

Fredrikstad 16.mai 2007

Ordfører Ole Haabeth

Dear friends from the Baltic network, it's a great pleasure to welcome you to Fredrikstad.

As chairman of the border committee Østfold -Bohuslen/Dalsland I also want to welcome you to this region.

A region now working and communicating very good together, almost as if there was no border at all.

But it hasn't always been so.

First I will give you some words about our history.

In this region THE Northern part of Bohuslen and the southern part of Østfold you will find some of the richest traces from people living in the iron and bronze periods. An area in Tanum in Sweden just across the border is also

appearing on the world heritage list, because of its
marvellous rock carvings.

At Hunn in Skjærviken - just outside our city - archaeologists have found traces of a permanent settlement, which is some five thousand years old. There are also a number of rock carvings close to the city which show that people have cultivated the local soil for as long as three thousand five hundred years.

The earliest written sources, which mention the beginnings of our city, are the Icelandic chronicles. They tell us that Earl Alf Erlingsson - also known as Alf the Small - built a fortress on the island of Isegran in the thirteenth century - and marking the beginning of our city's written history.

Fredrikstad's growth and development is rooted in the City's geographical location at the mouth of the River Glomma. In 1567 when the enemy, at that time it always was the Swedes, once more burned the town of Sarpsborg, the king Fredrik II, decreed that a new town was to be built closer to the river mouth.

The town was named after the King, and is in fact Norway's first "Royal town".

When the Danish-Norwegian Union lost the region of Bohuslen to Sweden a hundred years later, Fredrikstad suddenly gained great strategic importance. The town was fortified and military outposts were constructed to defend and protect the approach from the sea. One of them, the island of Isegran, served as the main base for the Danish - Norwegian fleet from around the year 1700. Admiral Peter

Wessel Tordenskiold carried out several naval actions against the enemy from here. The navy had a number of vessels built at Isegran.

Fredrikstads development and wealth was provided by the "Green Gold" - timber. Logs were floated here from the upper reaches of the Glomma, worked and sawn in the mills And shipped to destinations all over the world from the Timber town at the mouth of the Glomma.

Shipping has always been important to Fredrikstad, and at the beginning of the last century we had the largest merchant shipping fleet in the country, engaged in particular in the export of timber products.

The river has also given us large clay deposits that provide the raw materials for the many brick-works around the town.

The excellent harbour and port facilities were also of great importance to the stone industry in the surrounding district. The famous Østfold Granite was exported worldwide by ship from Fredrikstad.

Our Fortified Town, with Fort Kongsten and the Old Town surrounded by the moat and the town walls, and Isegran as a first line of defence, located centrally in the mouth of the River Glomma, was built to protect us from our bothersome Swedish neighbours. In 1814 the Swedes were back in, and they managed to take the town - fortunately without damaging it.

Today we have every reason to be grateful for this, because our Old Town stands proudly as the best preserved fortified town in the Northern Region. In fact, a couple of years ago

our country's most widely read newspaper awarded Fredrikstad's Old Town the distinction of being Norway's number one tourist attraction.

Fredrikstad's history since those bygone days has been one of rapid change and development. Our sawmills and brickworks made us forerunners in the Industrial Revolution, And the exportation of these products made us the largest Tall ship town in Norway during the last part of the nineteenth and the first part of the twentieth century. Fredrikstad has through the centuries been host to ships and seamen from all over the world. Fredrikstad's own seafarers were influenced by other and often far distant countries and cultures. All these factors have merged to create a unique maritime culture at the Mouth of the

Glomma, but it has also made Fredrikstad one of the most internationally minded cities in Norway.

Today we are a centre of large-scale, diversified industrial production, with chemicals, manufacturing and information technology, and above all food processing, as staple industries.

In 1993 Fredrikstad was officially named an environmental city. This is not a reward for a job well done, but rather a challenge; a challenge to develop our city in such a way that it will contribute to a sustainable future. Our intention was to reverse trends, which threatened our environment and the lives of future generations. This program is no ended, we have made a lot of progresses, but we have still a long way to go to reach the goal of being a real environmental city.

However we are still working towards a more sustainable future and to improve the environment.

Once more I want to welcome you to this region to Fredrikstad and to this conference. I hope you will find the conference interesting and that your stay here in Fredrikstad will be pleasant and memorable.

Tomorrow Norway will celebrate our constitution, there will be a large parade through the streets and a lot of happy people, and I recommend you to watch the parade and all who wants to join the parade are very welcome to do so.