

# Position Paper on strengthening Resilience, Democracy, and Youth Engagement in the Baltic Sea Region

written by the participants of the BSSSC Youth Fall Event  
September 2024, Rendsburg-Kiel, Germany



In September 2024, young people from the Baltic Sea region came together to discuss key political issues. The event provided a platform for youth to exchange ideas and collaborate on important topics such as:

- 1. Resilience and Cultural Treasures**
- 2. Democracy and Fake News**
- 3. Cooperation with Ukrainian Youth**
- 4. Youth Involvement and Regional Cooperation**

Their discussions focused on the challenges facing the region and the role of youth in shaping a sustainable and secure future.



## **1. Resilience and Cultural Treasures**

For a successful cultural project in the Baltic Sea Region, it is crucial to make cultural differences, diversity, and similarities in values and ideas visible. The exchange of cultural habits and knowledge fosters mutual understanding and strengthens the bonds between communities. It is important that such projects are open and accessible to everyone, fostering an inclusive environment.

Effective marketing and a strong online presence with current events and information are essential. Utilizing various social media platforms allows us to reach a broad audience. The main message and essence of the project should be conveyed in a simple way to promote genuine understanding. Proactive involvement of the target group is of great importance.

## 2. Democracy and Fake News

To strengthen democratic resilience, we propose a two-pronged strategy to combat misinformation:

1. In the **short-term**, expand comprehensive media literacy courses for educational institutions and the general public to foster critical thinking, enhance the ability to recognize false information, and increase knowledge about the values and importance of democracies.
2. And to invest in technical innovations in the **long-term** to disrupt the spread of misinformation, especially considering the rapid development of artificial intelligence and the impacts of geopolitical conflicts.

In regard to media literacy courses, we should create campaigns aimed at educating, warning, and helping the youth and population of the Baltic Sea Region to understand the threats of fake news and how to combat them.

1. How to spot fake news and deep-fakes
2. How to search for reliable sources and step out of their information bubble.
3. How to protect themselves from misinformation in social media as well as traditional media.

### 3. Cooperation with Ukrainian Youth

During our event, we engaged in a conversation (via Zoom) with Natalia Shevchuk from the National Youth Council Ukraine and two Ukrainian refugees present in Rendsburg, who shared their experiences in Ukraine.

From this exchange, we identified key needs for Ukrainian youth work:

1. Provide tailored support for independent youth organizations, especially at the local level outside of state frameworks, and offer training for new young youth workers.
2. Facilitate youth exchanges to improve English language skills and promote intercultural training to combat radicalization.
3. Advocate for youth work to be prioritized higher politically, addressing topics like inclusion, mental health, and trauma treatment.
4. Organize visits to Western Ukraine with youth programs, conferences, and knowledge exchanges on democracy and youth structures, and develop a post-war strategy for youth work now.

We must not forget that a terrible war is happening at our doorstep. Freedom is not a given; we need to build common partnerships for freedom. The discussions have grounded us and highlighted the importance of our commitment.



Our discussion with **Natalia Shevchuk** from the National Youth Council Ukraine.

## 4. Youth Involvement and Regional Cooperation

We emphasize the importance of meaningful youth cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region. Empowering young people to participate in policy-making across diverse topics is an investment in our peaceful and sustainable future. The Baltic Sea Youth "deserve a possibility to be part of the decision-making process in building a safer and more secure, sustainable, and integrated region" (CBSS Porvoo Declaration 2024). To facilitate this, we will continue hosting biannual youth events focused on drafting resolutions and presenting key issues at the annual BSSSC conference.

We encourage all regions to name a BSSSC youth contact person. To ensure equal opportunities for youth participation across all regions, we support establishing a BSSSC Youth Support Fund.

We advocate for a long-term strategy for sustainable, meaningful youth involvement. Youth should have a say during the drafting of the next Baltic Sea Action Plan and the new Interreg Baltic Sea Program 2028–2034. We embrace the Interreg program and wish for its continuation beyond 2027, with specific allocation of funds for youth participation events.

We need sustainable youth involvement in the work of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), including a mandatory budget for youth involvement in Interreg calls and applications to the Annual Forum.

The rise of far-right and nationalist forces in the European elections concerns us deeply. Retreating into anti-democratic spheres cannot be the answer to Baltic, European, and global crises and conflicts. We call upon political decision-makers in the BSR to consider lowering the voting age for European Parliament elections, as Germany has done by reducing it to 16 years. Democracy must evolve with young people bringing unique perspectives, ideas, and solutions.

We encourage the 222 elected Members of the European Parliament from the Baltic Sea Region to form a BSR cross-party group in the new European Parliament.

We support offshore wind farms as a viable solution to combat climate change. However, we must minimize their ecological impact by conducting necessary assessments, collaborating with scientists in planning, and ensuring the protection of the Baltic ecosystem.

Unfortunately, as BSSSC has no legal status, we cannot participate in Interreg Baltic calls or Erasmus Youth as a legal partner. We urge the BSSSC board to seek solutions to this dilemma and explore alternative ways to participate in European funding opportunities.

## Election of New Youth Board Members

We are pleased to announce the election of Miro Broswitz from Brandenburg, Germany, as the newest member of our Youth Board. Additionally, Elias Arndt (Schleswig-Holstein, Germany), who was elected last year, will continue to serve as a Youth Board Member for another year until the election in September 2025.

Until December, Lina Elmawardy will remain Deputy Youth Board Member due to the current mandate terms in Norway. Starting in December, Justus August from Brandenburg, Germany, will assume the Deputy position and serve until the next election in September 2025.

We are committed to fostering a diverse board representation and encourage all interested participants to nominate themselves for future elections. Please note that funding opportunities in certain regions have posed challenges for some potential candidates' participation.

We look forward to a continued collaborative and dynamic leadership within our Youth Board.



**Elias Arndt** (Germany), **Lina Elmawardi** (Norway) and **Werner Schwarz** (Minister of Agriculture, Rural Areas, Europe, and Consumer Protection of the State of Schleswig-Holstein)