

CLOSING

Priorities of the Next Year's Host Country Sweden



Mr. Pyry Niemi
Incoming President of the BSPC for 2020-2021

Dear President of the BSPC,

Ladies and Gentleman,

Dear friends and colleagues,

First of all, I would like to congratulate our Lithuanian friends for having successfully led the BSPC during the last year, despite the unusual circumstances with the pandemic affecting all of us in our countries and our parliaments.

It has been a very special year, and it is in times like these, when we face common challenges, that we are reminded about the importance of our strong, regional, parliamentary cooperation. I am therefore very happy and proud that we have now had our very first digital Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference.

Dear Valerijus, thank you for your commitment to the BSPC and for the professional way you have led our cooperation. We were all looking forward to visiting you in your beautiful country and to meeting in the Seimas for the conference, and we all very much hope that we will get another chance to attend a Baltic Sea Parliamentary conference in Lithuania in the very near future instead.

I would also like to thank everyone involved in the programme. I believe that I speak for all of us when I say that it has been most interesting and absorbing, and I believe that we have all learnt a lot.

Many thanks to the secretariat; Bodo, Renata and the Lithuanian team, to our technicians and of course to the interpreters - you have done a great job!

Today, Sweden will take over the presidency of the BSPC. It is a great honour and pleasure for me to take over as President and to invite all of you to the 30th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference in Stockholm in August 2021. Hopefully, we can enjoy not only the beautiful views of the water surrounding the Parliament Building – where the Baltic Sea meets the Lake Mälaren – but also the pleasure of seeing each other face to face again.

During our Presidency, we would like to focus on sustainable democracy and how to face common challenges, where COVID-19 is one example. The spread of COVID-19 and the fight against the pandemic is one of many reasons to safeguard the strong cross-border cooperation that constitutes the BSPC as well as the democratic values on which it is based.

Furthermore, COVID-19 constitutes an area where BSPC members can exchange best practices and follow up different strategies that were put to use in order to combat the pandemic, with the aim of learning from each other.

In the light of the Swedish Parliament's commemoration and celebration of 100 years of democracy, the Swedish Presidency of the BSPC would like to highlight the importance of democracy. Democratic institutions, strong cooperation and environmental and social sustainability are cornerstones of the work of the BSPC; preserving these are clear priorities of the Swedish Presidency.

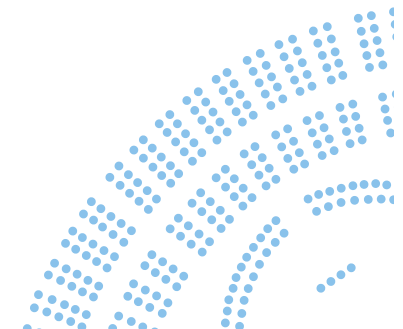
During the upcoming year we would like to focus on four areas related to achieving sustainable democracy:

First of all, we would like to focus our common work on peaceful and reliable neighbourliness and intense cooperation built



Swedish Presidency 2020-2021

Sustainable democracy – how to face a changing world

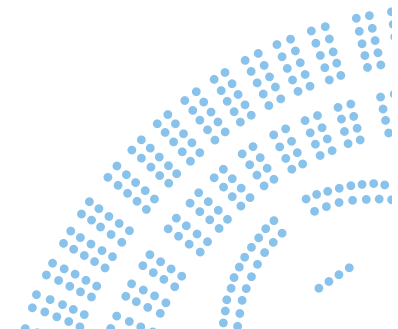


on participation and trust in the democratic system. Around us we see various new forms of political engagement, and we will therefore focus specifically on youth and the role of civil society.

We also believe that it is important to view democracy in a changing media landscape. Digitisation, disinformation and fake news have changed the playing field and it is now more important than ever to protect free media and freedom of speech.



-
- **Peaceful and reliable neighbourliness and intense cooperation built on inclusive participation and trust in the democratic system: new forms of political engagement with a specific focus on youth and the role of civil society**
 - **Democracy in a changing media landscape: digitisation, combating disinformation and fake news as well as protecting free media and freedom of speech**

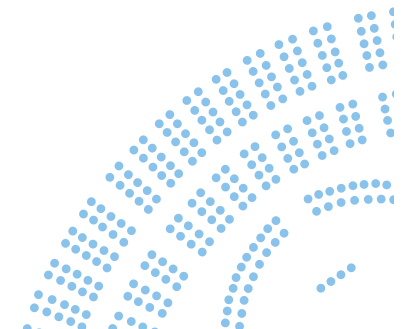


The world is changing and our region is changing. Another area that we would like to discuss is how to best adapt to a new demography in the Baltic Sea region and what challenges this implies for our welfare model. How are urbanisation, an aging population and labour shortages connected to trust in public institutions, social and regional equality and young people's opportunities? How can we, in the Baltic Sea Region, tackle these challenges in a sustainable and democratic way?

Lastly, we would like to focus on an area where the BSPC has a long tradition of commitment and engagement: the environment. This is a subject that has been discussed today during the conference, and I am very glad that we can continue to focus on the environment during the upcoming two years with the new working group on climate change and biodiversity. My colleague, Cecilie Tenfjord Toftby, has agreed to chair the working group and I would like to wish her and the working group the best of luck with their important task.



-
- **Adaptation to a new demography and challenges to the welfare model: urbanisation, an aging population and labour shortages and the connection to trust in public institutions, social and regional equality and young people's opportunities**
 - **Climate change mitigation, adaptation and the preservation of biodiversity: trust in the state as an actor, the role of NGOs and voluntary organisations and the importance of innovation and science**



In 2021, the BSPC will celebrate 30 years of parliamentary cooperation which will be commemorated at the conference in Stockholm. We believe that the BSPC as a forum for political dialogue, for exchange of best practices and ideas and as an actor for strong regional cooperation should be celebrated and we look forward to celebrating it with all of you.

So, let me once again say thank you to Valerijus, his team, as well as to Bodo, for organising this year's conference! I look forward to seeing all of you in Stockholm!



Welcome to Stockholm
29-31 August 2021!

