**Policy Analysis – Baltic Sea Region Governments’ statements regarding the implementation of the**

**26th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference Resolution**

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Berlin, 9 August 2018

Including the results of the BSPC SC Mariehamn 26 August 2018

1. **Introduction**

On 3-5 September 2017 elected legislators from the Baltic Sea Region states[[2]](#footnote-2) assembled in Hamburg, Germany, and adopted the 26th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) Resolution. In addition to a preamble the Resolution emphasises the general cooperation in the Baltic Sea region and three specific priority areas for action:

1. Democratic Participation and the Digital Age;
2. Innovative Science and Research;
3. Sustainable Tourism.

As a follow up to the 26th BSPC and in preparation of the 27th BSPC on 26-28 August 2018 in Mariehamn, Åland Islands/Finland, the BSPC General Secretariat asked the BSPC delegations to request their respective governments to submit a statement regarding the implementation of the 26th BSPC Resolution. The BSPC Secretary General commissioned Dr. Tobias Etzold and Christian Opitz at the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) in Berlin to evaluate and analyse the statements submitted by the respective governmental bodies of the Baltic Sea Region states.

1. **Content of this analysis and basic data**

This analysis includes:

* an overall quantitative assessment of the governments’ statements;
* a qualitative analysis regarding the governments’ statements regarding the more general section on regional cooperation as well as the three priority areas;
* and an overall assessment highlighting shortcomings and identifying recommendations for the future.

Basic data:

* the 26th BSPC Resolution,
* written statements by the respective governmental bodies received by the beginning of August 2018.
1. **Quantitative Overview**
	1. **Overall Response Rate**

Nineteen delegations from member states’ parliaments (ten national and nine subnational parliaments) and parliamentary institutions (three) adopted the 26th BSPC Conference Resolution. Fourteen governmental counterparts of the nineteen signatories, excluding the three parliamentary institutions, submitted statements to the BSPC Standing Committee regarding the implementation of the Resolution (see Fig. 1).[[3]](#footnote-3)

* 1. **Overall Response Variety**

The fourteen submitted statements in reaction to the 26th BSPC Resolution vary considerably concerning thematic depth and structure. Some statements, i.e. those from Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Hamburg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, portray on 10 - 20 pages in great detail and some even for nearly each paragraph of the Resolution what the respective government has done in order to implement it. Others, such as the Åland Islands and Norway, keep it limited to a rather general overview of about four pages touching upon only a few topics of the Resolution.

We explicitly point out to keep in mind that the level of comprehensives of a submitted statement by itself does not allow a direct inference to the overall activities of a respective government in the priority areas of the Resolution. Relying only on the statements therefore does not constitute a reliable data source for a proper statistical analysis. However, our qualitative analysis in the following section does highlight some general findings and shortcomings in the submitted statements. While the governments in their responses list both national and transnational initiatives and actions, with a strong focus on the former, we concentrate our analysis on the transnational activities as well as the links between both.

1. **Qualitative Analysis**

The 26th BSPC Resolution contains several parts. The preamble covers various broader issues. Most importantly, it welcomes the Foreign Minister’s meeting on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the CBSS as a positive development in order to re-establish “full-scale and comprehensive political dialogue”. In addition, the establishment of an independent group of wise persons is supported which was tasked to provide recommendations for a vision of the Baltic Sea Region beyond 2020 and the future role of the CBSS. Other provisions include the continued involvement of youth as well as the concern about the increasing number of terrorist attacks in the region.

This is followed by a more general chapter on “Cooperation in the Region” (Paragraphs 1-5), calling in particular for intensifying the cooperation in the Baltic Sea region (Paragraph 1). More specific issues are subsequently subsumed in three thematic sections:

* “Democratic Participation and the Digital Age” (Paragraphs 6-15),
* “Innovative Science and Research” (Paragraphs 16-27),
* “Sustainable Tourism” (Paragraphs 28-40).

The last Paragraph (41) expresses gratitude to the Parliament of Åland as the host of the 27th BSPC Conference in August 2018.

Our qualitative analysis of the governments’ statements will be grouped according to the structure of the Resolution. First we will assess the statements concerning the general cooperation chapter before turning towards the three thematic sections.

* 1. **Assessment regarding the chapter “Cooperation in the Region”**

Several governments support the Resolution’s request to intensify the cooperation in the Baltic Sea region (Paragraph 1). The Danish government for example states that a continued political dialogue is necessary as it contributes to decrease tension and to build trust. The German Federal Government underlines this notion, expressing its conviction that safety and trust in the region can be achieved through political dialogue and the practical cooperation with Russia in the long term. It further confirms its commitment to future Baltic Sea cooperation. Latvia confirms its commitment to the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) which it will chair between July 2018 and June 2019. The Latvian Presidency intends to focus on the prevention of human trafficking, the combating of organised crime, the shaping and preservation of cultural heritage in the BSR. It further plans to contribute to CBSS activities regarding sustainability, climate change and spatial planning. The Estonian Government supports as general principles for regional cooperation in various formats: division of labour, cooperation and avoidance of duplication. The Finnish government refers in detail to its recently adopted new National Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. With this strategy Finland wishes to boost its role in wider Baltic Sea cooperation. By setting for itself similar goals, Finland intends to actively support and contribute to achieving the wider regional goals set by all the countries of the region. However, despite these overall positive commitments to regional cooperation few concrete statements have been made on how overall regional cooperation could be intensified and improved and how tension could be decreased and trust rebuilt.

Many governments generally support the resolution’s request to strengthen the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) by carrying out its Baltic Sea Action Plan (Paragraph 2). Amongst others, the government of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern stresses that it “ambitiously implements the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan”. Indeed, many other governments report on national projects to this effect. The Polish government, for example, reports that in 2017 it adopted a National Program for the Protection of Marine Waters. The Program encompasses a set of measures in order to safeguard the environmental status of the marine waters. Latvia lists within this context for example its Water Services Law, its 2017-2020 Programme for a good environmental status of Latvia’s marine waters and the State Research Programme “the value and dynamic of Latvia’s ecosystems under changing climate”. Latvia’s annual campaign “My Sea” is said to have been an efficient instrument since 2012 in raising public awareness, data collection and coastal policy development work. It has become a backbone of emerging national policies regarding marine litter.

Various projects mentioned in the statements are often linked to the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting which was held in March 2018. Several governments (e.g. Lithuania) express their hope that the Ministerial Meeting will assess and continue the progress made as well as update the Baltic Sea Action Plan. Latvia expresses its confidence that the full implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan will be able to deliver to the UN Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 through sharing regional experiences in implementing international requirements toward the reduction of pollution from shipping. The German Federal Government explicitly states that the in the past unsatisfactory cooperation between HELCOM and the EUSBSR is improving, strengthening HELCOM’s function as the focal point for marine protection in the BSR.

However, no concrete proposal is suggested by the governments on how exactly HELCOM could be strengthened in the future. Neither do they indicate what conceptual and/or material resources they would provide in order to advance this goal. Moreover, despite the general support for HELCOM and its Baltic Sea Action Plan, not all governments seem to agree on specific issues. For example, the Russian government explicitly maintains that it is “against the introduction of any mandatory requirements for navigation with respect to reducing the level of underwater noise” (in reference to Paragraph 3). Rather it insists on the necessity for more scientific research and the search for new technologies in this matter.

The governments list a great variety of national, bilateral and regional activities on jointly promoting tourism in the Baltic Sea Region (see also section 4.4.). In this context we find projects particularly noteworthy which are “based on cultural and natural heritage” (Paragraph 5). The government of Russia, for example, reports on a plan to implement an international traveling exhibition “Vikings in the Baltic – Century of Innovations” together with Denmark and Sweden within the Partnership Network of Museums (founded in 2011). Hamburg emphasises a joint marketing project with Copenhagen within the framework of the “Hanseatic League of Modern Times”. Such transnational activities support not only a common tourist brand, but also demonstrate the rich historical foundation of today’s multifaceted cooperation in the region. Rather remarkable though is the comment of Estonia’s Ministry of Economics and Communications on the idea to create a common Baltic Sea Brand: “We do not particularly support the idea of a common Baltic Sea Brand because visitors are not interested in a Baltic Sea as a travel destination. They are more interested in different smaller regions or countries (cities) located around the Baltic Sea”. This is a rare example of a government explicitly rejecting a BSPC recommendation.

Most governments do not explicitly relate their many projects to the existing macro-regional strategies (EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region) (Paragraph 1). As the Resolution, we believe that the macro-regional strategies “offer efficient instruments to improve relations between neighbouring countries”. Against this background, it is necessary to aim at better embedding – conceptually as well as material – the activities in the context of the macro-regional strategies where common interests exist and mutual synergies could be achieved.

* 1. **Assessment regarding the chapter “Democratic Participation and the Digital Age”**

This chapter of the Resolution contains a number of very important topics now and in the future, such as democratic participation, the involvement of the youth as well as the opportunities but also risks of digitalisation. Most governments address at least a number of paragraphs and give examples for national measures and initiatives. There are, however, also at least two governments that do not address this chapter at all.

In terms of democratic participation (Paragraph 6) the Government of Åland refers to its decision to make online voting in future elections possible (from 2019 for voters residing outside the Åland Islands, from 2023 for all voters). The Government hopes that this will mean increased civil participation, also of citizens living elsewhere and disabled persons, and democracy and will create good conditions for dialogue and activity with modern methods. The Parliament of Lithuania approved the concept of a Public judge institute in the courts to be opened in 2020. There is a belief that this institute would increase the public trust in the courts and the legal system, promote the openness in the work of courts and legally educate the society. Denmark reports on its so-called Disruption Council. This new format is to create a forum to analyse, discuss and offer suggestions for how to create a prosperous Denmark utilising the technical opportunities in ways that benefit all Danes as well as to maintain and expand a dynamic and well-regulated labour market. The Swedish Government reports on its new strategy for democracy adopted on 20 June 2018. Here in the government identifies the current challenges of democracy and sets a number of policy priorities. Furthermore it lists an impressive number of measures to achieve a higher voters’ turnout at elections and to increase democratic participation in between elections such as a citizen dialog on complex and controversial issues or a project intending to increase knowledge on social integration of young people in particular in less privileged areas funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers. Furthermore various initiatives to strengthen civil society, for example by means of an enhanced dialog between civil society organizations and the government, as well as to enhance the trust in elected legislators and the authorities, for example increased insights into and transparency of funding of political parties (new law since 1 April 2018).

As to strengthening the involvement of youth in all areas of society (Paragraph 7), the Government of Åland reports that it has prepared a legislative proposal on lowering the age limit for voting in municipal elections from 18 to 16 in order to motivate young people to get involved in political decision-making, to give them accountability and stimulate their participation and integration in society. The Parliament approved the proposal in spring 2017. However, it has not been approved by the President of Finland in the legislative control procedure. The Senate of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg implemented a law that provides minors with the right to participate in a reasonable manner in planning procedures and projects touching their interest. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern lists in this context the “Beteiligungswerkstatt” (participation workshop), funded by the state government, that supports the participation of children and adolescents in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern since as early as 2001.

The various Paragraphs on digitalisation (8-14) are addressed in different ways and intensity, by some governments very specifically, by others in more general terms. The Danish Government, believing that there is a need to maximize the benefits while also minimizing the accompanying risks, outlines that it made digitalisation and technological development a strategic priority of Danish Foreign Policy. To this purpose it has appointed the worldwide first *Tech Ambassador* with a broad mandate. The government is also currently preparing a new 2018-21 national strategy for cyber and information security. The Lithuanian Government announced that a “Digital Agenda for the Republic of Lithuania” was adopted in December 2017. Its main aim is that at least 85% of the Lithuanian population would use the Internet by 2020, and 95% of the companies would use high-speed Internet. Sweden also reports on its new long-term strategy on sustainable digitalisation that outlines how digitalisation could contribute to an economic, social and environmental sustainable development. Norway states that “it is our hope that the digital forums will be used in a way that contributes to the expansion of democracy” but the government does not further expand how exactly. No government addresses the important issue of changes of digitalisation for decent working and living conditions (Paragraph 13) and only two refer to the likewise important point concerning gender and generation aspects of digital innovation (Paragraph 14). Denmark here states that the Minister for Equal Opportunities will focus on “how parents, educational institutions and young people can themselves help create a change in culture towards less gender-segregated education choices so that young women consider science and IT as an attractive choice of education and work areas”. The Ministry of Education is planning a conference to provide inspiration and to promote girls’ interest in technology.

The German Federal Government focuses in its statement on the legal possibilities to react against “Hate Speech” and fake News” (Paragraph 15), explaining in detail its new law for the improvement of asserting legal rights in social media adopted in 2017. It aims at fighting aforementioned phenomena more effectively on the national level. The Danish Government states that it has set up a commission on free speech. The commission has the mandate to examine the conditions for free speech and the impact of “fake news” on the democratic discourse. Tackling the challenge, Latvia is undertaking a review of the National Electronic Media Law and supports a practical NGO-driven project aimed at upgrading journalists’ professional skills and safeguarding the independence of the media. The Swedish Government lists an impressive number of national measures in order to enhance the public knowledge of the media- and information landscape, to strengthen the citizens’ capability of resistance to anti-democratic forces, to protect the freedom of speech against threads and hatred as well as to prevent and counteract attacks on democracy.

It seems natural that most actions in this field take place on a national level as the governments’ statements give proof of. However, governments and parliaments of the BSR should also more intensively consider what tangible measures could be taken jointly since some of the described challenges do not stop at the borders. There definitely is an interest in learning from each other and sharing technology and best practices (Paragraph 10). Mecklenburg-Vorpommern notes the well-advanced development of internet-based realisations of elections and votes especially in the Baltic countries with interest: “as far as it is compatible with the German constitution law and the jurisprudence of the Federal Constitution Court, this development could also be an example for Mecklenburg-Vorpommern”. Denmark explicitly supports the sharing of experiences and best practices among the Baltic Sea states in order to make the region a global frontrunner in the digital area: “ensuring a secure, free, open and peaceful cyberspace requires effective cooperation at all levels”.

* 1. **Assessment regarding the chapter “Innovative Science and Research”**

The governmental statements of which most address this section cover a plurality of interesting projects pertaining to the Resolution’s call for intensifying scientific cooperation (Paragraph 16). Many of the described activities in this field are set in a regional context. For instance, the Lithuanian government notes that the Baltic Ministers of Education and Science agreed in June 2017 to establish a joint Baltic Research Programme. The Programme’s aim is to “offer broad and sustainable cooperation opportunities between researchers and re-search institutions in the Baltic States” in response to common challenges. Particularly interesting is also the “Multi-Use in European Seas (MUSES)” project as reported by the government of Poland. The MUSES project will explore opportunities for (re-)using scientific data and insights across five sea basins: the Baltic Sea, the North Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea and the Eastern Atlantic. We highly welcome this ambitious goal to make inter-regional activities more compatible.

Having said that, a number of requests and ideas of the Resolution receive only limited coverage. For instance, while several governments like Hamburg as the initiator, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, the German Federal Government, Schleswig-Holstein, Denmark, Latvia and Estonia express their general support for the existing Baltic Science Network (Paragraph 17), most governmental statements contain just general lengthy descriptions of the Network and its activities. However, governments propose only few tangible activities on how to develop and strengthen the Network. At least, Germany and Latvia support the Network’s efforts to increase and improve the mobility of researchers around the region (Paragraph 27). For this purpose, the German Federal Government suggests that mobility of researchers could be supported by existing programmes of the German Academic Exchange service (DAAD) and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. The Latvian Government stresses that opportunities in the BSR need to be made better known with an emphasis on early career researchers. The same applies to the Baltic Sea Science Day (Paragraph 23). While its debut in 2017 in St. Petersburg and the follow-up in Turku are broadly seen as a success, few concrete suggestions have been made on how to build upon this new initiative. At least, Germany and Latvia mention that the next event is to take place in Riga in 2019 and its preparation is under way. Finally, only few statements report on projects supporting the Resolution’s call to “strengthen citizen awareness of education and science” (Paragraph 22). Especially interesting is the project “EDU-ARCTIC” as described by the Polish government. The project is “focused on attracting young people from Europe to natural sciences and polar research by introducing innovative program based on materials from stations in the Arctic”. Moreover, it is also implemented in a wider regional framework as partners from Norway, Iceland, France and the Faroe Islands are involved. Schleswig-Holstein reports on activities and projects within the trans-national SUBMARINER Network, working for a sustainable use of maritime resources, in which the state government is engaged. It includes projects such as *Smart Blue Region, the Blue Biotechnology Alliance* and *Baltic Blue Growth*.

Regrettably the governments are notably silent on their national and regional activities regarding providing sustainable resources for science and research (Paragraphs 18 and 20). We believe that science and research needs greater and permanent investment in order to be innovative and contribute to the societal progress. Bilateral and regional programmes could make an important contribution to this end. However, Denmark states explicitly that “BSR-wide scientific cooperation and mobility should be primarily facilitated via the European Union’s framework programme and its related programmes, such as BONUS and the tentative BONUS II programme” (Paragraph 24). These would provide high and concrete added value to regional stakeholders in terms of funding and mobility instruments. In addition, science and research thrive on international exchange. It is therefore also unfortunate that only few governments (e.g. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) list projects concerning short-term mobility for the academic community in terms of stipend programmes and summer schools (Paragraph 20).

* 1. **Assessment regarding the chapter “Sustainable Tourism”**

As already in 2017 most responding governments dedicate some space to the Resolution’s chapter on sustainable tourism. The focus lies on national measures to promote sustainable tourism within their respective countries but also several regional initiatives find mentioning. In several cases the two levels are interconnected.

The recommendation to work towards the vision that the Baltic Sea Region will become the first eco-region in the world (Paragraph 28), received somewhat varied responses. While Denmark supports this notion, the Estonian Government is of the opinion that the BSR can hardly be considered as the first eco-region in the world. Instead, many other eco-regions are already in place. Other governments list a number of projects related to Paragraphs 28 and 30. In 2017, Lithuania started the implementation of the project ‘From SDGs towards sustainable Tourism in the Baltic Sea Region’. It will track down the status quo of sustainable tourism in the Baltic Sea Region, identify best practices, trigger processes, gaps and differences in order to develop, provide and communicate solutions. Åland and Estonia report that they support the international environmental management system *Green Key* as an internationally recognized label for tourism enterprises. Åland joined the system as the first destination in Finland with the aim that 20 accommodations, 12 restaurants/cafes and three events join in 2018 and possibly even more companies in the future. Estonia also introduced a local label (EHE-Genuine and interesting Estonia) as a recognised ecotourism quality label for Estonian tourism products. Therefore, Estonia does not foresee a need for another new common label or standardisation (Paragraph 30). The German Federal Government describes in detail the work of the *Deutsche Zentrale für Tourismus* related to the German initiative for sustainability. This body supports the federal states and touristic destinations with its experiences and expertise in order to develop attractive sustainable products. It also participates in the Priority Area Tourism of the EUSBSR. The Swedish Government initiated a Commission of Inquiry in October 2016 with the task to submit proposals for a coherent policy for a sustainable and thriving tourism and hospitality industry as an engine for export growth and job creation. The Commission submitted its report to the government in December 2017. It currently is under review. The government also runs a sustainable tourism program 2016-2019 with a budget of 40 million SEK.

Addressing the issue of waste water facilities at harbours (Paragraph 31), the Danish and the Åland governments list a number of national, regional and European measures. So does Åland support three different projects to improve the standard for guest harbours on the islands. Denmark has introduced new regulations for cruise ship wastewater treatment.

Several governments (Poland, Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg and Latvia) report on national or local efforts to improve and expand the cycling infrastructure (Paragraph 32). Poland also highlights the project “Biking South Baltic” as an example for trans-national cooperation in this field. The project is about the promotion and development of Baltic bike routes, actively working in favour of improving the cycling infrastructure in the region. It is said to be a good example of ecological tourism and can potentially contribute to the creation of new jobs.

The proposal of a Tourism Transport Impact Assessment Study (Paragraph 33) was only addressed by Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. However, the state government “does not see the need for such a study, considering the very limited funds for assessments and/or studies of this kind”. The proposal to establish an international winter school counteract the lack of skilled workers in the tourism sector and to increase skills of staff (Paragraph 34) has only been taken up by one government but rather critically. Estonia states that a winter school alone would not be sufficient as a countermeasure. This problem would require both political decisions and relevant measures in the education and training system as well as continuous training. No government addresses the issue of advancing circular and fair-sharing economies (Paragraph 35), although this looks like an important and interesting aspect of future modern and sustainable economies.

The development of the Baltic Sea Tourism Centre (Paragraph 37), co-financed by the Interreg South Baltic Programme, with Regional Tourist Organization from Mecklenburg-Vorpommern as a “leading partner” and Pomeranian Regional Tourist Organization from Gdańsk as one of the main partners of the projects, finds mentioning and receives support in several governmental statements (Denmark, Estonia, Federal German Government, Latvia and Poland) as already in 2017. Estonia acknowledges the progress made so far. Denmark regards the creation of a permanent platform for collecting and sharing relevant information about the development of tourism in the region as useful.

Other transnational initiatives in the area of (sustainable) tourism are mentioned as well. Estonia highlights again the successful cooperation between the three Baltic countries “Baltic Connecting” and suggests extending this cooperation to the entire BSR. Denmark coordinates related activities around the Baltic Sea through the Nordic and European tourism collaboration. The Swedish Government refers to the strategy for international branding of the Nordic region 2015-2018 launched by the Nordic Council of Ministers. The strategy is hoped to improve the visibility of the Nordic region and also to contribute to marketing the Baltic Sea Area. In May 2017 the Nordic Ministers for Enterprise decided to elaborate a plan for Nordic cross-border Tourism cooperation with digitalisation as a priority. Schleswig-Holstein emphasizes the German-Danish Interreg project Undine II, running until the end of 2019. It aims at improving the understanding of the Baltic Sea by means of educational material and events.

Thus, some regional cooperation aiming at enhancing sustainable tourism is already in place. It, however, remains unclear what concrete results this cooperation has delivered so far. In addition, also here governments reveal little information on how they want to support and strengthen these transnational cooperation efforts.

**5. Synopsis and suggestions**

In general, we find that the submitted statements underline the notion that the responding governments have heeded the 26th BSPC Resolution. They demonstrate a serious effort to offer a good account of how regional stakeholders have striven to carry out the Resolutions’ calls and suggestions. The response rate has been good and can hardly be topped. That the central governments of all Baltic Sea littoral countries plus Norway and several relevant sub-state units have responded can overall be perceived as a good and encouraging sign. Having said that, we believe that there is at times a big potential for improvement in rendering the statements more accountable and relevant. In what follows we would like to give some recommendations toward this end.

First of all, regarding the formal parameters, the submitted statements display a great variety both in terms of length as well as elaborateness. On the one hand, this variability is understandable, sometimes even suitable, to offer a picture of the rich cooperation activities in the Baltic Sea Region. We do hold, however, that the **standard of comprehensiveness and quality could be increased** in the future. While no exhaustive listing is necessary or desirable, we still believe that they should address as many paragraphs of the Resolution as possible and as concretely and comprehensively as possible. By doing so, they would benefit from highlighting the inherent interconnections between many aspects. In this regard, and as last year, the statements which contain varied responses from the responsible ministries of the respective government are especially informative. Only if the statements are comprehensive and interdisciplinary, can the governments be held accountable regarding the BSPC Resolution.

Next, the governments operate with a **too narrow focus when reporting on their activities**. We warmly welcome that some of them seem to have followed last year’s suggestion to concentrate more on transnational initiatives compared to strictly national projects. This effort has enriched the statements providing at times a fascinating picture of the multi-faceted cross-border cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region. However, the statements still dwell too much on previous activities, several of which even date back several years. Some contain lengthy general descriptions of regional activities and initiatives that are widely known and merely sum up in which regional cooperation formats and initiatives respective country is or has been participating.

Focussing on the reporting period would be one way to counter such retrospective approach. Moreover, we still believe that the governments should strive more to include their **goals and plans for future activities** in line with the Resolution’s character as calls for future action. This is especially relevant as many paragraphs address novel societal developments (e.g. digitalisation). In this respect, ideas or suggestions on how to tackle them in the medium to long term – both nationally and regionally – would certainly improve the statements. Instead of only looking back, it is thus our opinion that the government should adopt a more prospective reporting, offering political visions on the future cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region. The Report “Vision for the Baltic Sea Region beyond 2020” by the Council of the Baltic Sea States Vision Group of June 2018 is a case in point. It has elaborated a number of fairly concrete recommendations concerning future cooperation within the CBSS and beyond, including structures, areas of activity and cooperation networks.

Third, the statements still almost solely list successful activities and projects. This focus is easily understandable according to the logic of the governments. However, we reiterate our suggestion from last year that the statements should also cover **shortcomings and failures of regional cooperation and related national efforts**. Negative experiences would highlight most clearly existing challenges and areas where cooperative efforts are most warranted. In our eyes the statements would be more relevant by complementing the success stories with projects which met prevailing problems or failed completely.

Fourth, having said that, this time it is remarkable that several governments **respond rather critically to certain aspects of the Resolution**, expressing their disagreement with respective statement or doubting the necessity of the request. This is perhaps not exactly what the adopting parliaments had in mind. Nonetheless, more critical and sometimes even controversial remarks could lead into a fruitful and constructive debate among governments, parliaments and other regional stakeholders, identifying jointly what elements are required as well as realistic and feasible in order to improve and strengthen regional cooperation.

Fifth, another remarkable comment has been made by the Finnish Government regarding the reporting period: “The recommendations presented by the conference would require more than one year to be reached and the monitoring of these steps once a year does not necessarily give a full picture of the cooperation and action that is implemented in the region.” The rather **narrow time frame might indeed be a core problem** of the whole exercise and would at least partially explain why there are quite some repetitions in the statements from responses of previous years (in particular in the section on sustainable tourism which has also been a Resolution item in 2016) and why several governmental responses are not very concrete. Taking the Finnish remark up, a new resolution and reporting system could be a way out. If the BSPC Resolution would focus even more systematically on different topics each year the governments could be given two years to respond on the implementation of related calls within a somewhat longer period of time. After the two years the exercise focussing on the same issue areas could start again, with the Resolution taking up concrete points from the governmental statements judging whether the implementation over two years has been satisfying or rather not. This way there still would be a Resolution as well as governmental responses on its implementation every year. Also within this context, while most paragraphs of the Resolution are formulated fairly concrete asking for the implementation of specific aspects others are rather short and perhaps not concrete enough. An even more concrete and detailed formulation of calls throughout could be helpful for governments to know exactly what should be implemented and perhaps even how. Then, they overall may find it easier to respond to them in a more concrete and specific way.

Finally, we also highly welcome that, as the Resolution puts it, “successful steps taken to re-establish full-scale and comprehensive political dialogue in the Baltic Sea Region”, most prominently shown by the meetings of the foreign ministers in Reykjavik in June 2017 and Stockholm in June 2018. However, certain tensions and misgivings obviously prevail as expressed for instance by the Norwegian, the German Federal and the Schleswig-Holstein Governments. Most statements still read like technical exercises without taking into account the broader political climate and without revealing high political ambitions. Again, we do not see the merit in politicising successful local and transnational activities. But we find it unfortunate that the statements do not address **local implications and catalysts of the positive dynamic at the highest political level**. Particularly, we hold that the statements should elaborate more in detail how (parts of) the activities aim at, to quote the Resolution once more, “maintaining the momentum and spirit of these positive developments”.

1. \* The assessment and opinion expressed in this policy analysis are solely those of the authors and neither necessarily reflect the official opinion of the SWP nor of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference and its institutions.

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3. Denmark, Estonia, Federal Republic of Germany, Finland, Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, Latvia, Lithuania, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Norway, Poland, Sweden and the Åland Islands. The government of the Russian Federation submitted one statement including annexes on behalf of all Russian member delegations. The state government of Schleswig-Holstein annexed an assessment of the Resolution to its annual Report on Europe (*Europabericht*) 2017-18 of March 2018 (Doc. No. 19/985). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)