

**GRASS 2018** in Minsk 13th-14th April 2018

Venue: IBB Johannes Rau Center (Prospekt Gasyty Prawda 11, Minsk, Belarus)

Dear Ministers,  
Your Excellences' Ambassadors,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), I am honored to address such distinguished audience and welcome you all to the “Greener Agriculture for a Sustainable Sea – GRASS 2018” here in Minsk. What an excellent occasion for this conference to bring together representatives of academia, governments, and practitioners from the all shores of the Baltic Sea and beyond to discuss about this very crucial issue. Belarus is one of the Observer States of the CBSS, and we very much welcome increased cooperation on topics of common interest at the benefit of our Baltic Sea Region, as is sustainable agriculture. Occasions such as this conference help to strengthen collaboration between experts and between countries and thus help to strengthen our common identity, which is one of the key long term priorities of the Council.

However, the issues that will be addressed today and tomorrow in the GRASS conference are of crucial relevance also to the other priority goals of the CBSS: make the Baltic Sea Region a Sustainable and Prosperous, as well as Safe and Secure region. In particular, climate change and its impact to agriculture and food systems are core problems for the future of our region and, as coordinator of the Horizontal Action Climate in the frame of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, the CBSS encourages platforms such as GRASS to highlight solutions for increasing the resilience of our systems.

These priorities are stemming from the urgent need to tackle deepening problems created by the megatrends like globalization, population growth, ageing of societies, urbanization, climate change, and pressure on ecosystems. All of those problems were also identified and addressed within the framework of the United Nations 2030 Agenda and by its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by world leaders in September 2015.

The Baltic Sea Region, including Belarus, still has many gaps in achieving the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs, especially when it comes to goals related to agriculture, consumption and production patterns, pressure on land and marine environment, as well as climate change. We must address these

questions now, with systemic approaches, and should do it together. Cooperation and exchange of knowledge is key to the solution.

In relation to rural development, for example, there is a need to diminish income disparities between the urban and rural communities and to provide social services to the people in sparsely populated areas at same standard than in cities. That would be the only way to stop the people leaving the countryside.

Or, as another example, there is need to cap the nutrients leakage, today still mostly born by intensive farming. Nutrients are causing eutrophication of the freshwater streams and lakes and finally the whole Baltic Sea. We all know that magnitude of algal bloom in the Baltic Sea and surface of oxygen-free bottom areas in Baltic Proper, are growing year-to-year. Global warming, well recorded also in our region, holds negative consequences not only to biodiversity of flora and fauna species, but also to the people's health and economies, which strongly depend on ecosystem services. The impacts of climate change will be more severe in near future if we do not take adequate counter measures and tackle the causes at the roots of the problem.

I wish that during the conference, today and tomorrow, you will all be actively exchanging your experiences and successful examples of solutions to these complex problems. I do hope that, by sharing the knowledge and enhancing cooperation between the experts, we will far better eliminate most of today's problems hindering rural development, and will increase the prosperity of our region through sustainable agriculture.

Thank you!