

**Speech of the President of Union of the Baltic Cities  
for the International Riga Forum.**

**Riga, Latvia, 20 August, 2004.**

Dear colleagues and friends,

The Baltic Sea Region is a significant European Region, with unique qualities and is recognized as one the most promising areas for development, economic growth and investments in Europe. The region also possesses an exciting blend of cultures and natural assets. It is an area where East meets West. The Baltic Sea is unique in that it is by far the longest brackish water reservoir in the World, but because of this it is also very vulnerable to pollution. Therefore we have to be concerned about our common Sea, lakes, rivers and other water resources.

Since the fall of the iron curtain, integration in the Baltic Sea Region has steadily progressed.

It is my pleasure as a President of Union of the Baltic Cities to support the Riga Forum whose main goals are to discuss the future of contemporary European port cities - their development, what are trends, opportunities, threats. What do these trends mean to investors, business enterprises and inhabitants of these cities and most importantly how to prepare for significant economic and social impact of the rapidly changing environment. These questions are of significant importance to Riga, to its sustainable development as livable city.

In my view Riga Forum presents a comprehensive professional programme covering issues from effective port development in the face of global challenges to the necessity for commitment to local actions. This is an important meeting place in your beautiful City for people with national, regional and local municipal perspectives on sustainable development. This gathering will include:

Experts working in the fields such as economic, environment, etc.,  
Politicians and decision makers,  
Grass - root workers, activists and other partners involved in implementation of the strategies  
for the Baltic Sea Region.  
Riga Forum has been a step forward for environmental health by stimulating discussions and professional exchange of experience and expertise. It has also given opportunities for establishing new contacts and building friendship.

The Riga Forum is taking place after Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Poland have been integrated in European Union. It will give us opportunity to reflect on development in the past years in the Baltic Sea Region as well as look ahead and discuss development potentials so far unexplored.

All of us who work in the area of cities development have to be able to offer citizens an opportunity for a good life. The City should be a favorable environment both socially, economically and physically - as a living and working environment in order for the people to build up, maintain and enhance their social, mental and physical health and wellbeing. A healthy population is the basis for sound economic development and it is also an indicator for the feasibility of sustainable development.

I hope that during the Riga Forum there will be fruitful discussions on a broad spectrum of innovative ideas, strategies and instruments for modern port development for implementation used by the regions and cities on the Baltic Sea area.