



**BALTIC SEA  
LABOUR FORUM**

Working together  
through Social  
Dialogue

June 2012



Dear reader

**Transnational Social Dialogue and regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region has gained status under the auspices of the Baltic Sea Labour Forum (BSLF).** With this newsletter we would like to inform you about recent activities of BSLF. Since its establishment in November 2011 in Hamburg, cooperation structures have been consolidated and a new work program has been developed. Both the members of the BSLN Steering Committee as well as

the members of the BSLN Facilitator Team have agreed to continue and broaden their successful work under the new umbrella of the Baltic Sea Labour Forum.

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### High level dialogue

The Baltic Sea Labour Forum (BSLF) team is writing to you off the back of the recent 9th Baltic Sea States Summit which took place in the Baltic Sea coastal town of Stralsund, Germany on the 30th and 31st May.

***The Summit of Prime Ministers hosted by Dr. Angela Merkel*** under the auspices of the German Presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States focused on two issues during its plenary sessions. The first discussion points concentrated on energy whilst the second dealt with the pressing issue of *Demographic change – consequences of an ageing society* which we find particularly relevant when discussing social dialogue and inclusive labour policy.

Back in February of this year the Prime Ministers of the Nordic-Baltic eight cooperation plus the United Kingdom met in Stockholm at the Northern Future Forum to discuss this very issue as well as female participation in the labour market and the Summit deliberations in Stralsund can be viewed as an inclusive extension of this discussion. The need to investigate a sustainable labour market that deals with both inclusion of senior citizens and youth in gainful and productive employment as well as creating a good work-life balance and flexible employment culture are all crucial for the future prosperity of our region.

In the Baltic Sea Region, as in other parts of the world the general conditions for growth need to be strengthened. Last week the 3rd EU Annual Forum was held in Copenhagen under the auspices of the Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union where economic competitiveness was at the front of the participant's minds.

Way back when the predecessor to the Baltic Sea Labour Forum, the Baltic Sea Labour Network was conceptualized it was already built into the DNA of the project that whilst improving the management and harmonization of the common labour market issues in the BSR - demographic changes and migration

processes would be taken into account. It could be said that one cannot develop joint transnational strategies without this approach.

So we are pleased to note that as July 1st marks the beginning of the Russian Presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States for a year, MP. Valentina Pivnenko, Chairman of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) who currently chairs the BSPC noted these issues in her address to the Prime Ministers at Strasund. Ms. Pivnenko, informed the participants of the 9th Baltic Sea States Summit about the work and focus of the Baltic Sea Labour Forum and the first meeting of the Enlarged Steering Committee in Hamburg, Germany. Referring to the priority of developing an integrated labour market in the Baltic Sea Region, she stressed the core aim of promoting social dialogue, tripartite structures and cooperation as crucial elements of sustainable economic growth and social development in the Baltic Sea Region. She explained that the BSPC will continue to “stay committed” to the Baltic Sea Labour Forum by supporting its political initiatives.

These guiding statements are important for our Forum as our members strive at synchronizing priorities with those of other stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Region, such as institutions like the Council of the Baltic Sea States, and implementing actors of policy frameworks like the Northern Dimension, as well as indeed the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) and the recently adopted North-West Russia Strategy 2020. Having already developed good structures for cooperation with Russia during the BSLN project, the Baltic Sea Labour Forum is especially welcoming the members “The Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia FNPR” and “Confederation of Labour of Russia KTR”.

It is commitment to the umbrella of the Baltic Sea Labour Forum which enables specific projects like our current project ForumSD<sup>BSR</sup>.

At the conclusion of the EU-Strategy for the Baltic-Sea-Region–Flagship Project BSLN a total of 21 organisations -to date- have signed a joint agreement aimed at creating a tripartite Forum for Social Dialogue in the Baltic Sea Region and enhancing cooperation through cross-border platforms. These movements forward can only aid the creation of a fair and competitive Baltic Sea Region.



## OUR WORK

### **New project ForumSD<sup>BSR</sup>**

The one year project ForumSD<sup>BSR</sup> already began back in November 2011 in order to facilitate the transition from the Baltic Sea Labour Network to the Baltic Sea Labour Forum. The project is aimed at establishing a BSLF-secretariat function for an initial period at the premises of the Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat, in Stockholm and at developing cooperative structures for the employers' associations in the Baltic Sea Region. Also the second Round Table of the Baltic Sea Labour Forum is to be prepared within this project. These are modest but necessary steps to ensure a continuation and development of the potential of the Forum. All activities are financed within the Budget Heading - Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue of the EUROPEAN COMMISSION, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

### **Enlarged Steering Committee**

The first meeting of the Enlarged Steering Committee took place on Friday 20 April 2012 at the premises of NORDMETALL, the employers association of the metal and electronics industry, Germany and was chaired by Franz Thönnies, MP, German Parliament, former Parliamentary State Secretary, and Member of the Standing Committee of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference.

As the Enlarged Steering Committee is the highest strategic decision-making body of the BSLF, the members adopted a common statement as well as the "rules of procedure" for the forum. Also a work programme for 2012-2013 was

agreed, focusing on the working areas mobility of labour and youth employment. The overarching objectives of the BSLF work programme are to identify the main common challenges for the labour markets of the BSR, to put commonly identified problems on BSLF's agenda in order to develop joint solutions and to create a base for issuing joint opinions and recommendations to decision-makers. The members of the Baltic Sea Labour Forum will establish working groups in order to identify these main common challenges for the labour markets in the Baltic Sea Region and for developing joint solutions.

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### **First Round Table for the Employers associations**

Representatives from the employers' associations in the Baltic Sea Region came together on 23 May 2012 in Hamburg to discuss potential cooperative structures for the employers in the Baltic Sea Region. The participants of the meeting underlined the benefit of networking. This has been endorsed during participation in the Baltic Sea Labour Network and other projects. Increased mobility requires a deeper knowledge of foreign legal systems. The participating representatives welcomed the planned conference for all interested employers confederations and associations from around the Baltic Sea which will be organised in autumn 2012 in Riga. The dialogue with employers' associations will be further developed in the next months.

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### **BSLF at the Baltic Sea Days in Berlin**

23-27 April in Berlin the German Federal Foreign Office organized an event which they called Baltic Sea Days, one of the highlight events of its Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) Presidency (2011-2012). One of the central happenings of the event, the Business Forum on the Baltic Sea Region, became a unique opportunity for the BSLF to articulate its relevance to the region. Upon invitation of the organizers – the German Federal Foreign Office as well as the European Commission's Representation in Berlin, BSLF was presented as an outcome of the Baltic Sea Labour Network, a Flagship Project under the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR). The presentation took place during one of the afternoon workshops, which addressed the question of how the EUSBSR may be relevant to the private sector as well as business/employers/labour cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region in general.

The very fact that BSLN project manager Ms. Katariina Röbbelen-Voigt was invited to share the experiences and findings of this project on the panel in a discussion with a representative from the European Commission DG REGIO Mr. Anders Lindholm, and moderated by Ms. Riitta Ahdan (INTERACT POINT Turku), confirms that the BSLN is perceived as one of the success stories from the EUSBSR Flagship Project portfolio. Information about the findings and outcomes of the project was received by the workshop participants with high

interest, with their comments and reactions proving that labour migration is of particular concern to various business actors in the Baltic Sea Region.

The Business Forum was one of the highest attended events during the Baltic Sea Days, and was organized in the premises of the German Federal Foreign Office. Political relevance of the event was endorsed by the Federal Minister Guido Westerwelle's opening speech as well as by the Federal President Joachim Gauck with whose address the one day-long Business Forum culminated.



### **Annual Round Table of the Baltic Sea Labour Forum**

The Annual Round Table is the main event of the Baltic Sea Labour Forum and will take place on 15 November 2012 in Hamburg. The programme will be announced before the Round Table meeting and will focus on the working areas mobility of labour and youth employment.

On one hand, many barriers still exist for mobile workers and there is a lack of knowledge about e.g. legal issues on the other side of the border. On the other hand the high number of unemployed youth in the Baltic Sea Region is alarming and transition management from school and university to employment needs to be taken into consideration. During the round table meeting it will be discussed how the working groups will start to deal with these topics, how the main challenges can be defined, and how to proceed with data gathering and labour

market monitoring.

Back to back with the Round Table, a meeting of the network of BSR cross border information centers will take place. The expertise of the participants will be a great input for the BSLF work.

## GET INVOLVED

All interested employers and trade union associations from the Baltic Sea Region are invited to participate in the Baltic Sea Labour Forum – the only cooperation body where trade union and employer’s associations as well as parliamentarian and governmental representatives work together to create sustainable regional labour markets within in the BSR. BSLF offers also the possibility for other interested institutions and networks from around the Baltic Sea Region to apply for an observer status in the BSLF.

**If you wish to contribute with your ideas, expertise and experiences or simply receive some more information on the work of the BSLF, do not hesitate to get in touch with one of our contact points**

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