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BALTIC SEA COMMISSION POLICY POSITION

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A BALTIC REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TEN-T (TRANS-EUROPEAN TRANSPORT NETWORK)

WHAT IS THE CPMR BALTIC SEA COMMISSION?

As one of the Geographical Commissions of the pan-European organisation of Regions - the CPMR (Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions of Europe) - the Baltic Sea Commission (BSC) contributes to the CPMR and provides input for its policy positions and concrete work plan. The three work priorities of the CPMR are: Cohesion Policy and territorial cohesion, Europe of the Sea and coastal areas, and accessibility for all of Europe's territories.

The Members of the Baltic Sea Commission have identified *Transport and Accessibility* as one of the strategic areas of interest to monitor and follow more closely than other policy areas. This is achieved through regular meetings of the BSC Transport Working Group. The purpose of the General Messages of the Baltic Sea Commission is to address a series of key political messages, driving our common work forward. Through the BSC Transport Working Group, a work plan with deliverables is connected to each message. Regional politicians participate in the Working Group, which is followed and supported by senior officials from the Regions working within the area of infrastructure, logistics, transport and transnational cooperation.

CONTEXT

The trans-European transport network is a planned set of road, rail, air and water transport networks in the European Union. Nine multimodal transnational corridors have been identified as priorities within this European network, in order to facilitate coordinated implementation.

The TEN-T Network, adopted in 2013, is unsatisfactory as far as the CPMR BSC Regions are concerned. The geographical scope and limited involvement of stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Region results in corridors that are far more favourable to the core of Europe. Still, many of our Regions are concerned and involved in the implementation of not only the core corridors but secondary and tertiary networks that feed into, and ensure the interoperability of, the core network corridors.

The infrastructure development of the trans-European transport network is closely linked with the implementation and further advancement of EU Transport Policy. The experience of the first year demonstrates that the core network corridor approach has great potential to stimulate positive effects beyond pure transport and mobility policies.

MESSAGES

Message 1: A strong core needs roots and branches just like a strong tree needs its branches and fine roots

We support the focus on territorial cohesion and accessibility that the CPMR has in promoting the principle of accessibility in EU Transport Policy.

We want to continue to stress that accessibility criteria should be introduced in further studies, and that implementing acts like the CEF Calls for Projects, which DG MOVE are initiating to improve the corridor work plans, should include additional criteria on the topic of Accessibility with a profound basis in Article 4 of the TEN-T guidelines.

The Article states that *“The trans-European transport network shall strengthen the social, economic and territorial cohesion of the Union... through Accessibility and connectivity of all regions of the Union, including remote, outermost, insular, peripheral and mountainous regions, as well as sparsely populated areas”*;

This is a cross-cutting message of utmost importance when it comes to the implementation of the TEN-T Core Network of Europe.

Maps are of great importance for communicating messages. Looking at the maps of the core network corridors, it is of great concern to see how significant areas in the European periphery are not covered by these corridors. We need a Europe that lives up to the policy of cohesion, a Europe that finds strength and added value in inclusiveness and equal opportunities in all parts of the Union to promote sustainable development.

Message 2: The interest of corridor-void regions should be taken into account in the formal process

The Baltic Sea Commission warmly welcomed the opening for the regions situated along the core corridors to participate in the Foras. The regions of the BSC along the core corridors are actively participating in the Corridor Forums and voice their opinions and needs in the preparation and updating of corresponding work plans. The BSC gathers their input and provides the CPMR with argumentation in order to improve the forums and work plans of the respective corridors.

Whilst the opening up of the governance of the core network corridors to the regions is welcomed, there is concern that some peripheral regions are not located along any core network corridor and therefore not represented in a Corridor Forum. Regions outside the corridors are excluded from these meetings even though the core network corridors are of great relevance to the transport of people and goods from and to the excluded regions. This leads to the stakeholders in the areas outside of the three core network corridors having insufficient capacity to plan adequate measures and mobilise financial support for the corridor access investments as a growth and prosperity factor.

The Baltic Sea Commission very much appreciates that the Corridor Coordinators do not only focus on the areas along the corridors, but also visit areas outside the corridors in order to understand the needs of the corridor-void areas and how they bring European added value. The Baltic Sea Commission wants the Corridor Forums to structure a broader participation in the formal process.

Message 3: The financial instruments are more applicable in some countries

There is a tendency to shift EU contributions to infrastructure projects from grants to financial instruments, mainly loans. This has significant effects. The financial instruments offered are very helpful in countries with low credit ratings while the effects in countries with better credit ratings are minor. In addition, it seems as if the European Commission has not sufficiently taken into account the structures for financing infrastructure in the different Member States. As a result, some financial instruments can barely be applied in certain Member States.

Message 4: Cooperation with third countries and neighbouring countries should be increased

Cooperation and relations with third countries is an important issue for the Baltic Sea Region and vital to fully utilise the development potential of the macro-region and to increase connectivity. Recognising that, in light of recent developments, the cooler relations between EU and Russia are likely to continue to affect transport patterns and interoperability. Five “Issue Papers” have been circulated to the participants of the Corridor Forums. One of them is on “Cooperation with third countries”. In terms of railway logistics, Russia is a straight connection to the Far East, for example the New Silk Route via Kazakhstan to Europe which will, during EU’s planning period, come to influence the TEN-T core network corridors.

The Baltic Sea Commission welcomes the Issue Paper, but so far no specific schemes on how to achieve interoperability between core network corridors and transport networks of third countries have been worked out. The Paper should also include Norway. In addition, cooperation with neighbouring countries, such as Norway for example, is important for the Baltic Sea Regions. The BSC welcomes the update of the TEN-T maps to include the neighbouring countries: Norway, Iceland and the Western Balkans Region.

Message 5: Increase funding for MoS and facilitate for the participation of actors in the comprehensive network and with third and neighbouring countries

The CPMR Baltic Sea Commission considers the MoS agenda for the period 2016–2020 to be vaguely formulated. With only one or two Calls for Projects, we believe that the conclusions that MoS Coordinator, Brian Simpson, is to present in June 2016 will mainly be applicable for post-2020. Two main concerns that the CPMR and the Baltic Sea Commissions have raised are:

- Connections between two ports in the comprehensive network are not eligible. Projects need to concern at least one core network corridor port. This is counterintuitive in relation to the overall goal of TEN-T policy, to promote the smooth functioning of the internal market and accessibility that supports economic, social and territorial development of all parts of the Union.

- At the moment, projects concerning an EU port and a third country port are not eligible. These kinds of projects are of high relevance for some BSC regions.

-These arrangements have been decided by the European Commission and applied in the CEF Calls for Projects. However, the arrangements are restricted interpretations of the legal bases adopted in co-decision by the Parliament and the Council. The way MoS are supported must be broadened.

Specific topics raised by the Baltic Sea Commission in regards to MoS are ice breaking, sulphur/SECA and seas with short distances between shores – ferry lines should to be considered an integral part of the network, comparable to roads and railroads.

Message 6: Harvest benefits on on-going projects

All European Territorial Cooperation Programmes (Interreg) have thematic priorities that are directly affected by the implementation of TEN-T policy. Interreg funding is of crucial importance for stakeholders within the Baltic Sea Regions in order to implement and realise TEN-T policy. Within the Interreg V-B programme for the Baltic Sea Region, three projects focusing on how the core network corridors can contribute to growth and prosperity in the Baltic Sea Region, were approved in the first Call. All three projects have BSC members as either lead partners or project partners. A close collaboration between the European Commission and the three projects TENTacle, Scandria2Act and NSB CoRe will not only lead to better cooperation between regional, national and EU authorities, but will also increase the awareness of European matters at all levels. Very often the Interreg projects are focusing on soft issues in comparison with CEF funding.