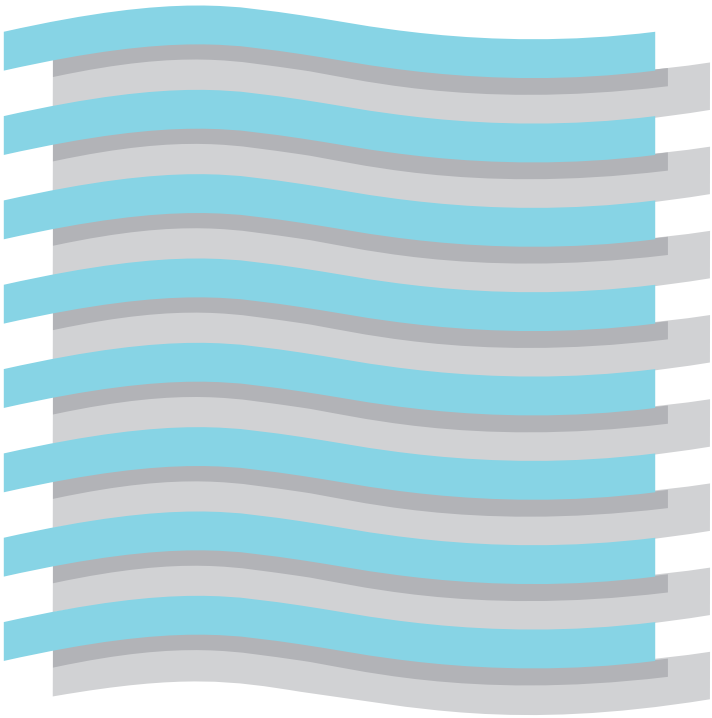
20 Years of Parliamentary Commitment

A Chronology of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conferences 1991–2010



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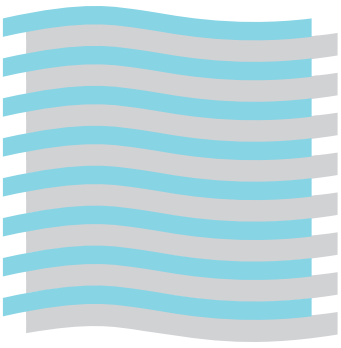

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The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) was established in 1991 as a forum for political dialogue between parliamentarians from the Baltic Sea Region. BSPC gathers parliamentarians from 11 national parliaments, 11 regional parliaments and 5 parliamentary organizations 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 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. The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference is the annual general assembly in the Baltic Sea Region for broad political debate on Baltic Sea issues. The Conference resolutions are political tools which enables the BSPC to launch and sustain political initiatives, and to approach the governments and regional organizations on issues of common interest. The BSPC has a number of working bodies at its disposal, which serve as resources for driving and implementing BSPC priorities and objectives. A Standing Committee and an Enlarged Standing Committee are responsible for the follow-up of BSPC resolutions, for identifying and addressing issues within the BSPC field of responsibility, and for preparing the annual Conferences. The BSPC Working Groups are political vehicles with the overall objective of elaborating joint political positions and recommendations on issues of common interest in 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 Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS), the Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation (BSSSC) and the Baltic Development Forum.

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20 Years of Parliamentary Commitment

I am delighted to present this overview of the first twenty years of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference – BSPC. BSPC was established in 1991 as a forum for political dialogue between parliamentarians from the Baltic Sea Region. It was one of the first structures for political cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region in the beginning of the 1990s. During its first two decades of work, it has grown into an organisation with permanent bodies, operational political ad hoc units, a secretariat and a budget of its own. BSPC now gathers parliamentarians from 11 national parliaments, 11 regional parliaments and 5 parliamentary organisations around the Baltic Sea. This makes BSPC a unique and comprehensive parliamentary bridge between all the EU and non-EU countries of the region.

BSPC is first and foremost a political body. Its primary mission is to raise awareness and form opinion on issues of current political

Christina Gestrin

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 to enhance the visibility of the Baltic Sea Region and its issues in a wider European context.

BSPC's external interfaces include parliamentary, governmental, sub-regional and other organisations in the Baltic Sea Region and the Northern Dimension area, such as the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), HELCOM, the Northern Dimension Partnership in Health and Social Well-Being (NDPHS), the Baltic Sea Labour Network (BSLN), the Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation (BSSSC) and the Baltic Development Forum.

Undoubtedly, a great deal is being done to help the Baltic Sea recover and to promote prosperity and welfare in the Baltic Sea Region. Many players, both public and private, have taken and implemented various types of initiative and action, which is promising. But naturally we cannot rest on our laurels and be satisfied with the state of things. The environmental problems in the region, not least in terms of the health of the Baltic Sea, are major and ongoing. Nor can we blind ourselves to the fact that there are great inequalities and imbalances in the Baltic Sea Region, resulting in social and economic anomalies. We should also be on the alert for new and emerging challenges so that they can be addressed and hopefully resolved at an early stage.

As parliamentarians and legislators we have a task and a mandate from our voters to carry out initiatives and measures to protect the Baltic Sea environment and to promote prosperity in the region. We must listen to the wishes and fears from grass roots level, form opinion and increase awareness, drive political issues in our home parliaments, exert political pressure on our governments to turn words into action, act as watchdogs to ensure that the governments keep their promises, and – not least – influence legislation.

I have a profound belief in the value of meeting and exchanging views, and gradually forging joint positions and opinions on issues of common interest. Since this process includes parliamentarians from all parliaments and parliamentary organisations around the Baltic Sea, it forms a powerful instrument for raising opinion and turning the political spotlight on issues of importance for our citizens.

Regional cooperation in general is becoming increasingly important. Not for the sake of fencing us in and becoming exclusive – on the contrary in fact, to strengthen our comparative advantages and joint assets and thereby make us better equipped to operate on a wider international and even global scale. It also improves our capacity to adapt to the consequences of globalisa-

tion and turn them into a benefit. This applies to both the economic and the political spheres. Just as the Baltic Sea Region has obvious potential to become one of the most competitive regions of the world, the parliamentary and governmental cooperation that has evolved in this region can also be something of a role model or export commodity when it comes to propagating parliamentary democracy and good governance. Globalisation offers an opportunity to be influenced by, and to influence, a wider community than our own immediate region.

Many of the challenges in the Baltic Sea Region are complex and have different consequences and repercussions for different countries or players. But their complexity and the fact that they require many different approaches is exactly why a forum like BSPC is so important. We can provide an arena where differences can be raised and where a candid political debate about them can be held. This is a necessary prerequisite for finding successful solutions and pragmatic compromises, even on sensitive issues.

Have we got a response? Obviously, the kind of political activities and recommendations that BSPC produces are not turned into reality overnight or even in a year. But it is equally obvious that our voice has been heard, not least when we collaborate with other players in the region and use our specific parliamentary strength to influence opinion and develop practical measures. Target-oriented, consistent and long-term political action keeps the issues on the agenda, and gradually develops solutions to them. As we all know, unity, persistence and patience are necessary qualities in politics.

Conferences, seminars, programmes and reports are important components in developing the Baltic Sea Region. But at the end of the day, the value and success of an organisation will be judged not by its internal coherence, but by its capacity to improve the welfare – in a broad sense – of the citizens of the region. Continued dialogue between citizens, experts and decision-makers is of vital importance for our joint capacity to meet the challenges of our region.

It is my conviction that BSPC will continue to play an important role as promoter of democratic, inclusive and constructive political processes for the benefit of the Baltic Sea Region and its citizens.

Christina Gestrin, MP, Finland
Chairman of the BSPC
2008–2011

The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conferences 1991–2010

1st BSPC

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 re-named 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-Western Pomerania, 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.

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

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 Inter-parliamentary 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 premature 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

The *3rd Baltic Sea Parliamentary 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 Secretariat 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 BSPC

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 mottoes.

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 implementation of the decisions included in the Resolution of the 3rd Conference, Swedish Foreign Minister Mrs. 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 Mrs. 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 proposals 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

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 BSPC

The *6th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference* was held in Gdańsk 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 Gdańsk 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 regional 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 support 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 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 Gdańsk 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 Mrs. Ursula Stenzel, and Poland's National Prosecutor Henryk Pracki). The atmosphere of the Conference was clearly influenced by the anniversary celebrations taking place in Gdańsk at the same time.

7th BSPC

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 Gdańsk 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 fol-

lowing 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 BSPC

The *8th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Parliamentary Conference* was held on 7–8 September 1999 in Mariehamn,Aland 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 BSPC

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 returned 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 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 second Session involved two working groups, discussing "Trans-European 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 Mariehamn).

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 2001 in Greifswald, by invitation from the Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

10th BSPC

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.

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 parliaments 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 representation 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 interregional 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 democracy, 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.

11th BSPC

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. Conse-

quently, 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

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

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 possibility of obtaining additional EU funds for projects in the Baltic Sea Region; the importance of the region as a common EU-Russia 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 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 Parliamentarian 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. Parliamentarians 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 reducing 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

The 14th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference convened in Vilnius 28–30 August 2005. The theme of the Conference was "Shared Concerns & 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 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 Con-

ference. 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.

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 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

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 seabed, 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

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 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.

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 regimes; 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 BSPC

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 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.

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

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 Conference 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 meet the challenges of the Baltic Sea Region. It also reiterated its support to 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 North-East 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

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 organisations 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 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.

Pertti Joenniemi, Senior Research Fellow, Danish Institute for International Studies

The Politics of Baltic Sea Cooperation: The Quest for Further Debate

The growth of a region

The Baltic Sea area is not what it used to be. The turmoil that swept across the region entailed, for example, that the maps outlining key aspects of its geography have been profoundly re-drawn. There can be no doubt that the geopolitical landscape has changed drastically, yet it must also be noted that the changes are by no means over. The progress has not been straightforward, and so issues relating to policies pursued are always current. Some of the issues at stake are potentially important subjects of discursive influence, i.e. the type of power exercised by bodies such as the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference.

In order to pinpoint various options, three distinct formative periods can be identified. The initial period is characterised by intra-regional cooperation. The second period consists of greater ambitions to include the impact of the exterior through participation in the building-up of Europe. The third, most recent, period is characterised by intensified competition as well as cooperation between different European regional formations, in particular the challenges posed by the growing significance of the various issues pertaining to the North Sea as well as the Arctic region.

Arguably, these different phases and initiatives call for policies of their own to a certain extent. Some of the policies initiated and implemented immediately after the end of the Cold War may still be of relevance. They have retained their value, although there are clearly new challenges that call for fresh approaches, new visions, new ways of thinking, and fresh debate. There should be greater emphasis on addressing the more recent type of issues relating to the Baltic Sea Region.

A record to be defended

This undoubtedly implies that the dialogue conducted by Baltic Sea parliamentarians is profoundly impacted by the new challenges. There is, in fact, a record to be defended, as the first parliamentary conference on cooperation in the Baltic Sea area, held in Helsinki in January 1991, was early in exerting an influence on the

region's agenda at a crucial juncture. The conference was part and parcel of establishing a dialogue during a sensitive period of turmoil and change. Some aspects of the conference involved countries and regions learning about each other after decades of division and enforced separation. It was also a matter of taking stock of the opportunities opened up by the disappearance of the previous bipolar setting.

In general, the conference was very much in tune with the new mood of cooperation prevailing in the region. "The ice on the Baltic Sea has melted; the waves go free," said Kalevi Sorsa, chairman of the conference, in his closing remarks. Yet he also saw the need for caution, and made the reservation that "the summer is not yet here". Naturally, the profound changes could also generate strains and tensions. They could even promote rather severe conflicts, and so there were good reasons to refrain from overly optimistic statements and to watch for possible backlashes. One of the reasons for serious concern was that the borders opening up across the previous divides also represented rather stark differences in standards of living. The neighbours that now had increasing contact with each other were not equal. Instead, they differed sometimes radically in their potential for and interest in greater cooperation.

However, these reservations notwithstanding, "summer" has remained the prevailing mood. The waves do indeed "go free". Over time, the fragile progress discernible even in the first parliamentary conference has turned into a dominant and stable trend. Initially, the cooperation was very much about laying foundations and knitting the region together. It was about establishing contacts across the previous divides. The aim was to remedy the damage caused by the bipolar division that had previously prevented almost all region-specific integration except for some initial efforts regarding environmental cooperation and the regulation of fishing.

In short, the Baltic Sea area has changed fundamentally. The region has actually transformed itself, in two decades, from one of the least regionalised parts of Europe into one of the most regionalised ones. It has done this quite spontaneously for the most part, and without any master plan to promote regionalisation. Naturally, it cannot be denied that there have also been various issues of contention, and security has remained a central concern, but the transition to a rather peaceful and cooperative region has nonetheless been quite impressive. The area has become deeply institutionalised through a rather dense web of interlocking institutions. The plurality has been formidable, implying for example that the driving forces are not just the countries of the region. They also include a broad spectrum of other players such as cities, enterprises, churches and non-governmental organisations. Overall, there is myriad of inter-governmental, trans-governmental and non-

governmental arrangements with a substantial variation in the strength and orientation of the various players.

Current dynamics

The intra-regional integration still continues, although it remains predominantly driven more by administrative and project-oriented initiatives rather than any explicit political aspirations. The building of the Öresund Bridge is a case in point. The region around the bridge recently celebrated achievements made and experiences gained during the first ten years of the link. Cooperation within the area has grown at such a pace that infrastructure must be developed further, so another bridge or tunnel across the strait is under discussion.

In discussions of a permanent link between Denmark and Germany across the Fehmarn Belt, the planning is now focusing on a tunnel to be lowered to the sea bed. Crucial decisions are still to be taken before construction can get underway, but the progress already made indicates there are good chances of a permanent link between northern Germany and the Nordic area within ten years. Similarly, Kaliningrad's prospects of becoming a transport hub are improving as preparations are underway – with some input and financing from Danish companies – for the construction of a major

container terminal outside the city of Kaliningrad in the vicinity of Baltisk.

The northeast part of the Baltic Sea area is displaying similar dynamism. An example is the new fast train connection (Allegro) between Helsinki and St. Petersburg. It may also be noted that the idea of a tunnel – initially viewed as interesting but no more than visionary in essence – has recently attracted rather more serious attention. Another integrative factor relates to new nuclear plants. A considerable number of plants have been planned (although there may be less interest in implementation in view of recent developments regarding the risks involved), implying that the region may actually become a major exporter of electricity to other parts of Europe.

Another cooperative initiative is the Nord Stream gas pipeline from Russia to Germany and other countries in central Europe. The first pipeline has been lowered into the sea and work has started on a second one. In general, the Baltic Sea has turned into such an intense energy-related transit route that issues of safety and environmental cooperation have become priorities. These issues necessitate cooperation between the countries and regions around the Baltic basin.

Regionalisation as a way of building Europe

Another aspect of Baltic Sea development consists of the region looking outwards and becoming part of broader developments in Europe. In fact, the aim of remedying the region's marginal position at the edge of Europe was there from an early stage, but the issue has become far more pronounced in recent years. The increasing regionalisation of the European area, exemplified by the EU's macro-regional strategies, provides a highly significant incentive as well as an outlet for such policies.

The preparation and adoption of the EU's Baltic Sea Strategy (BSS) in 2009 is an important initiative for incorporating the region in the wider Europe. It does so by inviting and encouraging the Baltic Sea area to spearhead the development of European macro-regions. It has become a model for other macro-regions to follow. The Danube region has already heeded the call and developed a strategy of its own and two other regions – the Alps-Adriatica and the North Sea – are gradually following suit. In addition to the four main pillars of the strategy – environment, prosperity, accessibility and safety and security – it contains 15 priority areas involving some 80 concrete "flagship" projects.

Importantly, the policy-making relating to implementation of the EU strategy is expected to be primarily regional rather than being concentrated in Brussels. This was evident to some extent already in the preparatory phase, because it involved new and region-specific forms of engagement as well as public consultation. The EU Baltic Sea Strategy seems to encourage the region to pursue policies of integration in line with the EU's own philosophy, thereby strengthening its plurality by allowing "all flowers to bloom". The region is not asked to comply with, emulate and duplicate something that is already there and dictated by Brussels. The Baltic Sea area is given great scope and is cast in the role of a creative and pro-active force, one that drives the process.

In other words, the tasks allotted to the region are highly political in nature, although they have – within the region – been seen as largely administrative rather than political in nature. The players of the region do not seem to have a sufficiently common perspective to fully utilise the window of opportunity opened by the BSS.

It may also be that the nomination as a forerunner and a model among European macro-regions comes as something of a surprise to many of the players in the region as they are not accustomed to a central role. They still tend to perceive themselves as peripheral in nature and so the invitation of the EU to take the lead, at least in the sphere of Europe's regionalisation, lacks credibility. They tend to abstain from re-framing the policies pursued. In any case, the EU Baltic Sea Strategy clearly offers opportunities, not just to pursue further intra-regional developments but also to exert an influence

on Europe as a whole. Consequently, it is very important that the policies pursued by the region are aligned with the options on offer.

Focused dialogue is needed within the region itself so that it can live up to expectations. The region must define its own priorities far more clearly, broaden its perspectives and redefine the policies for the currently somewhat inappropriate and rather diffuse institutional architecture, instead of re-structuring itself to align with the targets.

Links to the North Sea and Arctic regions

Another development calling for new approaches and broader strategies is the growing importance of the North Sea and Arctic areas. In recent years, many major players in the sphere of international relations, including many of the littoral states around the Baltic Sea, have had cause to develop an Arctic strategy of their own. In comparison, the Baltic Sea area might suffer in terms of political attention. The resources available for regional initiatives may be dedicated for use in the Arctic, but the Baltic Sea area may also gain from the links if practical policies are developed and pursued. Visions and strategies should therefore be developed so that the Baltic Sea Region benefits rather than suffers.

This implies that, while the relationship between the Baltic Sea area and the more northern areas may be slightly competitive, there are also potential synergies from which both areas could benefit. It seems that the underlying philosophy and ways of organising cooperation and relevant players run sufficiently parallel to each other to allow the development of complementary approaches.

In this context it is crucial to note that the developments in the North Sea and Arctic areas may further augment the importance of northern Europe. This will boost the standing of the Baltic Sea Region, not just in a European context but also in a far broader international context. The various geopolitical and geo-economic shifts taking place in northern Europe contrast with the somewhat EU-centric conceptualisations normally applying to the Baltic Sea area. Such trends may at least potentially allow the region to shake off its previous peripherality, and so the tapping of this potential is one of the key issues to be addressed in the sphere of the current Baltic Sea policies.

In a broader context and in view of its proximity to the Arctic region, the Baltic Sea area may be perceived as a transport hub connecting Europe and much of Asia. Already the opening of the North-East Passage supports this idea and makes it realistic. The Trans-Siberian railways, intensified connections by air or the waterways and river systems linking the Baltic Sea with the Barents Sea

and the Arctic also provide credence to such thinking. In short, there are rather good reasons to deviate from traditional perceptions of peripherality and re-think the very basis on which the Baltic Sea strategies rest.

Breaking a taboo

The dismantling of the previous confrontational pattern has prompted the emergence of a much more cooperative constellation, but traditional security has not lost its position in the discourse about the Baltic Sea area. Obviously, the region is no longer a zone of confrontation but security still has a high profile. It actually constitutes a significant obstacle to the devising of a common and more integrative Baltic Sea agenda.

It may also be noted that the emphasis on traditional security by no means unifies the region. Instead it appears that the different players within the region have different views on security. The interests and agendas vary considerably, creating occasional mismatches of mutual expectations. Some of the players in the region have adopted cooperative forms of security, and prioritised various human, environmental as well as energy-related concerns. Others have largely chosen to stay with the more traditional and military-related issues. A crude division is that the Nordic countries together with Germany largely belong to the former group, while the Baltic States, Poland and Russia mainly align with the latter stance.

The lack of unity on the security issue has no doubt had crucial consequences for the development of the Baltic Sea Region. It has derailed any joint and explicitly agreed desecuritisation activities. The region remains void of any common platform for the waging of a security-related discourse, and no region-specific agreement in the spheres of arms control and disarmament has seen the light of day. The Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) has implemented various measures relating to civil security, including cooperation on initiatives to counteract cross-border crime. Joint naval exercises (Baltops) are held annually, led by the US Navy and involving all the navies in the Baltic Sea area. However, in spite of these examples of cooperation, cooperation on security appears to be the least developed aspect of Baltic Sea unity. The region is indeed lagging behind many other parts of Europe.

Consequently, security stands out as a sphere that provides plenty of space for the exercise of discursive power. To date, the Baltic Sea parliamentarians have chosen – with few exceptions – not to intrude into that space. Issues relating to traditional security and desecuritization have either remained taboo, or the tone of the dialogue has been rather traditional, not to say offensive. This clearly represents the "ice" to which Kalevi Sorsa referred some

twenty years ago, and which remains unbroken, but it is also an area where parliamentarians could once again position themselves as forerunners. The chance to move the discourse in a new direction is there. Practical developments, such as the revision of and further talks on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) as well as issues relating to the regional impact of the strategic missile defence systems debated among the major powers, offer openings that could be utilised if there was a common political will.

In conclusion, there are considerable opportunities for discursive influence and further opportunities will undoubtedly arise over time. Many of the policies adopted a couple of decades ago still apply, but there is also an increased need for new themes, concepts and initiatives. The considerable interdependence of the Baltic Sea Region implies that the task of developing policies to meet current challenges requires joint efforts more than ever.

The BSPC Standing Committee 1991–2011

In 1991, 1992 and 1994 (Helsinki, Oslo and Warsaw) the Conferences were planned and carried out mainly by the hosting parliament with support by the Nordic Council Presidium and Secretariat.A dedicated reference group was set up for the 1995 Conference.The function and name of Standing Committee was established in 1996.

1994

Mr Heinz-Werner Arens, MP, Speaker of the Schleswig-Holstein Landtag;
Ms Dorte Bennedsen, MP, Denmark, Member of the Nordic Council Presidium;
Mr Vladimir Stepanov, MP, Speaker of the Karelian Parliament.

1995

Ms Dorte Bennedsen, MP, Denmark, Member of the Nordic Council Presidium, representing the Nordic Council (Chair of the Reference Group);
Mr Heinz-Werner Arens, MP, Speaker of the Schleswig-Holstein Landtag, representing Germany;
Mr Longin Pastusiak, MP, Senate, Poland;
Mr Juris Sinka, MP, Latvia, Member of the Baltic Assembly Presidium, representing the Baltic Assembly;
Mr Vladimir Stepanov, MP, Speaker of the Karelian Parliament, representing Russia.

1996

Ms Dorte Bennedsen, MP, Denmark, Member of the Nordic Council Presidium, representing the Nordic Council (Chair);
Mr Heinz-Werner Arens, MP, Speaker of the Schleswig-Holstein Landtag, representing Germany;
Mr Longin Pastusiak, MP, Senate, Poland;
Mr Juris Sinka, MP, Latvia, Member of the Baltic Assembly Presidium, representing the Baltic Assembly;
Mr Vladimir Stepanov, MP, Speaker of the Karelian Parliament, representing Russia.

1997

Mr Longin Pastusiak, MP, Senate, Poland (Chair);
Ms Dorte Bennedsen, MP, Denmark, Member of the Nordic Council Presidium, representing the Nordic Council;
Mr Heinz-Werner Arens, MP, Speaker of the Schleswig-Holstein Landtag, representing Germany;
Mr Juris Sinka, MP, Latvia, Member of the Baltic Assembly Presidium, representing the Baltic Assembly;
Mr Vladimir Stepanov, MP, Speaker of the Karelian Parliament, representing Russia.

1998

Mr Heinz-Werner Arens, MP, Speaker of the Schleswig-Holstein Landtag (Chair);
Ms Dorte Bennedsen, MP, Denmark, Member of the Nordic Council Presidium, representing the Nordic Council;
Mr Longin Pastusiak, MP, Senate, Poland;
Mr Juris Sinka, MP, Latvia, Member of the Baltic Assembly Presidium, representing the Baltic Assembly;
Mr Vladimir Stepanov, MP, Speaker of the Karelian Parliament, representing Russia.

1999

Mr Svend Erik Hovmand, MP, Denmark, Member of the Nordic Council Presidium, representing the Nordic Council (Chair);
Mr Heinz-Werner Arens, MP, Speaker of the Schleswig-Holstein Landtag, representing Germany;
Mr Ragnar Erlandsson, Ragnar, MP, Speaker, Parliament of the Åland Islands, representing the host parliament;
Mr Juris Sinka, MP, Latvia, Member of the Baltic Assembly Presidium, representing the Baltic Assembly;
Mr Valery N Ustyugov, MP, Speaker of the Kaliningrad Duma, representing Russia;
Mr Edmund Wiibrodt, MP, Senate, Poland.

2000

Mr Svend Erik Hovmand, MP, Denmark, Member of the Nordic Council Presidium, representing the Nordic Council (Chair);
Mr Heinz-Werner Arens, MP, Speaker, Schleswig-Holstein Landtag, representing Germany;
Mr Longin Pastusiak, MP, Senate, Poland;
Mr Juris Sinka, MP, Latvia, Member of the Baltic Assembly Presidium, representing the Baltic Assembly;
Mr Vladimir Stepanov, MP, Speaker of the Karelian Parliament, representing Russia.

2001

Mr Heinz-Werner Arens, MP, Speaker, Schleswig-Holstein Landtag, representing Germany (Chair);
Mr Svend Erik Hovmand, MP, Denmark, Member of the Nordic Council Presidium, representing the Nordic Council;
Mr Hinrich Kuessner, MP, Speaker, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Landtag, representing the host parliament;
Mr Romualds Razuks, MP, Latvia, Member of the Baltic Assembly Presidium, representing the Baltic Assembly;
Mr Valery N Ustyugov, MP, Speaker of the Kaliningrad Duma, representing Russia;
Mr Edmund Wiibrodt, MP, Senate, Poland.

2002

Mr Nikolay Tyulayev, MP, Speaker, Kaliningrad Regional Duma (Chairman from 1 September);
Mr Valery N Ustyugov, MP, Speaker of the Kaliningrad Duma (Chairman until 31 August);
Mr Heinz-Werner Arens; MP, Speaker, Schleswig-Holstein Landtag, representing Germany;
Mr Gerard Czaja, MP, Senate, Poland;
Ms Outi Ojala, Outi, MP, Finland, Member of the Nordic Council Presidium, representing the Nordic Council;
Mr Romualds Razuks, MP, Latvia, Member of the Baltic Assembly Presidium, representing the Baltic Assembly;
Mr Konstantin Kosachev, MP, State Duma, Russia.

2003

Ms Outi Ojala, Outi, MP, Finland, Member of the Nordic Council Presidium, representing the Nordic Council (Chair);
Mr Heinz-Werner Arens, MP, Speaker, Schleswig-Holstein Landtag, representing Germany;
Mr Gerard Czaja, MP, Senate, Poland;
Mr Konstantin Kosachev, MP, State Duma, Russia;
Mr Gennady Khripel, MP, Council of Federation, Russia;
Mr Kent Olsson, MP, Sweden, Member of the Nordic Council Presidium, representing the Nordic Council;
Ms Giedre Purvaneckiene, MP, Lithuania, representing the Baltic Assembly.

2004

Mr Kent Olsson, MP, Sweden, Member of the Nordic Council Presidium, representing the Nordic Council (Chair);
Ms Arja Alho, MP, Finland, representing the Nordic Council;
Mr Heinz-Werner Arens; MP, Speaker, Schleswig-Holstein Landtag, representing Germany;

Mr Gerard Czaja, MP, Senate, Poland;
Mr Gennady Khripel, MP, Council of Federation, Russia;
Mr Inge Lønning, MP, Norway, representing the host country;
Mr Alexandr Orgolaynen, MP, State Duma, Russia;
Mr Jānis Reirs, MP, Latvia, representing the Baltic Assembly.

2005
Mr Trivimi Velliste, MP, Estonia, representing the Baltic Assembly (Chair);
Ms Arja Alho, MP, Finland, representing the Nordic Council;
Mr Heinz-Werner Arens; MP, Speaker, Schleswig-Holstein Landtag, representing Germany;
Mr Gerard Czaja, MP, Senate, Poland;
Mr Gennady Khripel, MP, Council of Federation, Russia;
Mr Kent Olsson, MP, Sweden, Member of the Nordic Council Presidium, representing the Nordic Council;
Mr Alexandr Orgolaynen, MP, State Duma, Russia.

2006
Ms Arja Alho, MP, Finland, representing the Nordic Council (Chair);
Ms Dorota Arciszewska-Mielenczyk, MP, Senate, Poland;
Ms Drifa Hjartardóttir, MP, Iceland, representing the host country;
Mr Martin Kayenburg, MP, Speaker, Schleswig-Holstein Landtag;
Mr Gennady Khripel, MP, Council of Federation, Russia;
Mr Valentinas Mazuronis, MP, Lithuania, representing the Baltic Assembly;
Mr Alexandr Orgolaynen, MP, State Duma, Russia;
Mr Franz Thönnes, MP, Germany.

2007
Mr Franz Thönnes, MP, Germany (Chair);
Ms Dorota Arciszewska-Mielenczyk, MP, Senate, Poland;
Ms Christina Gestrin, MP, Finland, representing Nordic Council;
Mr Martin Kayenburg, MP, Speaker, Schleswig-Holstein Landtag;
Mr Gennady Khripel, MP, Council of Federation, Russia;
Mr Valentinas Mazuronis, MP, Lithuania, representing the Baltic Assembly;
Mr Alexandr Orgolaynen, MP, State Duma, Russia;
Mr Erkki Tuomioja, MP, Finland, representing the Nordic Council;
Ms Diana Wallis, MEP.

2008
Ms Sinikka Bohlin, MP, Sweden, representing the host parliament (Chair);

Ms Dorota Arciszewska-Mielenczyk, MP, Senate, Poland (until 30 September);
Ms Christina Gestrin, MP, Finland, representing Nordic Council;
Mr Martin Kayenburg, MP, Speaker, Schleswig-Holstein Landtag;
Mr Bogdan Lis, MP, Poland (from 01 October);
Mr Anatoly Lyskov, MP, Council of Federation, Russia;
Mr Valentinas Mazuronis, MP, Lithuania, representing the Baltic Assembly;
Mr Vladimir Nikitin, MP, State Duma, Russia (from 1 October);
Mr Alexandr Orgolaynen, MP, State Duma, Russia (until 30 September);
Mr Franz Thönnes, MP, Germany;
Mr Erkki Tuomioja, MP, Finland, representing the Nordic Council;
Ms Diana Wallis, MEP.

2009
Ms Christina Gestrin, MP, Finland, representing Nordic Council (Chair);
Mr Mantas Adomenas, MP, Lithuania, representing the Baltic Assembly;
Mr Paavo Arhinmäki, MP, Finland, representing the Nordic Council;
Mr Nikolay Churkin, MP, Council of Federation, Russia;
Mr Ryszard Górecki, MP, Senate, Poland;
Mr Martin Kayenburg, MP, Speaker, Schleswig-Holstein Landtag;
Ms Valentina Pivnenko, MP, State Duma, Russia;
Ms Bilyana Raeva, MEP;
Mr Niels Sindal, MP, Denmark, representing the host parliament;
Mr Franz Thönnes, MP, Germany.

2010
Ms Christina Gestrin, MP, Finland, representing Nordic Council (Chair);
Mr Mantas Adomenas, MP, Lithuania, representing the Baltic Assembly;
Mr Paavo Arhinmäki, MP, Finland, representing the Nordic Council;
Mr Nikolay Churkin, MP, Council of Federation, Russia;
Mr Pat the Cope Gallagher, MEP;
Mr Ryszard Górecki, MP, Senate, Poland;
Mr Harry Jansson, MP, Parliament of Åland Islands, representing the host parliament;
Mr Martin Kayenburg, MP, Speaker, Schleswig-Holstein Landtag;
Ms Valentina Pivnenko, MP, State Duma, Russia;
Mr Franz Thönnes, MP, Germany.

2011
Ms Christina Gestrin, MP, Finland, representing Nordic Council (Chair);
Mr Nikolay Churkin, MP, Council of Federation, Russia;
Mr Pat the Cope Gallagher, MEP;
Mr Torsten Geerdts, MP, Speaker, Schleswig-Holstein Landtag, Germany;
Mr Ryszard Górecki, MP, Senate, Poland;
Mr Torfinn Opheim, MP, Norway, representing the Nordic Council;
Ms Valentina Pivnenko, MP, State Duma, Russia;
Mr Jānis Reirs, MP, Latvia, representing the Baltic Assembly;
Mr Franz Thönnes, MP, Germany.

The BSPC Enlarged Standing Committee

The BSPC Enlarged (up till 2011: Extended) Standing Committee was established and held its first meeting in 2006.The Enlarged Standing Committee is composed of one representative from each BSPC member parliament and parliamentary organization.The Chairman of the Standing Committee also serves as Chairman of the Enlarged Standing Committee.

The BSPC Working Groups

Committee on Maritime Safety 2001 – 2003
Chair: Ms Sylvia Bretschneider, MP, Speaker, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

Working Group on Eutrophication 2006–2007
Chair: Mr Asmund Kristoffersson, MP, Norway
Vice Chair: Mr Indulis Emsis, MP, Latvia
Vice Chair: Mr Reinhardt Dankert, MP, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

Working Group on Energy and Climate Change 2007–2009
Chair: Mr Mart Jüssi, MP, Estonia
Vice Chair: Ms Anne Grete Holmsgaard, MP, Denmark
Vice Chair: Mr Kurt Bodewig, MP, Germany

Working Group on Labour Market and Social Welfare 2007 – 2009
Chair: Mr Franz Thönnes, MP, Germany
Vice Chair: Ms Anna König Jerlmyr, MP, Sweden

Working Group on Integrated Maritime Policy 2009–2011
Chair: Mr Jochen Schulte, MP, Meckenburg-Vorpommern
Vice Chair: Mr Roger Jansson, MP, Åland Islands (from September 2010)

Vice Chair: Ms Lisbeth Grönfeldt Bergman, MP, Sweden (until September 2010)

Working Group on Civil Security, especially Trafficking in Human Beings 2009–2011
Chair: Ms Line Barfod, MP, Denmark
Vice Chair: Mr André Oktay Dahl, MP, Norway
Vice Chair: Mr Johan Linander, MP, Sweden

BSPC Rapporteurs and Observers

Kaliningrad 2003–2004
Mr Kent Olsson, MP, Sweden

NGO legislation 2003–2004
Ms Outi Ojala, MP, Finland

Eutrophication 2007–2009
Ms Christina Gestrin, MP, Finland

Energy and Climate Change 2009–2010
Mr Mart Jüssi, MP, Estonia

Labour Market and Social Welfare 2009–
Mr Franz Thönnes, MP, Germany

BSPC Observers in HELCOM since 2007
Ms Sylvia Bretschneider, MP, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern 2007–
Ms Christina Gestrin, MP, Finland 2010–
Mr Kent Olsson, MP, Sweden, 2007–2010
Ms Veronica Thörnroos, MP, Åland Islands 2007–2009

BSPC Observer in HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan Implementation Group
Ms Christina Gestrin, MP, Finland, 2008–2010


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