

CONFERENCE RESOLUTION

The Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) has at its X General Conference in Kristiansand, Norway, September 23 – 25, 2009 approved a new Strategy and a Sustainability Action Programme 2010 – 2015. Their aim is further strengthening the organisation and its activities to serve the member cities and the whole Baltic Sea Region even more effectively.

In formulating its new Strategy, the UBC has taken into consideration the goals, challenges and possibilities offered by the new EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, which was communicated by the EC on 10 June 2009.

Launching of the EU Strategy for the BSR has been seen raising great expectations in the region. UBC, in its position papers, has encouraged the EU to create a concrete, focused and innovative document with clearly defined governance model and accountability. The cities and urban dimension in general should be regarded as substantial elements of the Strategy. They establish a link between the European Union and its citizens.

The nearly two decades experience of the UBC network of cities confirms that a bottom-up approach is relevant in building regional cooperation and could also serve as a good basis for the new EU Strategy. The UBC stresses that an active and practical involvement of all levels of stakeholders in the region is important for reasons of legitimacy. This can improve the possibilities for successful implementation of the EU Strategy and its Action Plan.

UBC brings together more than 100 municipalities. This enables an effective and powerful regional and local implementation of the EU Strategy and its Action Plan.

The UBC statement in the preparatory process emphasized the importance of governance issues. The EU strategy introduces the notion of “governance by doing”. This leaves open many questions on accountability and responsibility.

The UBC wants to be active in the implementation of the EU Strategy as several actions in the strategy are linked to local authorities. The UBC will study them and participate in those that are most relevant for its members.

The EU Baltic Sea Strategy is an important step forward. It creates a joint framework and defines several areas of priority action. An important aspect is to involve non EU members within the Baltic Sea area and to encourage them to actively participate in the strategy implementation process.

For successful implementation of the Action Plan it is necessary to have financial instruments and EU funded programs directed to the Baltic Sea Region.

Now, the key issue is to turn these plans into concrete action. This requires strong political commitment from states surrounding the Baltic Sea as well as from all stakeholders. The UBC wants to be active in promoting this political commitment.

The Baltic Sea Region has been seriously affected by the global financial and economic crisis. The “success story” of the region has, for the time being, been shadowed by worries as economies entered into recession. In some countries this has reached crisis proportions, which has revealed significant differences between the countries. This stresses the need for deeper cooperation and stronger common initiatives.

Effects of climate change can already be seen in the Baltic Sea Region. More and more cities are suffering from extreme natural phenomena and increasing costs.

The solutions for recovery and sustainable development vary from city to city, and country to country. However, the UBC should use its potential to increase cooperation, deepen economic integration and improve the business environment and thereby to become a model region for others, in Europe and internationally.

The UBC and its member cities are a great resource of innovative solutions which can be transferred to other states and communities. Partnerships between public administrations and exchange of best practices are effective and affordable methods of providing administrative and technical assistance and expertise. Climate change strategies, regulations, research, projects and new risk management policies and plans are being implemented to our common benefit.

Sustainable development of our cities is a crucial element for the well being of our Baltic Sea Region and our cities. Good practises already exist but the challenge is to focus on how new, more environmental friendly energy policies and reduced emissions can develop into models to be used worldwide.

The UBC must enhance its visibility at the regional and European arenas in order to support actions and implementation of the policies for sustainable and prosperous Baltic Sea Region on the levels of EU, national states and local authorities. Therefore, with respect to all differences and local circumstances, let us join forces. Let us work in an even more effective way for the benefit of the entire region in order to use the full potential which the Baltic Sea Region cities possess.