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# VENTSPILS PAST AND PRESENT

**Ventspils has always been famous for its port which is the biggest port on the Baltic Sea and one of the 15 largest ports in Europe.**

It is also called a capital of transit business. The results of the successful port activities can be seen in the life of the town. The town invests in the development of the technical and social infrastructure, arrangement of public places - streets, parks.

## **GIS coming up**

The town is actively working at possibilities of involvement in the Baltic Sea region cooperation in order to become a cultural and educational center. Ventspils in cooperation with the Danish town Esbjerg works at the development of the Geographical Information System. An interesting method of work organisation has been implemented - making a territorial plan on the basis of airphotos.

## **Hopes for PHARE approval**

The Architecture and City Development

department with the participation of the Central Library and councillor in cultural issues has submitted a project application for the PHARE CBC programme 1998-2001 with the title "Involvement of the Ventspils Old Town into the Baltic Sea Countries' Cultural Society". The project provides foundation of the Culture and Information Centre, plan of the Old Town's physical and social renovation, development of passenger transport with Sweden, cooperation with the city of Västervik etc.

## **Chivalry Castle**

One of the most beautiful Ventspils sights is the Chivalry Castle of the Livonian Order, located in the Old Town and the port. This cultural pearl of the medieval period that can be fully admired also nowadays. Each Baltic Sea country is proud of at least one renovated castle - Danes are proud of Kolding, Swedes of Kalmar, Estonians of Kuressaare, Lithuanians of Trakai, Poles of Malbork, Finns of Hämeenlinna.

Ventspils Castle is the oldest

convention type castle and the oldest medieval fortress in Latvia that has remained in its typical structure till our days. The tower of the castle is considered to be the oldest functioning beacon in the Baltics. We have credible evidence about the tower as a beacon at least since the 17th century. The castle is a unique European cultural monument of the 13th century, the significance of which is much wider than that of a fortress only. Together with the port, it is a symbol and evidence of international relations development, as both the Livonian Order and the Hanseatic League are predecessors of the European Union.

At present the renovation works are going on in the castle. After the restoration, the Ventspils Historical Museum will move into the castle. The castle will be equipped with modern conference facilities, art exhibition and chamber music halls. In summer time the "Ventspils Opera Festival", with the participation of young artists from three Baltic states, partners from the Vadsten Opera Summer Academy, Sweden and Reinsberg Castle Opera Festival, Germany, will be held in the castle.



*Baltic decision-makers on their way to a closer cooperation in UBC General Conference.*

*photo: Agnieszka Lendzion*