



29 June 2026 · Inaugural Edition

1st Baltic Rectors' Forum

Proceedings, Strategic Insights and Recommendations



Minister of Science and Higher Education
Republic of Poland

Foreword

The First Baltic Rectors' Forum marked the inauguration of a permanent regional platform bringing together universities, public institutions, industry leaders and international partners to discuss the future of the Baltic Sea Region. While the challenges facing our region are increasingly complex, ranging from geopolitical security and energy transformation to environmental resilience and technological innovation, the Forum demonstrated that they can only be addressed through sustained cooperation and mutual trust.

The discussions held in Gdańsk confirmed that universities have a unique responsibility in this process. Beyond their traditional missions of education and research, higher education institutions are becoming strategic partners in shaping public policy, supporting innovation, developing future leaders and strengthening regional resilience. Throughout the Forum, a common conviction emerged: the future of the Baltic Sea Region will depend on our ability to connect scientific excellence with public leadership, entrepreneurial capacity and international collaboration.

One of the most significant outcomes of the Forum was the signing of the Gdańsk Declaration, reaffirming a common commitment to strengthening academic cooperation, research, innovation and sustainable development across the Baltic Sea Region. Equally important was the announcement that Klaipėda University will host the Second Baltic Rectors' Forum, confirming our shared ambition to establish this initiative as a permanent platform for regional dialogue and cooperation.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all speakers, panellists and participants whose expertise, openness and commitment shaped the quality of the discussions. My appreciation also extends to our two strategic partners – ORLEN and Ministry of Science and Higher education, all sponsors, honorary patrons and institutional partners whose support made this inaugural Forum possible.

The inaugural Baltic Rectors' Forum demonstrated that the greatest strength of our region lies not only in its scientific excellence or economic potential, but in its willingness to work together. It is my sincere hope that this spirit of cooperation will continue to guide our common efforts in the years ahead.

Prof. Piotr Stepnowski

*Rector of University of Gdańsk
Chair of the Organising Committee First Baltic Rectors' Forum*

Executive summary



The First Baltic Rectors' Forum marked the beginning of a new regional platform bringing together universities, governments, industry and international partners to address the strategic challenges and opportunities facing the Baltic Sea Region. Throughout the Forum, participants recognised that accelerating geopolitical change, the energy transition, technological innovation and environmental pressures require closer cooperation across institutional and national boundaries.

Hosted by the University of Gdańsk, the Forum brought together more than one hundred participants representing universities, governments, diplomatic missions, industry and international organisations from across the Baltic Sea Region and beyond.

Although the discussions covered a broad range of topics, from regional security and diplomacy to energy systems, academic cooperation and environmental resilience, a consistent message emerged: universities are increasingly expected to act as strategic partners in shaping the future of the Baltic Sea Region. Participants highlighted the role of higher education institutions not only as centres of research and education but also as contributors to evidence-based policymaking, technological innovation, workforce development and international cooperation.

A recurring theme throughout the Forum was the need to strengthen partnerships between academia, governments and industry. Speakers emphasised that addressing complex regional challenges requires long-term institutional cooperation rather than isolated projects. The discussions highlighted the importance of interdisciplinary research, international academic networks and stronger links between scientific expertise and public decision-making.

Energy security and the transition towards sustainable energy systems featured prominently across the programme. Participants identified offshore wind, nuclear energy, modern electricity infrastructure and maritime innovation as strategic priorities requiring coordinated regional action. Universities were recognised as essential partners in supporting these developments through research, education and knowledge transfer.

The Forum also reaffirmed the importance of environmental sustainability and resilience as integral components of regional development. Participants called for closer scientific cooperation to support marine protection, climate adaptation and sustainable management of the Baltic Sea, emphasising the value of long-standing regional partnerships such as HELCOM and the Baltic University Programme.

The principal institutional outcomes of the inaugural Forum included the signing of the Gdańsk Declaration, reaffirming a shared commitment to academic cooperation, research and innovation across the Baltic Sea Region, and the launch of the Baltic Energy Council as a platform connecting universities, industry and public institutions. The announcement that Klaipėda University will host the Second Baltic Rectors' Forum confirmed the participants' shared ambition to establish the Forum as a permanent regional initiative.

The Proceedings conclude with strategic recommendations that reflect the collective discussions of the Forum. These focus on institutionalising the Baltic Rectors' Forum, strengthening university–government–industry cooperation, expanding regional research and education networks, supporting the Baltic energy transition through science and innovation, and enhancing regional resilience through interdisciplinary collaboration.

The inaugural Baltic Rectors' Forum demonstrated that the Baltic Sea Region possesses not only outstanding academic and scientific capacity but also a shared willingness to work together. The discussions in Gdańsk established a foundation for a long-term partnership capable of strengthening research excellence, innovation, sustainable development and regional resilience for the benefit of present and future generations.

Acknowledgements

Organiser

- University of Gdańsk

Strategic Partners

- ORLEN
- Ministry of Science and Higher Education

Principal Sponsors

- Port of Gdańsk
- Nauta Shipyard

Honorary Patronage

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- Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland (KRASP)
- Pomeranian Voivode
- Marshal of the Pomeranian Voivodeship
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Programme

08:30 – 09:00	Registration Registration and Welcome Coffee
09:00 – 09:30	Opening Opening Session Official opening of the Forum and welcome addresses by the organisers and institutional partners. Opening Remarks • Prof. Piotr Stepnowski – Rector of the University of Gdańsk • Sławomir Radoń – Chief Strategy & Innovation Officer at ORLEN • Aleksandra Dulkiewicz – Mayor of the City of Gdańsk
09:30 – 09:45	Lecture Security and Resilience in the Baltic Sea Region: Hybrid Threats, NATO and the EU Perspective • Fredrik Löjdquist – Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies (SCEEUS)
09:45 – 10:30	Panel 1 Diplomatic Perspective on the Baltic Sea Region Discussion with diplomatic representatives on the strategic transformation of the Baltic Sea region and the future of regional and global cooperation through the eyes of their partners. Moderator • Sławomir Radoń – Chief Strategy & Innovation Officer at ORLEN Participants • Rauf Alp Denктаş – Ambassador of Türkiye to Poland • Saoud Abdulla Z. Al Mahmoud – Ambassador of the State of Qatar to Poland • Enass Alshahwan – Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Poland • Karl Matthias Klause – Consul General of Germany to Poland • Kazimierz Musiał – Council of the Baltic Sea States
10:30 – 10:45	Lecture Building Durable Regional Public Policies in an Era of Geopolitical Fragmentation • Michael A. Mehling – MIT Center for Energy and Environmental Policy Research
10:45 – 11:00	Lecture From Competition to Cooperation: How Baltic Ports Can Build Regional Security and Innovation. • Alan Aleksandrowicz – Port of Gdańsk
11:00 – 11:20	Break Coffee Break
11:20 – 11:35	Lecture Offshore Wind and Energy Transition in the Baltic Sea Region • Prof. Lena Kitzing – Technical University of Denmark (DTU)
11:35 – 11:50	Lecture Can the North Sea Energy Cooperation Become a Model for the Baltic Region? • Prof. Beatriz Martinez Romera – University of Copenhagen (online)

11:50 – 12:35

Panel 2

Strategic Energy Challenges in the Baltic Region

The role of universities and science in shaping the future Baltic energy agenda. Discussion on energy security, offshore infrastructure, nuclear and renewable energy development, and the strategic role of academia in supporting regional energy policy.

Moderator

- Tom O. Kleppesø – Nordic Marine Advisory Group

Participants

- Prof. Daivis Virbickas – Kaunas University of Technology / Lithuanian Energy Institute
- Jacek Murawski – ORLEN
- Prof. Lena Kitzing – Technical University of Denmark (DTU)
- Wojciech Falkowski – Baltic Nuclear Energy Forum
- Prof. Dariusz Mikielewicz – Gdańsk University of Technology
- Arnstein Eknes – DNV AS, Norway
- Andrius Sutnikas – Western Baltic Engineering

12:35 – 12:40

Lecture

CEEPR reflections for the Baltic Energy Council

- Joshua Hodge – MIT Center for Energy and Environmental Policy Research

12:40 – 12:50

Break

Family Photo

12:50 – 14:00

Break

Lunch

14:00 – 14:15

Lecture

Baltic University Programme – 30 Years of Academic Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region

- Prof. Charlotte Platzer Björkman – Uppsala University

14:15 – 15:15

Panel 3

Academic Cooperation and Education in the Baltic Sea Region

Joint research, mobility and future academic partnerships. Discussion on regional academic cooperation, joint educational programmes, research networks, mobility schemes and future institutional partnerships across the Baltic Sea region.

Moderator

- Prof. Hans Adolffsson – Stockholm University

Participants

- Prof. Morten Overgaard – Technical University of Denmark
- Prof. Gunilla Widén – Åbo Akademi University
- Prof. Arturas Razbadauskas – Klaipėda University
- Prof. Juhani Soini – Turku University of Applied Sciences
- Prof. Izabela Bodus-Olkowska – Maritime University of Szczecin
- Prof. Ineta Dabašinskienė – Vytautas Magnus University

15:15 – 15:30

Break

Coffee Break

15:30 – 15:45

Lecture

The Baltic Nuclear Renaissance: Strengthening Energy Security, Research Excellence and Regional Cooperation

- Aleksander Wołowicz – Polskie Elektrociepłownie Jądrowe (Polish Nuclear Power Plants)

15:45 – 16:00

Lecture

HELCOM and Regional Environmental Governance in the Baltic Sea

- Rüdiger Stempel – Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM)

16:00 – 16:45

Panel 4

Environmental Resilience and Academic Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region

Discussion on strengthening scientific cooperation to address climate resilience, marine protection and environmental sustainability challenges in the Baltic Sea region.

Moderator

- Joshua Hodge – MIT Center for Energy and Environmental Policy Research

Participants

- Prof. Ralph Schneider – Kiel University
- Prof. Eugenijus Valatka – Kaunas University of Technology
- Rüdiger Stempel – HELCOM Baltic Marine Environment Commission
- Prof. Daniel Schiller – University of Greifswald
- Prof. Anders Kottorp – University of Gävle
- Prof. Adam Weintrit – Gdynia Maritime University
- Dr. Laura Šaltytė-Vaisiauskė – Klaipėda University

16:45 – 17:00

Lecture

Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership – European Cooperation for Sustainable Maritime Development

- Monika Włoszek – National Coordinator for the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership

17:00 – 18:00

Closing

Closing Session and Strategic Declaration

- Sławomir Radoń
Chief Strategy & Innovation Officer at ORLEN
Concluding Remarks
- Signing Ceremony of the Gdańsk Declaration
Agreement on Cooperation for the Development and Energy Security of the Baltic Sea Region under the auspices of the Baltic Energy Council
- Prof. Piotr Stepnowski
Rector of the University of Gdańsk
Ceremonial Closing and Summary of the Forum



Proceedings

Opening Session



"Today, the Baltic Sea is no longer simply a geographical area. It is becoming one of Europe's most strategic regions."

Prof. Piotr Stepnowski

Rector, University of Gdańsk

Chair of the Organising Committee

Opening the First Baltic Rectors' Forum, Prof. Piotr Stepnowski welcomed representatives of universities, government, diplomatic missions, industry and international organisations to the University of Gdańsk. He noted that the Forum, held under the honorary patronage of three Polish ministries and supported by regional authorities, reflected the strategic importance of closer cooperation between higher education, science, public administration and business.

Looking beyond the ceremonial opening, Prof. Stepnowski framed the Baltic Sea Region as one of Europe's most significant strategic spaces. Drawing on its history of cooperation, he observed that periods of openness and collaboration had consistently strengthened the region. While today's geopolitical environment including Russia's aggression against Ukraine, growing concerns over critical infrastructure, energy security and technological competitiveness requires a renewed commitment to partnership.

Against this backdrop, he argued that universities must extend their role beyond education and research by contributing directly to regional resilience, innovation and sustainable development. Introducing the Forum's agenda, he highlighted the importance of cooperation in energy, maritime innovation, environmental sustainability and academic partnerships, presenting the meeting as a platform where universities, governments and industry could jointly shape the future of the Baltic Sea Region. He concluded by announcing the planned signing of the Gdańsk Declaration, describing it as a tangible commitment to strengthening long-term academic cooperation across the region.

Key Notes

- The Baltic Sea Region is emerging as one of Europe's most strategically important regions.
- Universities have a growing responsibility to contribute to regional resilience, innovation and sustainable development.
- Addressing shared challenges requires closer cooperation between academia, government and industry.
- The Forum and the forthcoming Gdańsk Declaration were presented as foundations for long-term regional collaboration.



Let the cooperation in the Baltic region and close cooperation between academia and the business begin today.

Sławomir Radoń

Chief Strategy & Innovation Officer at ORLEN

Speaking from the perspective of one of the region's leading energy companies, Sławomir Radoń argued that the Baltic Sea Region is entering a decisive period in which security, competitiveness and economic development have become closely interconnected. While noting that cooperation in the Baltic still lags behind that of the North Sea in areas such as offshore wind, gas infrastructure and carbon capture, he stressed that this gap represents an opportunity rather than a limitation.

He outlined the idea of a platform that could bring together universities, industry and public institutions around shared strategic priorities. In his view, the energy transition cannot be achieved by individual organisations acting independently; it requires long-term partnerships that combine scientific knowledge, industrial experience and evidence-based policymaking. Universities, he argued, have a central role in educating future specialists, advancing innovation and supporting the technological transformation necessary to strengthen the region's energy security and competitiveness.

Key Notes

- The Baltic Sea Region should deepen cooperation to accelerate its energy transformation.
- The Baltic Energy Council is intended to strengthen collaboration between academia, industry and policymakers.
- Universities are essential partners in developing expertise and innovation for the energy sector.
- Long-term partnerships are fundamental to regional security and competitiveness.



Big ideas begin here, but let us first spread the idea of cooperation across the Baltic region.

Aleksandra Dulciewicz
Mayor of the City of Gdańsk

Welcoming participants on behalf of the City of Gdańsk, Aleksandra Dulciewicz emphasised the importance of building stronger connections between academia, business and public administration, describing this partnership as the foundation of sustainable regional development. Referring to Poland's Presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the many existing networks of cooperation across the region, she observed that the establishment of the Baltic Rectors' Forum filled an important gap by creating a dedicated platform for dialogue among university leaders and strategic partners.

Drawing on Gdańsk's tradition as a city associated with freedom, solidarity and international cooperation, she encouraged participants to transform ideas into lasting partnerships. She expressed confidence that the Forum would contribute not only to academic collaboration but also to broader regional cooperation, strengthening the Baltic Sea Region as a community united by knowledge, innovation and shared responsibility.

Key Notes

- Cooperation between academia, business and public administration is essential for regional development.
- The Baltic Rectors' Forum establishes a new platform for strategic dialogue across the region.
- Gdańsk's heritage of openness and cooperation provides an appropriate setting for the Forum.
- Long-term partnerships are key to strengthening the Baltic Sea Region.



Security today is not only about military strength. It is equally about the resilience of our societies.

Fredrik Löjdquist

Director, Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies (SCEEUS)

In the opening keynote, Fredrik Löjdquist examined the profound changes in the security environment of the Baltic Sea Region following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. He argued that the region has become a focal point of European security, requiring closer cooperation among governments, international organisations and civil society to address an increasingly complex range of threats.

Moving beyond traditional concepts of defence, Löjdquist presented resilience as a comprehensive societal capacity encompassing energy systems, critical infrastructure, democratic institutions, cybersecurity and public trust. While NATO and the European Union provide the strategic framework for collective security, he stressed that long-term resilience also depends on education, research and informed public debate. In this context, universities have an important role in developing knowledge, strengthening critical thinking and supporting evidence-based policymaking.

He also highlighted the growing significance of hybrid threats, including cyberattacks, disinformation and attempts to undermine democratic institutions. Addressing these challenges, he argued, requires cooperation that extends well beyond the security sector, bringing together governments, academia, industry and society. The keynote concluded by positioning the Baltic Sea Region as a model for integrated regional cooperation capable of combining security, innovation and democratic resilience.

Panel 1



Diplomatic Perspectives on the Baltic Sea Region

Moderator

- Sławomir Radoń – Chief Strategy & Innovation Officer at ORLEN

Panellists

- Rauf Alp Denktaş – Ambassador of Türkiye to Poland
- Saoud Abdulla Z. Al Mahmoud – Ambassador of the State of Qatar to Poland
- Enass Alshahwan – Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Poland
- Karl Matthias Klause – Consul General of Germany to Poland
- Kazimierz Musiał – Council of the Baltic Sea States

"The greatest strength of the Baltic Sea Region lies not only in its economy or infrastructure, but in its ability to cooperate."

The opening panel broadened the discussion from regional security to the international significance of the Baltic Sea Region, bringing together diplomatic representatives from Europe and the Middle East to explore how geopolitical developments, economic transformation and academic cooperation are reshaping regional partnerships.

Although the panellists represented diverse national perspectives, a common theme emerged: cooperation has become the region's most valuable strategic asset. Participants highlighted the Baltic Sea as a dynamic space for trade, innovation, maritime development and energy transformation, while emphasising that its future competitiveness will depend on sustained collaboration across political, economic and academic sectors.

Several speakers underlined the importance of investing in people as the region's greatest long-term resource. Universities were recognised as trusted partners in developing future leaders, supporting international dialogue and strengthening scientific cooperation across borders. The discussion also highlighted opportunities for expanding collaboration beyond Europe, illustrating the Baltic Sea Region's growing global relevance through partnerships with countries in the Middle East and other strategic partners.

Rather than focusing solely on diplomatic relations, the panel demonstrated how education, research, innovation and people-to-people cooperation have become integral components of contemporary international engagement.

Key Notes

- International cooperation remains the Baltic Sea Region's greatest strategic advantage.
- Universities play an important role in supporting diplomacy through education, research and international partnerships.
- Human capital and talent development are central to long-term regional competitiveness.
- The Baltic Sea Region is attracting growing international interest as a centre of innovation, sustainability and economic cooperation.



"Durable public policy is built through institutions capable of adapting to changing geopolitical realities."

Michael A. Mehling

MIT Center for Energy and Environmental Policy Research

Addressing the growing fragmentation of the international environment, Michael A. Mehling examined how governments can develop public policies that remain effective despite geopolitical uncertainty. He argued that energy policy, climate policy and economic security can no longer be treated as separate domains. Instead, they require integrated governance supported by strong institutions and long-term strategic planning.

Drawing on international experience, he highlighted the importance of evidence-based policymaking and emphasised the role of universities as trusted providers of independent expertise. Research institutions, he noted, contribute not only through scientific discoveries but also by informing legislation, evaluating policy options and supporting public dialogue. He encouraged participants to view regional cooperation as an institutional process rather than a series of individual projects, stressing that durable partnerships are built through continuity, mutual trust and the regular exchange of knowledge.

Key Notes

- Geopolitical fragmentation requires resilient and adaptable public institutions.
- Effective public policy depends on close cooperation between research and government.
- Universities contribute to policymaking through independent expertise and long-term research.
- Regional cooperation should focus on building enduring institutions rather than isolated initiatives.



"Ports should compete where competition creates value, but cooperate where cooperation strengthens the region."

Alan Aleksandrowicz

Port of Gdańsk

Focusing on the strategic role of maritime infrastructure, Alan Aleksandrowicz explored how Baltic ports can contribute to regional security, economic resilience and innovation. He argued that the ports of the Baltic Sea Region should increasingly be viewed as complementary partners rather than purely commercial competitors, particularly in the context of changing supply chains, energy transition and geopolitical uncertainty.

He highlighted the Port of Gdańsk's growing significance as a logistics and energy hub and described closer cooperation between ports as an opportunity to improve resilience, accelerate innovation and strengthen the region's international competitiveness. Universities were identified as important partners in this process through research, technological development and workforce education, helping ports respond to emerging challenges associated with digitalisation, sustainability and new energy infrastructure.

Key Notes

- Baltic ports should combine competition with strategic cooperation.
- Maritime infrastructure is becoming increasingly important for regional resilience.
- Universities support port development through research, innovation and education.
- Stronger cooperation enhances the competitiveness of the Baltic Sea Region.



"The energy transition is not only a technological challenge but also a question of regional cooperation."

Prof. Lena Kitzing

Technical University of Denmark (DTU)

Prof. Lena Kitzing examined the rapid expansion of offshore wind energy and its strategic importance for the Baltic Sea Region. She argued that achieving ambitious climate and energy objectives requires coordinated planning, cross-border cooperation and investment in modern electricity infrastructure. Offshore wind, she noted, should be understood as part of a broader regional energy system rather than as a collection of national projects.

The presentation highlighted the growing importance of interdisciplinary collaboration involving engineering, economics, environmental sciences and public policy. Universities have a central role in generating the knowledge required to support this transformation while educating specialists capable of working across traditional disciplinary boundaries. Prof. Kitzing also underlined that successful energy transition depends on international cooperation, regulatory coordination and the sharing of research and innovation across the Baltic Sea Region.

Key Notes

- Offshore wind is becoming a strategic pillar of the Baltic energy transition.
- Cross-border planning is essential for efficient energy infrastructure.
- Universities contribute through interdisciplinary research and specialist education.
- Regional cooperation strengthens both energy security and climate objectives.



"Regional cooperation succeeds when countries are willing to align their long-term ambitions."

Prof. Beatriz Martínez Romera

University of Copenhagen

Joining the Forum online, Prof. Beatriz Martínez Romera considered whether the experience of the North Sea Energy Cooperation could serve as a model for the Baltic Sea Region. She demonstrated how long-term political commitment, regulatory coordination and shared strategic planning have enabled North Sea countries to accelerate offshore renewable energy development while strengthening regional cooperation.

Rather than advocating direct replication, she encouraged participants to adapt these experiences to the specific geopolitical, environmental and institutional conditions of the Baltic Sea Region. She emphasised that universities can play an important role in supporting this process by providing comparative research, policy analysis and independent expertise capable of informing future regional governance.

Key Notes

- The North Sea provides valuable experience for regional energy cooperation.
- Successful cooperation depends on long-term political and regulatory coordination.
- The Baltic Sea Region should adapt, rather than copy, existing cooperation models.
- Universities provide the evidence base needed for effective regional governance.

Panel 2



Strategic Energy Challenges in the Baltic Region

Moderator

- Tom O. Kleppestø – Nordic Marine Advisory Group

Panellists

- Tom O. Kleppestø – Nordic Marine Advisory Group
- Jacek Murawski – ORLEN
- Prof. Lena Kitzing – Technical University of Denmark
- Wojciech Falkowski – Baltic Nuclear Energy Forum
- Prof. Dariusz Mikielewicz – Gdańsk University of Technology
- Arnstein Eknes – DNV AS, Norway
- Andrius Sutnikas – Western Baltic Engineering

*"The energy transition is no longer a national challenge.
It is becoming a regional responsibility."*

The opening panel broadened the discussion from regional security to the international significance of the Baltic Sea Region, bringing together diplomatic representatives from Europe and the Middle East to explore how geopolitical developments, economic transformation and academic cooperation are reshaping regional partnerships.

Although the panellists represented diverse national perspectives, a common theme emerged: cooperation has become the region's most valuable strategic asset. Participants highlighted the Baltic Sea as a dynamic space for trade, innovation, maritime development and energy transformation, while emphasising that its future competitiveness will depend on sustained collaboration across political, economic and academic sectors.

Several speakers underlined the importance of investing in people as the region's greatest long-term resource. Universities were recognised as trusted partners in developing future leaders, supporting international dialogue and strengthening scientific cooperation across borders. The discussion also highlighted opportunities for expanding collaboration beyond Europe, illustrating the Baltic Sea Region's growing global relevance through partnerships with countries in the Middle East and other strategic partners.

Rather than focusing solely on diplomatic relations, the panel demonstrated how education, research, innovation and people-to-people cooperation have become integral components of contemporary international engagement.

Key Notes

- Energy security and decarbonisation must advance together through coordinated regional action.
- A diversified energy mix including offshore wind, nuclear energy and modern grid infrastructure is essential for long-term resilience.
- Universities are strategic partners in research, innovation and workforce development for the energy sector.
- Stronger cooperation between academia, industry and governments will determine the success of the Baltic energy transition.



"Research creates value when it becomes part of the policy process."

Joshua Hodge

MIT Center for Energy and Environmental Policy Research (CEEPR)

Reflecting on the discussions held throughout the day, Joshua Hodge explored how universities can contribute more effectively to public decision-making in the field of energy policy. Drawing on the experience of the MIT Center for Energy and Environmental Policy Research (CEEPR), he argued that academic research achieves its greatest impact when it informs practical policymaking and supports long-term institutional cooperation.

Rather than viewing universities solely as centres of scientific excellence, Hodge presented them as trusted partners capable of translating complex research into evidence that supports governments, industry and regulatory institutions. He emphasised that successful energy policy depends not only on technological innovation but also on effective communication between researchers and decision-makers. In this context, policy briefs, interdisciplinary collaboration and sustained engagement with public institutions were identified as essential mechanisms for ensuring that research contributes to strategic decision-making.

Looking ahead, Hodge suggested that the emerging Baltic Energy Council could become an important platform for connecting academic expertise with regional policy development, providing continuity beyond individual projects and creating lasting institutional partnerships across the Baltic Sea Region.

Key Notes

- Universities create the greatest impact when research informs public policy.
- Long-term institutional cooperation is more effective than isolated research projects.
- Communication between researchers and policymakers is essential for evidence-based decision-making.
- The Baltic Energy Council offers an opportunity to strengthen regional knowledge exchange and policy cooperation.



"Thirty years of cooperation have shown that strong academic networks create lasting regional partnerships."

Prof. Charlotte Platzer Björkman
Uppsala University

Marking the thirtieth anniversary of the Baltic University Programme (BUP), Prof. Charlotte Platzer Björkman reflected on one of the Baltic Sea Region's longest-standing academic cooperation initiatives. She demonstrated how sustained collaboration among universities has contributed to education, research and capacity building across national borders, creating a durable network founded on trust and shared commitment.

Looking back on the Programme's development, she emphasised that its success has relied not only on institutional agreements but also on long-term personal relationships between researchers, educators and students. The Baltic University Programme, she argued, illustrates how academic cooperation can support sustainable development while strengthening regional identity and mutual understanding.

Turning to future challenges, Prof. Platzer Björkman encouraged universities to build on this experience by expanding interdisciplinary research, student mobility and collaborative educational initiatives. She observed that the Baltic Sea Region already possesses the networks and expertise needed to respond collectively to emerging societal challenges, provided that institutions continue investing in long-term partnerships.

Key Notes

- The Baltic University Programme demonstrates the long-term value of sustained academic cooperation.
- Regional partnerships are built through trust, continuity and shared commitment.
- Universities should further expand interdisciplinary research and student mobility.
- Existing academic networks provide a strong foundation for addressing future regional challenges.

Panel 3



Academic Cooperation and Education in the Baltic Sea Region

Moderator

- Prof. Hans Adolfsson – Stockholm University

Panelists

- Prof. Morten Overgaard – Technical University of Denmark
- Prof. Gunilla Widén – Åbo Akademi University
- Prof. Arturas Razbadauskas – Klaipėda University
- Prof. Juhani Soini – Turku University of Applied Sciences
- Prof. Izabela Bodus-Olkowska – Maritime University of Szczecin
- Prof. Ineta Dabašinskienė – Vytautas Magnus University

"Academic cooperation is no longer an option.

It is a prerequisite to address the challenges facing the Baltic Sea Region."

Discussion Summary

The panel explored how universities can strengthen regional cooperation through joint education, collaborative research and institutional partnerships. While each panellist reflected the experience of a different institution, a shared message emerged: the complexity of contemporary societal challenges demands forms of cooperation that extend beyond individual universities and national borders.

Participants highlighted the importance of building durable academic networks capable of supporting interdisciplinary research, student and staff mobility, joint degree programmes and shared research infrastructure. Several speakers observed that universities already possess strong traditions of collaboration within the Baltic Sea Region, but argued that these networks should now evolve into more strategic partnerships with greater capacity to influence regional development and public policy.

The discussion also emphasised the need to educate graduates equipped not only with disciplinary expertise but also with international experience, intercultural competences and the ability to work across institutional and sectoral boundaries. Universities were encouraged to strengthen cooperation with governments, industry and civil society while preserving the values of academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

Taken together, the discussion demonstrated that academic cooperation is no longer viewed solely as an educational objective, but as a strategic instrument for strengthening the resilience, competitiveness and long-term sustainability of the Baltic Sea Region.

Key Notes

- Universities should deepen long-term institutional partnerships across the Baltic Sea Region.
- Student mobility, joint programmes and collaborative research remain central to regional integration.
- Future graduates require interdisciplinary and international competences.
- Academic cooperation strengthens regional resilience, innovation and societal development.



"The nuclear renaissance is also an opportunity to strengthen scientific cooperation across the region."

Aleksander Wołowiec

Polskie Elektrownie Jądrowe (Polish Nuclear Power Plants)

Aleksander Wołowiec presented the revival of nuclear energy as both an infrastructure programme and an opportunity to deepen cooperation between universities, research institutions and industry. He argued that the development of new nuclear capacity will require sustained investment in research, education and workforce development, creating new opportunities for international collaboration across the Baltic Sea Region.

Highlighting Poland's nuclear programme, he stressed that long-term success depends not only on engineering expertise but also on the ability of universities to educate specialists, support innovation and contribute independent scientific knowledge. He encouraged academic institutions to engage more actively in nuclear research and interdisciplinary education, emphasising that regional cooperation would help strengthen scientific excellence while supporting energy security and decarbonisation objectives.

Key Notes

- Nuclear energy creates new opportunities for regional scientific cooperation.
- Universities are essential for educating the future nuclear workforce.
- Research and innovation should accompany infrastructure development.
- Regional collaboration strengthens both energy security and research excellence.



"Protecting the Baltic Sea requires long-term cooperation founded on science."

Rüdiger Strempel

Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM)

Representing HELCOM, Rüdiger Strempel highlighted the importance of scientific cooperation in protecting one of the world's most vulnerable marine ecosystems. He reviewed the progress achieved through decades of regional environmental governance while emphasising that climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss and increasing human activity continue to place significant pressure on the Baltic Sea.

He argued that effective environmental policy depends on sustained collaboration between governments, research institutions and international organisations. Universities play a particularly important role by generating scientific evidence, monitoring environmental change and educating future specialists capable of supporting ecosystem-based management. He concluded that environmental resilience should be recognised as an integral component of regional security and sustainable development rather than as a separate policy domain.

Key Notes

- Environmental protection depends on sustained regional cooperation.
- Scientific evidence is fundamental to effective marine governance.
- Universities support environmental resilience through research, monitoring and education.
- Healthy marine ecosystems are essential for the Baltic Sea Region's long-term sustainability.

Panel 4



Environmental Resilience and Academic Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region

Moderator

- Joshua Hodge – MIT Center for Energy and Environmental Policy Research

Panellists

- Prof. Ralph Schneider – Kiel University
- Prof. Eugenijus Valatka – Kaunas University of Technology
- Rüdiger Stempel – HELCOM
- Prof. Daniel Schiller – University of Greifswald
- Prof. Anders Kottorp – University of Gävle
- Prof. Adam Weintrit – Gdynia Maritime University
- Dr. Laura Šaltytė-Vaisiauskė – Klaipėda University

"Environmental resilience depends on cooperation that is as interconnected as the Baltic Sea itself."

Discussion Summary

The panel explored how universities can strengthen regional cooperation through joint education, collaborative research and institutional partnerships. While each panellist reflected the experience of a different institution, a shared message emerged: the complexity of contemporary societal challenges demands forms of cooperation that extend beyond individual universities and national borders.

Participants highlighted the importance of building durable academic networks capable of supporting interdisciplinary research, student and staff mobility, joint degree programmes and shared research infrastructure. Several speakers observed that universities already possess strong traditions of collaboration within the Baltic Sea Region, but argued that these networks should now evolve into more strategic partnerships with greater capacity to influence regional development and public policy.

The discussion also emphasised the need to educate graduates equipped not only with disciplinary expertise but also with international experience, intercultural competences and the ability to work across institutional and sectoral boundaries. Universities were encouraged to strengthen cooperation with governments, industry and civil society while preserving the values of academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

Taken together, the discussion demonstrated that academic cooperation is no longer viewed solely as an educational objective, but as a strategic instrument for strengthening the resilience, competitiveness and long-term sustainability of the Baltic Sea Region.

Key Notes

- Environmental resilience requires coordinated scientific cooperation across the Baltic Sea Region.
- Universities play a central role in interdisciplinary research, education and environmental monitoring.
- Scientific knowledge should be more effectively integrated into environmental policymaking.
- Sustainable management of the Baltic Sea depends on long-term institutional partnerships.



"The blue economy can only be sustainable if innovation, research and cooperation develop together."

Monika Włoszek

National Coordinator for the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership

Closing the thematic programme of the Forum, Monika Włoszek presented the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership as an example of European cooperation supporting innovation in the maritime sector. She outlined how collaborative research and coordinated funding mechanisms are helping universities, research institutes, industry and public authorities address shared challenges related to sustainable maritime development.

Her presentation demonstrated that European partnerships provide not only financial support for research but also frameworks for building durable international networks capable of accelerating innovation and translating scientific knowledge into practical applications. She encouraged Baltic universities to engage actively in these initiatives, highlighting the region's strong research potential and long tradition of maritime cooperation.

Key Notes

- European partnerships strengthen research and innovation in the blue economy.
- Sustainable maritime development depends on cooperation across science, industry and public administration.
- Baltic universities are well positioned to contribute to European research initiatives.
- International collaboration accelerates innovation and knowledge transfer.

Closing Session



"Today we have started something that should continue far beyond this Forum."

Sławomir Radoń

Chief Strategy & Innovation Officer at ORLEN

In his concluding remarks, Sławomir Radoń reflected on the Forum as the beginning of a long-term process rather than a one-day event. He welcomed the breadth of perspectives brought together by university leaders, policymakers, industry representatives and international partners, observing that the discussions consistently demonstrated the value of cooperation across institutional and national boundaries.

Looking ahead, he underlined the importance of maintaining the momentum created during the Forum through continued collaboration and joint initiatives. He expressed confidence that the relationships established during the inaugural meeting would evolve into lasting partnerships supporting research, innovation and regional development..

Key Notes

- The Forum marks the beginning of long-term regional cooperation.
- Continued collaboration should build on the relationships established during the meeting.
- Sustained dialogue will be essential for addressing future regional challenges.

Signing Ceremony of the *Gdańsk Declaration*



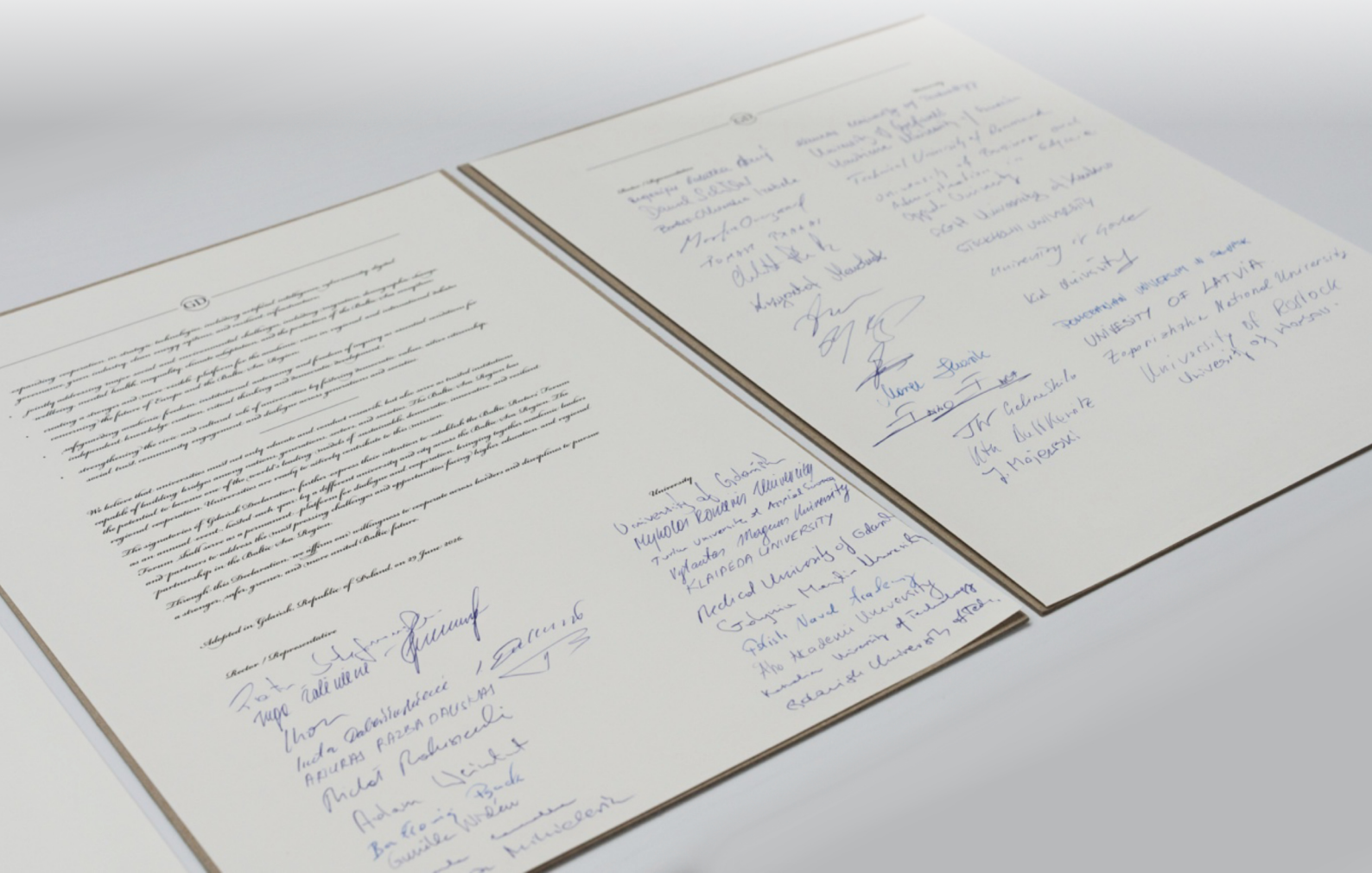
The signing of the Gdańsk Declaration marked the formal conclusion of the inaugural Baltic Rectors' Forum and represented the principal institutional outcome of the meeting. By endorsing the Declaration, participating institutions expressed their shared commitment to strengthening academic cooperation, supporting research and innovation, advancing sustainable development and contributing to the energy security and resilience of the Baltic Sea Region.

The Declaration translated the themes discussed throughout the Forum into a common framework for future cooperation, reaffirming the intention of universities and partner organisations to work together through interdisciplinary research, educational initiatives and strategic dialogue with governments and industry.

Key Notes

- The Gdańsk Declaration is the principal outcome of the First Baltic Rectors' Forum.
- It confirms a shared commitment to regional academic cooperation.
- The Declaration links higher education, innovation and sustainable development.
- It establishes a foundation for future collaboration within the Baltic Sea Region.

Signing Ceremony of the Gdańsk Declaration





"Today's discussions are only the beginning of a long-term partnership."

Prof. Piotr Stepnowski

Rector, University of Gdańsk

Chair of the Organising Committee

Closing the Forum, Prof. Piotr Stepnowski thanked participants for their engagement and reflected on the significance of bringing together universities, governments, industry and international organisations around a shared vision for the Baltic Sea Region. He observed that the discussions had demonstrated both the diversity of expertise present within the region and the willingness of institutions to work together in addressing common challenges.

He concluded by expressing confidence that the Forum would become a permanent platform for dialogue and cooperation, strengthening the contribution of universities to regional resilience, innovation and sustainable development. Then he confirmed that the Second Baltic Rectors' Forum would be hosted in Klaipėda University in 2027. The inaugural meeting, he noted, had established not only new partnerships but also a shared ambition to continue building the Baltic Sea Region as a space of knowledge, trust and collaborative leadership.

Key Notes

- The Forum established a foundation for long-term regional cooperation.
- Universities are central partners in addressing strategic challenges across the Baltic Sea Region.
- The discussions demonstrated a strong commitment to interdisciplinary and international collaboration.
- The First Baltic Rectors' Forum concluded with a shared vision for continued partnership.
- Klaipėda University was announced as the host of the Second Baltic Rectors' Forum, confirming the intention to establish the Forum as a permanent regional initiative.

Strategic Recommendations for *Future Action*

Recommendation 1

Institutionalise the Baltic Rectors' Forum as a permanent regional platform.

- Establish a permanent Steering Committee representing participating universities.
- Confirm a multi-year rotation of host universities.
- Develop a common annual work programme between Forums.
- Create thematic working groups (Energy, Security, Environment, Higher Education).
- Publish annual Proceedings and progress reports.

Recommendation 2

Strengthen university–government–industry cooperation.

- Launch joint strategic dialogue meetings between universities, ministries and industry.
- Develop regional challenge-driven research projects.
- Increase placements and secondments between universities and industry.
- Encourage participation of policymakers in academic research initiatives.
- Expand cooperation through the Baltic Energy Council.

Recommendation 3

Develop a Baltic Knowledge and Innovation Network.

- Expand joint Master's and doctoral programmes.
- Increase researcher and student mobility.
- Create shared research infrastructures.
- Develop regional PhD summer schools.
- Promote interdisciplinary research clusters.

Recommendation 4

Support the Baltic energy transition through science.

- Coordinate research on offshore wind and nuclear energy.
- Establish joint energy transition laboratories.
- Develop common policy briefs for governments.
- Strengthen university participation in EU energy programmes.
- Create a Baltic Energy Observatory led by universities.

Recommendation 5

Build regional resilience through interdisciplinary research.

- Launch collaborative research on hybrid threats and critical infrastructure.
- Expand cooperation on marine environmental monitoring.
- Integrate resilience into engineering, environmental and policy curricula.
- Develop common training programmes for young researchers.
- Strengthen cooperation with HELCOM, the Council of the Baltic Sea States and other regional

Scientific Council of the first *Baltic's Forum*

Located on the Baltic coast, Gdańsk is a vibrant city where rich history meets modern energy. Its remarkable cultural heritage and its role as the birthplace of the Solidarity movement make it a place of profound historical significance. The charming Old Town, maritime spirit, and cultural diversity create an inspiring atmosphere for international gatherings. Easily accessible and full of character, the city offers a unique blend of tradition and a welcoming, dynamic environment.



Hans Adolfsson
Stockholm University



Tomasz Szubrycht
Polish Naval Academy



Izabela Bodus-Olkowska
Maritime University of Szczecin



Enno Ence
University of Latvia



Carsten Orth Gaarn-Larsen
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Eugenijus Valatka
Kaunas University of Technology



Anders Kottorp
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Adam Weintrit
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Michał Markuszewski
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Charlotte Platzer Björkman
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Gunilla Widén
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Arturas Razbadauskas
Klaipėda University



Inga Žalėnienė
Mykolas Romeris University



Daniel Schiller
University of Greifswald



Ernest Czernański
University of Gdańsk



Ralph Schneider
Kiel University



Bartosz Różycki
University of Warsaw



Piotr Stepnowski (Chair)
University of Gdańsk



Maciej Sokołowski
Keio University



Juhani Soini
Turku University of Applied Sciences

Institutions Behind the *Forum*

Organiser



Strategic partner



Honorary Patron



Minister of Science and Higher Education
Republic of Poland

Patrons



Embassy of Sweden
Warsaw



EMBASSY OF THE
REPUBLIC OF LATVIA



Embassy
of the Federal Republic of Germany
Warsaw



Minister of Climate and Environment
Republic of Poland



Ministry of Energy
Republic of Poland



Ministry of
State Assets



Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Republic of Poland



GOVERNOR OF POMERANIAN REGION
BEATA RUTKIEWICZ

THE HONORARY PATRONAGE:



MIECZYSLAW STRUK
MARSHAL
OF THE POMORSKIE VOIVODESHIP



HONORARY PATRONAGE
Mayor of the City
of Gdańsk



**MAYOR OF
GDYNIA**
Aleksandra Kosiorek



Honorary Patronage
of the Mayor
of Sopot

Partners

CRASP

Conference of Rectors
of Academic Schools in Poland



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Global Compact
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**POLSKIE
ELEKTROWNIE
JĄDROWE**



**Baltic
Energy
Council**



Perspektywy

Perspektywy Education Foundation



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