**BSSSC AC Gdańsk, September 11th, 2018, Philharmonic House, 9:30**

**Welcome Speech, session 1; Wieslaw Byczkowski – Deputy Marshal of Pomorskie Voivodeship**

Dear Chairman, Mister Ambassador, Dear Former BSSSC Chairmen and Friends of old times, colleagues – selfgovernmental politicians, representatives of all levels of Baltic Sea Region cooperation, Madam Moderator, dear friends,

It is a pleasure and honour to welcome you, and the 26th BSSSC Annual Conference to Gdańsk. We are hosting you again, after 21 years. Some of you may still have some memories of the first Gdańsk Annual Conference in 1997.

This time, looking at today’s world and thinking about the future, we have decided to choose “Solidarity, participation and smart actions for a better future” as the main topic of our gathering.

Solidarity – not only because Gdańsk is the birthplace of the historical social movement Solidarity, which moved the first brick in the Europe’s east-west dividing wall. But mainly because of the situation in the world, today. In this context, I will take the liberty to quote Mr Brzezinski - an influential political adviser. He said:

“Why did Solidarity win? Because it was something so much broader than a political movement, than a trade union, and than a wish to regain sovereignty. It was not just a movement, it was Spirit – a powerful moral force, based on humanistic, religious and democratic values. It was a coalition without class or national hatred, a coalition whose goal was not to look back into history but to build a better future, based on social reconciliation and on reconciliation with the neighbours. This Spirit was the main source of Solidarity Movement victory - probably the most important peaceful revolution in history”.

Looking around at the developments in Europe and the world, it seems we have to bring back this uniting Spirit, and remind ourselves, that solidarity is an essential positive value in human relations, within the EU and between the various nations. Or it should be. I hope the debate ahead of us will make us think how, in today's world, we should understand solidarity, how to address it in our daily lives, taking political decisions or building the world order. How to remind societies that being solidary and working together is so much more positive, however demanding, than living in egoistic, fragmented cells - on individual or national level.

Then we have participation – or I would say – participatory democracy. We have to jointly find a way to make as many people as possible, especially young people, leave their IT equipment and comfortable social bubbles and act together in real life, complying with democratic rules, to make our small homelands and the whole globalised world better.

A necessary condition for that, is to be open to get to know "the other" and cooperate – as we do within the Baltic Sea Region, but better still. And probably we have to revise our thinking about the form of this cooperation again. We have moved from experience sharing, from joint discussions on what democracy means and, what are its basics, to very practical projects, solving tangible issues. Well, it seems we have either done it too early or, I would risk saying, we have not realised that the discussion and joint, everyday care for democracy should be a continuous, never-ending process.

The third key word is smart, as we have to be smart and use smart innovative solutions to build a better, cleaner and healthier world around. And we have to be smart to realise that introducing environmentally healthy solutions is not a burden but an opportunity, also in economic terms.

Ladies and gentlemen, we started this conference with a youth project, bringing together - as we call them - Pomorskie and Baltic youth – about 50 young people altogether. They have visited European Solidarity Centre and participated in “The world we share" project, originated in the secondary school number 2 in Gdańsk. We will hear more of it, I guess. But already now I would like to thank the people involved. In the ReGeneration 2030 movement document adopted during the summit in August this year, the young participants said they want to have “opportunities for youth to impact today’s and tomorrow’s decision making”. We have done our best, while planning this year’s conference programme, for the youth to be involved and discuss with all of us how to work for this better future we want.

Solidarity, participation, smart and youth – key words, many issues which we will address during those two days, having in mind the Baltic Sea perspective. We believe that we are a pilot region in many things, and top of Europe in some things. We definitely have a good tradition of cooperation and solving problems together. This is a good starting point for our further work. I am looking forward to this intensified, well-thought cooperation, but first to all the meetings and debates that are to follow today and tomorrow.

Thank you