*Dr Magda Leszczyna-Rzucidło*

*14th BS NGO Forum Coordinator*

*BYSED Project Coordinator*

Dear Mr Chairman, Distinguished Guests,

The 14th Baltic Sea NGO Forum took place from 10-11/06/2016 in Gdansk at the European Solidarity Centre. This was the 2nd time the Forum was organised in Poland. The Gdansk Forum brought together over 150 representatives of civil society organisations, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, Union of the Baltic Cities and other public authorities and officials from all eleven Baltic Sea countries. The Forum offered a unique opportunity for a wider cross-sector and cross-border dialogue.

The general theme of the 14th Baltic Sea NGO Forum was “Solidarity as a new dimension in the Baltic Sea regional cooperation”. Forum participants discussed the importance of wider and deeper inclusion to ensure possibilities for CSOs to influence and engage in decision-making processes in all countries around the Baltic Sea. Its aim was to strengthen the democratic processes in the BSR.

Participants of the 14th Baltic Sea Forum worked in different forms: plenary sessions, panel discussions and workshops regarding the following thematic sessions:

1. Culture and social innovation
2. Civic sector and social problems – self-independent youth
3. Migration processes in Europe

All these topics were discussed in the light of social economy, as we believe this is the key issue for the Baltic Sea Region and whole Europe now. Thus we also had an additional workshop on youth social entrepreneurship development, which gathered great NGO audience, many young NGO representatives among them.

NGO partners from our Network from Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Denmark for partnership in the Interreg Seed Money Facility project called “BSR youth social entrepreneurship development”, BYSED in short. The project received support from the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region Priority Area Education Coordinator. This is why during the Forum we discussed the possibilities to foster the entrepreneurial mindset of youth, as one of the answers to the youth unemployment, which is a common problem in our region. This was also underlined by the BSPC Standing Committee as we heard in Mr Vucan’s speech.

This is all connected to the future activities of the BS NGO Network – among them the seminar we will organize during the 7th EUSBSR Forum in Stockholm in November. Together with the Seed Money Facility BYSED project we invite all the stakeholders interested in youth policy, social economy and social entrepreneurship development to discuss further these issues during the Strategy Forum and thus underline their importance.

It is crucial for the Baltic NGOs to cooperate on regional level, but also to address regional stakeholders and policy makers, hence the joint seminar we organize at the most important Baltic Sea regional meeting. We hope that the voice of the NGOs will be heard and our activities will become more visible too.

Finally, I wish to express our deepest gratitude for the ongoing cooperation between the BSPC and BS NGO Network. I am honored to participate in this conference and the BSPC Jubilee and I wish the BSPC many years of successful work.

Thank you.