

31ST BSSSC

A N N U A L

C O N F E R E N C E

RESOLUTION

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Poland



Main messages:

The Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation (BSSSC) met in Szczecin, Poland 12 – 13 September to celebrate the network's 30 years as a driver for strong regional involvement to discuss the consequences of the war in Ukraine and how to build a more resilient region for the future. Issues such as green transformation, innovation transfer, sustainable transport and mobility, and offshore wind energy were on the agenda.

The Baltic Sea Region is distinguished by several national, regional and local governmental organisations and networks. This shows a large commitment asset and demonstrates the readiness of many stakeholders to engage in Baltic Sea co-operation. BSSSC will continue to offer its platform to interact and communicate with other organisations and formats in the BSR.

The BSSSC

- condemns Russian actions of invasion and violence in Ukraine and stands with the Ukrainian society and authorities in solidarity in these difficult times. While the war is not yet over BSSSC shares good practices of regional cooperation and believes that this situation forces us to adapt and develop to the new reality.
- noted with interest the outcome of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) Ministerial Meeting in Wismar, Germany on 2 June. BSSSC underlines the important role of CBSS as a forum for political dialogue and calls for a closer cooperation between the CBSS and the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR).
- welcomes the CBSS commitment to an ambitious and comprehensive implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Climate Agreement through Baltic Sea Region mechanisms and platforms. BSSSC is ready to continue its cooperation with the CBSS on these important issues.
- supports the CBSS's concerns on the environmental, security and economic risks related to the dumped munition in the Baltic Sea. BSSSC will continue to engage itself in the macro-regional dialogue on underwater munition and support the efforts to develop best practices for risk assessment and safe environmental management.



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01 Regarding Russia's war of aggression and supporting Ukraine

- The war in Ukraine has taken a huge toll on Europe and the Baltic Sea Region. Millions of people have been affected by the situation related to the emigration of Ukrainians, providing them with security, with shelter and needed necessities such as medical care, access to education and fundamental essentials. Our economies have suffered and large parts of our lives have changed.
- While the war is not yet over BSSSC shares good practices on regional cooperation and believes that this situation forces us to adapt and develop to the new reality. It's also a great example of how a community functions, helping each other in difficult situations not only materially but also through the exchange of experience and non-material contributions.
- To support Ukraine "BSSSC for Ukraine" project has been implemented. Partners: Odessa and Mykolaiv Regions participated in the project and have attended workshops.
- Topics covered at the workshops included e.g. principles of budget management, human resources management, education policy, health care policy, economic policy, agricultural policy, participation in grant programs and international aid programs, experience of BSSSC regions in "implementing decentralization".
- BSSSC supports the idea that more cities or regions in the BSR could enter into cooperation with a Ukrainian region or city in the near future.

02 Regarding Offshore wind energy

The BSSSC shares the opinion that climate change and energy transformation is the greatest challenge of our time. The Baltic Sea is a fragile ecosystem and without decisive action, this area might be destroyed irrevocably. Damage to the ecosystem of the Baltic Sea Region means many negative effects for neighbouring countries and regions in economic, environmental, and social terms. The condition of the Baltic Sea ecosystem proves the quality and pace of life, which is of key importance not only today but also for future generations.

Offshore renewable energy is one of the fastest-growing energy sectors in Europe and will undoubtedly play the role of one of the pillars of the European electric power system. Further development of offshore wind farms in the Baltic Sea Region will bring benefits in the following areas: economic, environmental, and social, creating development opportunities for the Baltic Sea countries (local content).

The BSSSC, observing the potential of offshore renewable energy in the European energy sector and the economic development of the Baltic Sea States, sees the following challenges:

- preparation of appropriate port infrastructure and service ports is currently a key aspect for many regions starting investments in offshore wind farms including Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. It is crucial to support national and regional authorities in this regard based on experiences and good practices to accelerate investment decisions.
- development of offshore renewable energy will come together with a greater demand for properly educated and qualified staff. Specialists will be needed from every level of education (secondary and higher schools). Green energy will require a wide range of smart people who understand its benefits and aspects. "Infecting young people with a passion for green energy" should be a hallmark of the Baltic Sea region and a key task for regional authorities to prepare the necessary staff.
- The education systems in schools and universities should flexibly adapt to labour market needs and key global challenges. Effective training systems, retraining programs, improving qualifications, and filling the competence gaps of employees require cooperation and support from employers from leading and accompanying industries. Clusters, cooperation platforms, and associations as well as employers' associations should play an important role in this regard. It is necessary to launch effective and coordinated actions and activities for the development and retention of staff working in the green energy sector, with particular emphasis on offshore wind energy.

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- the constantly progressing demographic deficit has a negative impact on local talent and competence resources. The need to acquire human resources and practical knowledge from other countries and regions will continue to gain importance.
 - Offshore Wind Energy areas should be identified and implemented only in agreement with existing principles on environmental and nature protection regulations. Baltic countries and maritime sectors should always work together with nature in mind and not at its expense. In particular, each national Maritime Spatial Planning should uphold and align with local, national, regional and, where applicable, EU maritime laws and regulatory frameworks, to support and deliver the targets and goals of the updated HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan.

The BSSSC therefore sees the need to promote and disseminate knowledge in the field of offshore renewable energy, especially among young people to "infect them with passion for green energy" to meet the staffing needs related to offshore renewable energy. Therefore, it is extremely important to support educational initiatives such as EDU OFFSHORE WIND prepared by the Pomeranian Platform for the Development of Offshore Wind Energy in the Baltic Sea.

The BSSSC welcomes all initiatives supporting offshore renewable energy undertaken by all States and emphasizes its readiness to support and disseminate them within its competence.

03 Regarding Transport

The BSSSC:

Calls on the European Parliament and the Council to take into consideration the position of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission on the revised TEN-T regulation now being negotiated in the co-decision procedure

- Reminds that it is still of key importance to ensure effective physical and functional access of the urban nodes and farther located rural & peripheral regions to the three TEN-T core network corridors crossing the Baltic Sea region.
- Requests the PA for Transport under the EUSBSR (coordinated by Estonia and Lithuania) to engage with national transport administrations and rail operators in order to improve the conditions for cross-border rail services in line with the EU Action Plan for boosting long-distance and cross-border passenger rail. Believes that it in this regard will be particularly important to speed up the removal of various bottlenecks of technical and administrative nature, and to facilitate for cross-border travel planning and ticketing across borders.
- Underlines the importance of harmonisation when building infrastructure for alternative fuels in cross-border sections, and that planning and deployment of new technologies must take place in close dialogue between the states and regional authorities.
- Supports initiatives from the BSR Transport Innovation Forum to increase the efficiency of border crossings with Ukraine, and to improve the transport infrastructure and remove bottlenecks at the Polish-Ukrainian borders.
- Highlights the need to accelerate the efforts of integrating the Ukrainian transport network with major transport corridors in the BSR.

04 Regarding Innovation Transfer

Building upon the work of BSSSC Innovation Transfer Working Group (ITWG) and topics covered in the ITWG meetings, the BSSSC:

- urges BSR regions and innovation actors to embrace the opportunities presented by the New European Bauhaus initiative, recognizing its potential to drive innovation and sustainable development in regions and cultivate collaboration between creative industries, policymakers, and communities.
- invites BSR regions and innovation systems to harness the power of value chains as regional development and policy tools, promoting the integration of local businesses and industries into global supply chains, and leveraging the potential to stimulate economic growth, innovation, and job creation.
- urges BSR regions and innovation actors to advocate for next-level thinking and action on climate change through initiatives such as the Climate Academy, the Climate KIC, and others, fostering knowledge transfer, capacity building, and collaborative approaches to address the climate challenges and promote sustainable practices in regions.
- acknowledges the importance of conserving biodiversity, maintaining ecosystem services, and sustainable management of natural resources for the development of the Baltic Sea Region. Therefore, BSSSC urges innovation actors to ensure that innovation activities have no negative impact on natural resources, biodiversity, ecosystems, and ecosystem services.
- encourages local, regional, and national governments, as well as innovation actors to empower children and young people by amplifying their voices and engaging them meaningfully in the development of creative ideas, innovation solutions, and decision-making processes.
- recognizes the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform as a valuable practical tool for advice, knowledge sharing, and networking among regions, promoting interregional cooperation, policy exchange, and the transfer of innovative solutions to address common challenges and drive regional development.
- invites BSR regions and innovation actors to explore the development opportunities offered by innovation ecosystems and share lessons learned from the Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument, highlighting successful strategies and best practices in fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and regional competitiveness.

05 Regarding Youth involvement and Youth Forum

Youth participation is the key to grow the capacity of BSSSC and their youth to become more sustainable, resilient and better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green transition contributing to a more regenerative Baltic Sea Region.

Therefore

- All regions should have a BSSSC youth contact person and should participate in every BSSSC youth event. A regional contact person is essential to reach out to the youth, to connect to local decision makers and to financial commitment.
- We consider the Study visit of the youth board members to Brussels as a success. One major outcome is the invitation of DG Mare to the youth to participate in the “Our-Baltic” conference in Palanga at the end of September. We should think about having a similar study visit at least every two years.
- We believe that an ever closer cooperation with other Baltic youth networks - especially CBSS – Baltic Sea Region Youth Forum- as essential for the future of youth involvement. We should share our capacities and knowledge even better. One opportunity to do so are the upcoming European Elections 2024 and the CBSS Youth Fake-News project.
- We see a Cooperation with Ukraine Youth as an imperative of our time. Perhaps with youth from the Black Sea Region we have the most issues in common. BSSSC Members should be ready to support possible preparatory meetings.
- We have and will continue to develop valuable recommendations to the planned boost of Offshore wind energy farms in the Baltic Sea: This is one of the major challenges as it combines the topics of Energy security, sustainability and economy with the fundamental needs of environmental protection of the Baltic biodiversity. Thanks to Pomorskie Region we will dive into the topic even deeper as they invited us to the 2024 Spring Event to Gdansk in March to participate in the Education Career Fair “EDUOffshorewind”.
- As the venue of this Annual Conference is at the shores of the Odra-River we want to remind the Regions, that most pollution of the Baltic Sea comes from the rivers. Therefore we need a better Cross border cooperation of the regions and a clear commitment to solve environmental issues.
- We see the urgent need for a better combination and collaboration of the BSSSC/BSRYF activities and the EUSBSR to strengthen the youth involvement in the EUSBSR work and Annual Fora on a regular and sustainable basis thematically and financially, e.g. by including a mandatory budget for youth involvement into to Interreg call and applications to the Annual Forum.
- With the next chairmanship of Schleswig-Holstein we are sure that we will continue a fruitful youth cooperation in perspective of the next 30 years.

06 Regarding Cohesion Policy

The participants of the BSSSC Annual Conference note that:

- EU Cohesion Policy has contributed significantly to positive structural transformation and development of EU regions over the past three decades and provides them with a fair chance to benefits from the Internal Market.
- What has been achieved must not be put at risk by abruptly reducing or discontinuing funding after 2027. Further closing the development gap between regions in Europe remains a key objective of the European Union.
- As a pillar of the European Treaties EU regional policy should continue after 2027 as the most important investment policy giving long-term development impulses and thus supporting structural transformation in European regions
- All regions of the EU should continue to receive support within the framework of the EU's Regional Policy. The financial resources should adequately match the challenges of transformation it is supposed to deal with.
- Regions are the forefront of the multiple crises that we are facing. Cohesion Policy is the only investment policy of the EU that specifically addresses the regional level where the European citizen needs it. Thus it is the only EU policy to offer regions their own place based strategic design options with which they can address their respective different transformation or (structural) reform needs in partnership with local actors, businesses and the civic society.
- In order to allow regions to respond to their specific development and transformation needs and to mobilize their specific potential EU Cohesion Policy should respect the leading role of regional authorities and provide maximum flexibility programming and implementation including adequate legal requirements for experimentation.
- In order to preserve this flexibility on the ground, EU Regional Policy needs to continue to be a comprehensive integrated investment policy and should not be weakened by specific funding instruments addressing specific challenges
- Regional policy is the best instrument to link our European ambitions with regard to the green and digital transition with promoting local solutions that are fitting to the specific needs.
- European Territorial Cooperation makes an important contribution to European integration and cohesion, to promoting good neighbourly relations in Europe and to the visibility of the EU through cooperation on the ground across national borders. BSSSC believes that the importance of cross-border, transnational and inter-regional cooperation programs is higher than ever given the challenges the EU faces internally and externally.
- Therefore, BSSSC demands that the role of macro-regional strategies such as the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region should be further strengthened, also with regard to rebuilding Ukraine.

07 Regarding culture, creativity and regional identity

In these days of severe threats and challenges that the Baltic Sea Region is facing, the long-term trust-building work of cultural relations is more important than ever before. The BSSSC:

- therefore, calls on regional policymakers to use the power of cultural cooperation and cultural relations in building mutual trust.
- Furthermore, calls on regional cultural policymakers to take into account the societal resilience-building aspect of culture. Cultural cooperation transports common values, is inclusive and fosters the involvement of civil society including all generations. The Baltic Sea Region therefore needs a variety of cultural projects and common endeavours more than ever.
- Therefore, strongly supports the project Baltic Sea Cultural Pearls in its implementation as it is prone to become a best practice example on how to build resilient communities through culture. Furthermore BSSSC will support the awarding of a Baltic Sea Cultural Pearls title to selected cities and regions on an annual basis beyond the Interreg project lifetime by promoting the concept and acquiring sponsors.
- Calls on the responsibility of the cultural actors for building bridges in the Baltic Sea Region, especially during these challenging times
- All four selected Baltic Sea Cultural Pearls cities will be invited to the next BSSSC Annual Conference in 2024.