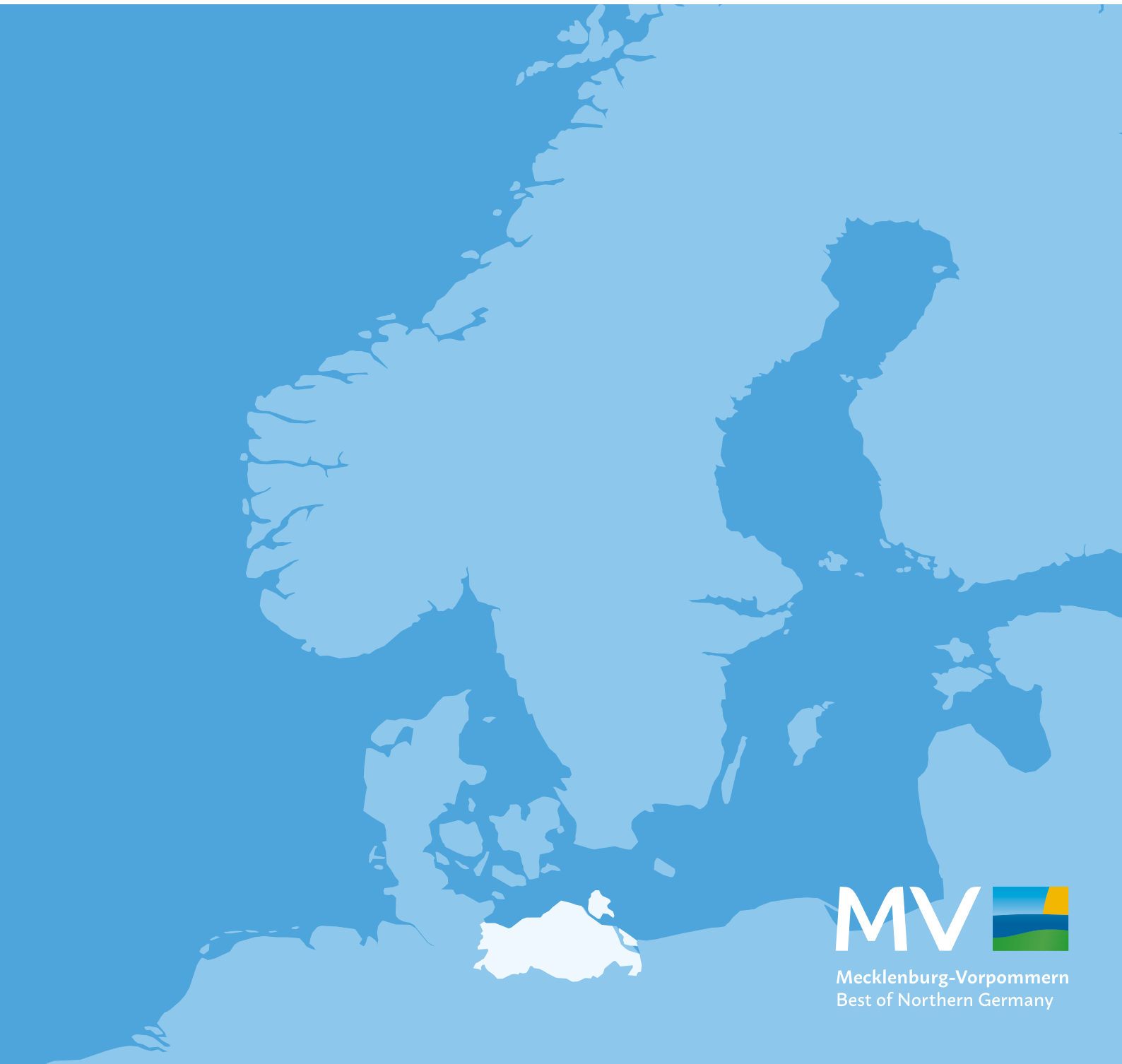


MV Baltic Sea Strategy

Strategy of the State Government of
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern for
cooperation in the Baltic Sea region





Mecklenburg-Vorpommern
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Strategy of the State Government of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern for cooperation in the Baltic Sea region (MV Baltic Sea Strategy)

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1

Introduction

As a region at the heart of Europe, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is firmly integrated in the European Union and the Baltic Sea region. This close connection is emphasized as a national objective in the state constitution. Part of this philosophy is the mandate that Mecklenburg-Vorpommern should continue to play an active role as a strong partner in cooperation in the democratic Baltic Sea region – one of the most competitive and dynamic regions in the world.

Mecklenburg-Vorpommern's close ties to the democratic Baltic Sea region and the cooperation that is practised there, e.g. in regional partnerships, have helped the state to develop into an innovative, competitive region. With its ports and harbours, good infrastructure, sustainable energy production, innovative healthcare industry and internationally acclaimed maritime research, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern today provides important prerequisites for further close cooperation in the Baltic Sea region.

The cooperation partners in the democratic Baltic Sea region are jointly facing major challenges. The changed geopolitical situation and the urgent need to transition to a climate-neutral and sustainable economy require all the states and regions in the democratic Baltic Sea region to make significant adjustments within a very short space of time. In addition to these transformation efforts, there are other major challenges: protecting the Baltic Sea environment, dealing with the consequences of demographic change, securing public services generally, especially in rural areas, medical care and in the field of nursing care, the future-oriented development of digitization and the safe use of artificial intelligence (AI), to name just a few.

To manage these processes, the State Government is focussing on even closer cooperation with its partners in the democratic Baltic Sea region. That body is convinced that many of the tasks that lie ahead can be accomplished better and faster together. This currently applies in particular to the “historic turning point”, which is a response to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine in violation of international law. The notion of cooperation in the Baltic Sea region has changed fundamentally since this war started. Against this current geopolitical

backdrop, cooperation can only take place without Russian participation. Our shared values, democracy and the rule of law, human rights, diversity, tolerance, freedom and the welfare state form the basis for working together as partners. Together, we have the opportunity to develop the Baltic Sea region into a model region for participation, innovation and sustainability.

In pursuing this goal, the State Government can rely on very active, broad-based and cross-level cooperation with the Baltic Sea region with the participation of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The most important trading partners in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern already come from the Baltic Sea region. Equally important are the numerous activities in the fields of business and science, education and culture, local authorities and associations, as well as voluntary work in civil society and by the younger generation in particular. It is only through this dedication that the collaboration can be imbued with life. The State Government recognizes the value of these diverse collaborations and supports them to the full. This is supported by a broad political consensus on the objectives and strategic priorities for Baltic Sea cooperation.

At a political level, cooperation is reflected in the regional partnerships with the voivodeships (provinces) of West Pomerania, Pomerania and Southwest Finland, in reciprocal visits and projects and through participation in various formats, such as the Helsinki Commission, the CRPM (Conference of the Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe), the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference and the Southern Baltic Sea Parliamentary Forum.

Development of the cross-border metropolitan region of Szczecin, which is to radiate into the southern Baltic Sea region, has been a strategic goal of the State Government for some years. These close ties are a good basis for overcoming the current challenges and transformation processes together with our partners. They are to be deepened and expanded. With this strategy, the State Government is consolidating its priorities and activities. At the same time, it offers an orientation framework for those players in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern who are active in the Baltic Sea region and who are supported by the State Government wherever possible.

To support this process, the State Government has convened an advisory body, the Cooperation Council for the Democratic Baltic Sea Region (KdO), consisting of independent experts from science, education, business, associations, sport and culture, which advises the State Government on the development and implementation of the Baltic Sea Strategy. This committee submitted its recommendations to the State Government in May 2023 and will also advise the State Government in the

further process. The State Government would like expressly to thank the KdO members for their outstanding work. They have provided many valuable impulses and thus created an important basis for the State Government's Baltic Sea strategy. Many of the proposals and recommendations for action have been taken up by the State Government.

2

The view of the future

The State Government is pursuing the political goal of developing the Baltic Sea region together with its partners into a peaceful, free and innovative model region with strong democratic coexistence, participation and equality. It will take targeted action where political support is required. This includes a regular exchange at political, economic, scientific, cultural and civil society level with countries in the democratic Baltic Sea region, for example through visits and delegation trips. The State Government is already involved here with numerous trips and political meetings. This commitment will continue at the highest level.

From the state's point of view, cooperation should focus more strongly on key areas of action in future and aim to accelerate joint solutions in areas of particularly high priority. The overarching objectives will therefore be underpinned by strategic measures. It is important to the State Government to create spaces for exchange and thought to support the development of new ideas and problem-solving strategies. The State Government is also focussing on groups for whom such exchanges have not been a matter of course in the past, such as the younger generation, vocational training and civil society involvement.

The State Government will continue to promote cooperation in the Baltic Sea region, as well as European and international

cooperation as a whole, as an integral part of the specialized policies of the State Government of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. This also includes the consistent use of EU funding programmes to implement this strategy. Only in this way can it make an effective contribution to the state's regional development and its future viability. And only in this way can Mecklenburg-Vorpommern be a strong and respected partner in international cooperation.

The State Government is aware that cooperation processes – especially in cross-border cooperation – take time: trust grows gradually, those involved must become accustomed to each other, financing must be secured, a common understanding must be developed and organizational hurdles and structural differences must be overcome. For this reason, it is initially prioritizing gearing the political framework conditions in the state more towards such cooperation processes and thus improving the basis for increased cooperation.

This is based on the KdO's proposals, which have been intensively reviewed and prioritized. In addition, links have been identified, for example to existing specialized policy strategies of the State Government and activities in the Baltic Sea region. On this basis, the State Government has formulated three overarching goals for cooperation in the Baltic Sea region.

2.1 Strengthening Mecklenburg-Vorpommern as a region that is friendly and keen to cooperate

Mecklenburg-Vorpommern has long been recognized as a competent and active partner in the Baltic Sea region. However, in order to strengthen networking in the Baltic Sea region, the state should become even more visible and raise its profile as a competent partner in a competitive and sustainable Baltic Sea region. In order for potential cooperation partners – in the state and in the Baltic Sea region – to come to an agreement, it is important to know more about each other. This is where the State Government will come in and pool the relevant information. The aim is to share cooperation experiences as well as information on cooperation and funding opportunities. A particular focus is on the areas of education, science, culture and business.

Cooperation can only succeed if there are enough players who are willing and able to do so. The State Government is therefore also focussing on Mecklenburg-Vorpommern itself.

In this way, the intercultural competences in the state are to be strengthened. A particular focus is on the younger generation. This group is to be integrated even more closely into the Baltic Sea region through suitable educational cooperation measures. In terms of strengthening an open and pluralistic society and cohesion in the Baltic Sea region, the topic of women's rights and gender equality also plays a role as one of the fundamental pillars of the European family. To this end, exchange and cooperation with partners in the Baltic Sea region is to be further promoted at political and non-governmental level.

In order to raise the profile of the region at European level, the common interests with partners from the democratic Baltic Sea region are to be represented and promoted more effectively in dealings with EU institutions.



2.2 Protecting the Baltic Sea and promoting a healthy environment for us to live in

Protection of the Baltic Sea and the promotion of a healthy and liveable environment, e.g. through the development of solutions for the sustainable use of resources, the expansion of circular economy structures and the production and use of renewable energies, have long been important goals of the state's Baltic Sea cooperation.

For example, the coalition agreement lists climate change as one of the major challenges of this decade. The EU has set itself the ambitious goal of becoming climate-neutral by 2050, and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern aims to achieve this goal by 2040. This process offers many opportunities for the state: To implement the European Green deals, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern aims to coordinate its activities more closely with the regions in the Baltic Sea region and promote the democratic Baltic Sea region as a model for the green transformation of the economy and society. On the basis of supra-regional cooperation structures, the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea region and the EU funding programmes, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern will utilize the potential for its own transformation towards climate neutrality and raise the state's international profile.

Joint initiatives in the Baltic Sea region, such as those to rebuild marine ecosystems, safeguard marine biodiversity and reduce eutrophication, are already being strongly supported by the state, alongside the Federal Government as part of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan.

The State Government is also endeavouring to achieve a joint approach by the countries bordering the Baltic Sea on the subject of environmental protection and ordnance recovery in the Baltic Sea.

The issue of energy supply in particular is currently of the utmost urgency for Germany and Europe. The central field of action is to achieve greater independence from fossil fuels. As a strong partner in the field of renewable energies (offshore wind power, hydrogen), Mecklenburg-Vorpommern can play a role here as a driver of innovation. Based on the experience and expertise available in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, the aim is not only to increase the proportion of renewable energy generated locally, but also to drive forward development together with European partners.

2.3 Securing future viability and prosperity

The Baltic Sea region is considered one of the most innovative and competitive regions in the world. The states located around the Baltic Sea can benefit even better from this dynamic background through mutual learning, the exchange of knowledge, innovations, in particular in the field of digitization, the safe use of artificial intelligence and taking into account

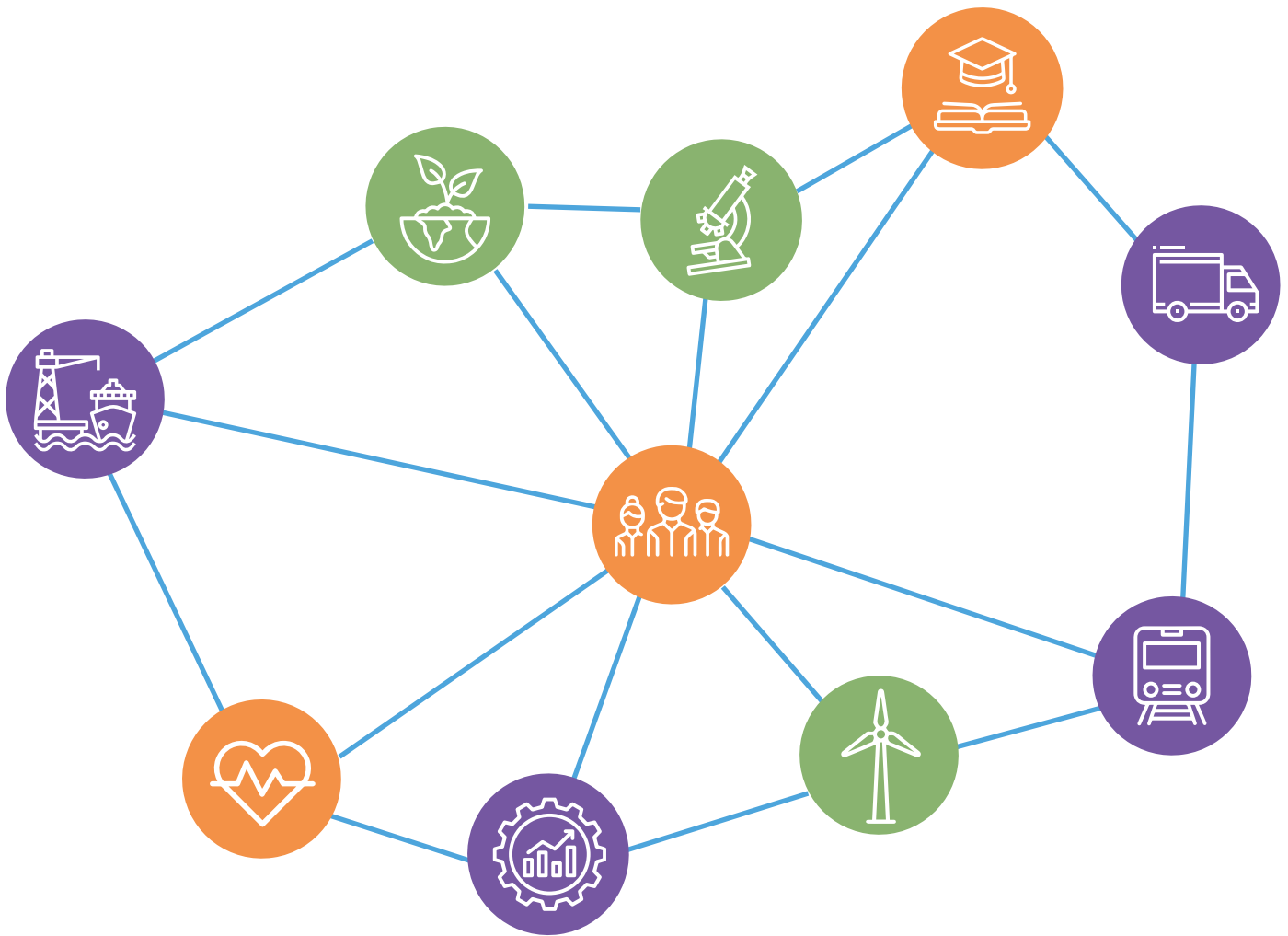
the needs of rural areas, and the expansion of economic and scientific cooperation.

Cooperation between universities is to be expanded and intensified, and existing European research programmes are to be used even more effectively.

3

The State Government's action plan

On the basis of the aforementioned goals, the State Government has identified the following measures, which are to be prioritized for implementation by the State Government itself.



3.1 Strengthening Mecklenburg-Vorpommern as a region that is friendly and keen to cooperate

Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is active in many fields of cooperation around the Baltic Sea. The State Government is endeavouring to broaden the basis for this cooperation in the state and to strengthen the willingness and ability to cooperate.

At the same time, it is important to improve the state's visibility as an efficient region and attractive cooperation partner. A particular focus is on young people in the state.

3.1.1 Increasing the visibility of the state as a cooperation partner in the Baltic Sea region

Thanks to the diverse activities of the State Government and numerous actors from the state, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is already recognized as an important partner in terms of Baltic Sea cooperation. Nevertheless, there is still a need to improve the state's international visibility as a promising cooperation partner, particularly with a view to expanding international relations, and the State Government intends to develop and implement two projects in particular.

The MV information portal

In order to exploit the various opportunities more efficiently, an information portal is being developed in English and in other languages of the Baltic Sea countries, through which the state, its structures, strengths and potential for Baltic Sea cooperation are to be presented. This portal will be set up as a central "landing point" for those interested in foreign cooperation and will lead them directly to potential contacts in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. At the same time, the portal is intended as a reference for actors from the state who present themselves in the Baltic Sea region and in this context can present the state as their region of origin.

Through close coordination, synergies are to be exploited with the various players in the international marketing of the state, such as the Tourism Association for Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Invest in MV, BioCon Valley and the universities and colleges of the state. The core topics will be the economy and innovation, opportunities for investment and cooperation, science and education and image promotion.

Promotional activities of the state

With its increased promotional activities, the state aims to attract greater attention in selected countries in the Baltic Sea region. In close cooperation with Invest in MV and the state marketing department, the focus is on the location's advantages in addition to the classic values of the state. In addition to available areas and short distances to the administration of the state and districts or independent cities, the international orientation in defined topic clusters, for example in the areas of renewable energies, hydrogen, research and Baltic Sea research, should be more strongly focussed on. These medium-term measures will be closely harmonized with the international advertising strategies of the metropolitan regions of Hamburg and Szczecin.

3.1.2 Combining resources and potential in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern to boost cooperation in the Baltic Sea region and develop the region more effectively

In Order to exploit the potential of cooperation in the Baltic Sea region for the state and its own regional development as much as possible, close cooperation between the State Government and the numerous actors in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern who are active in the Baltic Sea region is required.

The State Government is endeavouring to intensify the exchange between the state ministries and the other actors with experience in cooperation. At the same time, newcomers are to be shown opportunities for cooperation and given appropriate advice on funding opportunities.

To this end, the State Government will promote the pooling of expertise, networking and information on counselling services relating to Baltic Sea cooperation activities in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Specifically, the information on Baltic Sea cooperation made available on the state's Europe portal and the "MV Baltic Sea Forum" as a networking format for Baltic Sea stakeholders in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is to be further developed with the involvement of the specialized ministries.

3.1.3 Making Baltic Sea cooperation in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern more visible

Cooperation with partners from the Baltic Sea region is already taking place in numerous formats and in several fields. These relationships are reflected in particular in events such as scientific conferences, trips by business delegations, as well as cultural and film festivals. These events underline how cooperation works in practice, and at the same time make the practical added value of cooperation directly tangible. At the same time, this provides a starting point for further encounters and Baltic Sea-related discussion. In order to raise the profile of these activities, the State Government intends to collate information on these formats and communicate them more intensively and widely. In addition, the State Government intends to prioritize its thematic conferences and meetings in the coming years as part of its efforts to raise the state's profile in the democratic Baltic Sea region. Examples include the Healthcare Industry Conference and the Baltic Sea Business Day.

Baltic Sea Days

Guided by such shared values as cosmopolitanism, democracy, diversity and peaceful coexistence in the Baltic Sea region, the aim is to discuss and present the benefits of cooperation and joint action on the challenges in the Baltic Sea region in an interdisciplinary event format.

To this end, the State Government intends to establish the "Baltic Sea Days" as a framework for larger and smaller events related to the Baltic Sea in various areas and with a range of different formats. Partners from Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and the countries bordering on the democratic Baltic Sea region are to be recruited to participate in the organization of the Baltic Sea Days. The aim is to offer a colourful range of events from science, the environment, culture, sport and youth encounters.

3.1.4 Increased focus of European schools and student exchanges to concentrate on the democratic Baltic Sea region

The State Government sees closer cooperation within the framework of school partnerships and projects as well as cross-border encounters between pupils as a key to awakening an interest in other cultures and languages at an early age, discovering commonalities and developing a sense of community. With this in mind, the State Government supports the European schools and promotes international school partnerships

and cultural exchange through project-based encounters, including with the countries bordering the Baltic Sea. Funding for these school projects, training courses and student exchanges can be provided as part of the EU's ERASMUS+ programme. In principle, it is possible for non-accredited schools to apply for and carry out short-term projects via the Institute for Quality Development Mecklenburg-Vorpommern as consortium leader. Furthermore, travel allowances for pupils can be granted within the framework of school partnerships.

The European schools in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern have an important role to play here. These are general education or vocational schools that have particularly focussed their profile on topics of European integration and the promotion of intercultural competence.

The State Government is committed to focussing these activities more strongly on the democratic Baltic Sea region. In this context, cooperation with educational institutions in the countries bordering the Baltic Sea is also to be expanded in order to bring networking opportunities to schools in the state.

In addition, the State Government will campaign for Baltic Sea-related topics to be increasingly addressed as part of the annual EU project days in schools. However, the schools themselves will ultimately decide on their participation and the choice of topics.

It is also planned to support these measures through meetings at a political level.

3.1.5 Strengthening civil society encounters with a focus on youth and sport

The State Government of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern attaches great importance to promoting civil society encounters, especially in the youth sector and in sport.

To this end, the state promotes international youth meetings and, in so doing, supports international understanding through personal encounters. Some of the state youth associations funded by the state youth plan organize international youth encounters and trips. Building on the experience of organizing the Baltic Sea Youth Games from 1996 to 2019, the State Government is committed to working with organized sports stakeholders to establish a regular inclusive sports event with partners from the Baltic Sea region.

Mutual sensitization to the similarities and differences in relation to other countries and regions in the Baltic Sea region is an important concern in the context of the State Government's promotion of international sporting contacts. Against the backdrop of European cooperation in sport in particular, bilateral sporting contacts are to be developed and expanded, but also temporarily suspended relations are to be revitalized. In addition, the participation of sports clubs and associations from Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in cross-state, broad-based sporting events is expressly supported.

3.1.6 Further expanding cooperation in culture and art

The Baltic Sea region has much in common between the neighbouring countries in terms of its history, its cultural and artistic diversity and its landscapes. This results in numerous points of contact for the expansion of connections. Examples include Brick Gothic, castles and manor houses as well as spa architecture. The Manor House Centre of the Baltic Sea Region at the University of Greifswald – together with many other partners in the state – is doing pioneering work here.

The State Government will continue to promote the active exchange of museums or places of historical and political remembrance, active art scenes, living traditions and folklore. International music events and other cultural festivals, such as the "PolenmARKT", the "Nordischer Klang", the FiSH Film Festival or the Usedom Music Festival, play an important role in the cultural networking of the state.

The state's cultural project funding programme already supports initiatives for the presentation and mediation of contemporary art and international exchange formats as well as cultural projects involving foreign artists in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern or artists from Mecklenburg-Vorpommern working abroad in a variety of ways. Maintaining the shared cultural heritage in contemporary formats as an identity-forming element in the Baltic Sea region for future generations will continue to be an important area of focus.

3.1.7 Developing an exchange of ideas on women's and gender equality policy issues in the Baltic Sea region

The equal participation of women and men in social life, especially in working and professional life, is a key objective of state policy, which is firmly anchored at both national and European level. In recent decades, EU gender equality policy has contributed to the promotion of gender equality in the member states with a wide range of measures.

The State Government is actively committed to promoting dialogue with the democratic Baltic Sea states on women's and gender equality policy issues in the Baltic Sea region. In close cooperation with the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern State Representation to the EU and the universities in the state, the Ministry of Justice, Equality and Consumer Protection will work to establish suitable cooperation structures and formats.

As a milestone for implementation, the organization of an international symposium on the topic of "Participation of women in the Baltic Sea region" in cooperation with the Institute for Political and Administrative Sciences at the University of Rostock is planned for the course of the legislative period. As a result of the event, further steps for a continuous exchange and the identification of best practice examples in the context of women's and gender equality policy in the Baltic Sea region are to be developed.

3.2 Further developing cooperation for a healthy environment worth living in

The protection and restoration of a good environmental status of the Baltic Sea, in particular the preservation of biodiversity and a reduction in the input of nutrients and hazardous substances, are important concerns of the State Government of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. In the Baltic Sea region, it works together with the Federal Government to achieve these goals in a variety of ways, including the implementation of the Helsinki Commission's Baltic Sea Action Plan and the legally binding implementation of relevant EU directives such as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Water Framework Directive and the Nitrates Directive.

At the same time, the effects of the economic utilization of the Baltic Sea are increasing, not least due to the expansion of offshore wind energy. The aim here is to develop sustainable utilization strategies that also balance measures to combat climate change and protect the marine environment.

The State Government will focus on the following key areas:

3.2.1 Establishment of a federal centre of excellence for unexploded ordnance in the Baltic Sea

Unexploded ordnance in the Baltic Sea, and indeed in all oceans and seas, is an increasing and significant threat to the marine ecosystem and to humans. In addition, explosive ordnance poses a significant risk to shipping, the maritime economy, fishing and the expansion of offshore infrastructures, such as wind farms, and therefore represents an enormous challenge for society as a whole.

Just to recover the estimated 300,000 tonnes of explosive ordnance in the Baltic Sea over the next 100 years, Germany's existing disposal capacities would have to be tripled. The technically necessary and politically desirable shortening of the clearance period requires an additional multiplication factor. In addition, the existing options for recovering explosive ordnance from the sea are not suitable for the upcoming challenges. Until now, the clearance of unexploded ordnance has been carried out on an ad hoc basis, for example during the

construction of a wind farm, its connection to a power line or the relocation of a shipping route. The desired comprehensive clearance of ordnance from the seabed is hardly possible within a reasonable period of time with the existing technologies.

In order to manage this national task, it is necessary to systematically link findings on a federal and state level from basic research and the development of innovative technologies as well as the optimization of existing solutions, particularly in the field of underwater capabilities, and their transfer to industrial application to create the necessary salvage and disposal capacities.

In order to achieve this strategic goal, the State Government, under the leadership of the Ministry of Climate Protection, Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Environment, which is responsible for marine environmental protection, will coordinate the competencies at state level across departments with the participation of the Ministry of Science, Culture, Federal and European Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior, Building and Digitization.

At the same time, the State Government of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is continuing to lobby the Federal Government to create the political, financial and regulatory framework conditions required to transform these various elements into interlocking processes and thus accelerate the detection, monitoring and recovery of explosive ordnance from the Baltic Sea and beyond.

In addition, the State Government advocates that the Federal Government, building on its immediate action programme for the recovery and destruction of unexploded ordnance, should develop an overall concept for tackling this national task with the involvement of all the German states. The State Government considers the establishment of a federal centre of excellence for unexploded ordnance to be an essential component of such a concept and will advocate its establishment in Rostock in order to exploit synergies with the scientific, economic and structural capacities there.

3.2.2 Developing resource-conserving and organically based management systems

The sustainable, organically based economy as well as the increased development and utilization of biological resources and environmentally and nature-friendly production processes in all sectors of the economy are already making an important contribution to the sustainable development of the Baltic Sea region today. This transformation process must be driven forward.

In this context, the State Government sees the bio-economy – based on the utilization of regional renewable raw materials – as a cross-sectoral economic concept and a central element of economic development as well as for achieving climate protection goals. Close cooperation between research institutions and companies can also contribute to the sustainable development and growth of the Baltic Sea region's economy.

Projects such as Bio-Boosters, which supports bio-based companies in adapting their business models to a circular bio-economy, and BREC, which aims to teach and disseminate circular and environmentally friendly agricultural practices, are leading the way. Witeno GmbH and the University of Rostock from Mecklenburg-Vorpommern are involved in the projects funded by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme.

It is therefore the declared aim of the State Government to strengthen the bio-economy further. The German government has defined six common goals in its National Bio-economy Strategy. The state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is focussing its support for projects on the following three objectives in particular:

- developing bioeconomic solutions in line with agreed sustainability goals,
- expanding and applying biological knowledge,
- aligning the resource base of the economy sustainably.

With reference to these goals of the Federal Government's "National Bio-economy Strategy", the development of a bio-economy strategy for Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is envisaged, which contains proposals for action based on the specific regional strengths in order to bundle corresponding activities in the Baltic Sea region and thereby achieve the following goals, among others:

- transformation of the economic system in accordance with the triangle of sustainability, the further development of society while maintaining ecological, economic and social goals,

- preventing competition in the use of land for food, animal feed, biogenic raw materials, energy production, water and nature conservation,
- future-proof and sustainable food production,
- utilizing the bio-economy to quickly and effectively meet international climate protection targets,
- development of new technological processes using artificial intelligence and robotics to ensure sustainable land management and increase raw material efficiency.

The countries bordering the Baltic Sea face similar challenges to Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, such as low population density, changing demands on land management as a result of climate change and a high need for research and innovation. These structural similarities and the high innovation potential in the Scandinavian countries offer good conditions for jointly driving forward the development and strengthening of the bio-economy in the Baltic Sea region.

This potential is to be systematically tapped as part of the development of the state's bio-economy strategy. One focus will be on the further development of future-proof, sustainable food production in the Baltic Sea region and the presentation of new marketing channels for raw materials from alternatively used areas, e.g. wetland paludiculture or fibre plants, as well as new ways of utilizing raw materials in the food industry.

3.2.3 Involving the public in Baltic Sea-related research and programmes

The State Government welcomes and supports as far as possible the science communication and Citizen Science activities organized by the universities and research institutes. Examples include the biennial Baltic Sea Day and the Baltic Sea Science Conference.

The Interdisciplinary Research Centre for the Baltic Sea Region (IFZO) at the University of Greifswald sets a strategically important focus on the humanities and cultural sciences in Baltic Sea Region-related science communication, e.g. in "real-life laboratories" and through teaching materials, podcasts, panel discussions, international festivals such as the "PolenMARKT" and "Nordischer Klang".

3.3 Securing future viability and prosperity

The State Government sees the partnership with the democratic neighbours of the Baltic Sea region as an important building block for sustainably strengthening the state's competitiveness and better exploiting its own potential. The exchange of knowledge and joint innovations in business, science and administration show the way forward.

The State Government attaches particular strategic importance to political and economic cooperation in the Baltic Sea region in the field of renewable energies. In addition to the development of corresponding infrastructural capacities, it will also be important to develop corresponding value-added processes in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

3.3.1 Expansion of offshore wind energy and cross-border grid linking

The State Government supports the political goals that the foreign ministers of the Council of the Baltic Sea states agreed on in the "Berlin Declaration" on the expansion of offshore wind energy on 9 May 2023. In addition to ambitious expansion targets for offshore wind energy, the aim is to work more closely together on energy policy and projects, among other things. The aim is for the electricity grids to be linked better across borders. In the view of the State Government, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is the natural starting and landing point in Germany for energy partnerships in the Baltic Sea region. Cross-border networking and coordination with the EU countries bordering the Baltic Sea and Norway, both at state level and through greater integration of the economy, are intended to exploit the potential for developing new forms of energy generation and storage.

Offshore wind energy is seen as an important building block for a climate-friendly and reliable energy supply. The State Government is therefore endeavouring to intensify cooperation in this area.

In doing so, it can draw on experience from cross-border projects in the offshore pipeline sector, specifically the first maritime interconnector "Kriegers Flak – Combined Grid Solution" with Denmark, which has been in operation since December 2020, and the "Hansa Power Bridge" with Sweden,

which is scheduled to go into operation in 2028/29. The central player on the German side is the transmission system operator 50Hertz.

The German-Danish offshore energy project "Bornholm Energy Island", which aims to develop Bornholm into a wind power hub in the Baltic Sea by 2030, also opens up further prospects for Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

A test field for the complete supply of renewable energies and the corresponding reorganization of the regional economy is being developed there. The Baltic Wind Connector (BWC), a joint hybrid submarine cable project that 50Hertz has agreed on with the Estonian transmission grid operator, could develop into a connecting point towards the Baltic region. It is to come ashore in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, providing the state with another source of green electricity. Collaboration with Poland is also to be expanded accordingly.

3.3.2 Development of a regional hydrogen infrastructure

The production, storage, transport and use of hydrogen are key components of the future energy economy and its further decarbonization. Close cooperation with international business and technology partners is required for their development.

An important contribution to stakeholder networking is made by such projects as BOWE2H, which aims to improve stakeholders' ability to act by providing them with an understanding of the necessary guidelines, networks, investments and research frameworks for the development of offshore wind and hydrogen projects. The University of Greifswald is involved in this project, which is funded by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme.

The State Government's objectives are to develop and support corresponding cooperation in the Baltic Sea region and to raise the state's profile as a central marketplace for the Baltic Sea region. These goals are to be pursued in detail through various activities:

- Organizing an international hydrogen conference for the Baltic Sea region in Stralsund with the involvement of other

players from research, science and business in the hydrogen sector in order to establish Mecklenburg-Vorpommern as a central marketplace for applied hydrogen research and business in the Baltic Sea region.

- The establishment of a “Baltic Clean Hydrogen Competence Cluster” in the Rostock hydrogen region is to be examined with the involvement of the players and initiatives active in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. It is to serve in particular as an incubator and competence centre as well as a platform for regular exchange with other regions from the Baltic Sea region and to build on existing structures. In the view of the State Government, Rostock offers excellent conditions for developing as a hub for the hydrogen economy in Europe, whereby the Rostock seaport is to be established both as a hub for climate-neutral energy sources and as a production site for hydrogen along the entire value chain.
- Development of a cross-border “hydrogen core network” in the Baltic Sea region via the ports of the Baltic Sea states. The aim is to create a basis in the Baltic Sea region as quickly as possible that connects the central hydrogen infrastructures and locations, such as large industrial centres, storage facilities, power plants and import corridors.

In addition, the State Government will work at the federal and European level to improve the framework conditions for real laboratories in the hydrogen economy, especially in the Baltic Sea region. These are intended to support the research and application of innovative solutions in both technological and regulatory terms, and thus contribute to the further effective development of the potential of the hydrogen economy and the further development of the legal framework.

3.3.3 Coordination of maritime spatial planning and common standards in the Baltic Sea region

As a result of existing EU regulations, all EU Baltic Sea states are obliged to carry out maritime spatial planning. Within this framework, different usage requirements such as shipping routes, areas for offshore wind farms and energy lines, areas for coastal protection and raw material extraction, fishing and tourism, military areas (defence concerns) and nature conservation areas are to be reconciled. In Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, maritime spatial planning for the territorial sea is integrated into the state spatial development programme.

Overall, the Baltic Sea region can be seen as a pioneer for transnationally coordinated land use and maritime planning systems that contribute to improving the region's resilience and security.

Within this framework, the State Government is active in the following areas:

- participation in the Conference of Ministers of Spatial Planning of the Baltic Sea states and the implementation of the joint strategy adopted in Wismar in June 2023, “Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea (VASAB) 2040”, which formulates a Baltic Sea energy network with decentralized units as one of its goals,
- expansion of cooperation in maritime spatial planning and in the coordination of maritime spatial plans by exercising formal participation mechanisms within the framework of planning procedures and participating in the exchange of experience on cross-border planning and planning cultures within the framework of Baltic Sea projects,
- involvement of the energy sector in existing committees and strategies relating to Baltic Sea cooperation, in particular the “Baltic Energy Market Interconnection Plan” (BEMIP), e.g. the working group of the EU Baltic Sea states on offshore wind energy,
- networking in green pilot projects in the Baltic Sea region, such as the implementation of sustainable mobility and transport concepts for cities and rural areas as well as the installation of large-scale green charging infrastructures. The Ministry of Economic Affairs, Infrastructure, Tourism and Labour is currently coordinating the Interreg B projects “Green Industrial Areas” to develop a transnational certification standard for green commercial and industrial areas in the Baltic Sea region, and “HyTruck” to develop common standards for a transnational network of green hydrogen filling stations for large trucks.

3.3.4 Strengthening transport links to the Baltic Sea region

The improved networking of modes of transport in the Baltic Sea region, on land and water, for resource-saving and faster passenger and freight transport is an important concern of the State Government. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern has good natural and geographical preconditions for international maritime transport. It is therefore the aim of the State Government to secure, strengthen and further expand the attractiveness and competitiveness of the domestic port and logistics industry through infrastructural investments and marketing measures at home and abroad.

To this end, rail transport in particular can significantly expand its potential with the joint Danish-German “Rail Link to the Fehmarn Belt Fixed Link” (FBQ) project. In this context, it is important for Mecklenburg-Vorpommern that the relevant

access routes are modernized and expanded. The two most relevant rail projects are the upgraded lines “Lübeck – Schwerin” and “Hagenow Land – Rostock”. Planning is underway for both federal-level measures.

Rail links to the ports also play an important role, especially for the expansion of freight transport with the Baltic Sea region.

As part of the core network of the “Trans-European Networks”, the EU and the Federal Government are also extensively expanding the Berlin – Neustrelitz – Waren (Müritze) – Rostock main station – Warnemünde and the Kavelstorf – Rostock seaport routes. Many of the planned measures have already been implemented in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

In Vorpommern, the planning for the extension of the “Berlin – Stralsund – Sassnitz” (Vorpommern Magistrale) has been approved by the Federal Government. This forms the basis for a large number of other potential projects to improve transport links and economic development with the Baltic Sea region.

The international ferry connections between Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Scandinavia make a significant contribution to strengthening economic relations, tourism and national transport links. They are an important part of the regional infrastructure and play a particularly important role for the local ports and associated logistics and commercial companies.

Of the approximately 27.5 million tonnes (net) handled in 2022, almost 70 per cent came from traffic with countries bordering the Baltic Sea, including Norway, with the seaport of Rostock dominating both freight and passenger traffic in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. In addition to cargo handling, passenger transport by sea also plays an important part. In 2022, a total of around three million passengers were transported via the ports of Rostock and Sassnitz / Mukran, of which around 2.7 million passengers passed through the port of Rostock.

3.3.5 Promoting foreign trade links

The Baltic Sea region is a focus of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern's foreign trade activities. The State Government acts here in cooperation with the chambers of commerce and associations in the state. The main aim is to further develop and consolidate international economic cooperation, for example by organizing the “Baltic Sea Business Day” (BSBD) as a key event for business networking in the democratic Baltic Sea region.

This business conference, which was held for the first time in 2022 and is scheduled to take place every two years, with space

for political discussions and meetings, is intended to serve as a brand and platform for business contacts in the Baltic Sea region regionally, nationally and internationally in line with the slogan “Become part of the network”.

The State Government plans to organize the Baltic Sea Business Day on an annual basis, alternating with a bilateral business forum with one of the democratic EU countries bordering the Baltic Sea. These bilateral business forums are to be established as a central platform for informal dialogue between companies from the Baltic Sea region. One example is the German-Finnish Business Forum on the topic of “Cybersecurity Strategies and Tools for SMEs and Critical Infrastructure”, which took place in Rostock in the autumn of 2023.

In addition to this, business delegations to the Baltic Sea region, which usually take place under political leadership, are promoted, such as the trips to Finland, Sweden and Norway in 2023. Participation in trade fairs by SMEs in the countries of the democratic Baltic Sea region can also be subsidized.

The Baltic Sea region is a region with fast-growing companies.

For Scandinavian companies, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern has an important bridging function to the markets in Central Europe, which also provides opportunities for the further settlement of Scandinavian companies in our federal state.

Recent settlements such as DeLaVal, Schurpack and Fenix underline the great importance of the German market for Scandinavian companies. The state economic development agency, Invest in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, will therefore focus in particular on attracting companies from the Baltic Sea region. In particular, this includes the further establishment of company-related formats that explain the shared benefits for further growth.

3.3.6 Targeted expansion of cooperative relationships in the healthcare industry

The healthcare sector in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern has been a stable, crisis-proof growth factor for gross value added and employment for years and offers great potential for cooperation in the Baltic Sea region. Important topics for such cooperation include digitization, medical technology and biotechnology, health tourism and public services in health care, particularly in rural areas. The industry network, BioCon Valley® GmbH, is committed to strengthening existing relationships on the diverse topics in the Baltic Sea region, bundling synergy effects

and providing targeted support to SMEs in the state in their internationalization efforts in the Baltic Sea region. This is achieved through cluster meetings, company matching sessions, events, trade fairs and delegation trips, among other things.

The National Healthcare Industry Conference with around 700 participants must be emphasized as a showcase and renowned state and nationwide meeting point for the industry with international appeal and an annual partner country in which companies and institutions from the Baltic Sea region are involved. The “Baltic Sea Health Region Meeting” takes place as part of the event. The international “Baltic Sea Health Region Innovation Award” for start-ups and companies offers visibility for innovative ideas. In the field of digitization, the “Digital Health Hub MV” is exemplary as a platform for cooperation and as an initiator of joint project approaches.

Full use is made of existing contacts with the international innovation network ScanBalt, Northern Europe’s leading accelerator for interregional cooperation in the fields of pharmaceuticals, biotechnology and medical technology. That network brings together academic and industrial research, university hospitals and non-university research institutions, study centres and highly specialized suppliers from various European countries and regions, thus connecting regional health and life science cluster organizations around the Baltic Sea. BioCon Valley® GmbH is a founding member and has been the contact for Mecklenburg-Vorpommern via the ScanBalt liaison office since 2014.

3.3.7 Opening up the “Digital Innovation Space MV” for the Baltic Sea region

Under the umbrella brand “Digital MV”, the State Government is highlighting a wide range of activities, places and people that are driving digitization in the state. Digital MV stands for a forward-looking approach to the opportunities offered by digitalization, harnessed for the benefit of the state through dialogue and the creative power of the many different stakeholders. Due to its geographical proximity, the Baltic Sea region plays a key part in Digital MV’s cooperation activities at an international level. The provision of the web portal in English significantly improves the international visibility of Digital MV.

The “Digital Innovation Space MV” (DIR MV), consisting of six digital innovation centres and connected co-working spaces in rural areas, offers all stakeholders from business and society a point of contact to expand the development of their own innovative strength through networking, information and advice.

The event formats “Meet Discuss Create” and “Hackathon” in particular offer a platform for addressing overarching issues relating to the digitization of the Baltic Sea region. The Digital Innovation Space can draw on existing contacts with chambers of foreign trade and former Interreg project partners in the region.

The NØRD conference, which was organized between 2019 and 2021 as the State Government’s digitization congress, is also to be opened up internationally. From 2024, this will be developed into a digital conference and will also offer hybrid participation formats. There are also plans to organize a “Cross Border Day” and the “Digital Baltic Start-up Day” as part of this programme. This should enable greater accessibility to new target groups and the inclusion of actors from the digitization economy of the Baltic Sea states.

In addition, the Ministry of the Interior has been organizing regular delegation trips to the largest European start-up trade fair “SLUSH” in Helsinki since 2018. The State Government intends to organize the delegation trip in the coming years as well. SLUSH brings together founders, investors, media representatives and tech talents from all over the world. The State Government is providing financial and organizational support for selected start-ups from MV to participate in the business trip. This gives those accompanying the visits the opportunity to get to know the Finnish start-up scene and present their own start-up in front of an international audience. SLUSH is an internationally recognized marketplace for the successful mediation between investors and start-up companies. Here, start-up companies from Mecklenburg-Vorpommern are given the unique opportunity to present themselves to an international circle of investors. In the democratic Baltic Sea region, SLUSH is now also established as an effective networking space within the start-up scene in the Baltic Sea states. The exchange of the best ideas that takes place there provides significant impetus in the state. The overriding aim is to raise the profile of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern as an attractive place to work and live on a national and international level and to attract companies, especially start-ups, to work with us.

3.3.8 Modernizing administration activities through the use of artificial intelligence

A location can only be competitive if it has efficient public administration. In the next few years, around half of the employees of the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern state administration will be retiring. It is already becoming increasingly difficult to fill vacancies.

One challenge for public administration is therefore to organize itself efficiently and in line with the times with fewer staff in order to be able to continue to offer high-quality administrative services in the future.

In addition to various measures through which the state has increased its attractiveness as an employer, digitization is also making a significant contribution to making the administration fit for the future. The next step is to examine and implement possible applications of artificial intelligence as a key technology for public administration. The first projects in live operation are in the area of road construction management, to name one example. The "Modern Administration" staff unit in the Ministry of Finance coordinates these activities together with the state IT service provider, DVZ M-V GmbH.

In the coming years, an exchange with other countries bordering the Baltic Sea is to be established for these AI-related activities and, in suitable cases, for possibilities for further cooperation are to be examined.

3.3.9 Increasing the state's attractiveness for students with an international background

In close coordination with the universities, the State Government supports the strengthening of international marketing and the establishment of further internationally oriented and English-language degree programmes. The democratic Baltic Sea region is defined as a "privileged" partner region. This strategic orientation is being supported with start-up funding totalling one million euros. Any further financial support for purely English-language programmes will be examined in the course of the next target agreements following appropriate evaluation.

The State Government also supports the joint international summer school organized by all universities in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, which focuses on the topic of sustainability. This format is to be promoted more intensively in future via the contact office of the universities of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in Riga. Greater participation by students from the Baltic Sea region is intended to promote a shared awareness of the global ecological, economic and social challenges facing the region. The ultimate aim of increasing the attractiveness of the state is also one of the goals of the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern skilled labour strategy.

In line with this, the university-related measures are to be dovetailed with the measures of the skilled workers strategy and the career services at the universities are to be linked more effectively with the municipal and regional welcome centres as intermediaries for the regional economy.



The starting point for the development of the Baltic Sea Strategy are the recommendations for action presented by the MV Cooperation Council for the Democratic Baltic Sea Region (KdO) in May 2023.

The Cooperation Council will continue to advise the State Government on the implementation of the Baltic Sea Strategy.

The strategy was developed under the leadership of the Ministry of Science, Culture, Federal and European Affairs of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.



Mecklenburg-Vorpommern
Best of Northern Germany

