**Speech by Mr Olaf Scholz**

**First Mayor of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg**

**at the 26th BSPC Annual Conference**

**Opening**

**Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, Town Hall, 4 September 2017**

Mrs. President (BSPC President and President of the Hamburg Parliament, Carola Veit),

Members of all national and international parliaments,

Members of the diplomatic and consular corps,

ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to Hamburg! Our City is indeed very suited to host the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference this time.

As Hanseatic City, we have been closely linked with the Baltic coastal states for many centuries.

And I am glad to see that the Hamburg Town Hall offers room for joint consultations of so many Baltic Sea Parliamentarians today.

For the Hamburg Senate, the Baltic Sea Policy is highly significant. We are well aware of the importance of regional and transnational coordination. We value the dialogue between the Baltic regions on all levels. Especially with regards to creating a joint identity within the Baltic Sea Region, Hamburg as host has more than just symbolic value.

In our city and in the Hamburg Metropolitan Region, one knows from experience about the vastness of the Baltic Sea, how long the distances often are, but that the sea is also always a connecting opportunity that we can seize.

The Hamburg Port is Germany’s biggest sea port, one of the three leading container ports in Europe and ranks number 17 on the global scale. And with great pride as well as a small twinkle in my eye, I like to repeat: Today, Hamburg is the biggest Baltic sea port, at least when it comes to container traffic.

Many feeder ships connect our port with the Baltic Sea Region. The good hinterland connections, and especially the Kiel Canal, have closely linked trade, culture and policy. We almost feel as if we were directly located at the Baltic Sea – even though our port is a tidal port of the Elbe.

Developing the hinterland connection through roads, rails and waterways is of great national and international interest. In many Baltic coastal states, rail and road networks are increasingly congested. But our rivers, canals as well as the Baltic Sea still have room for more. That is why the European Union supports the transnational project EMMA. EMMA is the abbreviation for “**E**nhancing freight **M**obility and logistics in the Baltic Sea Region by strengthening inland waterway and river sea transport and pro**M**oting new intern**A**tional shipping services” This is not only a long title, EMMA also means a lot of work: Under Hamburg’s leadership, the expansion of inland waterway transport is promoted, while considering the specificities of the Baltic Sea markets and the very different conditions with regard to inland navigation.

Many of the EU projects in the Baltic Sea Region count on Hamburg’s involvement. In this regard, I would also like to mention TENTacle, which stands for “Capitalising on TEN-T core network corridors for growth and cohesion”. The project TENTacle takes care of the regions situated next to the core network corridors or beyond.

The improved connectedness within the Baltic Sea Region is also represented by the Fehmarnbelt Link. This major project will not only turn Hamburg and Copenhagen into neighbours. This connection will also link far bigger parts of the Baltic Sea area. Stronger links through improved infrastructure are mirrored in increasing cooperation in the field of research infrastructures.

Some of you have already visited the German Electron Synchrotron and obtained first-hand insight in the high standard of materials sciences – which are world-class in our region. This holds especially true for the scientific collaboration between the just officially opened European X-ray Free Electron Laser, European XFEL here, and the European Spallation Source, ESS, in Lund, which is currently being constructed. The usage of these and other research infrastructures by companies, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises, is pushed through the flagship project Baltic TRAM directed by DESY.

Hamburg is proud of being a “gateway to the world” on many levels. Various companies from the Baltic Sea area take their first steps in international expansion in Hamburg. Hamburg is one of the leading civil aviation industry sites, a media location and a centre for medical industries – and we cooperate with the Baltic coastal states on all levels. Even a majority of the more than 6.5 million tourists coming to Hamburg each year originate from the Baltic Sea area. The regional connectedness grows and becomes increasingly important. This is especially true with regard to sustainability and the development of new projects for environmental protection.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference is highly important for the bond throughout our region. This is reflected in many fields – in economy and infrastructure, but also in education and research. Among others, the Baltic Science Network stresses the importance Hamburg assigns to engaging in the Baltic Sea area. This project is substantially brought forward by the Hamburg Ministry of Science, Research and Equalities. I would like to seize this opportunity to thank the Council of the Baltic Sea States very much for the sound collaboration in this regard.

Boosting prosperity is one objective of our regional cooperation. In our interconnected and service-oriented society, this prosperity increasingly depends on education. Therefore, Hamburg is proud to coordinate the policy area “Education, Research, Employability” of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region together with our Swedish partners from the Norden Association.

The 2016 Resolution of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference explicitly stated the importance of integrating education and the labour market to lower youth unemployment and to train skilled workers. This is also a truly important matter for Hamburg. With the establishment of the Jugendberufsagentur, the youth employment agency, Hamburg reorganized the training opportunities for the better. The Jugendberufsagentur today celebrates its fifth anniversary. We focus on the transition between school and vocational training and offer a one-stop-shop for every young person. No youth is to be left behind, that is our motto. We are very glad that so many other cities from the Baltic Sea Region have already enquired about the Hamburg model.

No region can afford to forego the potential of its youth. Therefore, it is very good that the project “School to Work” of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region also works in this direction. Especially by including the young generation, Interreg projects like these strengthen our commonalities and support the identification with the Baltic Sea area.

By the way: Not only the European Union has developed a strategy for the Baltic Sea Region; also Hamburg as a location for economy and science has its own Baltic Sea strategy. This further illustrates the importance we assign to our joint region. And both strategies explicitly include partners from outside the European Union.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Prosperity and education, labour mobility, Smart City and environmental issues – the catalogue of our joint topics is substantial. Our experiences are enriching, our perspectives often differ and even when we do not aim at achieving the same objective, we all know about the importance of cooperation.

On behalf of the city of Hamburg, I wish all Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference participants fruitful discussions and good luck. This meeting is a very positive and important contribution for cohesion, peace and prosperity in the Baltic Sea Region.

Thank you!