



BSSSC BOARD MEETING

12 May 2017

Kuressaare, Estonia

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BSSSC Board meeting – draft minutes Kuressaare

Friday, 12 May 2017, 09.30-14.00

Meeting venue: Kuressaare Town Hall, Lossi 1, Kuressaare, Estonia.

Present: Chairman Mr. Roger Ryberg (BSSSC), Mr. Jan Edøy (BSSSC), Ms. Ann Irene Saeternes (BSSSC), Mr. Lars Lund Godbolt (BSSSC), Ms. Hilde Aarø (BSSSC), Ms. Kari Lie (Eastern Norway County Network/Hedmark), Mr. Rune Bakkevoll (Akershus), Mr. Reiner Kneifel-Haverkamp (Brandenburg), Mr. Jon Halvard Eide (Agder), Mr. Iisakki Kiemunki (Regional Council of Häme), Ms. Krista Taipale (Helsinki Uusimaa Region), Ms. Marlene Rothe (Schleswig-Holstein), Mr. Sebastian Magier (Euroregion Baltic), Ms. Krystyna Wroblewska (Pomorskie Region), Mr. Toivo Riimaa (Association of Estonian Cities), Ms. Marili Niits (Association of Municipalities of Estonia), Mr. Ott Kasuri (Association of Municipalities of Estonia) Ms. Helen Söber (European Union Secretariat Government Office of Estonia)

1. Opening of the Board meeting

1.1. Opening of the meeting – Mr. Roger Ryberg, BSSSC Chairman

Mr. Roger Ryberg welcomed the participants, and expressed his gratitude of the success of the last Board meeting and hoped that this meeting will proceed in the same way as last time in Brussels. He also thanked the hosts for a lovely guided tour from Tallinn to Kuressaare the day before.

1.2. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

1.3. Adoption of Board meeting minutes from Brussels 9 February 2017

The minutes were adopted.

2. Tour de table - country specific reports

2.1. Information about ongoing/planned local/regional reforms

Mr. Ossi Savolainen informed that the current regional reform is the biggest in Finish history and will start in 18 months. Responsibility of the social and healthcare sectors will be transferred from the municipalities to the regions. This means that employees within these sectors have to change their workplace. In Helsinki-Uusimaa alone it leads to 65 000 new employees. There are ongoing discussions in the parliament concerning laws and regulations connected to the reform and there is some uncertainty concerning the outcome. As the reform itself will take place in 18 months, the time pressure is high. It will certainly be an expensive reform.



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Mr. Toivo Riimaa informed about the state reform of local governments. There are 15 counties in Estonia but these counties are run by state administration and does not have an elected body. There are 213 municipalities at current in Estonia and the government is aiming at reducing this to 75 municipalities. The reason for this is that approximately 80 percent of the current municipalities have less than 5 000 habitants. The government has set a minimum of 5 000 habitants per municipality, but recommends 11 000 habitants, except from in the small islands. The administrative reform bill will merge Estonian municipalities in two stages. In the first phase, the small municipalities that merge voluntarily will get financial support from the state. The financial support is offered in order to motivate them to unite voluntarily (the deadline for this was 1 February 2017). In the second phase, municipalities will be merged by force by the government without receiving the financial grant offered in the first phase. The municipalities that have not merged have a deadline until 15 May 2017 to report to the government. The merges enter into force with the local council elections in October 2017. By 1 January 2018, the new structure is expected to be implemented. The local mayors will receive one-year salary as a compensation.

Mr. Roger Ryberg informed that 75 out of 431 municipalities in Norway have agreed to merge voluntarily. Norway is aiming at reducing the number of municipalities with 25 per cent. The merges will take place from 2020. Concerning the regional reforms there are hard discussions taking place and the outcome of the reform depends on the national elections taking place in September 2017. More information will be given in October.

2.2. Important issues/policy areas in focus at the moment

Ms. Marlene Rothe informed about the state elections held in Schleswig-Holstein 7 May 2017. The Christian Democrats won the elections with 32 per cent of the votes. The Social Democrats received 27 per cent of the votes. The Green party received 13 per cent of the votes. The Liberals received 11, 5 per cent of the votes. The Alternative for Germany received 5, 9 per cent of the votes and the Danish Minority Party received 3,3 per cent of the votes. The German Federal Election will take place on 24 September 2017.

Ms. Krystyna Wroblewska informed that there will be regional and local elections in Poland in 2018. The current government is exploring regional reforms that will give them more support in the regional elections. The reason is that they want a stronger centralized government, but that this process is debated throughout Poland. The threat of the EU to stop funds will most likely affect the Polish people and not the members of the Parliament. She also mentioned that there is a national education reform as well as a health reform under preparation. The reforms are not broadly discussed, and the majority in the



parliament will most likely decide. Protests are ongoing where inhabitants show their reluctance towards the proposals from the government.

3. Estonian EU Presidency autumn 2017 and the EC White Paper on the future of the EU. Information by Ms. Helen Söber, European Union Secretariat Government Office of Estonia

Mr. Roger Ryberg introduced **Ms. Helen Söber** by mentioning that we are very much looking forward to the Estonian Presidency. **Ms. Helen Söber** informed that this is the first time the Presidency is held by Estonia. She argued that they cannot put their national interest in front and said that the four main priority areas are as follows:

1. An open and innovative European economy

This is improved by:

- Making the four freedoms reach its full potential. Reaching the full potential by decreasing bureaucracy.
- Making sure that providing services and starting a business in the EU is as easy as possible and advancing trade negotiations.
- Creating new funding opportunities for companies and ensuring a stable banking sector
- Ensuring fair competition by preventing tax evasion. This is especially important in the financial sectors.
 - The Estonian Presidency also wants to focus on the energy sector. They wish to make the market more transparent and get rid of monopolies. In sum, they want the consumer to see the marked prices and the electricity market in general should go towards consumer friendliness.

2. Digital Europe and the free movement of data

This is improved by:

- Developing cross-border e-commerce and e-services for the benefit of consumers, producers and businesses.
- Ensuring modern and secure electronic communications available everywhere across Europe as well as creating a favorable environment for new innovative services.
- Advancing cross-border digital public services to facilitate everyday life.

3. Safe and secure Europe

Ms. Helen Söber introduced this policy area by saying that this is the most important topic amongst Estonians. They will focus on:



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- Exchanging of electronic criminal records.
- Strengthening the fight against terrorism and organized crime and strengthening the internal security.
- Continuing the work tackling the migration crisis and reforming the Common European Asylum System.
- Increase defense expenditure, developing European defense cooperation and the EU-NATO partnership.
- Will want to look for security other places than NATO also by securing good relationship with neighboring countries through the Eastern Partnership programs.
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4. Inclusive and sustainable Europe

Ms. Helen Söber argued that they are striving to find the balance between economic, social and environmental goals. They want to:

- Modernize the rules in order to promote labor mobility and free movement of persons.
- Ensure equal opportunities in the labor market and social inclusion.
- Secure a more sustainable environment.

Future of the EU (European Commission White Paper on the future of the EU)

Ms. Helen Söber introduced the topic by mentioning that populism is rising and people want a change. She presented how the European Union is working to adopt to these changes. There have been two parallel paths. The one path is that the Council of the European Union has had three meetings debating how the EU should look the next ten years. The other path is the European Commission tabling a white paper with five possible scenarios for the future of the EU. The Commission does not have any clear idea on how this will turn out. They are working on five reflection papers. These are (date released):

- Developing the social dimension of Europe (26 April)
- Harnessing globalisation(10 May)
- Deepening the Economic and Monetary Union (31 May)
- The future of Europe's defense (7 June)
- The future of EU finances (28 June)

Junker's state of the Union speech in September will start the discussion and it is still uncertain if the decision on which path the EU should take will be finalized in December this year.



3.1. Questions and dialog

The Chairman thanked for the interesting intervention and opened the floor for questions and comments from the Board. The Board emphasised the need to focus on youth policy. It was also noted that the digital agenda is part of all the horizontal approaches because it is linked to all policy areas. Finally, the Board also stressed the need to regulate the digital single market. **Ms. Helen Söber** took note of the comments and underlined that these areas will be part of the Estonian Chairmanship program.

4. 25th BSSC Annual Conference 2017

4.1. Presentation of draft program

Mr. Reiner Kneifel-Haverkamp presented the draft for the Annual Conference 2017 called Cohesion = Togetherness. The theme of the conference is that borders are now getting more complicated and we need open borders in Europe these days. The conference will also take into account that cohesion goes beyond the redistribution of funds. There is also a youth event taking place, but it is not possible to arrange this in Potsdam. It will be held close to the Polish border - in Trebniz. **Ms. Malgorzata Ludwiczek** will help organizing this. The Board meeting will be held in the afternoon 20 September 2017 most likely at the University of Potsdam. The reception will be held the same evening. There will be a shuttlebus set up between the hotel and the place of venue. It will be difficult to get a representative from the European Commission (Commissionaire) to attend the Annual Conference (AC) as it takes place very close to the National Election in Germany. EU Commission do not visit member countries close to elections. **Mr. Nicola De Michelis, Head of Cabinet, DG Regio**, will be asked to attend and a draft of the AC programme will be sent to him after today's meeting. Session two in the draft; Cohesion as a concept, needs refining and is currently being worked on. An invitation to the Governor of Kaliningrad is in process. A German organization has offered to help organizing the upcoming project presentations. On the second day of the conference in session 5, a keynote speaker is lacking. **Mr. Ott Kasuri** offered to contact **Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves** - former president of Estonia and one of the founding fathers of the EUSBSR.

4.2. Discussion and recommendations

It was pointed out that the seventh Cohesion report might be published just in time before the AC is being held and that it would be nice if a speaker addressed the report.



Ms. Marlene Rothe called for that there should be a youth representative in all the panels and they welcome a youth representative in the panel on culture.

Ms. Krista Taipale informed that the TEN-T days will be organized in Estonia at the same time as the BSSSC AC and that it therefore is important to avoid overlapping topics at the AC. (Note by the Secretariat: With reference to the presentation by the Estonian representative this event is called *Connecting Europe Conference*)

4.3. Conference resolution - information by the BSSSC Secretariat

Ms. Ann Irene Sæternes presented the framework of the conference resolution. The Board agreed to the framework and timeline.

5. Implementation of the work plan – how to move forward

5.1. Paper for discussion

Ms. Ann Irene Sæternes informed about the role of rapporteurs and how we can implement the work plan.

This is a summary of the ideas and thoughts that came up in the discussion:

- We have limited resources. We have to maximize the effects of what we do. What direction do we want to be more visible? We want to be more visible in our regions. How do we do this?
- We could arrange events in conjunction with board meetings. The board could also have a meeting with local politicians in cooperation with host regions of the board meetings.
- Be more visible in the Baltic Sea region by establishing contact with the informal BSR group in the CoR (Committee of the regions) and by making other organizations refer to us. UBC, BSC-CPMR, organization for which we are a platform. If we for example can participate in their board meetings. We are not more visible to the extent that we are perceived as useful.
- In the European Parliament, there is also an informal group of MEPs for Baltic Sea issues. This group needs activation. Together we should decide how to activate the informal network groups in Brussels.
- We could have an annual seminar or event to communicate relevant topics for BSSSC. The board could have one Board Meeting in Brussels every year and combine it with a seminar. A topic that is important for us for lobbying purposes. We could also cooperate/join forces with other organizations.



- It was also noted that if the aims are too high we might fail. It was therefore agreed to change the wording in our work plan from “the rapporteur shall” to “The rapporteur is encouraged to”.
- The rapporteurs for transport requested a BSSSC message on the questions in the transport report. What is BSSSC interest in transport, what do we want?
- Some board members requested the secretariat to map the regions interest in the BSSSC policy areas, to get input on how to implement the work plan. This could perhaps be done by sending a simple survey out to the regions.
- Do we have too many policy areas and cross cutting topics? Perhaps we should do less and work more efficiently, for example focusing on cohesion policy, our relationship to Russia and migration issues. The most important ongoing discussions in our society today is solidarity, democracy and re-nationalization tendencies – we should take position and underline the value of BSR cooperation.

Ms. Ann Irene Sæternes summed up the discussions by concluding that

- Brussels antenna **Mr. Jan Edøy** takes the initiative for a meeting of our respective regional offices in Brussel to discuss the possibilities for more visibility in Brussels.
- The secretariat will take the lead in the mapping process of our member regions active policy areas as well as communicating more strongly with partners in the BSR.
- The rapporteurs try to decide what they need from the BSSSC Board to be more active in their policy area – a common statement, a working group, joining or supporting projects?

Mr. Roger Ryberg thanked everyone for the fruitful discussions and concluded that for the next Board Meeting this will be discussed further.

6. Reports from policy areas

Youth policy

Ms. Kari Lie informed about the upcoming youth conference *that* will be held back to back with the EUSBSR Annual Forum in Berlin on 12 and 13 June. In addition, BSSSC will together with UBC and ERB carry out a seminar during the Forum on 13 June. This will be a follow-up of the session held in Stockholm “Nothing about us without us”. Here we will focus on how to achieve our goals. **Ms. Kari Lie** will also be in the panel in a seminar organized by CBSS concerning sustainability on 14 June.

Northern Dimension

Ms. Ann Irene Sæternes informed that BSSSC had had a meeting with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning the relationship to Russia. BSSSC were encouraged



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by the Ministry to co-operate with Russia on a regional level as well as in Interreg projects. Norway is currently chairing the steering group on the Northern Dimension.

Sustainable Development and climate change

Mr. Lars Godbolt could inform that he will attend a meeting with the Council of Baltic Sea States Expert Group on the implementation of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in Iceland the following week. More information will be distributed after the meeting.

Culture

Ms. Marlene Rothe informed that there will be a fifth PA Culture Strategic Project Development Workshop in Berlin taking place back-to-back with the EUSBSR Forum in Berlin called "EVALUE-LEARN-CREATE". This will be followed up with a sixth workshop in Kaliningrad in September.

Maritime and HELCOM

Mr. Ossi Savolainen reported on Blue Growth. He referred to the written report submitted to the Board. He will attend the European Maritime days 2017 in Poole, U.K. HELCOM has granted BSSC observer status. **Ms. Krystyna Wroblewska** informed that there is ongoing work on the blue growth strategy and there will be a workshop on smart blue growth at the European Maritime Day.

Transport

Mr. Jon Halvard Eide informed that all relevant issues are enclosed in the transport report for the Board meeting. **Mr. Rune Bakkevoll** presented the discussion points at the end of the report on transport. They highlighted the need to spend more time on lifting and discussing these questions. **Mr. Roger Ryberg** stated that with reference to the discussion under point 5 in the agenda, this will be prioritized at the next board meeting. **Mr. Eide** pointed out that this was the second board meeting in a row when the discussion of the questions had been postponed to the next meeting, and questioned in light of this the rationale for spending time and resources on formulating questions which were not discussed.

Mr. Roger Ryberg thanked everyone for their information and the Board took note of it.

7. Report from Brussels antenna

Mr. Edøy informed about the most important ongoing discussions in Brussels. The topics that are on all agendas and influence all the meetings are Brexit, the election in France



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and the future of the European Union. These are topics the BSSSC should consider having opinions on. He further argued that there is a game changer now with Macron in France. There will be a lot of discussion that will influence the future of Europe. It is very important for BSSSC to follow these topics and try to influence the direction of Europe.

For the Horizon 2020 there are within the framework of societal challenges coming up many scoping papers on what is in the pipeline for the work programmes for the period (2018-2020). We are aware that there are some new initiatives of interest for our regions and networks. For example, a blue growth call earmarked for research and innovation projects in the Baltic Sea and North Sea Regions.

Other notable events:

- May 4th the commission approved the strategy for the Adriatic region (parallel activity to the EUSBSR).
- There is a new fund within the EEA Norway grants framework on 60 million euros to combat youth unemployment. Later, in September, a regional fund will be launched.

8. Reports from other organizations, programmes and networks

8.1. Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme

Ms. Ann Irene Sæternes presented the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme on behalf of **Mr. Matti Lipsanen**. The third call will be announced right after our annual conference. Partner search matchmaking etc. could therefore be a useful event at the AC. A workshop will take place 15 June in Berlin where the third call will be further discussed. There will be a joint meeting with the NCPs of the EUSBSR as part of this workshop.

8.2. EuroRegion Baltic

Mr. Sebastian Magier could inform that they are currently preparing the 20th anniversary of the organization. They are prioritizing the youth issue, as it is important to help the youth develop Europe. They are also focusing on unemployment. He stressed the importance of visibility and the need to update the declaration of common interest between UBC, ERB, BSSSC and COR. A joint project on youth participation has been initiated between Hedmark and ERB. Further ERB have launched a project together with BSC, CPMR and CBSS on sustainable development - funded by the Swedish Institute. Raising the awareness of the UN sustainable development goals. Releasing a series of seminars and webinars. There will be a Baltic Sea Conference in St. Petersburg where Mr. Magier will take part. He also offered to mention the BSSSC at this event.

8.3. UBC



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Mr. Toivo Riimaa informed that the 79th board meeting will take place in Berlin 15 May. The UBC annual conference 24-27 October in Växjö, "Leadership for the future - cities as leaders for global sustainable development". Registration will open in the beginning of June 2017.

9. Coming events

- 9.1. South Baltic Parliamentarian Forum in Szczecin 28 - 30 May
- 9.2. Informal Baltic Sea Group Summer Reception in Brussels 30 May
- 9.3. EUSBSR Annual Forum in Berlin 13 - 14 June
- 9.4. BSSC in Hamburg 3 - 5 September
- 9.5. Next BSSSC Board meeting Potsdam 20 September

Ms. Krystyna Wroblewska informed that her region, the Pomorskie region, could be interested to arrange the BSSSC Annual conference 2018 in Gdansk. Possible dates will then be September 12-14. She is still waiting confirmation from her region and will inform the BSSSC Secretariat accordingly

Mr. Roger Ryberg thanked the members of the Board for their active participation and contributions in the meeting. He thanked the Association of Municipalities of Estonia as well as the Association of Estonian Cities for hosting the meeting and assistance with practical preparations.