



UBC e-News

Number 42

06.08.2010

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Info

- **UBC Executive Board Meeting and the Annual Forum on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region on 13-15 October in Tallinn**

As decided in Trelleborg, the next meeting of the Executive Board will be held in Tallinn on 13-14 October 2010, in connection with the 1st Annual Forum on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region to be held on 14-15 October 2010 in Tallinn. The 2nd part of the Board meeting (morning 14 October) will be open to all member cities. Member cities can also participate in the EU Forum on 14-15 October.

In order to register to the EU Forum please visit the site:

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/baltic/events_en.htm

Paweł Żaboklicki
UBC Secretary General

- **58th UBC Executive Board meeting, Trelleborg, 4 June 2010**

The last, 58th UBC Executive Board meeting was held in Trelleborg on 4 June, upon the invitation of Mr Ulf Bingsgård, Mayor of Trelleborg.

UBC Commissions on Business Cooperation, Education, Energy, Environment made presentations of their activity and answered questions of the Board members.

The other topics presented and discussed at the meeting:

- application of the city of Elbląg to take the lead in the Commission on Social and Health Affairs

- proposal to establish the UBC Task Force on local safety & public order

- actual information on 4 flagship projects selected by UBC

- proposal of the UBC Commissions on Culture, Energy, Environment, Information Society to make video-conferences

- creation of the Conference of European Cross-Border and Interregional City Networks, where UBC is a member

Ms Catharina Sørensen representing the DG Regio, European Commission, made a presentation on the EU Strategy for the BSR and its latest developments.

The Board appointed Mr Mikko Lohikoski, city of Turku, as the Co-ordinator of the UBC Strategy 2010-15. He also made proposals on implementation of the Strategy.

The Board decided to sign the agreement between UBC and the Covenant of Mayors initiative, launched by the European Commission in order to involve local authorities and citizens in the development and implementation of the European Union energy policy.

Another decision of the Board was to give the UBC honorary patronage to the International Folklore Festival "Days of Kashubian

Culture", which will be held in the Pomeranian Region, Poland.

Minutes from the meeting are available at: http://www.ubc.net/events_calendar,74,771.html



- **CECICN**

Conference of European Cross-Border and Interregional City Networks (CECICN) had been established on 23 April 2010 in Santiago de Compostela.

CECICN was established by six organisations: Iberian Network of Cross-border Entities (RIET), Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities, MedCities, Mission Operationelle Transfrontaliere, Union of the Baltic Cities, Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities (C.A.A.C.).

The main aim of the new network is to get prepared for the period 2014+ in the EU and to provide cities, border-regions and interregional territories

- with a stronger voice and higher visibility in the context of the cohesion policies at an European scale
- to stimulate cross-border and interregional cooperation
- to foster the consolidation process of the EU

The Conference has one President and five Vice-Presidents (one from each organisation). Mr Xosé A. Sánchez Bugallo, Mayor of Santiago de Compostela is elected as the first President of the network, for a two year mandate, renewable.

The General Secretary will be linked to each Presidency. For the first period Ms Belén Mendoza was appointed.



From UBC Commissions

- **Annual Meeting of the UBC Commission on Culture**

I would like to invite you to the Annual Meeting of the UBC Commission on Culture in Umeå on 21-24 October 2010.

The theme of the meeting will be "The role of culture in city planning".

In the programme there will be among others, the guided tours in Umeå Institute of Design, Umeå School of Architecture, County Museum of Västerbotten and Bildmuseet, Umeå University's Museum.

Please find here:

http://www.ubc.net/events_calendar,74,754.html the programme with the registration form.

Tarja Hautamäki
Chairperson of the Commission
tarja.hautamaki@vaasa.fi

- **Annual meeting of the UBC Commission on Gender Equality**

Welcome to our annual meeting of the Commission on Gender Equality. We are glad to welcome you to our annual meeting in the beautiful city of Panevėžys. We will be taking part of interesting work, study visits, Gender Institute, exchanging good ideas between cities and more.

Gender equality issues are becoming more and more important within the European union, and we see many positive outcomes from our cities after working with these important questions. Working towards a gender equal city is a major part of possibility for cities and their future prosperity and social sustainability around the Baltic Sea Region.

The date for the meeting of the Commission on Gender Equality is 7-8/10, arriving in Panevėžys on Wednesday afternoon/evening of the 6/10.

We hope many representatives will be able to join us for this meeting. Amongst others, we will combine meeting in Panevėžys with study visit to EU Commission's newly opened Gender Institute in Vilnius (8/10).

Preliminary program:

6/10 Arrival in Panevėžys, get-together dinner
7-8/10 Commission meeting and study visit
Panevėžys

8/10 Transport to Vilnius at lunch-time, study visit at Gender Institute afternoon.

(Possible to travel home on Friday evening from Vilnius if this is more suitable.)

9/10 Optional tour of city of Vilnius before departure

So book the meeting dates already now, ensuring the opportunity for you to participate.

Please let us know as soon as possible your confirmation for this meeting.

All details with program and practical arrangements will be sent out after summer holidays.

Please forward this information to the staff at your municipality who is working with these issues and would be interested to take part in this Commission meeting.

Helene Brewer

Coordinator of the Commission

helene.brewer@umea.se

- **Meeting of the UBC Commission on Urban Planning**

The Commission on Urban Planning of the Union of the Baltic Cities cordially invites you to its next seminar in Šiauliai, Lithuania, between October 6th and 9th 2010. The seminar theme is "Vision of an Attractive City".

Šiauliai is the 4th biggest city in Lithuania with approx. 125 000 inhabitants. Even though the city has existed for almost 865 years, it is relatively new since the city was practically destroyed in the World War II and rebuilt after the war. In the 1900's Šiauliai became a remarkable centre of industry, but it also is the home of Šiauliai University and advanced education.

The Commission on Urban Planning seminar concentrates on the theme of attractiveness of cities and how to enhance the life in cities by means of urban planning. Our workshops concentrate on Šiauliai, which is a regional engine of business and cultural life, but suffering from population loss like many North-European cities. We will hear about practical examples of supporting vivid city centres from Vienna, Austria, and Hamburg, Germany. Also, if you have experience about a project increasing attractiveness of your city, we would like to hear about it: we have reserved time for 4 "best practice" examples

of 15 minutes from the seminar participants. In case you are willing to give a short presentation from your city, please inform Sirpa Kallio (e-mail: sirpa.kallio@hel.fi). The preliminary seminar programme is at: http://www.ubc.net/events_calendar,74,779.html.

The seminar participants are expected to make their own travelling and accommodation arrangements. As Šiauliai is close to the Latvian border, the nearest big airport is in Riga, from where it is recommended to take a bus for the 130 km journey to Šiauliai. The CUP is planning to arrange a bus transport from Šiauliai back to Riga airport on Saturday after the seminar, at a time that as far as possible will be adjusted to the participants flight departures.

Travel to Šiauliai must be arranged by each participant themselves. Bus ticket from Riga airport to Šiauliai costs 7.20€. The bus departures from Riga airport at 12.50 and at 19.05, it takes 1h 55min. Tickets can be booked and paid in advance by the participants on internet on <http://ticket.eurolines.ee/>. If you arrive in Riga airport with an early flight and want to make a short visit to Riga historical city center, it is possible to take a taxi or shuttlebus from the airport to Riga center, and then take the bus which departs from Riga Coach Station (Latvian: Rīgas Starptautiskā autoosta, situated at 1 Pragas Street near the historical city centre) at 18.45 and passes Riga Airport at 19.05 and from there it goes on to Šiauliai. There is also an additional, "last chance" bus from Riga Coach Station to Šiauliai at 22.10 (00.30 in Šiauliai). Please be careful and check on <http://ticket.eurolines.ee/> for bus ticket availability and booking and if there are any changes in ticket prices or timetables.

The seminar organizers in Šiauliai recommend hotel Saulys (www.saulys.lt) with

room price of 67€/night/single room or hotel Šiauliai (www.hotelsiauliai.lt) with room price of 35€/night/single room. Please make your own booking (the contact information is in the enclosed "Siauliai 1st invitation.pdf"-file).

Also, please send your filled in registration form to ubc@siauliai.lt by September 1st, 2010.

Sirpa Kallio
Chairperson of the Commission
sirpa.kallio@hel.fi

• Open meeting of the UBC Commission on Youth Issues

Hereby we are glad to inform you that UBC Commission on Youth Issues will hold its' second open meeting for this year in Rostock, Germany, October 26-28th 2010.

Topics which will be discussed during the meeting: overview of the results of questionnaire carried out by Commission during the spring-summer 2010 and discussion on the importance of prioritizing youth issues and existence of youth policies in UBC cities; strategical planning and better communication of the Commission; finalizing new project(s) and planning youth conference 2011; proposals for co-operation made to Commission; visiting youth friendly places in Rostock. More detailed program will be sent out in the beginning of September 2010.

We kindly suggest for you to book the dates and make your travel plans early to get good offers. We still expect you to take care of your travel expenses. This time accommodation for all participants (youth and civil servants) will be provided by the local youth organization "Kreisschülerrat Rostock" at youth hostel <http://warnemuende.jugendherbergen-mv.de/home-wm.html?&L=1&cHash=b7ead13693>).

We very much hope to see the representatives from your city - civil servant responsible for youth issues and 1-2 active young people in Rostock!

Ilona-Evelyn Rannala
Secretariat of the Commission
ilona-evelyn.rannala@tallinnlv.ee

- **Second meeting of the Local Safety Working Group**

It is our honor and pleasure to invite you all to the second meeting of Local Safety Working Group which will be held in Riga, Latvia from 13th to 15th of October, 2010.

The meeting will focus on local safety and public order providing in Riga. This will also be a great opportunity to elect chairman and two vice chairmen, discuss organizational issues how to coordinate Working Group, exchange experiences and information, learn from each others, discuss and develop way ahead of our Working Group.

Practical information and registration form are at:
http://www.ubc.net/events_calendar,74,809.html. Please return the registration form latest by 31st of August, 2010 to the e-mail address agnese.limanane@riga.lv.

Jānis Geduševs
Chief of Riga Municipal Police

Contact person: Agnese Limanāne
e-mail : agnese.limanane@riga.lv

- **Road Safety Seminar**

As a signatory of the European Road Safety Charter, the Union of the Baltic Cities (Commission on Transportation) wishes to carry out activities aimed at promotion of road safety issues.

Nowadays the traffic in cities is so intense that the road safety has become one of the vital issues. Despite many preventive actions the number of road accidents is still high. Unfortunately, among the victims there are also children and young people. It is often insufficient knowledge of the road safety rules or their disregarding which is the cause of an accident. That is the reason why on 21-22.10.2010 we are planning to organise in Gdynia (Poland) a UBC seminar on road safety, entitled: What can we do to increase the road safety among children and young people?

The seminar is aimed at showing what measures can be taken to increase the road safety of children and the youth, what has been already done and what more could be undertaken to increase the level of road safety. It is addressed to teachers, local government, non-governmental organisations, police, parents, institutions dealing with road safety issues.

The Commission on Transportation would like to ask UBC member cities to share their experience in the field of road safety by submitting proposals for topics, speakers or best practices you would like to present during the meeting. These proposals can be included into the seminar programme.

If you wish to contribute to the seminar please send your proposals to the UBC Commission on Transportation: ubctransport@gdynia.pl by 16th August 2010.

Monika Pawlinska
Secretariat of the Commission
ubctransport@gdynia.pl

- **2010 UBC Commission on Sport Grant Competition "Sport is cool!"**

The UBC Commission on Sport would like to announce its decision concerning the distribution of the 2010 UBC Commission on Sport Grants "Sport is cool!". Having analysed thoroughly the submitted applications, the Commission has decided to award four applicants whose projects have met all the requirements in the best way. Among the grant winning applications there are:

1. "Join Recreation Activities!", Tukums (Latvia) - 2.500 EUR
2. "Bergen Rugby Project", Bergen (Norway) - 1.500 EUR
3. "Sport for life", Sillamae (Estonia) - 1.500 EUR
4. "SPORT IS COOL - ~~im~~POSSIBLE", Voru (Estonia) - 1.000 EUR

The UBC Commission on Sport would like to thank all the cities for taking part in the grant competition.

Beata Łęgowska
Chairperson of the Commission
ubcsport@gdynia.pl

- **Competition to award climate change solutions!**

Have you got a practical solution to climate change that can also benefit municipalities?

Your solution can be a new or as yet unestablished practice, business concept or technology for slowing the effects of climate change. Enter your solution into our international competition that will award the winners with publicity, customer contacts, and assistance in marketing. Competition entries should be submitted by 30 September 2010 at www.solutions2011.fi/contest

Does your organisation have a solution that would

- combat climate change,
- support local and regional economics, employment and general well-being,
- lead to concrete changes in the practices of the municipalities and their residents, and
- can be broadly implemented as a successful measure?

We invite you to take part in this competition whose winners will be awarded in connection with the 'Solutions local, together' Conference scheduled to be held in Turku from 31 January to 2 February 2011.

Read more in all the languages of the Baltic Sea Region: <http://www.ubc-environment.net/index.php/main:solutions2011>

Stella Aaltonen
Secretariat of the Commission
stella.aaltonen@turku.fi

Other information

- **European Local Democracy Week 2010**

Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities has launched its 4th edition of the European Local Democracy Week, a pan-European initiative which gathers together mayors and local elected officials with their citizens to focus and debate a priority theme. This year the theme is "The impact of sustainable communities in fighting climate change". Thousands of Municipalities and cities from the 47 Council of Europe member countries are expected to take part in the ELDW, during the second week of October. CLRAE warmly invites UBC member cities to participate in the event.

Here <http://www.ubc.net/news,2,770.html> please find an invitation from Congress Secretary General Mr Andreas Kiefer.

You can find more information at www.coe.int/demoweeek.

Concerning registration please contact the Congress project manager Ms Maria Baroni, e-mail: maria.baroni@coe.int.

Paweł Żaboklicki
UBC Secretary General

- **7th Baltic Transport Forum, Rostock, 19-20 August 2010**

The German Association of Transport Sciences (DVWG) and the Baltic Institute of Marketing, Transport and Tourism at the University of Rostock are announcing the 7th Baltic Transport Forum taking place in Rostock-Warnemünde 19/20 August 2010.

"BALTIC MARITIME TRANSPORT AFTER THE RECESSION * sea transport and port development between continuity and restructuring"

Tendencies of maritime transport in the Baltic after the economic downturn will be analyzed by high-ranking speakers and moderators during several sessions. These experts will be representatives of leading transport & industrial companies, ports and research institutes from the Baltic Sea Region.

Here <http://www.ubc.net/plik,2375.html> you can find the draft programme of the conference with more detailed information concerning the different sessions. We would be very glad to welcome you as a participant on 19/20 August 2010 in Rostock. With pleasure we will furthermore inform you about the completion of the conference programme. If you are interested to get more detailed information in the future, please fill

in the last page of the draft programme and make a fax reply or use the E-Mail button (on the same page) to leave a message (this is not a conference registration).

Prof. Dr. Karl-Heinz Breitzmann
Conference Chairman
ostseeinstitut@uni-rostock.de
<http://www.ostseeinstitut.uni-rostock.de>

- **European Road Safety Charter - Summer Contest 2010**

Be a road safety onlooker, win a weekend in a European Capital!

Summer Contest 2010

Union of the Baltic Cities has been the signatory of the European Road Safety Charter since 2009. This Charter is an initiative of the European Commission. The main goal of the Charter is halving the number of traffic fatalities by 2010.

Within this initiative the European Commission has announced the Summer Contest 2010.

The participants of the contest are invited to submit examples of good and bad practices on road safety from the street, city or country by writing a short story or recording a road safety image (video or photo).

The contest is addressed to all European citizens and residents of the European Union. The prizes in the contest will be 5 weekends for two people (at their choice) in one of the following European capitals (signatories of the European Road Safety Charter):

- Brussels (Belgium)
- Copenhagen (Denmark)
- Dublin (Ireland)
- Madrid (Spain)
- Wien (Austria)

The detailed information on the contest is available at:

<http://www.erscharter.eu/inaction/award/17739>

If you have any further questions concerning the Contest please contact directly the organisers: European Road Safety Charter Team – e-mail: charter@paueducation.com

The contest proposals should be submitted by 3.10.2010.

Partner Search

- **Access to Sport – Non-profit sport activities, a key to social inclusion**

Name of Coordinating beneficiary: City of Umeå, Leisure and Recreation Department. Local partners: Department of Education, Umeå University; Västerbotten County Sport Association; SISU Sport Education. Area of intervention: Promoting social inclusion in and through sport. Project name: Theme for project is: Access to Sport - Non-profit sport activities, a key to social inclusion.

The Leisure and Recreation Department, City of Umeå, together with its local partners, are looking for partners to the project "Access to Sport", which will be submitted to the call Preparatory Action in the field of Sport 2010, in the area of "Promotion of Social Inclusion in and through Sport". Application deadline: 31.08.2010

If you are interested, please email your contact details, a brief description of your organisation and your interest in this issue, to the following address:
petra.rantatalo@umea.se

With this project we wish to highlight the possibilities of social inclusion through

sports. Based on research about Swedish children and parents experiences of sport and its benefits, we know that not all children/parents experience that they are welcome to take part in sport activities. It is also evident that there are few immigrants that find their way to certain sport activities. Many sport organisations are aware of that they have few members with foreign background, and that they lack both knowledge and methods to get immigrant children to take part of their activities. We also have examples of the opposite; sport organisations that have succeeded to embrace children and young people from different cultures, and hence contribute to a more inclusive society.

We have worked with several projects during the last years, as to address this issue. For example has the City of Umeå taken the initiative to start a project with the purpose to make the associational life in Umeå more open and accessible for third-country nationals, with contribution from the European Fund for Integration.

Through this call the City of Umeå are looking for European partners that together with us and our local partners would like to establish a strong network, with the purpose to identify methods and exchange best practices regarding social inclusion and integration through sports. Main activities will include a European survey, workshops for exchange of knowledge and methods, and a European training event for sport clubs and others. Further we would like to develop an action plan for future cooperation and projects.

Summary of the project at:

<http://www.ubc.net/news,75,806.html>

EUROPEAN NEWS

Norway tops up funding scheme for south-eastern EU states

Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein on 28 July 2010 agreed to donate €1.79 billion to the EU's poorer southern and eastern members in the coming five years for green projects, labour rights, research and human resources, a top-up of 22 percent compared to the previous period.

The funding scheme is part of the "European Economic Area" agreement which ties the three countries to the EU, allowing them to participate in the internal market without actual membership of the bloc.

Norway provides 97 percent of the funding, amounting to €1.73 billion, and has expressed its satisfaction that the original demand put forward by the EU – over €2 billion – was scaled down.

"The negotiations have been long and challenging. The demand originally put forward by the EU has been reduced to a sum that is acceptable, and we have agreed on how our contribution is to be targeted in order to ensure good results for both Norway and the EU," Norway's foreign minister Jonas Gahr Store said in a statement.

Initial disagreements over fish quotas for Norway, which are also part of the agreement, dragged the talks on until December 2009, when Oslo agreed to the terms of the deal. Since then, EU member states on the receiving end – all eastern European countries plus Greece, Spain and Portugal – have been quarrelling over who gets what.

This means that although the funding period is supposed to cover the years 2009-2014, money will not actually start flowing until 2011, pending bilateral agreements which still have to be signed with each recipient country.

Poland will continue to be the biggest recipient of the scheme, with €578.1 million, followed by Romania, for whom €306 million have been earmarked.

The bulk of the money will be allocated to environment protection programmes, renewable energy and the development of "carbon capture and storage" technology aimed at reducing CO2 emissions.

"We are entering into a critical phase in the global climate efforts, and we are pleased to have reached agreement with the EU on giving priority to climate change in the EEA cooperation with new member states," Mr Store said.

A novelty of the renewed agreement is the set-up of a fund worth €8 million targeting the promotion of "decent work" and tripartite dialogue with labour unions, employers and government officials, in line with the "Nordic model" of social democracy that Oslo is proud of.

Meanwhile, Iceland, who just started accession negotiations with the EU, gave reassurances it would not abandon its financial commitments even if it were to become a member before 2014 when the scheme is again up for renewal.

Switzerland, also a non-EU member integrated in the internal market and the border-free zone of the EU, has a parallel funding scheme for the new member states. Brussels is now looking at ways to integrate Bern into the EEA agreement – to which Swiss voters said no in a referendum in 1992.

Source: EUobserver

URBACT projects publish recommendations for sustainable urban development

Over 70% of European citizens live in cities, making sustainable urban development a key priority for European regional policy. The

European Union's URBACT programme has now published the results of six projects aimed specifically at providing solutions to major urban challenges, including cross-border cooperation between cities, land use management and housing development. Over the past two years, these projects have fostered exchange and learning among project partners to develop effective and sustainable conclusions and recommendations.

URBACT is a European Union programme targeted at urban and metropolitan regions. It aims to foster sustainable urban development by offering opportunities for increased cooperation and the exchange of good practices. The programme reaches 255 cities in 29 countries and consists of about 5,000 active participants.

Source: Inforegio

EU moots 'Michelin Stars' for top tourist spots

The world's top chefs would happily throw their grandmother under a Eurostar train to have their resto or bistro blessed with the award of a Michelin Star. Now Brussels hopes that European hoteliers, amusement park managers and art gallery curators will be every bit as ambitious to win the right to bear an EU tourist destination quality mark.

The EU executive on 30 June proposed the creation of a prestigious EU "Quality Tourism" label to reward the best tourist businesses, activities and destinations, from the most secluded and exclusive Greek beachside bars to the scariest Transylvanian vampire tour. "We hope it would be sort of like a Michelin Star award, but for all types of tourist sites," commission spokesman Fabio Pirotta said.

The European 'Qualité Tourisme' brand has yet to pin down a final name or logo, but ideas will be developed further in the coming

months should the plan win approval from member states and the European Parliament.

"You can imagine this becoming a real marker of excellence that tourists use," Mr Pirotta added.

The quality mark is to go considerably further than the bloc's existing but largely unknown Eden, or European Destinations of Excellence scheme, established in 2006 to promote destinations that ensure social, cultural and environmental sustainability.

The Network of European Regions for a Sustainable and Competitive Tourism, a regional framework launched in 2007, would provide the groundwork for the development of the new label.

The bloc also hopes to promote Europe as a tourist brand in itself. Currently countries such as Britain or Cyprus, or cities such as Paris or Amsterdam promote themselves, but no one other than Australia has yet tried to promote an entire continent as a brand.

"The idea is that instead of a family just coming to France for a summer holiday, they come to Spain as well on the same trip," Mr Pirotta explained. "Instead of the two countries competing for the same tourists, tourists could come to both destinations while on holiday."

The commission is also keen to stagger school holidays among different member states to try to extend the length of the summer and winter high peak holiday seasons. The re-jigging of school holidays would be voluntary, the commission underlined, but co-ordinated through an information exchange at the EU level.

Those tourism proposals also include help for disabled, elderly and poor people to travel more widely.

Source: EUobserver

EU population over half-a-billion

The European Union's population reached the half-a-billion mark at the beginning of 2010, with immigration pushing it up higher than the net increase would have been following the year's births and deaths, new figures from the EU's statistics agency, Eurostat, showed on 27 July.

The EU's population as of January 2010 was estimated to be 501.1 million, compared to 499.7 million last year. The EU gained an additional 1.4 million residents, with 900,000 immigrants entering the bloc atop a 'natural increase' - the net boost after births and deaths are taken into account - of 500,000.

Overall, the population increased in nineteen member states and decreased in eight, with the largest relative increases observed in Luxembourg (up 17.2 per 1,000 inhabitants) and the largest decreases in Lithuania (down 6.2 per 1,000).

When compared to the previous year, the number of children born per 1000 people slightly fell during the 2009 while the number of deaths remained constant. Net migration fell more significantly, Eurostat said. More than 5.3 million children were born in 2009 across the EU. Ireland was again reported as the country with the highest birth rate (16.8 per 1,000 inhabitants), followed by the UK (12.8 per 1,000) and France (12.7 per 1,000).

At the other end, Germany, although still the most populous country, still holds the record for the lowest birth rate in the EU with only 7.9 births per 1,000 inhabitants, followed by Austria (9.1) and Portugal (9.4). The highest natural growth in population was registered in Ireland, ahead of Cyprus and France. Ten member states had a negative natural growth, with the largest declines in Bulgaria and Latvia, Hungary and Germany.

Over 60 percent of the increase in the EU population came from immigration. Luxembourg welcomed the most new

inhabitants per capita (13.2 per 1,000), followed by Sweden (6.7) and Slovenia (5.8). Ireland, once a popular immigration destination for jobseekers, has returned to its traditional pattern of being a nation of emigrants, recording the highest net outflow (down 9.0 per 1,000).

Source: EUobserver

EU mulls gender quotas on company boards

The European Commission is considering introducing quotas to tackle gender imbalances in the decision-making bodies of private companies, where only 10% of members are women. "Equality in decision-making is not yet a fact," EU Fundamental Rights Commissioner Viviane Reding told a hearing of the European Parliament's women's rights and gender equality committee on 14 July 2010. "I do not rule out the possibility of putting forward legislation in this area," she added.

People close to the commissioner told EurActiv that the most likely action could be aimed at the private sector, with the introduction of gender quotas for boards of directors of top European firms. Currently, only 11% of such positions are held by women in top European companies, according to the European Commission.

Reding considers the introduction of binding quotas as a last resort should companies prove incapable of voluntarily adapting their gender balance. There have been suggestions that an initial quota of 20% or more could be applied, but the Commission insists it has no precise figure in mind at the moment.

In addition, no such moves are foreseen in the short term. "The commissioner will monitor companies' behaviour until the end of 2011 before taking action," an official close to the commissioner told EurActiv.

Age discrimination of women

As the commissioner unveiled her strategy to fight gender imbalances in Europe, the European Parliament's committee on women's rights and gender equality approved a report pointing to another form of discrimination affecting women across the EU – that of age. "Ageing women are subject to multiple forms of discrimination," said the MEP in charge of the report, Sirpa Pietikäinen (European People's Party, EPP; Finland), underlining that age discrimination is more frequently directed at women than men. In the working environment, "discrimination based on age is more often directed at women than men and it is visible, for example, for women who are over 50 years old, with difficulties in ascending in their careers and in their re-employment," reads a statement issued by the EPP. The MEP also highlighted sexual discrimination in hospitals, which becomes more significant as populations age. "Many diseases are diagnosed and cared for in the same manner for men and women, although, for example, women's symptoms in case of heart attacks are different. For this reason, women die more often in hospital, owing to the lack of adequate treatment," Pietikäinen said.

Source: EurActiv

EU passenger rights extended to boats, not buses

After air and rail, European citizens travelling by boat will be entitled to reimbursement and other compensation as of 2012 in case of cancellation or delays of more than 90 minutes, following a vote in the European Parliament.

The new EU rules also include a right to rerouting and cover assistance such as meals, refreshments and accommodation of up to three nights where necessary (with a limit of

€80 per night), the European Commission said, welcoming the Parliament's vote.

"This regulation on the rights of passengers travelling by sea and by inland waterway will extend passenger rights to further transport modes," said Siim Kallas, Commission vice-president in charge of transport. "This means that passengers travelling by water will benefit from the same basic quality service standards wherever they travel in the Union."

The new rights will come into effect as of 2012 and will entitle passengers for reimbursement of 25% of the ticket price in cases where journeys are cancelled or delayed for more than a quarter of their total duration.

If the delay is over double these minimum times, passengers will be entitled to compensation of half the ticket price, the Parliament said. All boats carrying over 12 passengers will fall under the new rules, with the exception of excursions and sightseeing tours.

Assistance for disabled passengers

The European Parliament also extended the initial proposal to cover assistance for disabled passengers. "Disability may not be used as a reason for denying a passenger the right to board," reads the new EU regulation, adding that "free assistance must be provided to disabled people in ports". The new rights for disabled will be restricted, however, "on condition that the carrier or the port operator is notified when the reservation is made or at least 48 hours before boarding". The rules will also apply to cruise passengers.

Negotiations ongoing for buses and coaches
However, the Parliament was unable to complete negotiations with EU member states on a proposed regulation awarding similar rights to passengers travelling by bus or coach. MEPs have amended the draft text to include the reimbursement of the ticket or rerouting in case of delays in departure of

more than two hours, as well as compensation of up to €1,800 for lost or damaged baggage. MEPs added there should be no limits to compensation in case a passenger dies in a coach accident. They also insist on free assistance or compensation if a bus breakdown delays arrival at destination. Free assistance for disabled passengers must also be provided, they say.

Siim Kallas said he hoped the negotiations with member states would be completed soon. But a conciliation procedure now appears "likely", the Parliament said, as MEPs want the regulation to apply not only to long-distance but also to regional bus transport, something that EU countries are reluctant to agree to.

Source: EurActiv

EU foresees take up of 'biodiversity businesses'

Biodiversity and ecosystem conservation offer an array of new opportunities for business, which can either develop green products and services or trade biodiversity 'credits', argues a new European Commission report on the economics of nature. The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) for business report was launched on 13 July, setting out the business case for providing green services. It notes that biodiversity and ecosystem services offer opportunities for all business sectors, mainly because integrating environmental concerns into company management can increase the cost-effectiveness of operations, ensure the sustainability of supply chains and attract new customers.

But nature considerations can also be the basis for new businesses, the report underlines. Conserving biodiversity and using biodiversity and ecosystem services in a sustainable and equitable manner can be the basis for unique business propositions,

enabling entrepreneurs and investors to develop and scale up biodiversity businesses, it argues. The authors note that opportunities for such businesses are growing, particularly due to the expected increased pressure on and more restricted access to natural resources on both land and sea.

The report predicts the emergence of biodiversity and ecosystem service (BES) markets, alongside existing ones such as the EU emissions trading scheme for carbon dioxide. This could create new biodiversity assets with local and international trading opportunities, the report adds, citing Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation and related land-based carbon storage and sequestration methods (REDD+) as the first major opportunity for such business. Another potential market opportunity is the Green Development Mechanism (GDM), a financial mechanism currently discussed under the Convention on Biological Diversity to mobilise private sector funding to mitigate biodiversity loss, particularly in developing countries. New markets for biodiversity credits and intangible ecosystem services such as watershed protection are also emerging, providing new environmental assets with both local and international trading opportunities, the authors note.

Securing property rights over nature

But before ecosystem markets can be developed, a number of financial, regulatory and market pre-requisites need to be addressed, the report says. These include securing property rights and insurance over ecosystem assets as well as defining ecosystem credits and debits. According to the report, fiscal incentives - such as tax credits for conservation and the establishment of a legal authority to trade ecosystem credits and debits - are also necessary.

Source: EurActiv