



## **MEMO OF THE MEETING WITH CITIES/ REGIONS OFFICES IN BRUSSELS**

**15 FEBRUARY 2011, NORWAY HOUSE, BRUSSELS**

One of the goals set by the UBC Strategy 2010-2015 is to strengthen the UBC's presence in Brussels and enhance its lobbying capacity. There are many BSR cities/ regions offices in Brussels. The UBC shall use their knowledge and potential. The Board decided to meet the cities/ regions EU representations to discuss how to do the lobby work for the benefit of the UBC members.

The meeting was held at Norway House on 15 February 2012. 16 representatives of the EU offices took part. As a follow-up, the working group should be established to coordinate the cooperation UBC – Brussels.

President of UBC, Per Bødker Andersen, welcomed the participants and thanked South Norway European Office for hosting the meeting. This was an opportunity to get together, opportunity for networking. The UBC intends to use the cities/ regions EU representations experience but the UBC itself might be helpful for the Brussels based offices, too. This could bring mutual benefits.

Bodil Agasøster, Head of the South Norway European Office in Brussels, host of the meeting, presented the main aims of the office activities and the ways of cooperation with other representations and European institutions. The South Norway European office contributes to a more international oriented business and public sector in the southern part of Norway, in which the opportunities in the EU is better exploited. Also, the development of the cooperation within education & research is fostered. Networking is a key element of the office's work.

Four representations, namely South Denmark EU Office, Turku – South West Finland, Pomorskie Regional EU Office and North Sweden European Office, were asked by the UBC Secretary General in advance to express their views during the meeting on how to raise the UBC profile in Brussels / how to promote UBC goals in Brussels.

Krista Taipale, Head of the Turku-South West Finland EU Office, underlined in her presentation that the discussion on active UBC presence in Brussels was well-timed. On the EU agenda there are many relevant political and legislative processes: EUBSR Strategy and macro regions, Structural funds 2014+ and financial framework 2014+, Horizon 2020 2014+, TEN-T, EU's Maritime policy, expected EU's port agenda 2013, etc. Moreover, the role of cities is crucial when achieving EU 2020 goals. EU to become a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy needs smart cities (centres of knowledge, smart specialisation, regional growth engines), sustainable cities (role of cities is crucial) and inclusive cities (social challenges and possibilities visible in cities).

Ms Taipale focused on the need of effective communication and presented the rule of 4R's: to deliver right message, to right person, in a right moment, in a right manner. Also, the benchmarking with similar organizations is essential.



Ms Taipale listed several practical forms of collaboration, e.g. targeted communication to UBC Brussels offices in order to keep them up-dated (UBC position papers, most important events etc.), briefings to Brussels offices when needed, making annual work programme related to EU-dimension on matters of strategic importance for UBC, collaborating in visibility events in Brussels.

Mikael Janson, Managing Director of the North Sweden European Office, found the information flow important. Firstly, a specific issue to be communicated should be focused to avoid too broad or general approach. The region has to attract the EU Commission's attention to the problem. The formulated message shall go through the whole European Commission and other institutions, not only DG Regio. The cooperation with the European Parliament's Informal Baltic Sea Intergroup could be helpful.

Though there is a number of discussions held in the Baltic Sea Region, the outcome is not spread out properly. The cooperation is crucial to promote the prioritized common problems despite competition or even conflicting interests between different regional stakeholders.

Karina Rembiewska, Pomorskie Regional EU Office, agreed the right communication process was necessary to break through. She advised the UBC should be represented on different kind of lobbying events/activities in Brussels i.e. Open Days, Regions for the Economic Change, COR's Forums, European Energy Days/Green Week/Maritime Days. UBC could be also active in organizing seminars, workshops and conferences or exhibitions at the premises of the Committee of the Region where some of the UBC members are represented. Moreover, bilateral meetings with high EU representatives and presentations in the European Parliament within the works of Baltic Sea Intergroup could be arranged. Last but not least, the input to EU publications/newsletters should be provided.

Jonas Groes, Director of the South Denmark EU Office, emphasized that first of all the common issues should be found on which the partners could work together. There are a lot of possibilities of project cooperation, e.g. within the INTERREG or framework programmes.

Marie-Louise Rönmark noticed the strategy of work towards the EU is necessary to promote the cities' interests.

Mikko Lohikoski, UBC Strategy Coordinator, informed shortly about the UBC Strategy implementation process which goes in parallel with many important processes in EU. He was wondering what the BSR influence was in Brussels, how its voice was heard there.

There is a strong competition concerning visibility here, in Brussels, said Krista Taipale. If you don't communicate, you don't exist. The crucial thing is to find the joint interests to make joint position papers with the other organisations in the region.

Mikael Janson added there was a need to find good partners to make an impact. The crucial is to attract the attention to the common problems.

Anders Franzen, Växjö, pointed to the problem of competition and conflicting interests.



Mr Janson and Ms Taipale agreed the collaboration on similar problems is the most important to make the voice heard.

Mr Andersen, President of UBC, stated the cooperation with the BSR and on macro-regional strategy was an added value for the EU which is normally based on the top-down approach. The BSR Strategy is rather a bottom – up approach which may be an opportunity for us.

Bodil Agasøster found networking with different organizations useful in promoting the common interests.

Gunars Ansins, Deputy Mayor of Liepāja called for more intensive and more effective communication between the UBC and the cities' offices in Brussels. The conference or discussion forum should be organized to highlight common activities.

Mr Lohikoski pointed to promoting the cities towards EU institutions. The cities are the engines of the growth, they are the centres of development of the regions. The BSR Strategy attracted the EU attention being the first macro-regional strategy. This interest concerns the actors on different levels. This is a kind of test for the region if it is able to manage the tasks set in the strategy. The bottom – up basis, multi-level governance is a huge challenge. UBC should find the way how to involve more actively in the implementation process.

Sven Kasto, Director of the Småland Blekinge South Sweden, informed the Informal Baltic Sea Group, established to exchange information, would have its conference on 30 May. He made a proposal to meet before this conference to discuss the common problems and list the priorities and areas to work on together.

Allan Alaküla, Head of Tallinn EU Office, pointed to the media important role in improving the visibility. Also, he found the UBC Cities Events Calendar a very useful promoting tool.

Paweł Żaboklicki, UBC Secretary General, informed representations about the Conference of European Cross-border and interregional City Networks (CECICN) and its 1<sup>st</sup> Congress on 25-26 June 2012 in A Coruna. CECICN associates 6 European regional networks of cities including UBC. South European networks - members of CECICN - have experience in lobbying in Brussels. Mr Żaboklicki stressed UBC could be more effective and visible in Brussels by joining forces with other networks via CECICN.

Ms Agasøster encouraged to share the success stories that the UBC cooperation brings, e.g. climate work.

In conclusion the participants agreed the timing was very good to start the discussion on the cooperation UBC – Brussels based offices. The effective communication is a key to succeed. UBC shall utilize all the possibilities different networks give.



As a follow-up, it was agreed a working group consisting of some Brussels offices, coordinated by Krista Taipale, would be established to work out ideas for the UBC Executive Board on UBC visibility and lobbying in Brussels.