

Statement at CBSS Ministerial Session in Svetlogorsk, Russia,

5-6 March 2002 by Mr Per Bødker Andersen, UBC President

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

UBC celebrated its 10th anniversary at our General Conference in Rostock, Germany last October, under the conference theme "Social Justice in the new millennium". At the same occasion, we welcomed our member cities number 99 and 100. Number 99 was the Estonian town of Paldiski with less than 5 000 inhabitants. Number 100 was Berlin, the capital of Germany.

Also, the UBC president, Mr Anders Engström, resigned after his 10 years as President of the UBC. Mr Engström has been present at almost all CBSS ministerial meetings since the Helsinki meeting in 1993 and the CBSS ministers have always warmly received UBC.

Looking back at the first ten years of UBC, the development has been significant with an eager and devoted participation from cities in all countries around the Baltic Sea.

Looking ahead ten years, we can see perspectives that are even more challenging. By then the Baltic Sea will hopefully to a high degree be considered an inland sea of the European Union, with free movement of people, capital and goods.

There is a need for co-operation between all government levels to make this development as prosperous and efficient as possible. UBC is prepared to take its share of the efforts needed.

I have to point out, that there will be a strong need for support from the national and European level for this.

UBC has during the years argued for the necessity of support for the co-operation between sub-national levels of government. There is especially a strong need for support for small and medium sized co-operation projects feasible for sub-national authorities in the Baltic Sea Region. We can therefore only regret the - hopefully temporary - setback of the Danish proposal for a fund to support small and medium sized co-operation projects. The need is still there, so UBC will also on this occasion emphasise the importance of support for sub-national co-operation.

UBC is an important platform for co-operation between cities in the Baltic Sea Region. We are still developing very much at all levels. Our number of member cities now exceeds 100. Co-operation is one of the political hallmarks of UBC, and facilitating co-operation of all kind and at all levels are among our main political missions.

In order to make extended co-operation even more operational, I should like to point out, that it would be of great importance to make physical connections between our member cities, their politicians, staff and other representatives more easy and non bureaucratic.

We have borders to cross now and in the future, normally meaning showing a passport. But sometimes delegates from some of our membercities have to apply for visa, which can be rather troublesome and time-consuming. I just like to point out, which big help it could be if all countries would treat border-crossing in the same way.

I am sure, that the great interest from the Kaliningrad-oblast to participate in co-operational projects would benefit immensely through a more smooth way of handling this issue.

To conclude my statement, this time I have concentrated on two issues:

The need for support for small and medium sized co-operation projects between sub-national authorities. UBC will continue to argue for the benefits of such programs.

The institutional problems with co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region, especially the Visa procedures. The Schengen countries as well as the Russian Federation should take measures in their handling of the visa issue. Thereby the members of UBC and other sub-national organizations should be able to play an even more active role in the common interests of the development of the future Baltic Sea region.

Thank you for your attention.

Per Bødker Andersen

President of UBC