



UBC e-News

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Info

- Presidium meeting regarding UBC antenna in Brussels

On 17 May in Kolding there was a meeting of the Presidium concerning among others establishing the representation of UBC in Brussels, which would be placed in the Stockholm Region Office. The matter will be treated at the forthcoming UBC Executive Board meeting in St. Petersburg, 9-10 June.

From UBC Commissions

- Commission on Environment

Meeting of the Commission, 4-6 May 2006, Lübeck

The meeting reported and discussed UBC's environmental and sustainable development activities, European Policy Developments (Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment), Baltic Co-operation Processes, BSR and European Projects, preparations for Baltic contributions at the 5th Pan-European Conference on Sustainable Cities and Towns, Seville, March 2007. The meeting, during the kick-off Roundtable, shaped the new Baltic Cities' Environmental Training Programme for environmental directors and experts.

Knowledge basis for the new program has been created through the Baltic Cities Sustainable Development Survey 2004/2005 and the CAPACITY feasibility study carried out in 2005-2006. The new executive program, to be co-funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers and Finnish Ministry of

the Environment, is open for all UBC members and is to be implemented during 2006-2008. Key intention with the roundtable session and working groups at the Lübeck meeting was to involve member cities for the design and implementation of the training program.

- Report/introduction from the Baltic Cities' Survey 2005 and the CAPACITY study
- Good practice presentations from member cities
- Discussion/mapping of development needs and challenges at the cities

4 working groups discussed the key topics for the new training program: Air Quality, Noise, Solid Waste, and Climate Protection. Participants also took part in the study visit to the Environmental Exhibitions at the Trade Fair Centre.

- Commission on Sport

On May 4-6, 2006 Gdynia played host to the UBC Commission on Sport Annual Meeting entitled "Active Living". The meeting consisted of two thematic blocks: the first one was devoted to multifunctional sports arenas. There were presentations of sports arenas in the cities of Gdynia (Poland), Rostock (Germany), Karlskrona (Sweden), Gladsaxe near Copenhagen (Denmark). The presentations consisted in demonstrating a management system of sports facilities as well as ways of promoting sport among inhabitants of all age groups from the a/m cities. The second block dealt with best practices connected with active living programs – "Cities on the Move".

This part of the Annual Meeting was prepared in cooperation with the Baltic Region Healthy Cities Association. The first presentation entitled "One step – better than nothing" showed how Turku (Finland) promotes healthy lifestyle as well as encourages its inhabitants to be active. Moreover, the representatives of Baltic Region Healthy Cities Association presented the programme "Schools on the move" whose objective is to make schooldays (especially school breaks) more physically active. Next, a representative of Polva (Estonia) presented the town's experiences in developing healthy and active strategies. The following presentation was focused on "Exercise and Diet on Prescription" - the initiative implemented in Copenhagen. This year the Commission's Annual Meeting was combined with the 14th Twin Cities Sporting Competition which is a sporting event organized in Gdynia since 1993 and attended by youth from European Twin Cities of Gdynia. Held on May 3-6, this year's competition was attended by nearly 450 young sportspeople from 10 cities: Aalborg (Denmark), Baranowichi (Bielarus), Kaliningrad (Russia), Karlskrona (Sweden), Kiel (Germany), Klaipeda (Lithuania), Kristiansand (Norway), Liepaja (Latvia), Opal Coast (France) and Gdynia (Poland). This year the youth competed in four sports: football, handball, judo and sailing.

More information: ubcsport@gdynia.pl

- Commission on Tourism

On 5 May in Koszalin there was a meeting of the Commission on Tourism.

The purpose of the meeting was the discussion about the program of the Commission's on Tourism activities in the period 2006-2007, as well as the presentation of two international tourist projects provided for to the realization in the current year. There was also the discussion about the limitations of the tourism development and ways of its

creating and promoting in different cities of Baltic Region.

Additionally, during the meeting participants discussed about the possibilities of the cooperation between cities of Union of the Baltic Cities within the range of gaining the UE funds for the development of the tourist subsidiaries of the cities.

- Commission on Youth Issues

Meeting of the Commission took place on 12-14 May 2006 in Tallinn.

During the meeting participants discussed:

- Cooperation with other UBC Commissions
- Guidelines for the Youth conference to be held in Parnu in 2007
- Proposal from Kolding on how the commission can test and also present its common values at the G.A. in Pärnu 2007
- Information strategy
- Proposal of large scale project to EU YOUTH

- Commission on Culture

"Cultural Festival of the years 2005 and 2006" Award and Nomination

The UBC Commission on Culture is asking the member cities to propose a candidate for award and nomination "Cultural Festival of the Years 2005 and 2006". While distributing the award and the nomination the UBC commission on culture will appreciate festivals which:

- have influenced the cultural life of the city in a remarkable way
- have influenced the image of the city in a positive way
- have strengthened the identity of the city
- have raised the awareness of cultural values of life

The nomination of Cultural Festival of the Years 2005 and 2006 is addressed to festivals in UBC member cities (for the list of member cities visit

<http://www.ubc.net/members/status.html>).

Municipalities are the only entities to apply.

The festival organizations willing to apply the nomination are obliged to submit their application forms by the agency of a municipality. The municipalities may decide what the responsible agencies are but the UBC commission on culture wish that the officials of the agencies are professionals in field of culture. Each UBC member city is allowed to submit only one application for the nomination. The cities that have a representatives in the board of the commission on culture may not submit an application.

The commission on culture will give the award and the nomination "Cultural Festival of the Years 2005 and 2006" for a festival in a UBC member city. The candidating festivals should have been realized successfully in 2005 or 2006 and have at least a five-year-old history behind them and realistic plans to continue in the future. The application should contain

- a detailed description of the festival
- a photographic portfolio (preferably digital photos)
- press cuttings (if available)
- the applicants (member cities) evaluation and motivations of the cultural and other values of the festival.

The grant for the festival of the years 2005 and 2006 is 1000 euro.

The festival which will be awarded the nomination "Cultural Festival of the years 2005 and 2006" is obliged to use the UBC logo in all publicity material (such as press briefings, promotional material, posters and web site) at least for one year. The logo should always be accompanied by the following by-line "UBC Cultural Festival of the years 2005 and 2006".

More information and application form at:

http://www.ubc.net/today/e_News/documents/CultF2006.doc

- Commission on Business Cooperation

Dear Members of the Union of Baltic Cities,
The City of Turku has been given the honour to chair the UBC Commission on Business Cooperation this year. Thus it is a great pleasure for me to invite the representatives of the UBC cities to the Commission meeting to our summery city in June.

The Turku region is a strong growth centre of the Baltic Sea Region. The region attracts people with its diverse business structure, high-quality supply of education, culture and good services plus the beautiful archipelago make for an attractive combination.

Marine and metal industries have long traditions in the Turku region. But this is not just history, Turku is today the one of the leading centres of expertise in this sector - the most modern cruisers in the world are built in Turku. Biotechnology and ICT are the newest sources of growth in our region.

We have made an interesting programme for you including some presentations on our core competencies, a visit to Turku Science Park and not to forget the opportunity to experience our unique archipelago on an evening cruise. I am convinced that Turku has a lot to offer you professionally and give some unforgettable memories as well.

I hope that as many Business Commission meeting participants as possible can also participate the European Day of the Entrepreneur (EDE) on June 14 when hundreds of entrepreneurs from Southwest Finland gather together in Turku. The UBC Business Commission meeting will start with EDE evening party.

Looking forward to meeting you in Turku

Mikko Pukkinen

Mayor, City of Turku

More information can be found at:

<http://www.ubc.net/calendar/doc/15-16-06-2006/index.htm>

Partner search

- LIEDRA network

ASAEI is an association of municipalities, districts and provinces in Aragón which represents over 300 municipalities and most districts and provinces.

The LIEDRA project is the result of an approved European programme (unique in Spain promoter) whose main objective to promote active European citizenship-Thematic Conferences.

This project has two goals:

- Firstly, to set up an International Thematic Conference in Zaragoza concerning local policies to combat gender violence.
- Secondly, This project aims to establish the Liedra Network to combat violence against women. We should explain that the statue of this network has already been successfully developed. The official approval of these statutes will take place in the international conference which will be held in Zaragoza on 19th-20th October 2006. If you wish to be involved in LIEDRA Network and participate in the International conference, please select a representative within your organisation, who should be a Mayor. As we have limited funding, the first 28 candidates will have their food and hotel expenses reimbursed during the two days of the conference. Additional small contributions towards travel expenses will also be available. We look forward to receiving your comments.

Yolanda Matas

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Invitations to other conferences

- 'International Conference on Emergency Communications 2006' to be held in Tampere, Finland, on 18-20 June 2006. More information can be found at: http://www.ubc.net/today/e_News/documents/ICECbrochure.pdf

Conferences attended by UBC representatives:

- 64th Plenary Session of the Committee of the Regions, Brussels 26-27 April 2006 (Mr Per Boedker Andersen, President of UBC)
- Conference Urban Futures 2.0, Stockholm, 3-4 May 2006 (Mrs Lillian Westerberg, City of Stockholm)
- Roundtable on the role of transnational networks in the European Union, Forli, 15 May (Mr Christopher Odmann, City Councillor, City of Stockholm, Mrs Anna Dargiewicz, UBC Secretariat)
- "Baltic Sea INTERREG III B project conference - setting regions in motion", Malmö, 16-17 May 2006 (Mr Adolfas Antanas Balutis, Deputy Mayor of Kaunas).
- "Baltic Europe – Region with the future", Gdynia, 18 May 2006 (Ms Anna Sosnicka, UBC Secretariat)
- "Baltic Sea Forum Pro Baltica", Gdansk, 19 May 2006 (Mr Pawel Zaboklicki, UBC Secretary General)

UBC will be represented at the conferences:

- 13th Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe Plenary Session, Strasbourg, 31 May-1 June 2006 (Mr Bjarne Ugland, Deputy Mayor of Kristiansand)
- 11th General Assembly of CPMR Baltic Sea Commission and a conference "How to improve sustainable accessibility in the Baltic Sea Region?", Karlskrona, 1-2 June 2006 (Mr Maciej Lisicki, Councillor, City of Gdansk)
- Conference: "Regions and Cities: Partners for Growth and Jobs", 1-2 June 2006, Barcelona (Mr Soeren Revsbaek, Deputy Mayor of Naestved)
- 17th Assembly of International Black Sea Club (IBSC) 1-4 June 2006, Odessa (Mr Vytautas Juodagalvis, City of Kaunas)
- Structured Dialogue meeting in connection with the 65th Plenary Session of the Committee of the Regions, 15 June 2006, Brussels (Mrs Marie-Luise Ronnmark, UBC 1st Vice-President)

New EU portal on health launched

The Commission has launched a new Health-EU Portal to answer to the needs of an estimated third of the EU population searching for information on different health issues.

According to the Commission, every third European adult is surfing the internet trying to find information on health. To help these people to find their way around, the Commission has launched, in the context of the eHealth 2006 conference, a new portal on health. The Health-EU Portal aims to be a gateway and 'one-stop-shop' to simple and reliable information on 6 thematic health areas, divided in 47 health topics, touching upon issues from health insurance and infectious diseases to bioterrorism.

The site aims to provide citizens, patients, healthcare professionals and scientists with information on both health topics and related policies as well as on the latest developments in research.

The Health-EU Portal supplies links to all member states' health-related policies and other health issues, to a large number of specialist websites and to sites of NGOs and international organisations.

This 600 000 euro project is an initiative of the EU Public Health Programme 2003-2008 and corresponds also to the aspirations on the e-Europe Action Plan as the portal aims to provide citizens with simple, clear and scientifically sound information on-line.

Source: EurActiv

EU & US: consumer education is they key to fight obesity

Both sides of the Atlantic agree on one thing: fighting the obesity epidemic starts by educating consumers to make informed choices. Obesity is one of the greatest public health challenges of the 21st century. Since the 1980s, the number of those affected in the EU has tripled and continues to increase at an alarming rate, especially among children. It is estimated that, at present, 7% of total EU

healthcare costs are spent treating obesity-related illness.

The first ever EU-US conference on obesity took place in Brussels on 11-12 May 2006. The event gathered some 150 government and Commission officials, members of the EU Platform for Action, industry players, NGOs and consumer representatives from both sides of the Atlantic to discuss and compare good practice on ongoing and new initiatives regarding health, nutrition and physical activity. The issues addressed included food advertising, labelling, consumer education and research.

The current EU initiatives addressing the problem of obesity are the following:

- Platform for action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health,
- Member state Network on Nutrition and Physical Activity,
- Labelling - a process of agreeing new rules on the use of health and nutrition claims on food labels is currently under way,
- Working with other policy areas such as sports and education,
- Support for obesity-related projects such as the one on childhood obesity and Eurodiet.

The Commission also recently adopted a Green Paper on the promotion of a healthy diet and physical activity aiming to stimulate discussion about effective initiatives to promote healthy diets and physical activity and to define best practices.

"Markets should go before mandates and the invisible hand of markets [industry self-regulation] should be privileged to the heavy hand of governments," outlined the deputy secretary of the US Department of health and human services, Alex Azar, the American view on the issue and emphasised the importance of providing more info on healthy diets to the consumers so that they can do informed choices. Further, "there also needs to be a business case for healthy food," he added meaning that the markets will produce healthy and tasty food if there's a market demand for it.

Source: EurActiv

Will the enlarged EU deliver the right kind of jobs?

The "Employment Week" conference focuses on the employment challenges for the enlarged EU in a globalised economy and the need for new skills in the workforce.

The 13th "Employment Week" in Brussels, 16-18 May, is centred on the theme "Working together for growth and jobs".

Both policy makers, NGO's and practitioners will meet to discuss trends and policies in European employment. Among the discussion items are the following themes:

- Is the new, enlarged, EU creating the kind of jobs that will ensure growth and prosperity in the expanding global economy?
- How well are companies and workers adapting to change? Is Europe moving towards a better work-life balance? Are we developing the right workforce skills to ensure continued competitiveness?
- How successful are we in building partnerships, promoting mobility, addressing demographic and social challenges, and creating the jobs of the future?

Participants are among others, Nikolaus van der Pas, Director General of Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, European Commission, Hans Martens, Chief Executive, European Policy Centre, Andrew Watt, Senior Researcher, European Trade Union Institute, Arnaldo Abruzzini, Secretary General, Eurochambres and Anne-Sophie Parent, President, Platform of European Social NGOs.

The opening session on "Growth and Jobs in the New Enlarged Europe" was chaired by EurActiv publisher Christophe Leclercq.

Source: EurActiv

Poverty - a steady guest in Europe

Poverty in Europe is on the decline, but very slowly so, says a recent study commissioned by Fondation Robert Schuman. The EU's role on combating pauperism, it says, is seldom acknowledged.

Even though social policy remains national competence, the EU has played an important role in reducing poverty, says the study, by Sarah Bouquerel et Pierre-Alain de Malleray of the Institut d'études politiques de Paris. Especially social cohesion policy, they say, is essential in combating monetary poverty.

"Poverty", the experts say, "is a phenomenon which takes many forms and is hard to comprehend. There can be no doubt that a household lacking of resources to fulfill everyday needs like food, shelter or heating, is poor. But what about a household which can't afford holiday trips, which can't buy a dishwasher?" There are big regional and national differences, they say, in evaluating such indicators. Subjectively, a household with the same living standard may go for poor in a Nordic country, but for relatively wealthy in Greece, Portugal or some new member states. Technically, the measure used is strictly national: A household which disposes of less than 60 percent of the country's median income is called poor. Expressed in purchasing power standards (PPS), the poverty line in 2001 was at 2,183 in Estonia and at 14,376 in Luxembourg. According to these criteria, 72 million Europeans (16%) lived under conditions of poverty, which is only 3% less than in 1994.

The authors argue in favour of the EU's exemption of social policy, such as housing and other social services, from the scope of competition policy: "The primary motor in reducing poverty in Europe is by far the social protection systems established by each Member State. The statistics speak for themselves: social protection regimes enable the reduction of the monetary poverty rate in Europe from 40 % (measured before social transfers) to 16 % (after transfers)! By positioning these measures outside the sphere of European competition and by progressively encouraging their coordination the Union thereby aids the effectiveness of the main instrument which public authorities dispose of to reduce poverty."

Source: EurActiv

Beer healthy for European economy

Europe is the most important beer producer in the world, according to a new study.

The study, conducted by accounting firm Ernst & Young, also highlights the importance of the brewing sector's contribution to the European economy. The sector had a turnover of around €57.5 billion or the equivalent to the GDP of the Polish or Austrian economy in the last quarter of 2004.

Of the seven largest brewers in the world, four are European while more than 3,000 European small and medium enterprises in the brewing industry. "Many of us enjoy a drink of beer, but few realise how significant Europe's beer sector is in contributing to the wider economy," said British liberal MEP Graham Watson at the launch of the study.

"At a time when attention in the EU is focused on ways to generate employment at home and develop market leaders in the global economy, the study offers confirmation of a European success story," he added.

"With such an impact on wealth and job creation in Europe, the brewers can help us deliver on the Lisbon goals in terms of competitiveness and economic prosperity," said the European brewery association in a statement. According to the study, taxes on beer consumers and producers brings in €38.8 billion to state revenues. With regards to employment, the study says that of all those employed in the EU member states, 1.2 per cent owe their jobs directly or indirectly to the production and consumption of beer.

European breweries provide jobs for 164,000 people, while 2.6 million jobs can be attributed to the brewing sector. Sale of beer in the hospitality sector and through retailers generates a large share of the jobs with some 2.1 million jobs in pubs, restaurants and shops.

The study focused on the 25 member states of the EU along with Norway, Switzerland, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey.

Source: EUobserver

Study highlights benefits of flexible working hours

A new survey has revealed that there are big differences between member states on flexible time arrangements, part-time work and family related leave. The survey, published in Brussels on Wednesday (17 May), was conducted the European foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions for the European Commission.

The survey shows that on average, flexible working time arrangements exist in 48% of establishments with 10 or more employees in Europe. Companies in Latvia, Sweden, Finland and the UK are the ones who tend to offer the most flexible working time arrangements. On the other hand, in Cyprus, Portugal, Greece and Hungary there are the least number of companies offering flexible arrangements. A wide variety of flexi-time schemes exist. Some 16% of firms operate schemes that allow workers to vary only their starting and finishing times of the day. Meanwhile, other schemes such as the accumulation of credit or debit hours and the opportunity to take full days off for the accumulated credit hours are less popular.

The survey indicates that both employers and employees benefit from flexi-time arrangements. 61% of managers surveyed for the report said that as result of flexible working time arrangements, there is a higher degree of job satisfaction among employees while almost two-thirds of employers representatives mentioned higher job satisfaction. A better adaptation of working hours to workload is another benefit. Over half of managers and two thirds employers' representatives cited this as one of flexi-time's benefits. The Foundation's director, Jorma Karppinen, highlighted the relevance of the survey for the EU's so-called Lisbon Agenda, a set of policies designed to boost the bloc's competitiveness. The Lisbon Agenda promotes higher employment rates among women and older workers. "The result of this survey demonstrates the benefits of flexible working time arrangements, benefits that can

help attract more people into employment and retain the," said Mr Karppinen. "Meeting the targets of the Lisbon agenda demands a clear understanding of the dynamics of the modern workplace and the societal factors that are impacting the way we work," he indicated.

Meanwhile, male employees taking parental leave was another issue analysed by this survey. With 69%, Sweden is the country where the most male employees take parental leave while only 1% of male employees in Cyprus take parental leave. The European average stands at 30%. The survey covered the 15 "old" EU member states as well as the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Latvia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia.

Source: EUobserver

Huge gap remains between EU's richest and poorest regions

London and Brussels feature as the richest EU regions, while the six poorest regions are all in Poland, according to new figures published on Thursday (18 May) by Eurostat, the EU's statistics office. The economic power of the top region - Inner London and the bottom region in the ranking - Lubelskie in Poland - differed by 278 to 33 per cent of the union's average respectively. Out of the EU's 254 regions, 37 exceeded the 125 per cent level - with seven of them being in Germany, six in Italy and the UK, five in the Netherlands, three in Austria and two in Belgium and Finland. The only new member state to feature in the group was the Czech Republic, with Prague recording 138 percent of the EU's average. The countries from central and eastern Europe, which joined the block in 2004, dominate the lowest positions of the table, with sixteen Polish regions below 60 per cent of the EU's average, seven in the Czech Republic and six in Hungary. The lowest ranked region amongst the old member states was Norte in Portugal (57%), while several poorer regions can be found in Greece and Italy, as well as overseas departments of Germany and France. The survey is based on

the 2003 GDP per inhabitant figures which are expressed in terms of purchasing power standards and it monitors the total economic activities of a region.

Source: EUobserver

Immigrant children lag behind in European schools

Immigrant children in various European countries are lagging behind in school performance when compared to their native counterparts, a study published by the OECD on 15 May shows. The research by the economic think tank reveals that more than a third of second-generation immigrant children in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Norway and also the US perform below a basic level of mathematical competence.

About 40 percent of second-generation immigrant students leave school without basic skills in mathematics. Concerned by the statistics, the OECD warned against being passive on the issue. "Doing nothing isn't an option, the data suggest: with unemployment rates in many countries two to three times higher among immigrants than among nationals, the cost of inaction may be far greater than the cost of action," an OECD statement said. In certain countries immigrants do substantially less well. Germany obtained some of the worst results, with statistics showing that the performance of immigrant students in German schools is worsening drastically. At the other end of the scale, Sweden emerged as the best performer among West European states in succeeding to reduce educational inequality between second-generational immigrant children and the native population

The research also says that immigrant students whose families are from Turkey tend to perform poorly in many countries, Germany remains the country where they do significantly worse.

From all the countries analysed, Australia and Canada got the best results.

Source: EUobserver