

OPENING SESSION ADDRESSES

Uldis Sesks

Mayor of Liepāja

Gunārs Anšņš

Deputy Mayor of Liepāja

Per Bødker Andersen

President of the Union of the Baltic Cities

Raimonds Vējonis

Minister of Regional Development

Republic of Latvia

Uldis Sesks
Mayor of Liepāja

Dear UBC conference members and guests!

This is the 20th anniversary year for the Union of the Baltic Cities. For the city of Liepāja it is a double delight and honor to host this event since it shall be written in history with Liepāja name.

The main topic of the conference – „Building on the past, heading for the future” – is also very important for the city of Liepāja which has faced and gone through different times. For about 45 years the Baltic Sea Region had been separated by invisible and visible border, so called ‘iron curtain’ that did not allow us to meet each other, to develop our Baltic Sea Region, our infrastructure, and our business. Today, we are able to build our future together and we are very grateful to many cities that are representing here today for sharing with us your experience.

The city of Liepāja has always been and still is the important industrial centre. We are focusing on creating and developing new industrial companies, assisting and helping to grow and expand existing industrial companies, for example the largest metallurgic company in the region ‘Liepājas metalurģs’.

Our strength is our industry. Today our industrial output per capita is twice as high as average in the country. We constantly work on improving the logistics solutions in Liepāja, also by seaways and airways. We have initiated the reconstruction of our airport in order to restart regular flights to Copenhagen, Hamburg, Riga, and Moscow as it used to be in 2008. In addition, we are committed to open new ferry lines next to already existing one that connects Liepāja with Lübeck. We very much look forward to establish regular ferry connections with Sweden and Denmark. I see this goal as something we can do together in order to achieve better results.

I wish all conference members to work on the common issues, to achieve good and fruitful results, to spent a wonderful time in Liepāja and come back here once again as tourists to enjoy our recreation and culture offers!

Gunārs Ansiņš

Deputy Mayor of Liepāja

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen,

Liepāja, like the Mayor already said, is a one of examples how to build the future with thinking about the past. City of Liepāja was one of the beautiful cities 100 years ago. Here you can see a slide from the downtown area. There was a time that the city was booming, basically for two main options: industrial development, port development and immigration. Liepāja was chosen as a port for immigrants from Ukraine, Russia to the USA and Canada.

Of course Liepāja had a very hard time during the II World War. For those, who are staying in the Hotel Liva, I would like just to show the place where the hotel Liva is located. You can see all city downtown was completely destroyed. Of course we have to work and work and build a new city again.

Liepāja was a base for Soviet Navy. Approximately one third of area was used for Soviet Navy. Of course we do not know how many persons were working in the Navy base, but based on statistics in our Hospital we estimated 30.000 inhabitants. After Latvia became independent, the city around 30.000 people moved out. I think the persons who know how the budget is planned and who know how the communal things cost understand that it means we lost around 30.000 tax payers.

Right now we are trying to clean up the areas in former military base territory. The city bought a special crashing machine to clean up this area. Of course it's a question of environment pollution, it's a question of land issues, but step by step we are trying to improve our city.

Today in Liepāja we have 85.000 inhabitants living in a city and of course during the number of crises including II World War, including the economic crisis just two years ago; we are trying to play the game, what we are thinking about strategic management of the city. And of course we made decisions and the city has to work in a number of sectors. The main priority is attracting industries in the town, providing a job for people. But at the same time invest in a basic infrastructure, like in roads, schools, irrigation systems. Liepāja is a home for a number of Scandinavian companies which located their business in Liepāja today. On the right side this is a business park which is owned by the Danish company, but at the same time there are 30 Scandinavian and American companies working in this business park. Local business society is also working very hard. One of the good examples is UPB Holding on your right side, which, I would like to say, has a very good progress in development working in Gotland, building schools in Sweden, developing number of projects in Germany, developing number of projects in Denmark. Liepāja is a place for a steel company called "Liepājas Metallurģs". It was built more than 100 years ago. Today this company is making the largest reconstruction works in history. In fact they are building new company and new factory. We believe that this particular company will be also in the future very important company for a town. This company is not working only for a business. They are working also very much with social aspects, for example sponsoring soccer team, ice-hockey team, and number of social events in the city. It's also one of the biggest employers in the town, with approximately 1.000 inhabitants working for the company.

The biggest and I would like to say one of the most advantageous priorities of the town is port development. During the soviet time the port was not commercial, it was used only for military activities, military ships. Like the Chief Captain of the port was saying, in 1992 we started our

development not from zero, but started from -10 at least. Because there were no cranes in this port. And today step by step we are improving basic infrastructure in the port. Today the biggest dredging work is going on in Liepāja port area. With the support of the Minister of Regional Development and Environment Mr Raimonds Vejonis who is also with us today, we received number of funding in order to clean the city from chemicals in the Karosta canal, and number of projects in the port which allowed us to make the port alive and make opportunity to grow investments in the port as well.

The Mayor already mentioned the ferry line from Liepāja to Germany and I will be very happy if during this conference we could also have some informal meetings and discussions with the cities who are interested to have ferry lines from Liepāja to Scandinavia and also to Russia.

Liepāja is working very actively in a number of projects and number of fields. We are trying to use very much the EU grants money. We made decision to provide quite large investment in an energy efficiency sector. All schools in Liepāja are right now covered by energy efficiency projects.

Liepāja is a place for regional hospital. We are also reconstructing hospital including also a very good inside infrastructure like special surgery rooms, but this project was started just recently, we built just one part of the project, but we will continue in two years time. I do believe that we will finish this project successfully.

Ten years ago we didn't know that in this world there are only two seasons. Summer - which we are calling construction, and winter. Today it is happening in the city of Liepāja, we are making a number of reconstruction works in the town, building new streets, new corridors for transport and logistics.

Next year we will start a very large project in the field of energy efficiency again. We will change whole lightening system in a city. To be a safest city in a country, but at the same time we will try to save money because basic infrastructure for lightening is quite old.

This is one of my favourite pictures. It's Liepāja airport. It was made in 1964. And like the Mayor already mentioned, right now we are making number of reconstruction works in the airport. We built already a new terminal, and next year we will start to improve our runway. I do believe that in a couple of years we will have also again number of new connections to Scandinavia, to the Baltic Countries.

This is a Liepāja bus station and a railway station. It's a picture from 70'; you see there is number of cars like Lada, Moskwich, maybe colleagues from Poland and Russia know this type of cars. Today we did completely finish rebuilding old bus and railway station. Today it's a very big comfort level also for our inhabitants and our guests.

Liepāja is trying to be a very green city, including the thinking of the environment; therefore we do very much love our trams. Therefore we arranged that the participants of UBC can use a tram for free during these General Conference days. Next year we will start a new project which will connect one of the biggest living areas in the town with a tram system and I hope that the inhabitants of the city of Liepāja will love this.

Two years ago we started to think how to improve our bicycle system in the town. There were a number of discussions. The project was very expensive and maybe not right in a time. But the City Council made a decision – yes, we are going for project, to create in a city quite large area of the bicycle roads. Based on statistics today, this bicycle road project is one of the top projects which citizens of Liepāja love. This is one of the symbolic pictures when we are opening this bicycle road together with a Mayor and the Minister of Environment Mr Vejonis. He is quite active guest in the city of Liepāja.

Of course for the time being Liepāja was closed for decades as a closed city, and tourism was one of the priorities how to open borders for the city. Step by step we are improving tourism infrastructure including some of bronze elements which are highlighting the anthem of the city of Liepāja. Therefore if you have time after conference, during tonight or tomorrow morning, I will recommend visiting also the city of Liepāja downtown.

Today we are having our General Conference in the Liepāja Olympic Centre. It's not only a sport complex; it's also a complex for education and for culture. Everyday in this particular building are going in and out 8.000 people. I would like to say that for the city in size of Liepāja it's a very large number. The next step of the project development is to build a swimming pool which is under reconstruction right now.

Liepāja is of course the best place to visit during the summer time. We are having a number of festivals and events. I would like to say – you have to come back to Liepāja during the summer again.

Thank you very much indeed for this very short presentation and now I would like to give a floor to the special present from the city of Liepāja. It's a bell choir and they will be ready to have an anthem of UBC.

Per Bødker Andersen

President of the Union of the Baltic Cities

Dear UBC friends!

Welcome to the XI jubilee General Conference of the Union of the Baltic Cities in Liepāja !

This year we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the UBC foundation in Gdańsk on the 20th of September 1991. Much has happened since then. The Baltic Sea Region has been an arena of spectacular changes. From the a region divided for 45 years by the iron curtain, it has transformed into an area of considerable cooperation and growth.

The theme of our conference is 'Building on the past, heading for the future'.

The first plenary session will bring an outlook on what happened during last 20 years from the end of the cold war to the present cooperation and what can happen during the next 10-20 years. We have invited distinguished speakers inter alia from the European Commission, the Polish EU Presidency, the Baltic Development Forum and other organisations.

The second plenary session will highlight the cities' role, their expectations, interests etc. Among the speakers will be our Vice-Presidents - Marie-Louise Rönnmark, Mayor of Umeå and Urve Tiidus, member of the Parliament of Estonia, former Mayor of Kuressaare.

We will start the second conference day with workshops covering three crucial issues, our societies are facing:

- How to strengthen economic attractiveness of cities
- How to master climate change; success factors in local integrated climate management
- How to meet the demographic challenge; the ageing society

Commissions responsible for the workshops have arranged interesting speakers. I hope the member cities will actively contribute to the conference workshops and keep exchanging experiences after the General Conference as well.

The second day will be also devoted to internal UBC matters such as reports, elections, finances and meetings of the commissions.

Anders Engström, UBC Honorary President, first UBC President and former Mayor of Kalmar, we could say "father of UBC" will due to serious health problems not be able to join us in person in Liepāja, but he is with us today in our thoughts. We will hear a greeting from him in the evening.

Dear friends, as a President of UBC, I wish us all fruitful debates and a good time in the beautiful Baltic city of Liepāja!

Raimonds Vējonis
Minister of Regional Development
Republic of Latvia

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and its Action Plan. Role of Cities

The members of the UBC play a key role in the governance of the region and in future their role shall further enhance. Cities are the closest political actors representing the interests of the citizens. This gives them a special role in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

(Implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region has been in a focus for the UBC during the last two year period.)

The Strategy builds on experiences of past cooperation and is fostering development of new networks. New approach – an integrated way of working is applied to implement the Strategy. Fostering cross-sectoral cooperation is an added value.

UBC member cities and commissions are participants in a range of Strategy's flagship projects aimed at sustainable environment, prosperity and competitiveness of the Region - be it transport, environment or climate change.

The Baltic Sea Region with population of almost 100 million people and its great economic and political potential has become one of the most dynamic regions in Europe. The Strategy for Baltic Sea Region - the first internal EU regional strategy, which aims to improve the current EU performance by integration regional vision in various sectors of EU policies.

Nowadays it is important to focus on concrete priority areas - environment, transport and energy - and to plan joint initiatives of regional cooperation.

For this purpose 15 priority areas are defined in the Action Plan of the Strategy. The area of cooperation in the energy sector is coordinated by Latvian Ministry of Economics in tandem with Danish colleagues. We believe that along with the issue of energy security the main areas of partnership include the use of renewable energy and energy efficiency.

In the context of the development of the Strategies for Baltic Sea Region and Danube Region, we consider these macro-regional strategies as coordinating mechanism of the EU policies. Macro-regional investment projects are linked to the increasing the competitiveness and thus might be financed through different financial instruments.

Existing programs of EU structural funds provide the necessary basis for enhanced cooperation, but we must recognize that many problems can be solved only in close partnership with various stakeholders – especially Baltic cities and neighboring countries – Norway, Russian Federation and Belarus.

Thus Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region can be an effective implementation tool for the development of regional policy and foreign policy and the strategic partnership between within EU.

In the nearest future Latvia will offer the updated list of project ideas for joint cooperation in such

areas as development of infrastructure, environmental protection, regional safety, conservation of biodiversity in the Baltic Sea.

Cooperation in Baltic Sea Region reveals importance of performance-based and result-oriented regional development to the European integration in the context of knowledge economy and global competition.

As You know the Baltic Sea Region has a competitive advantage with regard to high level of education, research & development potential. Therefore, facilitating a favorable business environment for Baltic cities is one of the key development factors for the Baltic Sea Region. The crucial importance of this aspect is confirmed by the Council of Baltic Sea States and approved in the European Commission Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

Baltic Sea Region needs innovative methods of cooperation and networking. We should all contribute to Cohesion Policy key objectives by developing common regional technology transfer and knowledge diffusion projects that:

- reflect the particular requirements of industries and services,
- are based on developing regional and local knowledge and talents,
- and reinforce institutional support for creating an attractive business climate in our region.