

- **19th Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, 26-28 October, Strasbourg (Per Bødker Andersen, President of UBC)**

The 19th Session of the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities adopted its priorities for 2011-2012 and the proposed changes to its structures and working methods. The session also asked the Committee of Ministers to amend the Congress Charter in line with the changes.

The aim of the reform is to increase the impact of the Congress' action and make it more effective and more relevant to European citizens and territorial communities. The objective is to make the Congress better adapted and more capable of pursuing its mission as the main contributor to the Council of Europe's action in the field of democracy and human rights at local and regional level.

Monitoring of local and regional democracy, observation of local and regional elections, targeted post-monitoring and post-observation assistance, the local and regional dimension of human rights, and streamlined thematic activities are the new focus areas of the Congress.

Three new statutory committees will be created to replace the existing four: a Monitoring Committee, a Governance Committee and a Current Affairs Committee.

Keith Whitmore (United Kingdom, ILDG), President of the Congress' Institutional Committee and of its Independent and Liberal Democrat Group (ILDG), was elected President of the Congress.

The Congress adopted a Report, a Resolution and a Recommendation following a debate on the municipal elections held in Georgia on 30 May 2010. The Report, presented by Günther Krug (Germany, SOC), was the result of an election observation mission of the Congress, with the participation of the EU Committee of the Regions.

The Chamber of Local Authorities of the Congress debated also reports and adopted recommendations on the state of local democracy in Montenegro and Estonia, following monitoring missions carried out in these countries in spring 2010.

Moreover, the Congress recommended Russia to reintroduce direct elections for regional governors, revoke the recent law concerning the dismissal of mayors, and improve legal safeguards to ensure that local authorities are not subject to excessive supervision by higher levels.

On 28 October the members of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe adopted two resolutions urging local and regional authorities to take specific measures for the integration of Muslim women and young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

- **Forum of Ionian and Adriatic Cities, 21-22 October, Split (Ms Marie-Louise Rönnmark, UBC 1st Vice President, Mayor of Umeå)**

The 12th Meeting of the Forum of Adriatic - Ionian cities took place in Split on 21 -22 October 2010. The theme "Towards Europe 2020. The role of local governments for a better quality of life" that has been chosen for the 12th session, addressed the priorities and strategies for the years to come.

At the session, the participants discussed the role of the Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities in the Adriatic macro-region, moreover, considerations were given to the future of the European Union

through the project "Europe 2020". In three roundtables, the participants addressed the three key challenges to local self-government : "The quality of public services: ICT and e-Government at local level", "Competitiveness in local economies: how cities by implementing benefits can assist entrepreneurs" and "Conservation and valorisation of cultural heritage : new employment possibilities".

The meeting in Split was held in a particular moment in the life of Europe; just before the start of the period of planning of the strategic directions to establish priorities and to determine the most efficient allocation of the financial resources for the next ten years and also in the moment when, the first steps towards the creation of the Adriatic-Ionian Macro region, along the lines of what has been achieved in the Balkan and Danubian area, were taken.

Apart from the issues related to the European integration process, participants had the possibility to exchange practical experiences of the cities and local associations in the various sectors of social life: schools, support of the youth employment, modern means of communication between institutions and citizens, best practices that are promoting active participation, democracy and the environment.

On Friday 22 October 2010, elections for a new president, vice-president, Management Board and General Secretary were held in the course of the session, since the two-year term of office of the Forum leaders expired in 2010. The new board of the Forum has been elected as follows: the President, Mayor of the City of Split, Željko Kerum, the Vice President, Mayor of the City of Pescara, Luigi Albore Mascia and the Secretary General, Deputy of the City of Ancona, Michele Brisighelli.

- **B7 and LEADER Conference Planning Europe, 23-24 November 2010, Kärđla (Mr Georg Linkov, Mayor of Kärđla)**

The aim of the B7 and Baltic Sea Strategy Conference was to debate the impact and opportunities of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR): What can the EUSBSR offer to regions, especially peripheral areas, such as islands? How can regions take part in the implementation of the strategy? How does the strategy influence the development of regions and opportunity to be involved in the European Single market? Does the strategy succeed to take into consideration the needs of the maritime peripheral regions and islands?

The LEADER Conference "Local Food, Basis of a Region's Identity" aimed to discuss why it is important to develop local small-scale production and why should we prefer local food? Present the researchers' opinions and research results and international practices and give an overview of what has been done by LEADER LAGs and introduce some of the projects supported by LEADER.

UBC was represented by Mayor of Kärđla, Georg Linkov. Linkov felt satisfaction about successful B7 youth meeting last summer, which was organized by Kärđla Town Government. Over 80 youngsters with leaders met on Hiiumaa and talked about the future of islands. Linkov appreciated youth and thought that politicians and public servants should to do everything for creating a quality of life on islands that encourages youth to come back after studies. „We need next generation for planning future on islands and Europe!“, said he.

Linkov said welcome to participants from Union of the Baltic Cities. He talked about Kärđla participation on UBC Executive Board in years 2007-2009 and the trust of Estonian cities who elected Kärđla back for the member of Executive Board for years 2009-2011.

Linkov stressed the participation in effectuation of Baltic Sea Strategy. He said: „We have a man by European Parliament, UBC president MR Per Bødker Andersen, who has been a member of Committee of Regions many years. We want like B7 that voice of our cities will resound to European Commission and European Parliament! UBC will give best efforts for effectuation of Baltic Sea Strategy participating in several *flagship* projects.” At finally Linkov expressed hope that cooperation between Kärđla and B7 and UBC and B7 will increase in the future.

- **87th Plenary Session of the Committee of the Regions, 1-2 December 2010, Brussels (Per Bødker Andersen, President of UBC)**

During the Plenary Session, the European Commission President José Manuel Barroso was presenting his priorities for 2011 to mayors, councillors and regional representatives from across Europe. He underlined that "from the beginning, my objective has been to deliver the Europe 2020 strategy with a wide range of partners, including the Committee of the Regions as well as regional and local authorities". CoR President Mercedes Bresso concurred that the success of EU flagship initiatives, as well as most EU policies, largely depended on a greater role for regions and cities. The Committee of the Regions substantiated this message in its first Europe 2020 monitoring report, published on 30 November. The report concludes that, while some countries seek the participation of regional and local authorities, "a lot remains to be done to ensure increased ownership of Europe 2020 through enhanced partnership in its implementation between all government levels". President Barroso assured CoR members that the Commission "will analyse the report very carefully".

Looking ahead, in a resolution on its priorities for 2011 adopted today, the Committee of the Region emphasises the leverage effect that the EU budget has on the European economic recovery strategy and the financing of structural investments. On the question of the EU's "own resources", it urges the Commission to press ahead with its consideration of whether to make use of revenue from a tax on financial transactions or financial activities, sales of greenhouse gas emission quotas, an air travel tax, a separate European value-added tax, or part of the revenue from an energy tax or company tax.

Also, CoR expressed their opposition to any proposal to slash resources earmarked for development policies. The rapporteur emphasised that "We are totally opposed to the idea of suspending European funds as a penalty for Member States that do not comply with the stability pact. It is counterproductive and makes a mockery of the principle of proportionality in that it will affect lagging regions that are particularly reliant on co-financed programmes to tackle their structural handicaps".

- **1st Annual Progress Conference of the Priority Area No. 11 of the Baltic Sea Strategy, 7 December 2010, Vilnius**

Around 70 representatives from the Baltic Sea Region transport community, including leaders of projects and flagships, as well as the owners of new initiatives, representatives from ministries and agencies, the European Commission, other relevant stakeholders from local authorities and regions,

associations and research institutions, gathered in Vilnius for an informal exchange of views on current activities and future plans for the Transport Area in the Baltic Sea Region.

Among the main topics discussed, there were: assessment of the added value of the Baltic Sea Strategy, implementation of the Transport Area of the BSS. The participants discussed the current TEN-T policy review, focusing on the planning methodology of the TEN-T core and comprehensive networks, financial challenges, as well as the criteria for main nodes and links. It was pointed that the elements of the comprehensive TEN-T network are currently discussed between European Commission and Member States in bilateral meetings, while the EC is engaged to draw the proposal for the core TEN-T network.

Also, the participants were introduced to the implementation process of the ongoing Baltic Transport Outlook (BTO) 2030 project, which was identified as one of the priority projects within Transport Area 11.

Much attention has been paid to the development of the Green Corridor concept. A Green Corridor model for BSR was proposed, composed of a network of Green Corridors across the Region, including TEN-T core links and the MoS. Scandria, TransBaltic and EWTC II projects remained most important for the implementation of Green Corridor concept in BSR.

Transport Priority Area of BSS is one of the most successfully implemented Areas within the Strategy. In order to continue the efficient activities within the Transport Priority Area during year 2011, main priorities were identified:

- Improvement of the involvement of regional stakeholders in order to better meet the future challenges in the BSR;
 - Inclusion of new initiatives;
 - Removal of bottlenecks and missing links, fostering of innovations;
 - Harmonization of the national transport policies and coordination of the infrastructure investments;
 - TEN-T revision and the extension of TEN-T to the neighbouring countries.
- **The Baltic Sea Region Programme conference "The power of the Baltic Sea macro-region", 30 November -1 December 2010, Jyväskylä, Finland (Mr Markku Andersson, Mayor of Jyväskylä)**

The Baltic Sea Region Programme conference "The power of the Baltic Sea macro-region" in Jyväskylä, Finland on 30 November -1 December 2010 was organised by the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013 in close co-operation with Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy, the Regional Council of Central Finland and the City of Jyväskylä.

More than 300 participants representing central, regional, local, as well as EU public administrations and agencies, research institutions and networks from the BSR, met to discuss i.a. the macro-regional strategies and the future Cohesion Policy. Finland's Minister for Economic Affairs, Mr Mauri Pekkarinen provided the opening statements. Several interventions from policy and research prepared the background for the panel discussions.

Also, the fourth and probably final call for project applications was officially launched on the second day of the conference. The Monitoring Committee decided to restrict the call to selected topics.

Some ongoing projects were presented, including the flagships of the EU Strategy for BSR. Moreover, the cooperation with partners from Belarus and Russia was discussed.

The next Baltic Sea Region Programme conference is planned for September 2012 in Norway.

- **Baltadapt kick-off meeting, 10-12 January 2011, Roskilde (Ms Zita Tverkute, Panevėžys, Ms Carina Keskitalo, Umeå)**

10 January, 2011-the first day of the kick-off meeting was to get partners up-to-date with the project BALTADAPT , to get project partners acquainted with their fellow project partners , and a general information to WP's 3-5. Also , it was made a brief introduction of and by project participants. The common photo of all participants was made.

The main topics of the day were :

- a) the idea behind a BSR wide climate change adaptation strategy-BALTADAPT as part of the BSR climate change adaptation strategy;
- b) what does means to develop and implement an INTERREG project (cooperation, commitment, take ownership)?
Distinguish between BSR Programme requirements and own aims and targets ;
- c) the full picture of a project : Interdependencies between WP's.

All the project BALTADAPR working plans were discussed:

- a) introduction to the work to be carried out in Working plan -WP 4:
aim of the WP ,
general planned flow of activities,
outputs to be produced;
- b) introduction to the work to be carried out in WP 3:
aim of the WP,
general planned flow of activities,
outputs to be produced;
- c) introduction to the work to be carried out in WP 5:
aim of the WP 5,
general planned flow of activities ,
outputs to be produced;

The second day - 11 January 2011

The main topics were discussed :

- 1.The BALTADAPT project administration. The regulative framework of the BSR IV B INTERREG Programme: basic INTERREG principles, WP1 and WP2, Project coordination, Partnership agreement, Reporting.
- 2.Financial management guidelines; first level control, Eligibility of Costs, Public Procurement, Costs Sharing, Financial Reporting;
- 3.WP5 : BSR Climate Change Adaptation Strategy Action Plan for adapting the BSR to Climate Change

4. Setting the indicators for BALTADAPT ; the indicators for the achievement of the specific results must be set: define the indicator (must be measured), set the baseline and the target figure;

The third day - 12 January 2011.

The main topics were discussed :

1. Project administration. The regulative framework of the BSR IV INTERREG Programme : basic principles , WP1 and WP2 , Project coordination , Partners Agreement , Reporting.
2. Financial management guidelines: first level control , Eligibility of Costs , Public Procurement , Costs Charing , Financial Reportings.

Ms. Zita Tverkute, Head of Ecology Department City Municipality of Panevezys (Lithuania)

The Baltadapt project is aimed to understand the challenges of adaptation to the consequences of climate change in the Baltic Sea Region, and develop an adaptation strategy for the region (building upon but proceeding from existing broad strategy documents). Partners in the project mainly include national research and development organizations, and mainly natural science participants. The aim is also to over time involve stakeholder organizations, in particular through stakeholder dialogues that may include specific meetings with stakeholders on a national or regional (e.g. ministry) level, and potentially also some inclusion of stakeholder dialogues on lower levels. Exact decisions on these latter meetings have not yet been made. The UBC organization is not one of the original applicant partners and is thus not financed by the project or given any specific role in the project plan. UBC is instead an "associated partner" for which participation mechanisms and role in the project at this point in time are relatively unclear (although one of the working packages of the project invited some participation from UBC members present at the first project meeting). It is possible that UBC may in particular benefit from participating in stakeholder meetings at national/regional level. UBC could also potentially support the project with regard to the development or selection of any local stakeholder dialogue case.

Carina Keskitalo, researcher at Umeå University, participating at the meeting on behalf of Umeå

- **88th Plenary Session of the Committee of the Regions, 27-28 January 2011, Brussels (Per Bødker Andersen, President of UBC)**

At the Committee of the Regions plenary session in Brussels mayors and regional presidents urged EU lawmakers to simplify the rules for delivering cross-border infrastructures and public services to citizens. They set out ways to improve a key legal tool, the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). They also launched a platform for public authorities setting up and running such cross-border bodies.

The Committee of the Regions' proposals are based on an extensive consultation of existing EGTCs, regional and local authorities as well as other stakeholders. One of the key issues raised by the CoR is the lack of coordination that has dominated the past five years. This resulted in a national implementing measures that are not necessarily compatible with each other. The Committee opinion therefore urges clearer guidance from the EU institutions on how to apply the concept in national

law. Another obstacle is that national capitals often take a long time to process requests for setting up EGTCs, which the CoR wants to reduce.

Also, CoR adopted an opinion on a new political framework for tourism in Europe. Europe's full potential as the world's leading tourist destination remains underdeveloped and local and regional authorities need to do more to help the tourism industry adapt to the current difficult economic climate through diversification and the development of more sustainable business models.

The opinion proposes four key priorities for action: stimulating competitiveness in the tourism industry, for example through the diversification of the tourist offer or an increase in 'social' tourism such as cultural exchanges; the development of sustainable tourism, for example through the creation of a quality label based on a stringent set of criteria drawn up partially by local and regional authorities; consolidating the image of Europe as a unified 'brand' to the rest of the world; and maximising the use of other EU funding lines and policies, such as rural development funds or social funds, to help support new tourist initiatives and improve the existing offer through, for example, better training of staff.

- **Solutions local, together - Nordic Conference on Sustainable Development in the Baltic Sea Region, 31 January – 2 February 2011, Turku (Jarkko Virtanen, Deputy Mayor of Turku, Mikko Jokinen, Director of Environment, Björn Grönholm, Head of EnvCom Secretariat)**

The three-day conference brought together more than 550 experts – local authorities and other stakeholders, and representatives of the business world – from 19 countries. Through the various workshops and discussions, new solutions were sought for creative urban planning, sustainable consumption, protection of the Baltic Sea, combating of climate change, and renewable energy use.

In her opening speech, Mari Kiviniemi, Prime Minister of Finland, highlighted the pioneering role of the Nordic region in sustainable development. In their panel discussion led by Minister of Housing Jan Vapaavuori from Finland, the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation pointed out that climate change is not only a threat but also an under-utilised opportunity for the green economy and finding new solutions for sustainable development.

The aim of the conference was to share positive experiences from innovations and models of operation while offering municipalities and other local actors genuinely productive and practical ideas. The best practical solutions for combating climate change were also recognised at the event. The awards went to the ECO₂ – Eco-efficient Tampere 2020 project of the City of Tampere and to the snowcooling project of Snowpower AB and the County Council of Västernorrland, Sweden.

More solutions for sustainable development will be explored later in Umeå, Sweden, which will host the next conference.

The *Solutions local, together* conference marked the start of the Finnish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Climate change is the theme of the Finnish Presidency, which aims to transform the Nordic region into a stronger and more unified climate leader. The conference was organised by the Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Employment and the Economy, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Association of Finnish Local and Regional

Authorities, Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment for Southwest Finland, City of Turku, and Union of the Baltic Cities.

- **Second Working Meeting on the Implementation of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, 16-17 February 2011, Gdańsk (Maciej Lisicki, Deputy Mayor of Gdańsk, Paweł Żaboklicki, Secretary General, Björn Grönholm, Head of EnvCom Secretariat)**

The Second Working Meeting on Implementation of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region was held in Gdansk, Poland on 16-17 February 2011.

More than 160 representatives of the national and regional development programmes, European Fisheries Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development programmes and the European Commission, Priority Area Coordinators, Horizontal Action Leaders and the National Contact Points of the EUSBSR participated in the meeting. Several other institutions were invited to take part and to share the experience gained.

On 8 December 2010 the European Commission adopted the Action Plan and Communication for the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region. The representatives of the National Contact Points and the Priority Areas of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) were participating in the meeting to share the ideas on the macro-regional strategy implementation and learn about the practical experience gained in implementation of the EUSBSR.

The meeting was aimed at strengthening existing cooperation and to build-up new links between the stakeholders of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) to support more effective implementation.

High level representatives: Mr José Palma Andrés, Director of the European Commission Directorate General for Regional Policy, Mr Maciej Lisicki, Vice-Mayor of the City Council of Gdansk, Mr Mieczysław Struk, Marshal of Pomorskie Voivodeship and Mr Artur Harazim representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland acting as the National Contact Point in Poland of the EUSBSR, welcomed the participants of the meeting. The key notes on the challenges of the EUSBSR implementation, financial engineering and linking of existing funding sources were presented by different invited experts (Mr Ole Norrback, Honorary Minister of Finland, Mr Alexander Schenk, Special Advisor of the Ministry of Finance of Sweden, representative of the European Investment Bank, Mr Graham Cope, Head of Region - Northern Europe of the Regional Business Development of the European Investment Fund and Ms Sheila Maxwell, external expert of INTERACT programme).

The stakeholders of the macro-regional strategies (EUSBSR and EUSDR) had an opportunity to define the key challenges they are facing and to discuss the next steps to be taken for the success of the macro-regional strategies' implementation. The concept of financial engineering and opportunities to link the existing financial sources to the implementation of the Priority Areas of both macro-regional strategies gave thoughts for the future.

Key words highlighted during the Second Working Meeting on Implementation of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region are - cooperation; networking; funding, stakeholders involvement and political commitment.

Just by joining the efforts of different stakeholder groups the macro-regional strategies could present practical results and success!

Baiba Liepa, Project Manager, INTERACT Point Turku

- **Meeting of the Conference of European Cross-border and Interregional City Networks (CECICN), 16 February 2011, Brussels, Krista Taipale, Head of TURKU-Southwest Finland European Office**