

30 Years of Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference

Platform for cooperation,
commitment and competence in
political dialogue of parliaments
in the Baltic Sea Region

Final-Edititon



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The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) was established in 1991 as a forum for political dialogue between parliamentarians from the Baltic Sea Region. BSPC aims at raising awareness and opinion on issues of current political interest and relevance for the Baltic Sea Region. It promotes and drives various initiatives and efforts to support a sustainable environmental, social and economic development of the Baltic Sea Region. It strives at enhancing the visibility of the Baltic Sea Region and its issues in a wider European context.

BSPC gathers parliamentarians from 11 national parliaments, 11 regional parliaments and 5 parliamentary organisations around the Baltic Sea. The BSPC thus constitutes a unique parliamentary bridge between all the EU- and non-EU countries of the Baltic Sea Region.

BSPC external interfaces include parliamentary, governmental, sub-regional and other organizations in the Baltic Sea Region and the Northern Dimension area, among them CBSS, HELCOM, the Northern Dimension Partnership in Health and Social Well-Being (NDPHS), the Baltic Sea Labour Forum (BSLF), the Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation (BSSSC) and the Baltic Development Forum.

BSPC shall initiate and guide political activities in the region; support and strengthen democratic institutions in the participating states; improve dialogue between governments, parliaments and civil society; strengthen the common identity of the Baltic Sea Region by means of close co-operation between national and regional parliaments on the basis of equality; and initiate and guide political activities in the Baltic Sea Region, endowing them with additional democratic legitimacy and parliamentary authority.

The political recommendations of the annual Parliamentary Conferences are expressed in a Conference Resolution adopted by consensus by the Conference. The adopted Resolution shall be submitted to the governments of the Baltic Sea Region, the CBSS and the EU, and disseminated to other relevant national, regional and local stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Region and its neighbourhood.

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Introduction by the President of the BSPC

As the President of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference 2020-2022, I am very proud and delighted to present this publication in honour of 30 years of parliamentary cooperation. This publication follows up on the previous ones, issued on the 20th and 25th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference. In addition, this publication includes reflections on our flourishing cooperation given by Speakers of the member parliaments in the Baltic Sea region.

I had truly looked forward to celebrating this occasion in Stockholm during our 30th Conference. However, this was unfortunately not possible due to the pandemic situation, and this year we will once again hold it online. But every cloud has a silver lining, and it is my great pleasure to, together with the Swedish delegation to the BSPC, host the 31st Conference, planned to be held in Stockholm in June 2022.

The current Swedish Presidency goes under the headline Sustainable democracy and focuses on how to face common challenges in a changing world. New circumstances emphasise the need for preserving and protecting democracy and addressing the challenges that lie ahead by adapting to changes. Democratic institutions, solid cross-border cooperation and environmental and social sustainability are cornerstones of the BSPC: preserving these are our priority. Furthermore, the Swedish Parliament's commemoration and celebration of 100 years of democracy constitute another strong reason to highlight the importance of democracy.

The spread of COVID-19 and the fight against the pandemic have given us even more reason to safeguard the strong cross-border cooperation at



the heart of the BSPC as well as the democratic values on which it is based. Democracy provides political accountability and ensures transparency as well as inclusiveness. Since its founding in 1991, one of the stated goals of the BSPC has been to support and strengthen democratic institutions, and we need to continue in this direction.

Another challenge that lies ahead us, is climate change and how it threatens biodiversity in our region. The current Working Group, chaired by my esteemed colleague Ms Cecilie Tenfjord-Toftby, is focused on these issues. Protecting the environment and safeguarding our Baltic Sea have for a long time been a top priority for our organisation and is still a core issue for the BSPC.

During the first ten years of the BSPC, the focus was on current and relevant topics discussed during the annual conferences. However, over the years, the organisation had developed and found a more stable ground for its work. As a

result, we founded the Standing Committee, we adopted Rules of Procedure, and we introduced a financial mechanism.

Around the turn of the millennium, the BSPC introduced Working Groups on specific topics to elaborate even more comprehensive and profound on a particular issue.

The dialogue between parliaments, governments, and civil society in the framework of the BSPC have significantly improved. Especially the relationship between the BSPC and the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) is worth mentioning. We share information, we have also gone into specific projects together and shared knowledge and input in various policy areas. The Working Group on Migration and Integration is one good example of fruitful cooperation; this year's Baltic Sea Parliamentary Youth Forum organisation is another.

The increased and improved relationship with the CBSS and other Baltic Sea region organisations also strengthen the common identity of our region. People-to-people contacts and relationships between citizens – that is the real backbone of our cooperation.

Our interaction with other external organisations has also improved. Our tradition with meetings in Brussels in the first months of every year underlines our close cooperation with the EU institutions. Our regular briefings by HELCOM, the Northern Dimension Partnerships and other international organisations such as WHO in our deliberations and on the regional level our deepened cooperation with the BSSSC and the Baltic Sea Commission of the CPMR is additional good examples of fruitful relations.

Five years ago, in the previous anniversary publication, my colleague Prof Jānis Vucāns declared that there in recent years had been a push to make the annual conferences them-

selves more political. I want to say that this trend is still going strong. Several Presidents of States, Representatives of the EU Commission, numerous national ministers as well as heads and other members of regional governments have attended the annual Conferences in the last years. In Oslo 2019, there was a back-to-back meeting with Ministers regarding labour market issues; this marks the political relevance of our cooperation.

The introduction of a general debate and roundtable discussion on the annual conferences has also served the Conference with more of a political nature. As a result, we debate current events during the Conference, and the range of issues that we discuss is more comprehensive.

One issue that has been high on the agenda during the last years is youth engagement and participation. In 2017, we held a Baltic Sea Parliamentary Youth Forum in Kiel on Sustainable Tourism. In 2018 we included representatives of the youth movement Re-Generation 2030 with the results of their first summit in our annual Conference. In 2019 we combined a two-day Baltic Sea Parliamentary Youth Forum in Schwerin with a meeting of the BSPC WG on Migration and Integration. Representatives of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Youth Fora presented the results of their work our annual conferences, which we picked up in the BSPC resolutions.

This year a Baltic Sea Parliamentary Youth Forum will be held in connection with the annual Conference. About 100 young participants from our eleven countries will attend, a clear sign of interest from the young generation to get involved in Baltic Sea issues.

Another aspect of our parliamentary cooperation is our partner organisations. Traditionally and from the beginning of our work, we have

high close and, in every respect, productive and fruitful - at times characterized by dual functions in both institutions - cooperation with the parliamentary institutions that are also members with us: the Nordic Council and the Baltic Assembly.

In addition, we have actively participated in the parliamentary assemblies of international parliamentary associations, or they had attended our annual conferences. That concerns the Northern Dimension Parliamentary Assembly, the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States (IPA CIS), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Arctic Council, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Barents Sea, the South-East European Cooperation Process Parliamentary Assembly (SEECPPA), the International Fora' Development of Parliamentarism', the Southern Baltic Sea Parliamentary Forum and the Parliamentary Association of North-West Russia (PANWR).

During the last five years, we were getting in close contact and cooperation with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, resulting in a memorandum of understanding between our organisations. Additionally, we deepened connections with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean and are in the process of having this cooperation also result in a Memorandum of Understanding.

The BSPC, with its long tradition as a forum of open political dialogue, can serve as a good role model for other regional organisations.

We can see our Conference resolutions as our sharpest political tool. Therefore, I am both delighted and proud to say that the resolutions continue to get political attention and more and more assertiveness, which enables the BSPC to take, support and realize political in-

itiatives. The feedback from the governments shows from year to year clearer that the BSPC is the main parliamentary body of the region.

It is one of the outstanding achievements of the BSPC that year after year - even in politically very tense times - we have succeeded in agreeing on far-reaching calls for action to be taken by governments, even on issues that have been controversial within its member countries and were also controversial between the individual countries.

That is Parliamentary diplomacy on its highest level and is only possible if cooperation is based on reliable trust.

As a result, we have achieved progress in several policy areas over the years:

Many years ago, we achieved a breakthrough in increasing maritime safety in the Baltic Sea.

The designation of protected areas in the Baltic Sea goes back to early demands by the BSPC,

The BSPC achieved improvements in the areas of labour and social affairs, environment, health, sustainable tourism and integration through urgent demands initiated by parliamentarians.

Strengthening the good and progressive forces and reducing the restraining ones has always been for the BSPC an essential factor in moving the entire Baltic Sea region forward on its path to greater prosperity while preserving its natural livelihoods.

To this end, the BSPC has made a significant contribution for 30 years, which has helped improve development.

Another landmark in our years of cooperation is the Covid-19-pandemic. The pandemic has

threatened the health of the citizens in our region; people have lost their jobs, young people have missed out on education, and democracies have made backslides. As a result, there is an urgent need for political decisions to restore and improve the lives and health of our citizens.

The BSPC built its cooperation on contacts among people, dialogue person-in-person and a familiar and friendly atmosphere. Even if that - due to the pandemic - has been difficult to achieve during the last one and half years: I am very proud to say that we, as the BSPC, were successful in continuing undiminished and even deepening our work by shifting to the online format and have maintained and intensified the parliamentary dimension of the international cooperation in the Baltic Sea region.

For 30 years, the parliamentarians have directly and indirectly made a decisive contribution to realising what the people who elected them primarily regard as the most important: to stabilise and guarantee the peaceful coexistence of

all people and countries in the region and, on this basis, to achieve the highest possible level of prosperity and sustainable use and protection of the natural foundations of life.

It is an honour to be the President of such a vital, engaged and relevant organisation as the BSPC.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference for 30 years of parliamentary cooperation, and I hope for many more to come!

Pyy Niemi

President of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary
Conference 2020 – 2022

1991 · 1992 · 1993 ·
1994 · 1995 · 1996 · 1997
STATEMENTS
CONGRATULATIONS
2001 · 2002 · 2003 · 2004
· 2005 · 2006 · 2007 ·
2008 · 2009 · 2010 · 2011
· 2012 · 2013 · 2014 ·
2015 · 2016 · 2017 · 2018
· 2019 · 2020 · 2021

BALTIC ASSEMBLY



Andrius Kupčinskas
President of the Baltic Assembly

With gratification, I applaud the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference and its devoted partners on the 30th anniversary of this fundamental forum.

Ever since its establishment 30 years ago, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference has granted the possibility of fostering political dialogue between like-minded parliamentarians with shared views on essential values such as sustainability, democracy, and equality. The Baltic Assembly has been an active permanent member of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference since 1992, when the Baltic states concluded that together they were stronger in this format as well.

This year, the Baltic Assembly also celebrates its 30th anniversary. We are proud to mark our success and development together with close-minded parliamentarians in the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference. The key to prosperity and partnership between the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference is our like-mindedness, shared priorities and values. For 2021, the Baltic Assembly has set out four priorities, including economic and social stabilisation of the Baltic states, a strong security and

defence community, interconnected energy and transport networks, and safe societies and quality of life. Similarly, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference has shared the focus on sustainability of democracy, environment and society. Apart from this, the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference have recently expressed support for the aspirations of the Belarusian people on their way to freedom. The reason for the success behind the cooperation of the two organisations lies in our common understanding of the most pressing matters in the region.

The cooperation between the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference demonstrates a shared vision on keeping our environment clean, mitigating effects of climate change and adapting to climate change, especially in the area of dealing with pollutants and garbage released into the Baltic Sea. The issues raised at the Conference have invariably been of great importance and relevance for the Baltic Assembly as well.

The cooperation between the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference is active, but, of course, there is still room for improvement in strengthening the partnership. Matters of great concern for the future include improving the environmental situation of the Baltic Sea region, securing climate, ensuring biodiversity and sustainability, protecting democratic values as well as improving security and prosperity of the region.

The challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis also show how essential it is to maintain the cooperation based on equality between national and regional parliaments. Regional institutions have a momentous role in addressing the challenges that require joint efforts. Overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic and coming out as strong, stable and robust as ever should be one of our top priorities for the nearest future.

Within the past thirty years, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference has strengthened the common identity of the Baltic Sea Region. We continue to be seen as a peaceful, advanced, socio-economically developed and successful region that shares close ties and maintains active

cooperation in the European Union and beyond. We should be proud of that.

I look forward to many more years of fruitful, prosperous and devoted cooperation with the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference! ■

GERMANY



Dr. Wolfgang Schäuble
President of the German Bundestag

Welcome message from the President of the Bundestag for a publication marking the 30th anniversary of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference

Cooperation within the Baltic Sea Region has a very long tradition. While the history of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference does not yet match that of the Hanseatic League, it can nonetheless be celebrated as a success after thirty years! This anniversary comes at a time of immense challenges. In order to manage the cur-

rent crises, multilateral cooperation is of particular significance, especially at parliamentary level.

The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference has a key role to play here. That is already evident in its particular structure, which sets it apart from all others: the BSPC brings together not only national but also regional parliaments from throughout the entire Baltic Sea Region. This decentralized set-up simplifies coordination and decision-making processes, allowing political activity to be adapted to local circumstances and requirements in an uncomplicated way.

The BSPC was founded in 1991 at the initiative of Finland. Initially, its thematic focal points were environmental matters and maritime security. Today, the BSPC's agenda has expanded to include economic and social policy issues; it also examines questions that extend far beyond the Baltic Sea Region, such as climate change and energy policy.

It is clear from both the BSPC annual conference and the individual working groups that participants call for practical improvements and monitor the implementation of the adopted measures. In addition, the BSPC initiates and supports democratic institutions in the Baltic

Sea Region and strengthens the dialogue between governments, parliaments and civil society.

A lot has been achieved over the past 30 years. Progress has been attained on various central topics, such as youth participation, or in the fields of sustainability, climate change and biodiversity. The following topics are especially important to the BSPC – and also to me – and show how much work we still have before us, despite all that we have achieved:

Commitment to sustainable tourism as a means to foster cross-border dialogue while simultaneously maintaining high environmental standards has been one of the cornerstones of the work of the BSPC in recent years. In this way, the BSPC actively drives forward cooperation on tourism in the Baltic Sea Region and has an influence on political initiatives such as the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the associated action plan.

The BSPC wants to inspire young people's interest in politics. Youth participation requires an exchange between generations, it encourages innovative and forward-looking ideas and strengthens young people's democratic skills. We can all benefit from the ideas and innovations of the younger generation. That is why young people are already actively involved in the work of the BSPC.

The Baltic Sea is very strongly affected by climate change. One particular working group within the BSPC looks at innovations and measures to combat global heating and to protect biodiversity, taking a comprehensive view of the challenges involved for science, technology and the economy.

In the Baltic Sea in particular, unexploded ordnance pose a threat to the environment and the health of coastal residents. That is why the BSPC

has focused on this topic and appealed to the respective governments to provide funding for the removal of these. At the initiative of the delegation from the German Bundestag, the topic was included in the conference resolutions in 2019 and 2020, with detailed recommendations. There is a multi-stage concept for the international approach to the retrieval of dumped munitions; the region is in a position to set global standards in this area.

The Baltic Sea is a unique and sensitive ecosystem that must be protected. On the whole, the resistance of the Baltic Sea ecosystem must be strengthened and protected against the results of climate change. Our aim should be to maintain the Baltic Sea as an intact habitat and economic region for future generations and to foster sustainable growth in the region. The BSPC plays a key role here.

In the long-term, the BSPC has the SDG and the year 2030 in its sights, focusing in particular on blue and green economic growth. It aims to support research and development, clean energy, environmental protection, comprehensive public healthcare and digitalisation that is open to all.

The German Bundestag will set focal points here when it takes on the presidency of the BSPC from June 2022 until August 2023.

I wish the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference much continued success and look forward to welcoming you all to Berlin for the BSPC annual conference in 2023! ■

DENMARK



Mr Henrik Dam Kristensen
Speaker of the Danish Parliament

Contribution to the Publication 30 Years Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC)

On behalf of the Danish Parliament, I would like to express my most sincere congratulations to the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) on its 30th anniversary.

We are deeply grateful that the BSPC for the last 30 years has enhanced cooperation and dialogue between parliamentarians from the Baltic Sea Region.

Denmark is one of the founding members of the BSPC and has always valued playing an active role in the political work of the forum.

Over the years, the Danish Parliament has had the honour of hosting two of the BSPC's annual conferences. The 4th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference took place in Rønne, on the island of Bornholm in 1995, and focused on maintaining security, stability, and human rights in the Baltic Sea Region.

In 2009, Denmark also hosted the 18th conference in Nyborg, on the island of Funen, where

parliamentarians from the region recognized the importance of environmental protection and fighting climate change.

From 2009 to 2011, the Danish Parliament held the chairmanship of the BSPC Working Group on Civil Security, which particularly focused on the prevention of human trafficking. The working group managed to reach consensus on a number of political recommendations on how to combat human trafficking and how to protect the victims of trafficking.

The Danish Parliament highly values international cooperation and actively contributes to a wide range of international parliamentary assemblies. In this regard, The BSPC is of high priority for the Danish Parliament, as it encourages political dialogue among parliamentarians from the countries around the Baltic Sea and increases the awareness of present and relevant challenges in the region.

The work of the BSPC plays an important role in securing a sustainable environmental as well as social and financial development in the Baltic Sea Region. The BSPC also serves as a unique parliamentary bridge between EU and non-EU member states around the Baltic Sea.

Denmark has significant interests in the Baltic Sea Region and has traditionally given cooperation among the Baltic States high priority.

The Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) was established at a meeting in Copenhagen in 1992 at the initiative of Denmark and Germany.

During the Danish chairmanship of the CBSS from 2019 to 2020, the Baltic Sea States adopted the Bornholm Declaration, which emphasizes the importance of fostering the commitment of the region's young people in decision-making and addressed climate-related challenges and cross-border organised crime. The Danish Par-

liament greatly appreciates the valuable cooperation and interplay between the CBSS and the BSPC within important areas regarding pollution in the Baltic Sea, safety at sea, and human trafficking, among other things.

The Danish Parliament looks forward to continuing the successful work within the BSPC in the future and to making additional progress towards a sustainable, stable, peaceful, prosperous, and democratic Baltic Sea Region. ■

FINLAND



Anu Vehviläinen

Speaker of the Parliament of Finland

Dear Reader,

It gives me pride and privilege to be able to write, that the impetus for parliamentary cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region can be traced back to my home country, Finland. One of my predecessors as Speaker of the Parliament of Finland, Mr Kalevi Sorsa was in fact among the very first to publicly call for increased parliamentary cooperation among the states around the Baltic Sea right after the fall of the Iron Curtain.

The very first Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference took place in our capital, where the participants called upon their home governments to establish an intergovernmental body in order to further strengthen their cooperation. This later became known as the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the CBSS.

The mission of the initial Parliamentary Conference was to strengthen the spirit of co-operation between the East and the West. Something that should not be forgotten even today. Later on co-operation started sprouting and resulted in wide plethora of areas of common interest for the countries around the Baltic Sea. Combating eutrophication, promoting maritime safety, strengthening green growth and energy efficiency, maritime policy and civil security, as well as fighting human trafficking and combating climate change are some sectors to be mentioned. Protecting the vulnerable environment of the Baltic Sea, which is one of the most polluted seas in the world, and its protection for future generations are still key priorities. Our cooperation has come far, and we are seeing positive results in the wellbeing of the sea and the continuation of dialogue even during troubled times.

Today, our cooperation is celebrating its 30th anniversary. It has evolved from an regional forum to a more widely networked, well respected international parliamentary actor, which cooperates closely with the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM), the EU, the Nordic Council, the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being, the Baltic Assembly, the Baltic Sea Cooperation Forum, the Baltic Development Forum and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, just to mention a few.

Today, in times of insecurity, it feels even more timely to reiterate the importance, the benefits, and the potential to be reaped from such peaceful and constructive dialogue. Our joint resolutions, our patient work of coming together on issues that matter to all of us can be seen not only in the environmental field; they are obvious proofs that it is cooperation – not confrontation – that pays off in the long run for all of us.

The Baltic Sea and the Baltic Sea region are important to us Finns in many ways. The Baltic Sea is our natural environment and a geopolitical lifeline for both our people and goods that are transported to other countries. Our reference point for cooperation as well as some of our most important markets are to be found around this sea of some 90 million inhabitants.

Through its committees and legislative work, the Finnish Parliament has an impact on the well-being of the Baltic Sea. Eutrophication due to excessive nutrient loads remains even today perhaps one of the most concerning environmental problems in the Baltic Sea. In addition, there are concentrations of other harmful substances coming from wastewater, traffic and from the air that are still too high. Not to mention the potential risks of oil and chemical accidents, that also affect the state of the Baltic Sea.

The shallowness of the Baltic Sea and the slow change of water make it particularly vulnerable. Littering also causes problems for the marine environment. The European Commission's plastics strategy contains many good initiatives to reduce littering.

International cooperation promotes the exchange of best practices, avoids duplication of work, and saves resources. Our parliament and MPs will continue to be active advocates and decision-makers in the Baltic Sea region in co-operation with others.

The speakers of the recent 13th Baltic Sea Region Forum organised by Centrum Balticum summarized the challenges we are all currently facing very well. In the speed at which our world is changing we need to engage citizens better in decision making processes on all levels in the society, as well as in the Baltic Sea Region cooperation in order to further mutual understanding and prevent future risks. We need to promote the goal for having an even safer and more secure, future oriented cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region.

I would like to take this opportunity and congratulate the Swedish BSPC Presidency for steering the ship during troubled times and also wish the BSPC many successful years ahead so that our sea will truly unite us in ecology, diversity and prosperity. ■

HAMBURG



Carola Veit

*President of the Hamburgische Bürgerschaft
(State Parliament of Hamburg)*

Happy 30. Anniversary, BSPC!

Looking back on 30 years of fruit- and successful parliamentary regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region against the background of different political beliefs, cultures, historical experiences and policy making we – the equally regional and national members of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary – can satisfyingly draw a conclusion regarding our biggest achievement so far: A thriving parliamentary assembly based on mutual respect, free exchange of ideas, trust building and the ability to compromise.

Instead of being fixed on what divides us, we are concentrated on what may unite us. This allows us to deal with very difficult political-societal issues to identify paths forward in accordance.

30 years ago, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference started jointly to strengthen democracy, peace, prosperity and the environment in every aspect in the Baltic Sea Region.

Undoubtedly, we have done a great deal to help the Baltic Sea recover environmentally and the region economically, and to promote prosperity

and welfare as well as to empower civil societies in the Baltic Sea Region. However, there are still severe environmental problems and there is still some way to go to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals to achieve a healthy Baltic Sea. Also, we are facing imbalances and inequalities in social and economic affairs that need to be addressed.

All this means we cannot stand still. We have to pull ahead of the most pressing questions of our time if we want to build on our previous success. In addition, we always have to pay attention to our mutual ideas of our work and common power.

Yet, the world and the challenges are changing and we are alerted to emerging tasks: In the first two decades, environmental, economical, socio-political, labour-, health and science related issues and energy politics had priority. In the last decade, we were dealing with digitalisation and its implications –also in regard to democracy and radicalisation –, culture, migration and integration issues and currently the urgent climate crisis.

The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference dealt already with certain issues in different policy areas in working groups to deepen the understanding by consulting experts, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders in the respective field.

In 2017, I had the honour to be the president of the 26. Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference hosting the annual conference in Hamburg for the first time. Topics were the Baltic Science Network, digitalisation and its impact on democracy and the development of societies. Back then, we launched the Working Group on Migration and Integration. We knew very well that we cannot solve all problems but we can overcome obstacles and pave the way to find solutions.

In addition, let me quote here from our final report explaining why the BSPC is such a successful parliamentary assembly: “The Working Group on Migration and Integration has truly shown that the BSPC is an arena for engaging discussions and cooperation, even in an area where opinions some-times differ. We all have different traditions when it comes to migration, as well as different priorities and conditions that need to be taken into account when formulating our individual approaches. By sharing best practices and our different perspectives on the topic, we have been able to learn from each other.”

Parallel to our working group meeting in Schwerin in 2019 a Youth Forum took place and tackled this issue in a refreshing way, willing to learn new approaches and showing empathy for the issue itself. They gave us at the annual conference in Oslo 2019 a professional and nevertheless vivid performance what migration and integration meant to them. We can only learn from this. Their refreshing, vital, demanding voices are important to be listened to by all of us and their actions are pioneering.

I am convinced, that we should establish a standing Baltic Sea Parliamentary Youth Forum – as a gift to ourselves and to the younger generations. They are our future and the future still lies ahead of them – including a safe and sustainable Baltic Sea Region where all of them are offered a future wherever they have their roots and however and with whom they want to live.

We bring up important and pressing topics to our governments making us a part of the political progress in the Baltic Sea Region. We approve our political recommendations and call for action of the annual Parliamentary Conferences unanimously. We submit the adopted resolution to our governments, the CBSS and the EU and we report to our parliaments.

As an example, Hamburg shares with its partners in STRING, the political network in the south-west of the Baltic Sea Region, the vision of developing the Fehmarn Belt region into a model region for sustainable “green growth” in which growth and jobs are stimulated, the attractiveness for companies and employees willing to base themselves here is increased and high standards for the quality of life of the population are ensured. Cross-border economic cooperation has been and is still a daily reality and should continue to be a focus, especially in (Northeast) Europe.

Let us cheer to the next 30 years of BSPC commitment to make the Baltic Sea Region a better place. ■

KALININGRAD



Marina E. Orgeeva
Chairwoman of the Kaliningrad Regional Duma

Dear participants of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference!

Dear Colleagues!

On behalf of the deputies of the Kaliningrad Regional Duma and on my own behalf I would like to congratulate all of you on Anniversary!

Despite sometimes differing assessments of the processes and events that are taking place in the world, we are all united in the basic understanding that we live in our common house called the Baltic. This understanding, in fact, is the key factor for the success of the international project called the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, which has been implemented almost for thirty years. It is precisely because we have been on the same page all these years that the relevance of the topics raised at the conference, the success and the results of the discussions, which took place in a warm atmosphere of understanding and partnership, are due.

Although our face-to-face contacts are currently extremely limited due to the coronavirus pandemic, I am convinced that in the near future we will definitely have the opportunity to meet again in a

non-digital format in order to jointly seek and find answers to epidemiological, environmental, climate and other challenges that equally affect the population of the Baltic countries. To find ideas together and develop solutions that have a positive impact on the quality and standard of living of people is a task that the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference is tackling very consistently and effectively.

I wish all of us further fruitful work for the benefit of our fellow citizens! I am sure that the 30th anniversary of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference will be held in a constructive manner, and the main provisions of its Resolution will certainly be implemented in practice.

Sincerely yours,
Chairwoman
of the Kaliningrad Regional Duma
Marina E. Orgeeva ■

ICELAND



Steingrímur J. Sigfússon
Speaker of the Icelandic Parliament



Silja Dögg Gunnarsdóttir
Chairman of the Icelandic Delegation to the Nordic Council



Kolbeinn Óttarsson Proppé
Member of the Icelandic Delegation to the Nordic Council and Representative to the BSPC

This went smoother than I thought. Here is text from Iceland already:

Why does an island state in the North Atlantic participate in a regional partnership of Baltic Sea states? Given Iceland's location in the middle of the ocean hundreds of kilometres from our nearest neighbours maybe one could argue that Iceland belongs to no community of nations. In fact our bonds to other countries and

regions are strong and of crucial importance. Given our relative geographical isolation our location can never be the deciding factor in how and with whom we choose to interact and cooperate.

We are bound by history, culture, language, values, trade, politics, migration and by other means to the Nordic Countries, to Northern and Western Europe and to Europe as a whole and to our partners and allies to the west, the United States and Canada, as well as to many other parts of the world.

In addition to the intangible connections we have to the countries and regions of the Baltic Sea there is in fact a physical connector of utmost importance. The ocean which surrounds us has historically been a resource, a lifeline and the route by which people, goods and new ideas have reached us from the rest of the world. So it has been since European seafarers, mainly from Norway, settled in Iceland more than a millennium ago.

The sea knows no borders and neither do the fish or other living organisms living in it, nor does the pollution of the oceans or the effects of

climate change. Given the importance of the ocean for Icelandic economy and society it is in the field of marine research and the sustainable use of marine resources that one of our main contributions to the BSPP can lie. The theme of the 15th Baltic Sea Parliamentary conference which was held in Reykjavik in 2006 was The Northern Dimension and the Ocean and Seas.

The founding year of the BSPP was also the year that the Baltic States' struggle for freedom bore fruit. Iceland was the first country in the world to officially recognize the independence of Lith-

uania, Latvia and Estonia, an act which Icelanders still take great pride in. Our participation in this process created a bond which has influenced Iceland's continued engagement with the region and the decision to join both the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference and the Council of the Baltic Sea States.

Building on this, in our work in the BSPP as well as in other interparliamentary cooperation we stress the importance of democracy, human rights, the rule of law and peaceful conflict resolution. ■

LATVIA



Ināra Mūrniece
Speaker of the Saeima Republic of Latvia

It is with great pleasure that I congratulate you on the 30th anniversary of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference.

These have been 30 years of great democratic change, new opportunities and growth in the Baltic Sea region. Today, the Baltic Sea Parlia-

mentary Conference offers us an inclusive platform for political dialogue, where we can get to know each other better and work together towards common goals in the region.

In January 1991, it was with great faith in the ideals of freedom and democracy that parliamentarians from the Baltic States participated in the first Parliamentary Conference on Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Area. A few days later, thousands of people gathered in Riga to defend their country's independence on barricades. Today, in the third decade of the 21st century, our democratic ideals remain unchanged. Cooperation in the region must be firmly rooted in shared democratic values. We, parliamentarians, must relentlessly stand up for human rights, for the freedom of free assembly and expression, for the right to vote in free and fair elections, for the rule of law, including strict respect for international law.

Thirty years in human life mark maturity. We can say the same about the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference. In recent years, we have accom-

plished a lot in reducing pollution of the Baltic Sea, contributing to the economic and social growth of the region and developing its competitiveness in Europe and globally. The people of the Baltic region want to live on the shores of a clean sea, in a safe and prosperous political, economic, social and cultural environment.

The Covid-19 pandemic crisis has been testing our societies. This crisis brings unprecedented challenges to both public health and our economies. It has been most difficult for those groups of society who are at greater risk of poverty and social vulnerability. It would be worthwhile for us to learn more about the best practices in overcoming the crisis. We are stronger when we work together. Therefore, effective international cooperation and coordination in decision-making is essential.

I would like to call on our youth to be more actively involved in a reflection process about the

future of the Baltic Sea Region. The Parliament of Latvia has a very positive experience in establishing a close dialogue with young people. The Saeima is an open parliament, which has been inviting young people to participate in the Youth Parliament for several consecutive years already. It provides young people with more opportunities to familiarise themselves with the foundations of parliamentary work and stimulates interest in active political participation in order to implement their ideas. We know that educated, competitive, and active people will determine the future of the Baltic Sea Region. We should put more efforts into promoting youth involvement in the work of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference.

The future of the Baltic Sea Region is in the hands of motivated and knowledgeable young people! ■

LITHUANIA



Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen
Speaker of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania

The 30-year-old Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) is not only an organisation with a long history, but also an initiator and developer of politically important activities. Over the years, considerable experience has been gained in initiating political action in the region, setting their direction, strengthening the democratic institutions of the BSPC participating countries, supporting dialogue between governments, parliaments and civil society, closely cooperating with national and regional parliaments, as well as initiating political activities to jointly address the challenges facing the Baltic Sea region by coordinating interests, identifying priorities for cooperation, strengthening our voice in international forums, and imparting to

these activities additional democratic legitimacy and parliamentary significance.

For 30 years, members of 11 national parliaments, 11 regional parliaments, and members of 5 parliamentary organisations of the Baltic Sea Region, united in the common aspiration to create a safe and secure welfare region for their citizens, have been implementing significant changes and common goals and tasks. They provide an opportunity to discuss often complex but critical issues related to common problems of our countries and economic, political or security challenges, and consistently carry out the main mission of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, namely, to raise awareness of and share views on the Baltic Sea Region's topical and politically relevant matters, to support and promote various initiatives and efforts to enhance sustainable environmental, social and economic development in the Baltic Sea Region as well as to increase the visibility of the region and its topicalities at a wider European level.

The Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania had the honour to preside over the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference in 2005 when we invited the participants to come to Vilnius, and also in 2020, when, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, regrettably, we had to organise the BSPC virtually. In fact, we all can see now that the world we live in has changed considerably in recent years. New challenges have altered our daily lives, habits and traditions. We can be pleased that the cooperation in the format of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference has proven to be effective and flexible in terms of the directions and forms we have chosen, and that we have been able to adapt perfectly to the new forms of work.

At the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, we will continue to work together as the countries concerned with the future of the international community and the world. We must never abandon the values that bind us. We need to be as united as possible, because only by acting as one will we be able to open up new opportunities and ensure security and development in our region. At the same time, we must overcome current and future challenges and solve the problems. Coordinating policies, establishing new partnerships, representing common interests, sharing experience and coordinating moves of parliaments and governments must be among the key tasks of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference.

I congratulate the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference on the 30th anniversary of its activities. I urge you to be proud of our accomplishments and I wish you a lot of further significant achievements in future. May I wish all of us mutual understanding, trust, good will, sincerity, great wisdom and a broad spectrum of approaches so that we can continue to work successfully for peace, stability, cooperation and win-win solutions. I urge each and every one of us to look for new ways, new solutions and new opportunities to strengthen the cooperation between the countries of the Baltic Sea Region. It is only by close cooperation that we can ensure a politically and economically strong and united region and provide practical results for the citizens of our countries. Let the agreement and cooperation of the countries of the Baltic Sea Region continue to be further based on accord, respect and unity. ■

MECKLENBURG-VORPOMMERN



Ms Birgit Hesse
***President of the State Parliament
 of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern***
BSPC Rapporteur on Sustainable Tourism



Ms Beate Schlupp
***First Vice President of the State Parliament
 of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern***
BSPC Observer at HELCOM

Looking Back at Thirty Years of Parliamentary Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region

The promotion of cross-border cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region is one of the state objectives of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern as outlined in Article 11 of its Constitution. The State Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern actively contributes to the attainment of this goal through its dedicated work within bilateral partnerships and multilateral cooperation fora, among which the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference without a doubt holds a very special place. The BSPC, which the State Parliament has been part of since its founding meeting in January 1991, offers our state a unique opportunity to exchange ideas, share experiences and shape the regional political agenda on an equal basis with other national and regional parliaments as well as parliamentary organisations from across the Baltic Sea area. Our strong commitment to this joint international forum is reflected in the regular practice of passing the respective conference resolutions and bringing them directly to the attention of

the State Government of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern – a practice that has been established as early as 1992. In addition, the Parliament annually requests a Government statement on the implementation of the passed resolutions by means of a joint motion.

The State Parliament highly values its long-standing engagement within the working bodies of the BSPC and the trust placed upon it by its international partners in connection with these special mandates. Thus, upon the initiative of the delegation of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, the tenth BSPC in 2001 had appointed the Committee on Maritime Safety (COMS), which later laid the foundation for the regular practice of establishing BSPC Working Groups on issues of mutual interest and concern. Since then, members of the State Parliament had had the honour to chair two further BSPC Working Groups – on Integrated Maritime Policy 2009–2011 and on Sustainable Tourism 2015–2017 – and continue to carry out their tasks as appointed BSPC (co)rapporteurs in these thematic areas. In ad-

dition, in 2002, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference attained observer status with HELCOM, which Ms Sylvia Bretschneider, former President of the State Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and former BSPC President, had continuously co-exercised with BSPC colleagues until her untimely passing in 2019. The Landtag currently holds three special observation and (co-)rapporteurs mandates, which it perceives as a great honour and commitment.

In the past three decades of ever intensifying and thematically broadening parliamentary co-operation, the State Parliament has twice had the pleasure and privilege of holding the annual meetings of the BSPC. Thus in 2001, the Landtag had the honour of hosting the tenth anniversary Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference in the city of Greifswald. At that time, the delegates exchanged their views on how the concept of civil society was transforming and shared their visions and interpretations of democracy and human rights. The main theme of this year's – thirtieth – anniversary BSPC, namely sustainable democracy, shows the significance of these recurring debates and underlines a simple yet often forgotten fact: democracy cannot be taken for granted and requires constant work to address persisting and newly emerging challenges. The focus of international attention has been gradually shifting from building and strengthening democratic institutions to defending democratic accomplishments and resisting the ongoing democratic decline – a task, for which we as parliamentarians have a special responsibility.

The second BSPC hosted by the State Parliament Mecklenburg-Vorpommern took place in Rostock-Warnemünde in 2015 and focussed on another issue, which is once again proving its extraordinary relevance and importance in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic: namely

public health. The 24th BSPC came up with a number of comprehensive demands and recommendations aimed at establishing the Baltic Sea region as a model region for innovation in social- and healthcare. Five years later, the 29th digital BSPC underlined the demand to step up efforts in order to make the Baltic Sea region a globally leading and prosperous metaregion in relation to health.

Youth engagement and participation in decision-making processes has traditionally stood high on the BSPC agenda. In this regard, the State Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern was delighted to host the joint meeting of the BSPC Working Group on Migration and Integration and the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Youth Forum in May 2019 in Schwerin. Representatives of the Youth Forum were then invited to present their wishes and recommendations at the 28th BSPC in Oslo. This successful tradition of promoting exchange between decision-makers and youth representatives will be continued at the 30th BSPC, where young people from across the Baltic Sea Region will have the opportunity to directly address the Conference on yet another burning issue, namely climate change and biodiversity.

It is with great pride, honour and dedication that the State Parliament looks back at the past thirty years of its BSPC membership. These three decades were characterised by change and continuity in the structural and thematic orientation of inter-parliamentary cooperation, yet our joint work has always stood on the solid fundament of mutual understanding, respect, and trust. These principles will guide our future work and guarantee that no matter what old or new challenges lie ahead, we can surely face them together for the sake of our Baltic Sea Region. ■

NORDIC COUNCIL



*Mr Bertel Haarder,
President of the Nordic Council*



*Ms Silja Dögg Gunnarsdóttir,
Deputy Member of the BSPC Standing
Committee and former President of the
Nordic Council*



*Mr Michael Tetzschner,
Member of the BSPC Standing Committee
and former President of the Nordic Council*

NORDIC COUNCIL

Contribution to the Publication 30 Years Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC)

On behalf of the Nordic Council we would like to express our warmest congratulations to the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference on this anniversary, celebrating 30 years of successful parliamentary cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region.

The Nordic Council is the official body for Nordic inter-parliamentary co-operation. Formed in 1952, it has 87 members from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.

The Nordic Council is among the founding members of the BSPC and has also contributed to the administration of the BSPC. The Nordic Council has always promoted sustainable development. From the very beginning of the BSPC, we have been linked through extremely close co-operation. A healthy and clean Baltic Sea is of the utmost importance to us all.

All member parliaments of the Nordic Council are also members of the BSPC. The Nordic Council contributes to a common Nordic profile within the BSPC, and the Nordic Council pays the contributions to the BSPC from the eight Nordic parliaments.

BSPC is one of the main priorities in the international work of the Nordic Council. The International Strategy of the Nordic Council 2018-

2022, unanimously adopted at the Nordic Council Session in Helsinki in 2017, highlights the importance of the BSPC as a platform that brings together parliamentarians and officials from all the countries around the Baltic Sea. The strategy also states that the Nordic Council will always strive to ensure that democracy, the rule of law, equality and human rights are high on the international agenda, and this is also of great significance to our work in the BSPC.

The Nordic Council finds many of its most important partners within the BSPC. The various personal connections which we have in the BSPC is essential to achieving consensual decisions and the fruitful exchange of best practice. Together we will continue to work for a healthy, clean, safe, democratic and peaceful Baltic Sea region. ■

NORWAY



Ms Tone Wilhelmsen Trøen
President of the Storting

On behalf of the Storting, it is a great pleasure for me to congratulate the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference on the 30th anniversary!

Even though the Kingdom of Norway is not bordering the Baltic Sea, we are very pleased to be a member of the BSPC as you are our closest neighbours, partners and friends. To have peace,

stability and mutual cooperation in the Baltic Sea area is of the outmost importance for Norway.

The Storting hosted the second BSPC in 1992 against a backdrop of global unrest. The Conference moved beyond some initial disagreements and agreed to make the Baltic Sea an area free of conflicts. It was also at this conference that the institutional foundations of our cooperation were finalised, and that the first BSPC-resolution was adopted – by consensus. The next time the Storting hosted the BSPC was in 2004. This time in Bergen, a city with close historical connections to the Baltic through the Hanseatic League. The title of the conference was “Sustainable development – shared concerns and responsibilities in the Baltic region.” A title that is still very much relevant today as we work to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Finally, in 2019 I had the pleasure myself to welcome the BSPC to the Storting in Oslo. This time clean oceans was a central theme for the conference. As littoral countries, this is a very important matter for all BSPC members and must be high on the BSPC agenda in the years to come! ■

POLAND



Ms Elżbieta Witek
Marshal of the Sejm



Mr Prof. Tomasz Grodzka
Marshal of the Senate

Dear Colleagues, On behalf of the Sejm and the Senate of the Republic of Poland, we extend our congratulations on the 30th anniversary of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference.

Today, 30 years after the outset of democratic transition and the re-establishment of independence and sovereignty for the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe, we can proudly look back on the transformation of the entire region that has been accomplished during this period.

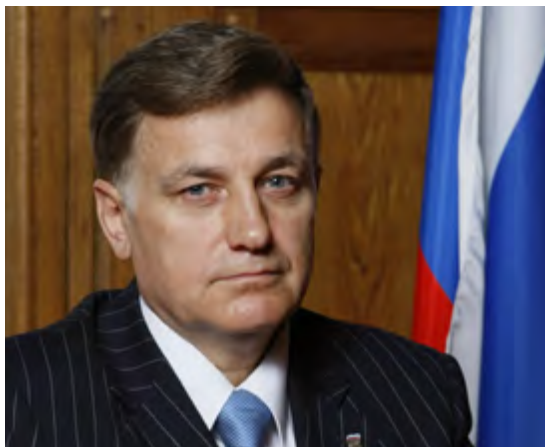
In this context, we acknowledge with satisfaction the development of Baltic parliamentary cooperation. In times of political tension and both socio-economic and environmental challenges, the role of parliamentary dialogue pursued consistently as part of the BSPC in a diverse political climate is all the more important, worth recognition and further pursuit. The achievements of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference attest to the need for dialogue between parliamentarians on matters of vital concern to the population of the countries and regions bordering the Baltic Sea. To Poland, despite the evolving geopolitical environment, the ultimate objective is still to build further understanding, mutual trust, and stability. It is important that the Member States of

the European Union and non-EU countries also participate in this Baltic dialogue. At the moment, our region is facing numerous difficult environmental, economic, and social challenges. Poland is unchangeably pursuing its efforts to ensure climate neutrality, increase security, prosperity and cohesion by, inter alia, promoting cultural cooperation, youth and academic exchanges.

The pandemic has become an event that has affected us all. We can plainly see now that the key to overcoming it and its impact on the society and the economy rests on the cooperation of all actors, including the supranational and local ones. Indeed, the solutions implemented by the different countries affect the immediate neighbourhood and influence each other. Poland is willing to strengthen the multidimensional cooperation in the Baltic Sea region, which can contribute to resuming the path of growth, and increase its prosperity and security. Furthermore, we support the inclusion of young generation representatives in discussions on the situation in the region.

We sincerely hope that you and the organisation as a whole will enjoy many fruitful meetings and success in finding solutions beneficial to the entire Baltic Sea region. ■

SANKT PETERSBURG



Mr. Vyacheslav Makarov
Chairman of the Legislative Assembly of
St. Petersburg

Greetings from the Chairman of the Legislative Assembly of St. Petersburg

Mr. Vyacheslav Makarov
on the occasion of the 30th anniversary
of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference

Over the centuries the Neva lands have been a territory where intensive interaction among various peoples, lively trade and civilizational exchange was carried out. St. Petersburg, founded more than three hundred years ago, has become a political and cultural center playing a connecting role between Northern, Western and Eastern Europe. St. Petersburg is not just the largest city in the Baltic Sea region and its eastern outpost, but also the western gates of Russia, open for co-operation and equal dialogue.

Twenty-seven years ago a new highest representative body - the Legislative Assembly - was created in St. Petersburg. In accordance with the Constitution of the Russian Federation the regional parliament has broad powers including implementation of international relations. One of the first steps of the St. Petersburg Legislative Assembly on the international scene was the

strengthening of professional relations with the representative bodies of the Baltic Sea region. The State Parliament of Hamburg became the first foreign partner of the St. Petersburg parliament, then bilateral agreements have been signed with the Tallinn City Council, the City Council of Gdansk, the Åland Parliament, the City Council of Turku, the Riga City Council. Thus, the Baltic Sea region has become a foreign policy priority of the Legislative Assembly of St. Petersburg.

The Baltic Sea region is rightly recognized as the most successful example of the regional cooperation in Europe. For many years the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region has been in force. The policy of the Northern Dimension and its Partnership plays an extremely important role in political dialogue and economic ties. The course towards the Baltic States focus has been designated as one of the international priorities of the Russian Federations in the Concept of its foreign policy.

In this regard the participation of the Legislative Assembly of St. Petersburg in such an authoritative international organization as the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference seems particularly meaningful both for St. Petersburg and for Russia as a whole. Understanding the challenges the region is facing which are common to its participants, finding solutions, in particular through the implementation of the main political instrument of the BSPC - its resolution, ongoing and engaged debate and deliberations with the colleagues, helps to «synchronize our watches» on the most pressing issues of the regional agenda. The BSPC as one of the best tools of the parliamentary diplomacy helps to draw the government's attention to the relevant citizen's requests and achieve the real actions. This reflects the practical significance of the conference which relates both to the politicians and the voters.

St. Petersburg twice in the years 2002 and 2012 had the honor to host the annual Conferences.

The discussions held within the residence of the Legislative Assembly – The Mariinsky Palace – and the results of these discussions were reflected in a series of the city regulations. I do hope that the Baltic Sea Parliamentary conference celebrating its 30th anniversary this year will keep proposing interesting ideas and initiatives to the region, aimed at the stable and sustainable de-

velopment of all the Baltic Sea countries, and the Baltic Sea will remain a zone of peace, good-neighborliness and mutually beneficial cooperation. On behalf of the members of the Legislative Assembly of St. Petersburg I congratulate the parliament-members of the BSPC on their significant anniversary. ■

SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN



Klaus Schlie
President of the State Parliament of Schleswig-Holstein

The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) celebrates its birthday: 30 years of success!

From 7 to 9 January 1991, representatives of the national and regional parliaments of all countries bordering the Baltic Sea met for the first time after the fall of the Iron Curtain at the invitation of the President of the Finnish Reichstag Kalevi Sorsa in Helsinki. The focus was on how to develop good neighbourhoods and sta-

ble democracies around the Baltic Sea, which had Separated the people between East and West after the Second World War for almost half, a century through closed borders.

The close dialogue, the trusting cooperation and the necessary willingness to compromise in all the countries bordering the Baltic Sea made it possible for us to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference in 2021. This is not a matter of course if we look back at the initial situation in which very different political cultures met. We therefore have a good reason to celebrate the success story of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference over a period of three decades.

For the Schleswig-Holstein Landtag, equal cooperation between national and regional parliaments in the Baltic Sea region was a decisive fact for the development of our country. Schleswig-Holstein lies between two seas, which are connected by the Kiel Canal as the most used artificial waterway in the world. Wide areas of land are below normal zero (NN), which is why coastal protection, climate change, groundwater protection, eutrophication, biodiversity and water management are of particular importance. This applies equally to shipping, the maritime

economy, an integrated maritime policy and maritime tourism. For Schleswig-Holstein, Baltic policy is more than just a dialogue among neighbours. Baltic Sea policy is the umbrella brand under which, among other things, all issues and decisions relating to the cross-border integrated maritime policy are bundled - a truly wide range. As a general objective, we are guided by the idea of protecting the Baltic Sea as an intact living and economic area and preserving it for future generations. For this reason, the Schleswig-Holstein Landtag advocates equal cooperation between national and regional parliaments and governments in the Baltic Sea region. 11 national parliaments, 11 regional parliaments and five parliamentary organisations from EU and non-EU countries around the Baltic Sea cooperate here. This is unique and distinguishes Baltic Sea policy from all other alliances of international cooperation.

The central task of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference is to initiate political activities, to accompany government action and to provide additional legitimacy. We give a parliamentary dimension to Baltic cooperation in dialogue with governments and civil society.

The resolutions adopted by the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference on the occasion of the annual assemblies are generally adopted unanimously in the Schleswig-Holstein Landtag. Furthermore, the state government is obliged to report in its European Report on the priorities of the implementation of the resolution in Schleswig-Holstein. This is now a well-established parliamentary procedure that has proven itself. In particular, the working groups of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference result in a wide range of political demands, which also lead to corresponding implementation steps in our country or allow best practice examples to be applied. Whether integration and migration, climate change and biodiversity, green growth and energy efficiency or integrated maritime policy-

it goes without saying that the results of these working groups of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference must be implemented at national, regional and local level. In order to ensure that the achievements of the BSPC working groups are not lost after their final report has been presented, the Standing Committee of the Baltic Sea Parliamentarians appoints rapporteurs on the respective issues that keep an eye on the further development and consolidate the parliamentary dimension of Baltic Sea policy in a professional manner.

The EU-Baltic Strategy as the first macro-regional strategy is due both to the outcome of BSPC resolutions and to the commitment of Members of the European Parliament. The focus is on strategic planning for the region and new interregional forms of cooperation. The EU-Baltic Strategy was adopted by the European Council in October 2009. It defines three overarching objectives: to protect the Baltic Sea, to better connect the region and to promote economic growth. Non-EU members such as Russia and Norway will be involved in the implementation of the strategy. The Strategy Action Plan provides a good orientation on the priorities and projects of the Baltic Sea cooperation. It covers 14 policy areas and was last time revised in February 2021. The current revision of the Action Plan takes into account emerging global challenges such as climate change, pandemics, demographic change and migration, and new strategic framework conditions for the EU and the Multiannual EU Financial Framework 2021-2027. This will ensure the integration of the Strategy into EU policies and funding programmes as well as a contribution to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The so-called flagship projects are essential for implementation. Thus, the EU-Baltic Strategy provides a reference framework for project-related cooperation in the Baltic Sea region in order to unlock cross-border, interregional and trans-

national potentials and to raise awareness of shared responsibility. The state government of Schleswig-Holstein, together with Poland, has so far assumed responsibility for the implementation of the cultural and creative industries policy area. This commitment is supported by the Schleswig-Holstein Landtag by the lead committees, the permanent parliamentary delegations for Baltic cooperation, the bilateral parliamentary partnership agreement with Kaliningrad, parliamentary cooperation in the southern Baltic region (Parliamentary Forum Southern Baltic Sea) and the parliamentary bodies for the protection and promotion of national 'minorities and the regional language Low German. Parliamentary action and government action in

the Baltic Sea region are closely interlocked in Schleswig-Holstein for the benefit of the citizens of our country.

The strategic orientation of the Baltic Sea cooperation and the integration into the EU's policy and economic development schemes are assessed by the Schleswig-Holstein Landtag as significant added value for the Baltic Sea region. I am a little proud and I am grateful that the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference has become a fixed international size. We can benefit from this together. We are giving important impetus to the development of the Baltic Sea macro-region, because we want the Baltic Sea region to remain worth living and to offer its people home. ■

SWEDEN



Dr Andreas Norlén
Speaker of the Riksdag

We are indeed living in interesting and challenging times. It is fair to say that the last 30 years have brought change to the Baltic Sea region. The fall of the Iron Curtain shaped a new geopo-

litical landscape, as did the process of EU integration, when several of the countries in the Baltic Sea region became members of the European Union. The last 30 years have brought economic growth, but also financial crises. Democracies have matured, but in more recent years we have also seen democratic backsliding and an undermining of the rule of law. Digitalization has provided us with new tools while, at the same time, presenting us with new challenges.

Despite the fact that our region has undergone major changes over the last three decades, much also remains the same. The first Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference held in 1991 was created as a forum for political dialogue between parliamentarians in the region, with the aim of strengthening cooperation and raising awareness of issues of common concern. Promoting cross-border regional cooperation and working together to achieve common goals continue to be as important today as they were thirty years ago.

The COVID-19-pandemic is the most recent proof of the ongoing need to preserve cooperation, as well as protect democracy. During the crisis, difficult, and sometimes rapid decisions have been taken in order to stop the spread of the virus. In times like this, it is vital to have well-functioning parliaments that can scrutinize and evaluate decisions and protect the freedoms and rights of the citizens. Parliament is at the heart of democracy – just as the Baltic Sea is at the heart of our region – and we need to continue to protect and preserve them both.

The pandemic has also underlined the importance of inter-parliamentary cooperation. The fact that the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference quickly adapted to the new circumstances and held its annual Conference online back in August last year should be regarded as a success.

The Swedish Parliament has had the privilege to host the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference twice. The ninth conference was held in Malmö in September 2000 on the topic: Baltic Sea Cooperation – Bridges to the Future. Malmö was chosen for the conference, because of the opening of the Øresund Bridge linking Malmö to Copenhagen. The bridge aimed to create local and regional cooperation and the theme of cross-border cooperation characterized the conference. In 2008, the seventeenth Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was held, this time in Visby on the island Gotland. The topic of the Conference was Energy Efficiency and Climate Change. Many of the participants expressed concern for the state of the Baltic Sea, an issue that is still high on the agenda with the current working group on climate change and biodiversity.

The current Swedish Presidency goes under the headline Sustainable Democracy, pointing to democratic institutions, strong cooperation and environmental and social sustainability as cornerstones of the organization. This theme is also connected to the Swedish Parliament's com-

memoration and celebration of 100 years of democracy. In September 2021, one century will have passed since women were allowed to vote for the first time in parliamentary elections in Sweden. Remembering this also makes it obvious that democratic values, participation, equality before the law and trust in the democratic system are nothing that we can take for granted. We must always strive to protect and develop our democratic systems.

Another key issue for the Swedish Presidency is youth participation, which is expressed through the organization of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Youth Forum in connection with this year's annual conference. Young people are our future. We ought to listen to their opinions and encourage their political engagement – intergenerational cooperation helps us to protect and develop our democracies.

Thirty years ago, our predecessors established this cooperation. The coming thirty years will bring new challenges and new opportunities. Therefore, I would like to congratulate the organization on 30 successful years, where the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference has proven to be an important platform for parliamentarians, not only to exchange views and ideas, but also to work for a better future together. ■

ÅLAND



Bert Häggblom
Speaker of the Parliament

It is now 30 years since the geopolitical landscape drastically changed with the dawn of the Soviet Union, the unshackled independence of former Eastern Bloc states and ensuing European integration. In this wholly new landscape, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference proved to be one important navigation tool, stretching from the East to the West, including all the countries and autonomous entities related to the Baltic Sea in one way or another. We have, over the years, also seen our form of cooperation emerges as a role model for the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.

For politicians from Åland, it is evident to see the benefits of Baltic Sea cooperation as we live in the middle of the Baltic Sea. It is easy for us to recognize every shift in water quality, we are truly dependent on the shipping industry, the maritime sector, the sea-based tourism and a lot of things that would be difficult without the Baltic Sea.

Looking back and even more looking into the future, it is obvious that the BSPC has meant a lot for our ambitions to improve the ecological status of our beloved Baltic Sea. But let us not



Wille Valve
Chairman of the BSPC Delegation

fool ourselves, more joint efforts are very much needed, particularly to reduce the outlet of nutrients into the Baltic Sea.

At times, the BSPC has also functioned as a “cushion” between the East and the West, when security policy tensions have been at rise there has always been at least one place where free discussions can be held – the BSPC.

Åland has arranged the yearly conference three times, 1999, 2010 and 2018. The conferences 1999 and 2010 were hosted by the Parliament during the chairmanship of the Nordic Council, but in 2018 Åland for the first time ever became chairman of the BSPC as well as the host for the 27th BSPC Conference.

The priority issues for BSPC during the Åland Islands’ presidency were: sustainable societies in the Baltic Sea region based on democratic values, human rights and equal opportunities for all, cooperation and integration and migration and integration for a secure and prosperous Baltic Sea area, finding solutions based on mutual information and best practices. With that message BSPC and Åland joined forces and spread

the word of democracy and autonomy to places and conferences like the annual conferences of the Nordic Council, Baltic Assembly, PABSEC as well as the meetings of the EU Northern Dimension in Brussels, Baltic Sea Day in St Petersburg, Interparliamentary Assembly of CIS and International Forum in Moscow.

Thanks to the BSPC we managed to spread the word of the need for cooperation and action in order to make the Baltic Sea and its surrounding countries prosperous and sustainable in every aspect of life. The Parliament of Åland emphasizes that it is the strength in ideas that matter more than the relative size of the country or region. BSPC is a think tank for democracy and important for every free society in the world.

During the Pandemic, the BSPC has proven to be one of the International Organizations able to function under exceptional circumstances. We believe we owe the Secretariat credit for this. From the Åland side, we welcome the recent development of having more plenary-style general debates. This format has been fruitful for raising new questions, such as the problems pertaining to ammunitions and war materials from the two World Wars.

Lastly, our organisation should not be underestimated when it comes to forming a joint understanding of common challenges. Let us therefore hope that our parliamentary cooperation will thrive for many years to come. ■

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THE BALTIC SEA PARLIAMMENTARY CONFERENCES 1991–2021

1st BSPC – 1991 Helsinki, Finland

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The 1st Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was held in Helsinki on 7–9 January 1991, on the initiative of the President of the Finnish Parliament, Mr Kalevi Sorsa. The title was the Parliamentary Conference on Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Area. Six successive Conferences had the English name of the “Parliamentary Conference on Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Area”. The 7th Parliamentary Conference replaced the word “Area” with “Region”. The Conference was renamed by the 8th Conference as the “Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference”.

The 1st Conference was attended by parliamentary delegations from Denmark, Estonia, Greenland, Hamburg, Iceland, Karelia, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Norway, Poland, Schleswig-Holstein, Sweden, the Åland Islands, the Faroe Islands, and the USSR. Observers were sent by the U. N. European

Economic Conference, EFTA, the Helsinki Committee, the Inter-parliamentary Union, the Nordic Council, and the Council of Europe.

Some of the subjects discussed at the Conference were proposed after earlier consultations (a preparatory meeting was held in Helsinki on 13 September 1990) but a number of other issues were discussed at the Conference forum. This gave the Conference the character of a working meeting that identified problems in the Baltic Sea Region needing swift action.

Talks held during the Conference concentrated on four subjects: economy, ecology, culture, and politics.

The economic discussions were dominated by issues relating to the transition of former communist bloc countries to market economies and the





economic reforms in the Soviet Union. It was emphasised that the economic development of the Baltic States and the Leningrad area was vital to the region's integration and that the West should develop an appropriate mechanism for assisting those areas. The speakers expressed

their hope for a rapid opening of the East to a capitalist economy, e. g. through free economic zones. However, they also emphasised that political stability free from armed conflicts is a pre-condition of development.



BSPC 1991 / Photo loan from Parliament of Finland / Photos: Vesa Lindqvist / Parliament of Finland

During the debate on environmental protection, the invited experts presented the situation regarding the contamination of the Baltic Sea waters. This made clear to the Conference participants that ecosystems are not divided by political boundaries and that any measures to improve the natural

conditions could be only be successful though joint action. Consequently, solution of ecological problems requires not only technological solutions but also political will and broad understanding. The participants called for urgent action to prevent contamination increasing in the Baltic region.

They proposed a number of concrete measures, such as a joint system of taxes and fines for environmental pollution or signing a convention on the reduction of harmful substances added to the fuel of ships using the Baltic Sea.

The Conference also pointed out the importance of developing cooperation in the fields of education and culture. The participants voiced their hope that this cooperation would enable Northern Europe to be a model for co-existence within and between regions and ethnic minorities. The Nordic Council reported a number of initiatives intended to intensify cooperation with the Baltic States: the Council opened its information centres in the capitals of those countries, and the Danish Culture Institute did the same in Riga. At the same time, Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia opened similar centres in Copenhagen.

The political debate was dominated by developments in the Baltic States. Their representatives strongly protested against measures taken by the USSR authorities, and other delegates, especially the representatives from Denmark, voiced similar opinions. The discussion also concerned the security issue in the region, the proposed Nordic nuclear weapon-free zone, and cooperation to combat international crime. There was also a proposal to establish a Baltic Sea Council that would compile plans for cooperation in the region, initially in the fields of culture and economy, and later in areas such as technology, power industry, and education. This proposal was soon implemented. In autumn 1991, Denmark

and Germany, considering economic and political stabilisation of the Baltic Sea Region, proposed an initiative to establish a new international organisation at governmental level. The Foreign Ministers of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Germany, Norway, Poland, Russia and Sweden, as well as representatives of the European Commission met in Copenhagen on 5–6 March 1992. They set up the Council of Baltic Sea States, an organisation to build up democratic institutions in the region and co-operate on matters of economy, culture, environmental protection, nuclear security, and social affairs. The Council is now one of the most important players for international cooperation in the region.

The Conference did not produce any formal conclusions or a resolution, but it should be considered as extremely important because of its ground-breaking character. The variety of regional development concepts presented at the Conference provided a basis for further debate and cooperation between the states and regions concerned.

It should be noted that a symbol identifying the Conference appeared as early as the Helsinki meeting in the form of a logo featuring a blue rectangular intersected by eight grey-and-black waving stripes. This logo is still in use today.

2nd BSPC – 1992 Oslo, Norway



Photo: shutterstock.com | joyfull

The 2nd Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was organised by the Presidium of the Nordic Council and the Parliament of the Kingdom of Norway. The Conference was held in Oslo on 22–24 April 1992.

The expectations of the Conference were high, especially from the Baltic States, which were in the process of building their independence and hoping for support at this forum for their aspirations. The breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991 created a totally new situation in the region and opened new perspectives. The delegates had to develop a plan for cooperation under the new circumstances and they had to find a place for the parliamentary dimension, particularly in the context of establishing the Council of the Baltic Sea States. These issues were also raised at the 1st and 3rd Plenary Sessions *Baltic Sea Identity – Visions of Regional*

Cooperation and Institutional Frameworks for Interparliamentary Cooperation in the Baltic Sea. The aim of the Conference was also to discuss issues relating to infrastructure and communications.

These topics were discussed at the 2nd Plenary Session.

As the Conference progressed, differences emerged as to the definition of the range of subjects for Baltic cooperation. Delegations from Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia represented an opinion that this cooperation should above all include security issues. In this context, they all demanded the withdrawal of Russian troops from their territories. The delegation of Russia's Supreme Council protested against the inclusion of these issues and blocked further debate on this subject. On the other hand, the Supreme

Council's delegates said the Parliamentary Conference was a good forum for discussing issues relating to ethnic minorities (the context of Russian minority in the Baltic States was more than apparent here).

The Conference eventually agreed that it should seek to turn the Baltic Sea into a conflict-free area and that this problem should be considered in the context of general parliamentary security.

Respect for the rights of ethnic minorities was a basic feature of democracy, and the Conference did not include any of these issues in its final Resolution.

The debate over the criteria for participation in the Baltic conference of parliamentarians took much of the Conference's time. The participants agreed that cooperation should involve not only countries but also autonomous areas, regions, and some cities. They also recognised the right of parliamentary multi-national organisations, such as the Nordic Council and the Baltic Assembly, to take part in the Conferences. They also concluded that the geographical criterion, i. e. the location in the immediate area around the Baltic Sea, is not an explicit condition for participation in the Conference. A geographic criterion was the reason why Iceland was not a member of the Council of Baltic Sea States from its very beginning.

However, following an intensive campaign, Iceland was accepted by the Council of Baltic Sea States at the 4th Ministerial Session of CBSS.

As regards positioning the Parliamentary Conference in relation to the Council of Baltic Sea States, the Norwegians made the most far-reaching proposals, suggesting that the Conference be held together with the CBSS meetings. The Conference would then fulfil functions similar to those of a parliament in relation to executive authorities. However, this idea was deemed pre-

mature though all participants agreed that mutual coordination of measures and problems discussed would benefit both organisations.

The conference adopted three documents: a Resolution (since then, each annual Conference has adopted its own Resolution), a Declaration on Communications, and a Mandate for Parliamentary Conferences for Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Area which was very important in terms of future activities of the Conference. The Resolution proposals included continuing the activities of the Conference as a basis for parliamentary cooperation in the region. It also defined areas that would form the focus of the Conference's work (environmental protection, economy, trade, education, development of democracy). It called on participating governments to recognise the Conference, to take into consideration its principles and recommendations as well as cooperate in solving the region's problems.

The Declaration on Communications addressed the issues discussed by the Conference of Baltic States' Ministers of Transport in Szczecin (17–18 March 1992) and appealed for programmes to develop infrastructure in the region and to develop telecommunications and mass media cooperation. It also asked the governments to present reports on the progress in these areas at the Conference forum.

The mandate worked out by the Conference in Oslo to provide a formal basis for the Conference activities included the following:

- The Conference is a body that initiates and coordinates cooperation on the forum of parliamentary debate;
- Decisions are adopted by consensus;
- Participants of the Conference are representatives of the parliaments taking part in the 1st Conference in Helsinki, as well as the parliaments of Bremen, the Federal Republic of

Germany, the Russian Federation (formerly the participant was USSR), the Nordic Council and the Baltic Assembly;

- The Conference can also invite other regional and international organisations as observers or special guests;
- A two-day Parliamentary Conference will be held every year and its host will be responsible for its preparation and running the secretariat (with the assistance of the Nordic Council, on request) and will cover the costs of administration and simultaneous translation, but the costs of participation (transport, accommodation) will be covered by the delegates themselves.

The document listed the Finnish, Scandinavian, Russian, Polish, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, German and English languages, but the number of languages was much smaller in practice;

- It is recommended that an inter-parliamentary working group be appointed, consisting of one representative from each of the following countries: the Nordic countries, the Baltic States, Germany, Poland, and the Russian Federation, which would help to organise the Conference.

The Parliamentary Conference in Oslo can be considered the final phase in setting up the institutional foundations of parliamentary cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region, in a period when the main principles of the organisation's activities were crystallising.

3rd BSPC – 1994 Warsaw, Poland



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The 3rd Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was held in Warsaw on 5–6 May 1994, at the Polish Sejm and Senate (Lower and Upper House) Buildings. The organisers had to cancel the meeting previously scheduled for 3–4 June 1993 because of a political crisis in Poland and dissolution of the Polish Parliament by President Lech Wałęsa. After consultation with the Nordic Council, the conference was postponed until the following year and the decision was approved by the Sejm Presidium on 21 January 1994.

The main objectives were to discuss the effectiveness of the Conference, intensification of parliamentary cooperation, and the impact of parliamentary activity on the transitional process in the Baltic region. The framework for this discussion was the issues discussed by three Plenary Sessions – *Euroregions in the Baltic Sea Area:*

Different Forms of Trans-border Cooperation, Cultural and Youth Exchange, Environmental Policy in the Baltic Sea Region, and Problems of Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region.

The Warsaw Conference continued to develop the decisions taken in Oslo, and made the final decision to set up the Inter-parliamentary Working Group with the membership as proposed the previous year. This body was known as the “Parliamentary Reference Group”, the “Working Group”, the “Inter-parliamentary Working Group” or the “Planning Group”. As was mentioned in the 5th Conference Resolution, although only adopted by the 8th Conference, the group was then usually called the “Standing Committee”. This group would be responsible for preparing the next Conference and representing the Conference in relation to other international organisations. The Group’s Secre-

tariat was to receive technical support from the Secretariat of the Nordic Council. From then on, the Group held regular meetings in between Conferences. The Secretariat met sporadically.

The above decisions were included in the Resolution, which also appealed for greater political cooperation in the region, support for local activities, participation in these activities by non-governmental organisations, promotion of programmes for cultural, educational, and scientific

exchange, as well as faster ratification of the Helsinki Convention on Maritime Environmental Protection in the Baltic Sea Area. The Resolution also referred to the activities of the Council of Baltic Sea States, thereby continuing the strategy of close cooperation between the Conference and the Council. It asked the Council, for example, to submit annual reports on its activities to the Conference Forum.

4th BSPPC – 1995 Rønne, Denmark



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The 4th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was held in Rønne, Bornholm, on 12–13 September 1995, by invitation from the Nordic Council and the Danish Parliament. For the first time, the Conference had a motto: *Towards a Baltic Sea Region*. This, however, did not become a rule right away: the 5th and 8th Conferences had no mottos.

The status of the Conference was certainly improved by Sweden and Finland officially joining the European Union on January 1, 1995. The Baltic Region then became one of the main areas in the European Union as shown by the attendance of and speech by the President of the European Parliament, Klaus Hänsch, Ph. D. Klaus Hänsch said that the new situation moved the EU's political centre of gravity northwards. He also spoke about the Union using Scandinavian experience in areas such as the labour market and consumer protection, and he announced the Union's active involve-

ment in solving the ecological problems in the Baltic area, rights of ethnic minorities, and nuclear security.

Four Plenary Sessions were held during the Conference: *Parliamentary Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Area*, *The Policy of the European Union in the Baltic Sea Area*, *Democracy, Human Rights and Minorities* and *New Concepts of Security and Stability in the Region*.

The speakers stressed the importance of cooperation with the European Union, with the associated opportunities and difficulties this entailed, and they emphasised the necessity of continuing regional integration and strengthening mutual bonds. Much time was devoted to questions of security in the region, especially in the context of Russia maintaining a large military potential in the Kaliningrad District. As part of the imple-

mentation of the decisions included in the Resolution of the 3rd Conference, Swedish Foreign Minister Ms Lena Hjelm-Wallen presented a report on the proceedings of the Council of Baltic Sea States. From then on, the report of the CBSS representative (usually the foreign minister of the country currently presiding over the Council) has become a permanent feature of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conferences.

Another report, “Democracy, the Human and Minority Rights”, was presented by Mr Ole Espersen, a CBSS Commissioner for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, and “Persons Belonging to Ethnic Minorities”. This body was established as part of CBSS structures in May 1994. Commissioner Espersen kept his mandate for two terms and was succeeded by Ms Helle Degn. Commissioner Espersen discussed the role of a parliamentary ombudsman and the opportunities such a role would present. He also discussed questions relating to the granting of citizenship and the continuation of the death penalty in some countries of the region. Deputy Włodzimierz Konarski of Poland presented the Polish proposal for confidence-enhancing measures as a programme of concrete actions to improve security in the region. His propos-

als included an intensification of the exchange of military information, military monitors, joint exercises and more working contacts.

The Conference Resolution spoke about support for cooperation at regional level and action by non-governmental organisations, and it encouraged the European Union to cooperate in controlling organised crime and to support regional pro-ecology projects. The Resolution devoted a lot of attention to the Standing Committee. Parliamentarians came out in favour of continuing the Committee’s activities. They suggested that delegations of the Conference should be permanent, and that they should be elected by the parliaments involved, and they also proposed establishing a permanent secretariat to support the work of the Committee. The CBSS was supposed to establish a similar structure, and its Secretariat, located in Stockholm, was inaugurated on 20 October 1998.

The Resolution reiterated the need for close cooperation with the CBSS. Its text clearly indicated that the Conference should evolve towards a permanent parliamentary assembly that applied democratic procedures to support the actions taken by the CBSS.

5th BSPC – 1996 Riga, Latvia



The 5th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was held in Riga on 10–11 September 1996, following an invitation from the Latvian Parliament. The Chairman of the Standing Committee that organised the Conference was Deputy Juris Sinka of Latvia.

The Riga Conference could be described as “typical” in terms of the subjects discussed. It emphasised environmental protection issues in the Baltic region and discussed the activities of the European Union and its Committee for the Baltic Sea Region. The Conference renewed its call for the implementation of the Helsinki Committee recommendations. Mr Joris Declerck, a representative of the European Committee, presented the main points of the document “The Initiative of the Baltic Sea Region”, adopted in Visby, on the Swedish island of Gotland, on 3 May 1996, which defined the

Union’s policy on the region. The main areas of this policy included strengthening and stabilising democracy, economic development resulting from trade liberalisation, building transport and power infrastructure, and support for sub-regional cooperation. The participants also discussed questions of trans-border cooperation in the region. The main areas of this cooperation were identified as economic cooperation to promote sustainable development, ecology and the sphere of contacts among citizens, and local initiatives. The speakers appealed for faster investment in the eastern part of the Baltic. Deputy Andrzej Wielowieyski described Poland’s experience in cooperating with Central European countries.

The Conference ended with a round-table debate that adopted the Resolution. The Resolution reflected all the subjects discussed by the

Conference. Its participants once again called for an intensification of contacts with the CBSS and close cooperation in fisheries, scientific research and other areas. The Resolution also drew attention to the necessity of solving the power problems of the region by implementing joint power management and utilisation of renewable sources at an industrial scale.

6th BSPPC – 1997 Gdansk, Poland



The 6th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was held in Gdansk on 15–16 September 1997. During the meeting of the Standing Committee in Copenhagen on 15 December 1995, Deputy Longin Pastusiak put forward an idea of organising a Parliamentary Conference in Gdansk in 1997. The timing would coincide with the celebrations marking the city's 1000th anniversary in the same year. At the next meeting of the Standing Committee (Riga, 29 March 1996) Deputy Pastusiak officially renewed the invitation. The invitation was accepted because of the anniversary, although only two years had passed since the 3rd Conference in Warsaw. Another candidate to host the Conference in 1997 was the Parliament of Schleswig-Holstein, which eventually agreed to postpone its candidacy by one year.

The motto of the Conference was *Mare Balticum – Mare Nostrum*. It focused on the broad region-

al cooperation to which it devoted its first and third Plenary Sessions, and also paid a lot of attention to cooperation in controlling organised crime in the Baltic Sea Region. The subject of the second Session was *Security and Confidence-building in the Region*. The session was held as a panel discussion moderated by Deputy Janusz Onyszkiewicz. The panellists tried to find answers to questions about the changing balance of power in the region resulting from the enlargement of NATO and the European Union, as well as the role of Russia and the Nordic Council in maintaining stability in the region. They also discussed the concept of neutrality of the Baltic Sea.

Apart from addressing such issues as cooperation with the Council of Baltic Sea States and control of organised crime, the Resolution also appealed to the governments for political sup-

port for regional and local projects and drew attention to the need to work for sustained economic and social development in the region. The Resolution called on the European Union to support the Baltic States in their applications for EU membership by providing expertise and by changing its internal structure to allow enlargement.

The Resolution confirmed the role of the Standing Committee as a link between the Conference and the CBSS and it appealed for the allocation of resources and personnel in the countries involved to support the continuation of the Conference proceedings. The document also mentioned the tragic floods in Poland and Germany and asked the governments of the region to provide assistance to relieve the consequences of the floods.

The Gdansk Conference focused on selected issues which allowed in-depth discussion of complex subjects and identification of existing problems. It succeeded in attracting outstanding speakers (e. g. CBSS Commissioner Ole Espersen, European Commission Member Ms Ursula Stenzel, and Poland's National Prosecutor Henryk Pracki). The atmosphere of the Conference was clearly influenced by the anniversary celebrations taking place in Gdansk at the same time.

7th BSPC – 1998 Lübeck, Schleswig-Holstein



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The 7th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was held in Lübeck on 7–8 September 1998, on the invitation of the Parliament of Schleswig-Holstein. This was the first Conference organised by a regional, not a national parliament. The Conference was originally planned for Kiel, as mentioned in the Gdansk Resolution. The Chairman of the Standing Committee during the conference preparation phase was President of the Schleswig-Holstein Parliament, Mr Heinz-Werner Arens.

The motto of this Conference was *A Follow-up of the Luxembourg Summit – Consequences for the Baltic Sea Region*. The meeting of the European Council in Luxembourg on 12–13 December 1997 had decided to start the process of enlarging the European Union eastwards by adding the Baltic countries of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Implementation of this process

would diametrically change the political and economic relations in the region. Consequently, this important decision was a subject of parliamentary debate.

The Conference had three Plenary Sessions. The 1st Session was *Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region*, the 2nd Session referred to the title of the Conference, and the 3rd Session dealt with *Links in the Baltic Sea Region – Solidarity and People-to-People Approach*. This means direct contact between people living in the near-border areas and local contacts at the lowest level.

The 7th Conference discussed a number of concepts and principles that offered hope for developing cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region and improving effectiveness. It should be noted that all the parliamentarians stressed the need to combine the processes of Baltic integration with

European integration. Consequently, they did not describe the regional cooperation as an alternative but rather a supplement on the road to integration with the European Union.

The Conference participants focused on developing practical cooperation and moving the Conference forward into a new phase. This switched the focus from strategic discussions to ways of promoting and supporting actual projects. Measures included coordination of the activities of various organisations operating around the Baltic Sea and focusing their efforts on concrete projects; also by developing the “people-to-people approach” initiative and following the principle of subsidiarity, which is one of the guidelines of the European Union.

A major issue raised by almost every speaker was cooperation with Russia. Inviting Russia (primarily Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg) to participate in joint projects and developing an overall policy for that country was described as a major task facing the Conference.

The Resolution adopted in Lübeck was the longest text ever accepted by the Parliamentary Conference. It included a number of requests to the European Commission, European Union, and governments, asking for facilitation of the EU enlargement process. The Resolution appealed to the candidate countries to quickly adopt the EU *acquis communautaire* and continue their political and economic reforms

The Resolution mentioned the organisations that, alongside the CBSS, were to become the main partners of the Conference: the Union of Baltic Towns, the Sub-regional Cooperation of Baltic Sea States, the Association of Baltic Chambers of Commerce, and the Conference of Europe’s Peripheral Sea Regions. The Resolution expressly recommended that the Standing Committee implement the Resolution’s provisions adopted by the Conference. The document also referred to the idea of the Northern Dimension, which became another major influence on the Conference’s activities. The concept of developing the “Northern Dimension” of the European Union was proposed by Finland in 1997. The idea was that countries and regions around the Baltic Sea including Russia (also Iceland and Britain) would play an important role in the political stabilisation and economic development of the growing European Union. On 25 November 1998, the European Commission adopted a report on the “Northern Dimension of the European Union’s Policy” after which the EU summit in Vienna, December 1998, decided to incorporate the Finnish initiative in the official programme of the Union.

8th BSPPC – 1999 Mariehamn, Åland Islands

The 8th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was held on 7–8 September 1999 in Mariehamn, Åland Islands, on the invitation of the regional Parliament. The Chairman of the Standing Committee that prepared the Conference in Mariehamn was the representative of the Nordic States (Denmark), Mr Svend Erik Hovmand. Up till that date, Denmark had represented the Nordic Council on the Standing Committee, Latvia had represented the Baltic States, and Germany had represented the Parliament of Schleswig-Holstein. Poland was also represented and Russia represented by the Kaliningrad District. The organiser of the next Conference is always invited to take part in the Committee work, unless already represented on the Committee.

The Committee also started work on drafting a new Mandate for the Parliamentary Conference and the Standing Committee for the next year by implementing the recommendations of the previous Resolutions. Although the Mandate was adopted by the Mariehamn Conference, it was slightly modified in relation to its original form. According to the Nordic countries, especially the social-democratic faction, the proposed version gave too much power to the Standing Committee and the Secretariat. Nevertheless, the general acceptance of the Mandate paved the way for further consolidation of Conference structures and opening up new areas for work.

The Conference also launched a number of initiatives to intensify cooperation with the Council

of Baltic Sea States. It started publishing information about its work in the Council's periodical "Baltinfo," visited the Council's Secretariat in Stockholm, and invited representatives of the Council to its sessions.

There were three Plenary Sessions during the Mariehamn Conference: "Social Dimension of the Enlargement of the EU as the Follow-up of the Lübeck Conference", "Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region, Including the Infrastructure", and "Sustainable Development and its Environmental Aspects".

The Conference in Mariehamn tried to refer to the previous Conference, so it devoted much time to the enlargement of the European Union. However, this time it focused on the new situation in the labour market and the social consequences of the process. Delegates of the

host country also pointed out the importance of environmental protection in the region (this issue being extremely important for the tourist-oriented Åland Islands).

The Resolution adopted included a number of principles regarding environmental protection, particularly the eradication of contamination sources in the region, and referred to the European Union's policy on the candidate countries.

9th BSPPC – 2000 Malmö, Sweden



Photo: shutterstock.com | Mikhail Markovskiy

The 9th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was held in Malmö on 4–5 September 2000, on the invitation of the Swedish Parliament. The motto of the Conference was *Baltic Sea Cooperation – Bridges towards the Future*. Malmö was chosen for the Conference because of the opening (in July 2000) of the bridge linking the city with Copenhagen across the Öresund strait. This transport route created new opportunities for local and regional cooperation and was also important an important link in the European transport system. As a way of illustrating the key importance of this international link, the Swedish hosts inaugurated the Conference with a dinner in Copenhagen, hosted by the Danish Parliament, after which the participants re-

turned to Malmö via the bridge. For the second time, Mr Svend Erik Hovmand was Chairman of the Standing Committee that prepared the Conference.

Topics discussed at this meeting of parliamentarians were more general. Participants discussed the further development of cooperation in the region and methods for bridging the economic gaps between the Baltic States, in order to establish an integrated economic area.

There were three Plenary Sessions: *Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region, Northern Dimension – Chances and Challenges for Regional and Sub-regional Cooperation*, and a recap session. The sec-

ond Session involved two working groups, discussing *TransEuropean Networks* and *Cross-border Cooperation*.

There was also a meeting of the Standing Committee with representatives of non-governmental organisations operating in the Baltic region. At this meeting, participants discussed how to intensify mutual cooperation (similar meetings were earlier held in Lübeck and Marihamn).

The unanimously adopted Resolution called on the parliaments and governments of countries and regions participating in the Conference to continue developing regional and sub-regional

cooperation and to assist cross-border cooperation, particularly by building new trans-European network links (e. g. roads, power, information highways, etc). The Resolution also supported the promotion of youth exchange, development of tourism, and cooperation in the fight against international crime.

The German representative (Parliament of Schleswig-Holstein) Mr Heinz-Werner Arens was elected Chairman of the Standing Committee after the Conference in Malmö. The following Conference was scheduled for 3–4 September 2001 in Greifswald, by invitation from the Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

10th BSPC – 2001 Greifswald, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern



The 10th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was held in Greifswald, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany, on 2–4 September 2001 at the invitation of the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Landtag. The theme of the Conference was *Civil Society – A Political Model between Vision and Reality*. Parliamentarians focused on two main issues – Civil Society and Safety of Ships and Sea Lanes.

The ten first years of BSPC had laid the foundation for the anniversary Greifswald Conference, where yet another step forward was taken in terms of establishing the BSPC as a significant parliamentary political player in the region. For the first time the Conference agreed not only on a general Resolution, but also on specific political messages addressed to the governments of CBSS Member States. The BSPC was seen as a second pillar of cooperation around the Baltic

Sea – a parliamentary sister organisation to the CBSS.

The Conference discussed how the concept of civil society was changing. Cooperation concerning youth issues, democratic and civil rights in all countries around the Baltic Sea was addressed. The interventions displayed the variety of opinions of the participants regarding the idea of democracy and human rights.

The Conference also discussed its own working methods. There were deliberations on the experiences of the first ten years of the BSPC, as well as its future tasks, structures and working methods. Constructive proposals were put forward in the discussion, which was also an occasion for self-critical stocktaking and for confronting some contentious issues.



Photos: V. Landtag Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

It was noted that in the early years of parliamentary cooperation, coming together and getting acquainted were top priorities. After ten years, the personal contacts, or even friendships, represent a value in itself since they embody the continuity of the work. One option suggested for the future development of the Conference was to appoint standing delegations from the participating parliaments to the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference for one electoral term. Another issue was how to combine national and regional parlia-

ments as equal participants at the Conferences. Some of the delegates thought that elected representatives from the regional level in other participating countries than only Germany and Russia should be invited, as there were other elected assemblies that could be compared to regional parliaments. Other delegates thought that there was no perfect balance, since the quotas of parliamentarians were not in proportion to the respective populations. During the Conference preparations, a number of concrete proposals about rep-

resentation in the Standing Committee had been tabled. As a result, the Standing Committee was enlarged by two additional members. Consensus was and has always been a guiding principle for the work of the BSPC.

The discussion on Kaliningrad that was started at the Malmö Conference in 2000 continued. Particular attention was paid to the problems of the Kaliningrad region, caused by its geographical situation. Many of the participants expressed a wish that the Kaliningrad region could be the subject of a pilot project for the long-term inter-regional cooperation between Russia and the EU.

The issue of energy cooperation has always been one of the top priorities on the BSPC agenda. The Baltic Electricity Ring was debated as an important strand of cooperation between people and countries around the Baltic Sea. Joint action to combat international crime was also a prominent issue at the Conference.

The complex issue of safety of shipping and sea transport lanes was widely discussed. Before the Conference, the host Parliament had organised a hearing on the topic and drafted a comprehensive report. The problem of preventing accidents and improving maritime safety was deemed complicated and difficult to overcome. Prevention of oil spills was another concern for the Conference. A difficult problem was eutrophication caused by excess discharge of phosphorus and nitrogen. A BSPC Working Group, the Committee on Maritime Safety (COMS) had drafted a couple of paragraphs on these issues as an input to the Conference Resolution.

This Conference also discussed the situation and participation of young people in decision-making, in NGOs, and in society in general. Representatives from different youth organisations attended the Conference and gave reports on the situation of young people and their organisations in the region. It was argued that involving young people is a basic premise for a healthy de-



mocracy, and that young people must be involved in the decision-making processes. This led to demands that youth issues should be a permanent topic at the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference. It was also agreed that a delegation representing young people should be provided a seat at the annual Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference. This has been the case since then.

When discussing civil society, it was observed that democracy in the Baltic Sea Region is based not only on freedom, but also on solidarity, and that civic participation should be encouraged and civil society strengthened. Equality between men and women was referred to as a guarantor for the development of sustainable, stable and prosperous societies. Issues regarding minorities were tackled. Delegates pointed out the utmost importance of majorities allowing forums for minorities, while unsolved minority problems can cause antagonisms. A strong and shared Baltic Sea identity was seen as a prerequisite for enhanced cooperation.

The Conference also received a political message from the delegates from Italy, Greece and Croatia, members of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII), a new parliamentary cooperative structure around part of the Mediterranean Sea. The AII was interested in establishing contacts with other parliamentary organisations, and for them the BSPC was an example of a well-functioning and solid sub-regional parliamentary structure.

The Conference celebrated the 10th anniversary of the BSPC by presenting the booklet “BSPC – 10 Years of Work”, the text of which is included in the first nine chapters of this publication, and by officially opening the BSPC homepage.

The Conference Resolution was in two parts. The first part was devoted to cooperation issues in the Baltic Sea Region, and the second part was dedicated to safety at sea, prepared by COMs



Photo: Vlandtag Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

11th BSPC – 2002 St. Petersburg, Russia



The 11th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was organised in St. Petersburg on 30 September-1 October 2002 under the theme *Baltic Sea and Ways of Integration and Cooperation*.

This was the first time the Conference had been organised in Russia. Consequently, a major issue was Russia's position in Europe, its role in the Northern Dimension, and cooperation with other countries both in and outside the region. Kaliningrad was again high on the agenda of the Conference. Many of the participants expressed that Kaliningrad is both a joint problem and a joint responsibility. The Russian parliamentarians wished to see Kaliningrad as a pilot project for the development of EU-Russia relations. But it was admitted that the exclave also had problems since it was, even in Russian terms, economically stagnant.

As to the upcoming enlargement of the EU, the Russian participants saw the visa issue as a test of Russia-EU relations. There were concerns that the visa regime would isolate Kaliningrad. Russian delegates also pointed out that EU-Russia relations were not only a question about Kaliningrad. They stated that Russia will participate actively in the Northern Dimension of the EU, both in economic and environmental spheres. According to them the main objective was to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines within Europe. A reduction of military resources in the region, as well as developing cooperation between armed forces, was also discussed.

At its launch five years earlier, Russia had high expectations of the Northern Dimension but now felt it was a disappointment. The message was that it should have embraced cooperation,

not only assistance, and dedicated funds should have been allocated. The Northern Dimension was, however, seen as an instrument for environmental cooperation that ought to be developed more actively.

An unusual input from the environmental angle was a report on the harbour porpoise, one of the smallest marine mammals, and its ability to survive in the Baltic Sea. This was an example of how enthusiastic projects can be transformed into political standpoints, as the porpoise issue was incorporated in the Conference Resolution.

The Conference also discussed the health issue which was, and still is, a vital concern to the Baltic Sea Region. Public health was seen as a part of soft security.

The Resolution was again divided in two parts. In the general policy part, the parliamentarians asked the CBSS and the governments in the region to undertake joint efforts to strengthen the Northern Dimension, and to contribute to a structured implementation and follow-up of the Northern Dimension Action Plan.

At the earlier meetings, the Conference had already expressed concern about the large number of players in the region. Consequently, the parliamentarians now expressed wishes that the cooperation within the Baltic Sea Region would be streamlined by an effective division of labour and responsibilities, that coordination would be improved between the numerous regional bodies and Working Groups and that duplication of projects would be minimised.

The second part of the Resolution included pleas to the governments and the CBSS regarding safety and security at sea. The Conference was unanimous in its view of IMO an important player in safeguarding the Baltic Sea. In this part of the Resolution, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference called upon the Council of Baltic

Sea States (CBSS) and the governments of the region to adopt a number of measures aimed at preventing and controlling shipping accidents, to continue to fundamentally improve the safety of ships and navigation, and to cooperate internationally in this field. The Conference also expressed its satisfaction that it had been granted observer status with HELCOM.

Eutrophication was mentioned as the most pressing problem in the Baltic Sea. Run-off from agriculture and air emissions from the use of fossil fuel was mentioned as the largest contributors to the nitrogen load. Urban and industrial sewage was the largest phosphorus source.

Some participants tabled a HELCOM report from 1992/93 which stated that after World War II, some 300,000 tons of German chemical munitions were dumped in the Baltic Sea, including about 65,000 tons of poisonous gases. This was not known for a long time, since military documents were classified. In the Resolution, one of the recommendations was that the governments of the HELCOM parties should carry out further investigations to localise and identify dumped chemical munitions.

The Resolution also noted that the COMS Working Group had proved to be a useful instrument for developing political opinion and recommendations, and for improving the dialogue with institutions in the Baltic Sea Region and beyond. It was stated that Working Groups should remain one of BSPC's instruments in future work.

The Conference amended the BSPC Rules of Procedure so that two more members, one from Russia and one from the Nordic countries, were added to the Standing Committee.

12th BSPC – 2003 Oulu, Finland



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The 12th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was organised in Oulu, Finland, 8–9 September 2003. The theme of the Conference was *The Baltic Sea Region – An Area of Knowledge*, which was an appropriate topic to be discussed in Oulu, being an IT and knowledge centre in the Gulf of Bothnia, Northern Finland. The upcoming enlargement of the European Union was mentioned in almost every intervention at the Conference. It was seen as creating a new challenge for the whole region and many of the participants assumed and hoped that it would further underline the importance of EU-Russia relations and of the Northern Dimension. One of the fundamental objectives of the Northern Dimension would be to enhance the welfare, health and security of citizens.

At the time of the Conference, the construction of the south-west wastewater treatment plant in

St. Petersburg had begun. This was the largest single investment during the decade to improve the condition of the Baltic Sea. The project was warmly welcomed by the parliamentarians. The establishment of the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership was another breakthrough.

It was stated that greater efficiency in agriculture should not lead to increased runoff of nutrients. Support from the European Union would be vital especially for environmental protection in Russia, and the Northern Dimension Partnership Fund in the EBRD should be a vital instrument in improving the state of the Baltic Sea.

The situation of the NGOs was once again discussed. A rapporteur was nominated to review legislation in the countries of the Baltic Sea Region and to monitor the situation of the NGOs.

The nature of parliamentary cooperation was once again tackled at the Conference. It was noted that the Standing Committee had two main tasks: firstly, to follow-up the final Resolution from the annual Conference and, secondly, to prepare the next Conference. The mandate of the Standing Committee had proved to be efficient but still restricted, so a broadening of the role of the Standing Committee needed to be considered.

The Standing Committee was already an acknowledged partner in the political landscape of the region. However, according to the statutes, the committee could not fully participate in discussions between the Conferences and take a position on a single issue if this issue had not been mentioned in the Resolutions. The EU enlargement and its impact on the region, as well as an increasing role of the CBSS concerning the development of the Northern Dimension, made it necessary to discuss the role of the BSPC and organisation of parliamentary cooperation in the future. The BSPC had been given the status of one of the regional organisations cooperating with the CBSS, thereby allowing it to monitor the work of the CBSS. The parliamentarians wished to strengthen and develop the structures and organisation of the cooperation towards a parliamentary dimension of the CBSS.

Since the Conference in Malmö in 2000, the topic of maritime safety had been a substantial component of the Resolutions of 2001 and 2002. The results of the BSPC Working Group COMS, which had been appointed in 2000, had also included the BSPC applying for observer status with HELCOM.

Developing Baltic Sea cooperation in the field of civil security was deemed vital. Organised cross-border crime, a growing drug problem, trafficking of women and children, smuggling of persons and goods, and brutal violence were emerging and worrying manifestations on the criminal scene.

The topic of maritime safety was again high on the agenda. The most important demands were the designation of the Baltic Sea as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA), and the introduction of compulsory use of pilots in particularly sensitive areas. The Conference noted that by undertaking joint actions with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), the Baltic Sea states have obtained recognition by the international community of the sensitivity of the Baltic Sea and its heavy sea traffic. All ships, regardless of flag, are now required to comply with more stringent discharge regulations when in the Baltic Sea area. In terms of the knowledge society in the Baltic Sea Region, the development of basic skills as a basis for future learning was considered important. The need for a comprehensive strategy to deal with key competencies was recognised, where basic education and lifelong learning will complement each other. The idea of founding a “Baltic Sea University” was once again raised. The Baltic Sea Region could emerge as a model knowledge society, where education, training and academic life are treated as key assets in sustainable development. This would require mutual recognition of diplomas and the creation of multi-institutional degrees in the Baltic Sea Region based on harmonised educational standards and programmes.

In analysing the labour market of the Baltic Sea Region, the Conference was concerned about the phenomenon of social marginalisation. The Conference called for the setting up of a database of job vacancies in the Baltic Sea Region in order to facilitate cross-border mobility of labour resources. Existing national databases of job vacancies should be developed in a way that would benefit the entire Baltic Sea Region labour market. The Conference also stressed that the Baltic Sea Region can only flourish if there are well-functioning labour market structures and a skilled labour force.

For the first time, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC) attended the Conference.

13th BSPC – 2004 Bergen, Norway



The 13th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was convened in Bergen, Norway, 29–31 August 2004. Under the theme *Sustainable Development – Shared Concerns and Responsibilities*

in the Baltic Sea Region, the Conference showed two superficially contradictory trends in the cooperation: continuity and change. Continuity because the parliamentarians had been



meeting since 1991, and the regional parliamentary cooperation was well established. Change because this was the first Conference after the enlargement of the European Union in May 2004. The fact that the Baltic Sea was now almost an EU-Russian internal water was expected to change the form and to some extent the content of Baltic Sea cooperation. The impact of EU enlargement was not scheduled for separate discussion but became a constant thread in the debates on the present and future of Baltic Sea cooperation. The following points were repeatedly mentioned as the most important aspects of the enlarged Union for regional cooperation in Northern Europe: the possibil-

ity of obtaining additional EU funds for projects in the Baltic Sea Region; the importance of the region as a common EU-Russian geographical area; the necessity of a parliamentary aspect to the Northern Dimension; and the need for future participation of the European Parliament in the BSPC.

The theme of change and continuity ran vertically through all the discussions at the Conference, but was most clearly visible in the discussion about the future of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference itself. There was a clear consensus among the participants that parliamentary cooperation would also be needed in the future, not





Photos: Bodo Bahr

only at European level, but also at a regional level. Everybody agreed that, under the new geopolitical circumstances, the BSPC should be strengthened and turned into a true parliamentary dimension of the CBSS, though there were diverging views as to how this should be accomplished. A Parliamentary Partnership for Northern Europe, as an overarching structure for the geographical area and a driving force in relations with the governments and the EU Commission, was proposed as food for thought and inspiration. The idea received support but did not lead to any major changes in the parliamentary structures in Northern Europe.

The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference has no mandate to make binding decisions. Its strength lies in bringing together different voices from the Baltic Sea States. Parliamentar-

ians from national and regional parliaments around the Baltic Sea attend the Conference, many of them also representing regional organisations like the Baltic Assembly or the Nordic Council. The Conference was again joined by representatives from the Adriatic Ionian Initiative and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, reminding the Baltic Sea parliamentarians again of the BSPC's function as a model for other regional initiatives in Europe.

Another, though less obvious, theme of the Conference was that of consensus and dissent. In the past years it had become quite clear where the common interests lay and the areas in which joint measures were possible. A number of successful initiatives were mentioned by the parliamentarians, such as measures for re-

Photos: Bodo Bahr



ducing the load of heavy metals discharged into the sea. But bones of contention had also become something of a tradition, hampering progress in areas such as maritime safety.

At the end of the Conference, the Resolution was passed unanimously despite the often heated discussions. The non-binding Resolutions of the Conference and the broad extent of the topics of Baltic Sea cooperation mean that most of the issues discussed are long-term projects.

During the past year, the Standing Committee, whose task is to represent the BSPC outside the annual meetings, had concentrated on concrete political activities, such as the Northern Dimension, EU enlargement and the European Neighbourhood policy. The Standing Committee had also made its first visit to Brussels in November 2003 to discuss these issues. The outcome was positive and the committee would therefore continue this practice.

The success of the joint application to the IMO to grant the Baltic Sea status of a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) was seen by many participants as the biggest success of Baltic Sea cooperation since the Conference in 2003. At the same time, the application was a joint effort by a majority of Baltic Sea States.



Russian parliamentarians, while supporting the idea in the final Resolution of the 12th BSPC in Oulu, remained strictly opposed to the idea.

For the final Resolution, a compromise had to be found, as the original text calling for the governments, the CBSS and HELCOM to “Continue to work for designation of the whole Baltic Sea as a PSSA” was not supported by all participants. Instead, the wording “Support effective associated protective measures with respect to relevant provisions in all the Resolutions of the BSPC on the protection of marine environment” was chosen. By formulating the text in this way, the 13th BSPC declared that it stood behind all its previous Resolutions, thereby including its support for the PSSA designation.

Before the Conference, a new function had been established by the Standing Committee, through nomination of a rapporteur for Kaliningrad. Kaliningrad had grown considerably, but around 180,000 inhabitants of the region still lived below the poverty level.

Since the previous Conference, another parliamentarian had been acting as BSPC Rapporteur on the legislation regarding NGOs in the Baltic Sea Region. A statement was made that effective cooperation between people’s elected

representatives and the civil society is vital for the democratic development of the region and the wellbeing of its citizens. According to the report, the status of the non-profit sector varied greatly between the Baltic Sea countries. Reforms were needed in all countries in order to facilitate the active participation of the civil society sector in all stages of governance: local, regional, national and international. Several political recommendations regarding the status of NGOs in the region were put forward.

The discussion tackled the issues of weapons dumped after World War II, and chemical and other toxic weapons stored by Baltic Sea countries.

Already at the 12th BSPC in Oulu in 2003, the need for reform and the desire to strengthen the BSPC had surfaced. This was brought to a head at the 13th BSPC, where the BSPC Standing Committee was given the task of making concrete proposals on the restructuring of the parliamentary Conference. It was asked to elaborate a proposal for how to develop the parliamentary dimension in cooperation with the CBSS and the participating parliaments and relevant inter-parliamentary bodies. The discussions showed clearly that the goal of strengthening the BSPC was shared by all members of the Standing Committee and the BSPC, although there were disagreements on how to achieve it.

14th BSPC – 2005 Vilnius, Lithuania



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The 14th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference convened in Vilnius, Lithuania 28–30 August 2005. The theme of the Conference was *Shared Concerns and Responsibilities for Stability and Democracy*, and it was aimed at strengthening the parliamentary dimension of the Baltic Sea Region and debating the shared concerns and responsibilities of the region. The broad participation, with over 90 parliamentarians and 150 observers and guests from all of the Baltic Sea

countries, testified to the importance of parliamentary cooperation in the region.

Even though more than a year had passed since the enlargement of the European Union in May 2004, the impact of this process remained a fundamental issue during the Conference. The accession of the three Baltic Countries and Poland to the EU had brokered new possibilities for regional cooperation in Northern Europe, especially



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with regard to the new options of additional EU funds for the various projects in the Baltic Sea Region. An important step was the participation of the European Parliament in the work of the BSPC Standing Committee. It was also obvious that the role of the CBSS had grown in view of the recent enlargement of the European Union.

A strong link to the previous BSPC in Bergen was apparent throughout the Conference. Not only was the important issue of the environmental situation in the Baltic Sea Region resumed, but the impact of EU enlargement and the reform of the BSPC were again crucial topics. In addition to enhanced cooperation with the CBSS, the main emphasis of future cooperation and development would be placed on the Northern Dimension framework and the European Neighbourhood Policy.

The future of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference and the reform of the Rules of Procedure for both the Standing Committee and the Conference itself were some of the main issues of the Conference. The theme ran vertically through all the discussions and accompanied the debate on the joint responsibility for stability and democracy in the Baltic Sea Region. One of the main issues in the Resolutions of 2003 and 2004 was the request for the Standing Committee to elaborate proposals on how to develop the parliamentary dimension in cooperation with the CBSS. The Standing Committee therefore had a task and mandate from the Conference to reform the BSPC Rules of Procedure. Through the participation of the parliamentarians and the strong cooperation with the CBSS, the new rules could contribute to the efficiency of the BSPC.



Photos: Bodo Bahr

Environmental challenges in the Baltic Sea Region were on the agenda. The urgency of this topic was raised by most speakers whilst several proposals and comments accompanied the debate.

The Conference noted that, in July 2005, the Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) of the IMO had agreed upon the designation of the Baltic Sea as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA). After the joint application to the IMO to grant the Baltic Sea PSSA status in 2003, this status is now regarded as a success for the entire Baltic Sea Region. When an area is approved as a particularly sensitive area, special

protection is granted due to its ecological significance, and specific measures can be used to restrict traffic in that area. The decision of the IMO was described as a great breakthrough for the Baltic Sea countries in their efforts to protect the Baltic Sea.

The role and status of civil society and especially NGOs was regarded as both a resource and a precondition for stability and democracy in the Baltic Sea Region. One of the main challenges concerns the differences between the countries in the Baltic Sea Region in respect to NGO legislation, which creates barriers to enhanced regional cooperation. As the role of civil society



Photos: Bodo Bahr

and NGOs in the Baltic Sea Region was again a main issue, the Conference was attended by representatives of many civil society organisations in the region.

After an intensive two-day debate, the Resolution and the new draft Rules of Procedure for the BSPC were adopted unanimously by all participating parliamentarians at the end of the Conference. The biggest change concerned the Standing Committee, whose mandate was expanded to work between the Conferences, and

whose membership now included representatives of the European Parliament and the German Bundestag. Moreover, an Extended Standing Committee acts as Drafting Committee during the Conference in order to strengthen continuity in the parliamentary work. The amended Rules and Conference Resolution, including the establishment of a BSPC Working Group on Eutrophication, were adopted unanimously.

15th BSPC – 2006 Reykjavik, Iceland



The 15th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference in Reykjavik, Iceland, 3–5 September 2006 addressed the *Northern Dimension and the Oceans and Seas*. The Conference was held in the northernmost European capital in the Baltic Sea Region. The Conference took up issues such as the environment, with particular focus

on the Baltic Sea, the Northern Dimension and how to further strengthen cooperation in the Region. The City of Reykjavik does not lie by the Baltic Sea, but this does not prevent the Icelandic Parliament participating in the work of the BSPC.





There was a lively debate throughout the two-day event in Reykjavik, with a wide variety of views and opinions exchanged. The Extended Standing Committee, convening for the first time as Drafting Committee in accordance with the new Rules of Procedure, had prepared the Conference Resolution.

The themes of the Conference were central to the discussions in the region, but this time special emphasis was put on how to make the work of the Conference more effective, i. e. how to move from the discussion of issues to their implementation. The underlying concept of the Rules of Procedure for the Standing Committee, as the permanent political body of the Conference, was to make the presence of parliamentary cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region felt beyond the annual Conference.

According to the new Rules adopted in Vilnius in 2005, representatives from both Bundestag in Germany and the European Parliament now had assumed their tasks in the Standing Committee. This was seen as a positive development that would hopefully secure continuity in the representation of the national and regional parliaments. Another important issue had been to implement the Conference Resolution and also to work according to the guidelines in a written Work Programme that had been developed during the previous year.

A lively discussion broke out regarding Belarus and its possible status as an observer at the Conference. Some of the participants thought that isolating an entire country, its parliament and people from any dialogue with its surrounding region was unacceptable. Others felt that due to the political events taking place in Belarus, granting it either



membership or even observer status at the BSPC could be difficult for some of the members of the BSPC. The Integrated Maritime Policy of the EU was felt to offer promising opportunities for the Region, not least in financial terms. Greater cooperation and coordination in order to boost the health of the Baltic Sea could lead to prosperity and higher standards of living for the people in the Region. Several speakers expressed wishes that the BSPC could participate actively in the deliberations on the policy.

The Nord Stream gas pipeline prompted lively discussion. The Russian participants assured that Russia would ensure that no harmful substances would leak out. Others expressed doubts about the project, emphasising the number of mines as well as chemical weapons on the seabed, and so the project was raising issues relating to ecology, economy, energy supply and security. The outcome of the discussion was put in the Resolution as a plea to the governments and HELCOM to ensure that the feasibility assessment for the pipeline is carried out with a high level of transparency and in compliance with all applicable international obligations.

The BSPC Working Group on Eutrophication had been active since the previous Conference. It had drafted input to the Conference Resolution regarding the serious situation of abnormal algae blooming and lifeless areas of the Baltic Sea sea-



bed, with a plea to the governments to strongly support all kinds of measures and instruments designed to reduce pollutant and nutrient inputs from agriculture, municipalities, shipping and industries. It expressed its full support to the HELCOM activities in the whole catchment area in order to fight eutrophication in the Baltic Sea.

16th BSPC – 2007 Berlin, Germany



The 16th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was held on 27–28 August 2007 in Berlin under the theme *Social Welfare, Maritime Policy, Energy Security*. It was the first time that the Bundestag had organised the Conference. It had been held in Germany twice before, having

been hosted by the Schleswig-Holstein Landtag in 1998 and the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Landtag in 2001. The Conference was the biggest so far in BSPC's history, gathering over 200 participants. The Conference acknowledged the collaborative spirit of the





BSPC and confirmed its pivotal political role in the Baltic Sea Region.

The BSPC was seen as a part of a larger formula of parliamentary cooperation in the Northern Europe. Establishing a recurrent Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum was a move supported by many participants as an important function for monitoring governmental actions in Northern Europe.

The BSPC's observer status in HELCOM was mentioned as one of the main avenues for parliamentarians to drive and follow up the discussion on maritime policies. It was also said that more focus should be put on labour market cooperation, the development of civil society, and the fight against organised crime. Coordination with other organisations was also deemed important. The Conference felt satisfaction that there now was clear evidence of progress on the





Photo: Stefan Müller

issues mentioned in earlier BSPC Resolutions. This showed that the opinions of parliamentarians and their work were being taken seriously.

The Nord Stream pipeline was discussed although it was not explicitly included in the programme. The Conference continued to discuss the munitions on the sea bed in the Baltic Sea. It was suggested that one possible, specific and realistic project could be the lifting of these munitions. Then they would not pose any danger to the gas pipeline which will be an important line for supplying energy to Europe. Many parliamentarians however expressed their concerns about the pipeline, which was described by some as an unfriendly action towards some of the countries. There were also concerns about the possible grave ecological consequences. The risk of terrorist attacks against the pipeline was another of the arguments against building it.

Those in favour of the pipeline, in their turn, reminded the Conference that the environmental risks of the Nord Stream pipeline had already been evaluated during the planning phase. The process has been open and transparent and anyone could submit comments on the pipeline. As for the risk of terrorist attacks, it was argued that the same threat applies to land-based pipelines.

Concerning labour market issues, the Conference discussed social welfare and living conditions from a regional as well as a global perspective. Economic, ecological and social concerns are becoming increasingly intertwined in the globalised world. Stable and peaceful labour market conditions are central prerequisites for a prosperous and fair social and economic development. It is important to take measures to promote a closer exchange of information and initiatives between social partners.

Photos: Stefan Müller



One question was how to regulate flexicurity, which is supposed to combine social security with openness to flexibility and mobility. The term “decent work” was applied, underlining that work as such is central for human dignity and individual self-appreciation. New issues facing societies, such as immigrant workers, cross-border workers, young and elderly people and work-related diseases were listed by the participants. Major priorities in the years to come will include providing decent jobs, skills enhancement and life-long learning. The problem is not so much a deficit of work but rather adapting the labour market to new conditions. After the thorough discussion on labour market issues the Conference decided to ask the Standing Committee to set up a Working Group on Labour Market Issues.

The BSPC Working Group on Eutrophication presented its final report, highlighting some of the suggestions of the Group, such as more environmentally sound agricultural production re-



gimes; more efficient cleaning of municipal and industrial waste water and waste water from ships; a ban on phosphorus in washing detergents; international initiatives to reduce the airborne nitrogen load in the Baltic Sea; and ongoing regional cooperation. The report and its recommendations were unanimously adopted by the Conference.

17th BSPPC – 2008 Visby, Sweden



The 17th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was held in Visby, Sweden, 31 August-2 September 2008 under the theme *Energy Efficiency and Climate Change*.

Right from the start, speakers and participants expressed concern about the situation in the Baltic Sea – one of the most polluted seas in the world, with excessive concentrations of phosphorus and nitrogen due to discharge from sources







Photos: Johannes Jansson, NMR

such as agriculture, traffic and flush toilets. The biggest problem is eutrophication, causing algae blooming and fish death. The Conference expressed support for HELCOM's Baltic Sea Action Plan, which was adopted by the environment ministers of the countries around the Baltic Sea in November 2007.

One way to tackle the discharge of pollutants into the Baltic Sea would be for everyone around the Baltic Sea to use phosphate-free detergents for washing-up and washing. Discharge of phosphorus would then be reduced by 20%. Agriculture must also reduce its discharges, and this applies to all countries surrounding the Baltic Sea.

Climate change, with temperature increases, warmer periods, and flooding, was seen as one of the worst crises that politicians have to tackle.

The costs of avoiding these are quite reasonable, but Europe cannot act alone in coming to terms with climate change. On energy supply and energy security issues, it was said that the most crucial security issue is climate change. Other factors significant to security are nuclear power, energy provision, energy efficiency and investments in energy savings. Development of new, ecologically-pure energy technologies was desirable. The discussion cannot just concern how to produce more energy – reduction in energy consumption and energy efficiency must also be discussed. Concern was also expressed over the dependence on nuclear power in the future.

The relationship between CBSS and BSPC was addressed, and it was noted with satisfaction that BSPC is one of the most active players in the Baltic Sea Region and is a strategic partner to CBSS.



Photos: Johannes Jansson, NMR

In one of the discussions, it was emphasised that Belarus must be included when considering the environment in the Baltic Sea. It was also emphasised that chemical weapons stored on the bed of the Baltic Sea might pose an important ecological problem that should be solved at European level, especially in view of the fact that the routing of the Nord Stream pipeline must bypass the areas containing old munitions. All countries around the Baltic Sea must ratify the Espoo Convention on transnational environmental impact assessments before the project is given the green light to continue.

The BSPC Working Group on Energy and Climate Change presented a progress report, noting that NGOs can comprise an important element in future work.

Certain dissatisfaction was expressed in the debate on maritime safety. Much remains to be done in the area of safety, particularly in view of the large increase in the number of maritime transport movements. The situation has actually been improved as a result of the reinstatement of the requirement for double hulls, but the biggest danger is small vessels that ignore the regulations and vessels that sail under flags of convenience.

The BSPC Working Group on Labour Market and Social Welfare also presented a progress report, noting that cross-border movement can be hampered by different labour market regulations, different insurance terms and conditions, different views on trade union movements, different tax systems, etc.

The Conference ended with an extensive debate arising out of a statement about inclusion of an addendum. It was recognised the

Rules of Procedure of the BSPC state unequivocally that decisions during the plenary session are to be taken in consensus between the participating delegations. Following the debate, the Conference decided to adopt the Resolution by consensus.

18th BSPC – 2009 Nyborg, Denmark



Photo: Bodo Bahr

The 18th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was held in Nyborg, on the Island of Fyn, Denmark, 30 August-1 September 2009. The theme of the Conference was *New Security Challenges*, and it attracted some 200 government representatives, parliamentarians and experts from the Baltic Sea Region. Once again, the Confer-

ence continued to bolster the spirit of optimism in the region.

The Conference reaffirmed the mutually beneficial contacts and exchange between BSPC and CBSS, and recognised the important role of the CBSS in initiating and coordinating actions to



Photo: Johannes Jansson, NMR, Publication Unit



Photo: Johannes Jansson, NMR, Publication Unit



meet the challenges of the Baltic Sea Region. It also reiterated its support for the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) as a central tool for restoring a good environmental status of the Baltic Sea by 2021, and underlining that governments must fulfil their pledges to

implement the plan according to its agreed timetable. The participants were careful to stress that the present economic downturn must not be taken as an excuse for lowering environmental goals, cutting environmental resources or delaying timetables for environmental plans and projects.

On Maritime Safety and Security in the Region, the Conference called for active cooperation within the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) on the development of relevant measures to reduce the environmental impact of shipping in the Baltic Sea, and concrete projects to implement maritime spatial planning in the Baltic Sea Region. The Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, the NorthEast Atlantic and the Irish Sea, should be designated as Sulphur Emission Control Areas (SECA), as is already the case with the English Channel, the North Sea and the Baltic Sea. Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) and Ship Reporting Systems (SRS) should be harmonised and integrated to enhance safe navigation of ships.

The Conference agreed that cooperation and coordination on civil security issues in general should be strengthened in order to foster a joint

and comprehensive understanding of the risks and threats facing the Baltic Sea Region. The fight against trafficking in human beings must be stepped up, with emphasis on preventive measures, protection and support for victims and people at risk.

Participants debated energy issues, noting the need to develop a coherent energy strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, in order to enhance security of energy supply, increase the use of renewable energy, and strengthen interconnection between countries.

The BSPC Working Group on Labour Market and Social Affairs presented its final report, calling for more systematic and coordinated efforts to identify barriers to the development of cross-border labour markets and mobility. It also wanted a more regular dialogue between associations representing cross-border workers, trade unions, employers and political decision-makers.

Again, the Rules of Procedure were discussed and amended. It was agreed that the Enlarged Standing Committee should convene twice a year and the Standing Committee convene twice a year, with the Standing Committee open for observers from national and regional parliaments that are not represented in the Standing Committee. The Conference also decided to establish a Working Group on Integrated Maritime Policy, especially infrastructure and logistics, and a Working Group on Civil Security, especially trafficking in human beings. It was noted with satisfaction that all member parliaments had paid their contribution to the joint budget.

The Drafting Committee for the Conference Resolution (comprising the Enlarged Standing Committee) had three extensive discussions during the Conference, after which the Resolution could be adopted by consensus.

19th BSPC – 2010 Mariehamn, Åland Islands



Photo: shutterstock.com | Jussi Kakela

The 19th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was convened in Mariehamn, Åland Islands, on 29–31 August 2010. The theme of the 19th BSPC was *Cooperation on Environment and Security*, and it drew some 200 politicians, experts and officials. Once again the Conference could observe that, although a lot has been done to help the Baltic Sea to recover, the environmental problems in the region are still major and ongoing.

The Conference reaffirmed the close, constructive and mutually beneficial exchange between BSPC and CBSS, as shown, for example, in the interaction between BSPC and CBSS, and the working groups on trafficking in human beings and on integrated maritime policy. The usefulness of this interaction as a joint resource in following and addressing the economic, social and political challenges of the Baltic Sea Region was also recognised. Contacts with other organisa-

tions and players in the region have also been strengthened.

The participants underlined the important role parliamentarians can play for a sustainable development of the Baltic Sea Region, by raising awareness, building opinion, driving issues, exerting political pressure on governments, and initiating and adopting legislation.

The Conference urged governments of the region to fulfil their already agreed obligations under the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan, in particular by producing concrete National Implementation Plans by early 2011 at the latest. It also reiterated its call for a coordination of the EU Baltic Sea Strategy with the Northern Dimension policy, as well as with the Council of the Baltic Sea States (a core regional cooperation body) and other Northern and Baltic cooperation bodies.



The participants expressed a wish for an ecosystem approach to be applied to the environmental work in the Baltic Sea Region, including investments, research and development to protect ecosystem services and to integrate their values in economic systems, national budgets and strategies for sustainable development. Stronger measures were seen as necessary to protect and restore biodiversity.

The BSPC Working Group on Integrated Maritime Policy presented a progress report, noting the need to investigate the extent to which the reduction of sulphur content in ship fuels may



Photos: Johannes Jansson, NMIR, Publication Unit

result in competitive disadvantages to the economy in the Baltic Sea Region and requested proposals on how to avoid such disadvantages while maintaining high environmental standards in the maritime sector. It also called for obligatory use of pilots in risk areas of the Baltic Sea and a strict implementation of the ban on transporting oil in single-hulled tankers. Moreover, the joint regional as well as national preparedness and capacity to tackle major spills of oil and hazardous substances must be strengthened.

The debate on Peace and Security in the Baltic Sea Region emphasised the need to foster a joint perception of the threats against public safety and civil security in the region, covering natural as well as technological and other man-made threats and risks. In this context, it was also considered important to exchange available information on the location and state of sea-dumped chemical weapons, to inform the public about

the threats caused by these weapons, and to prepare guidelines for how to handle accidents involving sea-dumped chemical weapons.

The BSPC Working Group on Trafficking in Human Beings delivered an interim report. The report called for sufficient, permanent and dedicated funds and resources to, for instance, public authorities, specialised agencies, NGOs, and inter-governmental organisations and projects, such as the CBSS Task Force on Trafficking in Human Beings, in order to maintain persistent and sustained initiatives against trafficking in human beings. It also underlined that a victim-centred approach must be adopted in all measures and actions against trafficking in human beings, and that development of the operational capacity to fight trafficking in the field must be promoted.

The joint financing of the BSPC by all participating parliaments was seen as a positive step towards a more organised and independent Baltic Sea Parliamentary cooperation. BSPC has matured into a stable structure, with permanent bodies and recurrent working groups, and with

established external cooperation and information channels. The new BSPC homepage (www.bspc.net) functions as a platform for dissemination of information and documentation. The Conference decided to ask the Standing Committee to evaluate the functioning of the BSPC Joint Financing Mechanism, including consideration of a possible revision of the procedures for financing the Secretariat function.

In the spring of 2010, the BSPC Enlarged Standing Committee had formulated a draft version of the Conference Resolution. The Conference Drafting Committee (comprising the Enlarged Standing Committee) considered the draft in two sittings, and then the Conference adopted the Resolution by consensus. The Resolution is the main political tool for directing joint political standpoints and recommendations to the governments of the Baltic Sea Region, the CBSS and the European Union.



Photo: Johannes Jansson, NMR, Publication Unit

20th BSPC – 2011 Helsinki, Finland



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The motto of the 20th anniversary of the BSPC was *Green Growth for a Bluer Baltic Sea* and it was hosted by the Parliament of Finland in Helsinki, 28-30 August 2011. The conference took place at the same venue as the very first BSPC in 1991. Therefore, the atmosphere of those days was brought up in the opening address of Mr Eero Heinaluoma, the Speaker of the Finnish Parliament.

At the beginning of the first session, on *Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region*, Ms Christina Gestrin, Chairman of the BSPC, also pointed out that there had been quite remarkable developments in the Region since the first conference in Helsinki. The biggest change, in her opinion, was that the Baltic Sea Region had evolved into an area of peace, democracy and cooperation. However, despite the remarkable progress in political coopera-

tion, and an increase in joint initiatives in research and development, many serious environmental, social and economic problems in the Baltic Sea region still remain. Ms Gestrin stated that joint endeavours towards security and safety, business cooperation, infrastructure, and research and development, strengthening the common labour market, and mobility in the region, create a huge potential for collective growth and prosperity in the BSR. Cooperation in the BSR has been recently strengthened by the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, which has been proposed by a group of European MPs and developed by the European Commission with the aim of facilitating cooperation in the Region. The Conference speakers underlined that it was crucial that all relevant stakeholders, whether they are in the EU or not, must be able to participate in the work on an equal footing. The Northern Dimension was mentioned



Photos: Johannes Jansson, NIMR, Publication Unit

as an important platform for cooperation between EU and non-EU countries, and as such should be supported by suitable funding.

A historical review of the 20-year work of the BSPC was provided by Mr Jürgen Schöning, former Minister, who was engaged in the BSPC work for 20 years as the former Director of the State Parliament of Schleswig-Holstein. He described the institutional development of the BSPC. Adopting an annual work programme, launching working groups and appointing rapporteurs with clearly defined missions, represented, especially in the second decade, milestones towards greater efficiency and political impact. He also underlined the well-functioning model of parliamentary cooperation involving both national and regional parliaments. Mr Schöning concluded that parliamentary cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region has been a success story.

Mr Pertti Joenniemi from the Danish Institute for International Studies admitted that the Baltic Sea Region could stand out as forerunner and a model in a Europe where macro-regions have a prominent place. For this purpose, more goal-oriented and pro-active policies are required in the future.

Representing the CBSS, State Minister Werner Hoyer described the CBSS priorities – a partnership aimed at modernising the Southern part of the Baltic Sea Region, and a coherent framework for cooperation and regional identity. He pointed out that parliamentary cooperation made a good contribution to the work of the CBSS and that cooperation between the CBSS and the BSPC was better than ever.

The main subjects discussed by the Conference in the second session, on *Maritime Issues*, were those linked to the results of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan, the findings of the BSPC Working Group on the Integrated Maritime Policy and developments in the field of maritime safety. The main achievements of the BSAP listed by Ms Ga-



Photo: Johannes Jansson, NMR, Publication Unit

biella Lindholm, Chair of HELCOM, were more-stringent regulations for sewage discharges from passenger ships, the disposal of sewage by cruise ships through a voluntary call by cities, working together with private companies on port-reception facilities, a flagship project in the framework of the EUSBSR, the IMO agreement to the global designation of the Baltic Sea Region as a Special Area for sewage discharge, and the designation of the Baltic Sea as a Nitrogen Dioxide Emission Control Area. Mr Jochen Schulte, Chair of the BSPC WG on Integrated Maritime Policy, expressed concerns regarding possible disadvantages for the Baltic Sea shipping business as



a consequence of the designation of the Baltic Sea as a Sulphur Emission Control Area. According to the Working Group, uniform environmental standards should be introduced also to other sea areas, such as the Mediterranean Sea. Interesting figures were presented by Ms Anita Mäkinen, Director of the Finnish Maritime Agency. She mentioned that at any given moment more than 200 vessels were passing through the Baltic Sea and 150 million tonnes of oil per year is transported through the Baltic Sea. There were 105 shipping accidents in 2009, 10 of which involved oil spills. The conclusion of that part of the session was that in order to minimise the risk of shipping accidents, greater control over ports is needed and both the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan are good platforms for collaboration towards enhancing maritime security and safety.

The *Civil Safety and Security* session began with the report of the BSPC Working Group on Civil Security and Trafficking. The most urgent request expressed by Mr Andre Oktay Dahl, Vice Chair of the Group, was that the BSPC should establish networks of parliamentarians to support the fight against human trafficking. Other recommendations featured in the report call for better coordi-

nation between the relevant authorities and institutions to detect money flows related to human trafficking, passing laws and regulations allowing for the confiscation of profit from human trafficking, and imposing severe fines. Other speakers stressed that a victim-based approach should be adopted in all measures and actions and the victims of human trafficking must not be treated as illegal immigrants, as the fear to be deported or charged discourages them from cooperation with the authorities. Among other issues mentioned with regard to the trafficking topic were modern slavery organised by globalised crime groups and the problems caused by large-scale emigration from the Baltic countries. The discussion led to the general conclusion that parliamentarians have a key role in their capacity as opinion-makers and legislators. Therefore, it is extremely important that they keep exerting political pressure on governments to take action against human trafficking.

The next part of the session was devoted to public health and social Well-being. It was underlined that those two terms were strongly interlinked. What's more, health is seen as a profound economic issue. As European countries spend 8.3% of their GDP on health, any actions taken towards

improving people's health are highly valuable. The Northern Dimension on Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS), as presented by Mr Maciejowski, the head of the NDPHS's Secretariat, supports initiatives strengthening policies and actions in the field of the prevention of non-communicable diseases which have a profound effect on the health of societies, and at the same time they are largely preventable, as they are caused by lifestyle. Mr Maciejowski concluded that more coordination and pooling of resources could be an answer to the common challenges BSR countries are facing with regard to public health and social Well-being. Alcohol consumption patterns are risk factors relating to diseases and injuries. The European Action Plan presented in the next part of the session consisted of a thorough diagnosis of the situation and the objectives of the Plan. The participants agreed that in order to reduce the incidence of alcohol-related diseases and injuries, more work had to be done – awareness of the burdens caused by the harmful use of alcohol should be raised, the commitment of governments should be increased, knowledge of effective measures to reduce and prevent alcohol-related harm should be spread, and coordination between stakeholders should be improved. The BSPC, appreciating the importance of cooperation in the field of health and social Well-being, granted BSPC Observer status to the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being.

The fourth session, on *Green Growth and Energy Efficiency*, included presentations on a variety of issues from different perspectives. Mr Berndt Voss, a Schleswig-Holstein MP, described green growth and energy efficiency in Schleswig-Holstein. Mr Hans Brask presented the activities of the Baltic Development Forum, and Ms Lene Grønning, a Business Ambassador from Bornholm, talked about the Bright Green Island project.

The panel debate on *the Future of Parliamentary Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Area* was moderated by Ambassador Sven Hirdman, who pointed out three areas in which he thought that cooperation must be strengthened in the future, including security, cross-border infrastructure projects and maritime safety. In addition to those fields, stable social development, results-oriented cooperation and education and culture, were highlighted by the panellists as a backbone for prospective social and economic development of the BSR. The debate was overshadowed by the terrorist attacks in Norway on 22 July and in that context the fundamental responsibility of parliamentarians to stand for democracy, openness and humanity was strongly emphasised. In the final part of the session Ms Holznagel, a Mecklenburg-Vorpommern MP, pointed out that a debate over the Resolution of the BSPC should be a daily practice of each BSPC parliament, in the same way as it happens in the Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

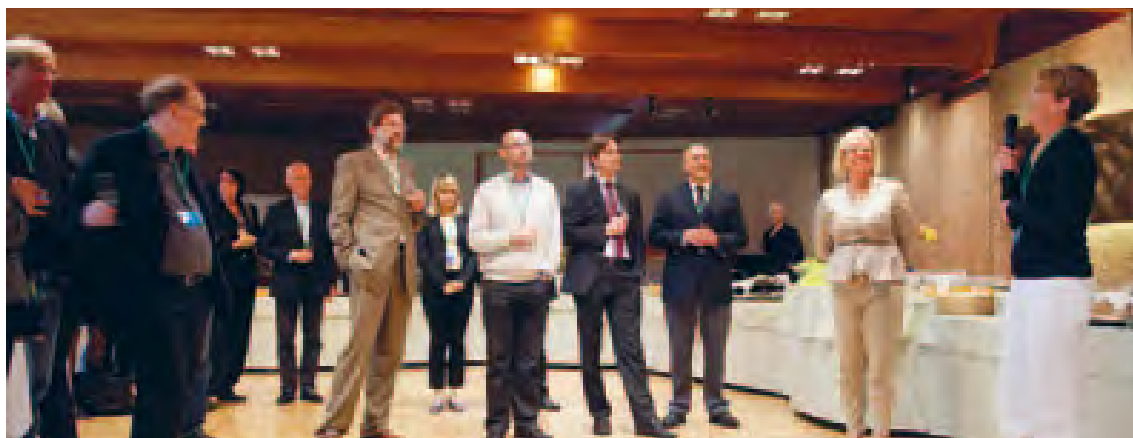


Photo: Johannes Jansson, NMR, Publication Unit

21st BSPC – 2012 St. Petersburg, Russia



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The 21st BSPC Conference was organised in St. Petersburg, Russia, 26-28 August 2012. For the second time, the BSCP took place in St. Petersburg and thus it opened the third decade of parliamentary cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region. Participants had the opportunity to visit St. Petersburg's municipal wastewater-treatment plant. The project was frequently cited throughout the conference as a best-practice example of BSR cooperation. Another group of participants visited the new passenger port terminal Marine Façade.

The various aspects of institutional cooperation in the BSR were among the main issues discussed during the first session, on *Regional Partnership and Cross-Border Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region*. The speakers stressed the synergy between the priorities of the CBSS under the

Russian Presidency and the Presidency of Russia in the BSPC. Ambassador Mr Gerhard Almer, Head of the Task Force for the German Presidency of the CBSS 2011–2012, referred to the extraordinary meeting held in Schloss Plön in February 2012 when the CBSS foreign ministers agreed on an ambitious programme focused on cooperation in the tourism sector, expansion of public-private partnerships, youth exchanges, academic and research cooperation, and sustainable development. Ms Valentina Pivnenko, Chairperson of the BSPC, underlined the necessity of modernisation and of developing innovation in the region, and admitted that it should be the main focus of cooperation at the political and administrative levels. Other issues of utmost importance mentioned by Ms Pivnenko were public-private interaction and the maritime strategy for curbing eutrophication, maritime



Photos: Jan Wiedberg, Bodo Bahr

safety for better protection of the environment, energy efficiency, nuclear safety, and the infrastructure for increasing the competitiveness of the BSR in Europe and globally. She stressed the fact that such a wide range of goals could be only achieved in close cooperation with sub-regional and non-governmental organisations, such as HELCOM, BSSSC, and the Northern Dimension. During this session two strategies

were presented: Mr Jacek Protasiewicz, Vice-President of the European Parliament, outlined the objectives of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, and Mr Stanislav Lazowsky introduced the participants to the North-West Russia Socio-Economic Development Strategy. Both strategies aimed at improving the ecosystem of the Baltic Sea, connectivity in the region, and the Well-being of the people living there.



Photos: Jan Wdberg, Bodo Bahr



“Therefore, both shall contribute to the development of the Baltic Sea area” – that was the final conclusion of the session which was included in the text of the BSPC Resolution. Mr Jakko Hettonnen, Manager of the NDEP assured, that the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP) can also contribute to the reduction of eutrophication by supporting wastewater plants and energy-efficiency projects in Russia and Belarus.

The second session, on *Environmental Health and Energy Cooperation*, began with a discussion on the status of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BASAP), presented by Ms Helle Pilsgaard, Chair of HELCOM. As regards the progress of

BASAP implementation, it has been acknowledged that the municipal wastewater-treatment sector and the industrial sector have been successful in reducing their discharges of nutrients and hazardous substances into the Baltic Sea. It was also noted that the Baltic Sea States have been successful in finalising a number of activities involving shipping and biodiversity. However, a lot of work still has to be done to limit eutrophication, which was the biggest environmental problem. The EU regulations regarding the use of phosphates and phosphorus compounds in the households were adopted in 2017, but the last part of that hazardous substance originating from agriculture requires special attention. Ms Christina Gestrin, BSPC HEL-



COM observer, underlined the strong involvement of the BSPC in this issue. In its Report from 2007, the BSPC Working Group on Eutrophication came up with far-reaching proposals, e. g. asking the IMO to prohibit nitrogen-oxide discharges in the Baltic Sea. Ms Gestrin concluded her speech by a call for the implementation of existing plans instead of making new recommendations.

Many interesting examples of environmental co-operation were presented during that session. What is more, the hosts' representative gave an assurance that the subsequent Ministerial Meeting in 2013 would provide reports from each country on the implementation of national commitments to the Baltic Sea Action Plan.

Sustainability must be the guiding principle for the increasingly developing tourism in the Baltic Sea Region – that was an important conclusion of the subsequent part of the conference. It was claimed that, together with innovation, going ecological can be a long-term driver for economic growth through investments in renewable energy and more-efficient use of energy and material. To support this direction, raised awareness of green growth and efficiency, better allocation of financial resources to such initiatives, the setting of nationally binding targets, and the promotion of public-private procurement, are required. That could be the remedy for the unsatisfactory, as expressed by the participants, state of Baltic Sea's environmental condition.

Special emphasis in the third session, on *A safe and Healthy Baltic Sea*, was put on cooperation between Baltic organisations such as BSPC, CBSS, BSSSC in the area of an Integrated Maritime Policy and, in particular, on the EU Sulphur directive on the environmental impact of the use of LNG and the promotion of maritime transports. Different organisations working with the integrated maritime policy have been able to work together and managed to take an integrat-

ed approach on such issues as reduction of emission, maritime transport maritime safety and a common maritime spatial planning, informed Mr Jochen Schulte, BSPC Rapporteur on Integrated Maritime Policy.

During the fourth and last session, on *Health, Social Welfare and Economic Development*, much concern was expressed with regard to the aging society, the growing burden of non-communicable diseases, antimicrobial resistance, diabetics and other socially significant diseases. The speakers representatives of NDPHS, the State University of Karelia and the Baltic Assembly – agreed that cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region, both political and project-related, had to be continued and developed in order to bring about new solutions to prevent the premature mortality from preventable causes. The next section, dealing with labour-market issues, was dominated by the discussion on high youth unemployment. It was said that, as Europe was facing demographic aging, the full potential of a small working population should be tapped into. To improve the situation, the process of transition between school and the labour market must be facilitated by, for example, dual education or well-functioning apprenticeship and internship systems. An extensive report on youth unemployment and measures to combat the problem in the Baltic Sea Region was recommended by Mr Franz Thönnies, BSPC Rapporteur on Labour-Market Issues.

During debates and in comments, the subject issue of democracy, freedom of expression and limits for freedom of expression was mentioned many times. The participants agreed that with the respect for cultural differences, building an open, equal and democratic society is the process that needs politicians' constant attention.

22nd BSPC – 2013 Pärnu, Estonia



The 22nd BSPC conference was hosted by Riigikogu, the Parliament of Estonia in Pärnu, 25-27 August 2013, and was honoured by the opening address by H. E. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, President of the Republic of Estonia. Mr Ilves pointed out that the Baltic Sea Region had an enormous potential to become a leader in innovation, but the implementation of innovative projects aimed at fostering economic growth requires political will, supportive decisions, relevant educational policies, adequate funding and appropriate legislative framework. H. E. Ene Ergma, President of the Estonian Parliament, in her speech emphasised that any development is based on innovation, sustainability and competitiveness, which are on the agenda of the 22nd BSPC. A responsible approach to innovation, however, means the intensive and diligent development

of new ideas followed by quick expeditious implementation.

The title of the 22nd conference was *Innovation for a Competitive Economy in the Region* with a key theme of the debate being innovation in the BSR from parliamentary perspective.

The first session, on *Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region*, was opened by Ms Laine Randjärv, Chairperson of the BSPC, who welcomed the fact that after a tough period of recession, the Baltic Sea Region countries have come back to being ranked as leaders in terms of economic growth indicators. New industrial structures, new market conditions and social transformations can be developed only when an innovative approach is introduced and applied in those areas. Therefore, Ms Randjärv proposed establishing the new BSPC



Working Group on Innovation in Social and Health Care. Once again the close connection between BSCP and CBSS was confirmed by Ms Satu Mattila, Chairperson of the CBSS Committee of Senior Officials. The main theme for the Finnish presidency in 2013-2014 was a “Clean, Safe and Smart Baltic Sea”, and many priorities such as the promotion of clean navigation and the use of alternative fuels, the prevention of maritime accidents, and the strengthening of civil society, are close to the topics discussed within the BSCP. Ms Mattila stressed the necessity for the recommendations of the BSCP to be implemented and added that dialogue between governments and parliaments within the framework of the Baltic Sea regional cooperation is of an utmost importance. The next speaker, Mr Sergey Petrovich, former Chair of the CBSS Russian presidency, continued the important issue of the implementation of political decisions by giving extensive examples of projects that had been launched in

North-West Russia as a result of CBSS initiatives. Ms Darya Akhutina representing the Baltic NGO Forum and the recently established Baltic NGO Network presented a number of recommendations with reference to enhancing the participation of civil society organisations in the decision-making process. In order to facilitate cooperation visa mobility system should be revised and the registration fee abolished at least for young members of NGO's, claimed Ms Akhutina.

Civil society was also a focal point of intervention by Mr Lars Kascha, from the Baltic Sea Youth Forum. He spoke about the attempts to re-establish the Baltic Sea Secretariat for Youth Affairs in Kiel and to create the Baltic Sea Youth Forum, a network of local, regional and national youth organisations operating in the Baltic Sea Region. Also in a comment by Mr Franz Thönnies, Member of Parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany, youth issues were highlighted. Mr Thönnies invit-



ed the Finnish CBSS presidency to organise a youth forum before the annual conference and also supported the opinion that visa liberalisation is essential for people-to-people contacts in the Region.

During any BSPC Conference a discussion on cooperation with regard to Baltic Sea environmental issues could not be omitted. This time the state of affairs was presented by Ms Monika Stankiewicz, Executive Secretary of Helcom. Eutrophication is still the major environmental problem, as Ms Stankiewicz reported, so it was put high on the agenda of the ministerial meeting. Reaching an agreement on the distribution of reductions in phosphorus and nitrogen among the involved countries would be one of the main tasks of the ministerial meeting in October 2013. Only timely implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan can lead to a healthy Baltic Sea. As to the situation in the maritime sector, it is expected that the ministerial meeting will agree on a new initiative – the establishment of a Green Technology and Alternative Fuels Platform for Shipping. Ms Stankiewicz invited the BSPC to support that initiative.

In her comment to that part of the session, Ms Sylvia Bretschneider, President of the Landtag of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and the BSPC Observer at HELCOM, mentioned the contribu-



tion of the BSPC to the ministerial meeting regarding an integrated maritime policy, energy and environmental protection.

Mr Pat the Cope Gallagher, Member of the European Parliament, briefed the BSPC on the development of the EUSBSR and the Northern Dimension. The Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region has been revised and currently the Revised Action Plan has only three objectives: Save the Sea, Connect the Region, Increase Prosperity; and focuses mainly on the environment and the economy, indicated Mr Gallagher. Environmental issues are also high on the agenda of the Northern Dimension, and cooperation with Russia is crucial in order to effectively address regional challenge, concluded Mr Gallagher. In their comments Ms Christina Gestrin and Mr Vantar Yagya supported such high expectations for EUSBSR and



claimed that more compatibility with other strategies, e. g. the Social and Economic Development of the North-West Federal Districts of the Russian Federation, the Barents Strategy and the Northern Dimension, should be encouraged.

Cooperation by the BSPC with political networks and institutions gained a new dimension when Ms Olena Netetska, Vice-President of the Parliamentary Assembly of Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC) announced that the 44th General Assembly of PABSEC had decided to grant the BSPC observer status.

The following sessions were characterised by many different topics which were raised in a wide range of expert presentations and with a great number of ideas and proposals to be discussed.

The second session, on *Economic Growth, Innovation and Competitiveness of the Baltic Sea Region Vision 2050 – What Innovation Does the Region Need to Become Sustainable?* featured an interesting discussion on key trends affecting the Baltic Sea Region and on the other gave many examples of innovation initiatives.

Prof. Erik Terk, Director of the Estonian Institute for Future Studies, admitted that according to future trends research, global growth in the next decades will not be driven by Europe. If Europe wants to continue its economic and social development it must adapt to the changes taking place in the global area. Therefore, Baltic Sea countries should restructure their economies, namely the industries and the proportion of high-tech production, develop new services, and revise the geographical patterns of their economic ties. For Mr Jari Kaivo-Oja from Finland's Futures Research Centre, the most significant effects of globalisation are those interlinked with changes in the demographic, economic and social structure. Globalisation, demographic changes, rises of complex societies, web-society empowerment of people, digitalisation, the Internet, the expansion

of resource-efficient technologies and the rise of the bio-economy are the main trends affecting the BSR. Ms Silvia Stiller from the Hamburg Institute of International Economics referred to the future potential and the challenges of the BSR area of innovation. She indicated that the Baltic Sea Region was characterised by substantial structural and developmental differences in the innovation potential, which included, firstly, distinct disparities in per capita income; secondly, differences in innovation potential; thirdly, differences in private and public investment in R&D; and fourthly differences in education systems. Ms Stiller pointed out that the analyses confirmed that innovation and the introduction of novelties to the economy are closely linked with the general education level of society.

After analysing the challenges to build the Baltic Sea Region innovative area, many encouraging and promising examples of activities and projects in the field of innovation were presented.

E-health has become a new sector which demands new solutions, so the project Accelerate Life, has been developed. The project brings together partners from 5 countries, with the aim of accelerating disruptive innovation in e-health, life science, med-tech, biotechnology and diagnosis.



Photo: Olev Mikkedmaa

tics, by supporting ten best start-ups with a 6 plus 6 months programme. Project BONUS is a research and development programme of the Baltic Sea Region with a budget for 2011-2017 of 100 million Euro. The mission of BONUS is to transform the Baltic Sea Research system into a durable, cooperative and multinational system. Nordic Innovation assists policy makers, policy implementers, and business and research organisations. The Nordic High Growth Entrepreneurship Initiative is aimed at facilitating national activities in increasing the capacities of innovative companies. The Nordic Built Initiative is aimed at the building industry and focuses on the harmonisation of standards and the promotion of innovation in industry. In their final comments the parliamentarians stressed the importance of innovation as the key-driving force in economic growth, welcomed the amendments to the resolution regarding marine technologies, and agreed that education is an important prerequisite for the development of innovation.

The third session, on *Green Growth and Energy Efficiency*, began with the BSPC Working Group on the Green Growth and Energy Efficiency report, presented by Chairperson Ms Cecile Tenfjord-Toftby. The political recommendations have been clustered in four core proposals and covered such issues as raising the awareness of the energy efficiency and green growth among households and enterprises, providing uniform technical standards and building codes, promoting green public procurement investments in the area of infrastructure, business and buildings, and implementing financial schemes that support green growth and energy efficiency. All of these have been included in the text of the 22nd BSPC Resolution. The remarkable results of the Group's work were highly esteemed by the audience. The CBSS, in 2014, in recognising the importance of the subject, announced their intention to organise a follow-up conference in cooperation with the BSPC.

Valuable facts and figures regarding the role of the green economy in growth, job creation and the environment were given by Mr Timo Mäkelä from the European Commission. The consumption and extraction of fossil fuels has increased by eight times. By 2050 the global demand for food might increase by 70 % while 60 % of the world's major ecosystems have already been degraded. By 2050 resource efficiency has to be increased by 4 to 10 times. On the other hand, prices for food, raw materials, energy, metal and minerals, despite the financial crises, are increasing. Therefore the transformation of the European Economy is an urgent demand, concluded Mr Mäkelä.

Dr. Sonja Deppish, from the University of Hamburg, focused on climate change and spatial development in the urban regions of the BSR. The key messages which needed to be delivered to the decision makers were cited as follows: climate change will affect technical infrastructure and buildings; the vulnerability of the urban population varies between social groups; and socio-economic structures around the Baltic Sea cities have to begin adapting. Some cities, like Copenhagen, Stockholm, Helsinki and Rostock, are already adapting but still, as Ms Deppish admitted, social and ecological aspects so far have been neglected.



Photo: Olev Mäkelmaa

Space technologies were the next subject of the debate and a number of purposes to which those technologies could be applied were presented by Ms Aire Olesk from Tartu University. Space technologies can be used in the energy sector, for example, by assessing mining subsidence in underground mines, measuring the geological stability of oil and gas fields, as well as monitoring pipelines and buildings constructed in large urban areas. Ms Olesk concluded her presentation by pointing out that the numerous other applications in meteorology, agriculture and forestry could be seen as reflecting the fact that the changing earth drives innovation.

Innovative solutions for strengthening competitiveness and economic growth are being developed within the framework of EUSBSR flagship project StarDust. 63 partners from academia, business clusters, and SME networks are involved in various activities. The aim of the project presented was to create globally recognised innovation hubs and use the excellence of neighbouring countries.

The Conference once more confirmed the findings of the BSPC Working Group on Green Growth and Energy Sufficiency and agreed that increasing public awareness of green energy and energy efficiency might change people's attitudes and the market demand. The first step can be taken by politicians who should distribute the report in the parliaments of their countries. Apart from that, the Baltic Sea countries should also take into account the 5th Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

The Economic and Social Conditions for Creative Entrepreneurship were discussed during the fourth session of the Conference. What could be done to support and develop creative entrepreneurship in the Baltic Sea Region – the answer to that question appeared not to be simple but there are many ideas, recommendations and initiatives towards building a creative Baltic Sea area. Some of them

were worked out by the European Design Leadership Board and presented as 21 policy recommendations at the Design and Innovation Summit in Helsinki. They were enumerated by Ms Deborah Dawton, President of the Bureau of European Design Associations, and referred to the positioning of design within the European Innovation system, design for innovative and competitive enterprises, design skills for an innovative public sector, design abilities in the 21st Century, and cooperation among the design sector.

Another approach was presented by the Board of Directors of the UN World Summit on the Information Society. Prof. Dr. Peter A. Bruck, Chairman of the Board, introduced the idea of the World Summit Award, which is aimed at facilitating innovative solutions, providing smart content and thus contributing to the knowledge-driven society.

For Mr Pritt Sauna, Co-Founder of the Garage 48 Foundation, the main basis for creative entrepreneurship is the experts who are able to create products, designers who make products appealing to customers, experts who sell the products and the experts who supervise the whole process. With the reports from the BSPC Rapporteurs on Maritime Policy and Trafficking in Human Beings the session ended.

In her closing remarks, Ms Laine Randjärv underlined that the 22nd Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference had articulated its strong conviction that the Future of the Region lies in smart specialisation and defining the competitive areas of growth. The world is changing and there is a need to take into account globalisation, demographic change, ageing and longevity. People are better involved and empowered through social media and web-based solutions. This leads to finding and using more efficient technologies, and the success of cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region will be judged by the Region's ability to exert a positive impact on people's everyday lives.

23rd BSPC – 2014 Olsztyn, Poland



Photo: shutterstock.com | Lukasz Sz waj

The 23rd Parliamentary Conference took place 24-26 August 2014, in Olsztyn, the capital of Warmia and Mazury, situated in the centre of the southern Baltic Region. The title of the conference, *The Baltic Sea the Quest for Harmony: cultural and natural heritage as an element in the harmonious development of the Baltic Sea Region*, has come to have a special significance in the times of political conflict caused by the Ukrainian crisis. A total of 200 parliamentarians, experts and officials from all the countries of the Baltic Sea Region gathered to discuss the history, heritage and culture shared by the people living on the Baltic Sea. In his opening address Mr Ryszard Górecki, Chairman of the BSPC and Senator of the Republic of Poland, stressed the great value of the political dialogue that has taken place in the last 23 years at the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conferences and expressed his

strong belief that its continuation lies in the vital interests of all the people of the region, in view of the number of challenges to be faced.

H. E. Bogdan Borusewicz, President of the Senate of the Republic of Poland, emphasised that it was the third time that Poland had hosted the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, the most important forum of parliamentary exchange in the region. He expressed the opinion that the Baltic Sea Region was an area of growing potential for cooperation, ever better integrated and prosperous, which was currently facing an opportunity to reinforce its position in both the European and global dimensions.

The first session, on *Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region*, focused on developments in cooperation with long-standing partners of the BSPC – the



CBSS, HELCOM, the European Commission, and the NGO Forum.

Mr Górecki opened the discussion by pointing out the fact that the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was set up in 1991 at a difficult time of profound political transformations in the region, so today, much like in 1991, a forum like BSPC is essential. Furthermore, he acknowledged that a few years ago the Baltic Sea Region was still mired in profound economic recession; currently, the BSR is proving to have the highest growth in the European Union. The proper use and implementation of innovations in produc-

tion, administration and management is of special significance for the regional economies. Mr Górecki also stressed the importance of a permanent dialogue with CBSS at the political and administrative levels and expressed satisfaction with the reporting on the contacts between the BSPC, on the one hand, and SEECF and PABSEC, on the other.

Ms Satu Mattila, Chairperson of the CBSS CSO 2013-2014, mentioned the long-term cooperation between the CBSS and BSPC. One example of such cooperation was a joint seminar of CBSS, BSPC and BASREC on energy efficien-



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cy, attended by the Finnish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Erkki Tuomioja. The CBSS also stepped up its cooperation with HELCOM. A conference on the use of alternative fuels in maritime transport was organised in January 2014, and a road map for the implementation of green technologies was developed during the Baltic Sea Days in Turku in June 2014. With the intention of reinforcing the role of civil society and the promotion of labour issues as part of the 'interpersonal contacts' priority, the Finnish Presidency supported the organisation of a forum of non-governmental organisations in Turku and the Baltic Sea Labour Forum (BSLF) meeting in Helsinki. In conclusion, Ms Mattila noted that the political climate changed midway through the Presidency and the planned CBSS summit in Turku was not held, owing to the situation in Ukraine, but despite the political uncertainty, cooperation in the region should continue at the legal, expert and parliamentary levels within the framework of the BSPC.

For Mr Raul Mälik, Chair of the CBSS CSO, the main task of the Estonian Presidency will be the practical implementation of the CBSS long-term priorities and the implementation of activities aimed at the achievement of the goals set



out in the Vilnius Declaration approved at the CBSS summit in 2008. Mr Mälik provided information on the meetings planned in 2014 and 2015 and emphasised that the CBSS considered the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference to be an important partner.

Developments in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and Northern Dimension were reported by Ms Lina Marcinkut, a representative of the European Commission. The report on Managing Macro-regional Strategies produced in May 2014 found that progress was needed. Regarding the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP), Ms Marcinkut admitted that its wastewater-treatment projects in north-west Russia and in Belarus had helped to improve the condition of the Baltic Sea.





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The progress of the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan was reported by Mr Harry Liiv, Chairman of HELCOM. Over 30 % of actions planned for 2017 have been completed and 60 % initiated or partly completed. As far as eutrophication is concerned, despite the actions being undertaken to mitigate the process, the Baltic Sea is still in a difficult position. A positive fact is the decrease of the dumping of nutrients into the Baltic by approximately 10% from 1994 to 2010, with the depositing of nutrients being reduced by 18 % and of phosphates by 16 %. A decrease in the emission of pollutants is also a priority of the Estonian Presidency in HELCOM. In closing, Mr Liiv announced that a regional action plan to limit the level of waste being dumped into the waters of the sea has been drafted and the final version should be approved the following year. In her speech Ms Sylvia Bretschneider, President of the Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and the BSPC Observer at HELCOM, emphasised the fruitful cooperation between BSPC and HELCOM, which had been going on for 12 years and spoke about her participation and address at the Ministerial Meeting in Helsinki on behalf of the BSPC.

Ms Valentina Pivnenko, Member of the Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, informed the participants about the Strategy of the socio-economic development of the North-West Federal District. The main goal behind the Strategy until 2020 is to increase the Well-being of the population and offset and/or reduce the differences in the standard of living in individual territories that lie within those 11 regions. In support of the development of the economy and innovation and of removing limitations on transport, energy and the infrastructure, 24 national programmes have been launched costing circa 390 million rubles. Russia is interested in joining forces with the European Union to solve the problems of the region as part of the coordinated implementation of the regional strategies, the NWFD Strategy, and EUSBSR – so that the efforts related to the Russian participation in the Interreg Baltic Sea Programme 2014-2020 would be very beneficial. Ms Pivnenko presented her point of view on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, considering it as an internal conflict in Ukraine.

Ms Daria Akhutina and Päivi Kärnä from the NGO Forum of the Baltic Sea shared their re-

marks on the future and role of NGO networks in the Region. The 12th Baltic Sea NGO Forum was held in June 2014, bringing together 230 participants. The final document noted that constant cooperation between citizens promotes stability in the region by decreasing tensions, promoting traditions and good neighbourliness, mutual trust and tolerance. Therefore, the parliaments of the BSPC are natural partners for the Baltic Sea NGO Network. Ms Akutina concluded with an appeal for launching permanent cooperation between the BSPC and the NGO Network.

Mr Rumen Gechev, Member of the Bulgarian Parliament representing the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEEC), presented information on parliamentary cooperation within SEEC and admitted that the model of Baltic cooperation was to a great extent a role model for the SEEC in the development of its Parlia-

mentary Assembly. Furthermore, he expressed the conviction that the SEEC would soon apply for observer status at the BSPC.

Further statements broadened the subject of the session. The speakers emphasised the very good cooperation within the BSPC and its role in strengthening democratic institutions and the building of trust in the BSR, and called for action in support of avoiding a new Cold War. The cooperation of young people in the Region was underlined and support for establishing a solid basis for young people's participation in the BSR was expressed.

Session two, on *Environmental legacy – environmental challenges*, began with an optimistic statement by Mr Andrzej Jagusiewicz, Chief Inspector of the Environmental Protection of the Republic of Poland, that his country would achieve the goals of the Baltic Sea Action Plan by 2021



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through the implementation of the National Programme of Construction of Wastewater-Treatment Plants. The programme, with a budget of €20 billion, covers the construction, expansion and/or upgrading of wastewater-processing plants in all clusters of 2,000 or more residents by 2015. Mr Jagusiewicz referred to the problem of chemical munitions lying in the Baltic. Poland leads UMBRELA (the Underwater Munitions Baltic Remediation cluster LeAgue), the EUSBSR flagship project, and is actively involved in other projects in this field.

In her Progress Report on Eutrophication, Ms Christina Gestrin, Member of the Finnish Parliament, underlined that eutrophication was the worst problem faced by the Baltic Sea. She recalled that the BSPC working group had developed and adopted the Clear and Clean Report in 2007. Ms Gestrin also emphasised the importance of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Plan. Also, she noted that the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership plays a significant role in combining the efforts of non-EU States, especially Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, and EU Member States to overcome environmental problems in the BSR. In her closing remarks Ms Gestrin noted that the current political situation in the region was a threat to the lasting positive process of the protection of the Baltic Sea and expressed hope for a prompt return of the political situation to normal.

Interesting projects in the framework of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, and methods for monitoring the maritime ecosystem of the Baltic Sea, were presented in the last two inputs of that session. In the CHEMISEA project the research teams undertook to identify the locations of chemical munitions in areas that had not yet been investigated, to estimate the concentration of chemical-warfare agents and to assess the risk related to the natural or accidental release of such substances into the ecosystem of the Baltic Sea. In turn, a new strategy for monitoring and assessment had been approved by HELCOM in 2013. Monitoring measures are being coordinated between countries and whenever possible made accessible throughout the region. International cooperation in that respect is the most efficient way of reducing the cost of research and monitoring, both as far as investment and the essential activities are concerned – that was the conclusion of that part of the session.

In their comments the speakers presented varying views on the situation in the Baltic Sea environment. On the one hand, the representative of the Åland Islands spoke about the mass growth of algae observed around the islands in 2014 and called for more intensive steps to be taken by other countries; on the other hand, remarkable progress had been made in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern towards reaching HELCOM goals on eutrophication. In Warmia and Mazury a compre-



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hensive Green University programme had been introduced at the University of Olsztyn, which led to the setting up of a new scientific institute dealing with the issues of environmental protection with special focus on limnology.

The third session on *The Baltic Sea Cultural Heritage providing orientation for good partnership*, was a direct reference to the title of the 23rd BSPC. Mr Piotr Zuchowski, Secretary of State at the Polish Ministry of Culture and the National Heritage, stressed that the Baltic Sea Region was one of the priorities of Polish cultural policy. Poland had coordinated the Culture Priority Area in the EUSBSR since 2013. In parallel, since 2014 Poland had presided over the Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDPC). In July 2015 Poland will assume its Presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States with special focus on culture and cultural heritage. Ms Anke Spoorendonk, the Minister of Justice, Cultural and European Affairs of Schleswig-Holstein, added that culture is a value in itself, as it builds bridges, unites, and brings people and regions together. She claimed that joint cultural actions are significant for the inclusion of Russian partners in Baltic cooperation, even during the conflict in Ukraine, and emphasised that the conflict could result in the breaking down of communication. The speaker emphasised the significance of the business aspect in culture and the creative industries, which provide the EU with 4,5 % of its added value. Culture is a significant catalyst for innovation and is important for other sectors as well.

Prof. Henryk Samsonowicz focused his considerations on the theme of *The Baltic Sea – a Frontier or a Meeting Point?*, pointing to the historical multitude of economic, cultural and social relations across the southern Baltic.

Prof. Jörg Hackmann, University of Szczecin, presented information on the Baltic Sea History Project, which is a flagship project of the culture priority area in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea

Region. The objective of the project is to look at the history of the Baltic Sea Region from a new perspective and to present various perceptions of Baltic Sea history.

Mr Mikko Härö, Director of the Department of Cultural Environment Protection of the National Board of Antiquities of Finland, suggested in his presentation that the only constant feature of heritage is permanent change. The new approach to heritage assumes that the definitions of heritage should be developed by communities and not by administrations. The speaker mentioned the Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society of the Council of Europe of 2005, which makes it possible to inscribe heritage into human activity and disassociate it from political associations. The speaker also recognised the European Commission Communication *Towards an integrated approach to a cultural heritage for Europe* (July 2014) as a milestone in the EU's approach to heritage. Dr. Hanna Hagmark-Cooper from the Åland Maritime Museum expressed her conviction that maritime museums had a key role to play in the maintenance and promotion of the marine cultural heritage and that through their activities they attracted the commitment of local communities. Museums have become involved in external and international cooperation, as five Baltic Sea Region Cultural Heritage Forums have been organised since 2013. Ms Anita Vaivade, from the Latvian Academy of Culture and expert for UNESCO, introduced participants to the



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prospects of cooperation in the field of intangible cultural heritage. The speaker mentioned “The Baltic Way”, a human chain formed in the Baltic States on 23 August 1989, as an example of intangible cultural heritage in the Baltic Sea Region. In closing, she emphasised that intangible heritage was of greatest importance for the functioning of local communities.

In the comments all speakers underlined the profound role culture had in supporting peaceful development, overcoming barriers and differences with knowledge-based tools and dialogue and in building a clean and prosperous Baltic Sea Region.

In his introductory presentation to the 4th session on *The Baltic Sea Region in search of a harmonious and sustainable future*, Dr. Leszek Melibruda from the SWPS University in Warsaw referred to the contemporary revolution in notions of trust, authority and freedom. The scholar expressed the opinion that politicians frequently could not influence the way they were presented in the media, and yet it was in the media that their image was built. That was why the development of public trust was currently being made extremely difficult, explained Mr Melibruda.

Ms Kinga Dudzińska of the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM) presented a report entitled *Cross-Border Movement between Gdańsk, Olsztyn, and Kaliningrad*, expressing the view that the introduction of an agreement on local border traffic between the Republic of Poland and the Russian Federation had proved to be a success in the social, economic, and cultural dimensions. This made it possible for the residents of the Kaliningrad Oblast, and some counties in the Pomorskie and Warmia and Mazury regions, to cross the border on the basis of permits, initiating more-frequent contacts.

Ms Olaug Bollestad, Chairwoman of the BSPC WG on Innovation in Social and Health Care,

presented the Midway Report from the BSPC Working Group on Innovation in Social and Health Care. The speaker mentioned the main healthcare problems that the group had been investigating – the ageing of the population, inequalities in health care, lifestyle-related diseases, and financial pressures. Innovation was highlighted as a tool to meet these challenges in a cost-effective manner without compromising the quality of health services. Among the preliminary recommendations of the Working Group were strategies and action plans for the promotion of innovation in social and health care, organisational and structural reforms, fiscal incentives to help SME's, favourable financing conditions for the health economy, the foundation of skill centres for the commercialisation of scientific knowledge, and competence enhancement in education and training, equal availability of healthcare and social-welfare services, a greater awareness of the needs of elderly people, and the exchange of best practices, as well as the continued support of the work of the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being. The results of the activities carried out by the Working Group were welcomed by Ms Valentina Pivnenko who expressed her belief that the interest of the BSPC in the area of healthcare would also continue in the years to follow once the Working Group had finished its operations.

Mr Mikalai Katsetski from Belarus, and Mr Piotr Bauć, Member of the Polish Parliament, emphasised the importance of the E40 waterway-revival project. The waterway, crossing the territories of both EU and non-EU States, provides an opportunity to develop commercial and tourist relations, as well as to strengthen ties between communities.

In conclusion of the conference, Mr Ryszard Górecki and Ms Sylvia Bretschneider, Chair of the BSPC 2014–2015, thanked Jan Widberg for his long-standing, dedicated work in the post of General Secretary of the BSPC.

24th BSPC – 2015 Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern



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The 24th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference took place in Rostock, 31 August-1 September 2015 and for the second time in the history of the BSPC was hosted by the Parliament of Mecklenburg Vorpommern. The subject matter of the conference focused strongly on various aspects of one main topic, namely health, with the title of the conference - *Baltic Sea Region - a Role Model for Innovation in Social and Healthcare*. This was the new strategic approach to – apart from the issue of cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region – focus on one main issue, which was also the topic of the BSPC working group. Additionally, the goal was to involve responsible representatives of the governments of the Baltic Sea States, which was requested during several of the former conferences. This granted a possibility to deepen one important political area, to discuss it not only with experts but also with representatives of governments and to enforce future development of this political issue by a comprehensive list of actions

and measures which are to be realised. The BSPC has succeeded in achieving this strategic approach.

Opening and welcoming words were given by Ms Sylvia Bretschneider, President of Mecklenburg Vorpommern and Mr Erwin Sellering, the Prime Minister of that Land. The Conference was honoured by the presence of Mr Günther Oettinger, European Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society as well as present and former Ministers and Vice-ministers of Health from the Baltic Sea States.

Traditionally, the first session covered the subject matter of *Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region*. Ms Sylvia Bretschneider, Chair of the BSPC, gave examples of visible progress which had been achieved during realisation of the goals of the BSPC mission statement. She mentioned: the contribution of the Standing Committee in keep-



ing health in the Action Plan of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, the intensified cooperation with the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS) and a joint letter to the IMO with the demands concerning protection of the Baltic Sea and modernization of wastewater treatment capacity throughout the Baltic Sea Region. Participation of the BSPC in Pan-European Dialogue in Cruise Tourism in Brussels and in the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum were also reported.

Information on cooperation with the CBSS was provided by both the outgoing chair of the CBSS, Mr Mälik, Ambassador of Estonia and by the incoming Chair, Mr Czyż, Ambassador of Poland. Mr Mälik admitted that the main task of the Estonian Presidency was to implement new long term priorities, adopted by the CBSS Council in June 2014. It has been held in a situation of changes occurring in the international climate - the first cancelled Prime Ministers meeting in its history, no meeting of foreign ministers and abandoned project ideas. The speaker underlined however, that although there had been a pause in a dialogue, there was a continuation in the practical work of the CBSS. The representative of the incoming Polish CBSS Presidency, Mr Czyż expressed the opinion that BSPC as the *vox populi* of the region, together with the CBSS, plays an essential role in defining and implementing a common vision of the region's future. Mr Czyż further stressed that although the Polish Presidency comes in times of uncertainty for the region, caused, for an instance, by the crisis in Ukraine, the usefulness of CBSS will become further apparent as an efficient platform for intergovernmental coordination. The Polish ambassador saw room for more regional coherence and synergy with the Northern Dimension, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, the Nordic Council of Ministers, Barents Euro Arctic Council, the Arctic Council and others, for instance by establishing a structured dialogue.

Next speaker Mr Jörn Dohrmann, Member of the European Parliament provided the information on the recent revision of the EUSBSR and underlined that although the strategy had been devised within the EU, it could only be pursued in cooperation with external partners in the region and acknowledged the role played by the Northern Dimension Partnership on Public Health and Social Well-being as coordinator for health policy area within the EU Strategy.

Ms Valentina Pivnenko, Member of Duma of the Russian Federation, acquainted the Conference with progress in development of the second regional strategy, namely the Strategy of Socio-Economic Development of the North-West Federal District. Ms Pivnenko admitted that the economic situation, especially in the North-Western district, has made it necessary to update the current goals. The main goals would be to achieve social stability and prosperity, to ensure competitiveness of businesses and to keep an eye on the budget. The speaker touched upon the natural resources of the Arctic, a part of the North-West District. The state saw the need to create infrastructure to access these resources and a number of projects are being developed with foreign partners. Ms Pivnenko also stressed the importance of the relationship with Europe which could be witnessed in many significant areas of cooperation with the protection of the environment as one of most promising fields of joint action of the EU and Russia. Finally, Ms Pivnenko addressed the role of Russia in the Ukraine by stressing the efforts of the Russian Federation to make the Agreement of Minsk reality.

Mr Harry Liiv, Chair of HELCOM, wanted to shed light on the progress of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan and its targets to reduce pollution and underwater noise. In his speech he mentioned eutrophication as one of the largest problems in the Baltic Sea and hence, the focus of a large part of the work done by HELCOM. Other challenges the speaker referred to were marine litter, heavy metals,

underwater noise and port reception of sewage. A number of measures, action plans and international laws were introduced to tackle these problems. Mr Liiv underlined that, for this to be successful, it is important to exchange best practices amongst the Baltic Sea countries.

Ms Daria Akhutina from Baltic Sea NGO updated the Conference with the results of the 13th Baltic Sea NGO Forum that took place in Tallinn on 10-11 June 2014. Final Statement adopted by the Forum consisting of 120 representatives of NGO organisations has been sent to the BSPC.

Session two *Cross-border Cooperation in Healthcare* was opened by Ms Rimantė Šalaševičiūtė – Minister for Health of Lithuania. The Minister informed the delegates about the innovations in the healthcare sector in Lithuania. The Lithuanian government prioritises the acceleration of the development in innovative solutions for eHealth, the development of university studies into biomedicine, bioinformatics and health informatics and also stroke diagnostics and treatment, infarction, traumatology, child health and oncology. Future investments (of approximately €600 million), admitted Ms Šalaševičiūtė, will be dedicated to, among other causes, smart specialisation of

stem cells, laser technology and development of safer and healthier foods. With the words of their Minister, the Lithuanian government has stated that it is eager to cooperate on the international health plans and very willing to share its best practices, for instance in the field of eHealth and antibiotics management.

In the following speech Mr Dmitry Kostennikov, Vice Minister for Health of the Russian Federation stressed the importance of the cooperation with BSPC to maintain good neighbourly relations and gave examples of many shared healthcare problems that must be tackled in a combined effort. Infectious diseases such as HIV/Aids and tuberculosis are the focus of the joint actions, while the fight against tobacco and alcohol abuse could become such in the future. Promoting a healthy lifestyle was also mentioned as a subject worthy of cooperation. The speaker shared results of a recent ban on public smoking, including the workplace, as well as the advertisement and open displays of tobacco products in Russia. Since the beginning of this programme, the level of tobacco use has dropped to 16-17 percent. Mr Kostenikov pointed to the possibilities of the telemedicine and e-Health, especially in sparsely populated areas.



Photo: Landtag Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

In her address Ms Annette Widmann-Mauz, Parliamentary State Secretary of the German Ministry for Health recalled main political and health challenges of the Region - demographic change, non-communicable diseases such as cancer and diabetes as well as infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and especially tuberculosis. The speaker praised the influence of Northern Dimension Partnership and Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS) – currently chaired by Germany - for its cross-border efforts in achieving high quality and for its cooperation with international organisations such as the WHO, the International Organisation for Migration and the International Labour Organisation. Ms Widmann-Mauz underlined her belief in international cooperation and exchange, and the potential it carries, for instance in drug and alcohol policy.

The representative of the WHO, Ms Nedret Emiroglu outlined the subject of cross-border cooperation in health from the WHO perspective. Particularly important matter that offers itself for cross-border collaboration is health security. The international community has seen many threats recently, such as the Ebola and polio. Ms Emiroglu emphasised that the International Health Regulations are the most im-

portant tool with which the international community should respond to all public health threats. She reminded her audience that the framework is a legally binding document that entered into force in 2007 and that there is a full commitment with 55 signatory parties in the European region alone. “Health 2020” is the health policy framework for health and Well-being in Europe, highlighted by the speaker. The Framework, which has been adopted by all 53 member states in the European Area of the WHO, is a value based, action-oriented framework and aims to improve health and diminish inequalities in health, obtain its goals with a whole-of-society and a whole-of-government approach. Another issue touched upon by Ms Emiroglu was The Post-2015 Development Agenda to be discussed by the United Nations in the autumn 2015. That framework continues the world development agenda beyond the millennium goals. Health is one of them, and it is considered as a foundation for development.

The last speaker of the second session, Mr Bo Könberg, Former Minister for Health of Sweden, presented his report about health cooperation in Nordic countries. Mr Könberg’s work



Photo: Landtag Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

has resulted in fourteen proposals, the most important of which involves the growing antibiotic resistance. Mr Könberg therefore recommended reducing the prescription to the level used in Estonia and Netherlands which are the countries with the lowest use of antibiotics in Europe. Another recommendations applied to patient mobility, cooperation on health technology, including eHealth, and the development of a Nordic search tool called "My Patient". The speaker concluded that of the fourteen proposals he made in the report, five were treated during the meeting of the Nordic ministers in October 2014 and the timeframe for the achievability of the recommendations in his report is five to ten years.

Mr Günther Oettinger, European Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society opened the third session of the conference *Health and Economy – Paving the Way for Innovation in Social- and Health care „eHealth – the European Dimension“*. He began with a strong message to the participants underlying that Europe consists of more than just the European Union and that the existence of regional networks such as the BSPPC, comprised of new member states of the EU and important neighbouring countries, is beneficial for its citizens and the respective economies. Mr Oettinger shared his view on the digital revolution through which the global community currently lives, this is quickly shifting away from services only provided by the IT sector and telecommunications, and is rapidly moving towards the digitalisation of the „real“ economy, with online media and autonomous driving. Healthcare is currently going through similar digitalisation, with mHealth, eHealth and digital operation, explained the speaker. The Commissioner informed the Conference on the European Commission's initiatives aiming at creating a European data security culture, such as Information Secure Active Network, a single European digital market and reliable and high-speed network.

Dr Horst Klinkmann, President of BioCon Valley and Dr Jaanus Pikani, Vice President of Scan-Balt in their speeches provided the participants with a wide range of good practice examples of cooperation in the health economy area.

Dr Dennis Ostwald, CEO of WifOR pointed out that accordingly to WifOR research, 11.1 percent of Germany's gross value-added comes from healthcare and healthcare forms 7.4 percent of the overall German export. One million new jobs were created in this industry since 2008, not counting the two million indirect jobs, and ten million induced jobs. Besides jobs directly related to the healthcare sector, trade, medical sales and real estate profit from the growing healthcare sector, too. The speaker argued that the healthcare sector as very significant economically and healthcare should be seen rather as the factor of economic growth than necessary expenditure.

Ms Sylvia Bretschneider, President of the Landtag Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, opened the second day of plenary sessions of the 24th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference with a speech commemorating the outbreak of the Second World War, which started on 1 September 1939. The horrors of war still shock us to this day, she said. The end of the war did not automatically deliver freedom, justice and self-determination to all, and it was clear that people still face challenges in society. People must learn from their history and maintain an awareness of the events of that war. The President then urged the representatives to seek answers and bear responsibility for the Well-being of all citizens, and to uphold the memory of those who suffered then.

With a keynote speech „Demographic Challenges and Care“ Ms Manuela Schwesig, German Federal Minister for Families, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth opened a discussion at the fourth session *Sustainable and Accessible Social- and Healthcare – at the Crossroads of Healthcare Provision, the Demographic Shift and Shrink-*

ing Budgets. The Minister focused on two important issues - demographic change and situation of young families. Closely connected to the first issue, from the minister's viewpoint, is the current refugee crisis. The Minister claimed, that the refugees must not be seen as a burden; they can be a counter-effect to the steady ageing of Germany. With regard to young families, young people need support in taking the step to form a family, especially if they want to have a career and, perhaps, need to take care of sick relatives at the same time, underlined the Minister. Among solutions implemented by the government Ms Schwesig mentioned "family working hours" - paid leave for taking care of sick relatives and reduced working hours for those providing healthcare to their relatives. Concluding, the Minister called for mutual intergenerational cooperation and support.

The final report of the BSPC Working Group on Innovation in Social and Healthcare was presented by Ms Olaug Bollestad, Member of Parliament of Norway and Chair of the Group. The 14 members, representatives of 9 countries, during intense 2 year period took part in study visits, working meetings and, also, have completed so-called homework to gain more insight into demography, ethics and strategies for innovation in the respective countries. The final report resulted in three sets of recommendations. The first set concerns cross-border cooperation within healthcare. The second set of recommendations surrounds health economy. The last set of recommendations is centered on sustainable and accessible social- and healthcare. Among recommendations which have been included in the 24th BSPC resolution there is the demand to strengthen cooperation and use synergies with existing strategies, institutions and organizations, to exercise stronger prevention policy, and to improve healthcare accessibility. Finally, Ms Ollestad concluded that most importantly, health should be taken into account in all policy considerations.

At the 24th BSPC conference, the young generation also had a say on social and health care in the Baltic Sea Region. Representatives of the BSPC Youth Forum Mr Maximilian Priebe and Ms Madara Muižniece presented final key points of the Forum Resolution, among them labelling on food products, a tax reduction on healthy food and tax increase on unhealthy food.

The last half an hour of the session has been dedicated to the roundtable discussion of recognised BSR experts, who tackled such complex issues as self-responsibility, sharing results of studies on healthcare, providing healthy food for pupils at schools, with an active participation of the audience.

The 24th BSPC has been concluded by the unanimous agreement on the resolution and the change in the Rules of Procedure. Additionally the observer status was granted to the South-East European Process. Mr Jānis Vucāns, Vice-President of the Baltic Assembly and Incoming Chair of the BSPC expressed great pride at Latvia's opportunity to host the Silver Jubilee of the Conference, 25 years after the Iron Curtain fell. He reminded the delegates of the main goal as an elected representative: to keep up a dialogue, to conduct an active peace policy, and to establish the Baltic Sea as a Sea of Peace.



Photo: Landtag Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

25th BSPC – 2016, Riga, Latvia



The 25th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference took place in Riga, Latvia, 29-31 August 2016. Around 200 delegates met at the University of Latvia Academic Centre of Natural Sciences right in the city centre of Riga with the aim to discuss the topic of the conference High Quality Education, and Labour – The Future of the Baltic Sea Region, and to pass a resolution on developing the Baltic Sea Region as a role model for future high quality education and labour. A special session on the second day commemorated the Silver Jubilee of the BSPC.

The BSPC Drafting Committee and the BSPC Standing Committee held their first sessions on Sunday, 28th August, in Saeima, the Parliament of the Republic of Latvia. In the afternoon, a guided tour of Rundāle Castle and the reception at it, provided the participants with insight into the history and cultural wealth of Latvia.

The Conference was opened by H.E. Mr Raimonds Vējonis, President of the Republic of Latvia, and H.E. Ms Ināra Mūrniece, Speaker of the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia. Mr Vējonis pointed out the fact that 25 years ago fifty years of the occupation of Latvia had come to an end. He also expressed his strong conviction that during those years, joint effort has transferred the Baltic Sea region into an economically vibrant, secure and stable area, and one of the most dynamic, IT- and innovation-oriented regions of the world. In her speech, Ms Mūrniece recalled the vision of peace shared by the founding fathers of the Baltic Sea regional cooperation. She confirmed that today, when contemporary world is shattered by crises and conflicts, their vision inspires even more than ever to build bridges and tear down walls.

The first session of the conference “Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region” was chaired by Prof. Dr

Jānis Vucāns, President of the BSPC, and Mr Franz Thönnies, Member of German Parliament.

In his report, the BSPC Chair Mr Vucāns mentioned the most important BSPC activities which had been conducted during the past year. The BSPC has had a clear thematic focus, namely education, the labour market and labour mobility as core issues of its work. Another issue listed by Mr Vucāns was the modernisation of social protection systems. Additionally, a fruitful exchange of experiences about the dealing with the refugee crisis, in the BSPC member countries took place. According to the speaker, it did prove useful to get an idea of how the situation is handled elsewhere and to find inspiration for the dealing with the topic in parliaments and in international cooperation. Another issue of utmost importance for many other parliamentary conferences and assemblies was: to undertake joint efforts against terrorism. Mr Vucāns emphasized the need to defend both the security and the fundamental values that make European societies strong - freedom, democracy and human rights. The BSPC chair reported also on the discussions with the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus with regard of granting the observer status to the Belarusian Parliament by the BSPC, and announced that the final decision on that issue will be taken in 2017.

Mr Valdis Dombrovskis, Vice-president of the European Commission, Vice-President for the Euro and Social Dialogue, also in charge of Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, outlined the role of the BSPC in the European dimension. In his speech Mr Dombrovskis referred to the prominent political scientist Francis Fukuyama – who in his book ‘Political Order and Political Decay’ - has created a motto around such a potential of the Baltic Sea Region Countries, which he calls ‘Getting to Denmark’. It has been a symbol of a well-governed, peaceful and prosperous place with low levels of corruption and a high level of

social inclusion, despite its relatively small size. Mr Dombrovskis described current global and regional economic situation and mentioned challenges such as, impact of the UK’s decision to leave the EU - and the uncertainty this creates, the crisis around Ukraine and refugee flows. He underlined the importance of the agenda for jobs, growth and investment, introduced by the European Commission the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the Commission’s New Skills Agenda, in order to boost the cooperation and economic development of the region. In his final remark Mr Dombrovskis encouraged the Baltic Sea states to use more actively the European Investment Projects Portal and the European Investment Advisory Hub that are designed to help bring project managers and investors.

Ms Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica, Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Latvia, referred to the importance of regional frameworks to keep a save, prosperous and connected region and the importance of strong networking on expert level. Mr Michał Czyż, Ambassador of Poland and outgoing chair of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), informed the delegates about the latest activities and achievements of the council. Mr Czyż began his presentation by admitting that the Polish CBSS presidency took place at difficult times. The utmost concern was the situation in Ukraine with its serious and long-lasting implications for the entire region. From the beginning, the main assumption of the Polish presidency has been to secure and consolidate the high level of cooperation achieved so far in the region, and to establish possible abutments facilitating the future progress. The three top priorities chosen by the presidency were Sustainability, Creativity and Safety. Amongst the activities mentioned by ambassador Czyż was the adoption of the Declaration 2030, on the political level. With regard to the priority Creativity, Culture has been established as a driving force

for social and economic development in the region. Under Safety Poland emphasised the importance of cooperation in the area of civil protection as a mean to strengthen resilience in the Baltic Sea region towards major emergencies and disasters. Mr Czyż pointed out the involvement of the CBSS Secretariat in coordination with three EUSBSR Policy Areas and Horizontal Actions. At the end of his presentation Mr Czyż reported on the highlight of the CBSS Polish presidency, namely The Warsaw Declaration which Deputy Foreign Ministers adopted on 8 June in Warsaw. The Declaration clearly confirmed that the CBSS Member States, despite all differences and difficulties, uphold their regional commitments, have a strong feeling of regional responsibility, and are ready to build a common future through joint actions.

Mr Guðmundur Árni Stefánsson, Ambassador of Iceland, presented an update on the priorities of the Icelandic CBSS Presidency. He emphasized the focus on the rights of children, promoting democracy, equality and respect for human rights and gender equality.

Ms Carola Veit, Vice-president of the BSPC, reported on the governments' responses to the last year's resolution. 10 governments out of 19 responded to the BSPC survey, 33% confirmed the implementation of the BSPC resolution with regard to Cross-border Cooperation in Health Care, 28 % to Sustainable, Accessible Social Care, 27 % to Health and Economy, and 12% to BSR cooperation. The results are promising and further investigation is worth continuing, concluded Ms Veit.

Ms Monika Stankiewicz, Executive Secretary of HELCOM, gave a report on the status of implementation of HELCOM commitments to achieve healthy marine ecosystems. Ms Stankiewicz expressed her gratitude to the BSPC for its very supportive role in the HELCOM work for the Baltic Sea marine environment. In her speech,

she focused on concrete achievements, especially in reducing inputs of excessive nutrients – nitrogen and phosphorus - which are responsible for eutrophication and algal blooms. This year the Baltic Sea coastal countries agreed and submitted a proposal to the International Maritime Organization, IMO, the global regulator of shipping, to designate the Baltic Sea as a NOx Emission Control Area (NECA). Another milestone in curbing nutrient inputs is the ban to discharge untreated sewage from passenger ships in the Baltic Sea. The Contracting Parties had finally fulfilled the formal conditions for the ban to be enforced and the new regulations will take effect by 2021, at the latest, for most of the IMO registered passenger vessels. Ms Stankiewicz admitted that the HELCOM cooperation with IMO and industry stakeholders on the establishment of these special regimes for ships operating in the Baltic Sea is an example of a successful regional cooperation across sectors, the aim of which is the implementation of the global regulations.

Following this, Ms Darja Akhutina, General Director, and Ms Magda Leszczyna-Rzucidło, BS NGO Network 2016 Forum Coordinator, reported from the Baltic Sea NGO Forum and Network and spoke about its focus on people-to-people cooperation and youth policy. The Conference was informed that the 14th Baltic Sea NGO Forum took place in Gdansk, June 2016, at the European Solidarity Centre. The Gdańsk Forum brought together over 150 representatives of social organisations, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, Union of the Baltic Cities and other public authorities and officials from all eleven Baltic Sea countries. The general theme of the 14th Baltic Sea NGO Forum was "Solidarity as a new dimension in the Baltic Sea regional cooperation". Work of the participants of the 14th Baltic Sea Forum took different forms: plenary sessions, panel discussions and workshops regarding the following thematic sessions: Culture and social innovation; Civic sector and social problems – self-independent youth and Migration processes



Photos: Reinis Inkens, Ernests Dinka

in Europe. All these topics were discussed in the light of social economy, as it is believed by the organisers, that this is the key issue for the Baltic Sea Region and whole modern Europe.

The first session ended by two speeches. Firstly, in her address Ms Maja Gojković, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC) and Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, underlined the importance of strengthening the regional dialogue as a means of promoting democracy and the rule of law and the enhancement of economic cooperation, peace and stability in the Black Sea Region and Europe at large. She particularly noted that the parliamentary cooperation, development of bilateral contacts between national parliaments and closer interaction between regional and international parliamentary assemblies paves the way towards more efficient pursuit of common goals. The PABSEC President expressed confidence for strengthening the cooperation between the two Assemblies and invited the BSPC to the 48th PABSEC General Assembly to be held in Belgrade in November 2016. She was followed by Mr Vitaly Busko, Chairman of the Commission on International Affairs of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus.

The second session, How to develop competitiveness in the Baltic Sea Region by linking education and the labour market, was chaired by Ms Dorota Arciszewska-Mielewczyk, Member of Parliament of the Republic of Poland, and by Mr Pyry Niemi, Member of Parliament of Sweden.

The speakers presented their views and statements on defining labour market needs, tools for forecasting trends in the labour market, vocational education, and cooperation in higher education and on corporate social responsibility for systematic and sustainable introduction of work-based learning.

Ms Līga Lejiņa, State Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Science, Latvia, presented lifelong guidance strategies and aspects of career management skills. Then, Ms Jadwiga Parada, Director of Vocational and Continuing Education Department from Ministry of National Education, Poland, informed on activities on vocational education, on cooperation in higher education and on cooperation with employers. Finally, Mr Poul Nielson, former EU Commissioner and Danish cabinet minister, author of the strategic review of the Nordic labour market, which was published 14th July 2016, presented the outcome of his work. He pointed out that apart from a number of differences between the countries in the Nordic region as regards the structure and policies of their labour markets; generally, there is a core of common types of employment, standards, and values which together define the nature of working life and labour market policy in the Nordic countries, so that one can speak of a “Nordic model”. The model, in fundamental areas, is distinct from conditions in the labour market in most other countries – both in Europe and the rest of the world. Presented by Mr Nielson report assumes that the challenges and opportunities for identifying new ideas which could strengthen co-operation in the Nordic region in the field of working life can be divided into four categories: 1) Substantive, common Nordic topics, 2) Institutional topics in Nordic co-operation, 3) The Nordic labour market, and 4) the EU and The Nordic region in the world. The report contains 14 specific action-oriented proposals for improving Nordic co-operation in the field of working life over the next 5–10 years.

Next speakers, Mr Jan Guz, OPZZ President and the Co-president of the Baltic Sea Trade Union Network, reported from the regional union federation; Dr Martin Sauer, Baltic Sea Labour Forum, highlighted the creation of sustainable regional labour markets within the Baltic Sea Region; and Mr Vatanyar Yagiya, Professor of the Saint-Petersburg State University and Councillor of the Saint - Petersburg Legislative Assembly Chairman,

stressed the leading role of the development of education in the Baltic Sea Region.

The ceremonial session held in honour of the 25th anniversary of the BSPC was conducted as a roundtable discussion chaired and moderated by Ms Carola Veit, Vice-president of the BSPC and President of the Parliament of Hamburg. The discussion circulated around the perspectives of “Baltic Sea parliamentary cooperation: yesterday, today, tomorrow”.

Mr Trivimi Velliste, former President of the BSPC and the Baltic Assembly, as well as former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Estonia, in his address went back in time and recalled some of the origins of parliamentary cooperation achievements. He underlined the fact that for 25 years the BSPC has furthered co-operation and provided a useful forum for open debate and exchange of information between Parliaments and other bodies of the Baltic Sea Region. This cooperation started due to a fundamental geopolitical change that had taken place

in the region. The historic meeting held at Ronneby, Sweden, on 2 – 3 September 1990, was the first summit of political leaders around the Baltic Sea since the World War II, where representatives of several States could once more sit behind their own national flags. The BSPC, which had its first convention in January 1991, was among the very first Baltic Sea cooperation forums to be established after the end of the Cold War. It predated the founding of the CBSS. This, for Mr Velliste, has been a symbolic landmark of democratic tradition.

In his speech, Mr Franz Thönnies - in his capacity as former BSPC President and since 19 years member of the BSPC Standing Committee - congratulated Latvia and Estonia on their 25th anniversary of gaining independence. He referred to “yesterday”, highlighting the development of a common identity, the stabilization of democratic structures and good neighbourhoods, and recapitulating the first steps of the BSPC 1991 in Helsinki. He reiterated, that the overall aim of the BSPC was to strengthen regional identity, to initiate more pow-



Photo: Reinis Jakums, Ernests Dinka

erful political activities and to enhance interparliamentary, intergovernmental, and inter civil societal dialogue through close cooperation between national and regional parliaments. He pointed out that many achievements characteristic for the situation of “today” were the result of this dialogue. The BSPC had proved to become a strong partner with considerable influence. It initiated claims which were incorporated in the HELCOM Action Plan tackling the challenge of marine litter in the Baltic Sea. The “Clean Baltic Shipping” concept was another example to fight pollution. The Labour Forum brings together numerous employer organisation and trade union representatives to promote labour mobility and fair labour conditions in the Baltic Sea. Referring to “tomorrow”, he stressed the importance of further strengthening cooperation in order to look for answers to international challenges such as the refugee situation and the threat posed by terrorism. Cooperating in fields like youth and sustainable tourism were essential to create a solid regional identity, he said. He concluded that as the region would constantly face new challenges, the BSPC needed to continuously work on dialogue, compromise and cooperation to face future challenges.

Next, Ms Anna Abrahamsson, President of the Nordic Youth Council, reported on challenges which youth faces today regarding education and labour and what solutions can be found for tomorrow. Ms Abrahamsson stressed the topic serving as the theme for this conference: education and employment, as for the youth, she said, education and meaningful occupation is one of the burning issues of our time. The youth of today is more educated than any generation before. Yet, she noticed, young people are concerned about the economic situation and the educational and job opportunities at hand. They have been hit harder by lack of jobs than the population overall and, for many, uncertain careers are the new norm. How to bridge this gap and provide more opportunities for all members of society, remains an important task for the future, she concluded. Another issue she touched

upon was the democratic participation of youth. She expressed the opinion that the fact many young people are feeling more and more excluded from the political sphere and are showing apathy towards democracy may form a dangerous trend in times of radical and extreme ideas on the rise. Ms Abrahamsson concluded her speech, and the session, by underlining her opinion that modern democracy can only be strengthened by greater youth representation and inclusion.

The third session, Realising employment opportunities – Improving labour mobility and combating youth unemployment, was chaired by Mr Jörgen Pettersson, Member of Parliament from Åland Islands, and Giedrė Purvanekienė, the Vice Chair of the Baltic Assembly and Member of Parliament of Lithuania.

The speakers focused on labour mobility, including emigration/immigration aspects, urbanization, trends, causes and solutions of youth unemployment, support mechanisms – the Youth Guarantee (support in the framework of active labour market policies, vocational education opportunities, measures to involve NEETs).

Mr Jānis Reirs, Minister of Welfare, Latvia, shared experiences on the Baltic employment services and on labour mobility issues in the region. Mr Reirs pointed out that Latvia has a successful cross-border cooperation experience in addressing employment issues with its two Baltic neighbours – Lithuania and Estonia. For years, Baltic institutions have been cooperating in the regular exchange of information on the labour market, mutual learning, joint job fairs, cross-border branch organisations’ cooperation workshops. Latvia has also significantly benefited from drawing on the experience shared by the German employment service in the framework of EURES. This successful cooperation among the Baltic employment services has been acknowledged at the European level, emphasized the Minister. Turning to the domestic labour mobility issue, the speaker admitted that regional

unemployment differences are more pronounced in Latvia than, for example, in Lithuania or Estonia. In June this year, in the Rigaregion, unemployment was only 5.3%, while in the Latgale region – as much as 18.0%. In this situation, the state must focus on promoting domestic labour mobility. Therefore, in 2013, Latvia introduced a regional mobility support programme. Another major future challenge is a population decline in Latvia. It is essential for Latvia to maintain a relationship with each of its citizens, including those who have emigrated to other countries. Measures to maintain the links with the diaspora can encourage the expatriate population to return. At the same time, their choice to come back will also depend on a range of socio-economic factors, such as the number of jobs. In conclusion, Mr Reirs pointed out that if the countries of the Baltic Sea region learn from one another and share their experience, it can make an invaluable contribution to a smart and well-thought-out long-term policy.

Ms Algimanta Pabedinskiene, Minister of Social Security and Labour, Lithuania, presented aspects on labour force migration in Lithuania, measures to reduce emigration and actions to fight youth unemployment. With regard to labour force migration, Ms Pabedinskiene presented the research showing that labour force emigrating from Lithuania is usually low-qualified or holds average qualifications. In parallel to the low-qualified labour force emigration, the so-called brain drain process

is also observed in Lithuania, where high-qualified specialists or those that potentially may become high-qualified specialists leave the country. Therefore, the Government is putting a lot of effort to change the situation. A number of legislative acts have already been adopted, and the new Labour Code that will hopefully be adopted include: a greater variety of employment contracts, greater flexibility for work and life balance, simpler procedures of employment and dismissal of employees. With regard to solutions to youth unemployment Ms Pabedinskiene presented the Lithuanian Youth Guarantee Mechanism which was created after careful identification of major youth unemployment problems: skills mismatch between labour market and education; lack of qualification and work skills; discrepancy between labour supply and the expectations of youth; lack of measures for combining work, education and family life. Ms Minister concluded by the statement, that the politicians and decision makers must keep pace with the changing world, provide timely professional assistance, analyse individual needs and opportunities of each person.

More information on the situation in the labour market was provided by Ms Anette Kramme, Parliamentary State Secretary of the Labour and Social Affairs Ministry, Germany, who presented the causes and trends of youth unemployment and support mechanisms for the integration of refugees in the labour market; Mr Thor Kleppen Sættem,



Photo: Reinis Jukens, Ernests Dinka



State Secretary of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, presented perspectives on youth employment promotion and on immigration in Norway, and Ms Egle Käärats, Deputy State Secretary General on Labour and Employment Policy, reported on the situation in Estonia.

During the next part of the session the Vice Chairman of the BSPC Working Group on Sustainable Tourism, Sara Kemetter from the Åland Islands presented the Working Group's Mid-way report to the conference participants. The group will elaborate its final report for the 26th BSPC in Hamburg. The parliamentarians were also updated on new developments in the respective fields of action by: the BSPC Rapporteur on Cultural Affairs, Sonja Mandt from Norway, the BSPC Rapporteur on Eutrophication, Saara-Sofia Sirén from Finland, the BSPC Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings, Thomas Stritzl from Germany and the BSPC Rapporteur on Integrated Maritime Policy, Jörgen Pettersson from the Åland Islands.

The Silver Jubilee edition of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was an overwhelming success, according to the conference participants. It was concluded with a unanimous adoption of the

Resolution on cooperation, education and the labour market in the Baltic Sea Region.

The Conference unanimously appointed Carola Veit from Hamburg as new BSPC President. Jörgen Pettersson from the Åland Islands and Prof Dr Jānis Vucāns from Latvia were appointed Vice-Chairmen of the Conference. The 25th BSPC concluded by the presentation of the incoming President Carola Veit and a film impression of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg – the location of the next – 26th BSPC as well as closing words of thanks by Prof Dr Jānis Vucāns.



Photos: Reinis Inkens, Ernests Dinka

26th BSPC – 2017, Hamburg, Germany



The 26th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference took place in Hamburg, Germany. Around 200 delegates, experts and guests met in the historic Town Hall of Hamburg. The aim of the conference was to pass a resolution on the Baltic Sea region as a role model for innovative science and sustainable tourism and to foster the participation and cooperation in the Baltic Sea region.

On the first conference day, **Ms Carola Veit**, President of the Parliament of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg and President of the BSPC, opened the conference, and Mr Olaf Scholz, First Mayor of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, welcomed the participants.

The following sessions focused on cooperation in the Baltic Sea region, on democratic participation and the digital age, on science and research and on sustainable tourism.

The final report of the BSPC Working Group on Sustainable Tourism was presented. Subsequently, the participants launched a new BSPC Working Group which would deal with Migration and Integration.

A tour through the German Electron Synchrotron Research Center and a harbour boat trip provided the participants with insight into the historical, economical and innovative characteristics of Hamburg.

To Celebrate the Centenary of Finland's independence, an exhibition was presented by the Finnish delegation to the BSPC. "Finland 100th Anniversary Exhibition" was accessible for all viewers of the Town Hall during the Conference Days.

Cooperation Brings Prosperity to the People of the Baltic Sea Region

Ms Carola Veit, President of the BSPC while opening the 26th Conference, stressed that the issues discussed had been carefully chosen. She stated that, “With our topics ‘Democracy’, ‘Science’ and ‘Sustainability’, I believe we have chosen forward-looking themes, which will determine the strength of our societies in the future”.

The first session “Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region” brought reports from the Council of the Baltic Sea States. **Ambassador Guðmundur Árni Stefánsson**, representing the outgoing CBSS Chair, referred to the meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Baltic Sea region which had taken place in Reykjavik and pointed out that the Ministers of the Baltic Sea region countries in the Declaration, which had been signed on that occasion, had expressed their willingness

to invest in the BSR cooperation, including the BSPC. **Mr Hans Olsson**, Chairman of the Committee of Senior Officials and Ambassador of Sweden, revealed the main keywords of the upcoming Swedish CBSS Presidency 2017-2018 – “sustainability”, “continuity” and “adaptability”.

The last part of the session was devoted to the report on the implementation of the 25th BSPC Resolution, presented by **Prof Jānis Vucāns**, BSPC Vice-President and Vice-President of the Baltic Assembly, and the speeches of the BSPC Rapporteurs.

In their presentations, the BSPC Rapporteurs, **Jörgen Pettersson** on Integrated Maritime Policy, **Sonja Mandt** on Cultural Affairs and **Franz Thönnies** on the Baltic Sea Labour Forum gave a brief review of work results of the working groups they had chaired.



Photo: Susanne Ahrens, Olaf Kosiński

Democratic Participation and the Digital Age

The second session brought a lively exchange of different views concerning the participation in decision-making processes, the role of digital participation and challenges that the developments of social media might cause.

The session was chaired by **Carola Veit**, President of the BSPC, in the form of a round table discussion. Ms Veit, in her introductory remarks, raised a set of questions regarding democratic participation. She pointed out that people had apparently been losing faith in the way the societies had been arranged. Even though participation in the polls had been on the rise recently, and greater engagement from active civil society could be perceived, the participation and engagement had shifted towards very local and very personal issues.

Prof Jobst Fiedler, in his address “Democracy at a Cross-Road – Rebuilding Trust through Participation”, outlined a wide range of problems contributing to the current crisis of trust and confidence in liberal democracy – rising inequalities and unequal opportunities, governance deficiencies, insufficient public sector performance and last but not least, a rise of new digital communication technologies helping to mobilise voters against “those at the top” and enabling new political populist entrepreneurs to move to fill the representational void.

Among proposals put forth by Prof Fiedler to make democracies more resilient were more efficient policies addressing the social inequalities and anxieties, the job losses and social alienation caused by immigration. He also noted that new forms of deliberate democracy, digital mobilisation and the increasing amount of political communication on the social media platforms could



Photo: Susanne Ahrens, Olaf Kosinsky



Photo: Susanne Ahrens, Olaf Kosinsky

be a way to complement and revitalise representative democracy by enlarging people's interest and involvement in political decisions.

Mr Alexander Shishlov, the Human Rights Ombudsman of Saint Petersburg, noted that for Russia, human rights institution had been rather young – they had been in place for only 20 years overall. In St Petersburg, they were just 10 years old. The Human Rights Ombudsman was independent of the Federal Constitutional Law, and he was not accountable to any state authorities and officials in exercising his mandate. The aim of the Ombudsman Institute was to guarantee that the rights and freedoms of human beings were protected. Mr Shishlov confirmed that trust in the state institutions had declined – in parliamentary elections in 2016, there had been a low turnout in St Petersburg (32 %). The reasons for that, according to the speaker, were: distrust and disappointment in the efficacy of democracy, lack of real political opposition, lack of real debate in TV programmes, an unstable electoral system and use of administrative resources to influence the results of the elections.

Nonetheless, Mr Shishlov praised the mechanism of democratic participation in St Petersburg. He gave an example of a social media ini-

tiative shaping public spaces in St Petersburg or the initiative to protect Saint Isaac's Cathedral. On the other hand, he noted the abusive impact of information technologies – hacker attacks, alienation and distrust in the state. The reason for that might stem from so-called *realpolitik* applied not only on the national but also on the international level.

After the two keynote speeches, other experts took part in the round table discussion. The speakers were: Mr **Veiko Spolitis**, Member of the Latvian Parliament, Ms **Valentina Pivnenko**, Member of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, Mr **Espen Krogh**, Nordic Council Youth President, and again Mr **Alexander Shishlov**, Human Rights Ombudsman for Saint Petersburg, as well as Prof **Jobst Fiedler**, Hertie School of Governance, Berlin. The main question of the discussion, moderated by Ms **Carola Veit**, concerned the reasons for the decline in people's trust in the democratic processes. The experts presented diverse opinions, pointing out economic problems and instability culminating in Brexit, people's interests being restricted to certain issues rather than general questions. The experts differed in their views on so-called deliberate democracy, along with legal measures implemented by Baltic Sea States and recently by Ger-



Photos: Susanne Ahrens, Olaf Kosinsky

many aiming to bar hate speech. A few examples of referendums were mentioned, such as one on the privatisation of the state energy company Latvenergo in 1990, another on Russian as the second language in Latvia in 2012 and a referendum in Crimea.

Science and Research as a Basis for Political Decisions

The session **Science and Research**, chaired by **Prof Jānis Vucāns**, MP of Latvia, Vice-President of the BSPC and Vice-President of the Baltic Assembly, and co-chaired by **Prof Aadu Must**, MP of Estonia, President of the Baltic Assembly, was an attempt to discuss the links between science, research and political decision-making processes. Another goal was to show the importance of evidence-based research and the societal role of science. Prof Jānis Vucāns emphasised that science had become a critical tool to defend democracy, and it was playing an important role in reversing the worrying trend towards a fact-free, post-truth world. Therefore, politicians needed support from scientists to take decisions based on sound knowledge and research.

Ms Monika Stankiewicz, HELCOM Executive Secretary, presented the main findings of the *State of the Baltic Sea 2017 Report*, monitoring the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan.

Ms Stankiewicz pointed out the poor state of the Baltic Sea. For instance, the Baltic Sea was still highly affected by eutrophication. Even though phosphorus and nitrogen inputs – causing eutrophication – had been reduced significantly, the Baltic Sea Action Plan had not yet been fully implemented. About 60 % of the agreed joint regional actions in the Plan had been carried out. Regarding actions to be implemented on the national level, the corresponding number

was between 30 and 65 %, depending on the country. If all agreed actions of the Baltic Sea Action Plan would be taken, this would bring about increased human welfare and economic benefits to citizens in the coastal countries, as evidenced in the State of the Baltic Sea report. Ms Stankiewicz underlined that total losses due to eutrophication were estimated at 3.8–4.4 billion euros annually for the Baltic Sea region. Ms Stankiewicz announced that HELCOM was about to launch a regional consultation on the “State of the Baltic Sea” and that HELCOM would like to hear the BSPC’s views in order to improve the report. She expressed her hope that the State of the Baltic Sea report could be used as widely as possible and that the BSPC politicians could also find it useful for their work.

Ambassador Maira Mora, Director General of the Permanent International Secretariat of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, recalled that dialogue on science and research cooperation in the CBSS had begun during the Latvian CBSS Presidency in 2007-2008 and been reconfirmed in the Vilnius Declaration “A Vision for the Baltic Sea Region by 2020” adopted in 2010. Thanks to the dedication of the CBSS Polish Chairmanship in 2015-2016, the first CBSS Science Ministerial Meeting had taken place in the previous summer in Kraków. It had put into action the two working groups via the Baltic Science Network and Baltic TRAM (Transnational Research Access in the Macroregion), both funded by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme. During the Icelandic Presidency, the Baltic Science Network had explored the existing researcher mobility patterns of the macro-region to reflect in depth which transnationally coordinated steps should be taken to enhance the research potential. The current CBSS Swedish Chairmanship, in turn, would benefit from the first results delivered by the Baltic TRAM partnership. Namely, the Baltic TRAM had processed the first business enquiries during the open call offering free access to the state-of-the-

art analytical research facilities across the Baltic Sea region.

Prof Ulrich Bathmann from the Leibniz Institute for Baltic Sea Research noted in his speech a number of factors affecting the environment of the Baltic Sea. The first referred to *carbon dioxide* (CO₂). Prof Bathmann confirmed that the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere was increasing. This meant that oceans would become more acidic as the pH of the oceans was decreasing due to the uptake of CO₂ from the *atmosphere*. The second fact was that the temperature of Earth was rising, and it would continue to rise. Accordingly, aside from many other aspects, sea water would expand, raising the sea level. The people around the Baltic Sea, i.e., 9 nations with 85 million inhabitants covering one tenth of the area of Europe, would have to face that situation. Next, Prof Bathmann described a number of areas in which human activity was exerting a particularly negative impact on the ecosystem, such as: tourism accelerated by globalisation; plastic and especially microplastic waste – hard to detect and harmful to the environment; increasing ship traffic meaning a growing likelihood of an accident and oil pollution; changing patterns of water exchange between the Baltic and the North Sea, i.e., anoxic areas in the Baltic Sea were getting larger while oxic periods were getting shorter; last but not least, WWII ammu-

nition at the bottom of the sea. Prof Bathmann recommended implementing additional measures and programmes to monitor the state of the Baltic Sea in order to provide answers to many questions, some of which were presented in his speech.

Mr Jari Haapala from the Finnish Meteorological Institute gave a presentation on the “Utility of Regional Climate Models for the Baltic Sea Region”. He provided an overview of a number of questions that the climatologists in the Baltic Sea region sought to answer. The speaker pointed out that climate change – as well as other anthropogenic and natural changes in the atmosphere, on land and in the sea – was exerting different pressures on the natural and human-shaped environment of the region. These pressures included regional warming, a declining sea ice cover, sea level rise, deoxygenation, acidification, changing precipitation and runoff patterns as well as a changing frequency of high impact events like storm surges, floods, drought and heat periods. The characterisation of these pressures as well as a synthesis of the state of scientific knowledge about their causes and impacts had been a core goal of scientists operating within the networking organisation: Baltic Earth. Mr Haapala stated that the environmental changes observed in the research of the Baltic Earth network were often caused by a mixture of factors, among them climate change



Photo: Susanne Ahrens, Olaf Kosinsky

and its associated impacts, eutrophication, pollution, fisheries, land cover change and others. Each of these factors had a scientific and a societal dimension, which were often interdependent. That complexity made it difficult to identify a single or even dominant factor responsible for the change.

Prof Dr Robert Feidenhans'l, Managing Director of the European XFEL, explained that his institute was the unique research facility for the largest and most powerful X-ray laser in the world to be used by researchers from Europe and across the world. The X-ray flashes were produced in underground tunnels, allowing scientists to map the atomic details of viruses, film chemical reactions and study the processes in the interior of planets. The facility had been officially inaugurated 2 days before the BSPC conference at an international event, attended by Prof Dr Johanna Wanka, German Minister for Education and Research. Professor Feidenhans'l underlined that the facility's launch was the result of the great cooperation in the Baltic Sea region. He further stressed that the involvement of young people was needed to develop and deepen this cooperation in the future. The facility was intended to be a place in which young people could meet and exchange their knowledge.

Tourism in the Age of Acceleration

The second day of the conference in Hamburg began with a discussion about new prospects and challenges for tourism in the Baltic Sea region and worldwide. The topic suited perfectly the United Nations having declared the year 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. The Vice Chair of the BSPC Working Group on Sustainable Tourism, **Sara Kemetter** from the Åland Islands, presented the working group's final report to the conference. The working group had developed eleven recommendations to the governments of

the Baltic Sea region, all of which had been included in the 26th BSPC Conference Resolution. "We will use our work and the recommendations in order to make a contribution that will strengthen sustainable tourism in the whole Baltic Sea region," Ms Kemetter pointed out. The contribution made by the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Youth Forum to the final recommendations on sustainable tourism were presented by two young delegates, **Friederike Schick** from Hamburg and **Elias Lindström** from the Åland Islands. Improving education standards and raising the job status in tourism, switching to eco- and agricultural tourism, strengthening sustainable transport and launching a Baltic Sea Summer Ticket were just a few of the many ideas discussed by young people and politicians during the meeting of the BSPC Working Group in Kiel. The final report of the Working Group on Sustainable Tourism had been published on the website and additionally distributed in a print version to the conference participants.

Mr Molstad, a journalist and advisor on sustainable tourism to international institutions, confronted the listeners with fundamental questions regarding the future of sustainable tourism in a world in which approx. 1.6 billion people were travelling abroad for touristic reasons every year, in which social media were driving the travel industry and changing the demand structure. Mr Molstad insisted that tourism needed to move to a low-carbon future by making the business case for meeting targets grounded in climate science. The speaker provided the participants with the example of Norway which had launched a cross-sectoral Green Competitive Initiative as a direct result of the Paris Climate Accord. The Initiative aimed to create sustainable travel and sustainable tourism in Norway by 2030. More positive examples of tourism industry efforts towards sustainability came from **Dr Monika Griefahn**, Chief Sustainability Officer at AIDA Cruises, **Alexander Sirchenko**, Vice Director General on the Development on Internal Tourism, TUI Russia,

and **Michael Otremba**, Managing Director of Hamburg Tourismus GmbH.

More Solidarity and More Collaboration – The Only Solution to Cope with the Migration Challenge.

With a view to the next working group of the BSPC which had been established by the 26th BSPC, the conference also dealt with migration and integration.

Pedro Roque, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, expressed his conviction that migration was not going away, that it was not something that could be stopped but could only be organised better. The population of Africa numbered about a billion people in the present day and would reach 2.3 billion by 2050. Every day, 33,000 young people were entering the saturated labour market in Africa. Only 40 % of them would be lucky enough to get a job. In this situation, he said, the only way to cope with that was close cooperation on the regional, European and global level.

Isabel Santos, Vice-President of OSCE PA and the Vice-Chair of the OSCE PA ad hoc Committee on Migration, called “For a Coherent, Shared and Responsible Governance of Migration and Refugee Flows”. She underlined that some restrictive policies, sometimes hostile public and political attitudes, combined with continuing arrivals and growing protection needs, were causing harm to families choosing the fastest rather than the safest route, taking impossible risks. They were resorting to using human traffickers, facing exploitation and abuse. Moreover, they had to suffer violence and were exposed to sickness, hunger and lack of care. Politicians, she noted, needed to start having a dialogue on what type of migration policy could be jointly developed in Europe.

Ms Maira Mora, the Director General of the CBSS Secretariat, announced the establishment of a new ad hoc/expert Working Group on Labour and Employment as a result of the meeting of labour ministers and their high-level representatives from the Baltic Sea in Berlin on 15 June 2017. The topics to be addressed by the working group included labour mobility, demographic challenges, youth employment and the integration of migrants.

In the following vivid debate, the parliamentarians emphasised that closer cooperation and more action were required from the governments and international organisations, allowing the newly established BSPC Working Group on Migration and Integration to serve as a great platform for cooperation with the CBSS on such an important topic.

The conference was concluded with the unanimous adoption of the resolution, along with some changes in the rules of procedure as well as agreeing on the Working Programme 2017-2018.

The new BSPC President Jörgen Pettersson invited the parliamentarians to the 27th BSPC conference in Mariehamn on 26-28 August 2018.



Photo: Susanne Ahrens, Olaf Kosiński

27th BSPC – 2018, Mariehamn, Åland Islands



The 27th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference took place in Mariehamn, Åland Islands. Some 170 delegates met in the Plenary Hall of the Lagtinget, the Parliament of Åland. The aim of this year's conference was to pass a resolution on cooperation, sustainability and smart energy in the Baltic Sea region.

The conference was opened by **H.E. Mr Sauli Niinistö**, President of the Republic of Finland.

The President underlined the uniqueness of co-operation among the countries around the Baltic Sea, which throughout history – beginning with the Hanseatic League – had brought remarkable benefits for the peoples living there. The sea had connected them long before the road and railroad network. He pointed out that there was probably no other region in the world with as dense a network of different regional co-operation structures as around the Baltic Sea,

listing the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, HELCOM, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation and the Union of the Baltic Cities as some of many examples of networks operating in the Baltic Sea region. He said, “Together we will achieve the goals for a better environment. But we have to keep in mind: Structures and conferences don't mean anything without concrete action.”

Ms Gun-Mari Lindholm, President of the Ålands Lagting, pointed out in her welcoming speech that the Åland Islands were often called the islands of peace. She noted that Åland had gained its autonomy in 1921 by a decision of The League of Nations, providing the guarantee of security in the region. She hoped the participants would learn more about Åland and their autonomy, business life and everyday life. She highlighted the fact that the Baltic Sea separated



people but also united them, and that it was the same sea which would be passed on to the next generations.

Ms Paula Lehtomäki, State Secretary to the Prime Minister of Finland, informed the participants about the development of Finland's strategy for the Baltic Sea region. She acknowledged that it was an interactive and inclusive process in which the priorities were selected in light of the views expressed by stakeholders from NGOs, business and academia. The new strategy had been published in November 2017. Then the speaker drew the attention of the audience to the preparation process of the White Paper on maritime policies, featuring key sustainable blue growth as the overall priority. The paper would also address such issues as maritime logistics, maritime cluster and blue economy, protection of the ocean and the seas. She stated her strong belief that strategies were useful because they boosted concrete actions and made them more efficient. Strategies could clarify targets and prioritise concrete actions, but most importantly, the preparation of the strategies brought people together. That, she underlined, was the way to guide the action towards the common goal.

Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region: The Best Way To Mutual Understanding

Mr Jörgen Pettersson, President of the BSPC, provided the conference with the report on the BSPC's activities throughout the previous year. He emphasised that the BSPC had visibly and, in every respect, fulfilled its strategic objectives, achieving significant progress. On the basis of the BSPC programme and the BSPC resolution in the year 2017-2018, the BSPC had communicated their principles and core messages at a large number of Baltic Sea-relevant events and beyond, had intensified the cooperation with its regional partners and efficiently promoted pro-

grammatic concerns and contents. The three strategic priorities of the BSPC's 2017-2018 work programme – sustainable societies in the Baltic Sea region based on democratic values; human rights and equal opportunities 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 – had been targeted in all activities throughout Åland's BSPC presidency. Jörgen Pettersson presented a list of events and activities that had taken place in the previous year and stressed that the attendance at that impressive number of events served to convey the message on the importance of international parliamentary cooperation – especially during tense situations – and on the need for interparliamentary dialogue as well as strengthening the influence of parliaments.

The Standing Committee had decided that the President of the Conference at which the resolution had been adopted would provide a report on the results of the governmental statements on the resolution's implementation and the evaluation. Therefore, the report was presented by **Ms Carola Veit**, President of the Hamburg Parliament and Vice-President of the BSPC. The speaker reminded her audience of the resolution's aim regarding strengthening the involvement of young people in all areas of society, including the BSPC's willingness to continue the work on establishing a Baltic Sea Forum for Young People. Those efforts had brought both the Nordic Council of Ministers and the CBSS to support the *ReGeneration 2030* initiative. The conference on the Åland Islands had brought together young people from Denmark, Estonia, the Faroe Islands, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia, Sweden, Germany and Åland.

Regarding the thematic chapter of the preceding year's resolution – "Democratic Participation and the Digital Age" –, Ms Veit declared that



many of those issues had been well covered by numerous programmes and projects such as digital elections in Åland, a focus on digital literacy, the journalists' ethnic ombudsman in Lithuania and the "Nationwide Education Network" in Poland. Closer regional cooperation on digitisation had been a key priority for the Norwegian Government during its Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Turning to the assessment of the resolution chapter on "Sustainable Tourism", Ms Veit pointed out that the focus in this diverse section – ranging from wastewater facilities to bike routes – concerned national measures due to certain international conventions to promote sustainable tourism.

Ms Veit underlined that thanks to the analysis presented in her report, the parliamentarians had been provided with the highest possible quality feedback for their further work, because, as she stressed, only comprehensive and interdisciplinary statements would allow the govern-

ments to be held accountable regarding the BSPC's resolutions.

Mr Hans Olsson, Ambassador of Sweden and outgoing chair of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), reminded the conference that the key priorities of the CBSS were Sustainability, Continuity and Adaptability. An important part of the Swedish presidency was the follow-up to the Reykjavik Declaration from 2017. In this respect, the task had been given to a group of independent experts to elaborate a report with suggestions for the tasks and working methods of the Council after 2020.

Ambassador Juris Bone, Chairman of the CBSS Committee of Senior Officials, pointed out three priorities: integrity and societal security, dialogue and responsibility. He mentioned that the Report of the CBSS Vision Group prepared during the CBSS Swedish Presidency 2017-2018 would be taken further and that an implementation plan would be elaborated. Youth involvement was also highlighted by the speaker.



He reported that the presidency had begun with an event connected to youth cooperation, the “Baltic International Summer School on Media Literacy and Democratic Processes” at the Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences in Valmiera in Latvia, as part of the framework of the CBSS Summer University. The ambassador underlined the unique role the CBSS had been playing in the Baltic Sea region and hoped for further close cooperation in changing conditions.

The Conference had been provided with a brief review of work results on areas of interest for the BSPC. **Mr Hans Wallmark**, Chairman of the BSPC Working Group on Migration and Integration group, provided a mid-way report on the group’s efforts, **Ms Christina Gestrin** presented information on the environmental cooperation in the Baltic Sea region, **Mr Franz Thönnies** and **Ms Daria Akhutina** gave a joint report on the work of the CBSS/BSLF Coordination Group on Labour and Employment.

Mr Simon Holmström and **Ms Hanna Salmén**, representatives of the Youth Event “ReGeneration 2030”, presented their manifesto and the results of the summit, as mentioned by previous speakers.



Photo: Ralf Rolerschek, Olaf Kosinsky

Briefings from BSPC Rapporteurs

The BSPC Rapporteurs – **Jörgen Pettersson** and **Jochen Schulte** on Integrated Maritime Policy, **Karin Gaardsted** on Cultural Affairs, **Sara Kemetter** on Sustainable Tourism, **Pyy Niemi** on Labour Market and Social Welfare, **Saara-Sofia Sirén** on HELCOM and on Eutrophication – presented the results of the actions taken in their respective fields.

Addresses by **Roger Ryberg**, Chairman of the Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation (BSSSC), and by **Ulla-Karin Nurm**, Director of the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-Being, **Prof Asaf Hajiev**,

Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC), and **Gun Rudquist**, Head of Policy at Baltic Eye, rounded out the first session.

More Action on the Vision of a Healthy Baltic Sea Urgently Needed

As stated in the introduction, the BSPC had supported the Baltic Sea Action Plan of HELCOM from the very beginning; however, three years before the end of the current Action Plan, a good environmental status for the Baltic Sea had not yet been achieved. Therefore, more political pressure and more action was needed in that respect. The speakers presented their views and statements on the Vision of a Healthy Baltic Sea.

Karmenu Vella, European Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, noted in his video message on the topic, “Protecting our environment while maintaining our competitiveness in regard to the UN 2030 goals for our oceans and the Baltic Sea Action Plan” called for a more strategic approach which would focus on pulling resources, scaling up projects and reaching critical mass. He emphasised that there was a need to extend and strengthen the cross-sectorial, regional and interregional partnerships. In fulfilling these tasks, EU funding could help. The speaker addressed the issue of waste in the sea. He explained that mapping litter sources in urban areas and at sea was the first step to reduce the amount of hazardous substances and plastic waste at sea. The European Union was working towards healthy, safe and sustainable oceans. The EU’s long-standing objective was in line with the global sustainable development goals. However, he underlined the importance of member states, regions, the world of business and academia working together.

Kimmo Tiilikainen, Minister of the Environment, Energy and Housing of Finland, stressed the priorities of the Finnish HELCOM Chairmanship and the future of the Baltic Sea Action Plan. The Minister referred to the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in Brussels, in March 2018, at which the status of the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan had been reviewed. Unfortunately, the meeting had come to the conclusion that, although implementation was underway, it had not progressed as swiftly as it should have, and there was still a lot to do before 2021, the deadline year for the Baltic Sea Action Plan. The speaker also mentioned an example of good cooperation, namely the preparations to jointly address the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) to declare the Baltic Sea a Nitrogen Emission Control Area NECA; jointly designating 12 % of the area of the Baltic Sea as marine protected areas and the recent agreement of all Baltic Sea states on the description of nine Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs).

Camilla Gunell, Deputy Prime Minister of the Åland Islands and Minister for Trade, Environment and Energy, informed the attendees about the sustainability strategy of the Åland Islands as a best-practice example for the Baltic Sea region. The strategy was a response by the Åland Islands’ society to the challenges of the climate change and to the consequences of rising temperatures. **Ottilia Thoreson**, Director of the WWF Baltic Ecoregion Programme, highlighted the Baltic Sea Scorecard and the need for stringent action.

Sustainable Energy, Smart Energy Distribution Platforms – The Future of the BSR?

The discussion on “Sustainable Energy, Smart Energy Distribution Platforms” was chaired by **Valentina Pivnenko**, Member of the State Duma

of the Russian Federation, and **Karin Gaardsted**, Member of Parliament from Denmark. Contributions were made about interesting pilot projects in the Baltic Sea region regarding the next generation of electrical grids.

Berndt Schalin, Senior Advisor of the Government of Åland, explained a project aimed at realizing a smart and flexible energy system, allowing novel energy markets and regulations to be implemented. **Reinis Āboltiņš**, Senior Adviser on Energy from Latvia, described challenges to sustainable energy in the Baltic Sea region.

BSPC Delegates in a General Debate

At the end of this 27th BSPC conference, a new format was introduced – a **general debate**

without restrictions to the content so that everyone could have the opportunity to contribute what was particularly close to his or her heart. Therefore, the topics were very diverse. For instance, various positions on international rights and the situation in Crimea were presented by **Atis Lejiņš** from Latvia and **Valentina Pivnenko** from Russia. **Britt Lundberg** mentioned the Nordic Council's international strategy to strive to ensure democracy, the rule of law, equality and human rights. Referring to environmental issues, she cited a low-key example from Copenhagen called “the Green Kayak”, a concept offering tourists and residents a free trip in kayaks in exchange for collecting waste from water surfaces and sharing these experiences on social media. **Annette Holmberg-Jansson**, from the Åland Islands, considered it a very positive aspect of the BSPC that it allowed people from small places like Åland or from large countries such as Germany to realise that they were still facing the same problems such as demographic change, i.e., society getting older. **Carola Veit**, referencing some of the previous statements, stressed

that political correctness should not deter them from pointing out problems and disagreements since political organisations were forums to discuss political disagreements. For **Kolbeinn Ótarsson Proppé**, member of parliament from Iceland, history was not the most important aspect but rather the future. With all the problems they were facing, what mattered was the commitment and willingness of the participants to tackle these issues. **Jörgen Pettersson** rounded out the discussion by noting that the participants of the BSPC came from extremely different backgrounds; some had experienced democracy for many years while others were relatively new to democracy, but all of them were the same kinds of people – people who wanted to be loved, to be respected, to feel safe; people who wanted a tomorrow that was better than today. That, he pointed out, was the basic reason for the attendees having come together.

At the end of this open forum, the resolution of the 27th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was adopted, and the Strategy and Work Programme 2018-2019 was released.

According to the BSPC's tradition, the incoming President of the BSPC, Mr Jorodd Asphjell, took over the baton and invited all delegates to the 28th BSPC in Oslo.



Photos: Ralf Rolenschek, Olaf Kostinsky

28th BSPC – 2019, Oslo, Norway



Over 180 delegates from the Baltic Sea region's parliaments and interregional organisations, guests and experts were welcomed by Mr **Jorodd Asphjell**, President of the BSPC, and **H.E. Tone Wilhelmsen Trøen**, President of the Storting, in the Plenary Hall of the Norwegian parliament, the Storting, on Monday morning on 26 August.

In her opening address, **President of the Storting Trøen** pointed out that “If we are to solve common, international challenges, we will need more and closer international cooperation, not less. Climate change, migration and security issues know no borders. Regional stability and friendly relations between our peoples are essential for the wellbeing of our citizens.” She voiced her contentment over the BSPC conference being hosted by Norway for the third time and reminded the audience that the topic discussed during the 2004 BSPC conference had been “Sustainable Development – Shared Concerns

and Responsibilities in the Baltic Sea Region”. 15 years later, that was still a burning issue, with “clean oceans” one of the main topics of the present conference. President Trøen emphasised that Norway remained strongly committed to the Paris Agreement and the UN sustainable goals with green solutions within shipping and the maritime industry as an important contribution to both of them. In the government's ocean strategy, the acknowledgement of crossover technology and expertise between the ocean industries as well as exploring new potential was playing an important role. The speaker noted that Norway also had the ambitious goals of cutting CO₂ emissions from domestic shipping and fishing by 50 % by 2030.

Mr **Audun Halvorsen**, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, presented “Framework conditions for cooperation in Northern Europe”. He stressed that the well-es-



Photo: Ralf Roltschek

established and diverse network of cooperation structures was a strength. But it also represented a challenge when it came to coordination, the potential for overlapping efforts and the need for strong prioritisation. Therefore, he said that “we need to make sure that our work within these different fora is efficient, effective and that we create synergies and avoid duplication (...); such coordination is obviously a responsibility for the governments”. Mr Halvorsen highlighted in the spirit of clear priorities the issue of safeguarding the oceans as a key priority area for Norway both in a regional and global perspective but also as an example for the importance of regional and multilateral cooperation. He stated that the balance between harvesting from the oceans and protecting them was even more important today – both in the Baltic Sea neighbourhood and globally. Therefore, multilateral cooperation and international alliances were needed to push the global community to take action to ensure that the oceans would remain healthy and rich. That was why Norway’s Prime

Minister had established the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy in the previous year. The panel consisted of 14 serving heads of state and government from ocean and coastal states representing all continents. With input from experts, the private sector and civil society, the panel would present a roadmap for action to the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon in June 2020. The speaker informed the delegates that in the upcoming October, Norway would host the “Our Ocean Conference” in Oslo with the aim to highlight the importance of knowledge as the basis of all actions and policies to achieve sustainable economic growth. Finally, he underlined the importance of the interaction between practical, project-oriented cooperation and political dialogue. “Political dialogue has been and remains a core condition for agreeing on common objectives and priorities. At the same time, concrete cooperation projects facilitate political dialogue and mutual understanding,” stated the speaker.



Mr **Jorodd Asphjell**, President of the BSPC, noted in his opening address that the historical context of the BSPC had been changing over time. These days, he pointed out, “we find ourselves in a situation of constructive collaboration in many policy fields in which we can all only benefit from cross-border cooperation. However, at the highest political level, we see rising tensions worldwide.” Therefore, a discussion on how to reduce tensions and how to stabilise and maintain peace and prosperity was needed. Mr Asphjell welcomed the distinguished guests of the 28th BSPC conference, among them the former European Commissioner for Human Rights, the Ministers and the State Secretaries from the Labour Ministries of the CBSS countries, the Transport Minister of Latvia, who presided over the Northern Dimension for Transport and Logistics, and the State Secretary from the Finnish Ministry of the Environment, who was holding both the Presidency of HELCOM and the

chairmanship of the EU Council in environmental affairs in the current year.

Summing up the Norwegian Presidency in the BSPC, he said, “In the past year, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference has visibly and in every respect fulfilled its programmatic and strategic objectives and achieved significant progress: Based on our strategy and work programme 2018-2019 and our resolution,

- we have communicated our principles and core messages at many Baltics Sea-relevant events and beyond,
- we have intensified the cooperation with our partners, and
- our programmatic concerns and contents are perceived more strongly.

We are becoming increasingly successful in in-

fluencing government action. Wherever possible, we have emphasised and strengthened the parliamentary dimension of cooperation. I hope that year after year, we will succeed better and better for the people who elected us.”

The opening was followed by three Monday sessions.

Baltic Cooperation – The Inalienable Value of the Region

Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region proved how intensely the BSPC was cooperating with important stakeholders in the BSR and beyond. Incentive speeches for the debate on *“Peaceful and close neighbourliness as well as intense cooperation based on democratic values, the rule of law, human rights and equal opportunities for all”* were given by: Mr **Nils Muižnieks**, former Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights, and **Dr Alexander Graef** from the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH). Next, the representative of the outgoing CBSS Presidency, Ambassador **Juris Bone** from Latvia, and **Ms Ida Heimann Larsen**, Chair of the CBSS Committee of Senior Officials from Denmark, presented the priorities and activities of the CBSS presidencies. As per tradition, several interregional cooperation organisations presented their achievements and possibilities for further cooperation in the Baltic Sea region.

The session on the Future of Working Life welcomed speeches by eminent experts, ministers and high representatives of Labour Ministers from Latvia, Lithuania, Germany, Finland, Norway, Poland and Russia who had held a back-to-back CBSS meeting on that topic to the 28th BSPC.

In his opening address, the chair of the session, **Prof Jānis Vucāns**, President of the Baltic

Assembly, noted that unemployment in Europe was historically low; nevertheless, the rapidly changing world of work had to be adapted and innovated. He expressed his strong belief that everybody’s living standards could be improved, provided that the governments together with the social partners would invest in new and better skills, higher qualifications and social services. These investments could prevent a brain drain in the region.

Integrated Ocean Management

The subject matter of the session, **Safeguarding the Oceans – Achieving the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals**, was a consequence of the demands in the BSPC resolution in which the BSPC strongly called for immediate actions to achieve the UN Agenda 2030 goals and to realise the vision of a clean Baltic Sea free from marine litter. Another demand was to take urgent efficient action on the worrying levels of plastics and micro-plastics in the seas; as well as to prepare for and help shape the “Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development” from 2021-2030 proclaimed by the United Nations. The chair of the session, **Ms Valentina Pivnenko** from the Russian Duma, said: “These are ambitious goals, but they are necessary if we want to change the situation for the better and improve the state of heavily polluted seas.” The session was a continuation of a very successful Joint Meeting of the Standing Committees of the BSPC and the PABSEC on the topic “Safeguarding our Oceans and Marine Life” in Istanbul, in April 2019. The third session was an opportunity to exchange experiences and opinions by representatives from very different backgrounds among the speakers.

Mr Tālis Linkaits, Minister of Transport of the Republic of Latvia, was sharing the views on behalf of the Northern Dimension Partnership on



Traffic and Logistics because Latvia was chairing the partnership on a steering committee level in that year. One of the focus areas had been meeting the need for reduction of greenhouse gases through the promotion of ecologically friendly transport. In 2013, the partnership had taken initiative on addressing the concerns on maritime pollution in the Baltic Sea, focussing on alternative and more environmentally friendly fuels. The Northern Dimension Partnership had joined forces with HELCOM as well as the Baltic Institute and the Baltic Sea Region programme InnoShip, arranging a first conference on alternative fuels. The result of this conference had been a roadmap for sustainable Baltic Sea shipping, currently adopted for the periods 2014-2016 and 2017-2025. The roadmap had featured clearly defined actions and was forming the guidelines for both the industry and the countries surrounding the Baltic Sea. He expressed his hope that the good results of the co-operation would contribute to the improvement of the environmental situation in the BSR.

Ms **Terhi Lehtonen**, State Secretary of the Ministry of the Environment of Finland noted that climate change affected all agendas, also the Baltic Sea agenda and cooperation. She announced that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) would release a special report on the oceans and cryosphere. It was well known that the Baltic Sea has warmed by about one degree and the impacts of change could already be experienced. Climate change was exerting extra pressure on the marine environment as water was warming, ice was decreasing, precipitation patterns were changing while oxygen depletion and acidification were also progressing. All of this resulted in a shifting of species ranges. Ms Lehtonen stated that “we need to ensure that we understand how climate change impacts on the marine environment – and most importantly: The updated Action Plan needs to take into account these changes and still enable us to reach a good environmental status. “

Mr Vidar Helgesen, Norway’s Special Envoy to the High-Level Panel on Building a Sustainable Ocean Economy informed the conference about the activities of the High Level Panel comprised of heads of 14 states/governments and a group of sherpas. The activities of the panel focussed on increasing the productivity of oceans (food, energy, minerals) and at the same time taking care of their protection. To achieve the SDGs goals, humanity had to reach for such new resources in the oceans.

The BSPC Rapporteurs: Ms **Saara-Sofia Sirén**, Rapporteur on Eutrophication and Mr **Jörgen Pettersson**, Rapporteur on Integrated Maritime Policy informed the audience about the developments in the respective policy fields.

Migration and Integration – A Challenge and an Opportunity for the Region

The main topic on the last day of the conference was migration and integration. The session on that issue was chaired by Mr **Pyy Niemi**, MP, Sweden and Ms **Carola Veit**, MP, President of the State Parliament of Hamburg.

A significant part of the session was given to the speech by two representatives of the younger generation and the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Youth Forum – Ms **Rama Akid** who introduced herself as a refugee from Syria living in Germany and Ms **Sara Zdanovska** from Latvia. They reported on discussions during the Migration and Integration Working Group in Schwerin in April 2019 and presented the young people’s view on that issue. The youths had identified the following as the most important problems of immigrants: differences of culture and religion, educational differences, the weather – an underestimated but important factor playing a role in the mental health of immigrants –, the language and different procedures in applying for a job. Among the wishes and recommendations to the decision-makers were the citizens of countries

being educated about newcomers and vice versa, desegregation, political participation, involvement of youth councils and education.

Mr Hans Wallmark, MP, Chairman of the BSPC Working Group on Migration and Integration presented the Second Interim Report of the Working Group, which had been published on the BSPC website. **Mr Wallmark** stated that “the challenge is that every member country has its own set of historical experiences, traditions and political culture. It is no secret that the member states of the BSPC have different approaches to migration. What may work well in one country may not work at all in another. Sometimes, we might have to modify a policy to make it successful in our own environment. The most important aspect is that we are open-minded and try to learn from each other’s successes and mistakes. That is what Baltic Sea cooperation should be all about.”

Mr Tuomas Martikainen, Director of the Migration Institute of Finland, presented some considerations and conclusions about the policy assessment and recommendations on the Baltic Sea governments’ Immigration and Integration Policy. He proposed that the surveys gathered by other organizations (e.g., OECD, Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), the Nordic Welfare Centre and the International Organization for Migration (IOM)) could be combined in the future with the data collected by the BSPC members. This would assist the public policies’ role in facilitating the desirable working conditions for NGOs and informal networks, thus strengthening immigrant integration.

The next speakers, Ms **Annika Annerby Jansson**, President Scania Regional Council, and Ms **Katarina Carlzen** shared the Skåne Multilevel Best Practice on Integration. In the case of Skåne, the multi-level way of working had been the key to success. Ms Jansson informed the audience that a joint strategy had been designed by

the Region Skåne, the County Administrative Board and the Skåne Association of Local Authorities. The responsibilities were shared by national, regional, and local authorities together with civil society and academia. She stressed that a common strategy had to be translated into concrete practice with different and complementary roles. That method of work – a multi-level platform, i.e., Partnership Skåne – had been partially transferred to large parts of Sweden, involving all of Sweden’s counties with more than 150 municipalities, five universities and a large number of NGOs. In the next part of the session, two BSPC reports were presented, one by **Ms Sara Kemetter**, MP on Sustainable Tourism, and by **Mr Jörgen Pettersson**, Vice-President of the BSPC, as well as **Dr Thomas Etzold** on the Implementation of the 27th BSPC Resolution. Session four was concluded by **the general debate**. There were no restrictions placed on the debate’s content, giving each parliamentarian and every participant the opportunity to contribute what was particularly important to him/her, regardless of the conference topic.

28th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference Successfully Concluded – Lithuania Takes over the Presidency of the BSPC

Concluding the conference, the parliamentarians unanimously passed a resolution covering cooperation in the Baltic Sea region, the future of working life, safeguarding the oceans – achieving the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals – as well as migration and integration. In their resolution, they called, among other points, to strengthen trust among all Member States of the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) through further concrete efforts and measures; to intensify the early involvement of the next generation and respect that generation’s concerns more intensively in policy and decision-making processes via concrete measures of the governments to reinforce the foundations of trust and security in the Baltic Sea region as an element of foreign

policy; to implement and exchange ideas on the ministerial level as early as possible; to include the social partners' current considerations and strategic approaches in meeting the considerable challenges regarding the future of working life and to use the early exchange of such to deal with these challenges in the individual countries of the Baltic Sea region; to support the further development of a legally-binding, globally-reaching mechanism for managing plastic waste and to explore the possibility of a Baltic Sea-wide agreement on the future management of migration.

After the successful passing of the resolution, the baton of the Presidency went to Lithuania as the host of the 29th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference. The conference unanimously appointed Mr **Valerijus Simulik**, Member of the Lithuanian Parliament, as the new BSPC President. Mr **Jorodd Asphjell**, Member of the Norwegian Parliament and Mr **Pyy Niemi**, Member of the Swedish Parliament, were appointed Vice Presidents of the BSPC. The upcoming BSPC President **Valerijus Simulik** invited the delegates to Vilnius (August 22 until 25) and remarked that after 15 years, the BSPC would come back to Lithuania. "During our Presidency, we want to place a special emphasis on what is particularly close to our hearts: a boost to innovation through science and technology and their interaction to achieve better added value in economic development based on science", he pointed out in his address as incoming President of the BSPC 2019-2020.

The success of the 28th BSPC Conference was not only shown in the unanimous adoption of a resolution with far-reaching common objectives but also in the creation of a platform for the presentation of sometimes very different positions and proving that a compromise could be reached in a debate that was sometimes heated at the beginning, but always conducted in a parliamentary fashion.

The many discussions that took place in the Storting plenary hall, within the framework of the cultural programme and especially during the evening to which the President of the Storting had invited the participants, helped to reduce existing tensions on some national levels, to build new confidence, to deepen cooperation and to decide on common, future-oriented measures.

BSPC President **Jorodd Asphjell** closed the 28th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference in Oslo with "a thousand thanks" – "tusen takk" – to all participants.

29th BSPC – 2020, Digital



Due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and measures taken in all countries, it was not possible to hold the 29th Annual Conference as planned in persona in Vilnius. Therefore, the Standing Committee of the BSPC had decided on 17 June 2019 to hold the 29th Annual Conference digitally on the initially scheduled date based on the far-advanced preparations and planning by then.

The Digital 29th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference gathered delegates from all member parliaments and parliamentary organisations of the BSPC. The representatives discussed topics such as the environmental state of the Baltic Sea, migration and integration, maritime policy and tourism; but the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on every aspect of cooperation in the Baltic Sea region was a constant element of the discussion.



On behalf of **H. E. Mr. Gitanas Nausėda**, President of the Republic of Lithuania, **Mr Sigitas Mitkus**, adviser to the President on Foreign Policy Issues, addressed over 150 participants of the Conference. In his speech, he referred to the situation in Belarus, expressing his support for the aspirations of the Belarusian people on their way to freedom. He reminded the Conference that 30 years earlier, the Baltic states had gained independence and stressed that Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were receiving significant support from other countries. Speaking for the president, Mr Mitkus pointed out at the end of his speech that he would like to believe in a free and democratic Belarus.

Mr **Viktoras Prackietis**, Speaker of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, in his speech emphasised the importance of cooperation in the Baltic Sea region to ensure sustainable development in this region. He expressed his hope that the region would remain an area of peaceful co-



operation based on the rule of law and human rights.

Mr **Virginijus Sinkevičius**, European Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, expressed his strong belief that the cooperation between the countries of the region should be strengthened to improve the environmental situation of the Baltic Sea. He announced the or-



ganization of a summit meeting of ministers responsible for the state of the environment in the Baltic Sea region.

Mr **Valerijus Simulik**, President of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, began his report on the Lithuanian BSPC Presidency 2019-2020 by noting that the Lithuanian presidency and the activities of the BSPC had been overshadowed since March by the COVID-19 pandemic along with the restrictions and measures associated with it in all their countries. Nevertheless, they had succeeded in mainly realising the strategy



and work programme that had been set out in August of the preceding year.

Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region for Safe and Prosperous Development

After the opening of the Conference, representatives of the incumbent, former and incoming CBSS Presidencies spoke about *Vision 2030: Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region for Safe and Prosperous Development*:

Mr *Neris Germanas*, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, presented the four priorities of the Lithuanian Presidency:



green and maritime tourism as an important sector in reviving the regional economy, increasing the region's visibility, giving employment opportunities to young people; civil protection in the region, strengthening resilience in the region against major emergencies and disasters; the fight against human trafficking for labour exploitation in the region as well as the prevention of violence against children.

Ambassador **Ove Ullerup**, representing the 2019-2020 Danish Presidency of the Council of Baltic Sea States, reported that on 19 May 2020, the Foreign Ministers of all 11 Member States and a high-level representative of the EU had met in a video conference. Mr Ullerup underlined the extraordinary level of participation as a strong sign of the political support for the re-



form of the CBSS. As a result of that meeting, the Bornholm Declaration had been adopted.

Mr **Dag Wernø Holter**, Senior Adviser, Nordic-Baltic Section, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Norway, confirmed that the in-



coming Norwegian presidency would continue to implement the CBSS reform and follow the Bornholm Declaration.

Mr **Pyy Niemi**, Vice President of the BSPC who was chairing the session, expressed his gratitude



to the management of the CBSS Secretariat for their excellent cooperation with the BSPC and added his best wishes to the outgoing Director General of the Secretariat, Ambassador **Maira Mora**.

Safeguarding the Environment, Seas and Oceans for Future Generations



The second session, chaired by **Ms Valentina Pivnenko**, former BSPC President, dealt with the topic of *Safeguarding the Environment, Seas and Oceans for Future Generations*.

The speakers of that session were: **Ms Svenja Schulze**, Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Germany, HELCOM Chair, European Council Presidency; **Mr Oleg Nilov**, Member of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, and **Mr Peter Stein**, BSPC Rapporteur

on Sea-Dumped Munitions, Member of the German Bundestag. All of them called for even closer and more active cooperation in these times of the coronavirus pandemic.

“The overarching goal remains the best possible protection of the Baltic Sea,” said **Svenja Schulze**, Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety of Germany, in her video address introducing Germany’s HELCOM Chairmanship, further adding that all efforts should also consider aspects of “sustainability, relevance for the climate and biological diversity, and suitability”. The Minister further noted that Germany’s Chairmanship would also lead to the finalisation of the update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) and its implementation as well as devote attention to strengthening regional cooperation and ocean governance. The Minister pointed out that significant improvements were needed regarding eutrophication and the conservation of marine biodiversity. This is why the German side would address this issue in detail at the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting next year. Finally, on the topic of munitions in the sea, all Baltic Sea countries had a shared responsibility. The minister’s goal for this process was to lead to joint action. She appreciated that the Baltic Sea parliamentarians had clearly signalled their support.

Oleg Nilov noted that much discussion was devoted to climate change, global warming and carbon emissions. There was another area that



was not talked about enough. This aspect was forest fires. Forest fires were a major problem in Russia. As a matter of fact, it was one of the greatest issues, if not right at the top of the list of environmental problems. The same was true of the United States, Brazil and many other countries, such as Australia. Forest fires were not only a disaster for these countries in themselves, but they also proved disastrous for the environment of the entire planet. That was because the fire's emissions were entering the atmosphere. The speaker pointed out that this was a massive problem and that the BSPC needed to discuss it.

Peter Stein reported on the topic of sea-dumped munitions and their removal that many researchers, institutes, nationally and internationally funded projects and private companies had developed a high level of expertise and that several companies were offering specialised solutions. However, despite existing knowledge and a general awareness of the dangers, no action had been taken. The reasons for that could be complex, among them diverse responsibilities and the high cost of potential action. He cautioned that this approach also meant having to deal with sunken ships and ghost nets in particular. Mr Stein noted that he had been quite shocked to hear that there were up to ten thousand ghost nets and sections of fishing nets simply floating around the sea, causing negative impacts on the fauna. That was an adjacent problem that had to be resolved along with the dumped ammunitions.



Liz Mattsson, Member of the Åland Parliament, emphasised that of a total 30,000 inhabitants of Åland, about 600 were farmers. With its rich agricultural landscape, a well-developed food indus-



try and small-scale production, Åland could be a good place for pilot projects in food production sustainability. The speaker gave examples of several projects currently being realised in her region.

The sea-dumped munition issue sparked a lively discussion in which **Mr Kacper Płażyński**, MP Poland, **Mr Christian Juhl**, MP Denmark, and





Mr Johannes Schraps, MP Germany, exchanged their views.

Migration and Integration: Finding Common Solutions Based on Mutual Information and Best Practices

Carola Veit, former BSPC President and Vice-Chair of the BSPC WG on Migration and Inte-



gration, chaired the third session on *Migration and Integration: Finding Common Solutions Based on Mutual Information and Best Practices*.

Hans Wallmark, Chairman of the BSPC Working Group on Migration and Integration, Sweden, in his conclusion of the three-year work underlined that all members should continue to disseminate and share best practices regarding, for example, supporting the employment and integration of certain groups of migrants. The multifaceted character of integration should be



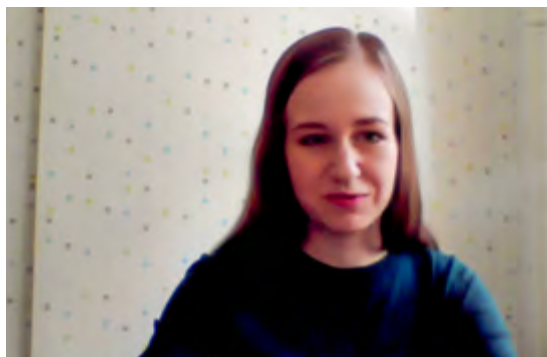
further explored, including the labour market, language, social relationships, and cultural accommodation.

Dmitry Demidenko, Deputy Head of the Main Migration Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation, brought the issue of migration during COVID-19 closer to the audience from a Russian perspective. He outlined how the President of Russia had ordered a comprehensive reform of migration re-



gimes and the institution of citizenship to be carried out. The rules for staying would be simplified and the conditions for compliance with the law rendered clearer and more feasible. He reminded the delegates that Russia was one of the centres of global migration flows and that every year, 16-17 million foreign citizens were coming to the country, with the current year accounting for about 10 million.

Vladlena Avdeeva, representative of the NGO «Stellit», St Petersburg, spoke about the role of



online technologies concerning migrant children in human trafficking. She pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic had increased the risks of children becoming victims of human trafficking as they were spending more time online with reduced adult supervision. The speaker added that digital technologies were erasing the geographical distances between the child and the perpetrator, thus improving children's accessibility. On the other hand, online technologies were playing an increasing role in the work of NGOs and government organisations helping them to identify vulnerable children, to monitor the condition of the child after rehabilitation or in preventing children from falling victim to human trafficking.

In the second part of the session, the reports by the BSPC Rapporteurs were presented: **Mr Jörgen Pettersson** and **Mr Jochen Schulte**



on Integrated Maritime Policy, *Ms Beate Schlupp*, First Vice-President of the State Par-



liament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, on HELCOM and on Sustainable Tourism.

The Conference was also addressed by *Mr Mieczysław Struk*, President of the Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation, BSSSC, Marshal of



the Pomorskie Voivodeship, and by **Mr Asaf Haggiyev**, PABSEC Secretary General.

A New **Working Group on Climate Change and Biodiversity**

The Conference approved the new BSPC Working Group on Climate Change and Biodiversity with Ms Tenfjord-Toftby from the Swedish Parliament as the Chairwoman of the Working Group. A lot of preparatory work had been done before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic; therefore, during the digital Standing Committee meeting in June 2020, an in-depth analysis and a scope of work for the new BSPC Working Group on Climate Change and Biodiversity had been presented.

The 29th BSPC Resolution Was Adopted

BSPC President Simulik thanked all the delegations for their constructive proposals and their hard work in the digital Drafting Committee meeting. He admitted that it had not been an easy feat to find agreement but due to mutual tolerance and the ability to compromise, they had succeeded. Moreover, all delegates had proven that even online, they were able to bring such a difficult resolution to an excellent result - the unanimous agreement of the Drafting Committee.

After that, the BSPC delegates adopted the Resolution of the 29th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference.

In his final remarks, **outgoing BSPC President Valerijus Simulik** expressed his great regret that the Lithuanian Parliament had been forced to cancel the 29th BSPC in Vilnius. Nevertheless, thanks to digital tools, it had proved possible to organise the meetings of the Standing Committee in May 2020 and the Drafting Committee on 20 July 2020 as well as finally the 29th BSPC Conference. The President expressed his satisfaction with the constructive, albeit sometimes fierce, discussion and with the outcome of the Conference which was the adoption of the Resolution by all delegations.

Then the symbolic baton went to the **incoming BSPC President Pyy Niemi** from the Swedish Parliament, who presented the priorities of the Swedish Presidency and invited all delegates to the 30th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference – hopefully with everyone present – in Stockholm 2021.

30th BSPC – 2021, Digital



Introduction

BSPC President Pyry Niemi opened the 30th Anniversary Conference of the BSPC.

Dr Andreas Norlén, Speaker of the Swedish Riksdag, delighted in 190 people from many parliaments taking place in the conference, despite living in interesting and challenging times. Much had changed in the past 30 years, among



other things economic growth, democratic development but also financial crises and backsliding democracies. The present pandemic had underlined the need for parliamentary cooperation, with the BSPC taking a lead in switching to digital conversation. For Dr Norlén, parliamentary cooperation and democracy dovetailed with Sweden celebrating the centennial of its own democracy. By understanding history better, participation and trust in the democratic institutions could be improved but should never be taken for granted. He also underlined the worth of intergenerational cooperation as paving the road for the future. The Speaker emphasised that democracy should and could never be taken for granted.

Ms Ann Linde, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, noted that democratic institutions and parliamentary cooperation were vital in times of



backsliding democracies and human rights, especially considering how the COVID-19 pandemic had affected the area around the Baltic Sea. Human rights and the rule of law were key goals of Sweden. The Drive for Democracy initiative of Sweden had been providing a counter-narrative to the erosion of democracy, highlighting how democracy protected the people and gave them a voice in their country's development. The freedom of opinion and expression were fundamental and had to be defended on all levels, much like activists for human rights. Environmental change also required international cooperation, such as the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan.

President Niemi pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic had not only affected their professional work but also their private lives. Nevertheless, he was glad that the BSPC had been able to continue its cooperation via digital means and without suffering interruptions. He highlighted democratic institutions, solid cross-border cooperation and environmental and social sustainability as cornerstones of the BSPC. The president outlined several of the undertakings of the BSPC in the past year, such as two seminars held online on important topics. Focus points of the parliamentarians' discussions included democracy in a changing media landscape; the COVID-19 pandemic with particular regard to the situation and progress on vaccination but also how the disease had affected youth employment; demographic changes, labour shortages and an ageing population. Cli-



mate change and biodiversity had taken up a goodly share of the efforts, primarily through the BSPC Working Group established on this issue. Another major pillar of the BSPC, the president explained, was its cooperation – not just among each other but also increasingly with other parliamentary organisations such as the PABSEC and the PAM. Moreover, involving young people in decision-making was another principal concern, which had led to the latest Baltic Sea Youth Forum held two days earlier. Cooperation across borders, across organisations and across generations, in a familiar and friendly atmosphere, was the foundation of the BSPC's success.

First Session: Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region

BSPC Vice-President Johannes Schraps chaired the first session, traditionally concerned with cooperation in the Baltic Sea region. Peaceful and reliable neighbourliness and intense cooperation



built on inclusive participation and trust in the democratic system were the goals of the BSPC. Neighbouring nations sharing in these values was vital for cooperation and progress.

Ms Ine Eriksen Søreide, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Norway, Norwegian Presidency 2021–2022 of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, underlined the great importance of interparlia-



mentary cooperation. She saw such conferences as checking the pulse of cooperation. Living in a time of major change and major challenges, global fault lines and rivalries were exacerbating, with added disruption brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The situation in Afghanistan was one example. The climate crisis would raise new and persistent migration challenges, she pointed out. The green agenda – such as the European Green Deal – had to be seen as more of an opportunity for growth and progress rather than a burden. Democracy, human rights and rule of law had to be cornerstones of their activities, and learning from the past had to aid them in countering negative trends through cooperation across borders. The Baltic Sea region, she underlined gladly, was a prosperous region, due in many respects to the region's close cooperation. The minister further highlighted regional identity, conversation between the generations and the fight against human trafficking. Baltic cooperation was marked by its focus on practical approaches. With regard to Belarus as an observer state to the CBSS, the use of force against

protestors and increasing tension between neighbours was deeply troubling. She called on Belarus to return to the rule of law and the values of democracy. Ms Søreide underlined again the need to involve young people in decision-making, like the Baltic Sea Youth Forum or the Norwegian Youth Panel.

Mr Michael Roth, Member of Parliament and State Minister for Europe, German Presidency 2022–2023 of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, underlined their desire to reinforce cooperation between governments, parliaments and civil society. He highlighted three topics of major importance for Baltic cooperation: European general values; the protection of climate and environment; the youth. In terms of the Baltic Sea's environmental status, Mr Roth pointed out that sea-dumped ammunitions were a particular



danger but offered the opportunity for the Baltic Sea region to become a forerunner in cleaning up the sea. In all these areas, the BSPC was a fundamental partner.

Session chairman Schrapps saw these contributions as evidence of the BSPC having worked on the right issues in their recent work.

Second Session: Democracy in a Changing Media Landscape

Pernilla Stålhammar of Sweden took over the chair, noting the backsliding of democracies in their region as well. Democracy was more than free elections but also free expression of opinion



and a vivid political opposition. Digitalisation had made the spread of information easier and faster: On the one hand, this allowed greater co-operation and lowered entry barriers. On the other hand, there was an increased risk for fake news and misinformation. Again, the COVID-19 pandemic had reinforced both opportunities and challenges.

Ms Margareta Cederfelt, President, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), highlighted the development of media information – from the 9/11 attacks televised live over embedded journalists reporting on the Iraq war to citizen journalists of today providing all kinds of perspec-



tives beyond any administrative control. At the same time, this had given rise to disinformation – especially in social media – as a threat to democracy. Media control – whether through station ownership or availability to government or opposition – was another vital issue. However, fake news – as propaganda – was indeed ancient, only employing a new channel. New media provided a tool that allowed both wider and more personal conversations. Ms Cederfelt raised the topic of Belarus as the internet has given succour and aid to the opposition efforts as well as the population at large. Greater media literacy was necessary to enable the people to better distinguish between proper and fake news. To that end, the speaker called for standards of reporting to be applied both to traditional and new media. Freedom of speech and media was vital.

Prof Dr Jeanette Hofmann, Weizenbaum Institute Berlin, spoke about how digitalisation and democracy were connected as well as current tendencies regarding the regulation of platforms. Digitalisation was usually regarded as the driver of democratic change as it was seen as the root of the decline of mass media, the rise of hate speech and fake news. In her view, that was the wrong point of view since digital media were invented and used by human beings. Therefore, digitalisation and democracy should be seen as two entities shaping each other. Democratic change concerned aging institutions – with declining trust in e.g., political parties or voting – but also expanding and new institutions – as evidenced by people wanting to participate in new



ways, through movements such as Fridays for Future, and political participation centred around issues rather than long-term structures. Another fundamental change was the growing importance of the public sphere and digital media, becoming more interactive, offering venues for criticism and approval of government action beyond elections every four years. A new phenomenon were so-called platform parties, often springing up quickly and without firm membership, that might offer new, experimental organisational structures without hierarchical structures. Therefore, democratic change was also driving digital development. These evolutions led Prof Hofmann to speak about the need for new rules to regulate the digital space. Enforcement was important, to make sure that illegal contents were removed but also ensure transparency reporting not just about complaint management but also the explanation of algorithms and their functioning. Beyond these recent legal measures, Prof Hofmann emphasises the importance of involving human rights. For example, human rights could be extended to include digital platforms. In addition, powerful rights to appeal should be established on digital platforms. Moreover, victims of defamation or hate speech had to be provided with institutionalised support.

Mr Oleg Nilov, MP, State Duma, Russian Federation, spoke about different perceptions of issues and/or people. He raised examples like Navalny being seen as a freedom fighter in Europe but as a corrupt traitor within Russia but also

the recurring forest and tundra fires in the Russian federation. In that respect, he called for joint international standards to represent reality rather than applying double standards. Mr Nilov hoped that they could be more honest and less biased with each other. Especially, he wished to avoid Russophobia and Russia-bashing.

Mr Erik Halkjaer, President of the board of the Swedish section of Reporters Without Borders, said that democracy continued to be under attack in most nations around the Baltic Sea. Journalists were being killed, even in the European Union. Harassment and hate speech, both from private but also official actors, were primary concerns. He cited the term of an “infodemic” affecting the present situation much like the COVID-19 pandemic. A “hurricane of disinformation” had descended not only on journalists but the entire population, making it more vital to see transparency of platform algorithms but also an easier spread of verified journalistic reports rather than unverified sources. To that end, Reporters Without Borders had established a tool for such verification – which in turn required traditional media to be more transparent in their methods and procedures as well. Disinformation was best fought by secure sources and by investment in trusted journalism. Mr Halkjaer regretted that some countries in the region were using methods to make journalism more difficult, such as Russia which required reporters to register and was blocking sites. He insisted that such negative measures were sensitive and preferred positive measures – the proverbial car-



rot rather than the stick – to promote good journalism, rather than having to decide what was fake news and what was proper information. In the same vein, he mentioned Belarus and its disinformation campaign against Lithuania. It was crucial for journalism to verify sources from more than one point of view.

Ms Cederfelt offered her agreement with several of her preceding speakers, supporting calls for transparency and safety of journalists. Regarding the comments by Mr Nilov, she rebutted that for instance, the forest fires in Siberia were part of the international efforts to counter fire disasters all over the world and for another instance that the Crimea situation was subject to international agreements which were unilaterally disregarded by the Russian Federation.

Prof Hofmann added that the news pipe of young people had to be acknowledged as a means of self-expression. User-generated content was a difficult concept – the term itself was insufficient. Much as it could support democracy, it could equally erode it. The protection of human rights was vital as was the enforcement of laws against disinformation and hate speech. In her view, none of them was able to distinguish truth and lies as the sole arbiter. These were new issues that needed to be investigated in-depth so that regulation would not harm the freedom of expression.

Mr Nilov addressed Mr Halkjaer, saying that he agreed with the opinion that bad examples were dangerous. He stated that such bad examples were originally used actively against Russia by western media. Regarding Ukraine and Crimea, he proposed Kosovo as a precedence case, assigning criminal actions to the country. While such actions should not happen anywhere, the reasons were to be found elsewhere.

Mr Halkjaer conceded that this was no Russian invention. He agreed with Mr Nilov calling Mr

Assange and Mr Snowden victims of disinformation campaigns and that fake news should be opposed across the board.

General Debate: Re-Starting After the COVID-19 Pandemic

Chaired by Mr Arvils Ašeradens, MP of Latvia, the general debate would deal with a great varie-



ty of topics, such as the pandemic and its effects, the responses on the economic and governmental front. Mr Ašeradens explained the present situation in the Baltic States which had had to deal with similar hard hits on economic sectors through the second lockdown. Support measures had eased difficulties to some degree, along with stimulus packages to revitalise the economy. These had a particular focus on implementing a green approach.

Mr Arnoldas Pranckevičius, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, in his keynote speech referred to the just-finished Lithuanian presidency of the CBSS. He saw four lessons in the aftermath of the pandemic: The climate crisis had not disappeared but had become even more important. It had to be tackled by all nations so that a climate-neutral Europe could indeed be achieved by 2050. The second lesson was digitalisation, giving rise to the phenomenon of the world being connected



more closely than ever before but at the same time individuals living in strictly separated spheres or “tribes”. Bridges had to be forged between these communities, along with cyber security and data privacy. Migration represented the third lesson, as controlling migratory flows – such as streaming out of Afghanistan at the moment – would be a major challenge of the 21st century. Moreover, migration being used as an instrument by Belarus posed a new aspect of the issue. Joint measures and proper routes for asylum seekers were crucial. The fourth phenomenon he wished to underline was that there had been a retreat of democracy in several areas around the globe, including Europe, so that it was necessary to speak more rather than less about human rights, rule of law and the shared values.

Mr Wille Valve of Åland pointed out that the BSPC on its 30-year anniversary had withstood the test of time, evolving into a role model of sorts for such parliamentary organisations. Yet the environment of the Baltic Sea still required attention as eutrophication led to toxic algal



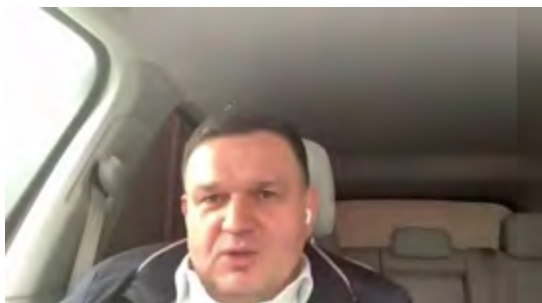
blooms with regularity. Previously established measures had already brought about some reliefs, such as wastewater treatment plants or the banning of cruise ship wastewater dumping. While phosphorus inflow had been curtailed to some degree, much more could and had to be done to reach a healthy state of the Baltic Sea. Increased joint efforts were needed as they owed that to their children.

BSPC Vice-President Johannes Schraps of Germany underlined Mr Valve’s contribution. Parliamentary pressure on governments was what could assist in this effort. He equally underlined the success of the BSPC as expression of Baltic cooperation. Yet huge challenges remained.



These could only be resolved through parliamentary cooperation, not only with each other but also with governments and civil society. The Green New Deal of the EU was one example of a new joint effort to resolve modern problems, such as the environment. The old approaches from before the pandemic should be refined into new and different methods to tackle the present challenges.

Mr S. Perminov agreed in cheering the 30-year anniversary, adding that the present topic of opposing the pandemic and paving the way out was very much on the political mind of the Russian Federation as well. He agreed that the Baltic Sea’s environmental condition was topmost on the Russian agenda as well, pointing out a recent



measure to reduce nutrient input into the sea. Regarding digitalisation, he joined the call for common rules and regulations. These would become even more important in the future, and he urged his listeners to view the future through a positive prism.

Mr Jonas Faergeman, representative of the Baltic Sea Youth Forum, noted that young people viewed the climate as by far the most important



issue of the area. For the past six decades or so, there had been resistance to enacting measures against climate change. Yet during the COVID crisis, measures had been put into place extremely quickly, and Mr Faergeman hoped that similarly fast and competent action would be taken on other urgent issues as well, especially climate change.

Third Session: Climate Change and Biodiversity

Valentina Pivnenko took the chair for the third session. Conservation and climate change was dominating the agenda of the conference, she underlined, and that was absolutely necessary. Much had been done to reduce phosphate and nutrient inflows promoting algal blooms as well as banning wastewater dumping from ships and HELCOM's efforts in that regard. Fishing methods



had been upgraded to sustainable procedures. In the present session, many more approaches would be explored. Still lacking was systemic research across borders as international cooperation was necessary in scientific efforts as well. Ms Pivnenko mentioned the development of environmentally friendly packaging materials.

Considering the interconnections between climate change and biodiversity, **Minister Svenja Schulze**, Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety of Ger-



many, noted that marine ecosystems were affected by climate change but could at the same time act against it. The potential and role of such blue carbon was to be explored at a HELCOM workshop in November. Nevertheless, addressing climate change had to go beyond these measures and had to rely on sharply reducing carbon emissions, both globally and around the Baltic Sea. Furthermore, the minister emphasised an extension of the network of marine protected areas which, in German waters, also were to become no-take zones. Not only were the protected areas calling for transboundary support but the entire endeavour, as evidenced by the ambitious HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan which would require cross-party political support from the Baltic Sea area to succeed.

Ms Cecilie Tenfjord-Toftby, MP, Chair of the BSPC Working Group on Climate Change and Biodiversity, outlined the background and goals of the working group. There had been countless examples of extreme weather all around the world in the past summer, showing that climate change was an ongoing process people had to adapt to. Cross-party support in mitigation measures was necessary from all countries around the Baltic Sea. By acquiring expert knowledge and studying each other, the working group would contribute significantly to these efforts as well as preserving biodiversity. Closer cooperation in the field and parliamentary support was one of the goals. In digital-only meetings, they had learned instructive information about the extent of climate change's impact

but also projects to roll back damages. For the success of such projects, local support was required as much as ample financial support to ensure the project's long-term sustainability. Ms Tenfjord-Toftby highlighted *ElectriVillage*, a small Swedish community's successful effort to create an interconnected, sustainable society, but also *Living Coast*, a project that had cleaned up a Swedish bay to an impressive degree. With the working group's tenure extended to three years, not least due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, even more extensive explorations of the topic at hand were likely. The chairwoman further underlined the importance of involving young people in the work not only of the working group but also the BSPC in general. She pointed out that the group's first interim report was currently available on the BSPC website, providing an in-depth overview of the working group's efforts as well as the instructive expert presentations.

Mr Anders Mankler, State Secretary to the Minister for Environment and Climate, Sweden, noted the IPCC's recent report about the impact of climate change, such as the ocean. Combating this was a major priority for Sweden since the climate of the future depended on the decisions of today, as Mr Mankler quoted from the IPCC report. Efforts for a healthy climate went hand-in-hand with efforts for a healthy ocean. Cooperation around the Baltic Sea was necessary because that was not only their shared sea but also their shared responsibility. He highlighted the necessity of an extended network of



marine protected areas that had to be secured. Mr Mankler insisted that an ecosystems-based approach had to be established for fishing, taking into account the various interactions surrounding it. The inflows of phosphorus and nitrogen into the sea had to be further reduced. The State Secretary underlined their cooperation with HELCOM as well as the EU. But science was a crucial basis for these efforts, and he emphasised the UN Decade for Ocean Sciences. All relevant stakeholders – including businesses, science and youth – had to be brought together in these efforts to fulfil their ambitions for mitigation and adaptations. Action had to take place now.

Mr Erwin Sellering, Chairman of the Executive Board of the Foundation for Climate and Environmental Protection and former Prime Minister of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, also placed climate change and biodiversity at the heart of this conference. The foundation he represented was intended to have the measures implemented on the governmental level be reflected by a private, independent institution to appeal to and inform civil society. The foundation further assisted small-scale initiatives in climate change and the environment in meeting their goals as well as cooperating with larger organisations. This had to happen under strict rules to fill gaps where there was no state funding available. Regarding the foundation's own projects, Mr Sellering mentioned climate change information in day-care centres. As an example, they wished to fund day-care centres to be able to climb trees to



learn. He also addressed a recent meeting on sea-dumped ammunitions – a particular topic of interest to the BSPC –, noting how vital it was to remove these from the Baltic Sea. Serious technological progress was still necessary for these efforts, as well as support from all around the Baltic Sea.

Representing the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Youth Forum 2021, **Mr Liviu Pintilie**, a Romanian resident in Estonia, began talking about the interesting discussions on the forum's recommendations. Their conclusions had been to go for practical and strong phrasing. He hoped for similar events to be organised in the future. The first



recommendation concerned innovation in the regard of which the Youth Forum 2021 called for nature-friendly farming and less hazardous alternatives to synthetic pesticides and fertilisers; sustainable innovation in green energy and transportation, all in relation to scientific research. For the circular economy, fishing had to be improved while they also called for re-used materials to be used in building undertakings. **Ms Kamila Ciok** of Poland took over in the presentation, asking each to picture their own relationship to nature to understand which efforts



were needed. New multinational organisations had to be reinforced across all economic systems around the Baltic Sea in their efforts to mitigate climate change. She insisted it was about moving forward rather than pointing fingers.

Ms Liz Mattsson, MP, Åland Islands, Vice-Chair of the BSPC Working Group on Climate Change and Biodiversity, noted that her home was located in the middle of the Baltic Sea, surrounded by waters. Temperatures had been unusually high in recent years, registering two marine heatwaves. One of those had been the highest since the registry had started. Fish stocks had been deeply affected. She pointed out that food



production was a primary industry of Åland, thus immediately reflecting the effects of climate change. Implementing circular efforts, reducing emissions and influx of nutrients into the Baltic Sea were some good examples of joint efforts. Although anecdotal, local observations reported visibly improved waters. Yet the recent IPCC report as well as the information gathered by the BSPC Working Group on Climate Change and Biodiversity were alarming, underlining that efforts had to be made by every single one to support mitigation efforts.

Dr Vadim V. Sivkov, Director of the Atlantic Branch of the Shirshov Institute of Oceanology of the Russian Academy of Science and the Federal State Budgetary Institution of Science, Kaliningrad region, spoke about the problem

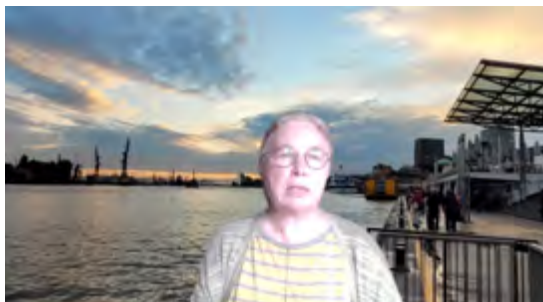
of greenhouse gas emissions and the local carbon sequestration test site. In that respect, a problem was how to quantify the anthropogenic greenhouse gases as well as their sequestration. He mentioned that there were two carbon test sites in the Kaliningrad region, one on land, one in the sea. The former was located within a peat bog the natural ecosystem of which was to be re-established. The offshore lay just before Kaliningrad, with a high anthropogenic load as well as, resultingly, unprecedentedly high levels of eutrophication. A primary reason were bottom sediments saturated with greenhouse hydrocarbon gases, mainly methane, one of the largest distribu-



tions in the Baltic Sea area. The work done at both sites would feed into the national Russian strategy for sequestration of carbon emissions. Once again, Dr Sivkov emphasised the need for precise numbers in quantifying the amounts of carbon absorbed. Various fields of science, like meteorology, oceanography, machine learning and so on, had to be combined in these efforts.

Mr Sergey Perminov thanked Mr SELLERING and his foundation for their efforts, noting that his side had been working together with Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in approaches such as re-establishing fish stocks. He added that the Russian energy industry was among the top five among carbon mitigation measures. The Russian Federation's goal, though, was to improve their ranking in this regard.

Ms Ulrike Sparr of Hamburg wondered how bog or moor structures could be maintained in hot



summers but also whether fossil fuels should be abandoned entirely.

Mr Perminov replied that the environmental laws concerning swamplands in Russia were among the strictest in the world, to ensure their continued existence. As for sustainable or fossil fuels, he noted that alternative fuels still harboured their own dangers, e.g., in recycling. Furthermore, the power grids still had to be upgraded sufficiently. That was the future, he insisted, but they were not in a situation where they could replace fossil fuels entirely in the present month.

Mr Jonas Faergeman insisted that it was only lack of will preventing a changeover from fossil to sustainable fuels.

Mr Anders Mankler underlined that conservation efforts had to be strengthened. Natural methods were in the focus of such efforts. He added that climate change mitigation needed to be the backbone of the ongoing recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

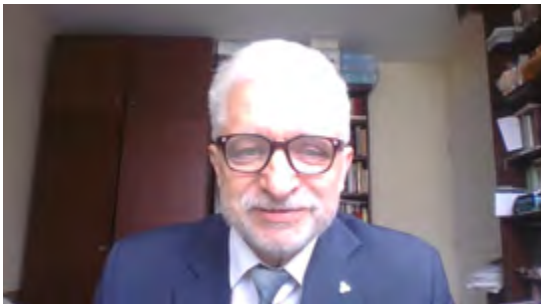
Ceremonial Session in Honour of the 30th BSPC

Chairpersons **Carola Veit** of Hamburg and **Jörgen Pettersson** of Åland – both former presidents of the BSPC – looked back at the history, pointing out that the organisation had never



missed an appointed meeting. Both Ms Veit and Mr Pettersson highlighted the familiar and familial atmosphere of the BSPC. The latter added that while digital means might not offer the same personal contact but they did allow him to attend the conference despite being literally on the move. Mr Pettersson noted that the BSPC derived their recommendations for governments from discussions with experts from science, business and civil society – forming what could be called a think tank for the Baltic Sea. Their similar background from the parliaments around the Baltic Sea fuelled the BSPC's efforts, standing for democracy and parliamentary representation.

Prof Jānis Vucāns had not only been president of the BSPC but also twice of the Baltic Assembly. There had been many political changes in 1991 so that there were several 30-year anniversaries in the current year, including the Baltic Assembly. The BSPC had originally been a forum for parliamentarians, to raise the awareness of issues affecting the Baltic Sea region but also enhance



ing the visibility of the Baltic Sea region and its issues in a wider European context. As much as every parliamentarian represented their home country, joining together in the BSPC crucially represented seeking mutual progress through cooperation. With regard to the issue of climate change, Prof Vucāns called for more research because science provided the foundation for any actions.

Former president **Ms Valentina Pivnenko** of Karelia, Russian Federation, voiced her gratitude over having been able to work together for such a long time in a friendly atmosphere. There had been so many changes since 1991, not least in



her home country changing from the Soviet Union into the Russian Federation of today. The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea and the Russian Strategy for the Northwestern Region were complementary approaches, she explained, and they had collaborated in protecting not only their environment but also the prosperity of the people. Despite having misunderstandings of one sort or another, she marvelled that they had been able to keep listening to each other throughout such situations. Ms Pivnenko conceded that relations between the EU countries and the Russian Federation had deteriorated since 2014 over the issue of Crimea, further explaining her view of the interaction and the application of democracy. Nevertheless, Ms Pivnenko underlined that they were all tied together and thus doomed to peace and working together. When confronting similar problems, cooperation was the logical avenue, as evidenced by the BSPC establishing ties to the PABSEC and the PAM. She hoped for their friendly work to continue, even when they differed in their opinions.

Another previous BSPC president, **Mr Franz Thönnies** of Germany had been instrumental in implementing the Baltic Sea Labour Forum and was still active in that capacity. Mr Thönnies noted that the just-mentioned Labour Forum was celebrating its ten-year anniversary, aside from the 30 years of the BSPC. After 30 years of political agreement and disagreement, they were still together, working towards a good and prosperous future of the Baltic Sea region. Mutual conversation was what had kept the BSPC to-



gether. Belarus was an example of this process as the BSPC had discussed the sustainability of progress with Belarusian parliamentarians regarding the nation joining the BSPC. As a result of those conversations, the BSPC had decided against accepting Belarus as part of their number. Mr Thönnes further pointed out that the BSPC had been among the first to mention the topic of environmental protection and pursuing measures to relieve the burdens suffered by the Baltic Sea. Labour market issues discussed in the BSPC led to the creation of the Baltic Sea Labour Forum as well as many other endeavours improving the situation of e.g., young people crossing borders to work. All of those positive examples proved to Mr Thönnes that parliamentarians were able to effect real and positive change. That could give them strength for the future. That could give them the strength to take the resolution of the conference back home to their parliaments and working to fill it with life.

Ms Christina Gestrin

had been president of the BSPC on three different occasions until the end of her parliamentary term in 2015. She pointed out the working groups established to resolve issues of common concern for the Baltic Sea countries, many of which remained topical until today. Patience and long-term visions were crucial for the work of the BSPC. Ms Gestrin believed that it was vital to get to know and understand each other. Citing the crises and divided opinions of recent times, she underlined the importance of the BSPC as a forum to discuss sensitive issues and would continue to serve the benefit of the Baltic Sea citizens for many years to come.



Turning from a view towards the past over to the future, **Mr Jonas Færgeman** of Denmark spoke as representative of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Youth Forum 2021. In addition to what the other representatives had already explained, Mr



Færgeman stated that social media had been a topic discussed at the forum. He disagreed with the way social media had been presented as he saw it as interpreted solely in regard to politicians talking to each other or as a tool. He next addressed the compartmentalisation of social media communities, harkening back to the “tribalism” mentioned earlier, which he saw as a problem for politicians who might misunderstand their audience. Mr Færgeman went on to criticise the general way in which politicians were permitting young people to speak in a limited framework. As for the main concern of young people, he said that it dealt with the environment and that politicians should fulfil the promises that had been made to young people since before Mr Færgeman had been born.

Fourth Session: Addresses and Reports

Session chair **Jarosław Wałęsa**, MP from Poland, introduced each guest talking to the conference.



Mr Pedro Roque of the Parliamentarian Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) had enjoyed the good cooperation in recent years with the BSPC. He was looking forward to signing a memorandum of understanding in the near future. Finally, the latest figures of the OECD showed trade reaching a new high after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, sectors such as tourism were still lagging. The PAM had implemented measures to aid the economy. Moreover, they had established relations with the PABSEC and the parliamentary association of Turkish-speaking nations. Mr Roque noted the recent images of floods and wildfires, therefore resolute action against climate change could no longer be delayed. Green recovery strategies had to be part of any post-COVID-19 approach. He was delighted that the BSPC was also keen on tackling climate change. He be-



lieved that their interparliamentary work could contribute significantly to these efforts.

Mr Asaf Hajiyev, PABSEC Secretary General, noted that his organisation was also heading for



a celebration of its 30th anniversary in the near future, hoping that the BSPC would also attend that event. He spoke about the refugee flows, underlining that they were victims of political wars or the like. While it was possible to simply build a wall to keep them out, Mr Hajiyev argued for each democratic country finding ways to harbour more refugees, to allow them a way to live their lives.

Ambassador **Grzegorz Marek Poznański**, Director General of the Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat, spoke of the need for science-based policies in order to have a functional democracy. The CBSS was working with academic institutions as well as partners like the BSPC on localising strategies. They were also making the youth voice being heard, through



the CBSS youth platform, mobilising them towards taking action. The current decade had to be the decade of action so as to make this a better place for the future.

Mr Mieczysław Struk, Chairman of the Baltic Sea States Subregional, Cooperation, BSSSC,



Marshal of the Pomorskie Voivodeship, was planning to serve as an important and active part of the future of Europe. Even stronger engagement and togetherness was necessary among all parts of the Baltic family. Much had been done but even more was yet to be achieved. The issues of the day had grown even more urgent than had been foreseeable only a few years earlier, as had the concerns like sea-dumped ammunitions, ageing societies, digital difficulties as well as growing distrust in democratic institutions. Civil society had to be further developed. Together, the loss of trust in science and logic had to be reversed. Solidarity with those in need and with future generations was very much required.

Mr Jari Nahkanen, President of the Baltic Sea Commission of the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions (CPMR), agreed that close cooperation of the organisations and peoples around the Baltic Sea was needed to resolve the urgent issues of the day. The Baltic Sea was under a lot of pressure, and a blue economy would help alleviate its stressors. Connectivity was also important in the Baltic Sea region, as

transport throughout the area was important. In addition, he emphasised the necessity of cross-border cooperation, even in times of tension. Mr Nahkanen pointed out his concern about the development of the Arctic region, noting that he was paying close attention to the EU strategy for the Arctic. In general, the



CPMR was looking for deeper cooperation with the BSSPC.

Anders Bergström, representing the Baltic Sea NGO Network, said that cooperation was even more needed today than ever before. Here, he referred to more than climate change but also to social issues. Any opportunities were better tackled jointly than by creating rivalries within their region or within countries. Together, they could develop targeted solutions to problems and make better use of their resources. The macroregional strategies provided a framework for such collaboration among stakeholders, both from the EU and neigh-



bouring countries. Further work was needed to stabilise and sustain these strategies and also continued investment. The NGOs were not always included in this scheme, as funding was often reserved for public institutions. It was high time to reform the Baltic Sea NGO Network, Mr Bergström underlined which he expected to occur by the end of the year. He added that political support was needed at all levels, increasing awareness of needing each other across borders. Transnational collaboration had to be an integral part of development in every respect.

Ms Ulla Karin Nurm, NDPHS Secretariat, said that intense cooperation was the only way to make progress. She dealt with the impact of cli-



mate change on human health which was yet underexplored. Natural disasters were damaging livelihoods and killing people on the one hand, on the other disease patterns were changing, with e.g. Lyme disease entering areas previously safe from it. Ticks were another threat moving into areas where it had been thought they could not survive. Beyond these rather obvious developments, the loss of sustainable food supplies made it increasingly difficult to consume a balanced diet. To fight climate change, people had to step out of their silos and work together. More to the point, GDP should not be the measure of success but rather the health and prosperity of the people.

Ms Anna Mannfalk, Vice Chair of Region Skåne Health Care Committee, noted that the NGOs were contributing by informing communities, especially in those that might not trust govern-



ment institutions. Secondly, NGOs provided services, such as health care. Thirdly, they had proven adept at innovation, such as when they had welcomed migrants during the 2015 crisis. The region was working together with NGOs to establish sustained operations, attracting scientific knowledge and more funding.

Mr Peter Stein, BSPC Rapporteur on Sea-Dumped Munitions, emphasised that there was



not very much time left to resolve this issue. The task was not just to remove the munitions from the sea floor but also to remove the traces of a world war that Germany was still regretting starting. He hoped there would never be war in the Baltic Sea region again. Going back to the is-

sue at hand, he underlined that this was only the beginning of the process of clearing out the munitions.

Ms Carola Veit, BSPC Rapporteur on Migration and Integration, stated that the nations were revising their migration and integration strategies. She highlighted the issue of unaccompanied minors which had received further attention from



Baltic organisations. The actions of Belarus to use migrants as instruments in hybrid, asymmetric conflicts had to be noted. Ms Veit conceded that the COVID-19 pandemic had also led to negative effects for migrants' likelihood of being integrated into society, in various respects. She called for the nations to continue sharing best practices as well as sharing the task of migration.

Mr Jochen Schulte, BSPC Rapporteur on Integrated Maritime Policy, said that the pandemic had shown that the maritime economy remained a vital part of the global economy. Contrary to what had been effected, COVID-19 and the lockdown had led to a huge growth, particularly in online retail, increasing freight rates in major shipping routes. Some have tripled or quadrupled since the turn of the year 2020. Maritime stakeholders were achieving transitions to more sustainable replacement fuels to fossil fuels, leading to higher prices for customers but a better solution for the environment. Harbours in

the Baltic Sea area could become models for green growth and sustainable development. What was crucial was facing challenges together. He noted that they could expect temperatures to rise until the end of the century such that the water level of the Baltic would rise by one metre. There would be more natural disasters, losses of biodiversity. Therefore, maritime policy had to develop solutions, despite their divergent views.



Closing Session

The 30th Conference decided to extend the tenure of the Working Group on Climate Change and Biodiversity by another year, so it would deliver its Final Report to the 32nd Conference of the BSPC.

BSPC President Pyry Niemi noted that the work to deliver the current resolution had, as often,



been difficult. Yet reaching a consensus also proved the ability of the BSPC to overcome such odds, even despite the added obstacle of the on-line-only discussions.

The 30th BSPC unanimously agreed on the resolution, calling on the governments of the Baltic Sea region.

Traditionally, the baton of the presidency of the BSPC was handed over at this point. Since President Niemi would remain in office for another term until a hopefully in-person 31st Conference of the BSPC, he retained said baton.

He was delighted by the results of the work of the BSPC over the past year but also throughout the present conference, having deepened the fundamental and significant issues of the future. They had intensively involved the youth in their decision-making processes, seeking to gear their recommendations to the needs of future generations as well. President Niemi offered his gratitude to everyone involved in the conference.

BSPC President Pyry Niemi declared the 30th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference closed.

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