

Working together for sustainable labour markets

Statement of the BSLN Steering Committee

9 October 2009, Riga

The Baltic Sea is uniting a group of countries that have strong economic and political role in Europe. Economic cooperation, joint political bodies and initiatives as the EU Baltic Sea Strategy and the Northern Dimension Policy are practical examples of cross-border activities of the region. The Baltic Sea Region should be seen as a regional entity of the northern Europe and developed to a model for the rest of Europe in terms of sustainable labour markets and labour policies.

The Baltic Sea labour markets are facing serious challenges in the time of economic recession. The unemployment is in some countries rising over 15 per cent and closing 20 per cent. Hundreds of thousands of emigrants have left the Baltic States and Poland leading to risk of losing a competent and sufficiently large work force which is basis for prosperity and crucial for countries or regions to survive in international competition.

The labour markets are the backbone of sustainable economic growth. Without a doubt, the social partners are regulators and experts of the labour markets, even though labour market systems and models differ from one country to another.

Governments and politicians should listen carefully to what trade unions and employer organisations have to say about competitiveness, decent working conditions, wages, social security and stability in the Baltic Sea Region. It is crucial to understand that without genuine involvement of the organised employers and trade unions, development of the regional labour markets and measures to fight the economic crisis are insufficient, simply because they lack the point of view of the civil society and grass root actors.

Joint solutions to common challenges

It is important to ensure the availability of qualified labour to all countries in the Baltic Sea Region. The quality of the labour markets should in any case be levelled upwards in the integration process of the Baltic Sea Region.

The BSLN looks for solutions to impacts of the economic crisis and mobility of labour in the Baltic Sea labour markets by using social dialogue and active labour market policies.

The Baltic Sea Labour Network aims to become a forum for the decision and policy makers of the Baltic Sea Region to combine knowledge and ideas in order to come up with strategies, policies and practical solutions.



Development of transnational social dialogue

The BSLN Steering Committee is a high-level body encompassing representatives of tripartite cooperation and serving as a platform for strategic and political decision making of the Baltic Sea Labour Network project. The Steering Committee is a unique opportunity for high-level representatives of trade unions, employer organisations, parliaments and governmental organizations to work together to create sustainable regional labour markets in Europe.

We, representatives in the Steering Committee of the transnational cooperation project of 26 partners from 9 countries in the Baltic Sea Region, can be seen as a first step and an example of developing transnational tripartite cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region.

It is very important to improve cooperation between regional, national and transnational actors in order to raise questions that are important of the labour markets in the Baltic Sea Region's point of view. Therefore, we would like to call on trade unions, employer and business organisations, politicians, experts, public officials, NGOs and academics to strengthen dialogue and open new communication channels in order to achieve sustainable development through the BSLN.

We see the social dialogue as a crucial and constructive element in building a sustainable Baltic Sea Region. Bargaining between employees and employers as well as tripartite cooperation (government, employers and employees) are tools to together develop labour markets in the region.

The economic crisis has hit the whole Baltic Sea Region and conditions in the labour markets have changed drastically in many countries. We would like to draw a special attention to the Baltic States where the hit of the economic meltdown has been hardest. We would like to stress that, especially in the time of crisis; the social dialogue is needed most for the achievement of sustainable and competitive labour markets in the region.

Knowledge on Baltic Sea labour markets

We would like to draw an attention to the need for comparable labour market information and statistics. One fundamental problem seems to be that nobody has overall picture what is going on in the Baltic Sea labour markets as a region. There is information, but it is fragmented and not always easily accessible. Clearly, one cannot solve any problems without deep knowledge of nature of the challenges.

We are using joint resources of the BSLN project for various research activities in order to fill this information cap. However, given the scale of the challenges that the region is facing, it is obvious that we are unable to succeed in this work alone. We need to work together with experts and organisations that are already now focusing on labour market issues in different parts of the Baltic Sea Region. In order to create a positive synergy, we are aiming to establish a BSLN Network of Knowledge for



experts, researchers and academics to provide a comprehensive picture of the challenges facing the Baltic Sea labour markets. This knowledge is further transformed to BSLN pilot projects.

We would like to invite all interested experts to work with us, in order to combine ideas and knowledge to develop labour markets of the Baltic Sea Region. Together we can find ways how to make high quality data more accessible and comprehensive. The priorities for the activities lay in the main working areas: mobility of labour and active labour market policy.

Political dimensions

Sustainable labour markets are only possible if politicians and governments implement political recommendations. We would like to stress that in this respect the BSLN gives politicians and governments a possibility to collaborate with the social partners and to make use of the knowledge of labour market experts. We are actively working with and through regional political bodies as Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC), Council of Baltic Sea States and the European Union. The BSLN will also build a contact network among EU parliamentarians.

We believe that the Baltic Sea Strategy should be instrumental in ensuring fair and well-functioning labour markets. The BSLN is chosen to “flagship project” of the EU Baltic Sea Strategy. The “flagship projects” are special projects presented in the Commission Action Plan having high significance.

We welcome the fact that the Commission in this way has included labour market issues to the strategy and actively involved the social partners in the implementation of the action plan. The special status of the BSLN gives us a good possibility to influence policies concerning the Baltic Sea labour markets through the EU Baltic Sea Strategy after it has been approved during the Swedish EU Presidency. We would like to point out that we strongly believe that the implementation of the Baltic Sea Strategy will require the establishment of its own separate budget, otherwise the strategy risks remaining merely a political statement and will not achieve its aims.

The Baltic Sea parliamentarians have shown good example for other political bodies in terms of dialogue with the social partners. The resolutions of the 18th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference in 2009 were based on hearing the representatives from the Baltic Sea Trade Union Network (BASTUN) and Business Europe. The recommendations of the conference can be used as a starting point for future political discussions to identify solutions to the challenges facing the Baltic Sea labour markets.

We welcome the recommendations of the 18th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference that the governments of the Baltic Sea Region make systematic and coordinated efforts to identify barriers to the development of cross-border labour markets and mobility, in accordance with the political recommendations in the final report of the BSPC Working Group on Labour Market and Social Welfare, and to carry out practical measures to dismantle and prevent such barriers.



We urge the governments to look closely into the resolution of the 18th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference concerning establishment of new information centres in locations where the number of cross-border commuting is growing but where centres do not exist. The information centres should have the capacity and mandate to provide comprehensive and official information on social security, employment legislation and tax legislation in relevant languages.

We also support the recommendation of the resolution to foster regular dialogue between associations representing cross-border workers, trade unions, employers and political decision-makers, and strengthen cooperation regarding cross-border labour markets via the establishment of councils for border regions and the development of networks; likewise, an exchange of experience should be organised regarding the work of the information centres throughout the Baltic Sea Region.

On behalf of the Baltic Sea Labour Network,

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