

UBC Executive Board meeting, Kiel, 20 June 2013

Input from Helle Bechgaard, Vice Chairman, BDF, ca. 09:30-09:50

Introduction to BDF

BDF is the leading high level network and agenda-setting organization in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). A platform for public-private dialogue, gathering business, governments, academics etc. to discuss and cooperate on issues of regional importance. We have members from large companies, major cities, institutional investors and business associations. Our mission is to promote the Baltic Sea Region as an integrated and competitive region.

The main activity of BDF is to organise an annual Summit. At last year's Summit in Copenhagen we saw several heads of government, two EU Commissioners and 800 participants. Last month we organised the 15th BDF Summit - in Riga, Latvia - including three Prime Ministers, a President and 700 participants. We also currently set up conferences, seminars and round tables, to discuss the development of the region.

BDF is also a think-tank. On an annual basis we publish reports with trend analysis of the economic development of the BSR (State of the Region Report) and the political development (Political State of the Region Report). We also spread the good stories about the region via our new website "newsWave" (www.newswave.eu)

BDF also takes the role as project facilitator within thematic topics of strategic importance for market opportunities and political goals for the region. The Digital Single Market, Energy efficiency, Green Growth and Investment Promotion are among topics we have taken up.

Optimism in the Baltic Sea Region

The Riga Summit had focus on competitiveness, investments and business development. The region is doing well. We are "the Top of Europe", not only in geographical but also economic sense. Especially the three Baltic States and Poland have been able to cope with the crisis by carrying out tough reforms and cleverly manage public finances. Trade intensity is high and new regional value chains are developing, bringing new opportunities to the BSR and inspiration to the rest of Europe. The Summit also confirmed that we are all depending on each other. By raising the competitiveness of our neighbors we improve our own competitiveness.

The EU Strategy for the BSR is an important step forward. BDF is working close together with the European Commission in the implementation of the Strategy, and we have taken special responsibility for actions within regional branding and identity.

But there is no guarantee that the Strategy will succeed. First of all we need to engage the business sector. The enterprises generate growth and they don't care about strategies, structures and bureaucracy. Also no extra money is set aside for the Strategy, therefore we are very depending on informal cooperations to succeed. Our tradition and ability to cooperate among stakeholders is a crucial strength of this region.

BDF and UBC

Therefore we are very glad for our cooperation with UBC, which has developed positively through many years. It is important that these two large organisations work together in promoting the BSR and exploiting new topics and win-win's in the public-private dialogue.

A good example is the concept of "Smart Cities". UBC Environment Committee and BDF has together developed a project application for a "Baltic Urban Forum for Smart Cities". The aim is to establish a network for medium sized towns and cities to facilitate dialogue, experience sharing, learning and joint action on green technologies and innovations in urban areas. I can see that the project will be presented later at this meeting.

We think the Smart Cities project is a win-win. BDF will involve our private partners as they provide technology and solutions to many urban challenges. Turku and Tartu are already deeply involved, Riga is interested and we welcome other UBC members with strong competences and experiences. Malmö is a good example and - like Turku - a member of both UBC and BDF. Last week the application was granted and we hope to be able to present the initiative at the UBC General Conference in Mariehamn in October, where we are looking forward to meet many of you.

We also have good connections to the UBC Business Committee. Last year the Business Committee was our partner in the so-called Baltic Business Arena, a matchmaking event for SME's organised as part of the BDF Summit. And we are planning a next meeting with the Business Committee in Copenhagen this September.

Finally, a few words about the next BDF Summit in June 2014. We have the pleasure to organise it in Turku, together with the City of Turku and the Finnish Government. It is going to be a huge event, co-located with the European Commission's Annual Forum for the EU Strategy and the Ministerial meeting under Finnish CBSS

presidency. The key topic of the Summit will be: Russia. The next important step for this region is to further develop our cooperation with Russia – in business as well as politics. City of Turku has taken interesting steps in this direction, and Kaliningrad and St Petersburg are among UBC member cities. In BDF we are looking forward to discuss these opportunities with you in Turku. Until then we will enjoy to deepen our relations with you in our good current dialogue.