

Conference of Baltic Cities

Gdansk, September 19-20

2nd Plenary Session

Goals and objectives of the Union of Baltic Cities

Honourable Ladies and Gentlemen,

The main objective of this part of the plenary session of the Conference is to reflect together on goals and tasks of the Union of Baltic Cities. As we are under the strong pressure of time, I suggest that we focus our attention on the most important and very concrete matter, that is the draft of the Statute of the Union of Baltic Cities which has been sent to the authorities of all towns invited to take part in this Conference,

Therefore, I'll give up the presentation of the developments which led to our meeting. Those of you who are not familiar with the origin of the concept could find some interesting information in my speech delivered at the 5th European Conference of Frontier Regions held in Rovaniemi, Finland on June 18-21, 1991 and which dealt with "Transborder Co-operation Around the Baltic Sea", I shall just confine myself to saying that the idea to organize a Conference of Baltic Cities found its expression in the "Declaration of the City Council of Gdansk of intention of animation of the Baltic Cities Co-operation", the first resolution passed by the new, democratically elected authorities of the town on June 5, 1990. Point no. 24 of this document reads: establishment of permanent Conference of the Baltic Cities.

The Declaration of the Baltic Sea adopted by the Conference of Prime Ministers and high-ranking officials of the Baltic States, Norway and the Czech-and-Slovak Federal Republic in Ronneby, in September last year is another important document on this subject.

Point 15 of this very document encourages the Baltic nations to invigorate their co-operation and ease human contacts in pursuit of a more efficient policy in protecting the Baltic Sea environment. A fragment of such a policy would be materialized by a broad participation of regional and local state-owned and private institutions, industrial circles and outside- governmental organizations dealing with economy, trade, education, culture, transfer of information, etc.

The authorities of Gdansk have been given yet another incentive to undertake the idea of the Conference when the Polish Prime Minister in his speech at the Ronneby Conference stressed the special role that Baltic coastal cities could have in fostering better understanding and mutual knowledge. Our cities had, in the past, periods of successful co-operation in trade and transfer of knowledge and skills. The governments of the Baltic states should assist and encourage regional authorities, institutions and state-run and private companies to promote and tighten these contacts nowadays, the Polish Prime Minister said at the Ronneby Conference. The idea of a conference of Baltic Cities and communities, that has been under discussion for some time now, has also met with a warm support of the Polish Government which views it as a great opportunity to establish and tighten friendly personal contacts between members of the authorities of these cities.

Thus, on December 19, 1990 the City Council of Gdansk adopted a resolution committing the Board of the City to hold a Conference of Baltic Cities. Initially, the Conference was intended to be held on the exact anniversary of the Ronneby meeting but at the request of our colleagues from Sweden, it was finally scheduled for September 19-20 as not to coincide with parliamentary elections in that country.

Honourable Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is no doubt that in this specific geographical and political region, this form of co-operation is to be intensified to precede and stimulate the integration of particular countries as an important element of a general, predominant trend aimed at the creation in the future of a united democratic Europe.

Let me draw your attention to similar integration processes between other cities in Europe. The Fourth Eurocities Conference ended in Birmingham only a few days ago. A delegation of Gdansk took part in its Round Table discussion devoted to co-operation between the West and the East. Again our Conference coincides with the International Conference on Regional and Municipal Co-operation within the framework of the Helsinki Process which is being held in Prague.

Since they had committed themselves to organize a Conference of Baltic Cities, the authorities of Gdansk were making repeated attempts to set up a representative organizational committee of the Conference. The committee was finally made up of representatives of nine Baltic cities, one from each state of the Baltic region. The only sign that the initiative was born in Gdansk and all the pre-preparatory procedures were agreed upon in our town has been reflected in the composition of the Committee, as some of its members have close contacts with Gdansk thanks to the signing of the "Sister-Cities" agreements. Members of the Organizational Committee of the Conference are: Aarhus, Kalmar, Leningrad, and Turku, all of which have already established the sister-city ties with Gdansk, as well as Klaipeda, Lubeck, Riga and Tallinn. All together representatives from over 40 Baltic cities are taking part in this Conference.

Had the planned Conference turned out to be a one-meeting event only, it would still rank high and bear positive and far-reaching consequence for our urban communities. The question is, however, whether yet another step cannot be taken to further integrational processes in this part of Europe, by themselves quite inevitable to occur, anyway. It was among the representatives of some of the Baltic Cities that a conclusion has been reached that the time has come to take such a step. This gave rise to the idea to launch at the Baltic Cities Conference in Gdansk a new organization - the Union of Baltic Cities. This momentous decision has been long discussed during various meetings and it seems to offer a unique chance of successful materialisation of all these unprecedented processes which are taking place in Europe, and particularly in our part of the continent, just now. In such circumstances there can be but one response of the authorities of Gdansk, the town that saw the birth of “Solidarity”, the movement so momentous in reshaping this part of Europe. The authorities give their full support to the idea of the union in hope it will help overcome passivity of many coastal towns.

The draft of the Statute that you have in front of you was initially discussed during visits paid by the Mayor of Gdansk to some other Baltic towns earlier this year. We took into regard a number of corrections and supplements suggested during these meetings and having the approval of the very spirit of the draft Statute, we decided to send this version of this document to all the cities concerned and request them to submit their comments and suggestions. We hoped that such a procedure would rationalize our work during the Conference. I am happy to say that only several draft amendments have been filed so far which is a good omen for our further work on the Statute and its final approval.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My suggestion is that we continue our work in three following stages, i.e. that we:

1. discuss the already submitted amendments and supplements to the draft Statute,
2. present and discuss newly submitted corrections, if there are any,
3. discuss the future work of the Union ensuing from its Statute and make decisions to this effect.

NOTE 1

Although every participating delegation is welcome to table suggestions, corrections and supplements to the draft Statute, however I would rather suggest a far-reaching moderation in this respect. It is worth noticing that quite likely the draft Statute, whose common approval will provide a formal basis for the establishment of the Union of Baltic Cities, will need to be redrafted some time in the future as the Union gains practical experience in its work. Maybe the next Conference would be the best opportunity to carry out such a work. Therefore, I suggest that we restrict our comments to the most important issues. If it turns out that the number of suggested amendments and supplements is so big that it surpasses our abilities to review all of them during the current plenary session, I

think it would be useful to set up a Special Working Commission for the Statute whose job would be to collect all the proposals and prepare draft decisions by tomorrow morning.

NOTE II

We suggest adopting the following procedure for the establishment of the Union of Baltic Cities. In line with art. 3 of the draft Statute, the participating delegations of Baltic Cities get the status of the charter members of the Union. We are taking part in the founding meeting at delegates whose approval of the uniform version of the Statute means they agree to join the Union. Some of the delegations, however, may not be authorized to adopt an amended and supplemented text of the Statute. Then, the final decision concerning the Statute will be in the hands of municipal councils. Thus, if the delegations adopt the Statute today or tomorrow, the further procedure will involve the approval by individual municipal councils and then, in line with the Statute, the document will have to be signed by municipal authorities and sent to the Secretariat of the Union. I suggest allowing two months for the approval of the Statute by authorities of the charter member cities of the Union. After that period, the President of the Union will notify each of the associated cities that the Statute has been adopted by the members of the Union of Baltic Cities. In line with the existing legal regulations, this will provide formal grounds for the registration of the Union in the hometown of the Secretariat.

Ad. 1

The organizing team from Gdansk has received a number of suggestions concerning corrections and supplements to the submitted draft Statute of the Union of Baltic Cities and all of them are presented in the Annex.

Ad. 2

I suggest that after a correction or supplement has been tabled by a delegate during the discussion, it should also be presented in a written form along with reasons behind it, the delegate's name and the town he represents. Corrections and supplements would be passed or rejected by open ballot. My another suggestion is to first of all collect all the corrections and supplements and if it turns out that there are too many of them for us to discuss during the current plenary session, then, as I have already mentioned, the only way to solve the problem will be to set up a Special Working Commission for the Statute.

Ad.3

The presented version of the draft Statute makes it clear that needed are several decisions which would specify further work of the Union. I mean here art. 5 of the draft Statute which reads:

- it is necessary to start work on rules and procedures of a meeting of General Conference (art. 5, point 1),
- rules of funding the Union's activities (art. 5 points 3 and 4, art. 13),
- creation of the Union's programme (art. 5 point 5),
- appointment of permanent and ad-hoc Committees of the Union (art. 5 point 7)

If you, Ladies and Gentlemen, find it useful, the commissions could be formed from the already operating working teams for the ecological protection of the Baltic Sea and Baltic cities, transport and maritime economy, telecommunication, etc.

We should also decide about:

- the location of the Secretariat of the Union of the Baltic Cities
- the election of the President and two Vice-Presidents of the Union. We could hold the elections tomorrow, after the approval of the Statute (art. 5 point 2)
- the time and the venue of the next General Conference of Baltic Cities,
- other issues, including the establishment of the Baltic Cities Award

Ladies and Gentlemen

The Conference is attended by delegations from 45 cities. Whether the Union of Baltic Cities is set up, depends on us and the effectiveness of our work. So, let us start the discussion.

Resolution 1

The Union of the Baltic Cities resolves to establish the Baltic Cities Award to be granted for outstanding achievements in promoting regional co-operation around the Baltic Sea. The Award will be presented annually to private person or an organization by a Committee whose statute will be prepared under separate procedure.