**Speech by Mr Jörgen Pettersson**

**President of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC)**

**27th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference**

**Ålands Lagting, Plenary Hall**

Dear colleagues, excellences, ladies and gentlemen, honourable guests,

It is the honourable duty of the BSPC President to provide the delegates of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference with a report on the activities throughout the past year. The following issues – from my point of view – clearly stands out in our common work for an even better life for the people around the Baltic Sea:

In the past year, the BSPC has visibly and in every respect fulfilled its strategic objectives and achieved significant progress: On the basis of our programme and our resolution,

• we have communicated our principles and core messages at a large number of Baltic Sea-relevant events and beyond,

• we have intensified the cooperation with our partners, and

• our programmatic concerns and contents are perceived much more strongly.

We are becoming increasingly successful in influencing government action.

Wherever possible, in accordance with the fundamental concerns of our institution: We have emphasised and strengthened the parliamentary dimension of cooperation and stressed the principles of our cooperation time and again.

The conference in Hamburg last year passed the Work Programme 2017-2018, which is – combined with our annual resolution – our strategic basis in which we identified as core issues of our work for 2017 to 2018 which are of great importance for the future of the development in our region and the wellbeing of our people:

• Sustainable societies in the Baltic Sea region based on democratic values, human rights and equal chances for all

• Cooperation and integration for a secure and prosperous Baltic Sea area as well as

• Migration and integration,

• finding solutions based on mutual information and best practices

We have geared our activities to these topics and targets:

The first Standing Committee under the Åland Presidency took place here in Mariehamn.

In the run-up to the establishment of our working group "Integration and Migration", we had a detailed presentation on this topic and a lively exchange of information with experts from Åland.

Hans Wallmark, the Chairman of our Working Group, will soon give us a deeper insight into the current work of the Working Group.

Our second Standing Committee meeting took us to Brussels at the invitation of the Chairman of the EP’s SINEA delegation, Jørn Dohrman.

It has been a good tradition for the BSPC to hold its winter meeting in Brussels to meet with important stakeholders from the European level.

Even though this time, it was a very dense presentation programme with a myriad of facts confronting us: In and with this meeting, we have worked through a large part of the requirements that we had set ourselves in our work programme.

The Standing Committee also took the opportunity in Brussels to discuss the possible consequences of Brexit for the Baltic Sea region and we also made good on our promise to liaison with our partners, most importantly the CBSS.

Ambassador Hans Olsson – who will report to us today – gave us an interim report on the Swedish Presidency of the CBSS. He not only highlighted the measures initiated by the Swedish CBSS Presidency but also made a number of concrete proposals to deepen cooperation between the BSPC and the CBSS. We have already reacted to some of these concerns and will continue to work on implementing them.

This includes, for example, our support and participation in the ReGeneration 2030 youth conference, the results of which will be very much part of our conference later on. This further includes the concern that our rapporteurs should participate more strongly in the relevant CBSS thematic events and make a greater contribution there. As we will hear later, this has already been done in the field of labour and social affairs and is also the firm intention of other rapporteurs. I am pleased that we have succeeded in significantly deepening cooperation with CBSS this year. When it comes to form strong policies, we are all in it together.

In Brussels, we also had a very detailed report from our second, extremely important partner in the Baltic Sea cooperation: Ms Marianne Wenning, the Chair of HELCOM, in the run-up to the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting *presented the current state of the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan.*

Ms Susanne Scherrer, Director of the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat in Rostock, Kiel and Riga, among many important facts concerning the transnational cooperation pointed out that currently capacity for offshore wind energy production was barely used in the BSR, due to missing connections between electricity grids, gaps in Research & Development and insufficient cooperation.

Our third session during this Conference will go into the details of this important energy field.

In Bruessels we also learnt that Interreg TN funding was decisive for making macro-regional strategies work and enabled cooperation with Russia. She concluded that there was great potential for even more cooperation across the Baltic Sea Region.

This consideration of transnational programmes was a good basis for our next Standing Committee in the National Park of Koli in Finland.

In continuation of the Bruessels-meeting, experts from the *Finnish Environment Institute* addressed the SC members in a round of presentations about projects by the Finnish Environment Institute and about collaborative practices for environmental decision-making.

But, dear friends, we have not only deepened the content and strategic priorities of our work programme by bringing experts to our meetings on these topics, but also that we have "gone outside" as intensively as possible, participated in the high-level events of our partner organisations and became involved there.

It is the honourable duty of the BSPC President to meet with our partners and other parliamentary organisations. I had – inter alia - the pleasure of addressing during my Chairmanship:

The Session of the Nordic Council in Helsinki,

The Baltic Assembly in Tallinn,

The Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum in Brussels,

together with the head of the Finnish BSPC delegation, Kari Kulmala,

the International Environmental Forum “Baltic Sea Day” in St. Petersburg,

and

the Plenary Session of the Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS Member Nations in St. Petersburg,

All those meetings were used to conduct intensive bilateral talks with many high level representative of the countries.

Together with Valentina Pivnenko we also participated in

the International Forum on Development of Parliamentarism in Moscow where

delegates from 96 parliaments all over the world and representatives of 10 international parliamentary organisations attended. The BSPC was the only international parliamentary organisation to address the participants during the opening plenary session.

The BSPC was represented at the 50th and 51st General Assembly meetings of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC). Based on our memorandum of understanding, what connects us with PABSEC, our collaboration has also been deepened by the Secretaries General. I’m very pleased that the Chairman of the PABSEC Legal and Political Affairs Committee as well as the PABSEC Secretary General, Prof Asaf Hajiev, can attend our conference today.

The key messages at all these events were:

Based on our fundamental convictions I pointed out the vital importance of international parliamentary cooperation – especially in times of tense situations,

I have repeatedly pointed out the need for interparliamentary dialogue and to strengthen the influence of parliaments. We are the voice of the people who, all over the world, want love, security, prosperity, peace and freedom.

And I have underscored the necessity to include the young generation in our deliberations.

That’s why we supported from the very beginning the youth summit ReGeneration 2030, that’s why the BSPC attended and that’s why we will get a presentation from two representatives about the results and the manifesto they agreed to. And we even go one step further: One of the representatives of the summit will moderate the panel debate.

This way, we will now give the future generation of decision makers the possibility to already raise the core questions for the future to the decision makers from today.

Vice-President Carola Veit attended the Parliamentary Assembly of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) in the Slovenian capital Ljubljana, emphasising there the crucial importance of parliamentary cooperation and partnerships between the various parliamentary forums.

Other MPs have taken part in other events important to our work, such as Kari Kulmala and Saara-Sofia Siren at the EUSBSR Summit in Tallinn.

In addition, our rapporteurs have been to a number of events and have taken on board the findings relevant to their policy fields. This is detailed in the written and oral reports to follow. The tremendous work behind all this becomes apparent when you look at the reports that have been published on our website day after day during the past week. On behalf of the BSPC I want to express my thanks to all of you involved in this work.

What I am now recording as this year's conclusion also includes what my very esteemed colleague and Vice-President Carola Veit is about to comment on: namely the step-by-step and year-by-year intensified reactions of governments to our resolutions.

We have also established closer contacts with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean. In addition to discussions with the President, the Vice-President and the Secretary General of PAM we were also represented at a high-level parliamentary meeting in Belgrade organised by PAM and the United Nations.

Ladies and gentlemen, all these expert hearings, all participation in international events, all the deliberations and discussions we have had form the basis for today's conference and this year's resolution.

We have further deepened our internal contacts and relationships through many discussions and close cooperation. We have grown more and more into one family. And we are demonstrating today that those who once worked for us continue to belong to the family: with Christina Gestrin and her presentation. She was our long-standing President as well as presiding over our 19th BSPC 2009 in this plenary hall and is dealing now intensively with ‘Environmental Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region’ and with our former President, Working Group Chairman and long-standing Rapporteur for labour and social affairs, Franz Thönnes.

Once you have been connected to us, you will never get away from us again.

And because we work with each other on a close and largely friendly basis, we have dared to try out a new format tomorrow: a general debate without restricting the content in order to give everyone the opportunity to contribute what is particularly close to his or her heart. I hope that we will stick to an objective debate in this part, too. We’ll then see from the response whether this is a format that we should continue to maintain in the future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

All this would never have happened without your support and friendship. From a personal level I want to thank you all for the possibility to lead this fantastic organisation, this Think tank in democracy where ideas grow. Thanks to you and especially thanks to our Secretary General Bodo Bahr and the Secretary of the Åland Delegation Sten Eriksson together with many others – you made this happen.

I wish us all a very successful conference, the deepening of our cooperation and friendships and wise decisions that will take us forward.

And let’s get better and better in working together for a prosperous, clean and peaceful Baltic Sea.

It is time to work.