

6th VASAB Ministerial Conference, Gdańsk, 19th September 2005

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank You for inviting the Union of the Baltic Cities to this distinguished forum.

Mission and aim of VASAB transnational co-operation is the sustainable and balanced spatial planning in the whole Baltic Sea Region. The co-operation within the Union of the Baltic Cities concerns very wide array of activities such as environment, transport, education, culture, tourism, business development, youth issues, gender equality as well as urban planning. However, unlike VASAB wide pan-Baltic approach, the UBC focuses on the local level and aims to increase the awareness of the issues facing planning, construction and architecture in the UBC member cities. The UBC Commission on Urban Planning organizes seminars which are great platform of exchanging ideas and experiences. About 40-50 city architects and planners have a chance to visit the UBC member-cities during such events. The frequent workshops give the opportunity to recognize the numerous planning problems in the cities which are discussed and mostly tackled - the UBC experts suggest the solutions at once. I would say that the UBC is perceived as the consultant in such cases, but the consultations are free of charge! As far as I am concerned, the cities which were a host of the Commission on Urban Planning meetings emphasize that the solutions and advices of the urban planners from 8 - 9 different UBC countries are often more innovative and fresh than suggestions of architects only from their own country.

VIII UBC General Conference will be held in 10 days in Turku, Finland. This Conference will focus on the situation in the Baltic Sea Region after the EU enlargement. The Union of the Baltic Cities is aware of the significant role of VASAB. Therefore, Mr. Zbigniew Rykowski, Chairman of VASAB Committee on Spatial Development is invited to the UBC General Conference as one of the main speakers. Additionally we will be pleased to listen as follows:

- Kornelius Sigmundsson, CBSS CSO Chairman
- Pavel Telicka, EU Commissioner
- Andrus Ansip, Prime Minister of the Republic of Estonia
- Kurt Bodewig, Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs, Bundestag
- Carl Cedershiöld, former Mayor of Stockholm
- Emilio D'Alessio - President of the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Cities and Towns
- Elisabeth Helander, Director, DG Regional Policy

The topics of the Conference to be discussed, i.a.:

- The Baltic Region as a part of the European Transportation System
- Logistic Corridors in the Baltic Sea Region, including the EU Initiative "The Motorways of the Seas"

- Cities and Competitiveness
- Cities and Good Neighbourhood Policy
- Baltic Sea Region - A Mediterranean View
- EU cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region; EU budget and its implications for the Baltic cities;

The UBC with Baltic Sea Seven Islands (B7), Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation (BSSSC) and Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe - Baltic Sea Commission (CPMR-BSC) sent to the European Commission the common statement on the New EU Cohesion Policy (2007-2013), 3rd Objective - European Territorial Cooperation, Cross-border Cooperation. The above mentioned organisations consider that maximum distance of 150 km of maritime border - to be eligible to obtain funding for cross-border projects according the new Commission's proposal - may impede the cooperation between the cities of the South Baltic area. Our opinion is that in case of the Baltic Sea Region, which forms a natural area of cooperation across the water, a mechanical maximum distance should not be fixed in such a definite way. The suggestion of EU that we can use the Transnational Cooperation strand can not be accepted. The fields of cooperation indicated in this strand are not compatible with the cities competence.

The Union of the Baltic Cities would like to ask the representatives of the state governments gathered in this conference to influence their Ministries of Economy which negotiate the future Cohesion Policy in Brussels to raise this crucial issue during the negotiations.

Paweł Żaboklicki

Secretary General
Union of the Baltic Cities