



UBC e-News

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Editor: Anna Sośnicka anna.sosnicka@ubc.net

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Info

- *IX UBC General Conference in Pärnu, 27-28 September 2007*

274 participants from 77 Member Cities as well as invited guests from international institutions took part in the IX General Conference of UBC, which was held on 26-29 September 2007 in Pärnu, Estonia. The first day of the Conference was devoted to three main topics: Cities' response to the climate change, Culture as a driving force for municipal development, Involvement of youth in democracy and in the life of the society. On the second day there was a General Assembly, devoted to internal UBC matters such as reports, elections, finances etc. In connection with the UBC General Conference there was also held a UBC Youth Conference "Under the surface".



Speakers

The conference was opened by Mr Mart Viisitamm, Mayor of the City of Pärnu and

Mr Per Boedker Andersen, President of the Union.

UBC invited those honourable Speakers:

- Ambassador Valdis Krastins, Chairman of the Committee of Senior Officials, Council of the Baltic Sea States, Latvia
- Mr Jüri Ratas, Vice President of the Parliament of the Republic of Estonia,
- Mr Alan Lloyd, Vice-President of the Bureau of the Congress of Local & Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe,
- Mr Uno Aldegren, President of RELEX commission, on behalf of the President of the Committee of the Regions, Michel Delebarre,
- Mr Toivo Käär, representative of the European Commission, Head of Representation in Estonia,
- Mr Xosé António Sánchez Bugallo, Mayor of Santiago de Compostela, President of the Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities,
- Mr Michel Sudarskis, Secretary General of International Urban Development Association INTA.

Conference workshops

The following workshops were held:

- I. Cities' response to the climate change.
- II. Culture as driving force for municipal development.
- III. Involvement of youth in democracy and in the life of the society.

General Assembly

In the morning the UBC Commissions held working meetings. Later on the Reports 2005-2007 and Action Plans 2008-2009 were delivered by the commissions' Chairmen or Board members during the General Assembly.



Elections

UBC elected the new Presidium for the term 2007-2009:

- Mr Per Boedker Andersen, Mayor of Kolding, as President of the Union
- Ms Marie-Louise Rönnmark, Mayor of Umea, as first Vice-President of the Union
- Ms Urve Tiidus, Mayor of Kuressaare, as Vice-President of the Union
- Mr Jarkko Virtanen, Vice-Mayor of Turku, as Vice-President of the Union

The new Executive Board for the next two year period:

Naestved (Denmark), Kärđla (Estonia), Kemi (Finland), Rostock (Germany), Liepaja (Latvia), Panevezys (Lithuania), Kristiansand (Norway), Gdańsk (Poland), St.Petersburg (Russia), Växjö (Sweden).

Other decisions:

- UBC adopted the Resolution on Climate Change. This resolution calls for concrete actions in facing the challenges of Climate Change. It stresses the importance of the cities and local authorities as the key players in the BSR. The resolution states that it is possible to combine increased welfare for our citizens and economic progress for our local companies with better energy efficiency and reduced emissions. The resolution is at: http://www.ubc.net/today/pictures/ClimateChange_resolution.doc

- UBC approved the Report on UBC Activities October 2005 - September 2007
- Ms Ewa Back, Ms Marta Chełkowska and Ms Silvia Löbner were re-elected to the UBC Board of Audit for a two-year period.
- UBC approved the new membership fees for 2008 and 2009
- Following the proposal of the Mayor of the City of Gdańsk, Mr Paweł Adamowicz, the General Conference decided to maintain the UBC Secretariat in the City of Gdańsk, for the next four-year period.
- UBC decided to hold the next General Conference in Kristiansand, Norway, in 2009.

The Best Environmental Practice in Baltic Cities Award 2007 was granted to Växjö, Sweden, for sustainable energy management. The Cultural Prize 2006-2007 for the best innovative cultural activity was awarded to Umea municipality for the Library 2007 project.



- *UBC Youth Conference "Under the surface"*

From demands to possibilities in the Baltic Sea Region

Two days, the 27th and 28th of September, Pärnu was the home for more than 100 young people from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Sweden and Russia who met at the third Union UBC Youth conference "Under the Surface".

On 27 September, the third UBC Youth conference “Under the Surface” was opened with a speech from Charlotte Gustafsson, the Chairman of the UBC Commission on Youth Issues. “During the conference we will dive in under the surface in order to discover possibilities offered in the Baltic Sea Region. I believe young people are an unknown resource to many powerful decision makers in the Baltic sea region. I believe young people carry a lot of answers to today’s questions, but also about which questions we will speak tomorrow”, Ms. Gustafsson said.

There were also speeches from Birgitta Elfström, Deputy Major City of Kalmar (Sweden), Kaia Jäppinen, Deputy Major of the city of Tallinn and Jaan Urb, the coordinator of Pärnu city Youth Council. Everybody agreed that Baltic Sea Region is very interesting in its history, geography and culture.

On Friday, the 28 of September, youngsters from the Baltic Sea Region met in Raekula old school to discuss about the various possibilities how to change the lives of many young people in the Region in a way that they could influence and take active part in the social and political processes all around them.

The main aim of the conference “Under the Surface” was to discuss various possibilities for young people in the Baltic Sea Region. After the conference the ideas of the youngsters will be reviewed in a Book of Possibilities.

There were many good and creative discussions about involvement of youth in democracy processes, youth communication, tolerance and intercultural learning, participation in youth organisations, influencing decisions in their local municipalities, European Voluntary Service (EVS), making micro projects and many other important issues. There was also a workshop for civil servants and politicians with an aim to discuss and change experiences about how to work with a child and youth perspective on a local level. One of the most important things to be remembered is that now youngsters

from Baltic Sea Region are able to get a certain amount of money and realize their ideas with the help of micro project competition.

For the first time in UBC history the Youth conference took place in interaction with the UBC General Conference. Young people from Baltic Sea Region had a wonderful chance to meet politicians, ask them questions and discuss actual problems in the region. “I think this is a great idea that young people can meet and speak eye to eye with politicians. It’s a huge experience for youngsters”, says Ieva Uzule a youth representative from Latvia. The youth conference “Under the Surface” was organised by the UBC Commission on Youth Issues and is part of the EU YOUTH project “Different History Common Future - Youth as a resource for sustainable future in the Baltic Sea Region”. The conference is co-financed by the European Union, the City of Pärnu and the CBSS Baltic Sea Working Group on Youth Affairs.

Edgars Lakutis

e-mail: edgars_lakutis@inbox.lv



From UBC Commissions

- **Commission on Energy**

Get some powerful answers to your community regarding "What can we do to stop climate change". Energy and climate change are strongly interrelated since over

80% of all carbon dioxide is generated within the energy sector. The cities and their inhabitants are major stakeholders in the battle to reduce green house gases. The energy systems that heat our cities and generate power for both private and public utilities are the center of our attention. Internationally leading experts and highly skilled representatives from other UBC cities will gather to learn and present the latest best practices in the Baltic Sea Area. The UBC energy commission invites all member cities to an open energy meeting in Kotka, Finland 22-23 November 2007 Please also see at: <http://www.ubc.net/calendar/doc/22-23-11-2007/index.htm> documents for practical information, travel arrangements, registration form and a welcome letter from the city of Kotka. If you have any questions please contact the secretariat +46491764292 or info@ubcenergy.org Call for "best practices from your city" please send this by November 15th to eva.hjalmered@ubcenergy.org

Mr. Stefan Windh, Co-Chairman
UBC Energy Commission

- Commission on Environment

The SUSTAINMENT Final Conference, - URBANworks-, will take place 12-14 November in Gdansk, Poland. The Conference focuses on disseminating models and tools for European cities and municipalities to sustainably and effectively manage their city's development. It will gather our project partners from thirteen cities around the Baltic Sea, as well as other local, regional and national authorities interested in Integrated Solutions for Sustainability Management in cities. The Conference will provide participants with opportunities to exchange experiences of how they have further developed or even reinvented the organisational units within their city administration to manage sustainable development of their city. The conference will

feature partner-led in-depth discussions about successful methods, as well as challenges of seeking support and resources among the stakeholders for a forthcoming sustainability management unit. Other key issues include cross-sectoral cooperation, monitoring, and communication. Individual forums for politicians will be held in parallel with technical sessions. The conference will conclude with a General Forum, where political decision-makers, administrators and researchers from local, regional and national bodies will explore the new forms of sustainability management in the ever integrating world. URBANworks, an interactive guidance tool to support cities in this organisational development, will be launched. For more information, please visit: <http://www.sustainment-project.net>

Kyösti Lempa, project coordinator

- Commission on Transportation

Nowadays the traffic in many cities is so intense that the problem of road safety has become one of the most important issues. In spite of numerous preventive measures the number of casualties of road accidents is still high. Unfortunately among the victims there are also children. It is very often lack or insufficient knowledge of the road safety rules which is the cause of an accident. Therefore it is essential to effectively teach children about road safety so that they can feel safe on the crossing, in public transport means or riding their bicycle. Being aware of the importance of the above mentioned subject, the Commission on Transportation encourages primary schools in the UBC member cities to take part in the Road Safety Contest. Here:

<http://www.ubc.net/commissions/transportation/RoadSafetyContest.doc> please find rules for participation and the application form. The contest is addressed to primary schools in the UBC member cities. However, only one school from a given UBC member city can

participate in the contest. It is the City Hall/Council of a given UBC member city to decide which primary school will represent the city and thus participate in the contest. The deadline for sending project proposals is November 16, 2007. Completed application forms should be sent to the UBC Commission on Transportation Secretariat - by e-mail ubctransport@gdynia.pl or fax: +48586218620. Should you have any further questions, please feel free to contact the UBC Commission on Transportation Secretariat.

Marcin Wołek
Chairman of the Commission

- Commission on Urban Planning

The Commission on Urban Planning had a seminar and annual meeting in Kotka between October 3rd and 6th, 2007. The seminar theme was City Identity and the theme was approached from different points of view by lectures by researchers from the Helsinki University of Technology. The lectures were about city identity building and branding and about cities inhabitants' experiences of good urban life. Again it was stated that a city's image and atmosphere is made by its inhabitants while planners' and administration's task is to create opportunities for urban life and culture. The seminar participants had a chance to get acquainted with City of Kotka as a maritime city with rich culture of forestry, paper mills, harbour life and international connections. An impressive experience was the visit to Sunila paper mill and housing area designed by famous architect Alvar Aalto in the 1930's. Kotka was also seen as a city of parks and green nature, where the presence of the sea can be felt everywhere. Seeing the calm water surface with fog rolling in from the sea at sunset followed by an excellent dinner of roasted lamb was a perfect ending to the first day of the workshops, and gave a good boost for continuation of our work for the rest of the seminar. The seminar workshops had two

themes, one about developing the original Kotka Port to the Harbour of Culture, and another about developing a suburban area Karhula and its neighbouring commercial area Jumalniemi. Four different workgroups worked intensively with these questions producing good proposals for future planning. Our hosts, the city planners of Kotka, were happy with the results of the workshops and said they got plenty of good new ideas for future development of their strategically important planning projects. The seminar participants especially appreciated the excellent organisation of the seminar and hospitality of the host city, the dynamic maritime city of Kotka. The annual meeting of the CUP focused on future activities of the Commission. The Commission aims to apply for financing for a project about Sustainable and Attractive Cities and seeks interested cities to become project partners. Also, it was announced that the CUP will have its next seminar in Aarhus, Denmark, in April 2008. The next seminars will be in Turku, Finland in autumn 2008 and in Gdansk, Poland, in spring 2009.

Sirpa Kallio
Chairperson of the Commission



Project "VisualCities" - a pilot study

At the UBC CUP seminar in Kotka, Finland, I presented a study of the possibilities to use public and free available internet tools, like

Google Earth, in urban planning. We have in Umeå done a pre-study where we use Google Earth for public presentation of a 3D-model over a future housing area. The model area is near 2 square km wide and contains around 200 buildings, modelled in 3D, with streets, public spaces and greenery and also new bridges to the island that is the case study object. The model illustrates how the area is proposed to be built. It will be made public available by using Google Earth during the period of public consultation of the land use plan for the area. This example is an attempt to increase the citizens' participation in the planning process by the use of modern Information Communication Techniques (ICT). So far we can see very promising and interesting possibilities in the use of Google Earth in this context. The ambitions of increasing citizens participation and democratic influence in land use planning processes has also been a topic for the cooperation within the CUP-network. The experiences from the network-seminars tell us that there is a widely spread interest for this question, stretching across the borders of BSR and the European Union. Out of that background I am now proposing to start a pilote-project within the CUP-network, where a number of interested UBC/CUP-cities together will start to look closer into these possibilities, exchange experiences and knowledge, also see if there are difficulties and limits in the technical and legal aspects etc. In short: to explore the possibilities of using ICT-tools like Google Earth in urban planning. We have from the municipality in Umeå been in contact with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). SIDA has established a Baltic unit to nurture Sweden's relations in the Baltic region. The unit works with activities of mutual interest rather than development aid. There is a financial program for supporting cooperation between Sweden and the BSR region, especially the eastern Baltic countries. Since the UBC-network also have such focus that program could be very

suitable for a pilot study as sketched above. I therefore hereby make a call to you for participation in such a pilot study. Some more details and economical conditions is presented in the document at: http://www.ubc.net/today/e_News/documents/VisualCities.pdf In short the idea is that the participating cities will contribute with their own working time for participating persons and that the project finances most of travel and accommodation costs for meetings/seminars. I hope that you will find this proposal interesting. Please give me your response as soon as possible. The idea is to launch the project as soon as practically possible. Application to SIDA for financial support will be made as soon as we have enough positive answers for participation. The project is limited to about 10 participating cities.

Lars-Göran Boström
Chief planner

- Commission on Education

On 9th October Commission on Education had a conference "What kind of guidance need the youngsters?" in Kärdla. Moderator of the meeting was Vice-chairman of the Commission on Education Mr Ivo Eesmaa, organizers Head of the Commission Secretariat Ms Annely Veevo and secretary Ms Kairi Priit. Around 100 participants were presented at the conference, most of them youngsters. First of all Mayor of Kärdla, Mr Anton Kaljula, welcomed the participants in Kärdla and expressed his gladness that such conference is happening in Kärdla. Mr Kurt Pettersson, the Chairman of the Commission on Education, opened the conference and welcomed everyone. The conference was built up in 4 parts: policy, expectations of youngsters, expectations of enterprisers and expectations of universities. *Policy*. From Republic of Estonia was represented Mr Edgar Slümmer (Estonian Youthwork Center), who spoke about EU policy about youth and guidance. He said there is no EU

policy in classical way but is only White Paper: A New Impetus for European Youth. Ms Üllý Enn from European Youth Estonian Office spoke about attracting young unemployed through non-formal study. *Expectations of universities.* Mr Kurt Pettersson as a representative of Uppsala University spoke about what expectations has University from youngsters after High School. He brought out examples from youth research school in Norrtälje. *Expectations of youngsters.* Students from Rodengymnasium in Norrtälje, Ms Annika Barnard and Mr Hogir Aslan, spoke about youngsters expectations before they starting to work. "Are young people in Estonia ready to enter into job market?" was spoken from Ms Anetta Kütt, Hiiumaa Youth Council; Ms Margit Kagadze, Hiiumaa Councelling Center). *Expectations of enterprisers.* From enterprisers were represented Mr Enn Veevo (M&P Nurst, Estonia), Ms Anu Pielberg (OÜ Hiiu Autotrans, Estonia) and Ms Liina Simm (Personnel Firma Fontes). E.Veevo brought forth rhetorical question: "The Young Employee – Yes or No?" A.Pielberg spoke about "Does Young worker meet expectations of employer?" and L.Simm about expectations of employers in generally. The conference was very interesting. Youngsters said later, that they were pity that only so few (around 100) pupils heard the speeches and promised next time disseminate information to more youngsters.

Annely Veevo



From UBC Cities

- City of Tartu

Call for registration to the international youth work conference in Tartu. We invite you to attend the international youth work conference "A Total Makeover – is it necessary?" on 22-23 November 2007 in Tartu, Estonia. The target groups of the conference are youth workers, youth work administrators, youth researchers, and youth leaders from different European countries. During the conference the question about the role of open youth centres and open youth work as a non-formal educational method in contemporary society will be arisen, the histories of open youth centres in different European countries will be compared, and good practices in open youth work will be shared. The conference is a part of an international project the aim of which is the thematic network development between Tartu and Tartu's twinned towns. As an expanded result of the project a handbook "Good practices in open youth work" will be published where a variety of successful projects from different European countries are presented in both working languages of the conference – English and Estonian. The deadline for registration is 16 November 2007. The conference fee per international participant is 800 EEK (about 52 EUR). The conference fee should be paid on the basis of the invoice received after registration. Information and registration is available at the website: www.tartu.EU/makeoverENG The conference is organised by Youth Policy Service of Tartu City Government, financed by Tartu City Government and co-financed by the European Union within the programme "Europe for Citizens" 2007-2013, and Estonian Council of Gambling Taxes. Information on registration: Reimo Rehkli, Chief Specialist of Youth Policy Service, Tartu City Government; phone: +3727361364; Reimo.Rehkli@raad.tartu.ee

- City of Turku

Turku Development Forum 2007

Please find here:

http://www.ubc.net/today/e_News/documents/TDF2007.pdf the 2nd announcement and programme for the Turku Development Forum 2007, which will be held in Turku, Finland on 29-30 November 2007. The main themes of the Forum: Education Systems - Vitality of Urban Regions - Welfare will be introduced by top-level speakers. The Forum will offer a platform for interaction and debate between representatives of public sector, business and research. The crucial question is: will they meet each other? I strongly encourage you to take part in this unique event. For further information and registration: www.turkudevelopmentforum.fi.

Harri Andersson
Vice Rector, University of Turku
harri.andersson@utu.fi

- City of Rostock

Conference on Cruise and Ferry Shipping in Rostock

The Baltic Institute of Marketing, Transport and Tourism at the University of Rostock in Cooperation with Baltic Sea Forum is inviting to the international Conference "Cruise and Ferry Passenger Shipping – Growth Potential, Ports, Regional Marketing and Economic Effects in the Baltic Sea Region". It will be held on 21 - 22 November 2007 in Rostock and is tailored for managers and specialists of cruise and ferry companies, agents, ports, tour operators, regional cruise marketing networks, tourist organizations of cities and regions, universities, academies and consultants with special interest in the Baltic. High ranking specialists of 9 countries will deal with the growth potential of cruise and ferry passenger shipping on the Baltic, future challenges for cruise ports and marketing

networking in port regions. For more information: www.ostseeinstitut.uni-rostock.de/englisch/cruise_eng.htm

Prof. Dr. K.-H. Breitzmann

Other information

- *"Tourism Destinations for the Future"*.

It is our great pleasure and privilege to invite you from the UBC network and other good actors in the BSR to taking part in the upcoming international conference titled "Tourism Destinations for the Future". The conference seeks to link the new EU policy on sustainable tourism development, the opportunities of the experience economy, the innovation potentials and the challenges destinations all over Europe are facing. Registration takes place on our homepage: www.DestiLink.www

Bjarne Rasmussen
Leader of DestiLink
e-mail: br@regionsjaelland.dk

- *Project proposal from Sevilla*

Sevilla Global, Seville's urban agency for economic promotion is looking for a partner within UBC for a project to be submitted to Interreg IV C programme. Here: http://www.ubc.net/today/e_News/documents/SevillaProject.doc please find a project description.

The main objective is to promote the economic modernisation and competitiveness in Europe. If your city is interested to take part in the project please contact Mr Fabien Mesclier, Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities, e-mail: fabien.mesclier@crpm.org

EU commissioner outlines new maritime policy

Europe's new maritime policy aims to deliver "coherent and wide-ranging" policies for the whole of the EU, said Joe Borg. The commissioner for fisheries and maritime affairs said, "Apart from being the product of two and a half years of work, it is also underpinned by a number of key political priorities." He said, "If these policies are developed carelessly this will threaten the very foundations upon which a substantial part of the wealth of Europe depends." The Maltese official was delivering a keynote address in Florence to the general assembly of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR). The annual event brings together representatives from 150 regions in some of Europe's outermost regions and, this year, was also attended by French presidential candidate, Segolene Royal. Borg said the maritime policy, unveiled on 10 October, marks an "important turning point" when a "decisive shift" has taken place away from a period of reflection to one of action. He said that next year the commission will develop a roadmap to facilitate the development of maritime "spatial planning". He also said that establishing a maritime data and information infrastructure is of the "utmost importance". His comments were echoed by Joao Mira Gomes, Portuguese maritime affairs minister, who, speaking in Lisbon on Monday at a meeting of EU maritime affairs ministers, said the new policy offered a "great" opportunity to develop the economies of maritime regions. However, the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) has expressed concern that the commission's new policy, or 'blue paper', has generated "widespread" disappointment among European seafarers. Its political secretary, Philippe Alfonso, said, "These proposals fail to address the dramatic employment crisis affecting EU seafarers and to strike a balance between social and economic pillars in search of more competitiveness for the sector."

Source: EUpolitix

Europe ageing and divorcing at high speed

There are currently more elderly people than children living in the EU, as Europe's young population has decreased by 21 percent - or 23 million - in 25 years, 10 percent of which in the last ten years alone. Only 16.2 percent of today's EU population is less than 14 years old, while one sixth (16.6 percent) is 65 years or more. In addition one out of every 25 EU citizens is over 80 years old. Italy has the least young people (14.2%) and one out of every five Italians is more than 65 years old. At the other end of the scale, Ireland has the most youngsters (20.7%), according to a recently-released report by the Institute for Family Policies based in Spain. However, the decrease in numbers has been greatest in Spain, where the young population has diminished by 44% in the 1990 to 2005 period. Despite these figures, the EU population has grown by 8.2% over the last 27 years, now reaching almost 500 million. This paradox can mostly be explained by an ever increasing number of immigrants coming to the EU. Last year alone, 75% of the population growth was the result of immigration flows, says the report. France and the Netherlands are the only member states where the natural population growth has been higher than the immigration inflow. A relative population growth can be noted only in Western European countries, however, while in central and eastern Europe it has either remained the same (Slovenia and Slovakia), or decreased. The decrease has been most significant in new member state Bulgaria, which has lost almost 8% of its population (7.94%) in the last ten years. Currently, around 7.6 million people live in Bulgaria - but if its demographic trend continues, they will be 5.1 million by 2050. Meanwhile, if the tendencies in the 27-member bloc as a whole continue, it is very likely that the US and the EU will have the same number of inhabitants by 2060, says the report. Currently around 300 million people live in the US - almost 200 million less than in the EU. But the natural increase of the

American population is 12 times greater than that of Europe. On top of that, the number of births across the EU has been decreasing and in some member states, the birth rate is almost two times lower than in the US (2.09 children per family in 2006). In Greece, Spain and Italy birth rates have reached a critical level of 1.28 to 1.34 children per family, while among the new member states, none but Cyprus has a birth rate of above 1.30.

One divorce every 30 seconds in the EU. The report which focuses on the Evolution of the Family in Europe in 2007 also points at the decreasing number of successful marriages. From 1980 to 2005 the number of marriages in Europe decreased by 22.3 percent, while divorces increased by 55 percent in the same period. Spain presents the most radical case-study, as the number of divorces there has increased by 183 percent in the last 25 years. Currently, a couple divorces every 30 seconds in Europe and over 13.5 million marriages affecting more than 21 million children ended between 1990 and 2005 in the enlarged EU, according to the document. The Institute for Family Policies is a nongovernmental organisation whose aim is to make family policies a priority for the EU. Its figures are based on member states' official statistics and on those of the EU statistics office Eurostat.

Source: EUobserver

New EU states face labour shortages

Member states in central and eastern Europe are facing serious labour shortages while thousands of their workers are employed in richer western countries. While the jobless rates have fallen "substantially" in all eight post-communist countries that joined the EU in 2004, the current lack of skilled and unskilled workers could become an "impediment" to further growth and job creation, according to a report by the World Bank. The report points out that there has been a "substantial improvement of labour market conditions over a short period of time," in the region, particularly due to a

boost in demand for workers in the domestic economies. However, some labour resources have still not been utilised sufficiently, with younger and older people included among the jobless and a significant long-term unemployed rate. "Many persons of working age are economically inactive either because they lack skills demanded by employers, or because of labour supply disincentives, such as early retirement benefits, high payroll taxes, and limited opportunities for flexible work arrangements," authors of the report point out. The World Bank experts suggest three concrete steps to overcome both the labour shortages and the unemployment rate among certain demographic groups. Governments in central and eastern Europe should reform their social security systems in a bid to make it more attractive for people to work, says the bank. Secondly, a big challenge for the region is to "improve worker skills through reforming the educational systems and improving domestic mobility." And finally, national authorities should consider importing skilled workers in the areas with the highest labour shortages by opening the countries' labour markets to foreign workers. "The weights assigned to each policy depend on the nature of the most binding constraint to labour supply, which vary across countries," Jan Rutkowski, the bank's lead economist commented.

Source: EUobserver

Quality gap in health care between east and west Europe

There is a persistent gap in the quality of health sectors between "old" EU member states and new countries in central and eastern Europe, with the best and most patient-friendly hospitals in Austria, the Netherlands and France, and the worst recorded in Latvia, Bulgaria and Poland. A report evaluating the health services in 29 countries - the EU member states plus Switzerland and Norway - was unveiled on 1 October by the Health Consumer Powerhouse, a Brussels-based

group specialising in health care research. The authors of the study measured the performance of healthcare systems in five categories which are key to the consumer, such as patients' rights and information, waiting times for common treatments, care outcomes, the generosity of the system and access to medication. The 2007 table is topped by Austria, as the country with Europe's most consumer-friendly health care, due to a "combination of widespread access to treatment and excellence in outcomes," for example in cancer treatment. Although not leading any single category, Vienna gathered the most points (806 out of 1000) altogether, with last year's winner, France, slipping to third place. The Netherlands, top in 2005, comes in at second place this year. However, the researchers suggest that there is a tiny difference between the top three countries plus Switzerland and Germany and only "very subtle changes in single scores modify the internal order" among them. The four Nordic countries Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark come in the next cluster, with different strong points. Sweden, for example, is EU champion for medical quality and Denmark for respecting patient rights and providing information. Of the "new" member states, Estonia features as the best performer in 12th place, with better results than several west European countries, such as the UK, Ireland and Italy. Cyprus and the Czech Republic perform similarly well. However, most other newcomers come out at the bottom of the table, with Latvia getting 435 points out of 1000 and a remark by authors that it is "at this point in time lacking in resources and organisational culture to be a really consumer-adapted system." The study points out that despite all the differences between the countries, none of them has achieved more than 80 percent of their potential, and all need further reform. "One major challenge across Europe is to actually start measuring and calculating what health care services do, how much and how well they do it," Arne Bjornberg, author of the study, said. "Because

traditionally what has been measured was how much money we put into health care or how many doctors we have or how many hospitals, but very little on what health care does and how well it does it," he added.

Source: EUobserver

EU the most popular among great powers

Citizens around the globe hope for a stronger international role for the EU to make the world a better place, this year's 'Voice of the People' survey has revealed. More than a third of respondents (35%) prefer to see the EU's power increasing while only 20 percent want it to decline. In comparison, only 26 percent of respondents believe an increase in US power would make the world more worth living in, while 37 percent think the opposite. The poll, released October 24 by a new think-tank, the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), was conducted among 57,000 students in 52 countries. Unlike the US, the EU seems to have a good reputation worldwide and is also "highly appreciated" among its neighbours, including potential future EU members like Macedonia and Albania, the ECFR analysts, Mark Leonard and Ivan Krastev, write. In contrast, citizens from most European nations name the US as the country they hate the most, even more than Iran, the only country with lower approval rates in the world, according to the survey. "The European Union is unique among the big four powers (the other three being the US, China and Russia) in that no one wants to balance its rise", the think-tank commented. According to the authors, "it is striking that a continent with a military budget second only to the United States, and the biggest number of peace-keeping forces serving in the world seems to be perceived as a force of good". However, this may be due to the failure of EU policymakers to achieve greater visibility for EU power, the authors suggest.

Source: EurActiv