

VASAB statement on COMMUNITY AND PAN-EUROPEAN TRANSPORT POLICY¹

European transport policy has a key role in the EU enlargement process not least in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). Being a region with great economic potential, the BSR still needs better spatial cohesion within itself, with the European Union and with the rest of the world. The first task is to improve the cohesion of the Region itself. Both east –west as well as north – south transport connections are equally important.

Being clearly aware of this, the Ministers responsible for spatial planning and development in the BSR adopted in the 5th Ministerial Conference of VASAB (Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea 2010) the Wismar Declaration and the VASAB 2010 PLUS Spatial Development Action Programme, in which they invite all actors to initiate and implement transnational spatial planning and development projects as well as cross-sector cooperation for all strategic development zones which support cohesion in the Baltic Sea Region.

As pointed out in the VASAB 2010 PLUS Action Programme, the improvement of accessibility to urban centers from all parts of every BSR country should be an essential goal. Not only metropolitan areas have to be connected with efficient, sustainable and safer means of transport; regions outside metropolitan areas also need better access to growth centers. A good transport network is necessary to keep the countryside alive as well.

One of the priorities of VASAB is to put emphasis on transnational projects (co-financed e.g. by the EU Community Initiative INTERREG III B) such as evaluation and complementing activities on Pan-Baltic intermodal transport networks from a spatial planning and development point of view, taking into account balanced regional structures and environmental impact. Prudent spatial planning can reduce the need for transport and thus prevent land consumption for transport infrastructure and reduce harmful emissions of all modes of transport.

Because transport corridors are an essential factor in promoting cohesion in the Baltic Sea Region, the VASAB 2010 PLUS Action Programme points out the insufficiency of long-distance transport links regarding the Baltic States, coastal areas of Germany, Poland as well as Kaliningrad and north-western Russia. The Action Programme includes an indicative list of transport links which may be promoted.

Within the Via Baltica project, initiated by VASAB, an initiative was taken to promote Via Baltica Rail. The Via Hanseatica supports the integration of southern and south-eastern Baltic coastal regions (e.g. under the framework of the South Baltic Arc co-operation project). Other

¹ This position paper has been prepared by the Committee on Spatial Development in the Baltic Sea Region (CSD/BSR), representing 10 Baltic countries: Belarus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, and Sweden.

mentioned links are the Crete Corridor IXB as well as links from Ventspils, Liepaja, Riga and Tallinn up to the Crete Corridor IX. Other links may be considered relevant at any later stage. Access to transport corridors should be secured for the most northern parts of the EU.

VASAB notes with satisfaction the progress in taking spatial planning and development as well as environmental aspects into account in European transport policy. This is visible in the White Paper on the future development of the common transport policy as well as recently in the work of The High Level Group on the Trans-European Transport Network (the Van Miert Group). VASAB also looks forward to the results of the work of special ad hoc Working Group of the Ministers of Transport of the Council of the Baltic Sea States and Baltic Development Forum on Transportation Infrastructure Development. In this context, VASAB points out that spatial planning can, particularly in the BSR, be an important instrument in implementing corridors for the carriage of international intermodal freight flows. To take an example, motorways of the sea require planning of port areas and land connections as well as analyzing and evaluating their effects on regional development.

After expressing its satisfaction for these indications of a positive approach towards spatial planning in e.g. the above mentioned EU documents and Baltic Sea Region initiatives, as well as bearing in mind the Communiqué of the 12th Ministerial Session of the Council of Baltic Sea States, in which the improved cooperation between VASAB, HELCOM and Baltic 21 was mentioned, the VASAB Committee on Spatial Development highlights the following issues.

- Missing links between TEN-T, TINA and Helsinki corridors have to be carefully identified in the Commission's revision of the Guidelines for the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T).
- When evaluating, planning and implementing Pan-Baltic intermodal transport systems, spatial development issues, such as balanced regional structure, should be taken into account in the TEN-T revision.
- The effects of infrastructure improvement on regional development should be taken effectively into account. This concerns particularly the rail network in the eastern part of the BSR.
- Because the environmentally vulnerable Baltic Sea will soon become surrounded by EU countries, with the exception of Russia as a strong actor especially in transport, VASAB points out the importance of close cooperation with Russia in environmental issues as well as maritime safety, concerning particularly oil transport.
- Because of their effects on spatial development, intermodal transport chains increase the need for a better integration of transport planning and spatial planning. This can be achieved e.g. by better integration of sectoral actors to the strategic spatial planning process, informal negotiations with business sector, using methods of extended strategic environmental assessments or/and spatial impact assessments.
- International cooperation in spatial planning is a strategic instrument to foster cohesion, integration, competitiveness and sustainability around the Baltic Sea. More active cooperation among transnational organizations is needed, for example in the form of elaborating transnational spatial planning recommendations. These recommendations could be based on best practice examples of environmentally sustainable transport (EST) and the experiences gained so far in the framework of INTERREG II C and III B.

- The Van Miert Group has proposed that the Baltic Sea would be a pilot region in implementing the Motorways of the Sea concept. Being the only form of cooperation dealing explicitly with spatial planning and development methodologies in the BSR, VASAB strongly expresses its interest to contribute with its expertise to this project.
- In line with the proposal of the Van Miert Group under chapter 6.6.4. *Adapt the assessment methods* VASAB also offers its support to develop common methods for territorial impact assessments of large scale infrastructure projects (implementation phase) and also programmes and policies (programming phase). Experience in some of the VASAB countries have shown that the assessment of spatial aspects at an early stage can greatly contribute to an efficient planning and programming phase.