

Rostock 12-14 March 2018

INVITATION

Gdańsk and Rostock, in December 2017

Dear UBC colleagues, dear friends of the UBC,

In March 2016, representatives of UBC cities gathered in Rostock in order to discuss the massive influx of refugees from the Middle East and Northern Africa. More than a million uprooted people flooded Europe following the vision of the European Dream promising safety, peace, as well as a chance for a decent life including a future for their children. Many of them arrived in the Baltic Sea region. Cities had almost no time to prepare properly. What cities had to do was to administer First Aid: shelter, food, clothing, transportation, ...

Today, two years after, the situation is less tense, although many people are still reaching us. It seems to be sure that most of them will stay for longer or even forever. Now the main focus is integration: language learning, schooling, housing, professional education, jobs, culture, participation in the society, ...

Integration is a matter of two sides: of those who are willing to be a member of the local society and of those who are willing to accept and involve them. A lot of work has to be done to achieve mutual understanding, mostly to overcome clashes of culture and religion.

Many Families in the Baltic Sea Region still have lively memories of war, flight and displacement. The elderly told us how difficult it was to restart a life under conditions of starvation, winter, poverty and illness. For many of them these were years of sacrifice and sufferings. So there is a rather fresh and unforgotten experience in the collective memory we should recall when evaluating the situation of the arriving refugees.

With this treasure of experience we want to analyze what has to be done and how to do it better in order to succeed in the efforts of integration. We want to take a time machine back to 1948 and see where we came from. We want to travel 20 years ahead and describe where we want to be then. Merging all our knowledge, we want to design the way to get there in the most effective manner. We want to listen to each other appreciating each point of view and lessons others had to learn.

To make things more effective, the Opening Plenum will be short because the works should start immediately. In eight small workshops the conditions for integration will be analyzed under different aspects. The second day we will listen to the results and points of view all-together by interviewing the workshop participants of the different working groups. Finally, we will not leave the conference without letting the world know, by means of a resolution, what we consider important for the role of the city in this historical moment.

The cultural framework of the Conference shall give an example how multiculturalism can enrich the society. You will be listening to a special concert of the Syrian Expat Orchestra in the most representative location of Rostock, the Barocksaal. Learn about 800 years of history of Rostock and feel the festival mood in the old Town Hall. Join us for a visit to the Art Pavilion at the Swan Lake where you can enjoy international food and music and, if you wish so, you can also paint a sail for the 10th SHIP OF TOLERANCE - an international art project by the famous Ilya and Emilia Kabakov.

In order to have lively and purposeful discussions during this Conference, we would like to encourage you to include at least one person in your delegation who could be considered a newcomer in the light of the past few years, which would be willing to tell us what integration means to her/him and what she/he - as well as her/his environment - had to go through until now. Like this we want to make sure that there wouldn't be any discussion about refugees and immigrants without listening to them and without taking into account what they have to say.

Finally, in case you have family memories of war, flight and displacement – please share it in a short written paragraph with us allowing us to pin it on a wall and/or referring to it in the Opening Plenum as a piece of a mosaic. It would be kind if you could add a photo – a new or old one – in order to put a face to your story. You could sign it, with your full name or with your initials, or not – as you wish. You can be sure that your contribution would be handled with the maximum of respect.

Dear colleagues and friends, the Union of the Baltic Cities and the City of Rostock are inviting all UBC member cities and beyond to register for the Conference on Integration SHARING THE EUROPEAN DREAM. We learned that a dream could come true though hard work. It is essential for local societies that old and new citizens to learn to live together. Helping hands towards both sides and a proper social environment are a good basis for that. Let's jump into the time machine and see what we can learn from each other. Then let's jump out and, all-together, make the dream come true.

We welcome you to the City of Rostock in March 2018!



Per Boedker Andersen
President of the UBC



Roland Methling
Mayor of the City of Rostock