

UBC President's statement published at the Baltic Cities Bulletin, April 2004

Dear UBC Friends,

This issue of the UBC bulletin is connected with the historical moment for our region. On 1 May 2004 Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland are joining forces with Denmark, Finland, Germany, Sweden in the European Union. The Baltic Sea becomes almost an inland sea of the EU. In the near future we will have free movement of capital, labour and commodities across the Baltic Sea. The national legislations in fundamental matters will be based on a common European legal foundation. We will live in a common area, based on democracy, freedom and human rights, area with stable economic and political system. Stability combined with qualified labour force and good educational system will certainly boost the economic development in the whole region. Already now the Baltic region is the fastest growing region in Europe. UBC will make all efforts to make this development sustainable, taking into account also social and environmental dimensions. Our region possesses strong resources - natural, human, institutional, cultural and financial. In the enlarged Europe the cities of the Baltic Sea Region united in UBC will more effectively utilise all these capacities for the benefit of their citizens.

At the General Conference in Klaipėda 18 October 2003, UBC adopted the resolution appealing to the European Commission for regular consultations with local authorities associations, on EC policies which affect local authorities. In January 2004 Commissioner Michel Barnier sent a letter to UBC informing that on 19 December 2003 the Commission adopted a communication on "Dialogue with associations of regional and local authorities on the formulation of EU policy". In this communication the EC proposes to give the regional and local representatives an opportunity of expressing their views - via their associations - during annual hearings which will concentrate on the Commission's annual work programme, and the major policy initiatives that have a significant regional and local impact. UBC and our sister organisation Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities welcome the EC communication as continuation of the work began with the publication of White Paper on Governance. However CAAC and UBC are of the opinion that consultations between the EC and local authorities associations should take a form of a dialogue; it can not be only one-way communication. Both organisations decided to send a joint statement to the EC expressing their views on proposed consultation procedures. Currently the Commission is in the process of identifying the associations to be invited to participate in this dialog. It is important for all of us to lobby and make sure that UBC and other regional associations are included on that list. It would not be good if only pan-European organisations and national associations would represent local authorities in the dialogue with the Commission.

At the last UBC Board meeting in Vaasa in March, CBSS informed about a joint project with the Nordic Council of Ministers aimed at enhancing cross-border cooperation at the "external" EU borders in the region. The goal of the initiative is to encourage local actors, authorities, private sector, NGOs, to establish a constructive dialogue on both sides of the "external" border. CBSS invited other Baltic Sea actors including UBC to participate in the project.

UBC welcomes financial instruments for CBC to be available for new EU member states since May 1st, namely INTERREG programs and Norwegian instrument within EEA agreement. At the same time UBC is very concerned that cooperation between local authorities across the Baltic Sea may decrease due to insufficient funding. Since several years UBC has been strongly promoting the idea to give the maritime borders in the BSR the same status as the land borders, which would allow cross-sea projects funding for example through Interreg IIIA. There are few exceptions - Interreg IIIA programs across maritime borders between Denmark-Sweden and Sweden-Finland. UBC encourages the EC and Baltic Sea countries to establish an Interreg IIIA area across the Baltic Sea, to allow cooperation

between Denmark-Poland, Sweden-Lithuania etc. Such decision is crucial for development of cross-border cooperation between the local authorities across the Baltic Sea.

I do hope one thing will not change in our region after the EU enlargement - the beautiful Baltic summer !

Per Bødker Andersen

UBC
Kolding, April 2004

President