

**BSPC Working Group on Sustainable Tourism**

**Mid-Way Report - Speech for the 25th BSPC**

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Third Session

Tuesday, 30 August 2015, 11.30

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As vice-chair of the Working Group on Sustainable Tourism I would like use this opportunity to present to you our mid-way report and our work within one year.

The mid-way report is meant as a strategic overview of the first sessions of the Working Group. The Working Group on Sustainable Tourism was established at the 24th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference in Rostock 2015 as an ad-hoc working group under the auspices of the Standing Committee. Since that conference, we met three times in Rostock, Helsinki and Petrozavodsk. The overarching objective of the Working Group is – according to the Mandate that was adopted by the Standing Committee - to elaborate political positions and recommendations pertaining to sustainable tourism. For this purpose, the Working Group should establish and maintain contacts with relevant institutions, organizations and other actors in the Baltic Sea Region.

Therefore, we invited experts to our meetings who provided presentations with different aspects of Sustainable Tourism. That way we approached themes like the “Baltic Sea Tourism Forum”, “The policy field “Tourism” in the context of the EU-Baltic Sea Strategy”, or “Waste Water Treatment in the Baltic Sea Regions”, but also national tourism strategies or practical examples like Cycling Tourism in Europe, case Iron Curtain Trail.

This very wide range of topics underlines the goal of the Working Group at achieving a comprehensive overview of the state of Sustainable Tourism in the whole Baltic Sea Region. That is also the reason why we gladly followed the invitation to hold a Working Group meeting in Petrozavodsk, Russia.

Since our beginning, we established contacts to active cross-border actors in the field of Sustainable Tourism. As a result, we will hold our upcoming Working Group meeting back-to-back to the 9th Baltic Sea Tourism Forum in Pärnu in October. Because of our gained expertise, the Working Group was asked to support the forum with several contributions. Of course, we will follow this invitation and use the opportunity for more exchange of experiences with other experts.

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One of our major tasks was to determine strategic priorities of the Working Group. Within intensive discussions we elaborated the Working Programme on the basis of the Mandate. Both can be found in the Mid-way Report. Especially the scope of work was in the focus of our discussions. Finally, we achieved to streamline and prioritize the tasks of the Working Group which is also a result of questioning the respective governments. Let me now present to you our scope of work. I quote from the Working Programme:

“The scope of work of the Working Group should as strategic priorities cover, but not be limited to, issues such as

* The state of sustainable tourism in the Baltic Sea Region from economic, ecological, social and cultural perspectives;
* Cooperation of all actors at all levels, including internationalisation of cooperation, exchange of experiences and political gatherings;
* Knowledge- and competence building in sustainable tourism, including sustainable development in the curricula on all levels in the educational systems in the Baltic Sea States to prevent skills shortages and to strengthen workforce;
* Awareness-raising and promoting the image of the Baltic Sea Region as travel destination, including marketing and communication strategies as well as campaigns and brandings;
* Measures to promote sustainable tourism as a competitive advantage for the Baltic Sea Region, including the development of attractive products which balance seasonality and also diverging interest;
* Awareness-raising about the potential benefits and business opportunities for the Baltic Sea Region through Sustainable Tourism, especially the role of SMEs in developing high-quality products and services in sustainable tourism – tax incentives being one of these benefits;
* Collection of best practices in sustainable tourism as a methodical approach to support the transfer of advantages and opportunities of sustainability into other states;
* Sustainable mobility, sustainable infrastructure and environment-friendly public transport possibilities to reduce the use of private cars;
* The importance of current unresolved Baltic Sea environmental issues and the challenge of climate change, with relevance to sustainability of the tourism industry, namely discharges from cruise ships and their treatment as well as the issue of sewage dumping in the Baltic Sea, especially in the Kaliningrad region.”

As you can see, we tried to find a good balance of a comprehensive approach on the one hand and specific targets that can be pursued on the other hand.

Another result of the Working Group is the 12 political recommendations which we elaborated during our meetings and conveyed to this conference. They will be part of the 15th Resolution of the BSPC.

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Finally I would like to make an appeal. As I said before, we already got in contact with several actors in the field of Sustainable Tourism. That is why we were informed that the Steering Committee for the Priority Area Tourism of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea is not equally supported by every respective government. Thus, I was asked to remind everyone to encourage their government to actively foster the Steering Committee.

As a final remark of the chairs of the Working Group, please let me thank all members of the Working Group for their engagement to the group until now. I think we have a great atmosphere which is reflected in the results of our work. I am sure that our fruitful and successful work will continue and I am looking forward to our next meeting in Pärnu.

Thank you for your attention.