



30TH BSPC: FOURTH SESSION

Addresses and reports

Speaker: ***Mr Anders Bergström***, Baltic Sea NGO Network

Your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends of the Baltic Sea Region,

Congratulation on the 30th anniversary of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference! This is a truly sustainable cooperation between Parliaments and Parliamentarians. An important foundation for successfully addressing our common societal challenges.

In fact, with today's complex societal challenges, we need each other more than ever before, in Europe and in our Baltic Sea Region.

I'm not just talking about the most obvious challenges, the climate ones but also social challenges related to integration of migrants, trafficking, young people unable to enter the labour market, ageing population - just to give you some examples.

There is also another reason why we need each other. The opportunities are better addressed jointly. Instead of competing internally we can join forces, develop products and services that we can compete with on the global markets.

Our great asset in the Baltic Sea Region is the skills and competences of our citizens. Another asset is the entrepreneurial mindsets and ability to adjust to change. Together we can develop targeted solutions to the challenges. Instead of struggling on our own, in one country, region or city, together we can make better use of our resources.

Now you might say: this sounds good but how do we do it in practice? How do we boost collaboration?

One answer exists already today, the macroregional strategies, with the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. An integrated framework for collaboration and a laboratory where new collaborative approaches are developed and practiced. Where stakeholders are invited to cross-sectorial, transnational, and multilevel formats – to co-create solutions to our challenges and make best use of our opportunities. The strategies involve stakeholders both from the EU members and neighbouring countries.

These Strategies, now four in Europe have proved to work - but more needs to be done to further develop them and to make them sustainable. Collaboration needs to be invested in. Not the least in building institutional capacity for international collaboration. Financial resources are also important. Transnational collaboration doesn't need to be expensive but today far too little of our budgets are used for something so important when addressing our challenges and making best use of our opportunities.

Where are the civil society organisations in this Baltic Sea landscape of transnational collaboration? Some are already part of the collaboration since many years. Some want to take part but can't find the entrance. Most of them lack the needed financial support. Today's funding is mostly tailor-made for the public sector. The Baltic Sea NGO Network has for 20 years offered support to non-governmental organizations, with contacts, with capacity building and as a platform for dialogue between civil society organisations and decision makers.

After 20-years it's high time we reformed the Baltic Sea NGO Network and this reform process is now taking place. Focus is on providing tailor-made support to those civil society organisations that want to be part of co-creating targeted solutions to our

societal challenges. Offering capacity building, guidance when searching for suitable frameworks for them to contribute and jointly to push for more financial support to non-governmental organisations that want to contribute with their competences to societal development. Widened participation in transnational cooperation is important and the Baltic Sea NGO Network is here to help. We aim at presenting the reformed Baltic Sea NGO Network towards the end of the year.

Finally, what can you as Parliamentarians do more to support transnational collaboration and civil society involvement? The political support is needed on all levels, national, regional, and locally. To push for more of transnational collaboration, helping to change mindsets increasing the awareness of that we need each other's across borders and that we today have excellent possibilities for collaboration with our neighbours. What we need is to make better use of the opportunities including investing in Baltic Sea Region collaboration. To make transnational collaboration an integrated part of strategic development, in cities, in regions and in countries. Including valuable contributions from civil society organisations.

The Baltic Sea NGO Network with its members are looking forward to continuing working with you in the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today.