



UBC e-News

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Info

The 53rd meeting of the UBC Executive Board will be held in Växjö, Sweden, on 29 October 2008, at the invitation of the Mayor of Växjö, Mr Bo Frank. The second part of the meeting comprising annual reports of the UBC working Commissions will be open to the member cities. A preliminary programme, practical information and registration form at: <http://www.ubc.net/today/53rd-executive.html>
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- The last, 52nd UBC Executive Board meeting was held in Kuressaare on 5 June, upon the invitation of Mrs Urve Tiidus, Mayor of Kuressaare and the UBC Vice-President. Topics presented and discussed among others: Baltic Cities & Regions contribution to the process of creation of new EU Baltic Sea Strategy (The Board decided, that the city of Turku in cooperation with Brussels Antenna shall prepare the first draft of the UBC position paper on the new Baltic Sea Strategy), Declaration of common interest between Committee of the Regions and Baltic Sea organisations, UBC statement on the EC

Blue Paper 'An Integrated Maritime Policy for the European Union', UBC reply to the consultation on the EC Green Paper on Urban Mobility, Helsinki-Turku initiative to clean the Baltic Sea - new developments; Presentation of B7 Baltic Islands Network. The City of Międzyzdroje was accepted as a new member of UBC.

The minutes from the meeting at: <http://www.ubc.net/today/52nd-executive.html>



- Events in UBC member cities in 2009

The UBC cities offer an enormous variety of things to see and do-including special events all year long. Despite the fact that it is late spring 2008, let's now think about next year and make preliminary arrangements for the visits in the UBC cities. To make it easier, the UBC Secretariat would like to gather all news in one publication which would be an informative guide to business, cultural, sporting, recreational activities and exhibitions to be organized by your cities. This calendar will allow the readers to be up-to-date on what is going on in our member cities. It will also help to choose from a wide range of options. Additional travel tips will hopefully make the travel pleasant and more convenient.

Therefore, you are very welcome to send us the list of the planned events in 2009 containing such information as:

- name of event
- date and place
- highlights
- contact persons (names, phone numbers, fax, e-mails, websites, etc)
- how to book accommodation
- travel tips (some facts on flight/train/ferry/car connections, maps, etc)

Please include the interesting photos connected with the event or promoting your city (min. 300 ppi). The photos and text (1-2 pages of B5 format) should be sent to: anna.dargiewicz@gdansk.gda.pl by 15 September 2008.

- Call For Stories To The UBC Bulletin

On 10 October 2007 the European Commission presented its vision for an Integrated Maritime Policy for the European Union. This document – also called the Blue book – was accompanied by a detailed Action Plan, an impact assessment and a report on

the results of the broad stakeholder consultation. The EU's integrated maritime policy focuses on i.e. maximising the sustainable use of the oceans and seas, building a knowledge and innovation base for maritime policy, delivering the highest quality of life in coastal regions, promoting Europe's leadership in international maritime affairs, and raising the visibility of Maritime Europe. The integrated approach is not only innovative, it is also strongly endorsed by all stakeholders at all levels – international, national, regional and local. The UBC believes that regions and cities have a pivotal role in the maritime policy. While the common European policy must be monitored and put into practice by the European institutions and the Member States, the cities and regions are the key actors in the implementation and securing good governance of this policy. The next Baltic Cities Bulletin will be entitled:

Cities towards the new European Maritime Policy

The Editorial Board welcomes the articles describing the UBC cities experience and best practices in maritime affairs. As it is a wide and multi-dimensional issue, the list of possible topics of the articles is at: http://www.ubc.net/today/e_News/documents/CallBCB2_08.doc As usual, apart from the main theme, we are looking forward to receiving stories on interesting events and daily life from our member cities. Those articles are published in the chapter "News from Member Cities". The UBC Commissions are welcome to inform about their events, meetings and projects in the chapter "UBC Today". Please follow these guidelines when submitting your story:

Deliver the story by e-mail to: anna.dargiewicz@gdansk.gda.pl in MS WORD format. Please remember to kill the viruses before sending it. Each member city may submit two articles - one related to the cover theme and one to the chapter "News from Member Cities". Guidelines for authors are included in the above mentioned

document. The deadline for stories to the Bulletin is 22 September 2008. Please respect this timetable as we are unable to print out stories received after this deadline.

All the material should be sent directly to the UBC Secretariat in Gdansk. If you have interesting issues to report, please do not hesitate to send them.

Paweł Żaboklicki
UBC Secretary General

- Call for stories to the Environmental Bulletin: Sustainable Development as a source for Innovations

Theme for the UBC Environmental bulletin 2/2008 is Sustainable Development as a source for Innovations. The next Environmental Bulletin is dedicated for innovations created by all the aspects of Sustainable Development such as administrative practices, technological solution, cooperation models and investment potentials. We warmly welcome stories from all Baltic cities and partner organisations.

Stories on your experiences, processes and lessons learnt will be invaluable for others to learn about. One of the most important intentions of the UBC network is to share good examples. In our 106 member cities there is a huge amount of good work being carried out. Let's promote this good work and make it visible and useful for others too!

All articles can be send to address: stella.aaltonen@ubc.net

The deadline for all stories is 26th September 2008. The recommended length of the articles is 300 to 500 words. Good quality photos are always welcome. They should be in tif - or jpg –format, with resolution of min. 300 dpi. For further instructions and inspiration, please, see the following file “*Guidelines for authors*”

http://www.ubc.net/today/e_News/documents/UBCEnv_0208.pdf If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact the

Environment and Sustainable Development Secretariat.

Looking forward to hearing from you,

Stella Aaltonen
Chief Editor of Baltic Cities Environmental Bulletin

From UBC Commissions

- Commission on Transportation

Annual Meeting of the Commission in Szczecin, 18-20 September 2008

UBC Commission on Transportation invites for the Annual Meeting, which will be held in Szczecin on 18-20 September 2008. This year's meeting will be devoted to the theme of "City Traffic - a problem of unsustainable mobility". A part of the meeting will be a seminar, where such topics will be discussed:
- Public Transport and parking zones: Air quality monitoring; Railway stations as elements of sustainable urban transport system

- Cycling zones and undisturbed pedestrianized zones: Cycling zones vs. city traffic; Multi-modal systems of active recreation against the city transportation system, A newly created Model Region Stettiner Haff – an example of cross-border cooperation, etc.

The whole invitation with the programme and the registration form is at:

<http://www.ubc.net/calendar/doc/18-20-09-2008/index.htm>

- Commission on Urban Planning

Seminar of the Commission in Turku, 24-27 September 2008

You are cordially invited to the seminar and annual meeting of the UBC Commission on Urban Planning in Turku during September 24th-27th, 2008. The seminar topic is

connected to the Attractive Cities theme and also to the fact that Turku will be the European Culture Capital in year 2011. During the "Urban DNA - Cultural Planning" seminar we will get to know an active UBC member city and its surroundings. Turku is the oldest city in Finland and has therefore all the possible activities that a city can have - trade, harbour, industry, culture, administration, military etc. During our excursions we will see some medieval remnants of the town and modern architecture, but also the Finnish nature in the world famous archipelago and some "nordic oddities" when we visit a Finnish sauna and taste some Finnish delicacies. During the seminar we will also give the participants information about the future activities of the Commission on Urban Planning. In case you have good "Best Practice Examples" of combining city planning and cultural planning of your own city, pictures and posters are warmly welcome to decorate the seminar location walls. In the enclosed Invitation and Seminar Poster, and Registration and Info you can find more details about the seminar location and accommodation. Participants are supposed to make their own hotel reservations. The organizers have negotiated accommodation in Radisson SAS Marina Palace Hotel:

(<http://www.radissonsas.com/cs/Satellite/Page/RadissonSAS/Page/rsasHotelDescription/1134484495345/en>), which is nicely located close to the City Centre and the seminar location. Please mention "The UBC Seminar" when booking your hotel room. Pack a swimming suit and warm clothes plus good walking shoes with you - we are not going to use them all at the same second, but during the same day anyway! The autumn weather on the northern coasts of the Baltic Sea can be rainy and chilly (+5C). Also the usual equipments, cameras and notepads, are recommended to be taken along. Please send your registration now to Mrs Ritva Nummiora (ritva.nummiora@turku.fi). Registration ends on September 10th. More information at:

<http://www.ubc.net/calendar/doc/24-27-09-2008/index.htm>

Sirpa Kallio
Chairperson

- UBC-EU Coordinators Network

Meeting of the Network, 9 October, Brussels 2008

The UBC-EU Coordinators' Network is pleased to invite all interested members of the UBC to a meeting during the Open Days in Brussels. This meeting will take place in Informationsbüro Mecklenburg-Vorpommern bei der Europäischen Union, Boulevard Saint Michel 80, 1040 Brussels, on 9th October 2008 from 3pm til 6pm.

The main topics will be:
- Possibilities for participation in the next Open Days

- Common projects and ideas for the European Week in May 2009

- Election for the EP next year

- Interinstitutional Cooperation in future with the UBC Antenna.

Subsequently to this meeting we would like to invite you to a Get Together or a common dinner. For more information or ideas / proposals please contact:

Alexandra Kienzle-Andrejew
Europäisches Integrationszentrum Rostock e.V.
kienzle@eiz-rostock.de

- Commission on Tourism

Meeting of the Commission in Szczecin, 10 October 2008

Please be informed that UBC Commission on Tourism plans it's working meeting on Friday, October 10, 2008, in Szczecin.

As usual we'll start a day before with a welcome dinner. The main workshop will

start on Friday in the morning. Various guest speakers will be invited.

The detailed programme will be announced next week, together with registration form and practical information. Please book a date in your calendar if you would like to take part in this meeting. I believe that a smart organisation and the attractivity of Szczecin and its surroundings will make this meeting unforgettable and fruitful for everybody.

Ryszard Zdrojewski
Chairman

- Commission on Environment

Meeting of the Commission in Tallinn, 30-31 October 2008

At: <http://www.ubc.net/calendar/doc/30-31-10-2008/index.htm> please find invitation to the Commission on Environment meeting on 30 – 31 October 2008 in Tallinn, Estonia. The meeting will concentrate on the "Cities and the Baltic Sea Strategy – concretizing the next UBC Sustainability Action Programme 2009-2015" and offer a broad and active discussion platform for UBC member cities. The meeting will continue on the discussions started in Tampere in February 2008 with almost 70 persons participating. Cities are also welcomed to propose topics, issues and speakers for the meeting. We expect to have several UBC Commissions present in the meeting in Tallinn.

Björn Grönholm
Head of the Secretariat

- Commission on Culture

Annual Working Session of the Commission, Bergen, 27-29 November

The Annual Working Session of the Commission on Culture will be held on 27-29 November in Bergen. The meeting of the Commission on Culture will be held at the

same time as the Mini Midi Maxi children's theatre festival; the festival is international in its scope – in 2007 performances from Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Russia, England and Norway were presented, with the addition of an international seminar and meeting program. The UBC forum will meet a number of the artists from the festival, as well as see at least one performance. The main theme of meeting is: "Art for Children - practice and theory: Reaching children and young people is a core competence for cities". Questions of what is quality, what is the good meeting between art and children, how does one strengthen the communication skills of both children and artists are central to the theme. Bergen will give an update on Norway's major school program "The Cultural Rucksack" (Den kulturelle skolesekken) for professional art and culture in schools aged 6 to 16. The city of Bergen is implementing a program for pre-schools (Den kulturelle bæremsen). This is a large program with challenges in production and in distribution.

More information and the program are at: <http://www.ubc.net/calendar/doc/27-29-11-2008/Programme%20.doc>

- Commission on Sport

Social Campaign entitled "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 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 detailed regulations please see the attached document.

Following some requests regarding the deadline of the International Multidisciplinary Competition "Always Active", we have decided to prolong it. Now the deadline for sending in competition works is **September 22, 2008**. 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 ;

<http://www.ubc.net/commissions/sport.html>

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.

Beata Legowska
Chairperson

- Commission on Transportation

Grant Competition - "Bike to School"

Heavy traffic causes problems not only on main roads but also around schools. Many children, even those living in the vicinity of their schools, are driven to classes by their parents. Such children do not develop sustainable transport habits and according to surveys are less independent than those walking or cycling to school. The UBC Commission on Transportation believes that it is essential to teach the right attitude towards sustainable mobility from an early age. We hope that more and more children will bike to school and encourage their classmates to do so. Therefore, the Commission has decided to announce "Bike to School" Grant Competition for UBC member cities and award the initiatives that promote biking to school among primary school children. Enclosed please find the rules of participation in the above mentioned competition together with the application form. This grant session is addressed to primary schools in the UBC member cities. However, only one school from a given UBC member city can participate in the competition. It is the City Hall/Council of a given UBC member city to decide which primary school will represent the city and thus enter the competition. The deadline for sending project proposals is 31st October 2008. Completed application forms should be sent to the UBC Commission on Transportation Secretariat by e-mail (ubctransport@gdynia.pl) or by fax: +48 58 621 86 20. For further details regarding "Bike to School" grant competition, please look at: [http://www.ubc.net/commissions/transportation/Bike to school/bike to school grants.doc](http://www.ubc.net/commissions/transportation/Bike%20to%20school/bike%20to%20school%20grants.doc) Should you have any questions, feel free to contact the UBC Commission on Transportation Secretariat.

Katarzyna Pragert-Biechowska
UBC Commission on Transportation
Secretariat

- Commission on Gender Equality

The Gender Commission is collecting information about gender issues in the member states. The material will be presented at the next General Congress in 2009. To assure a good quality and interesting information we need your help to show examples from the cities. In each section of the planned publication, there will be a heading "Examples from UBC cities". Please see the list of sections below and let us know if your city has any good experience working in this field. Especially if you think it can help other member cities in their work.

In this way, we can spread good examples of promoting gender equality around the Baltic Sea Region. All fields concern promoting gender equality in cities. We are also looking for interesting experience on gender mainstreaming in cities.

Sections for report:

- Choice of education field
- Share of teachers
- Sectors of employment
- Head of business
- Representation in politics
- Pay-Gap
- Parental Leave (Maternity and Paternity)
- Unpaid domestic work
- Sexual Harassment
- Prostitution
- Trafficking in Human Beings for sexual exploitation

To highlight the representation share of women and men in the City Council (Municipality Council), we urge every city to answer the following two questions.

- How many members does your city council have? Male/Female?
- Who is the president of the city council? Male/Female?

I am very grateful for any help in these matters. I hope we will get many good examples for our report enabling us all to move forward in these questions.

Helene Brewer, Gender Equality Officer,
helene.brewer@umea.se

Jenny Johansson, Project assistant,
jenny.e.johansson@umea.se

Conferences attended and which will be attended by UBC representatives:

- Stakeholders Conference on Baltic Sea Strategy, Stockholm, 30 September. The European Commission together with the County Administrative Board of Stockholm are arranging an international stakeholder conference on "Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region". Among the confirmed speakers are Swedish Prime Minister Mr. Fredrik Reinfeldt and European Commissioner Mrs. Danuta Hübner. The main focus of the day will be the ongoing process with the strategy and workshops structured around the four objectives for the strategy. During the workshop sessions opportunities will be given for stakeholders to present view-points and/or suggestions regarding the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

UBC will be represented by professor Esko Antola, Director of the Centrum Balticum in Turku and Thomas Friis-Konst, Director of the Stockholm Region Brussels Office.

Organisers of the conference asked UBC to select 8 cities - one from each EU country from the Baltic Sea Region to take part in the conference. These are: Cesis, Kaunas, Kiel, Kolding, Koszalin, Parnu, Turku, Umea.

- 17th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) in Visby, 1-2 September 2008 (Urve Tiidus, Mayor of Kuressaare, UBC Vice-President)

- XVI Conference of the Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation, Kaunas 17-19 September (Paweł Żaboklicki, UBC Secretary General)

- 10th Plenary Session Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities, Durres (Albania)

26/27 September 2008 (Maciej Lisicki, Deputy Mayor of Gdansk)

- 76th Plenary Session of the Committee of the Regions, 8-9 October, Brussels (Per Boedker Andersen, Mayor of Kolding, President of UBC)

Other information

- Sustainable Cities & Communities conference

WWF's One Planet Business conference together with Green Power conferences will be hosting the inaugural Sustainable Cities and Communities conference in Geneva 30. September – 01. October 2008. The inaugural Sustainable Cities and Communities conference will focus on how cities and communities can tackle rising greenhouse gas emissions, energy consumption and congestion. The event will also see the official launch of WWF's global "One Planet" initiative. This two day high profile business congress will bring together key players involved in planning, developing and managing new and existing urban infrastructure and look at how municipal authorities and urban planners can reduce the environmental footprint of their cities, adapt and reduce their exposure to climate change and the associated threats. In depth case studies and best practice examples will be presented by top level decision makers on the first eco cities, what they are, what they can achieve and how they can help us in retrofitting existing cities. Financial challenges, risk management as well as architecture and urban planning will be discussed to draw comprehensive conclusions across all sectors involved. For further details please have a look at: http://www.greenpowerconferences.com/renewablesmarkets/sustainable_cities.html

Pia Dorfinger
Research Analyst & Logistics Executive

- NTA World Urban Development Congress / Riga, Latvia

Please find at the link: http://www.ubc.net/today/e_News/documents/INTA32RIGA2008.pdf an information brochure introducing the 32nd World Urban Development Congress of INTA to be held in Riga on 26-29 October 2008. INTA invites the UBC member cities to participate in the event.

- Baltic Seminar for Youth Democracy Projects

Here:

http://www.ubc.net/today/e_News/documents/baltic_seminar_invitation.doc please find the invitation and application to the Baltic Seminar which will take place in Gdansk, Poland from 15th to 17th October and will be about youth democracy projects.

The idea of the seminar is to bring together representatives of municipalities and youth organisations from the Baltic Sea Region countries (Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland) and support creation of cooperation networks for youth democracy projects. Participation in the seminar is free of charge, travel costs are covered by National Agencies of the Youth in Action Programme. Deadline for application is 8th of September and everyone interested should apply to their National Agencies of the Youth in Action Programme:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/youth/program/natage_en.html#natagen).

For further information:

Mr Vilis Bruveris, vilisb@yahoo.com

Open Days - Regions and cities in a challenging world

Under the theme of “Regions and cities in a challenging world”, this event will serve as a platform on which participants can share their initial experiences of the Cohesion Policy programmes which began in 2007 and run until 2013. Total investment in these programmes, of which there are 345, amounts to some €500 billion of EU and national funding combined.

The event is geared towards EU and Regional Policy makers, as well as towards representatives from the world of business, banking and civil society. A record 216 regions and 32 countries have signed up as partners to the event and will host 235 local events throughout October as part of the “Europe in my region” project. French Prime Minister François Fillon will formally open the event on 6 October, alongside European Commission President José Manuel Barroso, Regional Policy Commissioner Danuta Hübner and Committee of the Regions President Luc Van den Brande. Over Open Days - Regions and cities in a challenging world Five thousand delegates are expected to participate in this year’s annual “OPEN DAYS 2008 European Week of Regions and Cities” on 6-9 October in Brussels. They will hold over one hundred seminars on four main discussion areas - innovating regions, sustainable development, cooperation and networking, and looking forward to a European Cohesion Policy for tomorrow.

Source: inforegio news

New EU members work above European average

According to a recent report, a striking gap in working time continues to exist between countries that joined the EU after 2004 and the other 15 members. Among those working longer hours, Bulgaria, Romania and the UK are well ahead of their European neighbours. The average agreed weekly working time

currently stands at 38.6 hours for the whole of the EU, according to Eurofound's European Industrial Relations Observatory (EIRO).

But if one considers the EU 15 alone, rates have fallen to just 37.9 hours – two hours less than the 39.6 hour week put in by workers in the EU's 12 new members. As for full-time workers, Bulgarians and Romanians emerge as the hardest working, clocking up 41.7 hours per week. The UK comes a close third, with its citizens working an average of 41.4 hours. This could be a result of the country's opt-out from the EU's 'Working Time Directive' that caps the working week at 48 hours. Indeed, the opt-out enables British citizens to work for up to 65 hours per week, although the Socialist Group in Parliament has vowed to contest this, arguing that it breaks "health and safety law". Full-time workers in France, Italy and Denmark are those putting in the least hours. Indeed, the French spend just 37.7 hours at work, leaving them the equivalent of a whole afternoon off each week. France is in fact a record breaker as far as working time reductions are concerned. It has cut weekly working time by four hours over the past nine years, far ahead of Luxembourg (1 hour), the UK (1.1 hours), Portugal (1.2 hours) and Sweden (2.5 hours).

This tendency to work less would appear to contradict EU recommendations to speed up labour market reforms and get people to work longer so as to face up to the pressures of globalisation and deal with the demographic challenges facing the continent.

Nevertheless, even in France - seen as one of the EU's most rigid models and where trade unions have been actively opposing reforms - change does appear to be taking place.

Indeed, in July, the French Senate approved a law to extend the compulsory cap of 35 working hours per week to boost the country's economic competitiveness.

Source: EurActiv

EU population getting dangerously old

The EU's population is to gradually get older in the next 50 years, with those aged 65 or older likely to make up for almost a third of the bloc's population by 2060, a new survey has shown. The ageing trend will be most significant in Poland, where 36.2 percent of people will be 65 or more by that time, but also in Slovakia and Poland (36.1 and 35 percent, respectively). However, all EU states will be affected to an extent, with the average number of seniors jumping from 17 percent currently to 30 percent in 2060, according to a Eurostat survey published on 26 August.

"There would be only two people of working age for every person aged 65 or more in 2060, compared with four persons to one today," the survey says. The European Commission has expressed concern about the figures and their possible impact on the economy. "We are concerned with finding out whether our member states will be able to pay for the costs linked to ageing, and whether future generations will not be overburdened," said commission spokesperson Amelia Torres.

Beyond just ageing, the bloc's population will be decreasing as well. By 2015, the number of deaths will exceed the number of births in the EU, with immigration becoming the only factor boosting the bloc's population, the survey says. After an initial increase from 495 million currently to 521 million in 2035, the total population in the EU's 27 member states will again drop to 506 million in 2060. The population of Bulgaria is to shrink the most (28%), followed by Baltic countries Latvia (26%) and Lithuania (24%), as well as Romania (21%) and Poland (18%).

On the other hand, Cyprus is to note the most considerable rise (66%), followed by Ireland (53%), Luxembourg (52%), the UK (25%) and Sweden (18%). Germany – currently the EU most populous state, with over 80 million inhabitants, is to shrink to 71 million, and be overtaken by the UK and France, with 77 and 72 million people respectively. Italy (59 million) and Spain (52 million) are set to stay

in the top 5. Eurostat, the Luxembourg-based EU statistics office, has warned that the figures should be taken with caution however, as they are "what-if scenarios" that are "one of several possible population change scenarios based on assumption for fertility, mortality and migration."

Source: EUobserver

Baltic economies continue freefall

The latest economic data from the Baltic states has revealed that the countries are continuing their fall into stagflation. Estonia has so far been hit the hardest as it became the first country in Eastern Europe to dip into a recession following years of high growth driven by credit. The country registered negative GDP alongside a double digit inflation rate. "The decrease in the GDP was mostly influenced by the weak domestic demand and at the same time by the decrease in exports of goods and services," the national Estonian statistics service said in a report on the country's GDP growth. Estonia's inflation rate remained in the double digits in August at 11 percent. The statistics agency said a 17.1 percent increase in food prices was a main contributor to the still high inflation rate.

The numbers reflect the Baltic states' continued fall into a widely predicted economic hard landing. Latvia's inflation, meanwhile, fell for the third straight month in August but remained 15.7 percent, the highest in the Baltics. Inflationary data is not yet available for Bulgaria- which boasted the second highest rate in the EU in July at 14.5 percent - and so it is not yet clear whether Latvia still has the highest inflation rate in the bloc. "Price decrease of vegetables and fuel, as well as price increase of clothing, catering services and housing rent had the greatest impact on consumer price changes in August," the Latvian national statistics office said in its report.

The country's GDP growth barely remained positive in the second quarter at only 0.1 percent higher than the same period in 2007. Many analysts predict that the trend will continue and the country will see negative GDP growth by the end of the year. Lithuania has so far suffered the softest economic landing of the three Baltic states. The country's average annual inflation rate in August hit 10.3 percent, while year-on-year GDP growth in the second quarter stayed at 5.3 percent.

Source: The Baltic Times

Talking cars to save lives on EU roads

With traffic jams an almost daily feature of most commuters' lives, Brussels in August announced plans to increase Europe's radio spectrum for technology that allows cars to communicate upcoming road and traffic problems.

EU telecoms commissioner Viviane Reding said the decision was a "decisive step" towards reducing accidents on Europe's roads with statistics for 2006 showing that over 42,000 people died and more than 1.6 million were injured in road accidents in the European Union. She noted that 24 percent of driving time in Europe is spent in traffic jams - something that is expected to cost the economy €80 billion by 2010. "So clearly saving time through smart vehicles communications systems means saving money," said the commissioner in a statement.

Similar decisions on smart communication between cars have also been taken in the US and Japan. The system envisages scenarios such as vehicles warning other cars about a slippery road ahead or traffic control centres sending messages about upcoming tailbacks and suggesting alternative routes. Now that the European Commission has made the extra bandwidth available, car manufacturers and telecoms industries can work on putting it in vehicles. The technology is expected to be

available in the next couple of years. The system will use 30Mhz of spectrum in the 5.9GHz band - something that will be allocated by national authorities to road safety outfits over the coming six months.

Source: EUobserver

EU plans rules for self-extinguishing cigarettes

All cigarettes sold across the European Union will have to be "fire-safe" by 2011, meaning they will go out automatically if not puffed on for a minute. "By introducing self-extinguishing cigarettes, at least 2,000 lives could be saved in the EU each year," EU commissioner for consumer protection Meglena Kuneva told German newspaper Die Welt. After having received the green light from member states last November, the European Committee for Standardization launched preparation of the technical specifications for the safer cigarettes.

The new method should provide additional layers of thickened paper wrapped around a cigarette to slow the burning process.

"We think that by 2011 at the latest, these cigarettes will be on the market," an EU executive spokesman told reporters in Brussels on Tuesday (5 August).

Brussels argues that such products would prevent fires caused by cigarettes, with a survey from 16 EU countries suggesting that habits such as smoking in bed caused 11,000 fires annually between 2005 and 2007, killing 520 people and injuring 1,600.

Tobacco companies are sceptical, however. Alison Cooper, a director of Imperial Tobacco Group Plc, has said that the term "fire-safe" is "misleading," adding there was doubt whether the new measures would bring any "real benefit," Bloomberg news agency reported.

Source: EUobserver