

The BSSSC Annual Conference 2020 online - September 30th - October 1st, 2020

Welcome speech - Mieczysław Struk - Pomorskie Marshal, BSSSC Chairman

Session: September 30th 10:00 - 11:45

Mr Minister, President, Directors representing the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, Council of the Baltic Sea States, European Commission and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, dear partners from the Baltic Sea Region, dear youth, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are meeting at the 28th Annual Conference of the Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation. When planning it, we were happy to be invited to Kaliningrad. Unfortunately, COVID -19 has forced us to redefine our plans. We had a choice to skip this year's conference or move online. We have decided that it is necessary to maintain effective collaboration and for that, continuous contact, even in the online version, is necessary. As the title says - "Strong and Inclusive Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region - Now More than Ever."

Thank you for being with us.

We are at a kind of a border line: with the still new European Commission and many new key European policies, new policies, and plans for the Baltic Sea Region, more demanding social, political, and economic challenges. And on top of that - pandemic.

And as Ursula von der Layen stated in her State of the Union 2020 report "it is the moment for Europe to lead the way from this fragility towards a new vitality". We believe the same for the Baltic Sea Region. Therefore, we follow with great interest the new policies and plans which will be shaping Europe and this region for several years to come. And we are doing our best to be involved in the governance as much as possible and in implementation.

We think that it is important now to look at the Baltic Sea Region from the European perspective, and discuss against this background the strategic plans in the key Baltic documents, namely the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and its revised Action Plan as well as a comparable Russian document for the North West regions, as well as the Territorial Agenda, being a strategic policy document for Europe. And on top of that,

we believe it would be important to look at the highlights of the Interreg programs and projects and on basis of the experience till now, discuss the ideas and plans for future cooperation.

When looking at the EU policies we welcome the updated green targets and the path towards a digital decade of Europe and in this connection appreciate the European Digital Strategy hoping it will support innovative solutions, smart development, and job creation.

European Green Deal is a very ambitious package indeed. But, we do need it to save the Planet Earth for generations to come. And it is promising to see the results of the Eurobarometer Survey of March of this year.

94% surveyed citizens in all the EU Member States say protecting the environment is important to them;

91% of citizens state that climate change is a serious problem in the EU;

78% of respondents believe that environment has a direct influence on their daily life and health.

The survey also examined attitudes to the clothing industry and found high levels of concern on how we produce, transport, and use.

This gives us the right, as I see it, to go the ambitious path. But, at the same time, we have to improve education, information, and promotion of our goals and reasons for them. We definitely have to strengthen trust in scientific research and improve critical thinking.

The quoted results also prove that our choice of parallel sessions on circular economy with the stress put on the fashion sector and on plastics polluting the sea has been the right one. We hope to learn more about the New Circular Economy Action Plan, too.

As the Cohesion Policy is at the centre of the green and digital recovery, no wonder it is so important also to us - the regional level. We welcome the reinforcement of the Cohesion Policy and will appreciate a more decentralised approach. We have received with appreciation the REACT - EU initiative of 55 billion euro. I am proud to say that at the October

session of the Committee of the Regions I am presenting our opinion on the REACT - EU package.

Talking about cohesion we are looking forward to the new Territorial Agenda 2030 with its two objectives of Just and Green Europe about which we will hear more tomorrow and which hopefully will help us achieve a more inclusive and sustainable future. We are looking forward to the strong role of regional and local actors in it.

Territorial cohesion and development require adequate transportation solutions and in this respect, we welcome the new Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy. Again we will hear more during one of the parallel sessions still today.

Just after the introductory part, we will hear about the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and its revised Action Plan and hopefully also some comments on how this document relates to the strategic plans of the Russian Federation - an important neighbour within our common Baltic. Again, we strive for as strong a role of regional authorities in both implementation and governance as possible. I will not go farther on this issue now - we have a better speaker on that in the second part today. I will only mention that we are looking forward to the Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region in October. We find very promising the idea of having the multidisciplinary workshops and teams around them. We are looking forward to the results and are pleased that the BSSSC is a part of the discussion.

At this point, I definitely need to mention the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference - we cherish to be your partner organisations. I only wish we could really meet face to face to discuss common plans and ideas. Online mode is appreciated and helpful but definitely cannot replace real-life contact.

We appreciate the CBSS reform process and are looking forward to the Vilnius Declaration to be due this December.

We, the BSSSC, are thrilled to be a part of the Baltic Sea Youth Platform - initiative born during the BSSSC Youth Camp and implemented under the leadership of CBSS in cooperation with other Baltic Sea Region organisations. Our BSSSC network and the youth have done our best to contribute to the joint programme which is to be a part of the Youth Event just within the

Baltic Strategy Forum. The BSSSC Autumn Youth Event of last week was a three-day discussion marathon in preparation to tackle today's conference and the Forum topics.

When talking about the youth - they are with us to share their opinions during the sessions. We are doing our best to empower them and hope they will use the possibility to the full.

Looking for the best possible solutions when it comes to the youth involvement we are also looking forward to the "Manifesto for Young People by Young People to Shape the European Territorial Cooperation" to be presented to the European Commission on October 15-16 during the Interreg Annual Event. We hope our youth will take the opportunity and be a part of the initiative and the implementation process.

And last but not least, I would like to draw our attention to culture - we have a session on this area of our life, too, and cooperate in this respect with the CBSS. The Baltic Culture Cities Initiative looks very promising. It is promising to notice that one of the workshops in preparations for the EUSBSR is devoted to culture and its influence on health. But still, I think we should put more attention to culture both within the EU and Baltic Sea Region. Culture is about humanity and values. It makes us human beings, teaches empathy and tenderness, builds our imagination. And we need all that in the world where human and democratic values, rule of law which is to serve us all and protect minorities, are questioned and where we tend to forget what such an important word as solidarity means.

Let us discuss that during those two days.

Thank you.