

Toruń in the New Hansa

In 1998, during the 19th International Convention of the New Hansa in Visby (Sweden), Toruń became a member of the Union of the Cities of the New Hansa. The decision on this matter was made by the General Assembly of Delegates of this organization, which according to tradition lasting several centuries has the power to accept new members. The application of the Toruń government was prepared under resolution number 715/98.

However, the history of Toruń in the Hansean League is much longer...

In German the word "Hanse" originally meant a group or community. Since the 13th century this word was used to define the community of travelling merchants. The convention in Lübeck in 1356 is considered to be the birth of the true Hansa. Throughout the history of the Hansa, 200 cities were its members, some of them for only a very short time. However, the core of the organization was formed by more or less 70 towns, especially during the period of the greatest rise of the Union, that is in the 14th and 15th centuries.

Toruń belonged to a group of cities that were considered to be members of the Hansa from the beginning and took part in the creation of the community already in the 13th century. Toruń was for the first time included in an organizational and political formation of the union in 1280. It was then, when the Council of Lübeck asked councilmen of Toruń whether they agreed to the counting house of the Hansean merchants to be moved from Brugge to Aardenburg. The role of Toruń in the historic Hansa was, most of all, to be the trade agent. From the west, mainly from Flanders, cloth as well as salt, wine, and spices were imported. While to the west crops, furs, forest products from Prussia and Poland, and Slovakian copper were exported. Due to the importance of the cloth trade for the trade of Toruń, participation of merchants from Toruń in the Hansean counting house in Brugge was very active. Citizens of Toruń took active part in the passing of the statutes of the counting house (Jan Rode) in 1347, and very often were members of its authorities. The economic role of Toruń in the Hansa increased at the end of the 13th century, when merchants from Toruń made contacts with Slovakia, from where they exported copper to the west.

Toruń took a very active participation in the structures of the Hansa. Of all 48 conventions that took place between 1356 and 1403 Toruń sent its delegates to as many as 40 of them. The townspeople of Toruń were also very active as far as debates and diplomatic negotiations conducted by the Hansa. Of all 35 diplomatic missions of the Hansa from 1356 to 1403 that we know of, the townspeople of Toruń took part in 21.

The former, historic Hansa, ceased to exist in 1669, but its ideas were reborn after more than 300 years - in 1980, when in a Dutch city of Zwolle, the first convention of the New Hansa took place.

The importance of this Union in Europe today may be observed in the fact that 50 cities took part in the first convention, and there were more than 100 cities during the Convention in Gdańsk in 1997 and their number keeps growing.

Toruń, a city with Hansean traditions, could not remain outside the Union of Cities of the New Hansa. For the first time, our city took part in the 17th International Convention of the New Hansa in Gdańsk in 1997, where at the organizers' requests it displayed its table with gingerbread and other sweets prepared in Toruń as well as wine. This table, planned by artists from Toruń, met with great interest and persuaded many people visiting the Oliwia Hall to see our city personally. Later, we took part in the 18th Convention of the New Hansa, in the Swedish city Visby in Gotland, which belongs to, just like Toruń, the privileged group of cities recorded in the UNESCO world heritage list. In Visby, Toruń showed its qualities and places worth visiting in the "Hansa Market", in which the stand of Toruń was crowded by guests from different parts of the world.

Aims of the Union:

- to present the past and the present days of the Hansa cities,
- to show relations of cities belonging to the Hansa,
- integration of the member cities, establishing close interpersonal contacts,
- creation of forms of exchange of economic, cultural and tourist initiative,
- presentation of cultural heritage of the cities,
- actions leading to the integration of healthy people in the world of the disabled,
- cooperation of private organizations,
- exchange of experiences and cooperation of young people

The New Hansa Union allows us to understand and accept cultural, political, and social differences of other nations. It teaches tolerance and mutual respect. It strengthens the feelings of democracy and lets us make use of the experiences of our partners. It brings together citizens of eastern and western parts of Europe.