

XIV UBC General Conference
Växjö, Sweden, 24-27.10.2017

*Karl-Heinz Lambertz,
President of the Committee of the Regions
UBC 25th Anniversary Session*

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for having invited me to the General Conference of the Union of Baltic Cities (UBC) here in Växjö. It is an honour for the European Committee of the Regions and for me to participate in this debate. It is also a pleasure to see so many colleagues and friends here in **Växjö, "the greenest city of Europe"**.

I would like to start by congratulating you for your achievements. For over 25 years, the Union of Baltic Cities has successfully served **as joint platform for local authorities** for exchange of experiences and for promotion of sustainable growth and interests of the cities and the region.

I do believe that the activities undertaken by the Union of Baltic Cities greatly **contribute to the economic, social and cultural development of the whole Baltic Sea Region**. The UBC General Conference and its 25th Anniversary is therefore **the proof that macro-regional strategies are the result of a bottom-up process** beginning with the cooperation between cities and regions. That is why today is an excellent opportunity to look back on the past and discuss **the next steps in implementing the Baltic Sea Region strategy**. This is for the benefit of the Baltic Sea Region as much as for other macro-regional strategies.

Here, I would like to refer to **my Statement on the State of the Regions**, the first address on the State of the Union as seen from the perspective of the cities and regions of Europe.

Some of you were following my statement at the CoR Plenary on 10 October. **President of the European Council, Mr Tusk**, was also attending and it is worthy to mention especially here, that President Tusk is **proud to be a native of** a Baltic city, the city of **Gdansk**.

As I said in the Statement, our approach is simple: **we must see Europe from the local perspective and build it from the bottom up, with the involvement of European citizens.**

Europe currently faces many challenges that transcend national or regional boundaries and that require a more holistic, inter-regional and cross-border approach. **This is the essence of macro-regions**, and I believe that the example of the EU Strategy for Baltic Sea Region is very inspiring.

I would like to insist very much on **the involvement of citizens.**

It is mentioned by many local/regional actors as really important as well as the involvement of civil society, of business associations and other organised interests groups.

My answer would be following: **we must engage citizens in the European project and bridge the gap between EU and local policy-making.** We must engage **young people** - and that is exactly what you are doing at the UBC while organising a special session and listening to the youth participants. I believe that given the current situation in the EU there is a need to communicate the added value of EU action. **Macro regional strategies are making European policy goals more visible and understandable to citizens on the ground.** They thus offer a response to current political developments in Europe.

The Baltic Sea Region is one of the most dynamic, innovative and competitive growth regions not only in Europe but in the world. **The Union of Baltic Cities and its member cities can be proud about this.** I hope the CoR will remain a true partner for you.

Thank you for your attention!