



## Vilnius Declaration

### Towards Better Territorial Integration of the Baltic Sea Region

Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea (VASAB) is an intergovernmental forum for co-operation of ministers responsible for spatial planning and development of Belarus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, the Russian Federation and Sweden. The Ministers have met upon the invitation of Lithuania in Vilnius on October 16, 2009 and adopted the following Declaration (Russian delegation took part at the Conference in observer status).

The Ministers,

*being aware* of the necessity of co-operation on spatial planning and development in compliance with such challenges as climate change, energy efficiency, urbanisation, maritime spatial planning, as well as economic performance of the Baltic Sea Region (below: 'Region') as a European macro region in a global setting,

*bearing in mind* that remains of the political divide of Europe are still reflected in the disparities between the countries in the Region, and that spatial planning co-operation can be an effective instrument in abolishing these disparities as rapidly as possible,

*sharing the interest* to develop the Region into a model case of concrete co-operation in spatially related cross-border and transnational spatial planning and development tasks towards territorial cohesion,

*recalling* the validity of statements in the Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea 2010, adopted in Tallinn in 1994, the VASAB 2010 Plus Spatial Development Action Programme adopted in Wismar in 2001, as well as the Gdansk Declaration on Connecting Potentials, adopted in Gdansk in 2005, as a recognition of fifteen years of experience in co-operation after adoption of the first Baltic Sea Region Spatial Development Vision,

*recognizing* the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea and the EU Commission's Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion as frameworks, as well as the Territorial Agenda of the European Union, drawn up in cooperation with Non-EU countries in the Region,

*noting with satisfaction* the active input by the Committee on Spatial Development in the Baltic Sea Region (below: 'Committee') as a common effort of the EU countries, as well as Belarus, Norway and Russia to policies relevant for territorial cohesion within the Region, the European Union and in the wider European Continent,

*therefore welcoming* the new VASAB Long-Term Perspective for the Territorial Development of the Baltic Sea Region, prepared for the period till 2030 and presented for this meeting,

*emphasizing* the importance of further concrete cooperation between countries, regions and cities, as well as pan-Baltic organizations, according to the actions proposed, would like to highlight the following findings and conclusions from the Long-Term Perspective work:

## **New challenges for pan-Baltic co-operation to achieve a territorially integrated Region**

1. During the present time, new common responsibilities and challenges have emerged which call for deeper pan-Baltic co-operation on spatial planning and development and integration of spatial development policies into all relevant sectors. The present economic restructuring has different effects in different places. Place-based planning and development policies have to react to that. There is a growing understanding that the Baltic Sea itself is in urgent need of maritime spatial planning. The new Long-Term Perspective for the Territorial Development of the Baltic Sea Region is an effort to define important challenges of a trans-national relevance and to illustrate how to deal with them.

2. Spatial planning is more than ever a cross-sectoral exercise and needs involvement of many actors. The array of actions in the Long-Term Perspective can only be identified, decided upon and implemented in close co-operation with other pan-Baltic organisations and partners from public, as well as private sector. Common efforts are needed to fulfil them. Therefore, the Long-Term Perspective is also a call to the pan-Baltic organisations, institutions, as well as national and regional authorities to co-operate in a transparent and efficient way.

3. The specific added value provided by VASAB to the co-operation and development in the Region is its expertise in long lasting international co-operation in spatial planning. In the Long-Term Perspective, policy guidelines and specific action agendas are presented and suggested in the following three thematic areas and outlined in 3 time horizons.

### ***Promoting urban networking and urban-rural co-operation***

4. A cooperation strategy is needed for the metropolitan areas in order to develop a strong Baltic Sea Region brand. Territorial divides should be overcome by building on the potentials of urban networking, as well as urban-rural cooperation and partnership. The development gap between Eastern and Western parts can be diminished by supporting cluster development. Potentials of small and medium sized cities and rural areas – close to metropolises but also in their wider vicinity - should be utilized to connect the Region with the global networks. Responsibility of metropolises for spatial development of the whole Region should be strengthened. North-West Russia should be better integrated with the other parts of the Region.

### ***Improving internal and external accessibility***

5. Accessibility links are still missing or are inadequate mainly because of the former East-West divide. The situation should be improved in short term, which would positively influence spatial development of the eastern part of the Region and territorial cohesion of the Region and Europe.

While overcoming the negative spatial effects and improving territorial cohesion, there is a particular need for fast road and rail connections between the Region and Central and Western Europe, above all – connections from the Eastern part of the Region to Western Europe by the Rail Baltica and Via Baltica. There is also a need of improving connectivity in the northern parts of the Region and connections to the South and East. Rapid implementation of the Motorways of the Baltic Sea is necessary in order to make full use of

the potentials of an integrated and sustainable transport network. The EU Trans-European transport networks (TEN-T) and the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region should be implemented and the EU transport network needs to be better linked with the neighbouring countries.

The main objectives are intelligent green transport corridors in the Baltic Sea Region with logistics to connect land, sea and air transport to secure a well-functioning multi-modal transfer of goods and people in the Baltic Sea Region. New solutions should be created for improving the accessibility of renewable energy sources and connections of energy networks to ensure better energy integration of the Region.

### ***Enhancing maritime spatial planning and management***

6. The Baltic Sea environment and the sustainable use of the sea resources needs to be supported through an integrated land and sea space planning and management. This is a common Baltic responsibility and should be shared by all countries in the Baltic Sea Region and relevant national sectoral policies. A common Baltic approach for Maritime Spatial Planning should be discussed and tools and methods of such planning developed. Enhanced co-operation is necessary in the field of capacity building actions to ensure exchange of experience, to promote education and to increase competence in Maritime Spatial Planning.

### **Future tasks for VASAB**

#### 7. The Ministers

7.1 encourage the present and coming chairmanships and all members to implement this Declaration and the Long-Term Perspective by allocating adequate resources and establishing appropriate structures, i.e. especially

- to discuss the perspective of urban networks and urban-rural relations towards a knowledge-based development of the Region with relevant stakeholders, disseminate experience of well-performing small and medium size cities of all areas, and develop new forms of urban-rural partnership in view of the growing urban-rural divergence, making use of experience of respective countries and relevant projects,
- to enter into a dialogue with the European Commission, relevant national ministries and stakeholders towards the implementation of the proposals on improving the external and internal accessibility of the Region, taking into consideration aspects of transport demand, regional impact and expediency,
- to promote the introduction and development of Maritime Spatial Planning in the Region, making use of experience gained in the Region and elsewhere. To achieve this, a close co-operation with HELCOM with regard to environmental aspects and with other relevant actors is essential.

7.2 note the importance given to land-based and maritime spatial planning in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, consider the Long-Term Perspective as a contribution to

it and to the further development of spatial planning in the Region and affirm the role of VASAB to continue this work,

7.3 instruct the Committee to monitor the territorial development of the Region and to report periodically to the ministers responsible for spatial planning and development and impart this information to the national governments, the European Commission and relevant stakeholders,

7.4 emphasise the building of knowledge of the Region's spatial planning and development and advise the Committee to co-operate with ESPON - the European Spatial Planning Observation Network on territorial development and cohesion - making use of European facts and evidence on territorial dynamics, as well as Russian and Belarusian research institutes and other sources of information towards further development of the Long-Term Perspective of Territorial Development,

7.5 appreciate the intention expressed by the Council of the Baltic Sea States 15<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Declaration to contact the co-operation of the ministers responsible for spatial planning of the BSR countries (VASAB) with a view to establish closer co-operation,

7.6 instruct the Committee to develop proposals for the ministers' approval on an appropriate organization of VASAB work and establish it after ending of the present extended mandate of the VASAB Secretariat,

7.7 ask the Lithuanian chairmanship, in cooperation with the Committee and the Secretariat, to distribute this Declaration and the Long-Term Perspective to relevant national, Baltic, European and global actors, emphasising in particular the Long-Term Perspective in the context of the European continent as a common effort of the EU and Non-EU countries with regard to the Council of Europe 15<sup>th</sup> CEMAT session in 2010,

7.8 decide to rename the Committee by adding the word 'planning', so from now on it is the Committee on Spatial Planning and Development in the Baltic Sea Region (CSPD / BSR),

7.9 decide that the next Ministerial Conference will focus on implementing the Long-Term Perspective of Territorial Development with particular emphasis on Maritime Spatial Planning in the Baltic Sea Region and ask the next presidency to prepare a progress report with the assistance of the Committee.