

**Policy Analysis – Baltic Sea Region Governments’  
statements regarding the implementation of the  
27<sup>th</sup> Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference Resolution**

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\* The assessment and opinions expressed in this policy analysis are those of the author and neither necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference and its institutions. Author’s contact details: [etzold\\_tobias@hotmail.com](mailto:etzold_tobias@hotmail.com)

## 1. Introduction

On 26-28 August 2018 elected legislators from the Baltic Sea Region states<sup>1</sup> assembled in Mariehamn, Åland, and adopted the 27<sup>th</sup> Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) Resolution. In addition to a preamble the Resolution emphasises the general cooperation in the Baltic Sea region and four specific priority areas for action:

- 1) A Healthy Baltic Sea;
- 2) Sustainable Energy; Smart energy distribution platforms,
- 3) Migration and Integration;
- 4) Economic development and growth.

As a follow up to the 27<sup>th</sup> BSPC and in preparation of the 28<sup>th</sup> BSPC in Oslo, Norway, on 26-28 August 2019 the BSPC General Secretariat asked the BSPC delegations to request their respective governments to submit a statement regarding the implementation of the 27<sup>th</sup> BSPC Resolution. The BSPC General Secretariat commissioned Dr. Tobias Etzold to evaluate and analyse the statements submitted by the respective governmental institutions of the Baltic Sea Region states.

## 2. Content of this analysis and basic data

This analysis includes:

- an overall quantitative assessment of the governments' statements;
- a qualitative analysis regarding the governments' statements regarding the more general section on regional cooperation as well as the four priority areas;
- and an overall assessment highlighting shortcomings and identifying recommendations for the future.

Basic data:

- the 27<sup>th</sup> BSPC Resolution,
- written statements by the respective governmental bodies received by July 2019.

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<sup>1</sup> Baltic Assembly, Free Hanseatic City of Bremen, Denmark, Estonia, European Parliament, Faroe Islands, Federal Republic of Germany, Finland, Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, Iceland, Kaliningrad Region, Karelian Republic, Latvia, Leningrad Region, Lithuania, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Nordic Council, Norway, Poland, Council of the Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, City of St. Petersburg, Schleswig-Holstein, Sweden, Åland Islands.

### **3. Quantitative Overview**

#### **3.1. Overall Response Rate**

Twenty-five delegations from member states' parliaments (eleven national and eleven subnational/autonomous parliaments) and parliamentary institutions (three) adopted the 27<sup>th</sup> BSPC Conference Resolution. Twelve governmental counterparts of the twenty-two signatories, excluding the three parliamentary institutions, submitted statements to the BSPC Standing Committee regarding the implementation of the Resolution.<sup>2</sup>

#### **3.2. Overall Response Variety**

The twelve submitted statements in reaction to the 27<sup>th</sup> BSPC Resolution vary considerably concerning thematic depth, length and structure. Some statements, i.e. those from the Federal Republic of Germany, Latvia, Russia and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, portray on 10 - 20 pages in detail and some even for nearly each paragraph of the Resolution related activities of respective governments. Others, such as the Åland Islands, Norway and Sweden, keep it rather limited to a general overview of two-six pages touching upon only a few topics of the Resolution. Several governments submitted one coherent statement, composed by one Ministry i.e. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, others submitted a compilation of statements issued by various departments.

The level of comprehensives of a submitted statement by itself does not allow a direct inference to the overall activities of a respective government in the priority areas of the Resolution. Relying only on the statements therefore does not constitute a reliable data source for a proper statistical analysis. However, our qualitative analysis in the following section does highlight some general findings and shortcomings in the submitted statements. While the governments in their responses list both national and transnational initiatives and actions, there still is a focus on the former. Nonetheless, the number of reports on transnational activities seems to have increased compared to previous years. The analysis concentrates on transnational activities as well as the links between both but also provides several examples for national provisions where appropriate.

### **4. Qualitative Analysis**

The 27<sup>th</sup> BSPC Resolution contains several parts. The preamble covers various broader issues regarding regional developments. Most importantly, it welcomes the resumption of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) High Level Meeting under the Swedish Presidency resulting in the Stockholm Declaration and calls for a resumption of the Baltic Sea States Summits to “foster the dialogue, strengthen cooperation and manifesting peace”. It also expresses its support for the vision of the CBSS Vision Group, “that the Baltic Sea Region shall become a role model of ecological, economic, social and security standards and policies, with a vibrant regional civil society” and its willingness to take into account the report of the Vision Group in further discussions on future developments in the BSR. In their statements, several governments hailed the report as an important contribution to the review and reform process of the CBSS which they overall welcome in order to enhance the flexibility and effectivity of the Council. Other

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<sup>2</sup> Estonia, Federal Republic of Germany, Finland, Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, Latvia, Lithuania, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Norway, Poland, Sweden and the Åland Islands. The government of the Russian Federation submitted one statement which again seems to be written on behalf of all Russian member delegations.

provisions include the continued need for political exchange among young people and for a Baltic Sea Parliamentary Youth Forum.

The preamble is followed by a more general chapter on “Cooperation in the Region” (paragraphs 1-6), covering various areas and issues of cooperation, calling for example for intensifying the interaction between the Northern Dimension policy and the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea and the Russian Strategy of social and economic development of the North-West federal district (paragraph 1). More specific issues are subsequently subsumed in four thematic sections:

- “Vision of a Healthy Baltic Sea” (paragraphs (7-16),
- “Sustainable Energy, Smart energy distribution platforms” (paragraph 17),
- “Migration and Integration” (paragraphs 18-24),
- “Economic development and growth in the Baltic Sea region” (paragraphs 25-28).

The last paragraph (29) expresses gratitude to the Parliament of Norway as the host of the 28<sup>th</sup> BSPC Conference on 25-27 August 2019.

With 28 paragraphs the 27<sup>th</sup> Resolution is considerably shorter than previous ones (2017: 41 paragraphs and 2016: 61 paragraphs). This is also reflected in the governments’ statements that on average are shorter than in previous years. Most themes addressed in the 2018 Resolution differ from those in the previous Resolution giving proof of the variety and diversity of regional developments and issues of regional cooperation.

#### **4.1. “Cooperation in the Region”**

All governments address at least several of the opening chapter’s six paragraphs. Most of their answers are fairly broad, mainly describing regional institutions and their activities as well as programmes and projects the respective countries participate in. In several cases (especially paragraphs 1-2), they express the governments’ general support for institutions, projects and programmes as well as the points made in the Resolution rather than evaluating and/or proposing concrete national and/or regional measures.

Addressing paragraph 1 on intensifying the interaction between the Northern Dimension and the EU and Russia regional strategies, Lithuania expresses its general support for cooperation and coherence between ND, EUSBSR and CBSS in areas of mutual interest. At the same time the government clarifies that it opposes “the inclusion of the Russian Strategy in the ND, EUSBSR, CBSS and other relevant regional documents on cooperation since 2012” and cooperation with the Russian strategy. The only concrete example for the suggested interaction is Mecklenburg-Vorpommern’s listed plan to hold the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum in Pskov (Northwest Russia) in autumn 2019 under the auspices of the Tourism Association Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in cooperation with the state Ministry of Economy, Labour and Health in its capacity as coordinator of the EUSBSR policy area Tourism. Other governments do not make any specific proposals on this issue.

Also paragraph 2 (extending the scope of transnational programmes covering the whole Baltic Sea area) does not receive much attention in concrete terms. Nonetheless, Hamburg reports that a resolution on European territorial cooperation of the *German Conference of the Ministers of the Länder dealing with European Affairs* supported linking the macro-regional strategies, e.g. EUSBSR, with the strategic orientation of the Interreg programmes. Hamburg contributed as a co-rapporteur. As the latter are regarded as important pillars in supporting the implementation of

the macro-regional strategies, the conference recommended not to curtail the Interreg program areas with regard to the macro-regional strategies and argued against funding cuts as proposed by the European Commission. They should rather continue in their present form and even be extended to match the macro-regions in order to enable better interconnection. The Swedish government refers to the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme that invites Russian organisations as project partners and Belarussian organisations as associated partners. For this purpose, a Financing Agreement has been put in place. Lithuania refers to a new project “Strengthening of the police transnational cooperation in the BSR” implemented since January 2018 by the law enforcement institutions of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Finland, funded by the *EU Internal Security Fund Police Instrument*.

Referring to youth cooperation (paragraph 4) the autonomous Government of Åland expresses its support for the political exchange among young people in all areas of society. In particular it stresses the *ReGeneration 2030* movement as a multinational forum bringing together young people from around the Baltic Sea. In cooperation with the CBSS and the Nordic Council of Ministers, the first *ReGeneration 2030* Summit was held on Åland in summer 2018 followed by the second in August 2019 themed “Changing Climate – Changing Lifestyles”. Also other governments (e.g. Estonia, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) confirm their support for youth exchange and an active participation of the youth in regional cooperation. Hamburg reports that young people in Hamburg have access to the appropriate advisory framework when planning concrete youth exchange projects. The German federal government confirms its financial commitment to the Baltic Sea Youth Dialogue (BSYD) to the amount of EUR 50,000/year.

Several governments address in detail paragraph 5 of the Resolution (labour and employment), referring both to the Baltic Sea Labour Forum and the first meeting of ministers of labour in Berlin in June 2017 (Russia, Latvia, German federal government) as well as national measures and reforms. The Russian Federal Service of Labour and Employment (Rostrud) and the State Employment Agency of Latvia expressed their readiness to participate in the project “Baltic Sea Labour Forum for Sustainable Working Life”. The overarching aim of the project is to improve working life conditions and life-long learning provisions, systems and policies for the elderly in order to promote active ageing and employability. The project receives funding from the European Social Fund (ESF). Hamburg state agencies support training exchanges using ESF and federal state funding, for example in the form of the ESF project “Working practice for all”, funding stays abroad for trainees, education managers and skilled workers. Norway works actively with BSR countries to realize the objectives of equal opportunities and equal access to the labour market as well as to achieve good and fair working conditions, social security and inclusion. Under the EEA and Norway Grants scheme, it funds projects in several Baltic Sea countries promoting economic and social cohesion and development as well as decent work conditions and the cooperation between social partners. In Finland new legislation for vocational education and training came into effect in 2018, aiming at improving the status of vocational training in society. The focus of this most extensive reform of education legislation in 20 years is on the funding system, steering and structures of the upper secondary vocational education providers. The Latvian Ministry of Welfare has created a Training Commission responsible for defining the training fields and approving training programmes for the unemployed. The Latvian State Employment Agency provides apart from job search assistance also career guidance to help the unemployed develop basic skills and competencies and choose the appropriate training. In Germany the *Skills Development Opportunity Act* came into effect on 1 January 2019. It enables employees to gain access to support for further training in case their work is to be replaced by technology, they are otherwise threatened by structural change or they seek further training in a profession with a shortage of workers. The Act also applies to elder employees (see below). Hamburg states its support for part-time training, rendering it easier for young single mothers to obtain professional qualifications.

Reacting to paragraph 6 (challenges of an ageing population, social cohesion and sustainable development), several governments list national provisions. Estonia refers to its *Welfare Development Plan 2016-23* aiming at supporting the employment of elder people as well as to achieve a longer life expectancy. Hamburg has set up an information centre to provide employees and employers with advice on creating a good working environment keeping people in employment. The Polish government lists several measures within the framework of its “Social Policy for Older People 2030. Safety. Participation. Solidarity” such as shaping a positive perception of old age in society, creating conditions enabling the use of the potential of older people as active participants of economic life and the labour market, adapted to their psychophysical abilities and family situation, and creating conditions for solidarity and intergenerational integration. The Latvian government launched an ESF co-funded project to retain the ability to work and to encourage employment of older workers (50+), including for example vocational guidance support and upskilling. Furthermore a pilot project “Support to Social Enterprise” has been initiated, aiming at providing additional support for disadvantaged unemployed persons as well as people with disabilities, including older workers. To support the improvement of the society’s quality of life and promote employment for groups at risk of social exclusion through the creation of an economic environment that supports social enterprises, the Latvian Parliament adopted the *Social Enterprise Law* that came into force in April 2018. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern maintains a multilingual training database in which companies as well as employees find easier access to information on vocational education measures.

## 4.2. “Vision of a Healthy Baltic Sea”

All twelve responding governments address at least several paragraphs in this chapter and provide examples for national as well as transnational measures, projects and initiatives the countries participate in. Partly, both dimensions are interlinked with each other, i.e. national measures to implement regional and international schemes such as the *Baltic Sea Action Plan* (BSAP), the *EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive* and the *UN 2030 sustainability goals*. In this context, HELCOM and the BSAP are mentioned frequently. Governments express their support and commitment towards HELCOM as well as the implementation and updating of the BSAP.

Concerning the Implementation Strategy for the sustainable Blue Growth Agenda for the BSR (paragraph 8), the Swedish government refers to its newly adopted Maritime Strategy with an integrated ecosystem approach structure. In this, a sustainable Blue Economy integrates environmental aspects, maritime development and attractive coastal and marine areas into one truly sustainable blue growth strategy.

Referring to a spatial master planning in the BSR (paragraph 9), Sweden took a lead role in the HELCOM/VASAB project to push a coordinated and harmonised planning of the Baltic Sea area. Sweden has also initiated a national centre regarding climate adaptation supporting Swedish actors including marine spatial planning on climate adaptation. Sweden also cooperates with Russia on water resources and the marine environment and developed a bilateral project on marine spatial planning in their adjacent sea areas. The Lithuanian government is in the process of elaborating a holistic *General Plan of the Territory of the Republic of Lithuania.*, aiming at harmonizing activities related to business, agriculture, tourism, recreation, protection of the environment, cultural heritage and infrastructure. The plan is to be adopted by 2020.

Referring to the BSPC’s demand to step up efforts at national and regional level to achieve the objectives of the BSPC by 2021 (paragraph 10), the Finnish government ensures its commitment to do so. It has launched a new Water Protection Programme 2019-21 to the amount of EUR 45 million, including e.g. investments in innovative water protection methods in agriculture. Estonia

reports improvements in wastewater collection and treatment both in rural and urban areas. They now work as required by the EU and as agreed in HELCOM. Estonia has also improved its capacity to clean up and monitor polluted sea by acquiring a new and modern patrol vessel with anti-pollution capabilities and a marine surveillance aircraft equipped with top-of-the line monitoring and engineering systems.

Addressing paragraph 12 (UN-Agenda 2030 goals), the Finnish government refers to its River Basin Management Plans 2016-21 containing 3500 measures and actions, most of them targeting nutrient loads, and currently being implemented. Hamburg developed a time table for achieving the UN sustainable development goals over the next few years already in 2017. This should happen in a very concrete way through local projects on environmental protection and urban development, economic and financial policy, participation and social cohesion as well as education and science. The Latvian government runs a “Programme of Measures to reach good marine environmental status (2016-20)”, including provisions for managing marine litter.

Referring to paragraph 13 (Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development), Hamburg reports on current negotiations between the north German federal states and the federal government on setting up a long-term funding programme for marine research from 2019. The newly founded *German Alliance for Marine Research* would aim at initiating and funding major inter-institutional collaborative research and infrastructure projects. Through the federal marine research programme MARE:N, the Federal Republic of Germany implemented an integrated approach to marine research. Germany will host a kick-off conference for the Decade of Ocean Science in Berlin in 2021, including representatives from science, society and politics. Norway presents its initiative to establish an international *High-level Panel for a sustainable ocean economy* that is to present a report with recommendations on the sustainable use of ocean resources, economic growth and development at the UN Ocean Conference in Portugal in 2020. In October 2019, Norway will host the *Our Ocean Conference* in Oslo, highlighting the importance of knowledge as the basis of actions and policies to ensure sustainable future economic growth and contributing to the UN Decade.

With regard to paragraph 15 (improve the quality of waste-water effluents and halt untreated discharges), all vessels in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and also other German federal states, can dispose their waste in appropriate reception facilities included already in the regular harbour fee. Germany treats wastewater almost universally and in conformity with all requirements of the *EU Directive on Urban Wastewater Treatment*. Latvia has introduced a new regulation on registration and management of decentralised canalisation systems in 2017. The Swedish government promoted investments of about EUR 25 million in the installation of advanced wastewater treatment techniques in the next three years. On basis of a HELCOM recommendation, Lithuania also approved stricter requirements for individual wastewater treatment plants, requiring treatment of nitrogen and phosphorus, coming into force in November 2019.

On paragraph 16 (action on plastic in the sea), several countries (e.g. Sweden, Latvia) express their support and commitment to the newly adopted EU directive on single use plastics. Finland presents various national measures such as a national survey on the state and sources of marine litter, a project on the development of best practices for the disposal of old pleasure boats and the reduction of the use of plastic bags through a green deal and voluntary action by shops. The Estonia government refers to its well-functioning deposit packaging system and to plans to develop a common and joint deposit system in the entire BSR. Scientific research on microplastics in Latvia’s marine waters is carried out within the frame of the project “Improvement of knowledge in the field of marine environment 2017-22” funded by the European Maritime and Fisheries fund (EMFF). The Swedish government took the decision to ban cosmetic products that are rinsed off or spat out and contain plastic particles that have been

added to cleanse, exfoliate or polish (e.g. toothpaste, shower gels, shampoos). In May 2017, it also adopted a package of measures to combat plastic pollution amounting at more than SEK 100 million per year until 2020, aiming at reducing the spread of microplastics and other plastic products as well as littering from plastic products and carrying out beach clean-ups. In Mecklenburg-Vorpommern the amount of marine litter on the beaches is regularly recorded and evaluated in accordance with uniform specifications. Taking the issue up to the international level, Norway is working towards an international agreement to combat marine litter. Towards this end, the country's government has also launched a development aid programme amounting to USD 200 over the next four years.

### 4.3. “Sustainable Energy, Smart energy distribution platforms”

Ten out of twelve governments address the one paragraph (17) of the Resolution calling for enhancing and efficiently using cross-border transmission connections. Several governments refer to the Baltic Energy Market Interconnection Plan (BEMIP) as an example for cross-border cooperation in energy affairs with a focus on electricity. All Baltic Sea littoral states but Russia as well as the European Commission participate in BEMIP. Norway is an observer.

A few governments also mention existing and planned bilateral submarine power cables, such as *NordBalt* between Lithuania and Sweden, with a link to/from Latvia, ensuring closer integration of the Baltic countries in the Nordic electricity market, and *Harmony Link* between Poland and Lithuania. Due to frequent failures the latter has been repaired recently with several components replaced in order to increase its interconnection reliability and to achieve a more effective operation of the regional electricity market. *Harmony Link* is part of the synchronization process of the Baltic states' electricity grids with the Continental European network which is to be completed by 2025. The Latvian government reports the launch of construction works of the third Latvia-Estonia power transmission interconnection in January 2019. Åland lists several sea cable connections between the islands and Finland and Sweden respectively. During 2018 the *FLEXe Project* has continued aiming at making Åland a test platform for smart energy networks. The autonomous government of Åland is also involved in the company *Flexen Ab Oy*, founded in 2018, aiming at commercializing efforts to create flexible energy solutions. Also here Åland, on which the project could have a major impact, acts as a test platform. With increased possibilities to transfer electricity in both directions between Sweden and Finland via Åland, the intention is to increase integration into the European energy network. A problem currently is, however, a high net fee on the Swedish side, limiting the effective use of the connection between Åland and Sweden.

Mecklenburg-Vorpommern highlights the project *Kriegers Flak – Combined Grid Solution* envisaging the construction of a submarine cable connection between the existing German Baltic sea wind farm *Baltic 2* and the future *Kriegers Flak offshore wind farm* in Denmark in order to increase the energy exchange and the system stability between Germany and Denmark. The planned connection will be the start of an integrated electricity network in the Baltic Sea that could also integrate Sweden in the long term. In addition, through the *Hansa PowerBridge* Germany and Sweden aim at connecting their electricity grids with each other via a new high-voltage direct current line by 2025/26. The state Ministry for Energy, Infrastructure and Digitization is a partner in the Interreg Baltic Sea Region projects *Baltic LINes* and *Baltic InteGrid*, contributing to the expansion of cross-border transmission links and developing a strategy for integrating the different sectors and a guideline for data exchange and transmission.

The Russian government made some critical remarks towards Estonia and Latvia, stating that they artificially restrict the export of Russian electricity via several high-voltage lines through their

countries to the Scandinavian market NordPool since 2013. In the Russian view this contradicts the content and spirit of this paragraph of the Resolution. The Russian Ministry for Energy considers the possibility of organizing an expert seminar on the development of the gas motor fuel market, including liquefied natural gas, under the auspices of the CBSS and/or the Northern Dimension.

Overall, the government's statements provide some interesting insights into unilateral, bilateral and multilateral projects in the field of energy with a focus on electricity. It however strikes that governments make little explicit reference to electricity from renewable sources but seem to refer to electricity in general leaving the sources open.

#### **4.4. “Migration and Integration”**

Ten out of twelve governments address in their statements at least a few of the paragraphs on migration and integration and/or the general paragraph on migration (3). Most governments list national/local measures, provisions and projects to improve the integration of migrants and refugees, concerning for example health care, labour market, education, language training and inclusion in sports (the German federal government, Hamburg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern list several projects aiming at integrating migrants through sports). Governments also give account of several European measures and provisions on migration and asylum that they support and help implement (paragraph 24).

Of particular interest in this section are efforts to intensify the dialogue on migration and integration among the Baltic Sea counties (paragraph 20). The Estonian government highlights a labour market inclusion initiative launched jointly with the Nordic Council of Ministers and the UNHCR to foster the development of a more coherent strategy to ensure successful labour inclusion of third country nationals. Every year Estonian governmental and academic stakeholders organise jointly with the Nordic Council of Ministers a conference to exchange best practices and latest research in the field of migration in the Nordic and Baltic countries. Finland also maintains a regular dialogue on migration with Russia. As to migration and security perspectives in relevant other political agendas such as trade, labour rights and environmental preservation (paragraph 23), the Swedish government mentions the new transnational project “Competence building, assistance provision and prosecution of labour exploitation cases in the Baltic Sea Region (CAPE)”, involving both local and national authorities of BSR countries. It aims at supporting authorities in combating and prosecuting forced labour and assisting victims. The German federal government expresses its support of an active civil society and governmental exchange on migration in the BSR and lists several fora and workshops e.g. on (irregular) migration and soft security challenges (cross-border crime, trafficking) within the framework of the Baltic Sea Region Border Control Cooperation (BSRBCC) and the CBSS-funded project “Trafficking along Migration Routes” (TRAM). The interesting and useful BSPC proposal to initiate a Baltic Sea-wide data basis on integration conditions and measures to improve the public discussion on a factual basis (paragraph 19) has only been addressed by the German federal government and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern but merely in a very general manner referring to the Common European Asylum System (CEAS).

Overall, the governments' assessments provide a broad picture of national, regional and European activities and provisions in the field of migration and integration with naturally a clear focus on national arrangements. But compared to previous years, more in terms of projects and exchange facilities on migration and related issues seems to be in place on the regional level now.

#### 4.5. “Economic development and growth in the Baltic Sea Region”

Nine out of twelve governments address in their statements at least some of the paragraphs on economic development and growth, revealing some interesting and useful information on national and transnational projects partly linked to European programmes and directives. Most assessments of this section are fairly short. Several governments address transport and infrastructure in the first place. But still in addition, several (Latvia, Norway, Poland) express their support for Blue Growth (paragraph 25) which they regard as an important topic of regional cooperation (CBSS Expert Group on Sustainable Maritime Economy). The Latvian Presidency of the CBSS 2018-19 gave some thought on the “development and implementation on sustainable maritime policy: opportunities and challenges for small and medium ports in the BSR” with a seminar taking place in Jurmala in April 2019. The Polish Ministry of Maritime Economy and Inland Shipping currently works on a strategic government programme for the development of Polish seaports until 2030. Several governments (Federal Republic of Germany, Estonia, Hamburg, Lithuania) underline and support the importance of the further development of the trans-European transport network (TEN-T) in the BSR (paragraph 27), giving a lasting boost to the economic competitiveness and the balanced and sustainable development of the BSR. Estonia and Lithuania hail Rail Baltica as the most important regional TEN-T rail project from which citizens and businesses will profit. The project should be completed by 2026. Lithuania expresses its support for the European Commission’s proposal on the revision of the Eurovignette Directive, introducing electronic tolls and reducing the differences in member states’ toll systems. Lithuania plans to introduce an electronic tolling system for trucks by 2020, aiming at moving parts of cargo from roads to railway.

The Finnish government addresses paragraph 28 (Baltic Sea as a pioneer area for automatic shipping) by stating that Finland has actively participated in developing automatisations for maritime transportation through cooperation between universities and companies. It has also taken an active role in promoting trials of automatisations (including tests of an automatic passenger ferry in the Gulf of Finland). While officially shipping in international waters falls under the responsibility of the German federal government, the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is committed to render shipping efficiently, economically, environmental friendly and sustainable within the scope of its responsibility. This commitment includes investments in ports infrastructure in order to be able to clear and fuel large vessels and dispose their waste in an environment friendly way.

### 5. Synopsis and suggestions

Overall, the submitted statements underline the notion that the responding governments have taken the 27<sup>th</sup> BSPC Resolution seriously. The response rate has been good although somewhat lower than in 2018. Most governments demonstrate a sincere effort to offer a good account of how national stakeholders have striven to implement the Resolutions’ calls and suggestions on the national as well as the transnational/regional level. They overall contain a lot of interesting and useful information on implemented as well as planned activities and offer a broad and rich picture of the cooperation network across the Baltic Sea Region. This network does not only consist of institutions and programmes in which all the countries of the region participate but even those numerous initiatives/projects formed by a smaller group of countries/actors. The various formats have a great potential to complement each other and to contribute all to reaching the common goals and ambitions as for example outlined in the BSPC Resolution. The answers give also proof that **a lot in terms of structures is already in place in the BSR** and that new structures do not have to be invented. On the other hand, it also becomes obvious that **existing**

**structures could and should be used more effectively and efficiently** in order to achieve the objectives as outlined in the Resolution.

As in previous years, the submitted statements display a great variety both in terms of length, structure and elaborateness. Several governmental statements in general or several individual points within statements are **straight to the point offering clear, specific and informative answers**. This is facilitated by the fact that most paragraphs of the Resolution are more concrete and to the point than it occasionally has been the case in previous years. In this regard, and as in previous years, the statements which contain varied responses from various responsible departments of the respective government are especially informative. Taking into account that the 27<sup>th</sup> Resolution has been considerably shorter than previous ones, governments might also find it easier and more convenient if they can focus their attention on fewer calls.

However, **other statements continue to be rather general and descriptive**. Many statements also still contain a mere expression of support for certain calls of the Resolution referring to institutions, projects and initiatives without indicating and specifying how this governmental support could look like in more concrete terms. Also several statements continue to contain lengthy general descriptions of regional activities and initiatives that are widely known. They merely sum up in which regional cooperation formats, initiatives and projects respective country is or has been participating. As in previous years, several statements read like technical exercises without taking into account the broader political climate and without revealing high political ambitions. Thus, as in previous years it still holds that the **standard of comprehensiveness and quality as well as of concreteness and thoroughness could be increased** even more in the future. There still is some potential for improvement in rendering the statements more accountable and relevant.

Nonetheless, several governments seem to have followed the suggestion of previous years **to concentrate more on transnational initiatives** compared to projects/laws/provisions strictly limited to the national level. This effort has enriched the statements providing at times a fascinating picture of the multi-faceted cross-border cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region. It strikes that the statements dwell less than in previous years on activities in the past, but focus more on current and future activities in line with the Resolution's character as a call for future action. In the future, **governments could even try to formulate and offer more such considerations for future action**. It helps that the BSPC put the time frame a bit wider, as the policy analysis has suggested in 2018, by focussing in the 2018 Resolution on different topics than in 2017. This gives the governments the possibility to stretch the time frame a bit further back which means that they might have more to report on. This way it could be avoided that information already provided in previous government responses is repeated. Repetitions still occurred in various responses also this year. **It might help if this method, different topics every year, the same only every second year, and extending the reporting period to two years, would be systematized.**

Given all the numerous interesting activities which are given attention in the statements, it is sometimes equally interesting what is not mentioned. Also this time hardly any statement addresses the continuing **fraught political climate** around the Baltic Sea Region. It is only the German federal government stating that strengthening trust among all member states of the CBSS remains a priority. It is true that the climate overall seems to have somewhat improved as recent developments within the CBSS give proof of (e.g. Jurmala Roadmap of the CBSS reforms). Both the Resolution as well as the governmental reports reveal a remarkable spirit of cooperation. Nonetheless, the conflicts touching upon the region since 2014 have not disappeared. Some tension can also be sensed in the governmental reports in several places e.g. when Lithuania rejects the idea of intensifying the interaction between ND, EUSBSR and the

Russian North-West strategy or when the Russian government criticizes Estonia and Latvia on energy issues (see 4.1 and 4.3). **In this spirit, future Resolutions and governmental statements need to be fully aware of the general political climate as well as possible changes (both to the better and to the worse) and be more explicit about the ramifications of the changed environment, where it causes challenges, and elaborate how the still existing cleavages could be overcome.**