

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNION OF THE BALTIC CITIES

Dear friends and colleagues from the Baltic Cities

First I would like to take the opportunity to thank you all for the honour and confidence you have shown me by electing me as your president for the next two years.

The last years have seen dramatic changes in our part of the world, the Baltic Sea region. Three states have been recreated, new ways of contacts are possible. The Baltic Region is now in a completely new situation.

The Baltic region has now the possibility to take its place in a new developing Europe, with its long tradition of city co-operation, its plentiful of universities, with the will and the strength to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

The only way to meet the global competition of tomorrow will be to form this region of ours.

I am convinced that this is the best way to start, to build up a network of cities, to start from a firm ground. The nations can support the idea of international co-operation and open up barriers, support projects financially etc, but the actual work must be done by cities and its individuals and firms.

We are not talking about a new way of super-coordination of our cities from above, we are talking about opening up barriers, shaping networks, getting cities and people closer to each other and out of all this we think that trade, tourism and cultural contacts will flourish.

The cities of the Baltic Sea will have so much in common, the long history and a prosperous future, if we can manage to solve some of our present problems. The Baltic itself must be saved, we must find efficient ways to transport goods and people, we must be able to communicate.

These matters have been discussed in the parallel seminars and we all agree on the following statements:

Firstly, saving the Baltic Sea starts in our cities and is by far the most important issue. Secondly, transport of goods and people must be given extra emphasis over the next years, new flights and ferries over the Baltic are needed as well as new roads and railways to connect the ports and their hinterlands. Thirdly, telecommunications have to be improved because it is the most important and efficient means to get in touch over distances, a common telecommunications network must be build which will give the base for further contacts, to foster trade as well as contacts between citizens.

But there are some other important questions and tasks for the Union.

We have to pay attention to the great importance and rapid development of science in a number of fields like technique, medicine and social sciences. Co-operation among our universities and colleges will certainly give a strong contribution in developing our region.

Young people are our future. We have to stimulate an increased exchange of contacts between the youth in our cities. For the culture we have to make a wide understanding of our different historical backgrounds, religions and cultural traditions so that this knowledge will deepen our understanding about each other and thereby will diminish the risk for future conflicts in our region.

An increased exchange of cultural ideas may enhance the interest to keep our distinctive characters and at the same time stimulate new cross-cultural developments.

New ways of tourism may give rise to an increase in employment in many sectors and also contribute to the feeling of one Baltic region. It is most interesting of course to look at the Baltic as one tourist region and a very attractive one I think. People from other parts of Europe as well as other parts of the world will find in this area lots of stimulating experiences and adventures.

Exchange of ideas within our own sector, the work of cities, would also be of great interest. This can be stimulated in a lot of ways, study visits, courses or specific projects in fields like the protection of the planning and so on.

Ladies and Gentlemen

There are of course, even more questions which will in the future have their place on the agenda of the Union of the Baltic Cities or will be treated in contacts between our cities. There will certainly be no lack of matters to be discussed. I think, though, that it is important to concentrate our efforts to a few, special issues. In these fields, certain projects will be launched by the Union, other will be worked on by individual cities or groups of cities. All these projects should not be decided upon by the Union. I hope, however, that all projects will be reported to the Secretariat of the Union so that information can be spread to all members.

In accordance with what we have discussed earlier here in Gdańsk, we will at the next conference adapt a program for the Union. It will take some years till we have found the proper ways of working. My first task will be to try to make concrete proposals for priority areas, projects and working procedures.

I will, firstly, through contacts all members of the Union collect ideas and suggestions for the future work. I will, secondly, try to survey which other actors are working with our questions concerning the Baltic. It will be most important to make contacts with different national and international institutions where we can get support for our work. I am also convinced that we will have good relations to the New Hansa led by Lubeck.

Dear colleagues, it is my hope that the step we have taken here in Gdańsk will be followed by further steps in our Union. Next time we meet I hope that we all have agreed on the statutes which we have discussed here. I also hope that we can form a number of projects which will give us program to handle for the further development of our

region. I am also convinced that the step we have taken here will be fully supported by our governments and that they will look upon this Union with full understanding of its goals and aims.

Finally I want to thank the City of Gdańsk for acting as a host for this conference. We know that there has been a lot of effort put into this conference, before and during these days and I think this has been done with great excellence. Especially I would like to thank Mr. Starościak - a great enthusiast - who has worked hard to make this conference possible - it is in many ways his conference. I also want to thank all persons who have contributed to make this conference a success.

I hereby declare this first and historical conference of the Union of the Baltic Cities to have come to an end. I wish you all welcome to our next year's conference in Kalmar.