

WELCOMING WORDS

*Prime Ministers, Dear Commissioner,
Representatives of the diplomatic circles, academia, business, local and regional governments, NGOs,
European and Baltic Sea institutions and organisations and especially President Roger Ryberg,
Dear Youth, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends!*

I am honoured and pleased to host the tenth jubilee Annual Forum of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. It is also my pleasure to stress that Pomorskie Region has already co-organised the 2nd Annual Forum in 2011 as well as a round table on environment prior to establishment of the Baltic Sea Strategy. I believe it is a proof of our strong involvement in the Baltic Sea affairs.

This time we have taken this responsible task together with *Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation* Norwegian Presidency, European Commission and Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It has been a great job together!

The 21st century has brought many challenges, including rapid changes in technology, crises of capitalism, growing egoisms and populisms, loss of trust in democratic institutions, migrations, ageing of population, generation divides and climate crisis, looming shortages of natural resources. This is quite a gloomy picture. We believe that actions are needed and really quickly to make the best use of the still existing positive potential. To prepare well for those actions we have decided to concentrate during those two-day debates on circular and sharing economy.

I must say this concept is nothing new. It was coined a long time ago and many visionaries and experts have been working on putting it into practice. However, we have not treated the issue seriously enough. Policies have been defined, initiatives launched but consumerism and devastating approach to natural resources proved to be permanent. It is just recently that the world have noticed we have to change and do it fast. And thus we see reports and initiatives driven by United Nations, The World Economic Forum, the European Commission or CBSS, which all deal with the circular and sharing economy concept.

Regions, cities and civil society are also active in this respect. Let me mention here some examples of circular economy in our region, such as: Pomorskie participating in the Polish Circular Hotspot initiative. Or establishment of EKOAGORA Pomorskie Social Communication Platform providing information and promoting educative actions. Or initiatives such as Plastic Free Gdańsk.

Ladies and Gentleman,

We have a good starting point. What we need now is a more coordinated action with policy-makers, business, academia and civil society. We need political leadership, common vision, closer collaboration and structural social changes on all levels. We need to prepare an offer which would be attractive enough to get citizens on board.

That is why we have gathered at this Forum: to see where we are, to learn from the more advanced, to decide on joint actions and look bravely into the future. To do this we have prepared three reports: *Better Together* – on the ten years of European Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, *No time to waste. Unlocking the circular potential of the Baltic Sea Region* and *Circular Baltic 2030* with best practices from our area and beyond. Just prior to the Forum there was a *Participation Day* for those who want to join the process. We will be also provided with the message from a three day *Baltic Youth Camp* for over 100 young people discussing circular economy needs among others.

Some experts say it is already too late to stop the changes. Other say we still can make a difference. I belong to the second group. We are just in the process of revising the *European Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region* – it should concentrate more on Sustainable Development Goals, including circular and sharing economy, so that Baltic Sea Region could maintain its position as a forerunner in the field.

We have just elected a new European Parliament which is greener than before. Let's hope its political decisions will be greener, too. And we strongly advocate the decisions on the EU budget to be more green and circular. There is no time to waste, also for the Member States!

Thanking all of you, our experts, speakers and all participants for coming to Gdańsk I wish you a great debate! Thank you.