**Speech by Carola Veit**

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**First Session**

**Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region**

**Ålands Lagting, Plenary Hall**

**Implementation of the 26th BSPC Resolution**

Check against delivery

**Implementation of the 26th BSPC Resolution**

Thank you very much, honourable President,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It was a great pleasure and an honour for me and the Parliament of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg to host the 26th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference last year in Hamburg.

This Conference focused on three challenging areas we had agreed on before:

Democratic Participation and the Digital Age,

Innovative Science and Research as well as

Sustainable Tourism.

As usually, recommendations with regard to those topics were included in the 26th BSPC Resolution.

And today, I have the honour to present an overview on the governments’ responses to the 26th BSPC Resolution implementation survey.

This is including a corresponding policy analysis as we had last year by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs. You can find it on our homepage.

We feature **14** submitted statements in reaction to the 26th BSPC Resolution.

They vary considerably concerning thematic depth and structure.

Remarkable is that all national governments of the countries around the Baltic Sea have sent a statement.

I’d like to stress that the governments treated our request seriously and have done so more and more comprehensively in the last three years.

Pointing out differences in the answers and analytical recommendations for the further procedure should not be understood as criticism.

In the first instance, I would like to point out that the resolution’s aim regarding strengthening the involvement of young people in all areas of society and thus including the BSPC’s willingness to continue the work on establishing a Baltic Sea Forum for Young People,

Åland has initiated a cooperation with both the Nordic Council of Ministers and the CBSS to support the *ReGeneration 2030* initiative.

*ReGeneration 2030* brings together young people from Denmark, Estonia, the Faroe Islands, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia, Sweden, Germany and Åland.

The *ReGeneration 2030 Summit* took place right here on the Åland Islands last week, and two representatives of this Youth Event – Simon Holmström and Hanna Salmén – will give us a report about its outcome and success within this First Session.

Thus, we have in today’s second session an event under the motto:

The future generation of decision-makers is asking the current generation of decision-makers highlighting the need to discuss the needs of the younger generation.

Now I cometo the **assessment of the implementation, regarding some of the remarkable results.**

**In regard to the first thematic chapter of last year resolution: “Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region”** you will soon get several expert-presentations, so you can draw your own conclusions and i will skip that.

But let’s have al look at the **the second thematic chapter of last year resolution: “Democratic Participation and the Digital Age”.**

Many of the issues raised are well covered by numerous programs and projects:

 like digital election (Åland),

focus on digital literacy, journalists’ ethnic ombudsman (Lithuania)

or the “Nationwide Education Network” in Poland.

Closer regional cooperation on digitization was a key priority for the Norwegian Government during its Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2017, what summed up in anministerial declaration *Digital North*.

It is ment to “set out that we should develop a digitally integrated region that will contribute to the Digital Single Market to the benefit of Europe at large.” This is a good example for a transnational activity.

Another issue is democratic participation and the digital age with regard to employing new digital technologies for the subjects of democracy and political development.

Here, I would like to mention a transnationally successful example, which is Helsinki’s cooperation with Hamburg within the framework of the EU project “MySmartLife”. Among other things, the subject of participation is playing an active role in this project.

And I would like to point out one of the participatory projects of my hometown, Hamburg, called “Finding Places” for accommodating refugees.

Interactive planning desks allow citizens to identify areas for building sites and settlements and review existing proposals.

So we have an interesting collection of relevant steps and best practices shared on the way to make our region al democratic global frontrunner in the digital area.

Turning to the **assessment regarding the chapter of last year resolution: “Sustainable Tourism”** that followed the results of the 2-year-WG; \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_will report you later on so I keep it very briefly:

The focus in this diversified section – from wastewater facilities to bike routes – lies on national measures due to certain international conventions to promote sustainable tourism.

Additionally, some initiatives to strengthen transnational and cross-border cooperation are also mentioned.

Therefore, I would like to highlight the regular participation of several countries in the annual Baltic Sea Tourism Forum.

Most countries are supporting the establishment of a Baltic Sea Tourism Centre in order to create a permanent platform for collecting and sharing relevant tourism information about the development of tourism in the Baltic Sea Region.

One example requesting more exchange across nations as well as between the CBSS and the BSPC:

the idea of a *Common Baltic Sea Brand*.

Based on cultural and natural heritage, to strengthen tourism competitiveness, this idea is considered in a constructive-minded, nevertheless critical exchange.

Estonia for example opines that “visitors are not interested in a Baltic Sea as a travel destination.

They are supposed to be more interested in different smaller regions or countries (cities) located around the Baltic Sea.”

**Summing up and coming to the analysis:**

The submitted statements highlight the notion that the responding governments have heeded the 26th BSPC Resolution.

They demonstrate a serious effort to offer a good account of how regional stakeholders have striven to carry out the Resolutions’ calls and suggestions. But I think that the **standard of comprehensiveness and quality could be increased** in the future.

Both for the BPSC and the CBSS, it is important that we as parliaments receive the highest possible quality feedback for our further work, because “only if the statements are comprehensive and interdisciplinary, can the governments be held accountable regarding the BSPC Resolution.”

What is also striking is that a number of responses are at the government level, thereby giving the replies a stronger political dimension.

Other governments forward their responses at the administrative level.

Here, too, I think it would be good if we could ensure that these are official government opinions throughout.

I also welcome that some of the governments seem to have followed last year’s suggestion to concentrate more on transnational initiatives compared to strictly national projects.

However, the statements still concentrate too much on previous activities, several of which even date back several years.

And I also think that the governments should strive more to include their **goals and plans for future activities** in line with the Resolution’s character as calls for future action offering political visions on the future cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region - instead of only looking back..

The Report “Vision for the Baltic Sea Region beyond 2020” by the Council of the Baltic Sea States Vision Group of June 2018 is a case in point.

Conversely, we have to reflect seriously on the Finnish Government's advice on how we can enable governments to report on the implementation of various measures over a **longer** period.

The reporting period of less than a year to implement certain requirements is of course too short in a number of cases to talk about concrete results.

It is always a particular concern of ours "to take successful steps to restore a comprehensive political dialogue in the Baltic Sea region".

Despite certain tensions mentioned in some statements, such steps were prominently shown by the meetings of the foreign ministers in Reykjavik in June ’17 and in Stockholm in June ’18. Our Resolution is recurring to that.

In that respect, it would be particularly important for us, as parliamentarians, to see more attention paid to the overall political environment and the current political development, which encompass the concrete technical measures.

I hope that our resolutions and the conclusions we draw from the implementation reports will make an ever improving contribution to this in the future.

Thank you for your attention!