

## CONFERENCE STATEMENTS

Commissioner Monika Wulf-Mathies

European Commission, responsible for Regional Affairs

### THE ROLE OF THE CITIES IN A BALTIC SEA POLICY

Union of the Baltic Cities

The Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) was founded in Gdansk in September 1991. The purpose of the organization is to support the development in the region through an active cooperation between the cities around the Baltic Sea. 58 member cities of the UBC present hereby, at its third General Conference 8-9 December 1995 in Aarhus, Denmark, the following statement concerning the Union's Baltic Sea policy.

The Baltic Sea Region - a part of the new Europe

UBC emphasizes that the Baltic Sea Region is an integral part of the new Europe.

Geographically, the centre of Europe is located 25 km north of Vilnius, Lithuania.

Consequently, the UBC regards a complete policy for the Baltic Sea area as very important; a policy to promote the aspects of security policy, the democratic, economic, social and ecological development and the conditions of the law-governed community in the region.

The development in Eastern- and Central Europe after the disappearance of the Soviet regime and the fact that Sweden and Finland now are members in the EU have dramatically changed the conditions in the Baltic Sea area. Today, the Baltic Sea practically is an inland-sea in the EU. The region is surrounded by ten states, four of them members of the EU - Denmark, Finland, Germany and Sweden. Furthermore, Norway is involved in the process through the EEA. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland are associated through Europe Agreements and Russia is associated through a Partnership Agreement. A total of about 50 million people live around the Baltic Sea, half of them inhabitants in the union. The economic and social differences between the eastern and western parts are enormous. However the recovery, especially in Poland, and in the other Baltic States is taking place at a fast rate.

UBC therefore regards the European Commission's proposal for a Baltic Sea policy as entirely positive. Future efforts should, however, be coordinated in a better way than previously done. The programmes applicable today are often characterized by too many regulatory details, narrow demarcations, lack of coordination and flexibility. It is also very difficult for one city alone to get a general view of the different possibilities at hand. This fact alone and all those discussed earlier might lead to the cities not taking advantage of these possibilities. The demand for common goals, larger economic resources, lucidity and coordination is therefore obvious.

A future policy of the European Union should be based on the competence of the cities. Experiences from present cooperation show that concrete projects between cities have been the most cost-efficient and goal-oriented. The primary reason for this is the natural personal commitment in implementing the projects. The parties concerned, on all levels respectively, have together accomplished the projects themselves. All UBC members share the same experience. There are tremendous activity in all cities to promote the development around the Baltic Sea. The cooperation has also resulted in extensive personal contacts and a better mutual understanding and knowledge of different cultures. It is in everyday cooperation between people on this level that the most effective and thorough work can be carried out. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that the future Baltic Sea policy is formulated to stimulate and facilitate cooperation on a local level.

UBC therefore suggests that local and regional authorities, to a larger extent, may propose projects, apply for project grants and administrate these projects. This should also apply to cooperating networks like and similar to UBC. In this context, UBC would like to stress the necessity of long-term arrangements and continuity. Current projects should, when possible, extend over longer periods of time.

UBC furthermore supports the European Commission's proposal to pay more attention to the cities. It is important that this does not only refer to the larger but also to the small and medium sized cities, which play a significant role in the economic and social development in the Baltic Sea region.

Anders Engstrom  
President

9 December, 1995

## The UBC Statement on Local Self-Government

Union of the Baltic Cities was established in September 1991. The overriding aim of the organization is to contribute to the democratic and economic development of the Baltic Sea Region as a European Region. The UBC today consists of 58 member cities from 10 countries.

At the third General Conference, 8-9 December 1995 in Aarhus, Denmark, the UBC has approved the following statement which the states ought to take into consideration in matters concerning local governments:

- the autonomy of the local authorities is a corner-stone for democracy and is deeply rooted in the consciousness of the public,
- Local Government is an important part of public decision making where citizens can act as voters, politicians, opinion builders or users,
- Local Government gives the citizens opportunities for democratic schooling and training through handling important tasks in our societies,
- decisions should always be made on the lowest efficient level to make them fit to local demands and prerequisites,
- activities of local authorities should be primarily financed at a local level and it is important that new responsibilities are not imposed by the states unless financing is previously secured,
- initiatives must be taken in facilitating participation of municipalities in international cooperation.

UNION OF THE BALTIC CITIES

Anders Engstrom

President