



EUROREGION BALTIC ANNUAL REPORT



2023

EUROREGION BALTIC

EXECUTIVE BOARD 2023

Mikael Benzon	ERB President, Regional Municipality of Bornholm
Heidi Burgedahl	Member, Regional Municipality of Bornholm
Peter Löfström	ERB Vice President, Region Kronoberg
Robert Olesen	Member, Region Kronoberg
Grzegorz Grzelak	Member, Pomerania Region
Gustaw Marek Brzezina	Member, Warmia and Masuria Region
Witold Wróblewski	Member, Association of Polish Communes
Vytautas Grubliauskas	Member, Klaipeda Region
Maria Ixcott-Nilsson	Member, Region Kalmar
Elinor Troli	Member, Region Kalmar
Suzanne Svensson	Member, Region Blekinge
Lisa Österblad	Member, Region Blekinge
André Nord	Chairperson, Youth Board (until September 2023)
Emma Falkbäcken	Chairperson, Youth Board (from September 2023)

Helle Munk Ravnborg	Deputy member, Regional Municipality, Bornholm
Helen Bengtsson	Deputy member, Region Kronoberg
Emil Torstensson	Deputy member, Region Kronoberg
Johanna Zielińska	Deputy member, Association of Polish Communes
Hanna Pruchniewska	Deputy member, Association of Polish Communes
Mahmoud Al Mokdad	Deputy member, Region Kalmar
Andreas Salomonsson	Deputy member, Region Kalmar
Anna Ekberg	Deputy member, Region Blekinge

In 2023 Euroregion Baltic Executive Board met three times:

- 2nd March on Bornholm (Denmark),
- 15th May in Karlskrona (Sweden),
- 26th September in Brussels (Belgium).

EUROREGION BALTIC

YOUTH BOARD 2023

Emma Falkbacken	Chairperson, Region Kronoberg, from September 2023
Arnas Murauskas	Vice Chairperson, Klaipeda Region
Estelle Nerö	Member, Region Blekinge
Amelia Laszewska	Member, Pomerania Region
Jakub Hamanowicz	Member, Pomerania Region
Artur Frajny	Member, Association of Polish Communes
Grzegorz Gieda	Member, Warmia and Masuria Region
Inés Ixcot Nilsson	Member, Region Kalmar
Sofie Christiansen	Member, Regional Municipality of Bornholm
Amar Dlakic	Deputy member, Regional Municipality of Bornholm
Dawid Jędrzejewski	Deputy member, Association of Polish Communes
Gabriela Mierzejewska	Deputy member, Warmia and Masuria Region
Mr André Nord	Deputy Member, Region Blekinge, chairperson until September 2023

WATER CORE GROUP 2023

Maria Ixcott Nilsson	WCR Chairwoman, Region Kalmar County, Sweden
Sarah Ericsson	Region Blekinge – expert sustainability, Sweden
Tobias Facchini	Region Kalmar County, Sweden
Antje Schreyer	Region Kalmar County, Sweden
Torben Jørgensen	Bornholm Energy and Supply, Denmark

Members of the Task Force Climate Change and Green Transition

Experts and specialists

Mr Robert Hedman, Region Blekinge – TF spokesperson (SE)

Professor Adam Cenian, R. Szwalski Institute of Fluid-Flow Machinery, Polish Academy of Sciences (PL),

Dr Ksawery Kuligowski, R. Szwalski Institute of Fluid-Flow Machinery, Polish Academy of Sciences (PL),

Director Søren Møller Christensen; Baltic Energy Island (Bornholm, DK)

Dr Mieczysław Dzierzgowski, Warsaw University of Technology, Faculty of Building Installations, Hydrotechnology and Environmental Engineering, (PL)

Ms Carolina Gunnarsson, Kalmar Region (SE)

Dr hab. inż. Tomasz Kolerski, The Gdańsk University of Technology (PL)

Mr Tomasz Koprowiak, National Association of RES-friendly Communes (PL)

Mr Adam Krzyśków, Foundation PRO-Masuria (PL),

Director Mariusz Rychcik; Municipal Waste Management Company Ltd., Olsztyn (MWMC Olsztyn),

Mr Pierre Stahl, Energy Agency Southern Sweden

Director Anne Thomas, Center for Regional- and Tourism Research (CRT),

Members of ERB secretariats

Marcin Żuchowski, Paulina Lieder-Żuchowska, Adrianna Gniado-Turkowska, and Jolanta Olszewska, Association of Polish Communes (PL)

Niels Chresten Andersen, Regional Municipality of Bornholm (DK),

Johanna Rönn, Region Blekinge (SE)

Sławomir Demkowicz-Dobrzański, Region Kronoberg (SE)

Antje Schreyer, Region Kalmar

Greta Tautavičiūtė and Eglė Stonké, Association of Klaipėda Region (LT)

Łukasz Bielewski and Piotr Zwolak, Warmia and Masuria Region (PL)

Monika Pochroń-Frankowska and Adam Krzemiński, Pomerania Region (PL)

ADDRESS BY ERB PRESIDENT

Between 2nd March 2023 and 15th February 2024, Euroregion Baltic was under political leadership of the Regional Municipality of Bornholm, Denmark. The position of president was held by Mr Mikael Benzon, Member of the Council of the Regional Municipality of Bornholm.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Friends of the Euroregion Baltic cooperation,

It has been a great honour for me to be the President of Euroregion Baltic during 2023, where we celebrated our 25th Anniversary.

During the 25 years Europe has changed significantly, also in our Southern Baltic corner.

Lithuania and Poland together with other countries joined the European Union in 2004 and the Interreg South Baltic programme was introduced in 2007, just to highlight two of the major changes, especially relevant to Euroregion Baltic and the regional development in our countries.

More recently the Covid-19 pandemic and especially the war in Ukraine has changed the European Agenda. And even influenced the agenda of and cooperation in Euroregion Baltic, being in a new geopolitical situation with the Russian Federation as our neighbour, Finland and Sweden as new members of NATO, and more pressure for us to improve the green transition and strengthen our cooperation in several fields.

Besides marking our 25th Anniversary the Presidency held by Bornholm also had the strengthening of the ERB cooperation platform as a main priority. We have followed up on the decision during the Warmia and Masuria Regions presidency, to prepare ERB to get a legal status as a European Group of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). We all owe Warmia and Masuria Region our big thankfulness to their hard and time-consuming work on this matter.

Continuing our active engagement in the Interreg South Baltic programme, promoting blue and green growth and our youth cooperation were also our main priorities. Our Youth Board now includes members from all the ERB member organisations, and they are doing a great job. Another important result has been the establishment and mapping work done by the Task Force for Climate Change and Green Transition, as well as the Water Core Groups implementation of the Waterman project.

By these words I would like to thank all members of Euroregion Baltic for close cooperation during 2023, allowing us to navigate safely through the sea of unprecedented challenges.

Mikael Benzon,

President of the Euroregion Baltic 2023



1998 THE ERB FOUNDERS

Euroregion Baltic (ERB) is one of the biggest maritime euroregions, founded 22nd February 1998 in Malbork, Poland. A politically solid and well-anchored cross-border cooperation platform in the south-east of the Baltic Sea region.



1999 PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE COOPERATION

From 1998-2001 in total more than 45 cross-border projects were implemented, co-financed by the EU PHARE Small Project Fund and managed by the Association of Polish Communes in Elbląg. The projects created a perfect platform to develop the people-to-people relations in ERB in the following areas: Culture, education, sports, health, tourism, promotion, environment and economic development.



2000 EUROREGION BALTIC EXPO'S

In 1999 and 2000 Euroregion Baltic Expo's was organized in Gdynia, Poland and Klaipeda, Lithuania. In Gdynia with 83 exhibitors and accompanied with a conference on Tourism and promotion of all ERB members regions.



2001 WE ARE FROM THE SEA - WORKS OF ART FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

More than 20 years the International Competition for Fine Arts for children and youth were organized in Elbląg, Poland - with some years more than 3 000 works of art received from around Euroregion Baltic.



2002 THE SEAGULL DEVERB PROJECT

With Kalmar region as the lead partner and more than 30 other partners the Seagull Deverb project was implemented from 2002-2005, co-financed by the BSR Interreg programme with 1.3 MEUR. The project resulted in the first ERB Development Programme including a strategy, action plan, online tool-boxes, information and communication strategy.



2005 ERB AND THE EU COHESION POLICY

Lobbying for the interests of the Euroregion Baltic regions are one of the main type of activities in ERB - based on joint Position Papers, addressed to national, EU and other key bodies. Especially the EU Cohesion Policy, transport and cross-border policies have been subject to ERB lobbying activities.



2006 THE INTERREG SOUTH BALTIC PROGRAMME

One of the biggest results of the lobbying of Euroregion Baltic was the decision in 2006 to create an Interreg cross-border cooperation programme for the South Baltic area, covered almost all of the ERB territory. The first programme was operative from 2007-2013.



➤ Euroregion Baltic cooperation priorities 2023

The Presidency in 2023 focused on four main priorities, reflected in the activities for the Euroregion Baltic during the year:

1. Strengthening the ERB cooperation platform, by following up the preparations of providing ERB with a legal status, as a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), to re-establish a permanent international secretariat – and to celebrate the ERB 25th Anniversary as well as organise the Annual Stakeholder Forum
2. Interreg South Baltic Programme 2021-2027, through active participation in the programme monitoring committee, promoting the programme and its calls, and by facilitating capacity building activities
3. Blue and Green Growth, through the Water Core Group and the establishment of a new ERB task force for green transition (circular economy and renewable energy)
4. Youth Cooperation, by supporting the Youth Board and promote the youth cooperation in the ERB regions



Transfer of ERB Presidency 2nd March 2023, from Warmia and Masuria Region to the Regional Municipality of Bornholm. From right the new ERB President, Mr Mikael Benzon and the former ERB President, Mr Gustaw Marek Brzezina.

Improving ERB organisation, leadership and visibility

To ensure the Action Plan implementation, ERB will also improve organisational, executive and communication capacities. To achieve this, the ERB will:

1. Apply for a legal status, as European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)
2. Re-establish a permanent international secretariat, as well as organising monthly meetings with the regional ERB secretariats
3. Use the ERB 25th Anniversary to improve the visibility through an exhibition and an updated promotion brochure
4. Improve the organisational support of the Youth Board

➤ Towards European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation

Establishing and operation of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation is regulated by Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC), as later amended. Under this regulation, EGTC is an entity with legal personality, which can be established on the territory of the European Union. Its objective is to facilitate and support territorial cooperation (cross-border, transnational or interregional) for enhancement of economic, social and territorial cohesion of the European Union. In each of EU member states EGTC has a legal capacity and capacity to perform acts in law.

EGTC statutory seat is located in one of EU Member States, while its members are located in at least two Member States. EGTC members may belong to one or more of the following categories: Member States, regional authorities, local authorities, enterprises, associations consisting of units from one or a number of these categories. EGTC has at least two organs: an assembly (made up of representatives of its members) and a director (who represents EGTC and acts on its behalf). EGTC statutes may provide for additional organs with clearly defined powers.

In March 2023 the Board authorized the Warmia and Masuria Region to start informal consultations with the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the drafted documents – Convention and Statutes.

Based on the comments from the Ministry, the documents were revised and the ERB member organisations during 2023 had consultations with their respective national authorities and adopted the documents, expected the EGTC status to be a reality during 2024.

1. South Baltic Agenda

➤ **Supporting the continuation of Interreg South Baltic Programme 2021-2027;**

- active participation in SBP Monitoring Committee meetings and heading the Joint Delegation of Euroregions in close cooperation with Pomerania Euroregion.
MC meetings scheduled 27th April 2023 (last MC in the former programme 2014-2020) and 21-22nd June 2023.

The closure of the South Baltic Programme 2014-2020 and the implementation of the 2021-2027 programme were both on the Monitoring Committee agenda during 2023, with the Euroregion Baltic representatives actively engaged in the Monitoring Committee meetings in April and June 2023.

Euroregion Baltic is represented in the Monitoring Committee by Mr Lukasz Bielewski from Warmia and Masuria Region, close cooperating with the representative from Euroregion Pomerania.

In December 2023 the European Commission finally approved the extension of the programme area to include Olsztyn subregion. ERB has strongly argued to include the Olsztyn area, which means having almost all the ERB covered directly by the programme area.

➤ **Promote the programme 2nd Call during Autumn 2023,**

- facilitate project partnerships and support project development connected to the ERB priorities

Conclusions on the first call 2021-27 was made in June 2023, and the second call was launched during Autumn 2023.

➤ **Facilitate and support cooperation between Local Action Groups (Leader groups) in ERB regions**

- International LAG seminar on Bornholm 2nd March 2023

Back-to-back to the Board meeting on Bornholm 2-3rd March 2023 an International LAG-seminar was organised on Bornholm, hosted by the Local Action Group on Bornholm (LAG-Bornholm), and with participants from Denmark, Poland and Sweden.

The Local Action Groups are connected to the EU Rural Development programme and based on the Leader method with a bottom-up and cross-sectoral approach for local development.

The aim of the seminar was to discuss future cooperation between the LAG's.

2. Baltic Sea Region Agenda

➤ Active involvement in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)

- actively participate in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region Forum

In connection to the Board meeting in Karlskrona 15-16th May 2023 the ERB Annual Stakeholder Forum was organised, focusing on: Baltic Sea Power for Regional Green Growth.

It was organized together with the Swedish Presidency for the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, Norden Association Sweden and the Nordic Council of Ministers.

EUSBSR cooperation in practice, Power2X & bioeconomy, and Business & growth in the energy sector were the main topics of the Stakeholder Forum.

The Baltic Sea Region Forum took place 4-5th October 2023 in Riga, Latvia, with the theme: Safe and Sustainable Baltic Sea Region for Future Generations. Several representatives of ERB participated.

➤ Maintaining active participation in the Baltic Sea Labour Forum (BSLF)

Baltic Sea Labour Forum was established in 2012 and brings together relevant stakeholders to work on making the Baltic Sea Region labour market more sustainable, inclusive and vibrant.

ERB has been an observer since the very beginning.



➤ Further developing cooperation with relevant pan-Baltic organisations

- Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation (BSSSC)
- Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)
- The Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC)
- The Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions (CPMR) Baltic Sea Commission

12 – 13 September 2023 – BSSSC Annual Conference in Szczecin – ERB was represented by Mr Łukasz Bielewski

3. European Agenda

- Continue close cooperation with ERB member organisations' offices in Brussels as a channel for dialogue with EU institutions, lobbying and gaining knowledge on topics relevant for ERB
 - Executive Board meeting to be placed in Brussels September 2023

On the 26th of September 2023 the Euroregion Baltic Executive Board met in Brussels. The meeting was hosted by the Greater Copenhagen EU Office, which is the regional EU office for the regions, municipalities and universities of Eastern Denmark, Bornholm included.

The meeting included a good opportunity for the Board to get more familiar with the regional EU offices in Brussels.

Mr Sven Kastö from the South Sweden EU Office presented the ongoing consultations and perspectives for the EU Cohesion Policy 2027. Based on the presentation and discussion the ERB Presidency together with the coming presidency, Region Kronoberg and coming vice presidency, Pomerania Region, agreed to prepare an ERB Position Paper on the EU Cohesion Policy 2027+, to be discussed at the Board meeting 15th February 2024 in Växjö, Sweden.

Three representatives from the European Commission DG Energy presented the EU Energy Policy in relation to the EU climate targets. The information given confirmed the Board decision to establish a Task Force focusing on renewable energy sources.

- Continue cooperation with the European Commission DG REGIO unit D2: Interreg, Cross-Border Cooperation, Internal Borders representatives;



2004 INTERNATIONAL PERMANENT SECRETARIAT

On 1st July 2004 ERB established a joint secretariat – the International Permanent Secretariat, in Elblag. At the same time ERB membership fee was introduced, and regular online meetings between the ERB secretariats introduced (MS Messenger).



2003 GREEN CIRCLE SCHOOLS PROJECT

Between 2003-2005 12 primary and secondary schools from all ERB regions implemented the Green Circle Schools project, with the aim to set up and evaluate a tool for environmental education leading to a more sustainable development. The project was co-funded under the EU Comenius programme.

4. Youth and People-to-People Agenda

➤ Improvement of youth cooperation

- Youth Dialogue event in Växjö 20-21st March 2023

Mr André Nord from Region Blekinge was elected as the chairperson of the Youth Board, and replaced in September 2023 by Ms Emma Falkbacken from Region Kronoberg.

During 2023 the Youth Board was fully including members from all the ERB member organisations, and is working on different project ideas such as young entrepreneurship, youth with mental challenges and involving of youth in the local democracy.

➤ Improvement of people-to-people cooperation



5. Green and Blue Growth Agenda Activities

➤ Improved and more effective water cooperation within ERB Water Core Group

- Support and promote the INTERREG BSR Waterman project

WaterMan - Climate Resilient Water and Wastewater Management in the BSR

Project seed money WaterMan – financed by Interreg Baltic Sea Region - was implemented from March 2021 to March 2022. Project consortium consisted of nine partners from Poland, Denmark, Sweden, Russia and Lithuania, with support by Union of the Baltic Cities. Aim of the project was to prepare a joint application to Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme 2021- 2027.

A new, regular WaterMan project since 2023 has been implemented. The project will last 3 years, and cover 8 countries and 5 pilot areas. Its budget is 4,38 mln EUR. It will consist of 16 normal partners and 27 associated partners from Sweden, Poland, Denmark, Lithuania, Latvia and Germany. Considerable part of the budget are investments.

In the project WaterMan, public authorities and water companies model strategies to reuse water and recirculate retained water, e.g., for industry and agriculture.

WaterMan promotes the reuse of water in the Baltic Sea Region. Thus, it adds a new element to water management that can make water supply more climate resilient. The key actors for water reuse are local authorities and water companies, for most of which the topic is still a novelty.

WaterMan will supply them with knowledge and tools to develop strategic approaches and to implement concrete measures that bring water reuse into practice.

The capacity building process involves a transnational peer learning process.

Municipalities and water companies from 6 countries will, assisted by R&D institutions / domain experts, co-create:

(1) Exemplary water reuse strategies for selected model regions that combine measures for (a) reuse of treated water (b) recirculation of retained water (c) promoting stakeholder & consumer acceptance for water reuse.

(2) A set of complementary pilot measures for water reuse that depict typical use cases, and that adapt, test and validate concrete solutions for utilisation in the BSR. The results are processed into a “BSR Water Reuse Toolbox”. It gives other local authorities & water companies concrete guidance on how to foster water reuse and is pro-actively & widely disseminated to them.

Geographically, WaterMan focusses on the southern parts of the BSR (southeast SE, DK, DE, PL, LT, LV, EE). This concentration on a homogenous geology & landscape type will make peer learning and knowledge transfer more effective.

➤ **Establishing an ERB Task Force focusing on green transition (circular economy and renewable energy)**

At the Board meeting on Bornholm in March 2023 it was agreed to establish a new Task Force on Climate Change and Green Transition, followed by an approval of a commissorium for the Task Force at the Board meeting in Karlskrona, May 2023.

During the summer 2023 the Task Force was established with experts and secretariats from all the ERB member organisations.

The Task Force met online 30th August, 19th September and 23rd November 2023, and 11th January 2024.

Due to the TF Commissorium the first task was to make a mapping on Renewable Energy Resources on relevant policies, strategies, plans and roadmaps, ongoing and planned projects.

The report was ready in January 2024, to be presented for the Board at the meeting 15th February 2024 in Växjö.

At the same the Task Force will begin its second task, identification of potential joint ERB efforts, such as lobbying, exchange of knowledge and experiences, and joint project initiatives.

A webinar on EU funding opportunities was held online 11th January 2024.

Concrete recommendations are foreseen to be ready before May 2024.





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From ERB Board meeting in Karlskrona 15th May 2023