25 YEARS BSPC
Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference

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

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Texts: Andrzej Januszewski, Päivikki Lindroos, Jan Widberg, Malgorzata Ludwiczek, Florian Lipowski, Bodo Bahr

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Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference
www.bspc.net

Bodo Bahr
Head of BSPC Secretariat
bb@bspc.net

BSPC Secretariat
c/o Lennéstraße 1
19053 Schwerin
Germany
Phone (+49) 385 525 2777

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

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

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

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

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

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INTRODUCTION

As the President of the BSPC 2015-2016, it is my great pleasure to be the host of the 25th anniversary of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference in Riga on our organisation's Silver Jubilee.

Under the motto "High Quality Education and Labour – The Future of the Baltic Sea Region", the conference will focus on issues related to the labour market and labour mobility in the region. Namely, we will discuss "how to develop competitiveness in the Baltic Sea Region by linking education and the labour market", and how to take advantage of employment opportunities by "improving labour mobility and combating youth unemployment". Both issues are of fundamental importance for achieving the common goal of a prosperous region.

At a Ceremonial Session in honour of this jubilee, the conference in Riga will also commemorate the 25 years of parliamentary cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region .

On this occasion, it is only appropriate to also issue a special publication reviewing the conferences and topics of the past 25 years. This publication, with a more thorough focus on the previous five conferences, follows up on the last such publication, which was issued on the occasion of the 20th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference in Helsinki.

I am proud to report that the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference has become a very visible actor in Baltic Sea affairs, improving dialogue between governments, parliaments and civil society in the region, strengthening the common identity of the countries and states it represents, and initiating and guiding political activities, endowing them with additional democratic legitimacy and parliamentary authority.

Our interaction with external parliamentary, governmental, sub-regional and other organisations has been further enhanced. It has become a good tradition of the BSPC Standing Committee to hold its first session of the year in Brussels, thus enabling our organisation to initiate and guide political activities also in a wider European context. It was also at the request of the BSPC Standing Committee at its winter meeting in Brussels in 2015, which was attended by the European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, that the European Commission decided to maintain the policy area "Health" within the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

The BSPC and its executive counterpart, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, also come together on a semi-annual basis: within the framework of the Standing Committee winter meeting, as well as on the occasion of the BSPC's annual conferences. This has allowed the BSPC to coordinate activities with the CBSS and to be informed about the priorities of the relevant CBSS Presidency.

Our conference resolutions have always been political tools that enable the BSPC to take and support political initiatives, and to approach the governments and regional organisations on issues of common interest.

Over the past few years, there has been a push to make the annual conferences themselves more political. Numerous national ministers have attended BSPC conferences in recent years; in the same vein, European Commissioners have recently informed the Baltic Sea parliamentarians about European level initiatives that are of relevance to our work. The 2015 conference in Rostock has introduced the Round Table format, in order to induce the conferences with more debate and political relevance.

Consequently, the feedback from the governments to our annual resolutions has become increasingly comprehensive. We have taken these comments on-board in our work, and they are of evidence that the BSPC is seen as the main parliamentary body in the Baltic Sea Region. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the former

Chairman of the BSPC Working Group on Innovation in Social and Healthcare, our colleague and friend Raimonds Vējonis, has now been elected President of the Republic of Latvia.

The resolutions of the BSPC have contributed to positive developments in the region over the past 25 years. Most recently, the IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee agreed on a concrete timetable for the prevention of pollution by sewage from ships. The BSPC has urged the governments to support and fulfil the regulations under the relevant MARPOL Annex since its resolution at the 23rd conference in Olsztyn, Poland. The recommendation was reiterated at our 24th annual conference in Rostock in 2015. Furthermore, the BSPC observers in HELCOM have tirelessly lobbied the HELCOM contracting states to implement the obligations to achieve the status of special area.

To achieve all of this, the BSPC underwent several fundamental stages. During its first ten years, the BSPC was very much focused on the topics at hand and addressing these in the framework of its annual conferences. Around the turn of the millennium, to further support its work the BSPC introduced Working Groups on topics such as maritime safety, eutrophication, climate change, labour market and welfare, trafficking in human beings, integrated maritime policy, and most recently – sustainable tourism. Since the introduction of a joint financial mechanism, the BSPC took another step towards further streamlining of its work. Most recently, besides thinking further about means of cooperation in the region, the BSPC has narrowed the focus of its annual conferences to concentrate on one important issue in depth.

In 1991, when our conference was established, it could not be foreseen that it would become such a success. The sea that once divided is now a sea of peace and freedom. But there is no denying the fact that there have also been signs of tension in the Baltic Sea Region. Especially in times like these, trustworthy, candid, and longstanding cooperation and dialogue are more important than ever before, in particular at the inter-parliamentary level. The representatives from the countries around the Baltic Sea, chosen by their constituents, must jointly work towards maintaining the peaceful cooperation that has characterised the region for the past 25 years.

On the eve of the 25th anniversary of the BSPC, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference is more vital than ever before. One of stated goals of the BSPC is to support and strengthen the democratic institutions in the participating states. Therefore, it is in the

interest of the BSPC to use the tools at its disposal to contribute to the democratic developments in countries in our neighbourhood, for instance, via the observer status at the BSPC.

We will continue to work on our mission to bring parliaments, governments, and civil society in our common Baltic Sea Region ever closer together.

People coming together is the basis for any cooperation.

Trusting cooperation based on a constructive dialogue also contributes to peace.

It is in this spirit that I wish the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference a very successful continuation of our 25 years of cooperation.

Prof. Dr. Jānis Vucāns
President of the BSPC 2015-2016

THE BALTIC SEA PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCES 1991–2016

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1st BSPC – 1991 Helsinki, Finnland

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

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

Some of the subjects discussed at the Conference were proposed after earlier consultations (a preparatory meeting was held in Helsinki on 13 September 1990) but a number of other issues were

discussed at the Conference forum. This gave the Conference the character of a working meeting that identified problems in the Baltic Sea Region needing swift action.

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

The economic discussions were dominated by issues relating to the transition of former communist bloc countries to market economies and the economic reforms in the Soviet Union. It was emphasised that the economic development of the Baltic States and the Leningrad area was vital to the region's integration and that the West should develop an appropriate mechanism for assisting those areas. The speakers expressed their hope for a rapid opening of the East to a capitalist economy, e. g. through free economic zones. However, they also emphasised that political stability free from armed conflicts is a pre-condition of development.

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.

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2nd BSPC – 1992 Oslo, Norway

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

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

These topics were discussed at the 2nd Plenary Session.

As the Conference progressed, differences emerged as to the definition of the range of subjects for Baltic cooperation. Delegations from Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia represented an opinion that this cooperation should above all include security issues. In this context, they all demanded the withdrawal of Russian troops from their territories. The delegation of Russia's Supreme Council protested against the inclusion of these issues and blocked further debate on this subject. On the other hand, the Supreme Council's delegates said the Parliamentary Conference was a good forum for discussing issues relating to ethnic minorities (the context of Russian minority in the Baltic States was more than apparent here).

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

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

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

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

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

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3rd BSPC – 1994 Warsaw, Poland

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 Wałe¸sa. 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.

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4th BSPC – 1995 Rønne, Denmark

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 involvement 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 Ms Lena Hjelm-Wallen presented a report on the proceedings of the Council of Baltic Sea States. From then on, the report of the CBSS representative (usually the foreign minister of the country currently presiding over the Council) has become a permanent feature of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conferences.

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

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5th BSPC – 1996 Riga, Latvia

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

The Riga Conference could be described as "typical" in terms of the subjects discussed. It emphasised environmental protection issues in the Baltic region and discussed the activities of the European Union and its Committee for the Baltic Sea Region. The Conference renewed its call for the implementation of the Helsinki Committee recommendations. Mr Joris Declerck, a representative of the European Committee, presented the main points of the document "The Initiative of the Baltic Sea Region", adopted in Visby, on the Swedish island of Gotland, on 3 May 1996, which defined the Union's policy on the region. The main areas of this policy included strengthening and stabilising democracy, economic development resulting from trade liberalisation, building transport and power infrastructure, and support for sub-regional cooperation. The participants also discussed questions of trans-border cooperation in the region. The main areas of this cooperation were identified as economic cooperation to promote sustainable development, ecology and the sphere of contacts among citizens, and local initiatives. The speakers

appealed for faster investment in the eastern part of the Baltic. Deputy Andrzej Wielowieyski described Poland's experience in cooperating with Central European countries.

The Conference ended with a round-table debate that adopted the Resolution. The Resolution reflected all the subjects discussed by the Conference. Its participants once again called for an intensification of contacts with the CBSS and close cooperation in fisheries, scientific research and other areas. The Resolution also drew attention to the necessity of solving the power problems of the region by implementing joint power management and utilisation of renewable sources at an industrial scale.

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6th BSPC – 1997 Gdansk, Poland

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

The motto of the Conference was *Mare Balticum – Mare Nostrum*. It focused on the broad 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 the continuation of the Conference proceedings. The document also mentioned the tragic floods in Poland and Germany and asked the governments of the region to provide assistance to relieve the consequences of the floods.

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

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7th BSPC – 1998 Lübeck, Schleswig-Holstein

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

The motto of this Conference was *A Follow-up of the Luxembourg Summit – Consequences for the Baltic Sea Region*. The meeting of the European Council in Luxembourg on 12–13 December 1997 had decided to start the process of enlarging the European Union eastwards by adding the Baltic countries of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Implementation of this process would diametrically change the political and economic relations in the region. Consequently, this important decision was a subject of parliamentary debate.

The Conference had three Plenary Sessions. The 1st Session was *Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region*, the 2nd Session referred to the title of the Conference, and the 3rd Session dealt with *Links in the*

Baltic Sea Region – Solidarity and People-to-People Approach. This means direct contact between people living in the near-border areas and local contacts at the lowest level.

The 7th Conference discussed a number of concepts and principles that offered hope for developing cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region and improving effectiveness. It should be noted that all the parliamentarians stressed the need to combine the processes of Baltic integration with European integration. Consequently, they did not describe the regional cooperation as an alternative but rather a supplement on the road to integration with the European Union.

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

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

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

The Resolution mentioned the organisations that, alongside the CBSS, were to become the main partners of the Conference: the Union of Baltic Towns, the Sub-regional Cooperation of Baltic Sea States, the Association of Baltic Chambers of Commerce, and the Conference of Europe's Peripheral Sea Regions. The Resolution expressly recommended that the Standing Committee implement the Resolution's provisions adopted by the Conference. The document also referred to the idea of the Northern Dimension, which became another major influence on the Conference's activities. The concept of developing the "Northern Dimension" of the European Union was proposed by Finland in 1997. The idea was that countries and

regions around the Baltic Sea including Russia (also Iceland and Britain) would play an important role in the political stabilisation and economic development of the growing European Union. On 25 November 1998, the European Commission adopted a report on the "Northern Dimension of the European Union's Policy" after which the EU summit in Vienna, December 1998, decided to incorporate the Finnish initiative in the official programme of the Union.

8th BSPC – 1999 Mariehamn, Åland Islands

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

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

further consolidation of Conference structures and opening up new areas for work.

The Conference also launched a number of initiatives to intensify cooperation with the Council of Baltic Sea States. It started publishing information about its work in the Council's periodical "Baltinfo," visited the Council's Secretariat in Stockholm, and invited representatives of the Council to its sessions.

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

The Conference in Mariehamn tried to refer to the previous Conference, so it devoted much time to the enlargement of the European Union. However, this time it focused on the new situation in the labour market and the social consequences of the process. Delegates of the host country also pointed out the importance of environmental protection in the region (this issue being extremely important for the tourist-oriented Åland Islands).

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

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9th BSPC – 2000 Malmö, Sweden

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 the further development of cooperation in the region and methods for bridging the economic gaps between the Baltic States, in order to establish an integrated economic area.

There were three Plenary Sessions: *Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region*, *Northern Dimension – Chances and Challenges for Regional and*

Sub-regional Cooperation, and a recap session. The second Session involved two working groups, discussing *TransEuropean Networks* and *Cross-border Cooperation*.

There was also a meeting of the Standing Committee with representatives of non-governmental organisations operating in the Baltic region. At this meeting, participants discussed how to intensify mutual cooperation (similar meetings were earlier held in Lübeck and 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 September 2001 in Greifswald, by invitation from the Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

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10th BSPC – 2001 Greifswald, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

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

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

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

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

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

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11th BSPC – 2002 St. Petersburg, Russia

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

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

As to the upcoming enlargement of the EU, the Russian participants saw the visa issue as a test of Russia-EU relations. There were concerns that the visa regime would isolate Kaliningrad. Russian delegates also pointed out that EU-Russia relations were not only a question about Kaliningrad. They stated that Russia will participate actively in the Northern Dimension of the EU, both in economic and environmental spheres. According to them the main objective

was to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines within Europe. A reduction of military resources in the region, as well as developing cooperation between armed forces, was also discussed.

At its launch five years earlier, Russia had high expectations of the Northern Dimension but now felt it was a disappointment. The message was that it should have embraced cooperation, not only assistance, and dedicated funds should have been allocated. The Northern Dimension was, however, seen as an instrument for environmental cooperation that ought to be developed more actively.

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

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

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

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

The second part of the Resolution included pleas to the governments and the CBSS regarding safety and security at sea. The Conference was unanimous in its view of IMO an important player in safeguarding the Baltic Sea. In this part of the Resolution, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference called upon the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and the governments of the region to adopt a number of measures aimed at preventing and controlling shipping accidents, to continue to fundamentally improve the safety of ships and navigation, and to cooperate internationally in this field. The Conference also expressed its satisfaction that it had been granted observer status with HELCOM.

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

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

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

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

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12th BSPC – 2003 Oulu, Finland

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.

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13th BSPC – 2004 Bergen, Norway

The 13th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was convened in Bergen, Norway, 29–31 August 2004. Under the theme *Sustainable Development – Shared Concerns and Responsibilities in the Baltic Sea Region*, the Conference showed two superficially contradictory trends in the cooperation: continuity and change. Continuity because the parliamentarians had been meeting since 1991, and the regional parliamentary cooperation was well established. Change because this was the first Conference after the enlargement of the European Union in May 2004. The fact that the Baltic Sea was now almost an EU-Russian internal water was expected to change the form and to some extent the content of Baltic Sea cooperation. The impact of EU enlargement was not scheduled for separate discussion but became a constant thread in the debates on the present and future of Baltic Sea cooperation. The following points were repeatedly mentioned as the most important aspects of the enlarged Union for regional cooperation in Northern Europe: the 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 concen-

trated 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.

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14th BSPC – 2005 Vilnius, Lithuania

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

Even though more than a year had passed since the enlargement of the European Union in May 2004, the impact of this process remained a fundamental issue during the Conference. The accession of the three Baltic Countries and Poland to the EU had brokered new possibilities for regional cooperation in Northern Europe, especially with regard to the new options of additional EU funds for the various projects in the Baltic Sea Region. An important step was the participation of the European Parliament in the work of the BSPC Standing Committee. It was also obvious that the role of the CBSS had grown in view of the recent enlargement of the European Union.

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

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

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.

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15th BSPC – 2006 Reykjavik, Iceland

The 15th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference in Reykjavik, Iceland, 3–5 September 2006 addressed the *Northern Dimension and the Oceans and Seas*. The Conference was held in the northernmost European capital in the Baltic Sea Region. The Conference took up issues such as the environment, with particular focus on the Baltic Sea, the Northern Dimension and how to further strengthen cooperation in the Region. The City of Reykjavik does not lie by the Baltic Sea, but this does not prevent the Icelandic Parliament participating in the work of the BSPC.

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

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

parliamentary cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region felt beyond the annual Conference.

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

A lively discussion broke out regarding Belarus and its possible status as an observer at the Conference. Some of the participants thought that isolating an entire country, its parliament and people from any dialogue with its surrounding region was unacceptable. Others felt that due to the political events taking place in Belarus, granting it either membership or even observer status at the BSPC could be difficult for some of the members of the BSPC. The Integrated Maritime Policy of the EU was felt to offer promising opportunities for the Region, not least in financial terMs Greater cooperation and coordination in order to boost the health of the Baltic Sea could lead to prosperity and higher standards of living for the people in the Region. Several speakers expressed wishes that the BSPC could participate actively in the deliberations on the policy.

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

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

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16th BSPC – 2007 Berlin, Germany

The 16th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was held on 27–28 August 2007 in Berlin under the theme *Social Welfare, Maritime Policy, Energy Security*. It was the first time that the Bundestag had organised the Conference. It had been held in Germany twice before, having been hosted by the Schleswig-Holstein Landtag in 1998 and the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Landtag in 2001. The Conference was the biggest so far in BSPC's history, gathering over 200 participants. The Conference acknowledged the collaborative spirit of the BSPC and confirmed its pivotal political role in the Baltic Sea Region.

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

The BSPC's observer status in HELCOM was mentioned as one of the main avenues for parliamentarians to drive and follow up the discussion on maritime policies. It was also said that more focus should be put on labour market cooperation, the development of civil society, and the fight against organised crime. Coordination

with other organisations was also deemed important. The Conference felt satisfaction that there now was clear evidence of progress on the 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.

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17th BSPC – 2008 Visby, Sweden

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

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

Photo: Bodo Bahr

18th BSPC – 2009 Nyborg, Denmark

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 for the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) as a central tool for restoring a good environmental status of the Baltic Sea by 2021, and underlining that governments must fulfil their pledges to

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

On Maritime Safety and Security in the Region, the Conference called for active cooperation within the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) on the development of relevant measures to reduce the environmental impact of shipping in the Baltic Sea, and concrete projects to implement maritime spatial planning in the Baltic Sea Region. The Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, the 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.

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19th BSPC – 2010 Mariehamn, Åland Islands

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.

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20th BSPC – 2011 Helsinki, Finland

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

At the beginning of the first session, on *Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region,* Ms Christina Gestrin, Chairman of the BSPC, also pointed out that there had been quite remarkable developments in the Region since the first conference in Helsinki. The biggest change, in her opinion, was that the Baltic Sea Region had evolved into an area of peace, democracy and cooperation. However, despite the remarkable progress in political cooperation, and an increase in joint initiatives in research and development, many serious environmental, social and economic problems in the Baltic Sea region still remain. Ms Gestrin stated that joint endeavours towards security and safety, business cooperation, infrastructure, and research and development, strengthening the common labour market, and mobility in the region, create a huge potential for collective growth and prosperity in the BSR. Cooperation in the BSR has been recently strengthened by the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, which has been proposed by a group of

European MPs and developed by the European Commission with the aim of facilitating cooperation in the Region. The Conference speakers underlined that it was crucial that all relevant stakeholders, whether they are in the EU or not, must be able to participate in the work on an equal footing. The Northern Dimension was mentioned as an important platform for cooperation between EU and non-EU countries, and as such should be supported by suitable funding.

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

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

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

The main subjects discussed by the Conference in the second session, on *Maritime Issues,* were those linked to the results of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan, the findings of the BSPC Working Group on the Integrated Maritime Policy and developments in the field of maritime safety. The main achievements of the BSAP listed by Ms Gabriella Lindholm, Chair of HELCOM, were more-stringent regulations for sewage discharges from passenger ships, the disposal of sewage by cruise ships through a voluntary call by cities, working together with private companies on port-reception facilities, a flagship project in the framework of the EUSBSR, the IMO agreement to the global designation of the Baltic Sea Region as a Special Area for sewage discharge, and the designation of the Baltic Sea as a Nitrogen Dioxide Emission Control Area. Mr Jochen Schulte, Chair of the BSPC WG on

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

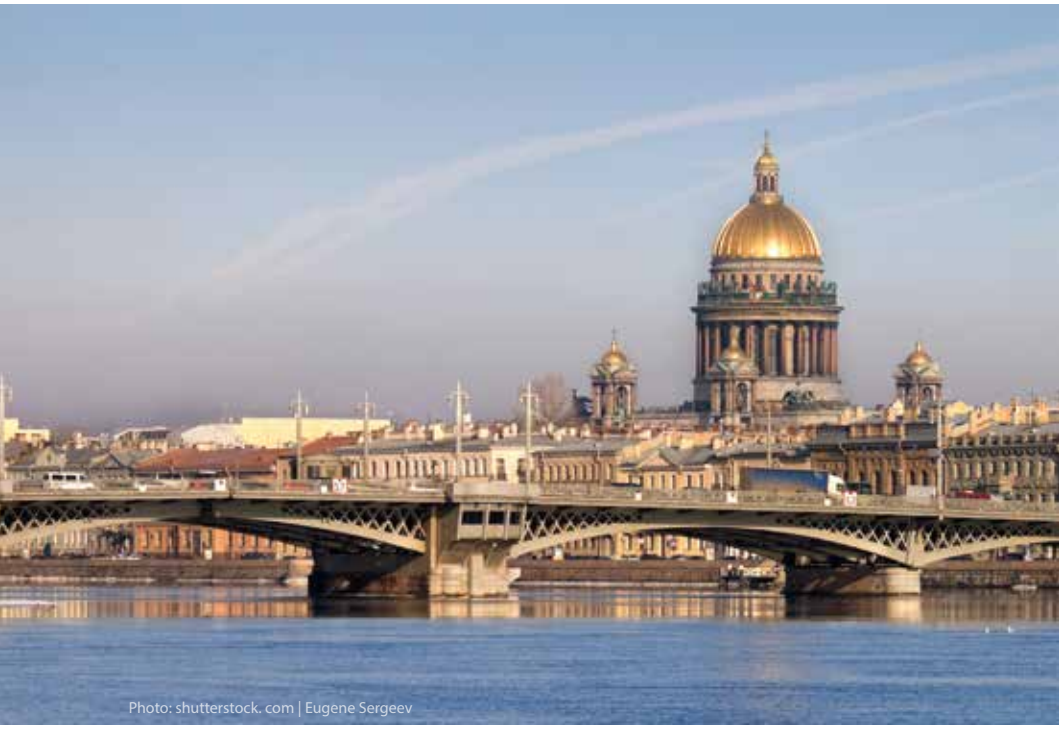
The *Civil Safety and Security* session began with the report of the BSPC Working Group on Civil Security and Trafficking. The most urgent request expressed by Mr Andre Oktay Dahl, Vice Chair of the Group, was that the BSPC should establish networks of parliamentarians to support the fight against human trafficking. Other recommendations featured in the report call for better coordination between the relevant authorities and institutions to detect money flows related to human trafficking, passing laws and regulations allowing for the confiscation of profit from human trafficking, and imposing severe fines. Other speakers stressed that a victim-based approach should be adopted in all measures and actions and the victims of human trafficking must not be treated as illegal immigrants, as the fear to be deported or charged discourages them from cooperation with the authorities. Among other issues mentioned with regard to the trafficking topic were modern slavery organised by globalised crime groups and the problems caused by large-scale emigration from the Baltic countries. The discussion led to the general conclusion that parliamentarians have a key role in their capacity as opinion-makers and legislators. Therefore, it is extremely important that they keep exerting political pressure on governments to take action against human trafficking.

The next part of the session was devoted to public health and social Well-being. It was underlined that those two terms were strongly interlinked. What's more, health is seen as a profound economic issue. As European countries spend 8. 3% of their GDP on health, any actions taken towards improving people's health are highly valuable. The Northern Dimension on Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS), as presented by Mr Maciejowski, the head of the NDPHS's Secretariat, supports initiatives strengthening policies and actions in the field of the prevention of non-communicable diseases which have

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

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

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



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21st BSPC – 2012 St. Petersburg, Russia

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

The various aspects of institutional cooperation in the BSR were among the main issues discussed during the first session, on *Regional Partnership and Cross-Border Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region.* The speakers stressed the synergy between the priorities of the CBSS under the Russian Presidency and the Presidency of Russia in the BSPC. Ambassador Mr Gerhard Almer, Head of the Task Force for the German Presidency of the CBSS 2011–2012, referred to the extraordinary meeting held in Schloss Plön in February 2012 when the CBSS foreign ministers agreed on an ambitious programme focused on cooperation in the tourism sector, expansion of public-private partnerships, youth exchanges, academic and research cooperation, and sustainable development. Ms Valentina Pivnenko, Chairperson of the BSPC, underlined the necessity of modernisation and

of developing innovation in the region, and admitted that it should be the main focus of cooperation at the political and administrative levels. Other issues of utmost importance mentioned by Ms Pivnenko were public-private interaction and the maritime strategy for curbing eutrophication, maritime safety for better protection of the environment, energy efficiency, nuclear safety, and the infrastructure for increasing the competitiveness of the BSR in Europe and globally. She stressed the fact that such a wide range of goals could be only achieved in close cooperation with sub-regional and non-governmental organisations, such as HELCOM, BSSSC, and the Northern Dimension. During this session two strategies were presented: Mr Jacek Protasiewicz, Vice-President of the European Parliament, outlined the objectives of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, and Mr Stanislav Lazowsky introduced the participants to the North-West Russia Socio-Economic Development Strategy. Both strategies aimed at improving the ecosystem of the Baltic Sea, connectivity in the region, and the Well-being of the people living there. "Therefore, both shall contribute to the development of the Baltic Sea area" – that was the final conclusion of the session which was included in the text of the BSPC Resolution. Mr Jakko Hettonnen, Manager of the NDEP assured, that the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP) can also contribute to the reduction of eutrophication by supporting wastewater plants and energy-efficiency projects in Russia and Belarus.

The second session, on *Environmental Health and Energy Cooperation,* began with a discussion on the status of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BASAP), presented by Ms Helle Pilsgaard, Chair of HELCOM. As regards the progress of BASAP implementation, it has been acknowledged that the municipal wastewater-treatment sector and the industrial sector have been successful in reducing their discharges of nutrients and hazardous substances into the Baltic Sea. It was also noted that the Baltic Sea States have been successful in finalising a number of activities involving shipping and biodiversity. However, a lot of work still has to be done to limit eutrophication, which was the biggest environmental problem. The EU regulations regarding the use of phosphates and phosphorus compounds in the households were adopted in 2017, but the last part of that hazardous substance originating from agriculture requires special attention. Ms Christina Gestrin, BSPC HELCOM observer, underlined the strong involvement of the BSPC in this issue. In its Report from 2007, the BSPC Working Group on Eutrophication came up with far-reaching proposals, e. g. asking the IMO to prohibit nitrogen-oxide discharges in the Baltic Sea. Ms Gestrin concluded her speech by a call for the implementation of existing plans instead of making new recommendations.

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

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

Special emphasis in the third session, on *A safe and Healthy Baltic Sea,* was put on cooperation between Baltic organisations such as BSPC, CBSS, BSSSC in the area of an Integrated Maritime Policy and, in particular, on the EU Sulphur directive on the environmental impact of the use of LNG and the promotion of maritime transports. Different organisations working with the integrated maritime policy have been able to work together and managed to take an integrated approach on such issues as reduction of emission, maritime transport maritime safety and a common maritime spatial planning, informed Mr Jochen Schulte, BSPC Rapporteur on Integrated Maritime Policy.

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

well-functioning apprenticeship and internship systeMs An extensive report on youth unemployment and measures to combat the problem in the Baltic Sea Region was recommended by Mr Franz Thönnes, BSPC Rapporteur on Labour-Market Issues.

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

Photo: -jkb-

22nd BSPC – 2013 Pärnu, Estonia

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

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

The first session, on *Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region,* was opened by Ms Laine Randjärv, Chairperson of the BSPC, who welcomed the fact that after a tough period of recession, the Baltic Sea Region

countries have come back to being ranked as leaders in terms of economic growth indicators. New industrial structures, new market conditions and social transformations can be developed only when an innovative approach is introduced and applied in those areas. Therefore, Ms Randjärv proposed establishing the new BSPC Working Group on Innovation in Social and Health Care. Once again the close connection between BSCP and CBSS was confirmed by Ms Satu Mattila, Chairperson of the CBSS Committee of Senior Officials. The main theme for the Finnish presidency in 2013-2014 was a "Clean, Safe and Smart Baltic Sea", and many priorities such as the promotion of clean navigation and the use of alternative fuels, the prevention of maritime accidents, and the strengthening of civil society, are close to the topics discussed within the BSPC. Ms Mattila stressed the necessity for the recommendations of the BSPC to be implemented and added that dialogue between governments and parliaments within the framework of the Baltic Sea regional cooperation is of an utmost importance. The next speaker, Mr Sergey Petrovich, former Chair of the CBSS Russian presidency, continued the important issue of the implementation of political decisions by giving extensive examples of projects that had been launched in North-West Russia as a result of CBSS initiatives. Ms Darya Akhutina representing the Baltic NGO Forum and the recently established Baltic NGO Network presented a number of recommendations with reference to enhancing the participation of civil society organisations in the decision-making process. In order to facilitate cooperation visa mobility system should be revised and the registration fee abolished at least for young members of NGO's, claimed Ms Akhutina.

Civil society was also a focal point of intervention by Mr Lars Kascha, from the Baltic Sea Youth Forum. He spoke about the attempts to re-establish the Baltic Sea Secretariat for Youth Affairs in Kiel and to create the Baltic Sea Youth Forum, a network of local, regional and national youth organisations operating in the Baltic Sea Region. Also in a comment by Mr Franz Thönnes, Member of Parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany, youth issues were highlighted. Mr Thönnes invited the Finnish CBSS presidency to organise a youth forum before the annual conference and also supported the opinion that visa liberalisation is essential for people-to-people contacts in the Region.

During any BSPC Conference a discussion on cooperation with regard to Baltic Sea environmental issues could not be omitted. This time the state of affairs was presented by Ms Monika Stankiewicz, Executive Secretary of Helcom. Eutrophication is still the major environmental problem, as Ms Stankiewicz reported, so it was put high on the agenda of the ministerial meeting. Reaching an agreement on

the distribution of reductions in phosphorus and nitrogen among the involved countries would be one of the main tasks of the ministerial meeting in October 2013. Only timely implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan can lead to a healthy Baltic Sea. As to the situation in the maritime sector, it is expected that the ministerial meeting will agree on a new initiative – the establishment of a Green Technology and Alternative Fuels Platform for Shipping. Ms Stankiewicz invited the BSPC to support that initiative.

In her comment to that part of the session, Ms Sylvia Bretschneider, President of the Landtag of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and the BSPC Observer at HELCOM, mentioned the contribution of the BSPC to the ministerial meeting regarding an integrated maritime policy, energy and environmental protection.

Mr Pat the Cope Gallagher, Member of the European Parliament, briefed the BSPC on the development of the EUSBSR and the Northern Dimension. The Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region has been revised and currently the Revised Action Plan has only three objectives: Save the Sea, Connect the Region, Increase Prosperity; and focuses mainly on the environment and the economy, indicated Mr Gallagher. Environmental issues are also high on the agenda of the Northern Dimension, and cooperation with Russia is crucial in order to effectively address regional challenge, concluded Mr Gallagher. In their comments Ms Christina Gestrin and Mr Vantar Yagya supported such high expectations for EUSBSR and claimed that more compatibility with other strategies, e. g. the Social and Economic Development of the North-West Federal Districts of the Russian Federation, the Barents Strategy and the Northern Dimension, should be encouraged.

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

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

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

Prof. Erik Terk, Director of the Estonian Institute for Future Studies, admitted that according to future trends research, global growth in the next decades will not be driven by Europe. If Europe wants to continue its economic and social development it must adapt to the changes taking place in the global area. Therefore, Baltic Sea countries should restructure their economies, namely the industries and the proportion of high-tech production, develop new services, and revise the geographical patterns of their economic ties. For Mr Jari Kaivo-Oja from Finland's Futures Research Centre, the most significant effects of globalisation are those interlinked with changes in the demographic, economic and social structure. Globalisation, demographic changes, rises of complex societies, web-society empowerment of people, digitalisation, the Internet, the expansion of resource-efficient technologies and the rise of the bio-economy are the main trends affecting the BSR. Ms Silvia Stiller from the Hamburg Institute of International Economics referred to the future potential and the challenges of the BSR area of innovation. She indicated that the Baltic Sea Region was characterised by substantial structural and developmental differences in the innovation potential, which included, firstly, distinct disparities in per capita income; secondly, differences in innovation potential; thirdly, differences in private and public investment in R&D; and fourthly differences in education systeMs Ms Stiller pointed out that the analyses confirmed that innovation and the introduction of novelties to the economy are closely linked with the general education level of society.

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

E-health has become a new sector which demands new solutions, so the project Accelerate Life, has been developed. The project brings together partners from 5 countries, with the aim of accelerating disruptive innovation in e-health, life science, med-tech, biotechnology and diagnostics, by supporting ten best start-ups with a 6 plus 6 months programme. Project BONUS is a research and development programme of the Baltic Sea Region with a budget for 2011-2017 of 100 million Euro. The mission of BONUS is to transform the Baltic Sea Research system into a durable, cooperative and multinational system. Nordic Innovation assists policy makers, policy implementers, and business and research organisations. The Nordic High Growth Entrepreneurship Initiative is aimed at facilitating national activities in increasing the capacities of innovative companies. The Nordic Built Initiative is aimed at the building industry and focuses on the harmonisation of standards and the promotion

of innovation in industry. In their final comments the parliamentarians stressed the importance of innovation as the key-driving force in economic growth, welcomed the amendments to the resolution regarding marine technologies, and agreed that education is an important prerequisite for the development of innovation.

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

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

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

Space technologies were the next subject of the debate and a number of purposes to which those technologies could be applied were

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

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

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

The Economic and Social Conditions for Creative Entrepreneurship were discussed during the fourth session of the Conference. What could be done to support and develop creative entrepreneurship in the Baltic Sea Region – the answer to that question appeared not to be simple but there are many ideas, recommendations and initiatives towards building a creative Baltic Sea area. Some of them were worked out by the European Design Leadership Board and presented as 21 policy recommendations at the Design and Innovation Summit in Helsinki. They were enumerated by Ms Deborah Dawton, President of the Bureau of European Design Associations, and referred to the positioning of design within the European Innovation system, design for innovative and competitive enterprises, design skills for an innovative public sector, design abilities in the 21st Century, and cooperation among the design sector.

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

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

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

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23rd BSPC – 2014 Olsztyn, Poland

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

H. E. Bogdan Borusewicz, President of the Senate of the Republic of Poland, emphasised that it was the third time that Poland had hosted the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, the most important forum of parliamentary exchange in the region. He expressed the opinion that the Baltic Sea Region was an area of growing

potential for cooperation, ever better integrated and prosperous, which was currently facing an opportunity to reinforce its position in both the European and global dimensions.

The first session, on *Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region*, focused on developments in cooperation with long-standing partners of the BSPC – the CBSS, HELCOM, the European Commission, and the NGO Forum.

Mr Górecki opened the discussion by pointing out the fact that the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was set up in 1991 at a difficult time of profound political transformations in the region, so today, much like in 1991, a forum like BSPC is essential. Furthermore, he acknowledged that a few years ago the Baltic Sea Region was still mired in profound economic recession; currently, the BSR is proving to have the highest growth in the European Union. The proper use and implementation of innovations in production, administration and management is of special significance for the regional economies. Mr Górecki also stressed the importance of a permanent dialogue with CBSS at the political and administrative levels and expressed satisfaction with the reporting on the contacts between the BSPC, on the one hand, and SEECP and PABSEC, on the other.

Ms Satu Mattila, Chairperson of the CBSS CSO 2013-2014, mentioned the long-term cooperation between the CBSS and BSPC. One example of such cooperation was a joint seminar of CBSS, BSPC and BASREC on energy efficiency, attended by the Finnish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Erkki Tuomioja. The CBSS also stepped up its cooperation with HELCOM. A conference on the use of alternative fuels in maritime transport was organised in January 2014, and a road map for the implementation of green technologies was developed during the Baltic Sea Days in Turku in June 2014. With the intention of reinforcing the role of civil society and the promotion of labour issues as part of the 'interpersonal contacts' priority, the Finnish Presidency supported the organisation of a forum of non-governmental organisations in Turku and the Baltic Sea Labour Forum (BSLF) meeting in Helsinki. In conclusion, Ms Mattila noted that the political climate changed midway through the Presidency and the planned CBSS summit in Turku was not held, owing to the situation in Ukraine, but despite the political uncertainty, cooperation in the region should continue at the legal, expert and parliamentary levels within the framework of the BSPC.

For Mr Raul Mälk, Chair of the CBSS CSO, the main task of the Estonian Presidency will be the practical implementation of the

CBSS long-term priorities and the implementation of activities aimed at the achievement of the goals set out in the Vilnius Declaration approved at the CBSS summit in 2008. Mr Mälk provided information on the meetings planned in 2014 and 2015 and emphasised that the CBSS considered the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference to be an important partner.

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

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

Ms Valentina Pivnenko, Member of the Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, informed the participants about the Strategy of the socio-economic development of the North-West Federal District. The main goal behind the Strategy until 2020 is to increase the Well-being of the population and offset and/or reduce the differences in the standard of living in individual territories that lie within those 11 regions. In support of the development of the economy and innovation and of removing limitations on transport, energy and the infrastructure, 24 national programmes have been launched costing circa 390 million rubles. Russia is interested in

joining forces with the European Union to solve the problems of the region as part of the coordinated implementation of the regional strategies, the NWFD Strategy, and EUSBSR – so that the efforts related to the Russian participation in the Interreg Baltic Sea Programme 2014-2020 would be very beneficial. Ms Pivnenko presented her point of view on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, considering it as an internal conflict in Ukraine.

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

Mr Rumen Gechev, Member of the Bulgarian Parliament representing the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), presented information on parliamentary cooperation within SEECP and admitted that the model of Baltic cooperation was to a great extent a role model for the SEECP in the development of its Parliamentary Assembly. Furthermore, he expressed the conviction that the SEECP would soon apply for observer status at the BSPC.

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

Session two, on *Environmental legacy – environmental challenges,* began with an optimistic statement by Mr Andrzej Jagusiewicz, Chief Inspector of the Environmental Protection of the Republic of Poland, that his country would achieve the goals of the Baltic Sea Action Plan by 2021 through the implementation of the National Programme of Construction of Wastewater-Treatment Plants. The programme, with a budget of €20 billion, covers the construction, expansion and/or upgrading of wastewater-processing plants in all clusters of 2,000 or more residents by 2015. Mr Jagusiewicz referred to the problem of chemical munitions lying in the Baltic. Poland leads UMBRELA (the Underwater Munitions Baltic

Remediation cluster LeAgue), the EUSBSR flagship project, and is actively involved in other projects in this field.

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

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

In their comments the speakers presented varying views on the situation in the Baltic Sea environment. On the one hand, the representative of the Åland Islands spoke about the mass growth of algae observed around the islands in 2014 and called for more intensive steps to be taken by other countries; on the other hand, remarkable progress had been made in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern towards reaching HELCOM goals on eutrophication. In Warmia and Mazury a comprehensive Green University programme had been introduced at the University of Olsztyn, which led to the setting up of a new scientific institute dealing with the issues of environmental protection with special focus on limnology.

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

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

Prof. Jörg Hackmann, University of Szczecin, presented information on the Baltic Sea History Project, which is a flagship project of the culture priority area in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. The objective of the project is to look at the history of the Baltic Sea Region from a new perspective and to present various perceptions of Baltic Sea history.

Mr Mikko Härö, Director of the Department of Cultural Environment Protection of the National Board of Antiquities of Finland, suggested in his presentation that the only constant feature of heritage is permanent change. The new approach to heritage assumes that the definitions of heritage should be developed by communities and not by administrations. The speaker mentioned the Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society of the Council of Europe of 2005, which makes it possible to inscribe heritage into human activity and disassociate it from political associations. The speaker also recognised the European Commission Communication *Towards an integrated approach to a cultural heritage for Europe* (July 2014) as a milestone in the EU's approach to heritage.

Dr. Hanna Hagmark-Cooper from the Åland Maritime Museum expressed her conviction that maritime museums had a key role to play in the maintenance and promotion of the marine cultural heritage and that through their activities they attracted the commitment of local communities. Museums have become involved in external and international cooperation, as five Baltic Sea Region Cultural Heritage Forums have been organised since 2013. Ms Anita Vaivade, from the Latvian Academy of Culture and expert for UNESCO, introduced participants to the prospects of cooperation in the field of intangible cultural heritage. The speaker mentioned "The Baltic Way", a human chain formed in the Baltic States on 23 August 1989, as an example of intangible cultural heritage in the Baltic Sea Region. In closing, she emphasised that intangible heritage was of greatest importance for the functioning of local communities.

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

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

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

Ms Olaug Bollestad, Chairwoman of the BSPC WG on Innovation in Social and Health Care, presented the Midway Report from the BSPC Working Group on Innovation in Social and Health Care. The speaker mentioned the main healthcare problems that the group had been investigating – the ageing of the population,

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

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

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

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24th BSPC – 2015 Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

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

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

Traditionally, the first session covered the subject matter of *Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region.* Ms Sylvia Bretschneider, Chair of the BSPC, gave examples of visible progress which had been achieved during realisation of the goals of the BSPC mission statement. She mentioned: the contribution of the Standing Committee in keeping health in the Action Plan of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, the intensified cooperation with the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS) and a joint letter to the IMO with the demands concerning protection of the Baltic Sea and modernization of wastewater treatment capacity throughout the Baltic Sea Region. Participation of the BSPC in Pan-European Dialogue in Cruise Tourism in Brussels and in the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum were also reported.

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

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

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

Mr Harry Liiv, Chair of HELCOM, wanted to shed light on the progress of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan and its targets to reduce pollution and underwater noise. In his speech he mentioned eutrophication as one of the largest problems in the Baltic Sea and hence, the focus of a large part of the work done by HELCOM. Other challenges the speaker referred to were marine litter, heavy metals, underwater noise and port reception of sewage. A number of measures, action plans and international laws were introduced to tackle these problems. Mr Liiv underlined that, for this to be successful, it is important to exchange best practices amongst the Baltic Sea countries.

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

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

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

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

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

The representative of the WHO, Ms Nedret Emiroglu outlined the subject of cross-border cooperation in health from the WHO perspective. Particularly important matter that offers itself for cross-border collaboration is health security. The international community has seen many threats recently, such as the Ebola and polio. Ms Emiroglu emphasised that the International Health Regulations are the most important tool with which the international community should respond to all public health threats. She reminded her audience that the framework is a legally binding document that entered into force in 2007 and that there is a full commitment with 55 signatory parties in the European region alone. “Health 2020” is the health policy framework for health and Well-being in Europe, highlighted by the speaker. The Framework, which has been adopted by

all 53 member states in the European Area of the WHO, is a value based, action-oriented framework and aims to improve health and diminish inequalities in health, obtain its goals with a whole-of-society and a whole-of-government approach. Another issue touched upon by Ms Emiroglu was The Post-2015 Development Agenda to be discussed by the United Nations in the autumn 2015. That framework continues the world development agenda beyond the millennium goals. Health is one of them, and it is considered as a foundation for development.

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

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

Dr Horst Klinkmann, President of BioCon Valley and Dr Jaanus Pikani, Vice President of ScanBalt in their speeches provided the

participants with a wide range of good practice examples of cooperation in the health economy area.

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

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

With a keynote speech „Demographic Challenges and Care" Ms Manuela Schwesig, German Federal Minister for Families, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth opened a discussion at the fourth session *Sustainable and Accessible Social- and Healthcare – at the Crossroads of Healthcare Provision, the Demographic Shift and Shrinking Budgets*. The Minister focused on two important issues - demographic change and situation of young families. Closely connected to the first issue, from the minister's viewpoint, is the current refugee crisis. The Minister claimed, that the refugees must not be seen as a burden; they can be a counter-effect to the steady ageing of Germany. With regard to young families, young people need support in taking the step to form a family, especially if they want to have a career and, perhaps, need to take care of sick relatives at the same time, underlined the Minister. Among solutions implemented by the government Ms Schwesig mentioned "family working hours" - paid leave for taking care of sick relatives and reduced working hours for those providing healthcare to their relatives. Concluding, the Minister called for mutual intergenerational cooperation and support.

The final report of the BSPC Working Group on Innovation in Social and Healthcare was presented by Ms Olaug Bollestad, Member of

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

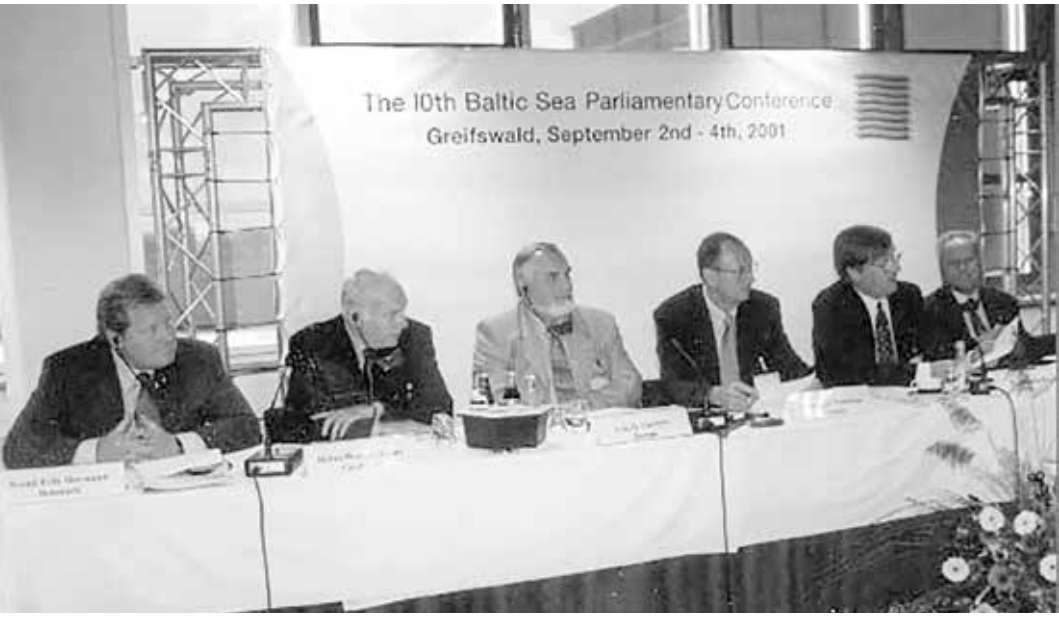
At the 24th BSPC conference, the young generation also had a say on social and health care in the Baltic Sea Region. Representatives of the BSPC Youth Forum Mr Maximilian Priebe and Ms Madara Muižniece presented final key points of the Forum Resolution, among them labelling on food products, a tax reduction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

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

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

IMPRESSIONS FROM SOME CONFERENCES

10th BSPC – 2001 Greifswald, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern



Svend Erik Hovmand, President of the Nordic Council, Heinz-Werner Arens, President of the Schleswig-Holstein Parliament, Valeriy N. Ustyugov, Member of the Council of Federation, Russia, Jürgen Schöning, Director of the Schleswig-Holstein Parliament, Romualds Ražuks, Vice-Speaker of the Latvian Parliament, Hinrich Kuessner, Speaker of the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Parliament.

Lord Russell-Johnston, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Heinz-Werner Arens, President of the Schleswig-Holstein Parliament.

Dr. Henning Klostermann, MP, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Chairman of the first BSPC Working Group Committee on Maritime Safety (COMS)

Trivimi Velliste, Member of Parliament, Estonia, President of the Baltic Assembly.

Plenary Session of the 10th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, Max-Planck-Institute, Greifswald.

Dorothee Stapelfeldt, Speaker of the State Parliament of the City of Hamburg, Franz Thönnes, Member of the Bundestag and Anke Spoorendonk, Member of the Schleswig-Holstein Parliament.

Wolfgang Thierse, Speaker of the German Bundestag

Handover of the Presidency from Hinrich Kuessner to Valerij Ustjugow

13th BSPC – 2004 Bergen, Norway

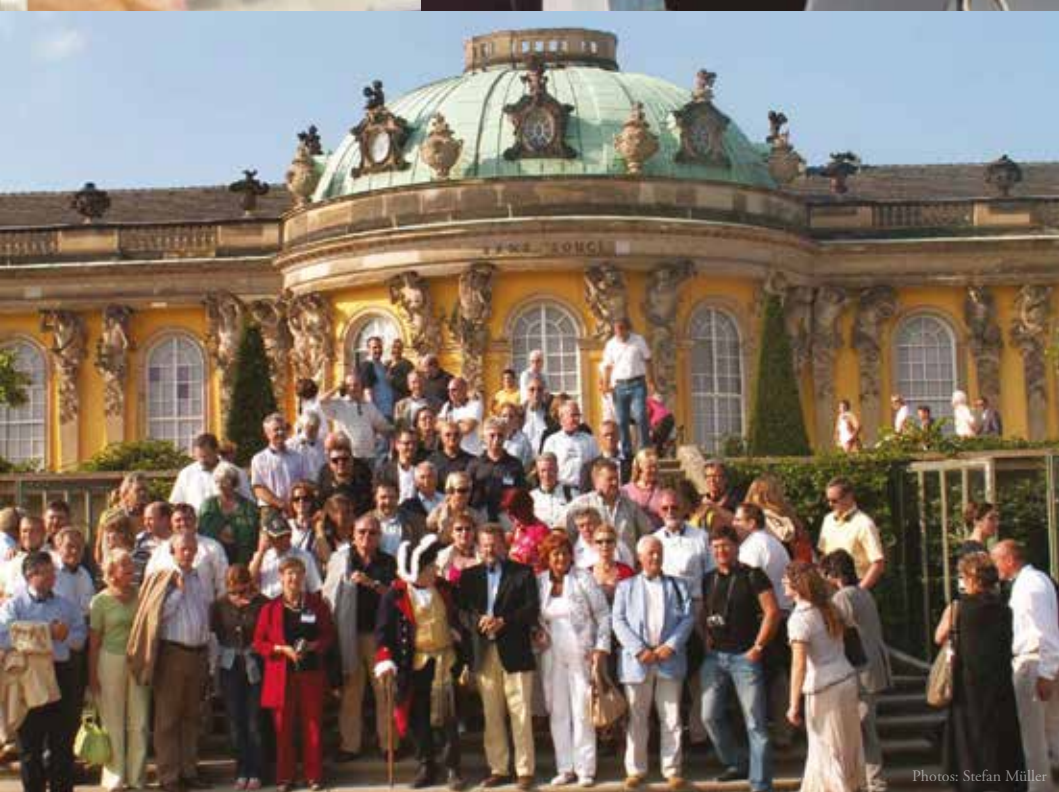
Photos: Bodo Bahr

14th BSPC – 2005 Vilnius, Lithuania

Photos: Bodo Bahr

15th BSPC – 2006 Reykjavik, Iceland

16th BSPC – 2007 Berlin, Germany



Photos: Stefan Müller

17th BSPC – 2008 Visby, Sweden

Photos: Johannes Jansson, NMR

18th BSPC – 2009 Nyborg, Denmark

Photos: Johannes Jansson, NMR, Publication Unit

19th BSPC – 2010 Mariehamn, Åland Islands

Photos: Johannes Jansson, NMR, Publication Unit

20th BSPC – 2011 Helsinki, Finland

Photos: Johannes Jansson, NMR, Publication Unit

21st BSPC – 2012 St. Petersburg, Russia

Photos: Jan Widberg, Bodo Bahr

22nd BSPC – 2013 Pärnu, Estonia

Photos: Olev Mihkelmaa

23rd BSPC – 2014 Olsztyn, Poland

24th BSPC – 2015 Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

Photos: Landtag Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference Secretariat
www.bspc.net

BSPC Secretariat
c/o Lennéstraße 1
19053 Schwerin
Germany
Phone (+49) 385 525 2777