

MINUTES OF THE 92nd MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

Riga, Latvia, 25 April 2024

1. Opening of the meeting by UBC President and adoption of the agenda. Election of two persons who, together with the President, will check the minutes.

UBC President Mantas Jurgutis welcomed the participants of the 92nd UBC Executive Board meeting hosted by Riga, Latvia. The meeting was also transmitted online.

The Board adopted the agenda, attached to the minutes. Elina Rantanen, Turku and Maja Wagner, Gdynia, were elected to check the minutes together with the President.

2. Welcome by Linda Ozola, Deputy Chair of Riga City Council, presentation of the city.

Linda Ozola, Deputy Chair of Riga City Council, warmly welcomed the participants and made a presentation of the City of Riga.

Riga is the capital and the largest city of Latvia, also one of the biggest cities in the Baltic Sea Region. One third of Latvia's total population lives in Riga. Over 47% of inhabitants are ethnic Latvians, 35% are Russians, and the 18% are Belarusians, Ukrainians, Poles and other.

Riga's historical center is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, noted for its Art Nouveau/Jugendstil architecture and 19th century wooden architecture.

The city has a number of educational institutions, with 42 universities and colleges, and approximately 70.000 students.

Riga is one of the key economic and financial centers of the Baltic states. The biggest exporters are in wood products, IT, food and beverage manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, transport and metallurgy. Riga Port is one of the largest in the Baltics.

The city is also an important center for art and culture, in 2014 the city was the European Capital of Culture together with Umeå in Sweden.

Linda Ozola informed that since 2020, the city has been struggling with different crises, including pandemic, money laundry, energy crisis, war in Ukraine. Among the challenges for the city there are also: derusification in different areas e.g. in education system to strengthen the position of Latvian language; how to keep young families with children in the city, as they choose to move to the suburbs of Riga, to neighbouring municipalities.

Mrs Ozola mentioned also development areas – University of Latvia Academic Centre, Skanste center, VEFRESH center for innovation, VERDE office district.

3. Invitation to 3rd UN Ocean Conference 2025 in Nice, France, 9-13 June 2025, Ambassador Aurélie Royet-Gounin.

Mrs Aurélie Royet-Gounin, Ambassador of France in Latvia, informed that the third edition of the UN Ocean Conference will be held in Niece on 9-13 June 2025 and co-hosted by France and Costa Rica as mandated by the United Nations General Assembly in the resolution adopted by consensus on 20

December 2022. Both countries wish to raise the level of ambition compared to the two previous editions of UNOC, by associating with the political declaration an action program made up of voluntary commitments, carried by coalitions.

The event will serve as a forum for discussion on the following issues:

- advocate for the success of multilateral processes directly or indirectly related to the ocean and consolidate and reinforce our common objectives for ocean protection,
- mobilize and increase funding, including through the development of new financial mechanisms relevant to achieve Sustainable development goal N°14 (SDG14) and support a sustainable blue economy,
- strengthen and better diffuse knowledge related to ocean sciences for science-based, comprehensive decision-making

Mrs Royet-Gounin underlined, that the organizers plan a strong impact and strong input from civil society and local authorities, because such UN meetings shall be deeply rooted in the normal, everyday life of everybody, and the local authorities are the key element. She said that the Ocean covers more than 70% of our planet's surface, and over 3 billion people depend on the ocean for their livelihoods. The ocean is polluted, and the collective action is needed.

The Conference will build on the previous UN Ocean Conferences, hosted by Sweden and Fiji in 2017 in New York and by Portugal and Kenya in 2022 in Lisbon, but there were only few new ideas how to tackle the problems, or preserve biodiversity.

The third edition of the UNOC will be structured around the following three pillars: pushing forward multilateral processes, sustainable blue economy, developing new financial instruments, ocean sciences.

During the conference there will be science congress with over 3.000 researchers, special forum devoted to blue economy and special summit focused on resilience to climate change of the coastal cities. This could be interesting for UBC and its members.

Additionally, there will be few symbolic gestures, for example the organizers want to gather ships from around the world in front of Niece, a symbolic United Nations fleet of all types of boats, fishery, leisure, transport, etc. to materialize the strong world commitment. Mrs Royet-Gounin expressed hope, that they can count on UBC to make the conference a success and invited the member cities to participate and also send boats.

President Mantas Jurgutis said that UBC is a strategic partner in the EUSBSR Annual Forum and now we can also be partners to United Nations initiatives. The Board encouraged member cities to take active part in the 3rd UN Ocean Conference.

4. Applications from Rubizhne, Chernihivka, Rivne Oblast, to join UBC.

UBC has received applications from, Rubizhne, Chernihivka and Rivne Oblast, Ukraine, to join UBC. The applications are attached.

Rubizhne

Andrii Yurchenko, Head of the Military Administration, thanked for invitation to the meeting and for the possibility to join UBC as an Associated Member. Mr Yurchenko introduced the city.

Before the war, there were 59.000 inhabitants. Rubizhne is an industrial city, with the leading branches: chemical, pulp, paper. It is a logistically developed city with big railway station.

Now the city is under occupations, the authorities are temporarily relocated to the city of Dnipro.

The city helps a lot to the military – subventions are the central part of the budget.

Despite the occupation, the center for primary medical and sanitary care resumed the work in the city of Dnipro. Rehabilitation Center "Rubizhne Center for Restorative Treatment and Rehabilitation" was opened in the city of Kharkiv, and the Rubizhne Humanitarian Headquarter started operation in the city of Vinnytsia.

There are five schools and four kindergartens with online education. Also an inclusive-resource center for the children with the special needs has been created.

For the administration of Rubizhne, external cooperation as an important part of the activities, for exchanging experiences, e.g. to show anti-crisis cases, how to live under occupation. They participate in the international events, like in the European Summit for the Cities and Regions in Belgium. The city is also involved in many international projects. External cooperation includes two sister cities in Ukraine: Dolyna, Chervonograd and cooperation with funds: USAID, IsraAID, MOM; participation in international events, e.g. Exhibition ReBuild Ukraine 2023 in Warsaw, the 10th European Summit of Regions and Cities 2024 in Mons.

Chernihivka

Vitalii Manych, Head of the Community, presented the settlement.

Chernihivka lies in Zaporizhzhia region, there are 15.500 inhabitants. Chernihivka is currently under Russian occupation. The authorities of the community had to move to Zaporizhzhia and 1.500 inhabitants were also relocated there, where they get help in the Humanitarian Hub.

The Community, composed of 41 settlements, specializes in: crop production, cultivation of wheat, barley, sunflower, rapeseed animal husbandry raising cattle, pigs. In Chernihivka there are large deposits of granites and apatite, also uranium ores.

In the settlement there is also wide tourism offer, including 245 historical and cultural monuments, e.g. archaeological ones, like Megalithic Park "Scythian State".

Numerous cultural festivals and events, e.g. Festival "Legends of the Steppe" are held in the settlement.

Chernihivka was also a partner in numerous international projects.

The authorities continue with medical and humanitarian help to the inhabitants of the settlement. Over 30% of the budget is dedicated to help the military.

Rivne Region

Olha Yatsuk, Advisor of the Head Rivne regional military administration, made the presentation of the Rivne region.

Rivne is a region in north-western Ukraine. Its administrative center is Rivne. The surface area of the region is 20.100 km², the population was ca. 1.141.000 in 2022. The major cities are: Rivne, Dubno, Varash, Ostroh, Zdolbuniv, Korets. The main business sectors are wood, furniture, food, logistic and High-Tech Organic Farming, Berry Cultivation and Gardening. Since 2021 there is an Industrial Park.

The region has a wide cultural offer with two theatres, several museums, several festivals. In the region there are also several touristic objects, like cultural and historical reserves, an ethnic park, monastery – fortresses and the zoo.

The Board accepted Rubizhne and Chernihivka as UBC Associated Cities and Rivne Oblast as Partner.

5. Task Force to discuss Ukrainian cities membership and participation in UBC.

UBC joining the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine.

President Mantas Jurgutis reminded that the Task Force was established at the 91st Executive Board meeting in Palanga on 24.10.23, in order to follow the resolution on aggression on Ukraine, adopted at the XVII General Conference in Palanga on 26.10.23. The Task Force is facilitated by Brussels Antenna.

Marko Paunovic, Head of UBC Antenna in Brussels, added that at the General Conference in Palanga, October 2023, the “UBC Resolution on Brutal and Unprovoked Russian Invasion of Ukraine” was adopted. The TF role is to implement the resolution.

Mr Paunovic presented the framework of the TF and its activities. It is attached to the minutes.

The main aim of the Task Force is to prepare the framework for the integration of new Ukrainian cities into the UBC activities and support them during the war, and post-war democratic consolidation and recovery.

Among then planned activities there are:

- Tandem programme: UBC Tandem program focusing on bilateral policy cooperation between UBC Member Cities and Ukrainian Associated Member Cities in reaching EU standard in democracy and sustainable development;
- EU Funding support mechanism: Creating and kicking-off an EU Funding project schemes on EU projects that develop and implement together, policy coordination (joint advocacy and policy influence mechanism);
- Participation within UBC: Mainstreaming and reinforcing the active participation of Ukrainian cities through existing UBC Structure such as policy positions, participation in commissions, task forces and similar.

Marko Paunovic introduced also the timeline of the activities.

Marko Paunovic added that in the resolution it is stated that UBC is dedicated to becoming a part of the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine. Few weeks before the Executive Board meeting, the UBC was accepted as associated partner to the Alliance.

The Alliance is the largest association of different stakeholders on European level to support Ukraine, launched by the Committee of the Regions and its partners, including EU and Ukrainian associations of local and regional authorities.

The aims of the Alliance are:

- to coordinate joint efforts, with European Union cities and regions ready to deploy resources to support an effective and sustainable reconstruction of Ukraine;
- to further facilitate the contacts and cooperation of its core partners with the EU institutions and within the “Ukraine reconstruction platform”, as well as between EU and Ukrainian local and regional authorities and associations;
- to provide information and feedback to EU institutions and the “Ukraine reconstruction platform”, and foster the political dialogue with the local and regional level accompanying the reconstruction efforts;
- to facilitate providing expertise in capacity building, good governance, and technical assistance to cities and regions in Ukraine.

In the framework of Alliance, 15 partners including Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Association of Ukrainian Cities, Eurocities, Energy cities, Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy and over 40 associated partners – cities, municipalities, regions and organizations, will join forces to help Ukraine in recovery and reconstruction.

Mr Paunovic informed about two events which will be organized by the Alliance, where UBC could engage:

- Ukraine Recovery Conference, 11-12 June 2024, Berlin, Germany
- International Mayors Summit (by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities under the President of Ukraine) 9-10 May, Kyiv

Marko Paunovic also informed about planned activities of the Antenna in 2024 year, including among others facilitation of the Task force for “Ukraine”, preparation of two EU funding Days, UBC Policy Passport - updates of the document, and more.

Piotr Grzelak, Gdańsk, asked if the TF should be more on political, or more on civil servant level. In his opinion a discussion about this TF is also a discussion about our organization, how widely UBC should open the doors. Mr Grzelak underlined, that the political dimension of the TF is also needed, so not only persons from the cities shall be involved, but also some Executive Board members.

Mantas Jurgutis added that this is one of the most important topics the Union was dealing with, so he expects the Executive Board to take it as priority and will actively participate in the TF.

Susanna Slotte-Kock, Vaasa, asked about the difference between associated city, partner city and observer city.

Mantas Jurgutis explained that associated members don't vote, however they have right to participate in the Union's activities. The same goes for partners. It shows that UBC is open to not only territorially based cities and partners.

Asta Anilionė-Lipovec, Klaipėda, asked if the associated members do not pay the membership fee, and if there is a concrete limit how many associated cities UBC can have.

Elina Rantanen, Turku, thanked Marko Paunovic for the good presentation. Ms Rantanen added that it would be good for UBC to participate also in the conferences mentioned in the presentation, where other organizations and institutions would participate. We need to be clear what is the role of UBC in helping the Ukrainian cities. There are a lot of bilateral activities between the cities, and there are many organizations and networks like Eurocities, that do the same as UBC. It would be good to have a specific role, what we as a city network really can provide. That's why it is important to be present in the commune events.

Piotr Grzelak added, that concerning the question how many cities we can have, it depends on what kind of organization UBC wants to be. If we want to focus only on the Baltic Sea, or we want to be an eastern organization for the cities, connected to the sea? He said that it is one of the biggest challenges for UBC in the history, and there should be a serious discussion which way we should go. It's the question of the philosophy of the organization.

Mantas Jurgutis added that this question was one of the most important questions UBC was dealing with. When EU is facing the accession process of Ukraine, UBC had already done the accession and now we have more Ukrainian cities than Lithuanian cities in the Union. However, all the process must be sustainable. The question for the Union is what the balance is in this.

The Executive Board adopted the proposal of the Task Force activities and timeline.

6. Proposal to establish the UBC Youth Board. (Youthful Cities Commission)

Dmitrijs Zverevs, Chair of Youthful Cities Commission reminded, that the idea to set up a permanent youth representation structure - a Youth Board within UBC governance system - was expressed by YCC at the XVII UBC General Conference in Palanga.

He added that establishing a youth representation structure within public bodies, intergovernmental and international organizations is a developing trend, and it is corresponding to the goal of the European Youth Strategy – to foster youth participation in democratic life.

Two other Baltic organizations: CBSS and BSSSC already have developed their own format for youth participation.

The region is getting older, each young person matters, also the opinions of young people on topics in the UBC agenda. We shall also see how the activities of UBC can be more youth friendly.

YCC during its meeting in Gdańsk in March had a dedicated session on the development of UBC Youth Board concept. The main concern was that such structure shall have a clear mandate, the young people should be granted some kind of decision-making potential.

Concerning the actions, two main aspects were tackled:

- The Youth Board could be a reference point for the commissions and other UBC bodies, on what young people think on topics on the UBC agenda and could be a platform for young people for co-operation.
- At the meeting in Gdańsk there were some Youth Councils from member cities, and this is also could be a platform for cooperation in the Youth Board.

There are also many possibilities for structure and composition, like e.g. copying the one of the UBC Executive Board. There are also many open questions, like the age limit, discrimination towards the cities which are not active in the YCC, financing of the travel costs etc.

Dmitrijs Zverevs asked if the Board agrees that YCC will prepare a concrete proposal with 3 different scenarios and risk analysis. He also asked the Board for giving him expectations and remarks.

The concrete scenarios should be offered to the Board at the meeting in spring 2025, and at the next General Conference it could be voted on having the Youth Board.

This autumn the YCC would contact the UBC cities and bodies to develop the scenarios.

Kaspars Varpins, Liepāja, sad that Safe Cities Commission has great experience in working with youngsters, for example in the project “Youth for Safer Youth”. Now the Commission is a partner in a project “BSR Secure Kids” about youth involvement in risk reduction activities. So participation is hot topic and he would suggest to look for some project opportunities.

Mantas Jurgutis added that Brussels Antenna could assist also on financing opportunities for young people.

Piotr Grzelak underlined that it is important subject for UBC, to hear voices of the young generation. There was also an alternative to have people within the commissions.

Dmitrijs Zverevs said that there was no point of having the youth board working autonomously, but it should be in connection with all bodies of UBC. The question is how it can contribute to the works of the commissions, Executive Board, etc. So it’s all about cooperation and not having something parallel.

The Board authorized YCC to develop concrete proposal for establishment and operations of UBC Youth Board.

7. Information from the Commissions on current and planned activities.

Cultural Cities Commission

Tiina Kasvi, Chair of the Commission, reminded that the City of Espoo started as a Chair of this Commission in February 2024. Kaunas is the Vice Chair.

Ms Kasvi introduced aims and themes of the commission for 2024 - getting to know each other again and making decisions on things which will be crucial this and next year.

She reminded that the CCC is taking part in the project “Baltic Sea Region Cultural Pearls for more resilient Cities and Regions”.

The Commission will have a meeting in Espoo on 6-7 June 2024. The main theme will be participation, cocreation, a meaningful life through art and culture. Frank Martela, a philosopher and researcher of psychology specialized in the question of meaning in life will be a keynote speaker. The second onsite meeting this year will be in Tartu, Capital of Culture 2024, on 12-14 September.

Three online meetings are planned for the second half of the year, including webinar on Culturability Cultural Tourism.

Inclusive and Healthy Cities Commission

Paweł Żaboklicki, Secretary General, reminded that Rostock asked last year to move the leadership to another city. Gdańsk is considering to take it over. The City plans to send out a letter to all member cities to express its overview and what are the priorities the City would like to focus on.

Piotr Grzelak added, that Gdańsk is considering taking responsibility for this Commission, and Ms Katarzyna Ziemann, Director of the Social Development Department considers to be the leader of the Commission, but she couldn't take part in the Executive Board meeting due to other obligations.

Learning Cities Commission

Matti Makela, Chair of the Commission, informed about the Objectives for 2024: strengthening the UBC cooperation in the field of education, organizing workshops, webinars and study visits, planning and implementing the BSR Education Conference in Riga, implementation of the GREEN Steam project (funded by Erasmus+) and planning of the new transnational projects, collection and dissemination of good practices, deepening cooperation with the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) Policy Area Education (PA EDU) and with other networks.

The Commission organizes many meetings of different types this year, e.g. the series of webinars introducing Education Systems of the BSR in different countries will be continued after the holidays.

An Education Conference and Study Visit will be held in Riga on 23 October 24. The main theme will concern The Future of Education / Education is the Future.

Mr Makela mentioned, that the Green Steam project (funded by Erasmus+) is being continued, and three more project proposals are in progress: Valmiera/Liepāja: Cooperation partnerships in adult education, Riga: Creating the STEAM ecosystem in the Baltic Sea Region, Kaunas: Ukrainian Universities Alliance for Higher Education in Turbulent Times (U-ALL).

Planning Cities Commission

Paulina Szewczyk, Chair of the Commission, reminded, that the Commission is a platform for exchange of experiences of architects, urban planners working for the UBC member cities. The main activity of the Commission is organizing seminars where they work together on a real urban challenge in the host city and exchange experiences during common work.

Mrs Szewczyk mentioned the activities the Commission had last year - joined seminar with Sustainable Cities Commission in Turku on "Revitalizing urban space connected to the Sea", 13-15 September, and a workshop on „Civil protection and urban planning. Building a resilient city” together with Safe Cities Commission at the UBC General Conference in Palanga.

In March the Commission started cooperation with Liveability project. At the Seminar in Gdynia there was a discussion how to involve UBC in their activities. The Commission, together with VASAB and Liveability project will organize a seminar at the EUSBR Annual Forum 2024 on „Designing / Planning liveable cities in the Baltic Sea Region”.

The Commission will hold its meeting in in Gdańsk on 9-12 September. Participants will work on sustainable transformation for resilient coastal city and will try to solve 3 urban challenges.

The registration opens in May, Mrs Szewczyk encouraged the member cities to participate.

Mrs Szewczyk added, that the meeting of the Commission in 2025 will be in Riga.

Safe Cities Commission

Kaspars Varpins, Chair of the Commission, said that the aim of the Commission is to make the life of the citizens safer. The main activities last year include 7 projects, participating in EUSBSR PA Secure steering group activities as a member, cooperation with high education institutions, joined workshop together with Planning Cities Commission in Palanga at the General Conference.

Mr Varpins informed that in 2024 the Commission is participating in 6 projects: From NEEDS to SEEDS, VOALA, BYFORES, PA SECURE KIDS, RAZOM, Connecting Resilient Cities.

The Commission will have a meeting in Pori, on 21-23 May 2024. The invitation will be sent soon. Topics to be discussed: flood, shelters and their upkeep, municipality's preparedness and readiness, organizing multi-agency cooperation for exercises.

Sustainable Cities Commission

Agnieszka Ilola, Head of the Commission's Secretariat, said that they recently published their Annual Report as of 2023. She added that most of activities, like projects and initiatives from last year will continue this year.

Ms Ilola introduced the Advisory Board and Co-chairs for 2024-2025 and encouraged the cities from Denmark, Lithuania and Norway to get involved in the Advisory Board.

The Commission is the partner in the current projects: EMPEREST, BALTIPLAST, Climate-4-CAST, SUMP's for BSR, Urban Biodiversity Parks.

Four new project proposals are under preparation or wait for approval.

The Commission will continue with the organizing webinars in the series UBC TALKS; five of them are planned in 2024. 22 webinars have already been made and the recordings are available on the website.

The meeting of the Commission will be held together with the Planning Cities Commission in Gdańsk on 9-12 September.

Youthful Cities Commission

Dmitrijs Zverevs, Chair of the Commission, introduced the objectives of the Commission for 2024 - promoting good practice examples and fostering innovative practices of the UBC member cities in the field of youth, promoting the work of the Commission and encouraging UBC member cities to participate in it. Designing the concept of UBC Youth Board and proposing it to the Board.

Mr Zverevs underlined that the Commission wants to get back to the regular practices and start sharing good examples and learn one from another. The Commission is trying to get more cities involved. In December 2023 an official letter was sent to contact persons, asking for updating the information.

Among the activities already made in 2024 there were: partnership building meeting for Erasmus+ projects, promotion of the YUPAD project, meeting of the Commission in Gdańsk on 20-21 March. At this meeting on the agenda there were among others: concept of the Youth Board, autumn issue of the Baltic Cities Bulletin, devoted to youth issues, launching a new format – youth opinions.

The works on those topics will continue in 2024, additionally there will be an onsite meeting in October, dedicated to youth councils. The Commission will also join the Council of the Baltic Sea States in development of BRAVE project proposal.

The presentations of the Commissions are attached to the Minutes.

The Board took note of the reports.

Two new EU projects

Paweł Żaboklicki informed, that UBC as legal entity is currently involved in 10 EU projects. Now two more have been accepted, funded by Interreg South Baltic Programme.

MariEx project devoted to maritime tourism. The aim of the project is to promote maritime tourism among inland tourists by:

- opening leisure boat ports for land tourists without disturbing the boaters
- turning marinas to meeting points for boaters, land tourists and citizens
- offering swimming pools and playgrounds for mingling
- revitalizing abandoned maritime infrastructure in collaboration with local initiatives and citizens.

Tourism Association Vorpommern from Germany is the lead partner.

The UBC budget is 97.440 EUR.

BOATMAN project - creating a South Baltic network of touristic and cultural hubs connected to the topic of heritage wooden boats. The project, initiated by the Jack Strong Foundation from Gdańsk and Klaipėda University has a goal of popularizing recreational boat building and other activities around heritage ships and boats. UBC is an associated partner in this project.

President Mantas Jurgutis thanked the Secretariat and Brussels Antenna for involving UBC in many projects since last three years, which shows the progress of the organization.

The list of projects with UBC as legal entity is attached.

8. Next meeting of the Executive Board, Brussels, autumn 2024.

The next Executive Board meeting will be held in November in Brussels. The exact dates will be set later.

President Mantas Jurgutis thanked all participants for a fruitful meeting and closed the 92nd Executive Board meeting.

Mantas Jurgutis
Chair

Paweł Żaboklicki
Secretary

Elina Rantanen
Adjuster

Maja Wagner
Adjuster

Link to the documents:

<https://ubc.net/documents/executive-board-meeting-documents/92nd-executive-board-meeting-riga-25-april-2024/>