

The need for financing of a Baltic Sea Project Facility

Statement at the CBSS meeting

Stockholm 30 May 2000

One main problem for multinational co-operation on sub-national level between east and west in the BSR is the lack of funding opportunities. You can find bilateral funding, especially in Sweden, and we have the Nordic Council of Ministers. But there is nothing from the EU Commission except for Swebaltcop, which however only finances Swedish participation.

The need is great, especially in the light of the many programs in this field that were open until 1998. In the autumn of 1998 there was a period when there were five deadlines for different programs on local and regional co-operation between east and west within six months. This created an understanding of the benefits of such co-operation, which makes the present total lack of opportunities even more complicated.

There are now, however, some initiatives which might help the situation hopefully in a near future.

We have heard of the Danish initiative to establish of a financing facility for sub-regional co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region. The main idea is that the full members and observers of the CBSS could become members of the proposed facility.

UBC indeed supports the initiative. Many of the elements of the proposal are similar to ideas proposed by UBC, for example regarding objectives or local administrative and decision making structure with simple and straightforward application procedures.

I must point out that UBC has not the financial capacity to co-finance the initiative with the proposed minimum 25000 Euro. We are ourselves financed by membership fees and by various grants for specific purposes which leaves no room at all for this kind of contribution.

However, I am convinced that the experiences and network of UBC will be utilised in one or an other way when the proposed facility will be created. UBC can for example contribute by participating in an advisory or steering committee as representative for the local government level in the Baltic Sea Region.

The planned Interreg III is hopefully on its way. UBC welcomes it of course, even with its drawbacks. I would specially like to point out the discrimination of maritime borders which makes most of the Baltic Sea not eligible for the bulk of the available funding in Interreg III Strand A.

UBC is active in two initiatives that hopefully also will be successful. The first is an idea to create a facility for financing of 100-200 small and medium sized local and regional co-operation projects in the Baltic Sea Region, to be financed by Interreg III strand B. We are doing that in co-operation with the new BSSSC secretariat in Gdańsk.

UBC is also active in process initiated by Eurocities and the Berlin and Hessen Offices in Brussels. It aims at creation of a program for co-operation between local and regional level in EU and the accession countries. It will cover the whole of Europe and not only the Baltic Sea Region.

These three initiatives all need strong support from all friends of the Baltic Sea Region, including CBSS, the governments in the accession countries, and representatives in the European Institutions. I do hope we can count on you.

Anders Engström

Union of the Baltic Cities

President