Mr Tālis Linkaits,

Minister of Transport of the Republic of

Latvia, Northern Dimension Partnership on Traffic and Logistics

Mr Linkaits noted that the topic of the session was an important and highly relevant subject for the transport and logistics industry since more than 90 % of the world’s trade was seaborne. The fast-growing blue economy was bringing not only the prosperity but also a number of new opportunities. There was no doubt that future success depended on managing their surroundings in more sustainable ways. It was also their common responsibility to take action in their part of the world. He was happy to share the views on behalf of the Northern Dimension Partnership on Traffic and Logistics because Latvia was chairing the partnership on a steering committee level in this year. Therefore, he wished to speak a little bit more about the issues guiding this framework.

The Northern Dimension was a cooperation forum between the European Union, Russia, Norway and Iceland. The aim of this joint policy is to promote a dialogue, strength and stability, boost economic integration and sustainable development in Northern Europe. The Northern Dimension policy had been initiated in 1991 and renewed in 2006. The Northern Dimension Partnership on Traffic and Logistics had been established in October 2009. The partnership’s overall goal was to improve in compliance with the ecological needs of the region major transport connections and logistics in the Northern Dimension region in order to stimulate sustainable economic growth. It covered all transportation modes, including both infrastructure and known infrastructure-related issues. In December 2012, the partnership support fund had been established. Its purpose was to give grants to projects serving as a catalyst for additional financial support from other sources. The fund had so far provided grants to nine regional projects, and seven of them had been successfully completed in the present.

Looking toward a brighter future, their goals were as important as they had been. At the partnership high-level meeting in Moscow in 2017, a set of focus areas for the partnership had been agreed on. One of these focus areas had been meeting the need for reduction of greenhouse gases, through the promotion of ecologically friendly transport. Reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases as well as stopping the waste flows into the oceans were both pressing global issues. In this respect, an international cooperation was a very important factor. Thus, he used an example from the partnership to illustrate good results. In 2013, the partnership had taken an initiative on addressing the concerns on maritime pollution in the Baltic Sea, focussing on alternative and more environmentally friendly fuels. The Northern Dimension Partnership had joined forces with HELCOM as well as the Baltic Institute and the Baltic Sea Region programme InnoShip, arranging a first conference on alternative fuels. The result of this conference had been a roadmap for sustainable Baltic Sea shipping, currently adopted for the periods 2014 – 2016 and 2017 – 2025. The roadmap had featured clearly defined actions and was forming the guidelines for both the industry and the countries surrounding the Baltic Sea. But it was not where the partnership would stop. As everything in the world was connected for the most part, it was necessary to respond to different areas, whether maritime, railway, road transport or aviation, and determine what could be done better for the climate.

Regarding the national level in Latvia, Mr Linkaits said that even though the country was rather small, it understood its role in a larger picture. For that reason, Latvia was in its position on EU communication, promoting a clean planet for all. They supported the European Union’s objective of climate neutrality in 2050. As for the national long-term strategy, the first draft had been published in August 2018. Looking towards a cleaner future, only in the May of that year, 2019, the Latvian government had approved their maritime spatial plan. It was a national-level long-term spatial development planning document defining the use of the sea. The maritime spatial plan covered internal sea waters, territorial sea and exclusive economic zones. It had taken four years to develop this, Mr Linkaits clarified, succeeding in agreeing with all interested stakeholders. At this point, though, it was finished and would serve Latvia as the main policy document, helping to ensure a clean Baltic Sea. The speaker underlined that this was not the stopping point for his country. Another area of great interest to the nation was road transport. A study had been carried out in Latvia, with regard to alternative fuels. The research had reviewed infrastructure implementation scenarios in the road transport sector, considering the fuels – electricity, liquified natural gas, compressed natural gas, hydrogen and biofuels. The main objective was to reduce the dependency on fossil energy sources.

Mr Linkaits believed that this day’s conference was an excellent example of working together and learning from each other. As the transport and logistics sector was an important factor in improving the environment, he was happy that they were moving towards a progressive and sustainable future. He concluded by thanking the BSPC for inviting him and wishing them a stimulating conference with thoughtful discussion.