

Expert opinion

Concerning the

Final Report of the UBC Task Force on Development of the Organization -
Conclusions and Proposals to the UBC Executive Board (25.2.2013)

*Dipl.-Pol. Tim-Åke Pentz
tim-ake.pentz@uni-rostock.de
Institute of Politics and Administrative Science
University of Rostock*

May 2013

I. Assignment and structure of the expert opinion

The Mayor's Office of the Hanseatic City of Rostock assigned the author to provide an expert opinion concerning the "*Final Report of the UBC Task Force on Development of the Organization - Conclusions and Proposals to the UBC Executive Board*" dated 25 February 2013 (further the *Final Report*). Other consulted documents:

- Minutes of the 66th Meeting of the Executive Board, Umeå, 8 March 2013
- UBC Draft Budget 2013
- UBC Statute
- UBC 2.0 - A Communication and Marketing Strategy for a Modern, Relevant and Trustworthy City Network in the Decade to Come
- Union of the Baltic Cities Strategy 2010-2015: Cities for a sustainable and prosperous Baltic Sea Region

This document follows the structure of the Final Report. Amendments and Recommendations with regard to its specific sections, "UBC Working Methods", "Recommendations for changes in UBC Statute", "Recommendations for changes in UBC Internal Regulation", are presented in part II of this document followed by concluding remarks in part III.

II. Amendments/Recommendations Final Report Sections 1-3

1. UBC Working Methods (pp. 7-14)

Topic	Amendments/Recommendations
Executive Board <ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Decision Making</i>- <i>Content of the meetings</i>- <i>Practical issues</i>- <i>Proposals</i>	<p>The task force's recommendations and proposals should be supported in general.</p> <p>However, all EB members should have the chance to give a feedback on the proposed agenda prepared by the President, General Secretary and Strategy Coordinator. Final agenda and proposals for decision-making should be distributed at least 8-10 working days in advance to guarantee proper consideration of the EB members.</p> <p>The time for meetings can be reduced to 2 days including travelling (lunch-to-lunch). For a concise EB meeting protocol HELCOM Working Groups protocols could be used as blueprint.</p> <p>If an information letter shall be distributed it should be guaranteed that its distribution follows max one week after the EB meeting.</p>
Presidium	The task force's recommendations and proposals should be supported.
General Secretariat	<p>The task force's recommendations and proposals should be supported.</p> <p>Even though it will be necessary to contract one UBC communications officer (language skills and skills for content management and website development are mandatory for this position) should be considered with regard to the UBC budget if further additional staff is necessary or if external services would be more cost efficient.</p>

Commissions	<p>The task force's recommendations and proposals should be supported.</p> <p>For reasons of organisational efficiency it is indeed highly recommended to reduce the number of commissions by clustering/merging issues. Recommended structure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Commission on Urban Planning, Environmental Protection and Resource Efficiency</i> - <i>Commission on Economic and Financial Affairs</i> (incl. Research, Investment, Tourism, Business Cooperation, Gender Equality) - <i>Commission on Urban Supply and Services</i> (including Water & Energy supply, Health Care, Culture, Transportation, Sport, Education)
General Conference	<p>The task force's recommendations and proposals should be supported.</p> <p>However, the creation of an additional conference (Urban Forum) in cooperation with other BSR Organisations could draw attention from the UBC GC as unique UBC event.</p> <p>There are basically two possibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Upgrade the GC as unique biennial UBC event b) Down size the GC to an add on event (back-to-back) taking place every two years during an annual Baltic Sea Region Urban Forum <p>With regard to the UBC budget and organisational efficiency it is recommended to favour possibility b).</p> <p>Further, it should be considered to expand the co-operation with UN HABITAT (attracting international guests/speakers and promoting the UBC as blueprint for other regions).</p>
Election procedures	<p>The task force's recommendations and proposals should be supported.</p>
Vision and objectives of the organization	<p>The task force's recommendations and proposals should be supported.</p>
UBC Communication	<p>The task force's recommendations and proposals should be supported.</p> <p>However, deviating from the common perception as stated in the <i>UBC Communication Strategy Fig. 11, p. 23</i>, tools and activities should be also used to strengthen UBC roots in local urban society and local media in addition to communication with UBC members and EU institutions.</p>

2. Recommendations for changes in UBC Statute

Topic	Amendments/Recommendations
Article 1.4.	New: <i>“Strive to achieve resource efficiency and optimal...”</i>
Article 3	Belarus: observer status
Article 5 (Point 2)	With regard to organisational efficiency and clear distribution of responsibilities a troika system should not be established. The President and Vice-President should be elected for a maximum of three consecutive periods to ensure a dynamic development of the UBC.
Article 9	New: <i>“The President of the Union is the external representative of the Union”</i>

3. Recommendations for changes in UBC Internal Regulation

Point 2.4.	New: <i>“The Executive Board may nominate an ad hoc UBC Commission after application from at least six Member Cities...”</i> With regard to the task forces suggestion to merge or reduce the number of Commissions a threshold of only three Member Cities to nominate an ad hoc UBC Commission is to low.
------------	--

III. Conclusion

Experiences from ongoing research and project work show that three main trends can be identified with regard to the development of Baltic Sea Region organisations:

- a) A trend to intensify cooperation between Baltic Sea Region organisations
- b) A trend for organisational/structural consolidation and improvement of internal communication and procedures
- c) A trend to improve external communication (marketing, public relations, public affairs) and application management for external funding.

The UBC in this regard is no exception. As in other BSR organisations, UBC activities are dependent on the time budget and financial support of its members. This demands for efficient and focused actions. Key factors for the development of the UBC are:

- The improvement of UBC internal and external communication including improved application management for external funding
- An efficient commission structure through clustering and developing interfaces between Committees and all other UBC bodies.
- A fair and politically sound distribution of tasks and responsibilities through elections and transparent decision-making processes

The task force’s Final Report addresses all these aspects in a concise way. Taking the indicated amendments into consideration it should be supported in general.