



## Statement of PAC Tourism

**Wolf Born, State Chancellery Mecklenburg-Vorpommern**  
**Nature Tourism Conference, Riga (March. 22-23, 2011)**

*Welcome*

I am very grateful to the Latvian Country Tourism Association and especially to Asnate Ziemele for organizing this conference which has brought us to Riga. I am also grateful for having the possibility to address some words to you at the beginning of this conference.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The major issue of this conference is on how to use our natural heritage for tourism purposes in a sustainable way. How to make ends meet for both worlds, nature protection on the one side, and the tourism market needs on the other side? Today and in the days to come, this will be the major topic of speeches, presentations and discussions. The strong participation in this conference shows that there is a need to make further progress in this field.

To enjoy a sustainable environment and an optimal economic and social development is also one of the overarching objectives of the EUSBSR. With this strategy and its underlying Action Plan, the European Commission has defined the first EU macro-region. Since the adoption of the Strategy in October 2009, the term "macro-region" has become so familiar to a lot of actors in the BSR. The common denominators of a „macroregion“ are – according to the European Commission - „one or more common features or challenges“. All in all, 17 different priority areas have been identified in the Action Plan, each of them with different but often interrelated topics. One major feature is to not reinvent the wheel but rather to build on established cooperation in networks, projects and institutions. The added value of the EUSBSR is to be achieved by improving cooperation among the relevant actors in the region and thus contribute to a better functioning of the macro-region.

Tourism is one of the priority areas in the EUSBSR with Mecklenburg-Vorpommern acting as a coordinator for its implementation.

The overall objectives of priority area tourism are to highlight and optimize the sustainable tourism potential, including Russia and other third countries. The second objective is to develop a network of tourism industry and tourism education bodies. In this context, the Action Plan makes reference to the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum process that has started in 2008. I will come back to that later.

In the implementation process, we have strong support by the

- Regional Council of South West Finland together with Turku Touring, being the lead partner of the flagship project on tourism in rural and coastal areas,
- Marshal office of Pomorskie and the Pomorskie Tourist Board, taking care of the flagship project on cultural and nature heritage, and last but not least,



- University of Greifswald being responsible for the development of a sustainable tourism strategy in the BSR.

The objective of the flagship projects is to develop a network of stakeholders in the respective fields – both public and private – in order to establish an exchange of experience, know-how, and where appropriate – develop joint projects for further action. Tomorrow morning, you are invited to join a workshop these three flagship projects in order to get acquainted with their activities.

Cooperation in the tourism sector is nothing new. It has been existed at different levels, subregions and in different niches. Here, I can only name a few examples. The Baltic Sea Tourism Commission was established some 25 years ago. It is a membership based organization and disposes of a strong network of partners. It currently focuses on media work mostly in Asian countries and the US. It thus helps to make the region better known and to attract incoming tourists. Nonetheless, membership is limited and it could not develop a common label for the sector in the BSR. In the field of cruise ship tourism, Cruise Baltic promotes destinations in the BSR on a global level. It developed out of a project, and today operates on a membership basis. Since 2008, annual Baltic Sea Tourism Fora have taken place on an annual basis, in Rostock, Vilnius and Kaliningrad. In 2011, the next forum will take place in Sopot on 17-18 May, financed by the Polish Ministry of Sports and Tourism. The aim is to improve cooperation in the tourism sector in the BSR. It is carried by a network of different partners like the tourism marketing organizations in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern / Germany, Pomorskie Tourist Board and Turku / Finland and the Tourism ministries in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Kaliningrad region. Their objective is to promote the development of joint tourism products and services and their marketing. They also want to establish a joint internet platform for the region.

Next to these examples, I would like to hint at some findings of an analysis that was carried out by the Pomorskie Tourist Board. They have analyzed the project activities in the different INTERREG programs in the BSR. They have identified 82 tourism related projects. 76 of these projects take place in the border region programs. To a large extent, these projects are in line with the objectives of priority area tourism which speaks for the validity of the flagship projects and our objectives. Nonetheless, these project are more or less passive with regard to the activities in PA Tourism as they were developed independently of it.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

against the background of fragmented and limited cooperation structures in the BSR, I see the major challenge of our work in the establishment of a joint cooperation platform. A joint cooperation platform should involve the already existing organizations, networks and projects in the region. It should not only comprise the tourism companies like tour or cruise ship operators, hotels or airlines, but also tourism education bodies like universities and professional schools, national, regional and local tourism authorities and their marketing organizations, and all those who have a vested interest in tourism related activities.



I see two broader functions that a common platform could offer to be pursued:

The first function would focus on our activities within the BSR. It would allow us to consolidate our common but yet fragmented knowledge in tourism related activities. I am convinced that we could become more efficient through mutual learning. It could also facilitate the development of the tourism potential we have in the region. The metropolises play an important role for attracting tourists to the region.

Because of their concentrated offer of attractions and their infrastructure, they serve as gateways and common access points for incoming tourists. At the same time, the metropolises could benefit from a closer integration of nature based tourism in the rural and coastal areas surrounding. Niche markets could be developed in those areas where we have common features in our cultural and historic heritage. The Baltic Sea itself is our basis for the further development of maritime tourism in the region. Our objective has to be to develop our potentials in a sustainable way that allows us to have a qualitative growth. I am convinced that sustainability itself will become a major feature of a tourism label in the BSR.

The second function of a joint platform should be to organize ourselves with regard to global activities. As the population in the BSR declines while we see other parts of the world, mostly in Asia, South America and also Russia growing at a stronger pace, we have to create the necessary conditions to also benefit of this development. To this end, a common labeling of tourism in the BSR should be developed in order to allow an international marketing of tourism in the region. In the framework of the Balt Met Promo Project, the Baltic Development Forum has published a comprehensive study on branding activities in the region that I recommend for reading. It highlights the different branding campaigns we have in the region and states the necessity to come to a joint approach. It is difficult, no doubt, but we have to make further efforts in this field.

Coming to the end, I would like to underline that a stronger cooperation in the tourism sector is needed in order to better formulate our common interests and aspirations. This also relates to politics. The tourism sector should articulate its interests when the priorities of the funding instruments are defined at BSR and EU level for the period of 2014 and onwards. But will be only possible, if the tourism stakeholders, and among them you individually, are ready to contribute and get involved in building a joint cooperation structure. The Baltic Sea Tourism Forum might become this joint platform in the future. For the moment, it has not yet set up a stable organizational structure that would allow a continuous work on joint topics. As Coordinator for PA Tourism, I accompany and support the further development of the BSTF.

I also speak on behalf of our flagship lead partner when I say that I am happy to be here in Riga with you today and tomorrow.

I wish to all of us a fruitful and constructive work in the days to come.

Thank you very much for your attention!

*Notice: For further information on Priority Area Tourism, please go to [www.baltic-sea-strategy-tourism.eu](http://www.baltic-sea-strategy-tourism.eu). Through the "get involved" button, stakeholders can get registered in the implementation process.*