The flexibility required from actors on the ground needs to be displayed by the Commission services, too. Regions and municipalities should be included in the design of programmes to the largest possible extent. The flexibility should be all the greater the smaller programmes and projects are.

Regarding Northern Dimension (ND) and cooperation with Russia:

- BSSSC strongly supports the continuous and concrete work of the Northern Dimension Partnerships;
- BSSSC supports continuation of cooperation programmes between EU member states and the Russian Federation and cooperation with Russia within all Pan-Baltic organisations.





Regarding green mobility and transport:

- BSSSC appreciates the EU Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy launched in December 2020 and agrees that green mobility must be the new licence for the transport sector to grow. Ambitious policies to reduce the use of fossil fuel in transport and new smart mobility solutions are needed to combat climate change. Rural and remote regions face particularly great challenges in searching for new smart green solutions to meet their transport demands and improve connectivity;
- BSSSC encourages local and regional authorities in the Baltic Sea Region to develop smart and sustainable mobility plans for urban and rural areas and their interconnections. BSSSC calls on national governments in the region to facilitate and support experimental smart green mobility initiatives and projects;
- The BSSSC calls on the European Commission to ensure that the revised TEN-T regulation more efficiently stimulate zero and low emission transport, is better prepared for the digital transition and that TEN-T infrastructure becomes more resilient. The network must also provide sufficient accessibility and connectivity to all regions - including peripheral and maritime regions and third countries like Norway and Russia. BSSSC furthermore supports the amendments to the design of the future TEN-T network as proposed by the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission.

Regarding culture, creativity and regional identity:

- The pandemic has revealed the true social value for societies in the Baltic Sea Region as well as the economic weight of the cultural and creative sectors and industries. The region's diverse cultural landscape has suffered severely from the COVID-19 pandemic and many actors in the cultural and creative sectors and industries are facing threatening situations;
- BSSSC underlines, that the post-pandemic recovery and revitalisation of cultural policy in the Baltic Sea Region are strongly connected to the other challenges that the Baltic Sea Region is facing, starting with the climate crisis;
- BSSSC, therefore, calls on future regional cultural policymakers to take into account the interconnectedness of culture with social challenges, especially the Green transition;





- The Culture and Creative Sector itself has over many years proven to be one of the strongest players when it comes to reaching out to a large community and having an impact. The projects Culture for Climate and Baltic Sea Cultural Cities call strongly upon this responsibility of the cultural actors;
- BSSSC supports and encourages artists and the wider cultural and creative community to take on this unique and critical role and be an agent of change for sustainable development and combatting the climate crisis in the Baltic Sea Region.

