

UBC President's statement published at the Baltic Cities Bulletin, May 2005

Dear UBC Friends,

Our VIII General Conference in Turku is approaching. The conference will be held on 29 September - 2 October 2005. The General Conference will deal with issues vital for the Baltic Sea Region such as logistic corridors, EU budget and its implications for the BSR, good governance, competitiveness, good neighbourhood policies, human contacts in the BSR etc. We have invited a number of high-level speakers who will address above important topics.

Transport and logistics issues will be one of the key items. UBC realises that modern port and land transportation infrastructure, coordinated with maritime transport, is crucial for the development of the BSR. This bulletin brings information about numerous projects aiming at improvement of intermodal transport network in the Baltic Sea area.

In connection with our conference the following events shall also take place: meeting of the Committee of Senior Officials of the CBSS, coordination meeting of Baltic Sea organisations and a seminar of Baltic Region Healthy Cities Association. Saturday, 1 October will be devoted to the internal UBC matters such as reports, elections, finances, etc.

At the UBC initiative, the major Baltic Sea organisations, namely B7, BSSSC, CPMR-BSC, UBC, decided to send to the European Commission a joint statement on the objective 3 of the reformed cohesion policy 2007-2013 (European Territorial Cooperation). The statement emphasizes that the proposed introduction of a maximum distance of 150 km of maritime border - to be eligible to obtain funding for cross-border projects - is counter-creative to the very idea of strengthening the territorial cooperation, and therefore we object to it.

We expect from the European Commission a more flexible approach taking into account existing cooperation in various fields between the partners on both sides of maritime border as well as historical, social, cultural and economical factors which justify cooperation across larger distance than mentioned above. I have sent this statement also to all prime ministers of our 10 Baltic Sea countries. I do hope all our governments will strongly take up this issue during the negotiations in Brussels on the new cohesion policy.

I have also sent out a letter to all member cities asking them to express their views how we can make our own organisation, the UBC, even stronger. A year ago, on the 1st of May we have experienced a significant historical moment - the Baltic Sea Region became almost an inland sea of the European Union. This fact will have a strong positive impact on further development of our region and it must have an impact on the activities of the UBC.

The EU enlargement in the BSR brings new opportunities and challenges to the UBC. How to promote effectively exchange of experiences between member cities ? How to enhance the work of our commissions and mobilise more outside funding ? How to ensure that concerns of our cities are listened to at national governments and in Brussels ? I received a number of ideas from the cities, for example: UBC could improve lobbying in Brussels by using the cities representation offices; gender balance is needed in the UBC authorities and commissions; less effective commissions could be incorporated by the effective ones, etc.

I look forward to your further ideas on the directions for UBC development. I also look forward to meet delegates of all UBC member cities at the VIII UBC General Conference in Turku !

Per Bødker Andersen

President Kolding, May 2005