



ITÄMERI-INSTITUUTTI
THE BALTIC INSTITUTE OF FINLAND

Union of the Baltic Cities Commission on Information Society

**Report to the UBC General Assembly
Klaipeda, 18 October 2003**

Background

The Commission on Information Society was established at the 34th UBC Executive Board meeting in Viljandi on 7-8 June 2002, and the City of St. Petersburg was appointed as the lead City of the Commission. In preparation for the establishment of the Commission, the City of St. Petersburg organized a seminar "*Electronic Union of the Baltic Cities*" on 25-26 April 2002. The seminar included presentations on Information Society programmes from the UBC member cities, discussion on cooperation opportunities and visits to local ICT companies in St. Petersburg.

During last few years Information Society development has emerged as one of the priority sectors for cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region, and the Region is developing into a European model region of Information Society and ICT. *eEurope*, *eRussia*, *the Northern eDimension (NeDAP)* and various national e-initiatives offer a financial and policy framework for the cooperation, and accordingly for the UBC Commission on Information Society as well. Baltic cities have been active in Information Society development, and various local e-initiatives and programmes have been launched. Joint projects, networking and exchange of experiences and information between the UBC members cities and their respective e-programmes contribute significantly to the Information Society development in the Baltic Sea Region, and to the objectives of European and national Information Society strategies and programmes.

Based on the above background and framework, there is a strong rationale for the active UBC contribution to the Information Society Development in the Baltic Sea Region through its Commission on Information Society.

Commission meeting in Klaipeda, 18 October 2003

In the beginning of the meeting, Mr. Alexander Spiridonov, Chairman of the Committee for Informatization and Communications of the St. Petersburg Administration, informed that since the establishment of the Commission, there have been unfortunately some problems in the organization of the Commission, and hence the beginning of the Commission work

has been delayed. The participants of the meeting discussed the above problem and possible solutions for facilitating the Commission's organization and for ensuring its fluent and efficient functioning in the future. Furthermore, ongoing Information Society related activities in the Baltic Sea Region in general, and in the UBC member cities in particular, were presented and discussed. Mr. Spiridonov, Mr. Pertti Paltila from the City of Tampere and Mr. Esa Kokkonen from the Baltic Institute of Finland informed the participants of *the St. Petersburg-Tampere Knowledge Society Partnership* that is based on cooperation in the framework of *eTampere* and *e-St. Petersburg* Information Society programmes. The Baltic Institute of Finland also presented an Interreg IIC project proposal *eCities Forum: Promotion of Information Society Development in the Baltic Sea Region*, with the UBC member cities Tampere, St. Petersburg, Kaunas, Tartu and Odense as project partners.

Based on the above presented ongoing cooperation between St. Petersburg and Tampere, Mr. Paltila and Mr. Kokkonen proposed that the City of Tampere together with the Baltic Institute of Finland could contribute to the re-launch of the Commission and to the preparation of a detailed Action Plan for 2004. The participants agreed on the need for the concrete Action Plan, and most potential themes and activities were discussed. Considering the variety of European, national and local e-initiatives and programmes being implemented in the Region, benchmarking, exchange of experience and information, as well as basic inventory of existing local e-programmes and best practices were recognized by the participants as possible activities to be promoted by the Commission. The need to reckon with the fact that there are different models and approaches for local Information Society development in use in the Region was also raised in the meeting.

The importance of close collaboration and coordination with other active Information Society related initiatives, programmes and organizations was emphasized by the participants. In this respect, *the NeDAP* and cooperation in its framework with *the CBSS*, Information Society initiatives of *Baltic Development Forum* and established Baltic Sea Information Society forums such as *eBaltics* in Riga and *InfoBalt* in Vilnius can be regarded as especially potential and interesting. A workshop or seminar on local e-programmes in the Baltic Sea Region in connection with *eBaltics* or *InfoBalt* was presented as a possible form of activity for the Commission. Furthermore, the above mentioned initiative of *eCities Forum* could be linked to the Commission, and thus to be developed further.

Finally, it was agreed that St. Petersburg together with Tampere will prepare a draft Action Plan and send it for comments to the UBC member cities. The final Action Plan would be then presented at the UBC Executive Board meeting during the first half of 2004. The first meeting for the Action Plan preparation will be organized in St. Petersburg in December 2003. In the drafting of the Action Plan the cities of Turku and Stockholm will be especially consulted with, considering their active contribution to the establishment of the Commission.

On behalf of the UBC Commission on Information Society

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