

Dear friends, Member Cities of the Union, and partners,

Today, I stand before you as the President of the Union of Baltic Cities, and I feel a deep sense of responsibility to address **several crucial matters that affect our region**, our solidarity, and our shared vision for the future.

“Changing Europe”

- First and foremost, we cannot discuss the state of our region without acknowledging the ongoing war in **Ukraine**. This devastating war has cast a long shadow over our continent and reminds us of the importance of peace and cooperation. It is our duty, as representatives of cities united by a common purpose, to express our support for Ukraine.
- In May 2022, the UBC General Conference affirmed the decision of the UBC Executive Board to terminate membership and positions for the Russian cities within the UBC structures. At the same time, Vilnyansk became the first Ukrainian city to join the UBC, leading the way for other Ukrainian cities such as Kherson, Kramatorsk, Pokrovsk, Vyshhorod, and Zaporizhzhia to follow.
- We stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian people, and we call for a independence and sovereignty of Ukraine and its people. Let us work together to support those Ukrainians in need and advocate for long-lasting democracy in Ukraine and of course European membership in the EU for Ukraine!

European solidarity is the cornerstone of our Union. In these uncertain times, the very idea of European solidarity is being tested. It is essential that we reinforce our commitment to this principle. We are stronger when we work together as a united front, especially in the face of challenges like climate change, economic transformation, and security concerns. As cities in the Baltic region, we share a common destiny. Let us continue to strengthen our bonds, fostering unity and cooperation that connects national borders though cities, on local level where real life happens!

Cooperation between our cities is at the heart of our mission. We are a diverse group of urban centers with unique identities and challenges. However, our shared goals and aspirations provide the foundation upon which we can build a brighter future together. The Union of Baltic Cities in more than 30 years offers a platform for the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and experiences. Let us use these opportunities and grow it!

Development is a driving force for our cities and the entire Baltic region. We must be proactive in ensuring that our cities are well-equipped for the challenges of the future. By investing in infrastructure, technology, innovation, education, young people and substantiality initiatives we can create thriving cities which inspires our people, communities and the rest of Europe!

“Changing UBC – from friends and partners to advocacy platform”

In these challenging times, I also here today to discuss the evolving role of the Union of Baltic Cities, our **transformation from network of friends into a more influential**

advocacy platform.

For decades, the Union of Baltic Cities has been a platform where friends and organizations have come together, fostering collaboration, exchange of ideas, and the strengthening of bonds among cities in the Baltic region. The relationships we have built, the knowledge we have shared, and the projects we have undertaken have all very valuable. They have laid the foundation for future that demands that we **transform** ourselves into a platform that advocates for the shared interests and values of our member cities.

To effectively serve as an **advocacy platform**, we must collectively **define our common goals** and interests, as outlined in our new strategic plan and policy positions. With a unique perspective on Baltic region issues, we must draw attention to matters such as environmental sustainability, security, and social inclusion, influencing regional and European policies through a unified voice. Leveraging our extensive network and partnerships, we'll broaden our outreach and collaborate with like-minded organizations. Investing in capacity building, training, and resources for member cities is a priority to empower effective advocacy. Lastly, we emphasize transparent and inclusive public engagement to keep our citizens informed and engaged, solidifying our role as a respected advocacy platform.

Since its foundation in **Gdansk in 1991**, Union of Baltic Cities stands for peaceful collaboration and shared purpose. As we navigate these challenging times, we must keep in mind the importance of our support for Ukraine, the strength of European solidarity, the opportunities presented by cooperation between our cities, and the imperative of continued development.

We have the potential to shape the future of our region and make it a model of unity and progress. Together, we can achieve great things, and together, we will work towards a brighter future for our cities and the Baltic region.

Thank you for your commitment to our shared vision, and let us continue to strive for a better future together.