Dear members of the Programme Preparation Group,

In view of the programme preparation, and based on the ambition that the new programme should be as closely aligned with our own draft North Sea Region 2030 Strategy as possible within the menu of policy objectives (POs) provided by the European Commission, the CPMR North Sea Commission at this stage in the process:

- Welcomes the fact that a new North Sea Programme is being developed and hopes that the programme, together with other available instruments, will provide sufficient resources for transnational cooperation in order for the North Sea Region to manage the shared challenges of global competition, climate change, social and geographical cohesion, citizen involvement, technological and digital development, and to contribute to the aims of the Paris Agreement and the Green Deal initiative.

- Expresses a strong wish that the United Kingdom will decide to remain part of Interreg cooperation and of the North Sea Region Programme after leaving the European Union, and that all counties in Norway will remain in the programme area. The North Sea Commission has member regions from all North Sea countries and believes that a programme geography covering all parts of the region is important to achieve the programme’s ambitions. All parts of the North Sea Region share similar concerns and challenges and will need to cooperate in solving them.

- Observes that the key topics of the draft NSR 2030 strategy are matching almost all the specific objectives under each policy objective (see overview in annex) and does not want to exclude any of the POs at this stage, but would recommend a flexible thematic focus which could be changed from call to call in order to address what are perceived to be the most relevant issues throughout the lifetime of the programme. It must be further discussed whether PO5 serves as a cross-cutting principle for all future priorities of the programme or as a single umbrella priority with several specific objectives out of PO1-PO4.

- Shares in general the analysis in the European Commission’s orientation paper for the new programme and the proposed thematic focus on policy objectives 1 and 2, and welcomes the mention of potential support to:
  - smart specialisation with a focus on connection of test and demonstration facilities to scale up innovation solutions in shared specialisation priority areas
  - implementation of new innovations/technologies which will facilitate transfer to a low-emission and eventually fossil-free transport system
  - solutions in renewable energy, circular economy, climate change adaptation and in tackling marine emissions and litter
- Welcomes the European Commission’s proposal to open up the discussion on policy objective 5. It has potential to generate projects that share learning and promote exchange and may attract local and regional authorities to the programme and lead to closer cooperation with citizens.

- Underlines that Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) is of great importance in the North Sea, which is used for several purposes and by many actors. MSP is supposed to reduce conflicts, encourage investments, increase cross-border cooperation and to protect and preserve the environment. Representation of local and regional interests and stakeholders, through existing and new mechanisms, is essential in this process, and we believe it is important that the programme can support activities in this field by promoting Interreg Specific Objective “cooperation governance”.

- Stresses the need to promote transnational cooperation in the development of skills/competences and mobility of researchers, students and the workforce.

- Invites the Programme Preparation Group to consider including support for Policy Objective 3 ‘A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility and regional ICT connectivity’ in addition to those listed in the orientation paper. The inclusion of PO 3 would have benefits in terms of:
  - Capitalising on the results of current and past projects in green transport and mobility and their corresponding partnerships
  - Identifying and preparing the ground for potential projects for CEF and EIB financing, since these instruments require maturity of projects
  - Raising awareness, mobilising and facilitating stakeholder involvement in relation to the implementation of the TEN-T core network corridors
  - Performing targeted demonstrations and pilots for innovative technologies
  - Exploring the potential for new/improved intermodal and maritime services in the sea basin
  - Developing long-range multimodal transport corridors beyond the range of cross border programmes
  - Ensuring alignment with the North Sea Commission’s strategy where transport is a priority area (transnational accessibility, clean shipping, climate-neutral and inclusive transport as well as intelligent transport solutions)
  - Facilitating multi-level governance and involvement of regional authorities, which is harder to achieve under CEF & EIB projects

We remain at your disposal for dialogue throughout the programming process. Our NSR 2030 Strategy will be finally adopted by our Annual Business Meeting in the autumn of 2020.

Kind regards,

Kerstin Brunnström
President
CPMR North Sea Commission
Relation between key topics in the draft NSR 2030 strategy and the Interreg Objectives

The key topics of the strategy are matching almost all (17 out of 19) of the specific objectives under PO1 – PO4. All 15 key topics are connected with one or several specific objectives under these POs.

A PRODUCTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE NORTH SEA

Healthy marine environment: PO2 (vii) enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution

Maritime spatial planning: PO2 (v) promoting sustainable water management

Sustainable aquaculture and fisheries: PO2 (v) and (vii) + PO1 (iii)

Sustainable blue economy: PO1 (iii) enhancing growth and competitiveness of SMEs; PO4 (i) enhancing the effectiveness of labour markets and access to quality employment through developing social innovation and infrastructure; PO4 (ii) improving access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and life long learning through developing infrastructure

A CLIMATE-NEUTRAL NORTH SEA REGION

Renewable energy/alternative fuels: PO2 (ii) promoting renewable energy

Energy efficiency: PO2 (i) promoting energy efficiency measures

Carbon Capture, Utilization and Storage and natural carbon sinks: PO2 (iv) promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience; PO2 (vii) enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution

Climate adaptation: PO2 (iv) promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience;

A CONNECTED NORTH SEA REGION

Transnational accessibility: PO3 (ii) developing a sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent, secure and intermodal TEN-T; also PO3 (iii)

Clean shipping, climate-neutral and inclusive transport: PO2 (ii) promoting renewable energy; PO3 (iii) developing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility; PO3 (iv) promoting sustainable multimodal urban mobility;

Intelligent transport solutions: PO1 (ii) reaping the benefits of digitisation for citizens, companies and governments; PO3 (i) enhancing digital connectivity;
A SMART NORTH SEA REGION

Smart specialisation strategies: PO1 (iv) developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship, PO1 (iii) enhancing growth and competitiveness of SMEs; PO1 (ii) reaping the benefits of digitisation for citizens, companies and governments; PO2 (vi) promoting the transition to a circular economy

Skills/competences and mobility of researchers, students and the work force: PO1 (i) enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies; PO4 (i) enhancing the effectiveness of labour markets and access to quality employment through developing social innovation and infrastructure; PO4 (ii) improving access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and life long learning through developing infrastructure; PO4 (iii) increasing the socioeconomic integration of marginalised communities, migrants and disadvantaged groups, through integrated measures including housing and social services

Circular use of resources: PO2 (vi) promoting the transition to a circular economy;

Innovative public procurement to stimulate economic transition: PO1 (i) enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies; PO1 (iii) enhancing growth and competitiveness of SMEs

The North Sea Region as a frontrunner for democracy (part of the vision for this chapter): PO 5 promoting involvement of civil society and local and regional governments, Interreg specific objective “cooperation governance” enhancing governance

Recommendation for selection of objectives

The NSC therefore recommends to include PO1, PO2, PO3 and PO4, with priority for the following specific objectives (SOs) as indicated below. This selection is also believed to represent good continuity with the priorities under the current NSR Programme.

PO1: ii), iii) and iv). Digitisation should be treated as a cross-cutting dimension under all POs as far as relevant.

PO2: All SOs except iii), which could be addressed in the context of ii)

PO3: SOs ii) and iii). SO iv) on urban mobility could be addressed under iii). SO i) on digital connectivity is reflected as a cross-cutting dimension.

PO4: SOs i) and III). SO ii) on education could be addressed in the context of transnational labour mobility.

Recommendation for allocation of funding

On the basis of the number of SOs and nature of projects, we believe that the highest share of programme funding should go to PO2. PO1 should have the second highest allocation, followed by PO3 and PO4 in that order.

Alternative approach
If the inclusion of some 12 SOs under four different POs should be considered as too broad, the following approach could be a way forward:

Selecting the Interreg Specific Objective “cooperation governance” with open thematic scope, as this approach would allow for an open and flexible thematic focus which could be changed from calls to calls in order to address what are perceived to be the most relevant issues throughout the lifetime of the programme.