

Speech 1

Opening Plenary Session, Mantas Jurgutis, President of the Union of the Baltic Cities

“Cities at the Centre of Europe’s Future”

Distinguished guests, city leaders, partners, my dear Presidium Team, ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the **XVIII UBC General Conference** here in hospitable Słupsk and UBC partner Dolina Charlotty. I’m truly honoured to stand before you today as President of the Union of the Baltic Cities.

Before we begin – let me share a personal story. In 2019 in Kaunas, Lithuania – I was first time elected as UBC President and our former President Per Atkinson handed to me something very special – not a document, not a plane and not a even suit – but a symbolic tie. “You’ll need it,” he said. That tie wasn’t just a gesture to me – it was a symbol and a message. A message that leadership in our Union of Baltic cities is personal, rare political, and always collective values realization. It was a message that later on acting all together with all of You and my leadership Presidium team we have proved – UBC is more than just an international organisation – it’s a partnership for already more than 30 years. I am sure that day Per didn’t know what is about to come in the world, but he I am also sure that he knew UBC will go far whatever happens.

Today, we gather here not only as colleagues, but more as partners in a very challenging times of world’s history. Europe is facing a new wave of uncertainty – from the war in Ukraine to climate breakdown, from social divides to the shrinking financial space. But ladies and gentlemen, as Aristotle once said: “The city is a partnership in living well.” And here, in UBC and this General Conference we surely demonstrate this in action, in the reality.

Even though the European Union is created and lead by the Member States – it’s in the cities where the people actually live, dream, and build their futures. It’s in the cities where all **final** things happen. I am sure, that there is no question to all of us that only strong cities, strong UBC is a guarantee for European Union to be understood and supported by our people and our communities.

This is precisely why the UBC exists. To amplify city voices, scale good ideas, and shape the future of our region – one Europe. From Turku to Gdańsk, from Riga to Kristiansand, from Bergen to Hamburg – more than 70 cities, we bring together people who believe that cities are not just implementers of policies, but the co-authors of concrete solutions which are so much needed for national government, and management of the European Union.

We are here this week to listen to each other, to speak up – and to lead. The new EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) is much more than a budget, it’s a political roadmap. And our cities are ready to walk that road together – as equals, as partners for living safe and well.

I am very satisfied that here in this General Conference, this week, we will present our common UBC Policy Position on the MFF 2028–2035. I am sure it will bring us to stronger action plan with Euro Cities, Energy cities, EU Commission and other stakeholders. Our main directions mentioned in that document are calling for:

- Direct access to EU funds for cities
- Less bureaucracy
- Stronger partnerships between EU institutions and city networks
- Support for Ukrainian cities on their EU path
- Recognition of the Baltic Region as a driver of innovation and cooperation

So UBC Cities in solidarity with Euro Cities say it clearly: cities need to be **at the table**, not just on the menu.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to our host city, Słupsk, and to Mayor Krystyna Danilecka–Wojewódzka for their commitment and gracious hospitality. My thanking words also go to our UBC Secretariat and, in particular, to those member cities that continue to lead by example. I am also very thankful to my Presidium team – Elina, Malin and Piotr – the best international crew I have ever worked with. So ladies and gentlemen, from now on we start this – moment of responsibility – and equally, a moment of opportunities realisation. And so we begin roadmap – as one region, with one voice, and with one remarkable network of cities. Let us roll up our sleeves, learn from one another, and turn this gathering into concrete progress we all want in our Union, European Union.

After all, this is the essence of the UBC: working together, learning together, and moving forward together. Let us approach these days in Słupsk in that same spirit – and enjoy this time as a one UBC family.

Thank You and let's enjoy the Union of us!

Mantas