

Dear Mr Westermann-Lammers,
[Erk Westermann-Lammers, *geschäftsführender Vorstandsmitglied der Investitionsbank Schleswig-Holstein*],

Thank you very much for your introductory remarks - and for your generous support for the conference of the Union of the Baltic Cities.

Dear Mr Andersen [*Per Bødker Andersen, Präsident der UBC*],
Dear Mrs Bechgaard [*Helle Bechgaard, Vice Chairman Baltic Development Forum*],
Dear conference participants,
Dear guests,

I would like to warmly welcome you all to Kiel. It is both a pleasure and an honour for me that the 67th meeting of the Executive Board of the Union of the Baltic Cities here in Kiel brings together so many people who are both interested in and committed to their city and the Baltic Sea States.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The people of Kiel love their Kieler Woche. It is the largest summer festival in Northern Europe and the largest sailing event in the world. But primarily it is also a festival of peaceful encounters of the people of Kiel for our guests from near and far.

Your visit, dear participants, enriches the Kieler Woche. You are a part of it, because the conference of the Union of the Baltic Cities is linked with international and cosmopolitan approach of the Kieler Woche. This concept has historical roots. The festival week has also been a think tank for political discussions and international exchange ever since the end of the Second World War.

After all, the best way to get to know one another is by working and celebrating together. And the best way to discover our city is at the Kieler Woche.

You will certainly have already gained some initial impressions at yesterday's barbecue on the "Kiellinie". A long weekend with a wide variety of topics and entertaining programme still lies ahead of you. Let me mention just a few of the highlights of your visit: on Friday you will visit the Schilksee Olympic Sailing Centre, the heart of the regattas. And on Saturday evening is the grand opening of the Kieler Woche on the City Hall Stage with Minister-President Torsten Albig and, as the guest of honour, Paralympics champion and swimmer, Kirsten Bruhn.

Dear Mr Andersen, I am particularly looking forward to your speech at the 37th International City Forum on Saturday morning on the subject of "The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities - and its implementation in both Kiel and its twin and partner cities. I find it very positive that this year there will be talks and discussions on the important subject of inclusion.

The Baltic Sea is at our heart. It connects our cities. It makes us neighbours. It is not only our natural centre in geographic terms, but also culturally, commercially and socially.

On the one hand, the Baltic Sea States have grown economically in recent years. This trend consolidated with the accession of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland to the EU in 2004. Estonia has been part of the eurozone [*spricht sich: Juroson aus*] since 2011. And this year Latvia is to become the 18th member of the monetary union. The Baltic Sea States rely

on a highly educated workforce, an attractive research and university landscape and they are characterised by their orientation towards the latest IT applications.

The high level of unemployment among young people is particularly serious. This currently stands at 23 per cent. We are therefore not only putting the future of our young people at risk, but also that of Europe. What is still lacking is effective practical help for our young people. This lack of planning by the EU is a threat to social peace and Europe's competitiveness. It is very positive that General Conference of the UBC will discuss this subject intensively in Mariehamn (Finland) in October. My colleague, Wolfgang Schmidt, chairman of the UBC Business Commission has been kind enough to offer a workshop on this topic.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Kiel is already very active within the UBC. We have chaired the Commission on Business Cooperation since 2009.

We are putting all our experience and expertise into this responsible task in order to reach our common goals.

As the gateway to the Baltic Sea Region, we benefit from the favourable geographical position. We offer optimum conditions for shipping and other maritime industries. Kiel harbour is on a growth curve. The passenger numbers for ferries have levelled out considerably higher than the 2 million mark. And Kiel has developed into the third largest hub port for passengers in the last few years.

Kiel is strong in the service sector and also in the high-tech industry. Our city is Schleswig-Holstein's leading educational location.

My goal as Mayor is to keep Kiel future-proof in research, education and business and to strengthen it in the long term.

For this, our city needs an overall strategy. We can only achieve this objective together with the cities of the Baltic Sea Region.

The UBC Commission on Business Cooperation is working on this overall strategy for the Baltic Sea Region:

- To this end, cooperation is to be intensified at regional, national and European level.
- It is our intention to market our Baltic Sea Region and raise public awareness by means of unified marketing.
- Furthermore, we want to strategically combine our experience and know-how in order to work out complex problems within the network.

Together with the city of Kristiansand in Norway we have developed a communication and marketing strategy for the UBC which will be the subject of your consultations.

I also find it important that the Commission on Business Cooperation will develop strategies to combat youth unemployment at its workshop in Mariehamn in Finland in October this year.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Union of the Baltic Cities is a great opportunity for us, because it does more than link us with regard to the significance of the Baltic Sea. It sets an innovative and economic dynamic in motion for the bordering countries.

Together we have a powerful voice in Europe. Together we stand for sustained development in business, politics and the environment. Together we can trigger developments and change. Together we can take the EU crisis as an opportunity for a new beginning and emerge from it with greater confidence.

We can only succeed in this because through the years a great deal of trust has developed among our cities in the UBC. We learn from one another and grow together facing similar challenges and changes.

With the Union of the Baltic Cities, we, as Europeans, are required to think internationally and within broader contexts. And in so doing we learn to act with a broad perspective, both locally as community leaders and also as municipal experts.

This meeting in Kiel is an important step for this. Here, relations are intensified and goals, both present and future, discussed.

I wish you eventful discussions, and an exciting Kieler Woche!