



UBC e-News

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Info

- 45th UBC Executive Board meeting

The 45th UBC Executive Board meeting will be held on 10-12 February in Kaunas. During the meeting, among others, such topics will be discussed:

- New Cohesion Policy - territorial cooperation
- UBC maritime logistics policy paper
- proposal on the commission on energy
- budget for 2006
- action plan 2006-2007
- cooperation agreement with Unitar
- and other

- The Steering Committee of the UBC Commission on Urban Planning will held its meeting on 19-20 January in Helsinki. The Committee will discuss the activity and meetings in 2006 and 2007.

From UBC Commissions

- Commission on Education

The annual meeting of the UBC Commission on Education will be held in Tallinn on 27 January 2006. The agenda can be found at: http://www.ubc.net/calendar/doc/27-01-2006/Tallinn_meeting.doc

The Commission on Education can cover the transportation costs for certain number of participants from member cities from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia (one delegate per city). Applications will be treated

on the basis "first come - first served". Applications should be sent directly to Kurt.Pettersson@ebc.uu.se and Annely.Veevo@kertel.ee

Registrations should be sent by 23 January 2006 to Mrs Annely Veevo, Secretary of the Commission on Education.

- Commission on Culture

The Commission on Culture of UBC initiates traditionally one Session with focus on a special cultural theme each year. Invited are professional lecturers and leaders from various cultural institutions and organizations in the cities of the Baltic Sea region.

The Session in 2005 was organized and successfully realized in Saint-Petersburg on 7 – 9 of December under the leadership of Olga Cherkasova, Director of the Museum of N.K. Rerih in Izvara and member of the Board of the Commission on Culture, with support from the Saint Petersburg Government. The 77 participants listened to 26 lecturers who made speeches on various subject related to the theme, for example: "Tukums City Museum in the context of city development", "Museums as centres of planetary thinking" and "Museums and Theatre in the format of a socio-cultural program". The participants also visited the Hermitage and other cultural institutions and were given wonderful experiences of the rich and qualitative cultural life of Saint Petersburg. The result was that a great amount of knowledge was exchanged and enriched by new contacts and networking

for future collegial cooperation. It gave also the opportunity to inform about the UBC and its Commission on Culture, also directly to the inhabitants of Saint Petersburg through a directly transmitted radio interview. One of several new ideas was to establish a Baltic Museum Forum. It was also announced that the Session in 2006 will be organized by the city of Vaasa 23-26 of November on the theme "Cultural Festivals as Strengtheners of Local Identity".

Olov Gibson, Visby

olov.gibson@kff.gotland.se



The museum managers and board members Olga Cherkasova and Agrita Ozola, with other participants of the Session.

From UBC members

- Invitation to a conference

We are glad to invite you to the international conference „Fortress in the town of the 21st century: an alien or a way to attract“. The conference will take place in Narva castle (Estonia) in February 10th-12th, 2006.

The main theme of this conference is already spelled out in the title of the future seminar. In other words many towns begin to advertise their historic fortresses as tourist attraction. Governments have to take care of them, which demands a lot of financial resources that can be used on other societal needs. What is this particular place of the fortresses in a

modern town? How can those buildings be integrated into the town outlook to save their historic authenticity, but at the same time to make them an organic part of the town? What could be the best functions of the historic fortresses and could those functions help to maintain fortresses without governmental support?

We would like to find the answers to those and many other questions by exchanging experience with experts in different spheres, who's work is related to fortifications.

You are given an opportunity to choose the topic for your presentation. We expect your speech will be based on your practical knowledge. All the presentations will appear in the collected articles of conference.

Presentations and discussions could be helpful for the town of Narva in its project "The Ring of Bastions".

We expect 1 expert from 1 city. The organisers pay the expenses (transportation, accommodation, participation, and meals).

The organisers of the conference are the Narva Museum and the Narva town council.

For more information you can e-mail:

angelika.kissel@narvamuuseum.ee

direktor@narvamuuseum.ee

teadus@narvamuuseum.ee

Partner Search

- Project "Join the Net – Dissemination of material for education and training on psychological symptoms caused by violence"

We are looking for institutions (NGO's) in other EU countries who are interested to cooperate with us in a follow-up-project in 2006/2007.

Our intention for this year is to work on increasing the sensitivity of professionals in social and health areas who get in contact with possible victims of violence (for example priests, social workers, doctors, teachers, police... any organisation in the area of health care/psychosocial care, where

traumatized women, girls and children might seek for help) for the symptoms of Post traumatic stress disorder. The goal for 2006/2007 will be to hold the training courses again in as many locations in the EU as possible and to monitor the results of the training.

What would a partner-organization have to do?

- 1) Bringing a list of institutions where traumatized people in your region can refer to for help.
- 2) Active participation in a "Train-The-Trainer" workshop in Göttingen/Germany (3 days/ 2 persons).
- 3) Carrying out 10-15 training sessions in your region (3-4 hours each/ 5-15 participants per session) with the target groups.
- 4) Reporting about the experiences in the further educations (questionnaire).
- 5) Active participation in the final conference in Göttingen (3 days/ 2 persons).

If you know of any other NGO's that might be interested in your country or in other countries in the EU, please forward this message, so that they might participate.

More information can be found at:

http://www.ubc.net/today/e_News/documents/Daphne_project.doc

Wiebke Landwehr
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- "Mayors for Peace ", Hiroshima

Dear Fellow Municipal Activist,

I am writing today to ask you to help us invite your members to join Mayors for Peace. Concretely, I am asking that you send the invitation letter to join Mayors for Peace to the local authorities affiliated with your organization and, if possible, to other local officials in your area.

As you may know, the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were instantly obliterated by atomic bombings in August 1945. Hundreds of thousands of precious lives were lost. To avoid any repetition of this horrifying tragedy, the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have worked continuously to communicate to the world the inhumanity of the atomic bomb and the need to abolish nuclear weapons.

Mayors for Peace was founded in 1982 by the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to promote the total elimination of nuclear weapons and the realization of genuine and lasting world peace. Today, we are a category II international non-governmental organization accredited by the United Nations with 1,253 member cities in 114 countries and regions.

In any war, especially nuclear war, it is cities that suffer most. We mayors are duty-bound to protect our citizens, and to prevent the unimaginable tragedy of a nuclear attack, we must work together to eliminate all nuclear weapons. Therefore, Mayors for Peace are now conducting a "2020 Vision Campaign" with the goal of total nuclear weapons abolition by the year 2020, the 75th anniversary of the atomic bombings

To strengthen this campaign, we need as many cities as possible to join our organization. Therefore, we would be very grateful if you would be willing to send the attached invitation letter and registration form to your member cities or local authorities. We are hoping you can include it in your next mailing.

For more information about Mayors for Peace and our campaign, please visit our website at: <http://www.mayorsforpeace.org/english/index.html>.

Sincerely,

Yasuyuki Yakushiji
Division Director
Mayors for Peace Secretariat
Email: mayorcon@pcf.city.hiroshima.jp

Conferences attended by UBC representatives

- In December UBC was represented by Adolfas Balutis, UBC Executive Board member in the conference: Depollution Initiative - High Level Meeting, which took place on 19 December 2005 in Barcelona. This meeting was organised to formally launch the preparations of the road map for the major Environmental Initiative designed to improve the quality of life of the citizens by the de-pollution of the Mediterranean by 2020.

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/05/1624&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

- In the next months UBC will be represented at the conferences:

- "Communicating Europe – Going Local" Conference, to be held in Brussels, 25.01.2006. It will be attended by Krista Taipale-Salminen, City of Turku-Southwest Finland European Office in Brussels. The Committee of the Regions is organising this conference on implementation of Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate. During the conference, there will be presented expectations regarding the implementation of Plan-D and the administrative and financial means that should be made available.

<http://www.cor.eu.int>

- General Meeting of the National Associations of Local Authorities of the Council of Europe, to be held in Strasbourg on 23-24.02.2006. It will be attended by Mikko Lohikoski, UBC Executive Board member. This conference will bring together mayors, representatives of regions and National Associations of Local and Regional Authorities. There will be discussed ways of increasing cooperation between the Congress and the associations. A Round Table is planned on the topic: "Congress and Associations: what common cause?".

http://www.coe.int/T/Congress/9-Acces-Restreint/programme_Assoc_public_060106_engl.pdf

- VII International Environmental Forum "Baltic Sea Day", which will take place in St. Petersburg, 22-23.03.2006. It will be attended by President Per Bødker Andersen. Forum is a kind of an arena for the exchange of knowledge and experience with the aim to develop partnership and enhance the capacity for cooperation and interaction between all Baltic countries targeted to sustainable development of the Baltic Sea region. One of the round tables will be devoted to the heightening cooperation between the Baltic Sea sub-regional organizations, the presentations of these organizations and the review of their projects. Such round table realization will give an opportunity for discussion of the further expansion and sub-regional cooperation consolidation, as well as it will contribute to elaboration of the joint decisions on Baltic Sea region environmental protection.

<http://www.helcom.ru/baltday.html>

Brussels Bulletin: news on and from Europe

The Brussels Bulletin is published in conjunction with the newsletter of the European Urban Knowledge Network, EUKN. The EUKN Newsletter concentrates on urban policy practice within Europe and primarily draws attention to new European highlights and best practices. The Brussels Bulletin will report on the most recent developments on and from Europe. Both newsletters are published biweekly, in alternate weeks. Accordingly, you will receive weekly information about any relevant developments and events.

<http://archief.e-mark.nl/toonarch.php?lang=&userID=8423F1468453009L381&z=13213>

Gerard Schouw

**EU migrant row overshadows 2006
'mobility year'**

Deep divisions over continuing restrictions on freedom of movement on citizens from the new EU are set to overshadow the European 'year of mobility' in 2006.

Europe's employment ministers will shy away from the controversial issue of inter-EU cross border migration at their meeting in Austria on Thursday.

The informal meeting will be the last before the European commission's report on the impact of migrant workers from the new member states is published on February 6.

But national capitals will avoid debating the issue, concentrating instead on measures to boost flexible working practices and improving cooperation on pensions and health care.

The commission's report will look at the impact of migrant worker flows on the job markets in the 'old' member states following enlargement in 2004.

Just one of the EU15 – Sweden – has allowed unrestricted access to its labour markets to the eight central and eastern European countries that joined the EU in May that year.

Several others have opened their markets with restrictions on the number of workers - Austria, Italy, Portugal or the Netherlands - or on the benefits they can claim - the UK and Ireland.

But seven – Belgium, Finland, Germany, France, Greece, Spain and Luxembourg – have opted for a 'transitional period' - effectively blocking access to their labour markets to the eight east European new member states. Two of the new member states, Hungary and Poland, have imposed restrictions on EU15 workers in retaliation.

Workers from Cyprus and Malta were not subject to the transitional measures.

Various independent analyses of migration flows from the new member states have shown that the much-feared flood of workers has not materialised, and the commission's report is expected to confirm these findings.

And although EU employment commissioner Vladimír Špidla has no power to oblige countries to open up their labour markets, he is expected to urge them to remove the restrictions as soon as possible.

The member states that have imposed transitional measures will have to decide by April 30 whether to extend them for a further three years from May 1, the second anniversary of enlargement.

Press reports suggest that a number of countries, including Finland and Spain, are preparing to lift the restrictions.

Belgium and Portugal are also thought to be debating the issue, but Austria and Germany are expected to extend the restrictions.

It is still unclear whether France, where high levels of unemployment have given rise to the so-called Polish plumber syndrome, amid fears of a flood of cheaper labour from the east, will open its doors.

Countries could, in theory, choose to open the doors to workers in certain sectors or from certain countries, but this would be a difficult move politically, signalling the creation of a two-tier Europe. Indeed, some critics argue that the restrictions in place have already created a two-tier system.

Austria's decision to extend its quota system for workers from the eight new member states was singled out for criticism at the European parliament on Wednesday.

Graham Watson, leader of the Liberal group in the parliament, accused Austrian chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel of violating the spirit of the year of workers' mobility "by prolonging transitional arrangements which hinder the free movement of workers within our union".

Source: EUpolitix

Europe gets bad marks on innovation

Europe keeps lagging behind the US and Japan on innovation, with the Nordic countries and Germany leading the EU list, while Spain and the new member states are the bloc's worst performers.

According to data published by the European Commission on Thursday (13 January), the picture across the EU is "extremely diverse," but if there are no changes in the current trends "the innovation gap between Europe and the US will not close." "Europe's overall performance in this area is rather disappointing," commented a commission official. The EU executive's research shows a number of reasons behind the gloomy conclusions, such as Europe investing a third less in research than the US, and EU firms being less active in pursuing new technologies.

The comparative table divides the bloc's member states into three categories.

Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Germany are referred to as "leading countries," and their innovation indicators are equal to "world class performers," according to the official.

However, Germany as the biggest EU economy so far profited mainly from its high-tech export-based industries, while the domestic population remains reluctant to embrace innovative products.

At the same time, the authors of the analysis point out that Germany might in future face difficulties in providing a skilled workforce for innovative companies, due to negative trends in the country's education system.

France, the UK, Ireland, Luxembourg and most other "old" EU member states feature as the countries with an "average performance" on innovation, with varying weak and strong points.

Finally, there is a group of several new member states such as Slovenia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Greece and Portugal, which are "catching up" on the innovation scale, while the rest of central and eastern European countries (Estonia, Poland, Slovakia) along with Spain are currently "losing ground."

According to the commission, countries from the "loser" group, which are currently enjoying good economic results - like Spain and Slovakia - seem to be soaking up spare resources at the moment but might encounter

more economic problems later, if they fail to improve on innovation.

Source: EUobserver

Chirac to compete with Google

French president Jacques Chirac has wholeheartedly lent his support to a Franco-German attempt to create a European multimedia search engine on the Internet, aimed at competing with US Internet giants such as Google.

In a New Year speech to the nation late last week, Mr Chirac described "Project Quaero" as a much-needed answer to the global challenge posed by American dominance on the Internet.

"We must meet the global challenge of the American giants Google and Yahoo," Mr Chirac said about the future search engine, already dubbed by media as Mr Chirac's "pet project".

"Today the new geography of knowledge and cultures is being drawn. Tomorrow, that which is not available online runs the risk of being invisible to the world," he continued according to press reports.

The word "Quaero" means "I seek" in Latin, and was chosen to name the project to avoid offending either German or French speakers.

Setting up a European Google-style engine is also part of a broader French and German plan to lift up the old continent to US and Japanese research and development levels.

The creators of Quaero say it will not just be a compelling alternative to Google as a search engine, but a set of tools for translating, identifying and indexing images, sound and text.

The initiative will be funded by both government and private entities in France and Germany, with the French contribution of 150 million euro coming from the newly established Agency for Industrial Innovation.

The firm Thomson is expected to lead the French side, while the German counterpart Bertelsmann is reported to be Germany's main player.

The project, for which interest has risen dramatically after president Chirac's official adoption, has been both praised and ridiculed over the last few days.

"There is already a good French search engine - it's called Google.fr," commentators on the Internet joke, writes the Financial Times.

The French satirical newspaper Le Canard enchaîné has also ridiculed Quaero:

"Compared with Microsoft's €30bn profits or Google's €100bn capitalisation, Chirac's announcement is really going to spread panic in Silicon Valley."

Source: EUobserver

EU compares quality of life in European cities

The European Commission has published a comparison of the quality of life between cities in the old and new member states aimed at promoting successful urban living as an engine for growth in Europe.

Regional policy commissioner Danuta Hubner in December launched the "Urban Audit" website, which lists 258 large medium-sized cities all over the 25 EU member states and candidate countries, according to a wide range of key indicators on the quality of life.

"For every two new jobs created in the city, there is a third one for a person that commutes", commissioner Hubner said at the launch of the project, aimed at creating jobs and enhance life in urban surroundings.

She added that 6 million jobs would have to be created in European cities if they were to meet the Lisbon targets.

"Only ten percent of the European cities have met with the targets", she said.

Commissioner Hubner said the Urban Audit was a "useful toolbox" for cities, allowing mayors and other local elected officials to compare their cities with others, and improve urban life by studying best practices.

Commissioner Hubner said that the most striking in the listing were the neighbourhood disparities, with unemployment or poverty

differences far greater within cities than between cities or regions.

"We have huge disparities within Europe's cities. We need to have a common policy that will address the problems' where they exist", Ms Hubner said.

According to the report, almost half of the cities looked at had neighbourhoods with unemployment rates above 20 percent, reaching as high as 58 percent in some areas.

Some of the recently riot-struck Parisian areas registered over 50 percent unemployment, while some Manchester neighbourhoods had an employment rate of 51 percent.

But Paris is also the most educated city among those listed, with almost 37 percent of residents of the French capital having a university degree. Cambridge came second in the listing with 32 percent.

Drivers in Milan are Europe's most dangerous, killing or seriously injuring 1.43 percent of the city's populations. Italy accounts for 17 of the 20 cities with most road accidents while the four safest cities are in Finland.

People in Budapest need the longest time to go back and forth to their job - 71 minutes on average - and the most crime-prone city in Europe is Liege.

Slovaks were found to attend most concerts in the EU, with 2,41 concerts per 1000 residents.

Source: EUobserver

Finns would spurn EU a new poll shows

Most Finns are unhappy with their membership of the European Union and would reject their country becoming a member of the bloc if asked, a new poll conducted in December 2005 indicates.

The survey conducted by Taloustutkimus - the second largest market research company in Finland - found that 49 percent of Finns would vote 'No' to EU membership as opposed to 44 percent who would say 'Yes'.

Seven percent of Finns remain undecided about how they would vote in a referendum on EU membership.

The question asked was: "How would you vote in a referendum on European Union (EU) membership?"

Finland joined the EU in 1995, following a referendum held on 16 October 1994, in which 56.9 percent of voters were in favour of accession.

Source: EUobserver

Irish most happy, Brits most unhappy with EU

Support for the EU is declining among the union's citizens, according to a new commission survey, while Europeans generally back the idea of an EU constitution and reject Turkish EU accession.

The "Autumn Standard Eurobarometer", presented on 20 December reveals that an average of 50 percent of European citizens consider EU membership of their country "a good thing", down from 54 percent in spring this year.

The survey, conducted in October and November, is the first commission poll on EU citizens' opinion of the EU since the French and Dutch rejection of the Constitution in May and June, as well as the breakdown of the June summit on the bloc's 2007-2013 budget.

European Commission Vice-President Margot Wallstrom, responsible for the EU's communication strategy, acknowledged that perceptions of the union had suffered from these events.

"Citizens have seen too much of selfish interest by member states, too little vision and solidarity," she said in a statement.

Of the 25 member states, Austria and the UK appear the most eurosceptic, with just 32 percent of Austrians and 33 percent of Brits saying EU membership is a good thing for their country, followed by Latvia (36 percent), Finland (38 percent) and Sweden and Hungary (both 39 percent).

On the other side of the coin are the union's greatest supporters, Luxembourg (82 percent) and Ireland (73 percent).

Remarkably, in the Netherlands, a country that overwhelmingly rejected a European constitution in June, a whole 70 percent of citizens say that EU membership is a good thing.

Only 32 percent of Swedes say they perceive that their country has "benefited from EU membership", closely followed by the Austrians and the British with 36 and 37 percent discontent citizens.

On the other side of the scope is - again - Ireland where 86 percent of citizens claim to enjoy Brussels's treats, and 69 percent of the Danes are as happy.

Idea of constitution supported

Despite the referendum failure in France and the Netherlands in May and June, support for a European Constitution has increased in the bloc of 25, with a majority of EU citizens in favour of a redraft of the faded constitution.

63 percent of EU citizens believe that the EU will work better with a constitution in place, an increase from before the French and Dutch referenda, when 61 percent claimed they were in favour of a constitution.

A new constitution should be sketched out, say 49 percent, while 22 percent think the ratification process for the current constitution draft should continue no matter the French and Dutch 'no' votes, and 13 percent believe the constitution should be scrapped.

Among French and Dutch citizens, 67 percent and 62 percent of respondents respectively said they back the idea of a constitution.

"The Eurobarometer survey shows that there is a positive mood about the constitution," a European Commission spokesman said.

"These results will be a valid contribution to the period of reflection on the constitution ahead of the next EU summit in June", he said.

Source: EUobserver