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Speech by Mr Bodo Bahr

**Secretary General of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary
Conference (BSPC)**

Baltic Sea Tourism Forum

Brussels,

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Thank you, Anastasia,

Dear Mr Volkmar, Dear Mr Cramer,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The venue and the date for this 12th Baltic Sea Tourism Forum are ideally chosen as we can not only look at the current situation of tourism in the Baltic Sea region and beyond, at our visions and future development, but we can also remember the basic conditions and foundations that have made today's development possible.

More than 30 years ago, no one could have imagined that tourism experts from all over the Baltic Sea region would meet here in Brussels today to discuss the development of tourism in the Baltic Sea region as a whole. No one could have predicted the high level of development of tourism in our region which we have today.

A few days ago, in Germany, on 9 November, we celebrated the fall of the Berlin Wall and the opening of the border between the two Germanies. At the end of August, the Baltic Way was commemorated in Riga, in which two million people over a distance of more than 600 km had held hands in all the Baltic countries and, with this human chain, had laid the foundations for the Baltic countries to achieve their independence very quickly.

We also remember what happened in Poland and other countries at that time.

It was before this background that the BSPC had been formed 18 years ago. 27 parliaments and parliamentary organisations around the Baltic Sea region joined forces to overcome the division of the Baltic Sea caused by the Iron Curtain.

And that is still fundamentally our goal today. We want to ensure that this region remains a region of peace and peaceful cooperation, that this region is a best practice example worldwide for successful cooperation at the highest level, for prosperity and growth while at the same time protecting our ecological foundations under the aspect of sustainability in peaceful coexistence.

That is all the more important during a time of growing tension.

It was only 30 years ago that the European Union of today was able to develop and put together the European Parliament in its present form. We should always remember that. We must always bear that in mind when we work on individual policy areas, particularly tourism.

We can extend the principle of this year's report of our BSPC rapporteurs for sustainable tourism and say:

The Iron Curtain separated us. Tourism unites us.

And tourism is a fundamental and very important policy area, if you look at the figures for global development, but also in the Baltic Sea region. It is not only an important player in the economies of the Baltic Sea States – growing larger each year.

It also connects us to an ever greater extent. Only if more and more people around the Baltic Sea come into cross-border contact with each other, spend time in the neighbouring countries, get to know the people there, then growing together is promoted, and tensions at the highest political level can be reduced from the bottom. That is the only way to break down prejudices, to achieve and stabilise a common peaceful development for all. And that is the only way to ensure that we can come up with common measures of a high standard in environmental policy and to protect our environment and our

livelihoods for the future. Everyone is aware of the problems we are all facing but not enough how urgent they are, and these problems do not stop at borders.

That is why it is incredibly important that we have also succeeded in creating a common platform in the tourism sector with the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum.

Its creation had been, by the way, triggered by a call for action of the parliamentarians in the southern Baltic Sea region.

That is why we have furthermore established a common institution working on precisely these objectives in this policy field and in the Baltic Sea region: establishing and improving cross-border tourism communication and cooperation, associating key tourism stakeholders and promoting sustainable and international tourism in the Baltic Sea Region and beyond, influencing the overall development in this area in such a way that it is sustainable and everyone benefits from it.

According to the 25th and 26th BSPPC resolutions, the promotion and support for further development of the Baltic Sea Tourism Center (BSTC) is a central demand of the parliamentarians around the Baltic Sea, which also include the European Parliament as a member of the BSPPC.

We appreciate that the focus of the Center was put on three main emphases: partnerships, insights, and skills, which were developed in an intensive process together with stakeholders. It was aimed at establishing four working groups in correlation with the three core competences on Sustainable Tourism (Skills), Training & Capacity Building (Skills), Market Research (Insights), and Politics & Lobbying (Partnerships).

It's also important that you elaborate an overview of international projects, initiatives and cooperation to also enable politicians to build synergies between already running and planned projects, to avoid parallel activities, promote joint projects and provide transparency about international initiatives.

And it is additionally important that such an institution is included in the discussion of the further development of the European Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

More details about the current work of the Center can be found in the report of our rapporteurs on sustainable tourism for our annual conference this year in Oslo:

<https://www.bspc.net/report-2018-2019-by-the-rapporteurs-on-sustainable-tourism-published/>

How important tourism is for all of us, was and is very clear to the parliamentarians around the Baltic Sea

– and this does not only include the European Union, because Russia, Norway, and Iceland are also members of the BSPC.

That is why we set up a working group on sustainable tourism a few years ago, by the way, also in Rostock.

That is why we have adopted far-reaching demands and calls for action to the governments in this policy area.

That is why we have appointed rapporteurs to report regularly on further developments in this policy field at our annual conferences.

After the tragic loss of Sylvia Bretschneider, the former President of the State Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, our long-time rapporteur, former President and chairwoman in this field, who had been highly committed to tourism for many years, the Standing Committee of the BSPC decided two days ago in Berlin to continue the mandate for this reporting and appointed the new President of the State Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Ms Birgit Hesse, who is also chairwoman of the Tourism Association in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern as Rapporteur on Sustainable Tourism.

We are doing exactly what you are doing here today to support each other in this field of work. We also look beyond the borders of our region and seek cooperation with other regions, for

example with parliamentarians from the Black Sea and Mediterranean regions. And it was precisely with the parliamentarians from the countries bordering the Black Sea in Istanbul in April of this year, that we intensively discussed the issue of keeping the seas clean, reducing plastic waste, and also the area of sustainable tourism. All of us will only benefit from this for the long term if the ecological foundations of our seas are maintained at a high level.

That is why, a few years ago, we here in Brussels made sure that tourism remained a policy area of the Baltic Sea Strategy, not only through us, but also with us.

I am very curious about the later intervention on the future of the Policy Area Tourism in the Strategy.

We strengthen our connection to Brussels by having a Standing Committee meeting once a year in the European Parliament to include the European perspective, the local experts, the Members of the European Parliament and the Commission.

That is why I will return to the starting point of my remarks. It is important to be present around the Baltic Sea, but it is also important to come here and seek direct dialogue at a broader level.

Tourism worldwide, but also tourism in the Baltic Sea region, is an incredible success story. Everyone here in the region is very aware of that. To ensure that this remains the case, however, care must also be taken at an early stage to ensure that the framework conditions on which tourism is based are maintained and preserved. The development is often so rapid that we are not aware enough of the need for precaution, and so we are then suddenly exposed to radical demands to do justice to what we are facing.

A broad majority will frequently find it difficult to communicate the full extent of prevention policy and far-reaching budgetary expenditure for negative developments. That is because these

negative outcomes can only be recorded in full in the future, and all too often, the negative effects of a development are not at all or not clearly enough visible and perceptible when prevention has to be implemented.

We are currently witnessing this in the climate debate.

At first, I wanted to go into this issue in more detail. But I think that is a subject that is worth discussing in-depth. More than 30 years ago I had already managed a Commission of the German Bundestag which dealt comprehensively with this subject.

Two days ago, the Standing Committee of the BSPPC decided to set up a working group on this issue which – for sure – will also deal with the impact of increasing travel intensities.

The day before yesterday, the BSPPC Standing Committee, with experts, dealt in depth with a subject that we all know for a long time, the problem of munitions dumps in the Baltic Sea.

And since then we have all been concerned in a much more intensive dimension than before.

We have been discussing this issue in HELCOM for more than 20 years.

The BSPPC discussed the topic our annual conference in Oslo.

We have now also appointed a rapporteur for this problem.

Some figures, only to make the dimension a bit more visible:

- After World War II, the Baltic Sea began to be used as a dumpsite for at least 40 000 tons of chemical warfare agents (CWA).
- Little Belt, Bornholm and Gotland Deeps, as well as Gdansk Deep are recognized to be the most important areas.
- An estimated amount of 300.000 tons of dumped explosive ordnance in the German EEZ alone

- Nearly 100.000 mines were laid in WWI and WWII in the Baltic Sea.
- We are now starting to understand the threat of ammunition in the sea.
- We need responsible entities in our governments and intensive national and international collaboration.
- Our window of opportunity to change things is closing.

It is not a question of a disaster happening tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, even if corrosion is an issue and first effects on living beings are proven.

The point is that we must start to act decisively today to prevent a disaster in 20-30 years' time. What has to be done cannot be done in a few days, weeks or months. The cost dimensions cannot yet be estimated at all. However, in limited regional areas alone, disposal costs of several hundred million euros are assumed.

And the point is that, if a disaster occurs because action has not been taken in time, everything that has been done and achieved above the water to make tourism more attractive will be destroyed by the underwater disaster.

The BSPC will continue to address this issue very intensively.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me come back to the issue of tourism in general:

We must ensure that development - particularly in the tourism sector - is and remains sustainable and takes proper account of ecological aspects so that we won't have to take radical measures at some point in the future.

And that is precisely why we need every single one of your projects,

why we need your commitment and cooperation,

why we need an institution such as the Tourism Forum and the Baltic Sea Tourism Centre for our region, and why - even if this is a booming economic sector and,

why we need further funding from Brussels and the preservation of tourism as a policy area within the framework of European macro-strategies.

But we also need a joint programme based on a strategy within the framework of the Council of the Baltic Sea States to develop sustainable tourism throughout the Baltic Sea region, and that also includes Russia.

Allow me to take a look beyond this forum into next year: by chance, three fortunate circumstances come together here which can also lead to synergy effects in the field of tourism:

The current President of the BSPC, Valerijus Simulik, whose warm greetings I convey, comes from Lithuania.

The next annual conference of the BSPC will take place in Vilnius at the end of August next year.

From June 2020, the chairmanship of the Council of the Baltic Sea States will be transferred to Lithuania.

And the next Baltic Sea Tourism Forum will also take place in Lithuania.

With so much concentration on the parliamentary, executive and tourist levels in one country, it should be possible to create synergy effects in this area and achieve something special.

Let us all work together on that.

And let us continue to work together to be a role model for sustainable tourism.

Thank you very much for your attention.

