



## BSSSC BOARD MEETING

9 February 2017

Brussels, Belgium

MINUTES

## BSSSC Board meeting – approved Minutes

Thursday, 9 February 2017, 09.00-15.00

Meeting venue: Oslo Region European Office, Rue du Luxembourg 3, 5<sup>th</sup> floor.

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. Radomir Matczak (Pomorskie Region), Mr. Lars Salvesen (Eastern Norway County Network), 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), Ms. Anna Drazek (Pomorskie Regional EU Office), Ms. Malgorzata Ludwiczek (West Pomeranian Region), Ms. Agita Kaupuza (Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments), Mr. Andris Jaunsleinis (Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments), Mr. Sebastian Magier (Euroregion Baltic), Ms. Isabelle Johansson (Region Östergötland), Ms. Åsa Bjering (CPMR Baltic Sea Commission), Mr. Bernd Hemingway (Council of the Baltic Sea States), Ms. Krystyna Wroblewska (Pomorskie Region), Mr. Wieslaw Byczkowski (Pomorskie Region), Mr. Toivo Riimaa (Association of Estonian Cities), Mr. Matti Lipsanen (Regional Council of Häme), Mr. Trond Myrland (Buskerud), Ms. Ieva Andriulaityté (Lithuanian Association of Local Authorities).

### 1. Opening of the Board meeting (09.00)

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

**Mr. Ryberg** welcomed the Board to the meeting as the new chair. He expressed that he was delighted to take over the chair for the next two-year period. Eastern Norway County Network will do their best to promote the interests of BSSSC, and follow the European agenda. The members of the Board and the Secretariat presented themselves. The chair expressed his satisfaction over the high attendance at the board meeting.

#### 1.2. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

#### 1.3. Adoption of Board meeting minutes from Stockholm 7 November 2016

The Board took note of the reply from Kaliningrad Region Governor.

The Board meeting minutes from Stockholm was adopted.



## 2. Introduction by the new chair 2017-2018

The Secretariat was presented and will in total, make up two full time positions. **Ms. Saeternes** will be Secretary General (50%), **Mr. Godbolt** will be Executive Secretary (100%) and **Ms. Aarø** will be Special Adviser (50%).

**Mr. Edøy** is the new Brussels antenna, and he is representing the Oslo Region European Office. **Mr. Ryberg** referred to meetings held 8 February in Brussels with the deputy head of the Norwegian delegation to the EU, **Ms. Ingrid Schulerud**, and with the President of Committee of the Regions (CoR), **Mr. Markku Markkula**.

### 2.1 New routines, presentation of new webpages

**Mr. Godbolt** presented the new webpage (<http://www.bsssc.com>) and the new communication tools. Furthermore, the phrase “members” has been removed from the webpages and replaced with “part of the BSSSC- network”. New routines were introduced. These includes a timeframe for sending out agendas, reminders and minutes to all members of the Board. The members of the Board approved the procedures introduced. A copy of the procedures will be distributed.

BSSSC has also established a profile on LinkedIn. All members of the Board were encouraged to link to BSSSC from their profile in order to promote BSSSC.

### 2.2. Work plan and project commitments

**Ms. Saeternes** presented the Work Plan based on the preliminary presentation in Stockholm 7 November 2016, and on the subsequent input from members of the Board. The work plan reflects upon the BSSSC strategy from 2016-2020. The work plan consists of four crosscutting themes and four policy areas.

**Ms. Saeternes** presented project commitment from BSSSC to projects in the second call of the Interreg BSR program. In addition to the three projects earlier agreed on - two new projects were presented. Letters of support have been issued to:

- “Smart-up BSR” (Improving smart specialization implementation of the Baltic Sea Region through orchestrating innovation hubs)
- “MAMBA” (Maximised MoBility and Accessibility of Services in Regions Affected by Demographic Change).

The work plan will be revised depending on the outcome of project decisions in May 2017.

There were no remarks to the support of the two additional projects.
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### 2.3 Discussion and adoption of the work plan

**Ms. Rothe** emphasized that culture and creative industries are together in the EUSBSR policy area and therefore should be treated as one topic in the work plan. In addition Schleswig-Holstein had some minor comments to the digital agenda/ risk of digitalization.



## BSSSC BOARD MEETING

9 February 2017

Brussels, Belgium

### MINUTES

**Mr. Magier** informed that they had a continued dialogue and co-operation with Kaliningrad about youth involvement; this should be mentioned in the work plan so that BSSSC expresses their support to this and thereby should follow up on this.

**Mr. Edøy** informed about the meeting with Markkula, the President of CoR. He had expressed an interest in co-operation - and finding a common ground with BSSSC on the youth-approach. The EEA-grants could be an example where funding might be available.

**Mr. Salvesen** asked about the Akershus rapporteurship on transport and what topics would be most beneficial to take into consideration. This has not been defined yet and will be further elaborated.

**Ms. Taipale** informed that the report from the Helsinki-Uusimaa Chairmanship period will be issued in the beginning of March. She thanked for the reports from the Board members, and is looking forward to more reports on policy areas that should be submitted by the end of February 2017.

The work plan was adopted with the changes proposed in the meeting. The members of the Board could submit comments and minor changes to **Ms. Saeternes** by 23 February 2017.

### 3. 25th BSSSC Annual Conference 2017 - Report by host region

**Mr. Kneifel-Haverkamp** confirmed the willingness of region Brandenburg to host the Annual Conference in Potsdam 20 – 22 September 2017. There will be an opening for a Board meeting on 20. September 2017. The venue is settled and it can accommodate up to 200 persons. He recommended that the Board set up a Task Force (TF) to prepare the program & content for the Annual Conference. Hotel bookings will have to be made early. **Mr. Ryberg** thanked Brandenburg for its willingness to host the Annual Conference.

**Mr. Salvesen** proposed that **Mr. Bakkevoll** could volunteer. **Mr. Lipsanen**, **Ms. Ludwiczek** and **Ms. Rothe** also volunteered for the TF. The Secretariat will contribute to the preparation of the Annual Conference.

The Board meeting proceeded with the flag ceremony - handing over the BSSSC-flag from **Mr. Kiemunki** (Hämeenlinna region) that hosted the Annual Conference in 2016 to **Mr. Kneifel-Haverkamp** (Brandenburg region) who will host the Annual Conference in 2017.

### 4. Northern Dimension - Information by Kim Kuivalainen, European External Action Service (EEAS)



## BSSSC BOARD MEETING

9 February 2017

Brussels, Belgium

### MINUTES

**Mr. Ryberg** introduced **Mr. Kuivalainen** by mentioning BSSSCs involvement in the Northern Dimension (ND).

**Mr. Kuivalainen** gave an update of the status concerning Northern Dimension in Europe today. He could inform that;

- The Ukrainian crisis has had a negative impact on cooperation within the Baltic Sea Region. Because of the EU's decision to restrict financial operations in Russia, the European Investment Bank has frozen all activities towards Russia.
- It has been positive that ND could convene a senior official meeting last autumn in Reykjavik, Iceland. Next steering group meeting in the ND will take place in Oslo in June 2017.
- The next senior official meeting of Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) will find place in Brussels 14 February 2017 where the cooperation with Russia will be a topic.
- ND has built new partnerships. A cooperation project with Belarus on energy and waste will be initiated. ND has completed a big wastewater plant in Kaliningrad.
- In the Arctic Council, where EU is taking part as an observer, there is business as usual. Finland will take over chair in council.
- It remains to be seen how the new U.S. Presidency will affect cooperation in Europe especially concerning climate change issues.
- Russia is chairing the Barents Council at the moment.
- "Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council" is now completed by the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. **Mr. Kuivalainen** thanked for contributions from the regions, and emphasized the importance of regions raising their voices in policy-making.
- It is likely that the EU will stick to their existing position and restrictions towards Russia. The European External Action Service (EEAS) will promote people-to-people cooperation with Russia and thereby supporting civil society. It is important to continue cooperation with Russia on e.g. environmental issues.

#### 4.1 Questions and answers

The Chairman thanked for the interesting intervention and opened the floor for questions and comments from the Board. The Board stressed the need to continue the dialog and to find the right actors to cooperate with. Baltic University Network was mentioned – where also Russian universities take part. Dialog through academia could form one way forward. The Board showed interest in the people-to-people cooperation and asked for more information about the 6 million Euros programme. Mr. Kuivalainen explained that this programme was not opened yet and that the Moscow EU delegation would be managing these funds. Northern Dimension is seen as a bridge builder between the Baltic Sea Region and the Arctic, as well as an umbrella for the work in the four regional councils – Baltic Sea, Barents, Arctic and Nordic Council. BSSSC was invited to take part in the further



development. EEAS is positive to the sub-regional aspect of ND and want to include the Committee of the Regions into this context. An idea was launched to take up the sub-regional aspect as a specific topic at the next Steering Group meeting in Oslo in June. Mr. Kuivalainen encouraged new initiatives to the ND work and looked forward to continue cooperation with BSSSC.

## **5. EUSBSR Annual forum in Berlin - Information on status by Ms. Åsa Bjering, Baltic Sea Commission**

The Federal Foreign Office together with the Baltic Sea Commission and in close cooperation with the European Commission will host the 8th Annual Forum of the EUSBSR. The formal planning meeting will take place in Berlin next week. The Baltic Development Forum will be held B2B. **Ms. Bjering** recommends that participants arrive as early as June 12<sup>th</sup>. They call for a stronger presence of local and regional authorities in the EUSBSR. The General Assembly will be held on the day before. It is important that people register early because they can only host 850 participants.

Three main sessions will be held:

- Connectivity with neighborhood including Russia
- Blue growth – agenda for the Baltic Sea Region by the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE).
- Focus on tangible discussions.

20 to 25 workshops will take place. As the BSSSC has a strong focus on youth involvement, Germany would like to see a strong youth participation in the forum, it will be a B2B event. This will be a continuation of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) youth dialogue. BSSSC will be contacted about this.

Ms. Bjering also informed that the Baltic Sea Commission is currently working on a pilot together with the group of Managing Authorities in the BSR (network within European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)) in order to better exploit the transnational component of the Operational Programmes. Region Västerbotten, Sweden is running a pilot on clean technology, and **Ms. Bjering** welcomed BSSSC regions to be involved in the initiative. Results from this pilot will be presented at the Annual Forum of the EUSBSR in Berlin in June.

## **6. Cohesion Policy (CP)**

### **6.1. Introduction by Mr. Nicola De Michelis, head of Cabinet of the Commissioner for Regional Policy**

**Mr. Nicola De Michelis** stated that the BSSSC discussion concerning cohesion policy is very timely. The European Commission will propose future budget in the second half of the next year. The discussion will be very difficult because the EU are losing one of the main



contributors – the UK. A potentially tighter budget will call for rethinking of the cohesion policy. As this policy is currently being renegotiated, it is important for the regions to take active part in the negotiations and forward ideas and proposals. A bottom-up approach to handle social challenges such as unemployment and increased poverty across Europe is important. This raises several difficult questions such as:

- Why do we need the Cohesion Policy? Who should manage the funds, should it be on a national level or from Brussels?
- Key objectives needs to be identified such as how the funds should be managed? Should the management be simplified?
- How should the cohesion policy be linked to the European semester? Should we be thinking in terms of using conditionalities – strengthening links between reforms and access to funds? There are several options on how to solve this, and there is an inevitable debate to come.
- The question of the performance of the EU budget must be taken into consideration, and it is important to keep in mind that the cohesion policy has demonstrated measurable impacts; however, one must ensure that public money is well spent.
- How will the future of territorial cooperation look like?

Furthermore, there are other issues worth taking a closer look at:

- Should one be more demanding in types of projects being funded? Should one concentrate on specific areas that are relevant? In that case, it needs to be justified.
- Macro-strategies and micro-strategies need to reflect each other. How should Macro Regional Strategies (MRS) and *Interreg* be connected? The future of the Baltic Sea Region program should mirror the EUSBSR. Furthermore, national and regional Operational Programs need to match the MSR.

Regarding resources, the future budget is uncertain, but it might be decreased and finances must be used more efficiently – create added value. The level of co-financing is too high at the moment, countries/regions must put in more resources. New priorities in Europe such as security, borders and immigration.

## 6.2 Discussion

The Chairman thanked **Mr. De Michelis** for a very interesting intervention and opened the floor for questions and comments from the Board. The Board underlined that the regions are faced with both the benefits and challenges of the cohesion policy, and that the BSSSC's position paper has addressed several of the questions and issues presented by **Mr. De Michelis**. The need for simplifications were stressed and it was pointed out that the level of control and audit is hampering the efficiency of the policy. At the same time, it was underlined that European Cooperation is more important than ever. The Board is positive to rethinking the cohesion policy and to break new ground. It was underlined that smart specialisation is an important tool and has given positive effect for implementation of



cohesion policy on the ground. Thematic platforms building bridges between regions and supporting smart connections and cooperation should be a key for the future. We need user-friendly systems for control and that the same type of rules apply for all funds to strengthen policy development. The Board referred to the “communication paradox” with regard to cohesion policy – meaning that the positive results of the policy do not seem to reach out no matter how much it is documented and presented. It is always asked for more justification of the policy and the programmes. The need for incentives for private sector involvement was mentioned as an important point. In addition, the non-used opportunities with regard to cross-programme cooperation was highlighted as an area for more synergies in the future. It was underlined that the cohesion policy is important to strengthen the EU Identity.

With regard to the reality of Macro Regional Strategies (MRS), Mr. De Michelis pointed to the fact that the governance is difficult. The MRS still depend too much on EU support. The member states and regions will have to priorities more resources to the strategies – to underline their commitment and their will to implement the priorities. A question was raised if transnational programs (Interreg) in the future should be better synchronized to the corresponding MRS. The need for a timely delivery of framework for the new policy from the European Commission was stressed. Delays causes problems with programming that again affects the implementation process and delivery of results. The new regulations should be presented before the next election to the European Parliament and a new European Commission will be appointed.

## **7. Position paper on Cohesion Policy**

### **7.1. Presentation of draft paper by the working group Chair/Rapporteur**

**Mr. Kneifel-Haverkamp** started with some introductory remarks to the position paper on Cohesion Policy, “Cohesion Policy post 2020 and BSSSC” and thanked all members of the ad hoc workgroup for their effort. The benefits of the Cohesion Policy was highlighted alongside the potential to improve performance due to over-regulation. Concerning funding of the Cohesion Policy it is difficult to give precise indications, and it is probably not realistic to assume that it will maintain its current share. The principle of solidarity should still be one of the pillars. The vast majority of funding should go to the least developed regions, but a higher relative share should go to more developed regions due to new challenges in Europe. Concerning the reliability of the Cohesion Policy, it should be continued as a seven-year period. A new focus should be emphasized, and that is an aspect going beyond growth; the importance of creating and containing trust. Examples of this could be more people-to-people projects and youth involvement. Further, it is necessary to have a stronger coherence between strategies and programs. It is important that innovation and smart specialization be in focus so that one allow creating a space for experimentation where it is room for failing. Another point is that Cohesion Policy is close to the regions and thereby its people.

### **7.2. Discussion and recommendations - and adoption of the paper**



## BSSSC BOARD MEETING

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**Mr. Ryberg** thanked the ad hoc group for a clear political document and opened the floor for questions, comments and proposals. The Board gave positive signals with regard to the document and signaled their readiness to approve the paper. As Mr. De Michelis pointed out in his intervention – the window is open to present input and proposals now and BSSSC should be involved as early as possible in the process. A question with regard to joining forces with other BSR organisations – to strengthen the voice - was raised. Ms. Saeternes underlined that BSSSC need to agree on an own paper – as a fundament for cooperation with other organisations. Adoption of the paper from the ad hoc working group will be the first step stone. The next step could be developed in cooperation with other organisations.

Some changes and comments were presented and discussed. The Rapporteur Mr. Kneifel-Haverkamp was given the floor to respond to the comments and proposals from the Board. A compromise was found with regard to the comment from Ms. Rothe on alignment of funds and with regard to the cooperation and dialog with partner countries Norway and Russia. The paper will be updated accordingly. The comments and proposals from Mr. Eide was taken note of and commented. Mr. Eide agreed to send the points in written to the Secretariat to be kept for later considerations.

The Board adopted the draft position paper from the ad hoc Working Group with the agreed changes. The updated paper will - as soon as possible - be sent to the relevant recipients in the EU institutions as well as shared with other European regional organisations.

#### 8. Reports from policy areas

**Ms. Taipale** informed about the annual meeting of the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission – Helsinki Commission (HELCOM), and stated that the BSSSC application to become an observer will be on the agenda at this meeting. BSSSC will also be an observer at the European Maritime Day.

**Ms. Rothe** proposed to discuss possible interests of the Board in the two cultural flagship projects the BSSSC supported with letters of support (Creative Ports and BalticRIM). It was suggested that the Board should discuss at a later stage, after the funding decision of the Monitoring Committee. The BSSSC needs to find its role in terms of being an associated partner of Interreg projects. Ms. Rothe pointed to three specific cultur projects that had applied for Seed Money.

**Ms. Ludwiczek** and **Ms. Lie** gave an update on youth seminar “Nothing about us without us” in Stockholm in November 2016. Governance, prosperity, empowerment of youth and environment were the topics. The next youth seminar will be held one day before the EUBSR conference, and it is important that a draft agenda and topics be presented. It is of great importance that they get a feedback on how many youth will participate. **Ms. Lie** highlighted the fact that there should be two youth members of the Board. Currently she is the only youth representative.

**Mr. Eide** called for a reflection on how to report on transportation. It is demanding to make a more specific report due to limitations in opportunities to observe all transportation arenas. For the next board meeting a report more specific to the BSR will be made.





### 8.1. Questions and discussion

It was called for the necessity to operationalize the BSSSC work on the arenas where participants of the BSSSC are present - as well as elaborating more on the concrete work to be done within each policy area. This could be a topic on the agenda in the next Board meeting in May.

## 9. Reports from other organizations, programs and networks

**Mr. Ryberg** emphasized that the BSSSC is an open network organization and the Board meetings are open to our cooperation partners. Dialogue, exchange of information and cooperation is essential for the work in the BSR.

### 9.1. CBSS

**Mr. Hemingway** is representing the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and he expressed that he had enjoyed being present at the current board meeting. He would like to participate at the next meeting in May. He called for a closer cooperation concerning youth participation with respects to Baltic Sea Youth. It is only a question of coordination. Once communication is established, it will be easier to overcome the challenges of finding relevant topics and joint activities.

### 9.2. Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme

**Mr. Lipsanen** could inform that 145 million euros remains in the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Program after the first round. The areas that were the most popular in the second call was non- technological innovation and clean water. 71 applications have gone through to the second round where approximately half are expected to be selected. Few applications on transportation projects has been put forward. One third of the applications included Russian partners, and there were relatively few Norwegian partners in the applications. Research- and universities were the main applicants and few regions are leading projects. The third call will open in the autumn of 2017 and will probably be the last full round.

### 9.3. EuroRegion Baltic

**Mr. Magier** informed about the Annual Forum held in Kalmar, Sweden on the 8. February 2017. He could inform that the presidency of the ERB now was transferred to Sweden. They would continue to focus issues of water management. Further, they are currently involved in projects connected to energy efficiency, passive houses and wetlands. Next year the ERB will celebrate their 20 years anniversary and he encouraged a joint Board meeting between BSSSC and ERB.

## 10. Coming events

### 10.1. Next Board meeting in Estonia in May

The next board meeting will take place in Estonia 11-12 May 2017. Our Board member **Ms. Marili Niits**, from Saaremaa will host the meeting. It was suggested that a bus could be set up from Tallinn Airport to Kuressaare. Alternatively one could take a plane. The Board agreed that a bus set up for the meeting would be a good idea, at least one way.



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**Mr. Ryberg** thanked the members of the board for their active participation and contributions in preparation for the meeting. He thanked the Oslo region European Office for hosting the meeting and assistance with practical preparations.