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Speech by Sylvia Bretschneider, President of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, President of the Landtag Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, at the ECPP in Oslo 11-12 September 2014

Honorable Presidents and Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

As the current President of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, BSPC, I want to stress the vital importance of international parliamentary cooperation – especially in times of crisis.

Therefore I want to thank our host, the President of the Storting, Olemic Thommessen, for inviting us to this highly topical parliamentary conference here in Oslo. It is an important forum for dialogue and exchange between parliamentarians from the member states and partner states of the Council of Europe.

The BSPC was established in 1991 as a forum for political dialogue between parliamentarians from national parliaments, from regional parliaments and from parliamentary organizations of the entire Baltic Sea Region.

This was a period of profound political change. The primary goal of the BSPC was to create a platform for open-ended parliamentary dialogue to overcome the Cold War and to establish the Baltic Sea as a sea of freedom and cooperation.

BSPC thus emerged against a background of dramatic events and in a conviction that cooperation and dialogue are central means to prevent conflict and promote joint progress.

I think this is worth keeping in mind now that we see the eastern neighborhood of the Baltic Sea Region being ravaged by dramatic and violent events. The crisis in Ukraine is in a dramatic stage. The number of casualties is rising. Unrest brings social and economic misery, and hampers much-needed reforms and reconstruction.

This vicious circle must be broken by honest initiatives to reach a durable resolution of the crisis. It is important to condemn violence and violations of international law and human rights. Existing mechanisms, networks and institutions should be fully employed to pursue political dialogue and trust-building communication in order to find ways and means to defuse the crisis.

We should not take for granted that we parliamentarians can always find satisfactory solutions to various issues. But as representatives of our citizens we have an obligation to our citizens to try and to contribute to the resolution of

conflicts.

Perhaps we might not be able to fully reconcile conflicting positions, but we can at least provide a forum where those differences can be openly ventilated and where we can have a candid political debate about them - and that, in my opinion, is a necessary prerequisite for the pursuit of pragmatic approaches and compromises to difficult issues. This is, by the way, exactly the way we worked at our 23rd Conference in Poland two weeks ago.

Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We must make all efforts to solve conflicts by political dialogue and not by armed forces.

Parliamentary cooperation is in this respect a powerful lever for transparent, democratic and fruitful political processes to handle contentious issues