

## **VISIONS FOR CBSS COOPERATION:**

### **PEOPLE TO PEOPLE CONTACTS**

Statement by UBC President, Mr Anders Engström, at the 9th Ministerial Meeting of the Council of Baltic States, Bergen, 21-22 June 2000

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

My first point that I would like to make here today is that the Northern Dimension Action Plan does not take appropriate notice of the level of local authorities. This is inconsistent with the chair's conclusions of the Helsinki Foreign Ministers' Conference. The Commission has also repeatedly signalled that the future of European governance lies in co-operation in the form of networking between local, regional, national and supranational authorities.

UBC agrees on the priorities in the Northern Dimension Action Plan, but there is a need for recognising local and regional authorities as actors on many if not all of the priority fields. Cities are the motors of economic development and innovation in their regions. Local political leadership represents democracy closest to the people. The Northern Dimension can be successful only with active participation from cities and towns.

The second point is the problems caused by the EU concepts regarding Maritime Borders in the Baltic Sea Region. It is a great obstacle to people to people contacts in most of the Baltic Sea Region.

The Northern Dimension is an addition to the EU policy caused by the accession of Finland and Sweden into the European Union. It meant new perspectives for the European Union, such as the climate, closeness to the Russian Federation, and so on.

Sweden and Finland also brought the Baltic Sea into the European Union. In that light, we can now note that the original European Union was shaped in the Continental Europe. I am specially referring to how the concept of trans-border co-operation is implemented in practice. You can trace the origins of the present implementation from the early seventies, especially from the border between Germany and the Netherlands, which is a land border between two equal partners. At the local government level in the Baltic Sea Region, which I represent, we can clearly see disadvantages with the present situation, which discriminate maritime borders in comparison with land borders.

The whole coast line from North Estonia down to Germany, from Stockholm to the Öresund Region, both shores of the Kattegat and Skagerrak plus parts of the Gulf of Bothnia coast will be excluded from large funding from the lion share of the new program Interreg III for transnational co-operation. It means that my own city, Kalmar, and the vast majority of the UBC member cities, will not be eligible for large scale funding that can strengthen co-operation with the neighbours across the sea. The strong regions, like the Öresund Region and the Stockholm-Turku region, will on the contrary be eligible for financing from all strands.

It is not difficult to argue for the great need of support. Probably the strictest section of the Iron Curtain in Europe was in the Baltic Sea. The amount of practical co-operation is today, in spite of this, impressive. And there is a need for support in order to strengthen the Baltic Sea Region as such. We need maritime equivalent to Trans European Motorways also across the Baltic Sea in order to be successful. We need more contacts and more co-operation, and we need European support in order to create that.

The accession of the Baltic Sea into the European Union must influence the legal system for transborder co-operation in all of the European Union in the understanding that the European Union is not longer only a continental inland matter. Instead, we must accept that our continent by far has the longest coastline in relation to the area compared to any other continent in the world.

I would like to argue for a concrete change of EU concepts, legislation and regulation regarding maritime borders latest when the next EU budget period starts in 2006.

Thank you for your attention.