

PONTUS LINDBERG
Association of the Baltic Chambers of Commerce

***“The Baltic View:
Cooperation and Neighbourhood Strategy”***

My name is Pontus Lindberg and I am working for the Baltic Chambers of Commerce. I thank you very much for the opportunity to be here and to learn what you have done around the Adriatic Sea.

I can see a lot of similarities with where I come from. I will give a brief presentation. I am representing the Baltic Sea Chamber of Commerce.

We are 46 different chambers of commerce in ten countries around the Baltic Sea region. We represent around 450,000 member companies. We have no further charity and compulsory membership going on. We were founded back in 1992. We have three main areas that we work with: we work with lobbying; we work with network with all our chambers and member companies; and with products and services. And our vision is to increase trade in our part of the world: the Baltic Sea region – which also happens to be the sea.

The work is led by Presidium in which there are representatives from all parts of the Baltic Sea:

President Stephan Muchler, CCI of Southern Sweden, Malmo, Sweden
Vice President Kari Jalas, representing the Central Chamber of Finland, Finland
Vice President Vytautas Sileikis, Kaunas CCIC, Kaunas Lithuania
Vice President Silm Rale, Estonian CCCI, Tallinn, Estonia
Vice President Peter Michael Stein, Flensburg CCI, Flensburg, Germany

What have we learned around the Baltic Sea that could be relevant to you? It is very much the same thing that’s going on in the part of the world where I live. It’s very much about transport and contacts. That is what brings us together.

We also share a history all around the sea, as you also do here. And this is a history that we can turn into an advantage when it comes to building a package for tourism. We have a lot of old contacts that we can evaluate and develop. We also have some very strong trade routes that were actually founded in medieval times and we can now see it works again and brings us together. We also have the religion as a component. Most of the countries are Lutheran, but we also have of course Poland and Lithuania, and we also have the Russian Orthodox Church, representing Baltic Sea countries in Russia. After 1989 we saw new possibilities; we very soon started up our contacts all around the Baltic Sea.

We also see that in our region we have a sufficient amount of people that have different sorts of contacts: we have 50-100 million inhabitants. We have several real metropolitan areas, which are more and more important to our vision, and we also have a number of competitive branches. For instance, the automotive industry the medical sector, and there is also a lot going on in our research and development and Higher Education.

What is our work and experience from our work in the Baltic Sea? We must accept that we are a heterogeneous region and every country differs and that we have different possibilities to do different things. But this is something that we can turn into a strength. We shouldn't see this as a problem, we should see this as a possibility because we can always offer something interesting on the other side of the sea.

There is always some business to be done. We must also realise that we have different ambitions. Of course, if you look at the map, you see that Sweden is more or less positioned in the middle of the Baltic Sea.

That means Sweden, together with Denmark and Finland, can be said to be 100% of the idea of the Baltic Sea because that's where we live and that is of course the same for small neighbours on the other side, like Estonia, Latvia and Ukraine. But when it comes to Germany and Poland, what goes on around the Baltic Sea is clearly not the same issue.

And that's something we have to keep in mind because that means that we can have different agendas. We have learned over the years that it's rather easy to work together when it comes to lobby issues; it's rather easy to join forces to push political questions forward. It is much harder when it comes to services that we should offer to our members because there we differ too much. But over the years we have tried with different types of activities, with trade fairs, business trips, exchange programmes and so on, and there are still a lot of things to do.

What we see is a problem with the political committee because sometimes we run into things that really need the help of the politicians. And after say ten, fifteen, twenty years of working together in the region you need to reach a point where there are some crucial, serious issues that need to be tackled that require politicians with a mandate that really tackles this issue.

Our problem in our region is, for instance, border crossing issues with Russia. Russia has an outer border with the European Union and we have a lot of trade with Russia. And this is a problem that we cannot solve; we really need real help from politicians. And probably this issue needs to be solved at a very high political level and will need a commitment from the politicians. And then of course we also have, from our experience we have competition for the attention of the European Union. And there I can guarantee that we see you as a very good potential and over the years you have been really good and that we need to really see that we can really learn from you in many things.

We are doing quite well. We have a reasonable growth. We have some really interesting newcomers like Lithuania, Estonia Latvia, and actually in some years they have even outperformed China when it comes to economic growth. We have some slower countries like Sweden, Denmark, etc. But still as region we are doing quite well.

We have actually within our cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region (and that's something I would like to finish off with), after ten years of cooperation we found out that there are actually four issues that were really worth discussing and we could really engage with. We believe that we can triple trade in our part of the world but then you need to attack four major areas: it's about 1) changing attitudes because there is still a lot of prejudice and wrong attitudes amongst our neighbours; 2) we need to involve Russia because it's the great potential in our part of the world; 3) we need to improve infrastructure; and 4) we have to promote and develop free trade so that we really have a large market. So that's what we are doing in my part of

the world. I have a few copies of our mission treaty, which I will put out there. If someone is interested they can always take a copy to see what's happening out there.

To finish off, I would like of course to thank the organisers for this opportunity, which has been very interesting for us. I think also that in the future there is also the potential for an exchange of ideas between different parts of Europe since we share a lot of the same problems and of course have the same opportunities. We need to work together to create some good ideas at the top of Europe and, today, at the South of Europe. Thank you very much for your attention.