**Ulkoministeri Valtosen videotervehdys 28.8.2023,**

**32nd Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC)**

Esteemed parliamentarians,

Thank you for this opportunity to greet you during the 32nd Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference.

The security situation in Europe started to deteriorate drastically last year in February due to Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine. Beside all the horrific consequences for Ukraine, this unjustified attack has also had an impact on the security situation and cooperation in the Baltic Sea region. Russia’s illegal invasion also led to Finland seeking NATO membership and wanting to contribute more to regional security. We became the 31st member of the Alliance only a few months ago and we are looking forward to welcoming Sweden soon.

Besides NATO, it is ever more important for us – the Baltic Sea countries – to collaborate even more than what we already have. Luckily, there are forums and organisations where we can engage constructively such as the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference.

Dear members of parliaments,

Finland has the honour to hold the presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States until the end of June next year. We take over from Germany and we are glad to continue the good work they begun.

The cross-cutting themes of our presidency will be comprehensive security, crisis preparedness and resilience. For decades, Finland has emphasized a comprehensive security concept which strengthens the links between the authorities, the business community, organisations and citizens to safeguard society’s vital functions. Security challenges are – unfortunately – only growing and therefore these themes will be also highlighted in our CBSS presidency.

We will be active with civil protection issues such as planning and preparing for civil defense and interfacing the roles of various actors. Finland will emphasize the work against human trafficking and also continue the work to seek solutions for the risks posed by underwater munitions in the Baltic Sea.

Also, youth will remain as a visible theme during our presidency. We think that youth participation is important and we need to hear their voice more for example via the European Parliamentary elections next year.

Dear parliamentary colleagues,

CBSS is a useful political forum for like-minded countries and we are happy to continue developing it further. We look forward to continuing constructive cooperation also with different actors in the region, including the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference.

Thank you and I wish you a successful conference.