

Trade Union Vision 2020 for the Baltic Sea Region

April 12, 2011 in Riga



Part-financed by the European Union
(European Regional Development Fund)



1 Trade Union Vision 2020 for the Baltic Sea Region

The Baltic Sea Trade Union Network (BASTUN) is a network of trade union confederations in the Baltic Sea Region. BASTUN works as a forum where the trade unions exchange information, discuss, develop and define common interests and initiatives. BASTUN is not an organization, but a trade union network that also serves as a link between confederations and sector organisations and international trade union organizations. The network believes in the core principles and rights at work, cooperation, democracy, freedom, equality and solidarity. BASTUN strives for equal and just societies and advocates for economic and social rights, such as decent wages and working conditions for all employees in the Baltic Sea Region.

In July 1999, the trade union confederations in the Baltic Sea area agreed on “Vision Baltic Sea 2010”. Since then the development in the Baltic Sea Region has been rapid. The accession of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland in the European Union in 2004 both deepened the integration in the area and made it more prosperous, but also created challenges due to the disparities in the social models. Ever since 1990’s trade union density has decreased around the Baltic Sea.

The judgments of the EU court have reflected these challenges. In the Laval case the fundamental question was whether or not the trade unions were entitled to demand the same rights for all those working in the same geographical area through industrial action. The judgment can easily be criticized and it underlines the problems of integration in the enlarged EU, where the social rights do not even have an equal footing with the market freedoms.

Lately a major challenge for the sustainable development in the region has been the economic recession that resulted from the financial crisis in 2008. It has caused mass unemployment, government initiated austerity measures increasing social inequality and severe problems for the national economies. There is a risk that the economic downturn further increases the disparities of the region.

Even if the economic situation is of great relevance for trade unions, the very essence of trade union activity cannot be neglected. Basic trade union rights, such as the right to organise and the right bargain collectively, have been under serious attacks at all levels especially in Belarus and Russia. The situation has not improved over the years.

In the year 2020 BASTUN envisages the Baltic Sea region to be a prosperous area with great potential to deliver welfare to its’ inhabitants based on sustainable economic growth. To achieve this, a stronger commitment to social dialogue and stronger social partners in the Baltic Sea Region, more sustainable labour markets, more equal standard of living and well functioning public services such as quality education, is needed. The trade unions in all the Baltic Sea countries should focus on increasing their membership in order to have a strong influence on the direction of our societies.

This document outlines the BASTUN vision for the next ten years. It seeks to identify the main development directions needed to strengthen social justice in the region. It also describes the role of the trade union movement and BASTUN in this process. Operational plans will be drafted separately.



2 For Sustainable Labour Markets in the Baltic Sea Region

2.1 Stronger trade union movement:

“Organising, cooperation over the borders, promoting trade union rights”

Trade unions are social partners, regulators and experts on labour market issues, even though their role and influence may differ from one country or social model to another. These differences between the countries and the diversity of the social models in the Baltic Sea Region call for trade union cooperation. The cooperation reflects the basic values of the trade union movement – by organising and acting together trade unions are able to defend the interests of employees also at the bilateral, regional, branch, national, multinational company and international level.

Strengthening trade union density and organising in the Baltic Sea area is a strategic priority because it equates with the influence of the trade union movement. The vision is that in the year 2020 the trade union membership base will be strong and stable in the Baltic Sea region. Trade unions will explore new ways to organise and share their expertise with others. Trade union organisations will be self-sufficient and capable of realising their objectives effectively.

Cross-border cooperation is increasingly important for social and economic development. Business and political decision making have long disregarded national borders. Internationally this has caused a more unstable situation than before the deregulation of capital markets. To counterbalance globalisation of capital and to maintain their role in labour markets and society, trade unions need to work together over national borders.

The very foundation of trade union activity is the same in all the countries – trade union rights are an integral part in many international human rights instruments, such as the ILO conventions, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Social Charter. The freedom of assembly, the right to organise, the right to collective bargaining and the right to collective action including strike are among the key elements that enable the trade unions to build and use their collective force to the benefit of their members.

BASTUN’s vision is that by the year 2020 the trade union rights must be recognised and effectively protected in all countries in the Baltic Sea Region. The trade union movement must actively keep these issues on the agendas of the ILO, the Council of Europe and the EU. The grave infringements in Belarus must be stopped. Also the trade union rights situation in Russia should be monitored. The trade union movement must also push for the European Union to take action during the next decade to guarantee that fundamental rights, including trade union rights, have a stronger footing than the four market freedoms.

2.2 Strengthening the social dialogue

“Institutionalised social dialogue as a mutual interest”



Part-financed by the European Union
(European Regional Development Fund)



One of the trade unions' strategic aims is to promote social dialogue and tripartite structures and cooperation in order to enhance sustainable economic growth and social development. Social partners have expert knowledge on issues concerning the labour market and working conditions. Social dialogue plays a key role in achieving decent and productive working conditions in a secure and healthy environment. It promotes democratic involvement and furthers social and industrial peace and stability and can also boost economic development.

In the year 2020 social dialogue should be operative at local and national in every country of the Baltic Sea Region. The regional cooperation on a tripartite basis should play a deeper role in the framework of political institutions of the Baltic Sea region. Trade unions should have an active role in it. A central aim of trade unions in promoting social dialogue in the Baltic Sea Region is to advance more balanced representation of trade union and business interests.

Social dialogue is essential to the monitoring and development of the labour market, in the safeguarding of employees' rights and in reducing social and gender discrimination in the Baltic Sea Region. Collective agreements reached through social dialogue must be recognised and respected at all levels. It is vital to increase the organisation density of both trade unions and the representativeness of the employers' organisations in the region in order to safeguard the bargaining capacity of both social partners.

2.3 Sustainable economic development, mobility of labour and welfare

“No to social dumping, yes for free movement”

Fair economic competition and decent working conditions are not only important for the sustainability of the labour market, but are also preconditions for sustainable business and thus for the stability of national economies.

Free movement of labour is a fundamental right that the trade unions adhere to. However, free movement of labour at times is nothing but social dumping, when the employees are subject to worse wage and labour conditions than is their right. Undocumented workers are in the most vulnerable situation. Another problem concerns the posting of workers, where the main focus has been on the rights of the business and not on the rights of the employees. Posting of workers should be considered as free movement of labour – not as free movement of services.

The trade unions will keep these issues high on their agenda. During this decade, the principle of equal wage and equal working conditions for the same work in the same workplace must be honoured and respected. Trade unions must continue to engage themselves in meeting these challenges and influence the political systems, employers and civil society.

3 The Role of the Baltic Sea Trade Union Network (BASTUN)

3.1 A network for joint initiatives

BASTUN is a forum for coordination, information exchange, discussions, development and definition of common interests and joint initiatives between the central confederations and sector organisations (European/Nordic federations) in the Baltic Sea Region. The Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (BKDP) is a strategic partner of BASTUN and the



network provides a platform for cooperation between BKDP and trade unions in the Baltic Sea region.

The network's central aim is the formulation of joint political and trade union initiatives in the Baltic Sea region. The role of the BASTUN's presidency and the network's secretariat is to coordinate and facilitate effective collaboration and content preparation. Joint initiatives are based on information exchange, communication and a broad network of contacts with the national confederations and the Nordic federations in the area, the Baltic Trade Union Council (BTUC), the Nordic Trade Union Council (NFS), the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the Pan-European Regional Council (PERC).

3.2 A trade union coordinator for the Baltic Sea Region

BASTUN also influences political institutions and political decision makers in the Baltic Sea Region through lobbying and presentations in matters that have been identified jointly. BASTUN is a strategic partner of the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and cooperates closely with the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC). Contacts between the BASTUN presidency and the CBSS presidency – BASTUN follows the same rotation pattern for the tenure of the presidency as does the CBSS – play a key role in developing the strategic partnership.

The new Northern Dimension of the four partners EU, the Russian Federation, Norway and Iceland – the new platform endorsed in Helsinki in November 2006, and the EU's Baltic Sea strategy are also relevant for BASTUN's work. The Baltic Sea Labour Network project in 2008-2011 initiated tripartite dialogue at the Baltic Sea level. This has been an important step for creating the political will to support social dialogue structures at the Baltic Sea level. BASTUN will endeavour to achieve a strong labour market dimension in the Baltic Sea Region when the EU elaborates strategies and budget of the next program period 2014–2020.

3.3 A facilitator for joint strategic projects

BASTUN functions as a forum for the coordination of trade union projects. It can facilitate for joining forces and develop joint projects that have an impact on the Baltic Sea Region. The projects must adhere to the network's vision and values. They should aim at organising and increasing trade union density; promoting social dialogue and tripartite structures; influencing labour market policies and mobility of labour; welfare policies and the trade union strategies against social dumping.