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## EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region Policy Area Culture

### Steering Group meeting

Date: 18/04/2025

Time: 12:00–17:00 CET

Ministry of Culture, Estonia

### Participants

1. Kadri Jauram, Ministry of Culture of Estonia
2. Dāvids Garšva, Ministry of Culture of Latvia
3. Birutė Kazlauskienė, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania
4. Anna Woźnicka-Hrnčić, Ministry of Culture of Poland
5. Tarja Hautamäki, Regional Council of Ostrobothnia
6. Marcus Hagemann, Ars Baltica, Finland
7. Kazimierz Musiał, Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat (online)
8. Felix Schartner Giertha, Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat
9. Dace Resele, Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDCP)
10. Tiina Kasvi, Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC)
11. Kaarina Williams, Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Areas, European Affairs and Consumer Protection of Land Schleswig-Holstein (PA coordination)
12. Magdalena Kleszczewska, Adam Mickiewicz Institute, Poland (Pa coordination)
13. Franziska Kapteina, Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Areas, European Affairs and Consumer Protection of Land Schleswig-Holstein (PA coordination)
14. Justyna Koć, Adam Mickiewicz Institute, Poland (Pa coordination)
15. Samandarbek Akhmatjonov, Youth representative
16. Antoni Wyligała, Youth representative

### 1. Opening of the meeting and approval of the agenda

Kadri Jauram welcomed participants and kicked-off the Estonian Presidency in the Steering Group. The proposed agenda was reviewed and approved with no changes or suggestions.

### Agenda overview



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- PA Culture coordination briefing
- Briefings from Steering Group members and observers.
- Cooperation perspectives
- Lunch break.
- Future Actions: focus activities based on final Action Plan draft, planning for 2026, input session.
- AOB and agreement on the next meeting date.

## 2. Steering Group Briefing

### Key highlights from Estonia

Presented by: *Kadri Jauram*

- In their presidency year, resilience and preparedness are two major topics for the Estonian chairmanship. The EUSBSR Annual Forum is planned for 11-13 May 26 in Tallinn.
- The main focal points of the Estonian cultural budget are among other things an increase of the salary of cultural workers/professionals (min. 1600 EUR, 1720 EUR )and support for professional athletes.
- The XXVIII Estonian Song and XXI Dance Celebration took place from July 3-6, 2025, in Tallinn. The event is held every five years to celebrate Estonian culture and heritage.
- An expert group on resilience and preparedness in relation to cultural heritage was set up on EU level, with their first meeting being on 1.12.2025. The group is concerned with the protection of cultural heritage and aims to create a permanent coordinated network.
- The EU just published the new “Culture Compass” available [here](#).
- The European Commission proposed to create a '[democracy shield](#)', describing the proposal to increase the resilience of European democracies as an essential response to increasing threats and challenges
- 2025 marked 500 years since the publication of the oldest printed word in Estonian, so it was the year of the Estonian book.



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## Key highlights from Latvia

Presented by: *Dāvids Garšva*

- In the context of cultural heritage, Latvia recently prepared amendments to the Museums Law as well as the library law. With the Heritage Lottery they also started an initiative to allocate public funding through a state-run lottery for the preservation of cultural heritage. As part of the National Civil Protection Plan, the Minister for Culture also approved the Plan for Protection and Rescue of Cultural Heritage in Crises.
- Concerning the professional arts, the Ministry of Culture has established a national award in visual art - The Annual Art Award of Latvia. Its aim is to highlight the most significant events and persons on the Latvian art scene, recognize current trends, and promote the development of artistic processes across the entire art field. The first award ceremony will take place in April 2026
- In June 2025 the Cabinet of ministers approved the proposal of the Ministry of Culture on new State indemnity System, so that accredited state museums could obtain state-guaranteed insurance for international exhibitions.
- Accessibility requirements have been systematically integrated into cultural funding schemes, making practical accessibility measures a formal criterion in national and EU-funded projects. New policies include mandatory Latvian subtitles for films, upcoming accessibility guidelines and audits for cultural institutions, and the integration of accessibility standards into strategic frameworks and evaluation systems.
- The Ministry of Culture's working group, in cooperation with the Latvian Association of Architects is working on new Architecture Law.
- The process of adapting the Article 13(2) of the EU's Audiovisual Media Services Directive into Latvian national legislation is currently underway, obliging on-demand audiovisual providers in Latvia, or audiovisual on-demand providers from another EU Member State whose services are aimed at Latvia, to make a financial contribution to the production of European audiovisual works up to 3.5% of the revenue earned in Latvia of the audiovisual on-demand services.
- The Ministry of Culture, in cooperation with Latvia's cultural and creative sectors, has developed a draft framework to promote the internationalisation and export of cultural goods and services.
- A new results-based funding model for cultural higher education has been introduced through agreements between universities and the responsible ministries, granting institutions greater autonomy and flexibility. In parallel, an updated standard for vocationally oriented education in art, music and dance defines common goals, content and quality requirements, currently shaping the education of over 28,000 students across Latvia.



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- The Safety of Journalists Action Plan was developed by an inter-institutional working group with representatives from ministries, law enforcement, judiciary, media councils, associations, NGOs, academia and media service providers. The Action Plan was adopted at November 2025.

### Key highlights from Lithuania

Presented by: *Birutė Kazlauskienė*

- The Lithuanian Government has recently approved the draft state budget for the upcoming year.
- The Government of the Republic of Lithuania underwent change in September 2025. Following this shift, a new Minister of Culture was appointed. The cultural policy priorities of the XXth Government remain the same - strengthening social and economic resilience, civic education, ensuring, decent remuneration for cultural sector workers, the preparedness for the protection of cultural heritage in emergency situations - these are the main priorities in the cultural field that are the continuation of the previous administration's focus.
- To build long-term collaboration on preparedness and resilience, Lithuania closely cooperates with the Baltic partners (Estonia and Latvia), as well as Poland in this field. Key areas include the cross-border digital preservation of cultural assets (in case of mobilization, armed conflicts, or emergency situations) and the exchange of information and best practices. Our experts participated in the international workshop "Countering Hostilities in the Cultural Domain", that took place in Tallinn on 14-15 October in 2025.
- Lithuania together with Nordic countries is planning to participate in the project Nordic-Baltic Cooperation for Cultural Heritage Preparedness. The Project is being coordinated by Hanaholmen.
- In December the 12th Congress of Baltic Librarians CoBaL: Libraries - Key to a Literate Society will take place in Kaunas.
- An exceptional policy focus on innovation and competitiveness of the CCI sector (Economic resilience promotion). The Ministry of Culture of Lithuania is implementing a special objective for the Creative and Cultural Industries (CCI) within the 2021-2030 National Progress Plan.
- Lithuania is one of the first EU Member States to begin calculating the value of the CCI sector using a more complex methodology. This will enable Lithuania to obtain leading statistical data at the Eurostat level, where such detailed statistics are still lacking.
- In September 2025, Vilnius hosted an international seminar on climate change and cultural heritage, organised by the Lithuanian National Commission for UNESCO together with the Nordic Council of Ministers Office in Lithuania. The Ministry of Culture is now looking for national and international opportunities to develop a science-based system for assessing and monitoring climate impacts on cultural heritage, including the possibility of forming a specialised consortium and applying to international funding programmes such as ESPON or others.

### Key highlights from Poland

Presented by: *Anna Woźnicka-Hrnčić*



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- 2025 was a busy year, as Poland had the presidency of the Council of the EU which, among other things, resulted in over 500 cultural events
- There also have been some international policy developments, in particular regarding young creators, the security of cultural heritage as well as solutions in the audio-video sector. There has been for example an approval of support for young artists and creators, tackling issues they're dealing with from day to day.
- In regards to the support of CCS, the Institute of Creative Industries is offering support in different sectors:
  - In context of the Video Games Support Program, the goal is to support ambitious, innovative projects. Areas of focus include creating new valuable games, increasing inclusivity (adapting games for players with disabilities), and facilitating international expansion through localization/translation of games, assuming Polish as the original language.
  - In the field of design, activities focus on the professionalization of young creators, promoting new crafts abroad, and strategic work for Polish design.
  - In the fashion sector, activities aim to strengthen the creative and export potential of Polish fashion, building a bridge between craftsmanship and innovation, and creating support infrastructure. The goals will be realized through the following initiatives planned for 2026
- The XIX International Chopin Piano Competition was held from 2 to 23 October 2025 in Warsaw, Poland. The 2025 competition marked the beginning of the International Chopin Piano Competition's centenary celebrations and drew a record 642 applicants, as well as 71000 attendees.

## Key highlights from Finland

Presented by: *Tarja Hautamäki*

- In Finland's 2024 cultural policy report, art and culture are put as a strengthening force, especially in cooperation with other policy areas. It identifies four key objectives: culture as a driving force for change, cultural actors in central roles, culture as everyone's right as well as the potential international impact of culture.
- Overall, there was a budget increase of 3.9 million in the field of culture, the catch being, that this budget is focused on the key priorities, key institutions as well as the European City of Culture. Beneficiaries are among others the expanding national museum as well as the museum of performing arts, while there was a cut as high as 7.8 mil when it comes to cultural grants and investment aids.
- When it comes to NGOs and creative actors, Finland is setting out to enable more multi-annual funding. Consideration is also given to the CCI export programme,



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regional equality and accessibility as well as long-term funding for regional culture-centers.

- Finland is restructuring its cultural administration by merging key bodies into a new agency, "Creative Finland," by 2026 to streamline operations, amid proposed budget cuts of 7 mil which could severely impact production, reducing the number of supported feature films. The reform impacts the Finnish Film Foundation (production support) and KAVI (archives/censorship) and the Arts Promotion Centre Finland (Taike) into a single, larger entity to enhance efficiency and reduce administrative overhead, while shifting toward international competitiveness, digital distribution, and streaming. New EU-driven legislation is expected to require streaming platforms (e.g., Netflix, AppleTV) to invest in domestic Finnish productions, similar to models in other Nordic countries (see Latvia).
- There is a proposition of a cross-ministerial cross-sectoral cultural council on national level
- 18 regions in Finland, not all with full-time cultural workers, came together to release a paper, stressing the right to culture, the safety and security of culture, as well as the regional aspect and the necessity to have culture available everywhere

### Germany / BSSC (Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation)

Presented by: *Kaarina Williams*

- On the national level, the funding for culture was raised in Germany, the purpose mainly being the renewal of infrastructure, support for the film industry, while participative elements like for example the culture pass are being cut.
- The Baltic Sea Philharmonic received significant funding from the German federal government, with €450,000 secured for 2025.

### Observers' Updates

#### ARS BALTICA

Presented by: *Marcus Hagemann*

- Ars Baltica held three Ars Baltica Creative Dialogues (ABCDs) in 2025: The first was held in March featuring showcases of best practice examples from the BSR to inspire new collaborations as well as an interactive workshop to discuss specific needs and potentials of cross-border cooperation. The other was divided into two parts: Part 1 invited the participants to explore and connect insights into the artistic approaches of



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Oksana Yushko and Arthur Bondar, followed by a moderated exchange. The second part consisted of a “Walk the Talk & Networking” in an open workshop format, exploring how art can act as narrative and where opportunities for collaboration and exchange within the ARS BALTICA network can emerge. It included a guided tour of the residency's closing exhibition. The third ABCD was in context of the Fehmarnbelt Days in Lübeck.

- Marcus Hagemann further informed about the developments in Pearls and the efforts being done at the moment regarding the continuation of the programme and the network, including new funding applications. Among other things, the project is applying for a “Future Cities”-Platform with Interreg BSR once more.

### **Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)**

Presented by: *Kazimierz Musiał and Felix Schartner Giertta*

- CBSS going through a reform adopted in June 2025 ([Vihula Declaration](#))
- An important factor for CBSS has been to see culture as a driver and at the heart of the regional identity, which also means that the view shifts from the necessity to nurture culture to culture as a means for resilience
- BSR Cultural Pearls Project update: The project is currently in its final (third) year of funding and efforts are underway. The consortium was able to set up a structure that will carry on the work for now and the planning for the Call 27 is on.

### **Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) - Baltic Sea Youth Forum**

Presented by: *Antoni Wyligata and Samandarbek Akhmatjonov*

- The youth representatives started of their report with the general observation, that there is a growing interest in involving youth in the work of cultural institutions. They however remarked on the challenge, that youth structures often are set up to intransparent and that some of the involvement gives the impression of “youth-washing”.
- The Working Group on Culture has been active since 2023. An important topic to the youth is the sense of belonging of people, arriving or departing places through culture. They are currently exploiting the involvement of minority youth in culture. For this purpose, they are researching minority groups in the BSR, provide them with a questionnaire, summarize the answers in a report and disseminate it as a final step. SG members critically remarked, that the framework of the research might not meet the requirements of a scientific research framework and that the outcomes would be



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more credible and more likely to make an impact if the compliance with scientific methods would be assured.

- Interest was expressed in an event in April 2026 in Warsaw that is centered around the intersection of culture, youth and security.
- The Youth representatives also reported that they have been participating in various events since October and that they plan to publish a position paper after the Annual Forum in Sopot.

### **Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDPC)**

Presented by: *Dace Resele*

- The Baltic Music Days 2026, themed "We Live in Different Times," will take place in Riga and Liepāja, Latvia, from April 9-17, 2026. A key highlight is the Culture Action Europe (CAE) North Satellite Beyond event, "Different Times: New Solutions," held in Riga from 14-16 April 2026. The festival features intense collaboration with Nordic and Scottish composers, including numerous premieres and performances by the Liepāja Symphony Orchestra and Orchestra "Riga"
- At the moment, NDPC has 8 initiatives ongoing
  - The Interreg BSR funded EnTRA project that builds a resource hub that helps public authorities and sectoral agencies across the Baltic Sea Region scale up the energy transition by making existing, validated solutions easier to access, understand and use.
  - Inclusive Wellbeing Through Arts and Culture in the Baltics (WITAC), a strategic partnership project aimed at developing and testing a new interdisciplinary collaboration model between culture and health in higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Baltic States.
  - CARE - Culture for Mental Health, a Creative Europe funded project that harnesses the transformative power of arts and cultural participation to improve mental health and well-being across Europe.
  - AWAKE: Arts & Wellbeing as a Creative Business and Future Livelihood", a project that aims to explore the intersection of arts and wellbeing from the perspective of creative business and future livelihood.
  - The CultureAndHealth Platform, an initiative led by Culture Action Europe (CAE) to support artists working in the intersection of culture, health and social sectors across Europe.
  - The Interreg BSR funded projects Creative Circular Cities and Cultural Pearls
  - Time for (S)heroes, a capacity building project for prospective fashion and costume designers with an impact for sustainability.



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## Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) - Cultural Cities Commission Presented by: *Tiina Kasvi*

- The XVIII UBC General Conference was held in Stupsk/Dolina Charlotty, Poland, on 4-7 November 2025.
- Tiina Kasvi furthermore noted, that a collaboration with the Eurocities network is enabling them to combine their efforts and speak with a stronger voice. She also mentioned the EuroCities Cultural Forum 2025, where participants reflected on how culture reshapes cities physically, socially and imaginatively, by turning places into hubs of community, creativity and resilience.
- For UBC, Safety and Security is an important topic. The Cultural Cities Commission (CCC) is especially emphasizing special tasks, that culture can take on in civil societies. In March 2025, there was an on-site joint meeting with the Safety Cities Commission in Espoo, Finland. Viewing safety and security also from a cultural perspective introduced innovative ideas for participants, offering a broader outlook on culture's role and impact, especially on citizen's identity.
- Meanwhile Espoo
- The CCC set up its [2026 Action Plan](#)

### 3. PA Culture coordination briefing

Presented by: *Magdalena Kleszczewska*

#### Recent work and progress:

- **Action Plan:** The action plan has been drafted (around 35 pages) in its initial form, and it will be further refined based on feedback. **Interreg BSR report** highlighted key achievements, including the **InnoCulture Conference in Gdansk** and the **Culture and Integration Workshop in Visby**. **Annual report to National Coordinators Group:** Content was largely based on the **Interreg BSR report** but tailored to the **NCG**. There was some feedback regarding the similarity between the two reports, which will be addressed.

#### Ongoing and upcoming work:



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- **Action Plan update:** The team is still working on finalizing the action plan update. The National Coordinators Group (NCG) has requested more time to review the draft and will conduct interviews with all Policy Area Coordinators.
- **Contribution to the "Securing the Future" Report:** As part of the 16<sup>th</sup> EUSBSR Annual Forum, PA Culture submitted a **2-page contribution** for the "Securing the Future" report.
- **Social Integration Platform:** PA Culture worked with **Policy Area Education** on a **social integration platform**, following up on the **Culture and Integration workshop** in Visby. A **pilot event** was held in **May**, and members are invited to participate.
- **InnoCulture 2.0:** The **InnoCulture conference** will take place on **19th and 20th November** in Tallinn, Estonia. This year's event will be a collaboration with **Creative Estonia** and will mark **Estonia's presidency** of the EUSBSR. This event will also celebrate **Creative Estonia's 25th Anniversary**.
- **Events and participation:** EUSBSR Monthlies (regular meetings of Policy Area and National Coordinators), CCI Network Meeting and ABCD Event in Schleswig-Holstein, Interreg BSR Event and the kickoff meeting for the Interreg BSR project platforms (May 2025).

## Break

### 4. Cooperation perspectives and future actions

Presented and facilitated by: *Franziska Kapteina*

- The presentation started with an introduction of the new Interreg BSR platform project "**REAVES**". The project aims to build a coherent **cross-sectoral support strategy** for the film, gaming, and music industries in the Baltic Sea region by strengthening collaboration between public authorities, academia, and industry actors. It seeks to overcome regional and sectoral silos, consolidate **results from 22 EU projects**, and create a **more resilient and innovation-driven ecosystem** through a shared policy roadmap, transnational

exchange of best practices, and cross-sector innovation initiatives. With a focus on better governance, streamlined funding approaches, and stronger international networks for talents and SMEs, the project is particularly relevant for policymakers. As it has just launched, stakeholders whose institutional priorities align—especially regarding policy development and cross-regional cooperation—are encouraged to connect, as direct engagement with ministries can significantly support its impact.

- **Franziska Kapteina** introduced a proposal for a policy exchange on **safeguarding cultural heritage in times of crisis**, with a focus on the **long-term storage and protection of digital cultural heritage**. Building on existing EU, macro-regional, and national preparedness efforts, the initiative—led by Estonia—explores a joint **European approach**, including the idea of mirroring digital heritage across multiple locations. The draft format foresees a short online exchange between administrative representatives from Baltic Sea Region countries to map existing standards, identify gaps, and share best practices. SG members are invited to identify and recruit relevant national actors and help shape expectations and contributions ahead of the planned meeting.
- Furthermore, cooperative perspectives with other EUSBSR Policy Areas were addressed. Plans are emerging for a cross-sectoral digital platform on Culture and Integration under PA Education, aimed at connecting actors across the Baltic Sea Region to foster inclusion, partnerships, and transnational cooperation, though the concept is still at an early stage. Parallel exploratory exchanges are underway with other Policy Areas, including Spatial Planning, Secure, and Tourism, focusing on shared themes such as cultural heritage in spatial planning, social resilience, New European Bauhaus-linked urban development, and sustainable cultural tourism.
- Franziska then transitioned to the **“Strategic Activities”** agenda point, explaining the **implementation of the new Action Plan** through a mix of policy exchanges, stakeholder meetings, and transnational events, including the InnoCulture Conference and workshops at the EUSBSR Annual Forum. Additional **instruments** include shared resources, targeted projects, and thematic platforms that bring together stakeholders across the Baltic Sea Region to support knowledge exchange, coordinated action, and project development.
- The **Action Plan** is structured around **three priorities**: strengthening the cultural and creative sector, fostering Baltic Sea Region identity and social cohesion through culture, and advancing sustainable culture and cultural heritage. Each action is supported by flexible instruments such as stakeholder meetings, policy exchanges, analyses, platforms, events, and pilot projects, with a strong emphasis on accessibility, artistic freedom, sustainability, and resilience. The proposed activities are indicative rather than fixed, leaving



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room to align with national and transnational initiatives. The next steps focus on reviewing plans for 2026 and collecting input from members to identify overlaps with national priorities and co-develop activities and formats that reflect a shared, collaborative approach.

## 5. AOB

### Next Steps and Action Items

#### Next Steering Group Meeting:

- The next steering group meeting was tentatively scheduled to be **back-to-back** with the Annual Forum in **Tallinn**, in May 2025.
- **Kadri Jauram** will be consulted regarding the logistics, and further details will be shared with members soon.

The **coordination** thanked everyone for their **active participation** and commented that the meeting was productive and informative.