



## **Between the Baltic and the Black Sea**

### **The cities as engines of interregional cooperation**

One of the most promising development after 1989 political transformations in Europe was the reinvigoration of cooperation between the cities located on the Black and the Baltic Seas' coasts within the framework of emerging formulas of 'twin towns', 'sister cities', 'partnerships' and 'cooperation'. Nowadays, the cities from the Black Sea region (excluding Greece in the Mediterranean Sea area that is a part of the Black Sea initiatives) has the most comprehensive network of ties with the cities of the Baltic countries. However, when compared to the Baltic Sea, the level of regional cooperation amongst the Black Sea cities is well below its potential due to a high level of diversity of the region. In consequence, the Black Sea cities have not managed to establish the Union of Black Sea cities. Our project is the first ever initiative dedicated to the cooperation between the cities from both regions and also located on the land trade routes connecting them (seaports as gates to the land, Sea-Land-Sea approach).

Indeed, from the continental point of view, the distance between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea merely exceeds 1200 km. By comparison, the basins of rivers flowing to both seas create the largest common space in Europe and a comprehensive network of river routes on the North-South Axis. For centuries, the contacts between both seas were intensive and had an important contribution to the history of Europe. During the Migration Period the Goths moved from Scandinavia to the Crimea where they lived until the 17-th century. The Kievan Rus, the largest European state in that period was established as a "trade-company" based on the route going from the Middle East and Anatolia to Scandinavia along Dnieper and Western Dvina. In the late Middle Ages, The Polish-Lithuanian Union untied for almost 150 years both Seas. According to Fernand Braudel, a famous French historian, between 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century an important trade route was established between Gdansk and Istanbul through Lviv which he called a Polish corridor.

Trade was accompanied by the diffusion of culture and the migration of people. The living legacy of this phenomenon are, amongst other, Swedish villages in Ukrainian

provinces bordering the Black Sea and the Tatar community originating from the Crimea that inhabits Lithuania. The vision of alliance between the countries located on both seas emerged particularly in the Polish foreign policy since the 17<sup>th</sup> century until today (the Intermarium idea). Today, the cooperation between both Seas is evident in transport projects covering railways (Viking) or express routes (Via Carpathia), development of energy infrastructure (interconnectors, LNG, Odessa-Brody-Gdansk), projects of river channel uniting Oder, Danube and Laba. These growing links between the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea have been also reflected in a domain of ‘great politics’, in political ideas and concepts of the eastern flank of the NATO, the summits of Central European leaders, the forum Adriatic, Black Sea and the Baltic Sea and the 16+1 initiative gathering China and the Central European countries.

The Baltic Sea cities succeeded in establishing one of the most developed regional cooperation in the world. Therefore, cooperation between the Black Sea cities and their Baltic partners creates a very timely “window of opportunity” for the Baltic cities to engage and to contribute towards enhancement of regional ties in the Black Sea region through the transfer of know-how and the best practices. It may also enhance the Black Sea region’s cooperation with the European Union on the local level. With an objective to facilitate and further encourage existing and new cooperation formats between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea on the municipality level, the city of Gdańsk and WiseEuropa, a Polish private think tank propose to establish a platform which will provide professional expertise and insights into a wide scope but precisely defined of phenomena and issues (i.e. culture, history, ecology, economy, energy, local administration, civic society) for the Baltic and Black sea cities. The platform will gather experts, municipal officials, NGO people and businessmen from both regions specializing in various fields and organize thematic seminars. The main outcome of these meetings will be analysis and ready-to-use expertise published regularly (in form of reports, case studies, guidebooks, feasibility studies etc). The seminars will be organized quarterly and the reports will be published with the same frequency. If agreed, the program will present regularly its achievements during the General Conference of the Union of the Baltic Cities.

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