



Armas Lahoniitty is the Mayor of Turku and the 1st Vice-President of UBC.

Union of the Baltic Cities – sustainable development and supervision of interests

The Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) promotes sustainable development of the environment, community and economy in the Baltic Sea region as part of the Baltic 21 programme. In addition to sustainable development, UBC takes care of the supervision of interests of its member cities.

"Immediately after the collapse of the iron curtain, the initial objective of the organisation was to build a bridge across the Baltic Sea in all directions and, on the other hand, to influence the government decisions that affect the towns on the Baltic Rim. The supervision of interests has also been directed at the decision-making concerning the European Union's local issues and local systems, and UBC has a permanent role of an expert in regional committee work. Furthermore, UBC has aimed to create natural co-operation and interaction with different Baltic Sea organisations for the forming and strengthening of the connections,

implementation of projects and supervision of interests", says **Armas Lahoniitty**, Mayor of Turku and the 1st Vice-President of UBC.

Founded in 1991, the organisation has more than 100 member cities that range from capitals to small towns from ten different countries: Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Germany, Finland, Denmark, Russia and Estonia. The Finnish cities in the organisation are Turku, Helsinki, Espoo, Lahti, Kotka, Kemi, Mariehamn, Tampere, Vaasa and Pori. The work of the organisation takes place in ten commissions formed by the representatives of different

countries. Each commission has its own area of specialisation.

Mr Lahoniitty says that the co-operation between traders and entrepreneurs from different countries has multiplied during UBC's existence. "The development gap between the cities of the east and west has become much narrower. The development has been favourable, and UBC has aimed to support it. At the beginning of May 2004, the Baltic Sea became the EU's inland sea, when Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland joined the EU, which also speeds up the development. In the future, we still need to deal with the gap in the standard of living."



Operations of the Environment Secretariat bring know-how capital to Turku

One of the founding cities of UBC is Turku, the location of UBC's international Environment Secretariat. The Secretariat makes important network efforts for sustainable development in the form of, for example, port projects. Hosting the Environment Secretariat combines the city's international objectives with those of sustainable development. The operation of the Secretariat has significantly affected UBC's evolution into an active and appreciated actor in the Baltic Sea region. At the same time, the work and location of the Secretariat have made Turku known as an active and concrete actor in the Baltic Sea region. Consequently, the Secretariat's work has supported the Turku Strategy and the city's internationalisation strategy.

"Environmental projects are among UBC's key tasks. It is environmental activities where UBC has proceeded most of all and realised different concepts quite successfully", Mr Lahoniitty commends. The projects have also born fruit: UBC has been involved in studying the environmental impacts of traffic in different countries, building waste water purification plants and waste water programmes, as well as planning and creating environmental norms and practices for ports.

In addition to operating in the Baltic Sea region, UBC is an expert invited by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency SIDA to act as a responsible organisation in the Lake Victoria

Region Local Authorities Co-operation (LVRLAC) which is co-ordinated by the Environment Secretariat in Turku. "In this project we can utilise the know-how gathered in UBC operations, as well as increasing our international know-how capital that we have attracted to Turku through the UBC system. We could utilise this intellectual capital, because we hope that Turku could act as the headquarters or node in other similar projects, too. We also want to act as the builder and engine of co-operation in the Baltic Sea region and even elsewhere", Mr Lahoniitty assures.

Mr Lahoniitty believes that the task of supervision of interests may be further strengthened in the future, and he says that there have to be clear guidelines for that. "One important thing is that the union has not been divided into two different organisations according to the size of the cities; both large and small towns are in it together. This policy should definitely be continued in the future, too."

General Conference will focus on Baltic Sea logistics networks

Co-operation between ports, and especially the motorways of the seas to Germany, southern parts of the Baltic Sea and Stockholm are important to the City of Turku. In 2005, the City will investigate opportunities for co-operation with Riga and Kaliningrad. UBC is a central organisation in co-operation also with these cities in e.g. environmental projects.

UBC's next General Conference will be arranged in Turku from 29 September – 2 October 2005. The special theme of the General Conference will be Baltic Sea logistics

networks and the motorways of the seas as part thereof. These issues are being prepared by the Logistics Task Force. Meetings for experts in the fields of transport, environment, safety and telematics will be arranged in the Baltic Sea region during the spring. The topic of the meetings will be brought up in the three workshops arranged in connection with the General Conference.

"The Baltic Sea logistics networks are a current subject, as they are obviously linked to the EU's plans, decisions and development objectives. We have co-operated closely with Brussels and the Finnish Ministry of Transport and Communications, and different port towns", Mr Lahoniitty explains.

Another important issue under preparation in which Turku is involved is the future of UBC. "We are pondering how the operations of the organisation should be directed in order to strengthen its impact and importance as the co-operative organisation and supervisor of interests of the member countries in the coming years. The future of UBC is worth investing in, because it is a channel through which the parties can act towards both individual countries and the European Union."

Extremely important issues for the City of Turku in the future include continuous maintenance and strengthening of connections, which can extend the basis for business operations. Mr Lahoniitty hopes that after he has left the post of the Vice-President, Turku will retain a strong and active position in UBC.

Further information: www.ubc.net