

Gdańsk Declaration

Adopted at the Sixth Conference of Ministers Responsible for Spatial Planning and Development in the Baltic Sea Region,
Gdańsk 19 September 2005

The Baltic Sea Region is one of the most promising regions in Europe with regard to economic growth, competitiveness, innovations, the improvement of the general well-being of its citizens, and quality of life. The Sixth Conference of Ministers Responsible for Spatial Planning and Development of the Baltic Sea States is aware of the spatial effects of these developments on both land and on the Baltic Sea itself. Therefore, cooperation on spatial planning and development is necessary to strengthen the positive effects as well as alleviating and preventing the negative ones.

We recognize that both the Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea 2010, adopted by the Ministerial Conference in Tallinn in 1994, as well as the VASAB 2010 Plus Spatial Development Action Programme, adopted in Wismar in 2001, continue to provide a good basis for co-operation between our countries.

The Tallinn and Wismar strategies can continue to serve as a basis for the development of new programmes and projects on cross-border and transnational co-operation. However, more emphasis should be put on priorities related to the changes in situation and the challenges brought about by EU enlargement and the strengthening of the territorial dimension of the EU cohesion policy.

These new challenges have emerged partly because of the scale of recent developments, and increase the demand for better coordination through spatial planning and integrated spatial development. The recommendations in the Policy Document "**Connecting Potentials**", prepared for this Conference, are intended to help to react to these changes and prepare for future challenges.

The Policy Document is a first step in creating a new long-term perspective for the spatial development of the Baltic Sea Region, in line with the encouragement of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, and taking into account the priorities of the EU Territorial Cohesion Policy, the conclusions from the Rotterdam and Luxembourg Ministerial Meetings, as well as the work undertaken by the European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning, CEMAT.

The Policy Document addresses priorities, opportunities and instruments brought about by the territorial dimension of the Cohesion Policy of the European Union as well as the new approach to spatial planning and development in the Federation of Russia. [6]

A major goal of the VASAB cooperation is the better spatial integration of the Baltic Sea Region, and the improved integration of the Baltic Sea Region with other areas of Europe, resulting in territorial cohesion. Spatial development cooperation undertaken so far in the Baltic Sea Region needs to be strengthened in order to overcome the evident lack of territorial cohesion in our Region.

The provision of convenient, efficient and environmentally friendly transport systems is important to connect existing potentials. However, improved accessibility is not sufficient for achieving spatial integration. Equally important is the cooperation between cities, firms and scientific institutions within the Region and within transnational development zones. Improvements to transport infrastructure and logistics should be considered in this context. The spatial co-ordination of policies for urban development, transport and innovation should be enhanced in the Baltic Sea Region. Spatial planning in intensively used maritime areas should be supported. Adequate attention should be paid to natural and cultural assets.

We address the European Union by pointing out the following issues:

- In future, EU Cohesion Policy could be better adjusted to the specific features and diversity of the different pan-European regions. It should take advantage of their specific potential and address key development issues. The Structural Funds Programmes, within all the three objectives, and the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument should take the consequences of their actions for spatial development into account.
- It is important to continue the future transnational cooperation programme in the Baltic Sea Region within the current INTERREG III B boundaries in order to maintain strong instruments for the implementation of a coherent spatial development policy in the Baltic Sea Region.
- Relevant research should be undertaken to provide a more precise specification of the needs and means for connecting Baltic Sea Region potentials into synergic network systems. Research programmes, such as ESPON 2, could provide more focused research on the specific territorial characteristics of European macro regions such as the BSR.

We ask the pan-Baltic organisations to pay attention to the spatial effects of their agreements, co-operation programmes and policies.

We instruct the Committee on Spatial Development of the Baltic Sea Region to focus the work of VASAB, until the Seventh Conference, on the following issues:

- to prepare a long-term perspective for the spatial development of the Baltic Sea Region under active participation of the regional authorities and in dialogue with relevant pan-Baltic organisations;
- to actively influence the preparation and the implementation of Baltic programmes for trans-national and cross-border territorial co-operation making use of the Policy Document "Connecting Potentials" and other VASAB documents;
- to actively take part in the European process of territorial cohesion as outlined in the conclusions of the Ministerial meetings of Rotterdam and Luxembourg;
- to stimulate and support projects that create model solutions in addressing common social, economical and ecological trends that have significant spatial effects;
- to initiate and organise an exchange of knowledge and expertise on innovative spatial planning and development approaches, and to present and discuss these in international fora.

Referring to the above mentioned tasks and responsibilities, the Sixth Conference of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning and Development of the Baltic Sea States asks the VASAB national governments to provide the Committee of Spatial Development with the resources needed to implement the tasks highlighted in this Declaration. Furthermore, the Conference instructs the Committee to decide on the role and practical arrangements of secretarial services after the year 2006.

The Ministers thank Poland for hosting and organising the Conference and ask for this Declaration to be distributed to the institutions of the European Union, the Council of Europe and the Council of the Baltic Sea States, requesting them to promote the objectives set out in their respective spheres of responsibility.