



UBC e-News

Number 38

24.04.2008

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Info

- The next, 52nd UBC Executive Board meeting will be held in Kuressaare on 5 June, upon the invitation of Mrs Urve Tiidus, Mayor of Kuressaare and the UBC Vice-President.



51st Executive Board meeting, Brussels, 7 February 2008

<http://www.ubc.net/today/51st-executive.html>

- Baltic Cities Bulletin no 1/08 has been published. Recent issue of the Baltic Cities Bulletin entitled “Cities’ response to the climate change” is devoted to the problem of the global changes in the climate conditions. For recent years, the cities have been facing the extreme weather events like intense bursts of rainfall, floods, landslides, storms and heat waves more often than ever. They seem to be only the first dangerous symptoms of the irreversible process. This issue of the Bulletin clearly shows the double challenge the cities and its inhabitants must face: to anticipate and prevent the negative effects of the climate change and to cope with living in the changing environment. The climate change

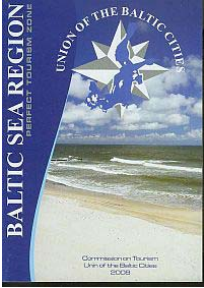
strategies, regulations, researches, projects and new risk management policies are being implemented. The most tangible results have been obtained in such areas as public transport, renewable energy sector or energy savings. Moreover, the consequent policies aimed at the significant cuts in the greenhouse gas emissions in industry as well as in individual households have already borne fruits in several cities.

As usual, the Bulletin contains also the information on latest UBC meetings and activities, news from the member cities and more. The bulletin can be found at: http://www.ubc.net/bulletin/bulletin1_08/index.html



- UBC Commission on Tourism published a second edition of the catalogue the “BSR – Perfect Tourism Zone”, presenting tourist base and attractions of 61 UBC member cities. The catalogue also contains beautiful photos and information about projects in which the Commission on Tourism is involved. The catalogue will be spread to all UBC member cities as well as other European organizations, events and institutions.

UBC publications:



Tourism

- Read about visions of the Baltic Sea and good examples in the *Baltic Cities Environmental bulletin 1/2008*. This issue of the Baltic Cities Environmental bulletin is dedicated to Visions of Future. In the editorial, Maciej Nowicki, Minister of Environment of Poland highlights that the whole humankind is now at the crossroads. Several articles point out that we in the Baltic Sea Region have the notes for common melody available if just we wish to use them. The bulletin, which is published by the UBC Commission on Environment, has been sent to all UBC member cities.

<http://www.ubc-action21.net>

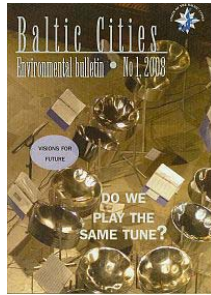
- These days the Commission on Urban Planning is holding a meeting in Aarhus. The seminar theme this time is "Future City Life". The seminar theme is connected to the current overall theme of the CUP, namely "Sustainable and Attractive Cities" and studying the question of how to create good living environments.

From UBC Commissions

- Commission on Information Society

"eCitizen 2.0 - The Second Preparation Seminar"

Challenge of eCitizen - Promoting eGovernment Actions in European Cities", a project financed by the EU's INTERREG IIIC North programme, ended in December 2007. eCitizen's concrete results and the strong will



Environment

of the project partners to continue the well-established cooperation have encouraged to start planning a new phase in interregional collaboration on eGovernment actions. You are warmly welcome to the seminar "eCitizen 2.0 - The Second Preparation Seminar" that takes place on 7-8 May 2008 in Helsinki. The seminar is organised in collaboration with the Union of the Baltic Cities Commission on Information Society (UBC IS Com). The main goal of the seminar is to discuss the objectives and activities of the new project and to strengthen the partnership of eCitizen 2.0. To support the discussion on the project content, an expert lecture on social media and the challenges it poses for the public sector is included in the programme. Interreg IVC financing programme and its requirements for eCitizen 2.0 will be introduced. The seminar includes lot of time for discussion to ensure that all potential partners can contribute to the preparation. The participants are kindly asked to register to the seminar by sending an e-mail with the following information to Katja Kaunismaa, katja.kaunismaa@tampere.fi

- name of the participant

- position

- organisation

Maximum amount of participants is 30, and registrations are accepted in the order they are received, except for old eCitizen partners, who have a priority to participate. Final date for registration is 30 April 2008, and confirmation of participation will be sent to participants immediately after registration.

The programme is at:

[http://www.ubc.net/calendar/doc/7-8-05-](http://www.ubc.net/calendar/doc/7-8-05-2008/index.htm)

[2008/index.htm](http://www.ubc.net/calendar/doc/7-8-05-2008/index.htm) Participation is free of charge. Welcome!

Further information on the seminar:

Ms Katja Kaunismaa

Project Director, Baltic Institute of Finland

katja.kaunismaa@tampere.fi

- Commission on Youth Issues

Meeting of the Commission in Tallinn

City of Tallinn has the pleasure of inviting you – civil servant, responsible for youth issues and youth representative of your city - to the Open Meeting of UBC Commission on Youth Issues which will take place 12-14th of May 2008 in Tallinn. Within last few years the Commission on Youth Issues has started many interesting and innovative activities – tolerance trips for youth, cooperation between NGO-s and European Voluntary Service (EVS) promotion, continued the tradition of youth conferences etc. We would like to introduce you all these possibilities created through the joint project “Different History – Common Future...”, invite you to participate in the project and also gather new ideas for new activities in future. Of course we will be interested to hear about the youth work in your city and your best practices and we will be happy to show you some good youth work examples in Tallinn. During the Commission Open Meeting there will be also a possibility to participate at EVS Promotion Seminar held at the same time in Tallinn. Preliminary program and guidelines for registration are at:

<http://www.ubc.net/calendar/doc/12-14-05-2008/index.htm> Please notice that deadline for registration is 25th of April 2008 and that you are also asked to do a little homework. We kindly ask you to take care of your accommodation, traveling and local transport costs (if you are not involved in the project “Different History – Common Future”). All meals and working materials will be provided. I sincerely hope that you can take the time to come and share your ideas and experiences in youth issues and learn from others, make new contacts, may be start new joint projects and enjoy the spring in Tallinn. Youth is the resource not the problem – a lot of fun and useful cooperation can be done if we follow this principle.

Kaia Jäppinen
Deputy Mayor of Tallinn, Chairperson

- Commission on Sport

Social Campaign “Always Active”

In order to counteract social exclusion originating from advanced age as well as to prevent consequent physical mobility restrictions, the UBC Commission on Sport has decided to launch the Social Campaign entitled “Always Active”. The objective of the campaign is to promote an active lifestyle as a factor enhancing health and functional capacity as well as to stress the importance of healthy ageing process. It should be stressed here that the above mentioned targets are in line with the priorities of the World Health Organisation. Within the “Always Active” Social Campaign, the UBC Commission on Sport intends to realise a number of activities, including the International Multidisciplinary Competition “Always Active” which will be addressed to elderly people (+55) living in UBC member cities. The objective of the competition is to encourage them to be creative despite their retirement years and advanced age. Additionally, the Commission would like to show the works of elderly people as well as their artistic and creative potential.

The competition will be held in the following categories:

- embroidery
- weaving miniature
- tourism (preparation of a small tourist guide that would present attractions of a particular UBC member city).

Participants should submit their works for the competition via a municipality or a local organization involved in the work for elderly people. The deadline for sending in the competition works is July 31, 2008. The organizations whose representatives will win in each category (embroidery, weaving miniature and tourism) will be awarded 1000 EUR each. The Commission on Sport will also award prizes in kind (album books, fleece jackets etc.) for individuals who have won the first three places in each category.

For further details please contact the Competition Coordinator: Joanna Leman, UBC Commission on Sport Secretariat, phone: + 48 58 66 88 207, fax: + 48 58 621 86 20, e-mail: ubcsport@gdynia.pl

I would appreciate if you could forward this information to departments in your city halls / organisations / institutions / centres involved in the work for the elderly.

“Sport for all generations”

The UBC Commission on Sport would like to announce its decision concerning the distribution of the 2008 UBC Commission on Sport Grants "Sport for All Generations". Administering a grant budget of 3000 EUR, the Commission has decided to award three applicants whose projects have met all the requirements in the best way. Among the grant winning applications there are:

(in alphabetical order)

1. Sport for All Generations, Liepaja, 1000 EUR
2. Physical Activity – for both Young and Elderly People, Panevezys, 1000 EUR
3. Voru Town 1784-metre Run, Voru, 1000 EUR

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

Beata Łęgowska

UBC Commission on Sport Chairperson

e-mail: ubcsport@gdynia.pl

- Commission on Culture

Cultural events

The Commission on Culture had a working session in Visby last May and there was a discussion concerning the flow of information about cultural events that take place at the Baltic Sea. The Ars Baltica Organising Committee has accepted the idea that the Ars Baltica website can be used for this matter. Ars Baltica Secretariat is launching a section consisting of a database of cultural events. Ars Baltica pr and communication specialist

Magdalena Zakrzewska-Duda is asking every city to send some information concerning the chosen important events in the UBC cities. To keep to the issue as simple as possible extensive information isn't needed, just

- 1) name of the event
- 2) date
- 3) venue
- 4) organiser
- 5) website

The information will be included in the sub-site called "Cultural Map" or something along these lines located in the section "Around the Baltic". Please, send the information directly to Ms. Zakrzewska-Duda:

magdalena.zakrzewska@nck.org.pl

- Commission on Education

“Small Town Inhabitants – Educated or Uneducated People?”

Can small town inhabitant to be successful? Has small town inhabitant a chance to burn up in the world? What is success? What is doing one person to be successful? What does a person need for success? What does it mean education by success? What kind of possibilities has small town inhabitant for self education? Is the “real life” only in big towns? That and many other questions will be answered in the event, which will be organized by UBC Commission on Education, Kärddla Town Government and Hiiumaa Youth Council. On the beginning of May UBC Commission on Education will pronounce a contest of smash-hit. Invited are youth until 26 years from all UBC member cities. Every candidate presents Essay about his/her smash-hit not later than 15 June 2008 to the address Annely.Veevo@kardla.ee Essay has to be minimum 1 page of A4 (with computer), font 12 (Times New Roman) and spacing single. Essay can be written from youth or some adult, but youth have to send it himself. Photos and videos are not allowed. Essay must be in two parts and includes next topics:

I part – From Past till Today

Youth success in societal and/or working area. What does it mean his/her success for his/her domicile? What has led him/her till its where he/she is today? His/her roots must be from UBC member city but he/she can reside somewhere else. What kind of childhood he/she has had (who/what has given a push or influenced to success), background of culture (polity, local peculiarity). His/her education (where and what studied, what has every training brought). His/her self-estimate: what kind of qualities are important to be successful? What kind of qualities are for blocking?

II part – Future

His/her vision for Future: Aims for Future and how he/she will achieve them.

The winners (3 people) will be invited to Kärddla Conference in October 2008, where they will present for auditorium their smash-hits.

Annual Meeting of the Commission

On 3rd April UBC Commission on Education had the Annual Meeting in Stockholm. Invited were representatives from UBC member cities and UBC Commission on Environment and Energy. Meeting was content-rich and successful. The representatives from commissions on environment and energy spoke of possibility of co-operation between commissions. Youngsters from Kärddla spoke of idea to organise in Autumn international conference for small towns: "Small town citizens – educated or uneducated people?". The conference will concentrate on educational possibilities which citizens in small towns have: Where are our roots? What kind of culture do we have? What are our possibilities? Mare Aasma from Kärddla conducted a brainstorm to find new ideas for next years. The main results were: youth involvement (arenas for exchange youth/teachers Outdoor school, etc) and joint projects (non-formal education, projects for adults, CTE Catalogue, Sustainability

environmental, vocational education; nature-practical seminars, camps, etc). At the end members of commission elected the chairman and vice-chairman for next two years. Kurt Petersson, who has been a chairman from beginning of commission, will continue as chairman. The new vice-chairman is Mare Aasma from Kärddla. She has been long time in education field and has many good experiences.

UBC Commission on Education will have much work next years and hopes for good co-operation with other UBC commissions.

Annely Veevo



Annely Veevo and Kurt Petersson

• Commission on Gender Equality

The Commission on Gender Equality had our spring meeting in a sunny Tallinn where we had an excellent working session on 17-19/4. The Commission has grown and we had the pleasure to welcome new representatives from the Lithuanian city Panevezys, Swedish cities Örebro and Nyköping, and the Norwegian city Kristiansand. We are glad that the Commission now also has representatives from these cities and now we are also looking forward to welcoming men from the UBC cities. This Commission works with issues on gender equality which are important questions for both men and women so we hope we will see men in our Commission in the future.

One of our main tasks is to raise awareness in gender equality matters and we are preparing several activities around this. Keep a look out on the website for new information, good examples, inspiration how your city can

approach these matters. We had two very interesting study visits during our Tallinn meeting. These were both linked to our focus area combating prostitution and Human Trafficking. We visited the Tallinn Women's Crisis Centre and also the Equal project "Integration of Women Involved in Prostitution, Including Victims of Human Trafficking into the Legal Labour Market. This is now an established centre and the National Institute for Health Development is supporting it. The work which is being done in these places is really good, and we could bring new ideas and experience home to our cities. We are also planning a conference on Prostitution and Human Trafficking which will take place during the autumn of this year. We had the pleasure of meeting Head of Social Welfare and Health Care Board in Tallinn, who could tell us some more about the current situation in Tallinn. Our host had also prepared a short meeting with a youth project concerning youth and health care, a youth centre where young people can get help and ask advice. We are working with labour market issues and currently starting up a work on how to work with gender stereotypes and how we can inspire cities around the Baltic Sea to start this work. The Commission on Gender Equality is now up and running, and since the Pärnu conference Autumn 2007, where we had our first meeting, we are filled with optimism and we are happy to be part of the work toward a gender equal Baltic Sea area. Please contact the Secretariat of the Commission if you have any questions concerning our work, our Action Plan or would like us to come and talk about gender equality in the other Commissions. One of our tasks is also to support the other Commissions in their work with gender mainstreaming so please contact us if you need this.

Helene Brewer
Coordinator of Commission on Gender Equality
helene.brewer@umea.se

- Commission on Tourism

The UBC Commission on Tourism Working Meeting was held on 3–5.04.2008 in Gdańsk, Poland. The theme of the first part of the Meeting was „Challenges & opportunities of tourism in BSR”. The second part was themed as „Towards sustainable tourism in BSR”. The final part was devoted to internal matters of Commission on Tourism like discussions, voting etc. The Meeting was attended by 27 participants, including representatives from 16 Member Cities, as well as invited guest from governments, international organizations and universities. The list of participants is enclosed to the report.

The following speakers delivered addresses:

- Mr Ryszard Zdrojewski, The Chairman of the Commission on Tourism, warmly welcomed all participants.
- UBC General Secretariat presentation – Paweł Żaboklicki, UBC Secretary General.
- Presentation on the bicycle paths – Agnieszka Pomaska, Deputy Chair of the Gdańsk City Council, Gdansk City Hall.
- Strategy of tourism development in the Pomeranian Region – Marta Chełkowska, director of Tourism Department, Pomeranian Marshall Office in Gdansk.
- The examples of tourism good practices in the Pomeranian Region – dr Jacek Podhorski-Piotrowski, Faculty of Economics, University of Gdańsk.
- South Baltic Programme 2007-2013 presentation – Monika Cholewczyńska, European Transborder Co-operation Programme Contact Point, Pomeranian Marshall Office in Gdańsk.
- Presentation about the II edition of the project “BSR – Perfect Tourism Zone” – Ryszard Zdrojewski, Chairman of the Commission on Tourism.
- Sustainable tourism and project AGORA 2,0 presentation – prof. dr Wilhelm Steingrube, director of the Institute of Geography & Geology, University of Greifswald.
- Presentation of the idea of Regiobike project – dr Marcin Wołek, Faculty of Economics,

University of Gdańsk. Afterwards a discussion took place.

- Continuing with the “BSR – Perfect Tourism Zone” project plus the website idea (idea of establishing a website connected with the “BSR – Perfect Tourism Zone” catalogue)
- Participation of the Commission on Tourism in the AGORA 2,0 project and the Regiobike project
- Place and date for CoT General Conference

Participants decided about continuing on the “BSR – Perfect Tourism Zone” project and taking part in 2 projects: the AGORA 2.0 project and the Regiobike project. Moreover there was a proposition of organizing the annual meeting in Trelleborg, Sweden, at the beginning of October.

The whole report can be found at: http://www.ubc.net/commissions/tourism/minutes_Gdansk.doc



Conferences attended by UBC representatives:

- The 3rd Territorial Dialogue for Growth and Jobs, Committee of the Regions, Ljubljana, 4 March 2008 (Maciej Lisicki, Deputy Mayor of Gdansk)
- Meeting on influencing the EU policies by associations of municipalities, organised by Barcelona Provincial Council and Arco Latino, Barcelona, 6 March 2008 (Marie-Louise Ronnmark, Mayor of Umea, UBC 1st Vice-President)

- Spring Session of Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, Malaga, Spain 13-14 March 2008 - (Mikko Lohikoski, Turku)
- VASAB annual conference on “Baltic Sea Region Spatial Development Policies in European Context: avenues to the Long Term Perspective”, Riga 23 April 2008 (Gunars Ansins, Deputy Mayor of Liepaja)
- Forum 'Cities of the future', Committee of the Regions, Brussels 10 April 2008 (Per Boedker Andersen, Mayor of Kolding, President of UBC). The Forum aimed at highlighting best practice in sustainable urban development, energy, mobility, transport and housing. The event took place in parallel to the CoR plenary session, was organised in partnership with the European Commission Directorates General for Energy and Transport (TREN) and Enterprise and Industry (ENTR), and Eurocities. At the accompanying exhibition, UBC had its stand as well as some selected European organisations.



Other information

- „Cēsis – European Capital of Culture 2014”.

The Cēsis City Council announces a Tender on the artistic conception of the culture programme „Cēsis – European Capital of Culture 2014”. The Tender Regulations may be received at Cēsis City Council, Citizen Service Centre, Room 111, Raunas street 4, Cēsis, or electronically by sending the request

to: cesis2014@cesis.lv Legal and natural persons can take part in the Tender (directors, producers, producer associations and other interested persons), by submitting the application pursuant to the requirements and order indicated in the Regulations herein. The deadline for submission a Tender application – until 4pm 6 June 2008. The Tender application shall be submitted in person at Cēsis City Council, Citizen Service Centre, Room 111, Raunas street 4, Cēsis, LV 4101; phone: +371 64121677, or by post (postal seal – 6 June 2008). Bidders can receive additional information on Cēsis City Council website www.cesis.lv/cesis-2014; tel: +371 64121677, mobile +371 26469249.

- *Musica Baltica*

The Music Academy in Gdansk invites to the 'Musica Baltica' International Musicological Conference. The conference will be devoted to the music culture of Baltic cities in modern times. It will be held in Gdansk, 20-22 November, 2008. More information at: http://www.ubc.net/today/e_News/documents/MusicaBaltica.doc

- *Mayors Meeting, Turku, 20.08.08.*

The City of Turku and Baltic Region Healthy Cities Association have an honour to invite Mayors and City Leaders of Healthy Cities and UBC networks to participate in Mayors Meeting, highlighting the 10th Anniversary of the Baltic Region Healthy Cities Association. Turku is a remarkable growth centre in the BSR and has recently established "Baltic Sea House" gathering the same premises organisations and activities of Turku operating in the Region. The aim of this Mayors Meeting "Networking in the Baltic Sea Region – Focus on Well-Being" is to discuss the role and importance of promoting health and well-being as key elements of attractiveness and prosperity of the cities. A healthy and sustainable city is built upon the well-being of inhabitants. In Turku, we see this meeting as a starting point for a new

discussion forum in the Baltic Sea between the cities and their leaders in the Healthy Cities and UBC networks.

More information at:

http://www.ubc.net/today/e_News/documents/MayorsMeeting.pdf

- *International Association Cities and Ports - 11th int. world conference Stockholm, 23–27 June 2008*

"CITIES AND PORTS INNOVATING FOR AN INTER-DEPENDENT FUTURE" The Ports of Stockholm will host the 11th international conference, organized by the International Association of Cities and Ports (IACP), an international network of cities and ports with 190 members from 35 countries worldwide. The IACP was formed in 1988 by a number of European port cities and is based in Le Havre, France. The Ports of Stockholm has been a member of the IACP since 2004. International world conferences are held every second year and last year's conference (2006) took place in Sydney, Australia. The network consists of cities and local authorities, ports, shipping sector experts, architects and town planners, financial enterprises, universities, research institutes, researchers, etc. The mission and tasks of the IACP are to:

- develop collaboration between cities and ports
- increase and broaden contact networks and dialogue
- gather and analyse information that will contribute to the development of port cities

The Ports of Stockholm aims to increase the number of participants from the Baltic Sea Region in the conference by working closely with the Baltic Ports Organization (BPO) and UBC. The Stockholm conference will be held in Norra Latin Conference Center and is expected to attract around 500 participants. The theme for the conference is collaboration between cities and ports innovating for an inter-dependent future.

More information at:

<http://www.citiesandports2008.com/en>

Nuclear energy a solution to climate change, says Brussels

The EU's top energy official has underscored the vital role that nuclear energy has to play in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in Europe and its importance in helping deliver the bloc's energy needs at a time of "persistently high" oil prices. "Nuclear energy makes an important contribution to our fight against climate change and our security of energy supply," said energy commissioner Andris Piebalgs, speaking at the European Nuclear Assembly in Brussels on 14 April, "but we need to strengthen the cooperation between EU member states on the issues related to the safety and security of nuclear installations and the treatment of nuclear waste." The commissioner launched his talk at the conference - Nuclear energy: Developing Europe's Low-Carbon Economy - organised by Foratom, the European nuclear industry's trade association, by noting that news that Russia's oil supply may have peaked is a reminder of how precarious Europe's energy security is. "We have to recognise that a change has come with high and persistently high oil prices," he said. "Today's supply-demand balance is leading to higher prices." Recent figures show that oil output in Russia fell one percent in the first quarter of 2008. In an interview with the Wall Street Journal, Lukoil vice-president, Leonid Fedun, one of the country's top oil executives, said he worried that output would not be able to continue to increase. Commissioner Piebalgs also argued that the EU needs substantial investments in order to replace its ageing power plants. A large number of currently operating nuclear power plants will reach the end of their lifespan before 2030. In order to make the necessary investments possible, the commission is examining ways to address the difficulties related to licensing, financing and different nuclear liability regimes. The commissioner also said that in order for the public to accept nuclear energy, nuclear safety concerns, nuclear waste management and transparency must all be addressed. Nuclear

energy remains controversial in several member states and the commission has only recently started to speak out so strongly in favour of it. He called on public authorities in member states to introduce safety regulations that would ensure public acceptance, but that at the same time would not endanger investment. He outlined as examples recent commission initiatives such as the High Level Group on Nuclear Safety and Waste Management, the European Nuclear Energy Forum and the Sustainable Nuclear Energy Technology Platform (SNE-TP).

Source: EUobserver

'Era of cheap food is over,' says EU

EU consumers should get used to paying more for food as prices for meat, grain, cereal and a range of agricultural commodities are set to increase further, according to EU officials and MEPs debating the issue in Strasbourg on 22 April. The EU's current push for biofuels came under repeated scrutiny during the discussion. Sharp increases in food prices in recent months have sparked riots in a number of countries, including Haiti, Mexico, Egypt, Morocco, Senegal, Uzbekistan, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Thailand and Indonesia. EU consumers have also seen dramatic increases in prices for basic foodstuffs. Rising global populations and demand for food, climate change related crop failures, higher fuel and fertilizer prices, speculation on commodity markets, dysfunctional global agricultural markets and greater biofuels production are widely seen as the causes of the crisis. EU policies, most notably export subsidies under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and more recently the bloc's proposed target to increase biofuels use by 10% by 2020, are also coming under increasing scrutiny. There are concerns that the combined effect of these measures acts as a disincentive to boost greater agricultural output in developing countries, notably in Africa. "We won't see food prices going back down to former

levels," EU Development Commissioner Louis Michel told a Strasbourg audience of MEPs convened to discuss the global food crisis. The "huge rise" in food prices is a threat to global stability, according to Michel, who announced an increase in EU spending on food aid to developing countries. But Michel also stressed that solving the crisis is "far beyond the EU's ability", pointing to structural problems in world agricultural markets and, in particular, a lack of purchasing power in poorer countries.

Empty bellies. Global average food prices have risen by 83% in the past three years, according to the World Bank, which notes a particularly sharp increase in the past six months. While EU citizens have to dig deeper into their pockets to meet rising costs, in many poor nations - where hundreds of millions of families and individuals live on less than one euro per day - the increase means the difference between poverty and starvation. Josette Sheeran, executive director of the UN's World Food Programme (WFP), has compared the crisis to the 2004 Asian tsunami, and is calling for "large-scale, high-level action by the global community, focused on emergency and longer-term solutions". The crisis has also raised concerns that the UN's objective of halving global poverty by 2015, the so-called Millennium Development Goals, will not be met.

'Hedge foods'. Growing demand for previously unaffordable meat and other 'luxury' foods in rapidly developing nations like China, India and Brasil is frequently cited as one of the main drivers of higher prices. But during their debate, a number of MEPs also pointed to increased food commodities speculation and profiteering in the wake of the recent melt-down of global financial markets. The implication, according to a number of Socialist MEPs in particular, is that players on the financial markets have scrambled to find new profits, and are deliberately driving down food supplies while pushing demand in order to boost the price of food commodities. Calls for greater regulation

of financial markets have raised red flags in Brussels, where the EU's Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson recently warned against using the crisis as an excuse for greater agricultural protectionism (EurActiv 21/04/08).

Bashing biofuels. There are growing concerns that a greater shift from food production towards biomass-for-biofuels production will further aggravate food shortages and price concerns. Bssels meanwhile continues to defend its biofuels proposals. "Biofuels have become a scapegoat for recent commodity price increases that have other causes - poor harvests worldwide and growing food demand generated by increased standards of living in China and India," EU Energy Commissioner Andris Piebalgs wrote in a blog post on 28 March.

Source: EurActiv

Call for change in youth policies

The 27 EU directors-general for youth, MEPs and young people alike are calling for urgent changes in youth, education and economic policies as every fifth young European lives on the poverty line and youth unemployment has reached 38%. "The voice of young people must not only be heard but also taken properly into consideration," said Zorko Škvor, the Slovenian director-general for youth, during a meeting with his European counterparts on 21 April. His comments came in response to the results of the Slovenian EU Presidency youth event held on 18-21 April. Entitled 'Promoting the Participation of Young People with Fewer Opportunities in Society,' the event gathered young participants from the EU 27, EFTA and Western Balkan countries to discuss youth mobility and employment in Europe, the role of young people in intercultural dialogue and their increased participation in political decision-making. The event highlighted the issue of youth unemployment. According to the Slovenian Presidency, young people account for 38.5% (a total of 4.7 million) of

all unemployed persons in Europe. The participants drafted proposals for an employment strategy that would ensure greater numbers of high-quality jobs for young people and link employment with active citizenship and life-long learning. Stressing the importance of the participation of young people in decision-making processes, they also proposed that dialogue with young people be further strengthened and structured at all levels. "One fifth of young people in Europe live on the poverty line, 38% of the young people are unemployed, there has been a decline in literacy, etc. These are facts indicating that changes are urgently needed in youth policy but also in education and economic policy and young people have to become actively involved in this," said Slovenian Education Minister Dr. Milan Zver. The launch of a written declaration on devoting more attention to youth empowerment in EU policies, initiated by a small number of MEPs, is foreseen in the European Parliament today (22 April). The declaration calls on the Commission and member states to consider the impact on youth when preparing legislative proposals and implementing the Lisbon Agenda. In 2005 the European Council adopted the European Youth Pact to promote participation of all young people in education, employment and society as part of the revised Lisbon Strategy.

Source: EurActiv

EU broadband use on the rise

Community efforts to boost citizens' access to the web are paying off, with 40 million more Europeans becoming "regular internet users" last year, according to a new Commission report. Over 250 million Europeans now regularly use the internet, among which 80% have access to high-speed broadband, reveals the report published on 18 April. Meanwhile, over 60% of public services in the EU are already "fully available online," while two thirds of schools and just under half of

doctors have fast broadband connections, according to the EU executive's mid-term review of its ICT strategy, 'i2010', agreed upon in 2005. The results show that ICT "is being promoted by all 27 EU member states in their national policies," said Information Society and Media Commissioner Viviane Reding, welcoming the "change of political direction". Nevertheless, almost 40% of Europeans do not use the internet at all, the report revealed, with 69% of Romanians, 65% of Bulgarians and 62% of Greeks not yet connected. At last month's Spring Summit, EU leaders failed to endorse the Commission's plan to connect one in three households to high-speed broadband internet by 2010, opting for "ambitious" yet non-binding national targets instead. Meanwhile, the EU executive's 2007 report on the EU telecoms sector, published on 19 March, found that just one in five households have high-speed internet connections, well below the bloc's target of 30%. The growth in high-speed internet use among public services such as the education and health sectors is "especially good news", said Commissioner Reding. The report shows that 77% of EU businesses, 67% of schools and 48% of doctors had broadband connections in 2007, indicating significant growth over the last few years. 96% of schools are now connected to the internet in some form. Reding admitted that "some parts of the EU are lagging behind" and urged EU countries to "work harder to close the gaps" by enhancing cross-border communication services and ensuring remote and rural regions are connected. The Commission will launch "large-scale projects" in May 2008 to boost the provision of public services online, especially "pan-European public services like the cross-border operation of electronic identity or electronic signatures," it said in a press release. The EU executive will also publish a guide to EU citizens' digital rights later this year "to encourage use of new online technologies".

Source: EurActiv