

FORUM DECLARATION ADOPTED BY THE 8th BALTIC SEA TOURISM FORUM

The participants of the 8th Baltic Sea Tourism Forum (BSTF) „Political Support, Cooperation and Development: One Sea - One Million Opportunities“, convened in Gdańsk, Poland, from 22 to 23 September 2015,

- appreciating the organisation of the 8th BSTF under the umbrella of the Polish presidency in the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) thereby strengthening the presence of tourism on political agendas at the macro-regional intergovernmental level,
- welcoming that among the priorities of the Polish CBSS presidency, in accordance with the CBSS' long-term priorities 'sustainable and prosperous region' and 'regional identity', are the promotion of both tourism cooperation, in particular the establishment of the Baltic Sea Tourism Center, and cultural tourism,
- welcoming the decision of the 24th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference to establish a working group on sustainable tourism as adopted in their conference resolution,
- welcoming the successful initiation by the European Commission of the Pan-European dialogue between cruise operators, ports and coastal tourism stakeholders in March 2015, as well as its Baltic counterpart, to improve inter-sectoral cooperation, to enhance the exchange of best practices and to make better use of existing synergies,

call on the governments of the Baltic Sea Region countries, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the European Union, tourism organisations, networks, NGOs, private entities and other tourism stakeholders,

regarding transnational tourism cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region,

1. to acknowledge that dependent upon dynamic improvements in the underlying Action Plan as ensured by its continuous revision, the EUSBSR indeed provides clear value added for the Baltic Sea Region in terms of growing cohesion and the advancement of the tourism sector as is already reflected in a number of successfully implemented flagships and the increased professionalization of the BSTF,
2. to support the work and efforts made by the Steering Committee of Policy Area Tourism to further advance the process towards a Baltic Sea Tourism Region at the strategic level,
3. to fully support the establishment of the flagship Baltic Sea Tourism Center in order to strengthen transnational communication and cooperation in tourism matters, to further professionalise the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum process as well as the development of the whole Baltic Sea Region as one tourism destination,
4. to promote the participation of stakeholders from non-EU countries, in particular at operational level, in order to ensure integration of all countries from the Baltic Sea Region and to add further perspectives for the mutual benefit of all,

regarding the existing funding schemes covering the Baltic Sea Region,

5. to acknowledge both the economic importance and the employment intensity of the tourism sector in the Baltic Sea Region as well as its fragmented and small-scale business structure which necessitate further, tailor-made support, especially for transnational projects including SMEs where suitable, to exploit the sector's full economic and innovative potential in order to advance the whole Baltic Sea Region through tourism,
6. to use and thereby strengthen existing networks to communicate and help bundling innovative project ideas in order to make the best possible use of the EUSBSR seed money facility to promote tourism-related projects, initiate flagships and thus transnational tourism offers in the Baltic Sea Region,
7. to extend the CBSS Project Support facility beyond 2015, because it constitutes an important additional funding source for tourism projects in the Baltic Sea Region and contributes to keeping opportunities and challenges of the tourism sector on political agendas at the intergovernmental level,
8. to exploit the Operational Programmes 2014-2020 and other relevant funding sources at EU, national and regional level so as to make tourism a priority funding area, because the sector naturally combines environmental, economic and social sustainability,

regarding the implementation of the revised EUSBSR Action Plan [SWD(2015) 177 final] in Policy Area Tourism,

9. to emphasise the great potential of the maritime and coastal tourism sectors as stated in the EU Blue Growth Initiative [COM(2012) 494 final], the EU Sustainable Blue Growth Agenda for the Baltic Sea Region [SWD(2014) 167 final] and the European Strategy for more Growth and Jobs in Coastal and Maritime Tourism [COM(2014) 86 final],
10. to consider tourism trends such as theme-based tourism, MICE tourism or food tourism in order to develop innovative transnational tourism projects with the potential to advance the region in terms of its attractiveness for international arrivals,
11. to support project initiatives which promote the digitalisation of the tourism sector to keep pace with continuously changing demand patterns,
12. to encourage smart combinations of the region's natural and cultural heritage, because a mixture of tradition and innovation not only helps to further build an identity around the Baltic Sea, but also opens economic potentials in the tourism sector.

The participants welcome the kind offer of the City of Pärnu and University of Tartu, Pärnu College to host the 9th Baltic Sea Tourism Forum in autumn 2016 in Pärnu, Estonia in cooperation with Policy Area Tourism in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Tourist Board.