

XVIII UBC General Conference

Opening Plenary Session

Thank you for the kind invitation to attend the XVIII UBC General Conference.

Dear Excellencies, ladies, and gentlemen – let me share two points with you this afternoon in line with the conference's focus on reinforcing UBC Member Cities' role in EU policymaking and participation in EU Funded Projects:

First, and as you well know, the Baltic Sea Region is presently a chessboard for hybrid operations. Over the past year, there have been multiple incidents across the BSR, including the jamming of satellite signals, the cutting of undersea cables, the disruption of air traffic using drones, arson attacks, and airspace incursions.

The shifting nature of these incidents changes the geopolitical context in the BSR, requiring innovative efforts at all levels of governance, ranging from the EU to the local level, which will often be among the first responders.

In this vein, the CBSS, which itself is undergoing a reform process to meet the changed geopolitical environment, appreciates the existing working relationship with UBC – such as the on-going collaboration with the Safe Cities Commission.

Second, certain trends such as increased connectivity will likely require particular attention at the local level to sustain societal benefits and resilience.

An example is the on-going trend towards the Internet of Things. As of 2025, there are approximately 19.8 billion devices connected to the Internet. Roughly another ten billion devices will be added by 2027 (Statista). This growing interconnectivity fuels the evolution towards smart cities, smart transport, the smart grid, smart homes, and increasingly cashless societies. While this evolution is expected to produce many societal benefits, it will also introduce new vulnerabilities and threats. For cities, this calls for sustained efforts vis-à-vis innovative policymaking and projects to ensure a certain degree of societal resilience.

Thank you for your attention and I take the opportunity to wish you fruitful and productive discussions during the conference.