



## **30<sup>TH</sup> BSPC: GENERAL DEBATE**

Re-starting after the COVID-19 pandemic

Speaker: *Mr Arnoldas Pranckevičius*, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania

Mr. Chairman, Members of Parliaments,

It is my pleasure to address you today on behalf of the former Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States.

During its year in this position, Lithuania was actively seeking ways of turning challenges that this difficult time brought upon all of us into future opportunities.

The CBSS is an important player in the region, so it was our task to ensure that the organization had an opportunity to shape a united response and strategy in the current demanding situation. It was our task to direct it toward concrete actions in the areas where the CBSS was uniquely suited to add value.

The Lithuanian Presidency continued to support the CBSS expert groups in their traditional activities as well as in those fields that Lithuania had chosen as its priorities, such as

- promoting green and maritime tourism aimed at reviving regional economy, increasing region's visibility, providing employment opportunities to young people,
- boosting civil protection in the region and strengthening its resilience against major emergencies and disasters,
- finding ways to protect those most vulnerable in our societies, such as those at risk of human trafficking for labour exploitation and children at risk of violence.

The Presidency has also been putting special attention to the involvement of the young people in building up the future of the Baltic Sea Region.

Still, the main goal of the Presidency has been to propose to the Member States to model jointly a common vision of the future of the Baltic Sea Region. After a careful elaboration the concluding document of the Lithuanian Presidency Vilnius II Declaration „A Vision for the Baltic Sea Region by 2030“ was adopted by consensus at the meeting of foreign ministers and high-level representatives of the Baltic Sea Region on June 1, 2021.

This document is a certain continuation of the Vilnius Declaration „A Vision for the Baltic Sea Region by 2020“ adopted by Heads of Government under the previous Lithuanian Presidency in 2010. During this latest Presidency Lithuania followed up the previous declaration by initiating a reflection paper, prepared by regional experts, which assessed the achievements, remaining challenges, and ways forward in the region, and evaluated the CBSS' role in fulfilling the Declaration's goals.

In Vilnius II Declaration, the countries of the Region agreed to maintain the overall objective of the Baltic Sea Region to become one of the most sustainable, prosperous,

innovative and competitive regions in the world using the strengths of the Council of the Baltic Sea States and other Baltic Sea regional cooperation frameworks. The ministers agreed to provide further political guidance for the coordinated development of the Region, and made a political commitment to realize this Vision. The Declaration affirmed the continuous commitment of the CBSS member states to political dialogue that would enable building up regional cooperation, fostering mutual understanding, building trust, ensuring stability and promoting people-to-people contacts.

The Declaration includes multiple aspects, such as achieving

- a strong and well-functioning multi-level governance structure,
- youth engagement,
- restoration of the ecological health of the Baltic Sea,
- green and blue economy based on innovations,
- renewable energy and green transition,
- fighting new forms of cross-border organized crime,
- strong resilience across all parts of society,
- regional cooperation in civil protection,
- cooperation in education, science, research and innovation, culture and tourism,
- building regional identity based on the basic shared values of the states of the region.

But most importantly, the states vowed to “uphold the rule of law, democracy, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”.

From the Lithuanian point of view, upholding these principles means many actions that should not take place in the Baltic cooperation.

First, hybrid attacks using ignorant migrants as an attempt to introduce destruction to the neighbouring states (this also should concern CBSS observer states) have to stop immediately. Cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns, spreading fake news and deep fakes produced by abusing the newest information technologies have to stop, as well as history falsification campaigns. Branding undesirable organisations as foreign agents, that undermines freedom of expression and people-to-people contacts have to stop. In economy, the abuse of economic interdependence, in particular the energy area, in order to interfere into internal and external policies of other participating states has to stop. This is only the beginning of the long list of abuses that should not be tolerated in our region.

In this respect, the Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs quoted in his remarks at the high-level meeting the wise words of Nobel Peace Prize winner Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov, who said: „Peace, progress, human rights – these three goals are insolubly

linked to one another: it is impossible to achieve one of these goals if the other two are ignored.“ This insight of seems to sum up some of the main of challenges we have to respond to today when working on building up our regional identity.

Mr. Chairman, Members of Parliaments,

Let me assure you that we are highly encouraged by your interest in the Vilnius II Declaration „A Vision for the Baltic Sea Region by 2030“ and have high expectations that this document will receive your serious consideration now that regional cooperation becomes more and more prominent in our national and foreign policy agendas. We strongly believe in the possibility of constructive political dialogue and rewarding practical cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region despite current global and regional challenges. We believe that in 2030, when we shall look back and evaluate the progress achieved during the past decade, we shall be satisfied with what we have accomplished following our commitments made in Vilnius II Declaration.

Thank you for your attention.