

Speech by the Minister for Education, Science, Research and Culture

Ute Erdsiek–Rave

For the Ars Baltica Organisation Meeting

26<sup>th</sup> April 2004

State Cultural Centre Salzau

The sea our future – the state government of Schleswig–Holstein sets key initiatives in commerce and science, in research and the environment, in art and culture under this motto. This hallmark, this leading aim the sea our future stands for our understanding of ourselves as a region – that is, it looks inwards. At the same time, however, it points beyond our state into the Baltic region connected by the Baltic Sea. The two belong together. Both influence and shape each other in a cooperative process.

In April 1988, Björn Engholm – then Prime Minister of the state – formulated a vision in his government policy statement: the Baltic Sea region was to become an economic and cultural community. And he was convinced that this vision could only be fulfilled with the aid of art and culture. The aim was for an Ars Baltica to emerge – relating to history and the present, but naturally also as a creative force to shape the future. This common art was to build bridges for politics and for the economy.

In 1988 it was a courageous impulse: to offer to a strictly militarised region not only points of exchange and purposeful collaboration, but also an invitation to work together in an open, non–hierarchical, multilateral network. Art was to cross over borders, to make people aware of what they shared and to create new community. That is how we grasp the philosophy of Ars Baltica!

When the first symposium on the principles of Ars Baltica took place in 1990, the political situation in the world had changed fundamentally after the fall of the Iron Curtain. The situation had become more favourable for an extensive artistic network as the basis of a comprehensive transregional cooperation between the Baltic states.

It has proved possible to realise a large number of initiatives, ideas and projects in the course of the last fifteen years: these have included, for example, the programmatic exhibition Face to Face, the Baltic Writer Center in Visby, or the Photo Triennial and the Jazz Baltica festival.

With respect to entirely different artistic disciplines, Ars Baltica is a platform for dialogue, for work in partnership and for a debate with themes that concern all those involved. It makes us aware of what we have in common – whether this be half–timbered Gothic architecture, design or music, aspects of the landscape or people's feeling for life. And in each case it also conveys the specific qualities, the differences, the characteristics which are perceived by all those participating as a strength rather than a weakness or something divisive.

For Schleswig–Holstein, this includes respectful cohabitation with minorities – with the Danes, the Frisians, the Sinti and Roma, or the successful integration of the many people who were driven out of their home countries and welcomed here around sixty years ago.

Everything that meets under the umbrella of Ars Baltica, that is examined and created with this seal; all this aims to create unity in diversity – and most certainly does not promote interchangeability or standardisation.

-----

A year ago, the Photo Triennial asked What is important? What is meaningful? We are not searching for ultimately valid answers, for the permanently binding. We wish to pose and to answer this question repeatedly. Precisely this is its creative potential.

I am very confident that in the future this initiative, this group will continue to succeed in building multinational bridges and in creating networks that inwardly and outwardly visualise the characteristics and the strengths of the Baltic countries. And that these will also have an effect upon the European Community – in the spheres of knowledge, education, politics and economics within the EU, but also above and beyond those.

15 years of Ars Baltica – today we have good reason to celebrate this as a joint success. 15 years of work in a network and a lobby that does not, of course, emerge of its own accord. Behind it there are agents by conviction: people – whether colleagues in the state governments, the foreign ministers represented in the Baltic Council, the numerous artists from the participating regions, or naturally the many sponsors in each case. They have always believed in this Baltic cooperation. They have advertised it with conviction. And they have helped in its design: from the point of view of organisation or structure, and artistically: in 21 projects during the last year alone.

Ars Baltica lives with its projects and through these projects. Its strength is its informal quality, which even extends to the structure of work and organisation. But networks also require a concrete centre. Since the beginning of this year, the secretary's office – financed by 10 countries – is under Polish direction, in the hands of Lidia Makowska. The chairman of the organisation committee is the Lithuanian Rolandas Kvietkauskas. These two functional posts assure the necessary, mid-term continuity of Ars Baltica– also thanks to the special commitment of the ministries of culture in Poland and Lithuania.

In a few days, four Ars Baltica partner countries will accede to the EU: Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Now the key is to transport into the west and the south those shared qualities which we have manifest to each other in the north and east during the past 15 years. Together we can increase the awareness for the Baltic region, and in this process we can also become more aware of our own identity. For our transregional motto the sea our future would be absolutely unthinkable without the outstanding artistic-creative initiatives in the Baltic area!

In this spirit, I wish you every success with your continuing work in general and for the realisation of the next two projects in particular: for the joint performance of Benjamin Britten's War Requiem in June of this year (which is being prepared at the Academy of Music in Lübeck in cooperation with the Association of Baltic Music Academies) and for the Folk Music Baltica, which is to take place in Flensburg during 2005.

For the future, I wish us all an even tighter-knit network of participants, an even more productive and intense exchange, and as soon as possible, a visible effect on cultural tourism. Finally, we will work together to ensure that this unique network of the Baltic region is perceived within Europe, in Brussels.