

## WELCOME ADDRESS

Mr Tomasz Posadzki  
Mayor of the City of Gdansk

Ladies and gentlemen, honoured guests,

I would like to greet most sincerely all the participants of the 4th General Conference of the Union of Baltic Cities, held in the year in which we are celebrating the Millennium of Gdańsk. I regard the choice of our city as the venue for the conference as an honour and a great distinction. It is a recognition at the same time of the role played in the past by Gdansk in the Baltic region, and of the position the city occupies today. I do believe also that among the rich and varied programme of events and festivities celebrating the Millennium, today's conference is one of the most important, and that the final effects of these deliberations and panel discussions will be another step on the way to strengthening the ties of co-operation in Baltic Europe.

The idea of a Baltic Europe was born out of the conviction that this region, more than Mediterranean or Atlantic Europe, is spatially cohesive, since it is directly connected with the basin of the Baltic Sea, which is an internal lake for the nine countries lying along its shores.

Six years have passed from the moment when, in September 1991, the Union of Baltic Cities was called into being. We always remember with pride that one of the initiators of forming this organisation was the City of Gdańsk's authorities. The philosophy of cooperation was the brainchild of the initiators of the 1990 Heads of Government Conference in Ronneby, the Prime Ministers of Sweden and Poland, Mr G. Carlsson and Mr T. Mazowiecki - for which we owe them grateful thanks.

The way in which the Union of Baltic Cities has functioned in the last six years has confirmed that it is a precursor of actions and initiatives activating the processes of cooperation between the cities of Baltic Europe. It is this part of Europe which is currently entering a phase of intensively seeking the choice of the right road and the need to define its concept of the future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

After an absence of more than fifty years the region containing the Baltic Sea countries is striding decisively onto the European stage. The countries of the former Eastern bloc are taking sovereign decisions, the Scandinavian countries have joined the European Union, and Germany has a sense of mission in supporting the development of the area around the Baltic Sea. A radically new situation is being formed as a result of the undoubted influence of the following factors:

- global restructuring of the core of European development, based on giving up traditional branches of industry or limiting them;
- the creation of a new axis of economic growth around the area where Spain, France and Italy meet;

- the moving of the capital of Germany to Berlin;
- the start of the Central European initiative;
- the expansion of the European Union to include Finland and Sweden;
- the regaining of sovereignty by the Baltic states.

It should be noted with great satisfaction that the European Union is devoting more and more of its attention to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and is including the areas and the countries of the Baltic area and the countries on the Danube.

Undoubtedly the conferences of ministers of land economy in Karlskrona (1992), Tallinn (1994) and Stockholm (1996) were significant stages in the formation of principles upon which Baltic Europe is being built. Each of these conferences introduced a new quality in the processes of co-operation between the countries around the Baltic Sea. The acceptance at the Stockholm conference of 'From Vision to Action', a report highlighting concrete tasks, is worth emphasising. The consciousness that conflicts in the sphere of land economy are concentrated above all in the border areas of Baltic countries ensures the harmonisation of many steps in order to eliminate or significantly cut down the number of potential conflicts. In connection with this the European Commission proposed as a new instrument the communal initiative INTERREG II C. Thanks to this it is possible to finance the spatial planning of town development and the introduction of a spatial vision of the development of cross-border regions not having a direct land border.

I am firmly convinced that these new possibilities and opportunities will be taken advantage of by the Union of Baltic Cities for the common good of all our citizens.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Baltic Europe stands before a great challenge. The vision of a common Baltic policy, from the point of view of our cities, ought to be based on the general principle that our basic aims are co-operation and European integration. This will create the conditions for speedy economic development of the Baltic region, which will become in the future, as a result of this, a new axis of growth, a growth which will have a positive influence on the development of all the Baltic countries. I would like to express the hope that the discussions of the 4th General Conference of the Union of Baltic Cities will add much to this process and that the member-cities of the Union will participate actively in all activities furthering these aims.

I wish you fruitful discussions as well as pleasant memories of your stay in our city.