

VASAB Stakeholder Workshop  
15 May 2018

**Achieving coherent and sustainable development of macro-region  
Unique team-work of the countries around the Baltic Sea**

**CONCLUSIONS**

In order to discuss the added value of macro-regional cooperation, VASAB was organising a Stakeholder workshop **“Achieving coherent and sustainable development of macro-region”** on **15th May 2018 in Brussels**. The workshop demonstrated achievements within the VASAB cooperation in three thematic sessions: 1) **urban networking**, 2) **accessibility** and 3) **maritime spatial planning**.

Key *“take-away’s”* from the workshop:

- VASAB creates inspiring policies and should stay a leader of macro-regional cooperation on spatial planning and development contributing the territorial cohesion perspective of the region.
- Cities are engines of the economic development in the BSR where the convergence of the economic performance has improved in the last decade;
- Within the global trends BSR small and medium-sized cities are facing depopulation mainly through ageing and outmigration processes that need to be balanced with the demand for the competitiveness and high-quality of life for their inhabitants - population size is the key variable for many policies, especially for provision and maintenance of public and private services;
- The concept of “smart cities” aims to integrate a digital transformation and smart communities into sustainable urban development;
- “Smart” leadership is needed for small and medium size cities;
- Urban revitalisation will gain importance as a key element of territorially sensitive development policies in the BSR and in the EU;
- Accessibility and BSR transport infrastructure development strongly depends on geopolitical and demographic factors. The accessibility is increasing in the metropolitan areas while the overall accessibility of the northern and eastern part of the BSR depends on air transport. On the other hand the road and rail transport systems are still insufficient in some big agglomerations.
- TEN-T network has an important role for territorial development and territorial cohesion, where the development of the TEN-T will yield a lot of improvements in the regional, national and international connectivity - in this regard the implementation of Rail Baltic foresees significant advantages for the affected regions.
- Transport infrastructure development is not the only and maybe not the most important issue to take care of – in regard of territorial cohesion multi-challenged regions need comprehensive strategies to develop their assets and to develop them as attractive locations to live and to develop competitive economic activities (such as the joint transnational spatial vision on regional development, logistics and mobility of NSB CoRe corridor). Development of high-quality transport infrastructure and connections can only be one element in such strategies aiming at territorial cohesion.
- Maritime and hinterland accessibility are enabling factors for handling of passenger (touristic) and maritime freight traffic.
- Macro-regional cooperation on maritime spatial planning (MSP) in the BSR has taken significant steps forward since establishment of the joint HELCOM-VASAB MSP Working Group in 2010. The Baltic Sea region could be considered as a “test-bed” for the solutions on future seas and oceans. Particularly the permanent structures at sea-basin level will play a role in coming years in order to ensure cross-border cooperation after the implementation of the EU MSP Directive. The monitoring and evaluation on MSP implementation will be the focus for macro-regional cooperation after 2020.
- The national governments will have an important role in determining the future of the macro-regional cooperation where VASAB as coordinator of the EUSBSR Horizontal Action “Spatial Planning” brings an added-value as an only targeted forum for spatial planning experts at transnational/ BSR level.