Dear President of the BSPC

Dear Mr Speaker:

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a Swede, it is always a pleasure to come to Oslo and Stortinget. Not only do we have close historical ties to our Western neighbour. The relationship between our countries seems to grow stronger by the day in almost every field. Migration is one of them. Today some 100 000 Swedes live in Norway and to many young Swedes, Norway seems to be the new country of opportunity.

No one knows what the migration flows between our countries will look like in the future, but one thing is for sure: migration in one direction or another is here to stay.

The same can be said about migration in the rest of Europe and indeed throughout most parts of the world. Migration flows may go in different directions, but it is close to impossible to stop the movement of people.

According to a recent survey from the Standard Eurobarometer, the question about migration is the number one topic for EU citizens. More than every third EU citizen, 34 percent to be exact, points out migration as the most important political question, far more important than for example climate change, the economic situation, terrorism or the environment.

Since we are living in a globalized world, it is likely that migration will remain high up on the European agenda for a considerable time. For this reason, it is also satisfying to see that there is a young generation who is ready and committed to face these challenges.

In our last meeting in Schwerin in the end of May, the Working Group on Migration and Integration was joined by the Parliamentary Baltic Sea Youth Forum. I think I can speak for us all that it was very rewarding to get the youth’s perspective on migration and I feel confident that a new generation will continue to discuss these crucial matters even after the Working Group has completed its mission.

In exactly one year the Working Group will present its final report in Vilnius. It is of course far too early to draw any final conclusions already now, but one thing is certain: we will all try to learn from each other. Applying best practices when it comes to integration has been one of the themes in the Working Group’s efforts.

One problem with these topics is that they spread over so many different fields. Migration is often a question revolving around international policy and various international agreements. Only through far-sighted agreements to solve the causes of involuntary migration and by avoiding wars, natural disasters and famines can migration be controlled.

Integration, on the other hand, is often dealt with locally. It takes place within the communities, at working places, in schools or in the daily interaction among different people. Combining the international perspective with a local perspective is one of the challenges.

Another challenge is of course that every member country has its own set of historical experiences, traditions and political culture. It is no secret that the member states of the BSPC have different approaches to migration. What may work well in one country, may not work at all in another. Sometimes we might have to modify a policy to make it successful in our own environment.

The most important is that we are open-minded and try to learn from each other’s successes and mistakes. That is what Baltic cooperation should be all about.

To conclude, even though we have not reached our goal yet and still have a year of work ahead of us, I would like to thank all the members of the Working Group for their high-quality contributions. The intensive discussions and the harmonious atmosphere we have enjoyed so far is because of you. A warm thank you also to all those who support the work of the Group with the highest level of commitment. Only through this highly committed cooperation is it possible to achieve results in such a difficult policy area.

I wish you a very successful meeting here in Stortinget and I am convinced that the constructive environment we have enjoyed so far within our Working Group will continue!