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18th Forum of Polish Euroregions

Between 15 and 18 June 2009 Euroregion Pradziad (Euroregion Praděd) on the Polish – Czech border hosted the 18th Forum of the Polish Euroregions. EU Commissioner on Regional Policy, Ms Danuta Hübner was a special guest at the Forum.

The Forum took place in Glucholazy, in the Region of Opole. Around 50 representatives of the following Polish euroregional structures participated in the event: Baltic, Beskidy (Beskydy), Bug, Glacensis, Nysa (Neisse, Nisa), Pradziad (Praděd), Puszcza Białowieska, Sprewa - Nysa – Bóbr (Spree-Neisse-Bober), Pro Europa Viadrina, Śląsk Cieszyński (Těšínské Slezsko), Silesia and Tatry.

The debates at the Forum centred around the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), and the effect these might have on the cross-border cooperation in Europe. Ms Danuta Hübner informed eight such structures have been established so far and around fifteen more are in the establishment process. The Polish Euroregions decided to work towards a closer relation with the Committee of the Regions' experts group monitoring the process of setting up EGTCs. It seems of utmost importance that Euroregions, which have been implementing cross-border cooperation in their local environments, remain relevant partners in discussing the objectives and practicalities of territorial cooperation in the European Union.

The Forum resulted in the adoption of conclusions, including the establishment of an inter-euroregional working group in order to develop a process leading to the initiation of a formal structure associating all Euroregions in Poland which will represent them in a dialogue with the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of Interior and of Regional Development. This dialogue should most of all concern matters related to the development and management of CBC programmes but also such EU policies as Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, Eastern Partnership and future Cohesion Policy.

Sweden Takes Over EU Presidency

On 1st July Sweden took over the EU Presidency. Sweden will hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union during the second half of 2009.

The Swedish Presidency's vision is a strong and effective Europe where focus is on the common responsibility to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow, including preparedness to manage crises.

The European Union is facing a crucial period. Together we must deal with the economic crisis and unemployment, but also unite the world to tackle climate change. The Swedish Presidency is ready to take on the challenge, said the Swedish Prime Minister, Mr Fredrik Reinfeldt on the outset of the presidency.

The coming six months will be characterised by both change and renewal. The newly elected European Parliament will begin its work and a new Commission will be appointed. The conditions for cooperation will change if the Treaty of Lisbon enters into force.

The biggest and most important challenges are the economy, employment and climate – issues that affect each and every citizen of the EU.

The remaining priorities within the Swedish working programme are:

- Stockholm Programme that safeguards security & the rights of individuals,
- EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
- The EU, its neighbourhood and the world
- New Parliament, Commission and Treaty of Lisbon

The programme also includes the informal meeting of ministers for agriculture and fisheries in Växjö in the ERB member region of Södra Småland. It will be held between 13 and 15 September 2009. Växjö municipality has received a number of international environmental awards over the past decade, and has been declared 'Europe's greenest city' for its climate goals and successful work to combat climate change.

after: http://www.se2009.eu/en/the_presidency

Launch of the Baltic Sea Strategy

The European Commission adopted a Communication on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region on 10 June 2009. This is the first time that a comprehensive Strategy, covering several Community policies, is targeted on a 'macro-region'.

Eighty flagship projects are listed in the accompanying Action Plan, under 15 priorities and 4 cornerstones:

1. Environmentally sustainable (e.g. reducing pollution in the sea);
2. Prosperous (e.g. promoting innovation in small and medium enterprises);
3. Accessible and attractive (e.g. better transport links);
4. Safe and secure (e.g. improving accident response).

The Strategy aims at coordinating action by Member States, regions, the EU, pan-Baltic organizations, financing institutions and non-governmental bodies to promote a more balanced development of the Region. It will be reviewed regularly. The proposal is now being discussed by the European Parliament and Member States. Agreement is expected by the end of the year. It is also one of the priority issues for the Swedish EU Presidency.

after: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/baltic/

European Policy for Culture?

The great European Forum was held in Montpellier, France, on 2 – 3rd July, closing the consultation phase initiated by ADCEI and the EUROMEDINCULTURE network in order to influence EU cultural policy.

The European Commission has proposed a European cultural agenda and in this context has begun a participative programme of consultation. The method chosen aims to involve as many people as possible in giving their views on the three main issues of the agenda:

- promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue;
- promotion of culture as a catalyst of creativity in the framework of the Lisbon strategy for growth and employment;
- promotion of culture as an essential part of the Union's foreign relations.

The EUROMEDINCULTURE Citizenship project invited European citizens of the North, South and East to express their views on a common subject: the place of culture in the Europe of tomorrow. Some six hundred responses were collected and presented at the Forum as proposals to the European Commission.

The following are some of the proposals:

- establishment of a European Ethical Committee to ensure the place of culture in all European activities based on the values of democracy, equality and exchanges;
- recognition that the right to artistic and cultural learning is a fundamental right for everyone;
- establishment of legal frameworks at a European level which will guarantee financial resources and minimum social guarantees for professionals and artists;



- free access to public owned / financed cultural facilities (e.g. libraries, heritage sites, monuments, festivals, archives, theatres, etc);
- support of local NGOs organized in European networks that can assure access to European programmes on a regional level.

after EUROMEDINCULTURE



The role of local and regional authorities was the subject of the seminar during Almedalsveckan on Gotland on 29th June 2009, organised by the regions of Blekinge, Kalmar and Södra Småland together with the SIDA unit on Gotland.

More than 50 people participated in the seminar with contributions from *inter alia* Mr Anders Lindholm (DG Regio), Mr Olle Schmidt (Swedish MEP), Mr Uno Aldegren from the EU Committee of Regions and several other representatives.

Euroregion Baltic was represented by the leader of the ERB Youth Board, Ms Cajsa Augustzén, who in her speech activated the audiences asking them to come up with concrete proposals on how to involve the youth in the implementation of the Strategy.

Also Mr Niels Chresten Andersen from Bornholm represented ERB, having a short speech on the role of cross border organisations.

He made it clear that Euroregion Baltic fully supports the initiative to have an EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region with the four proposed thematic areas, fifteen recommended priorities and so far seventy-eight examples of flagship projects included in the document. Euroregion Baltic has since January 2008 been taking active part in the preparations and consultations during the drafting of the Strategy and has worked closely together with five other Baltic Sea organisations – and has experienced a very positive approach from the European Commission as well as governments and other key actors.

Stimulating Youth Cooperation!

The Yc³ (Youth Cross-border Cooperation and Communication) project started with a Kick Off in Gdansk 9-10 June 2009 which was very successful. During the Kick Off information and communication issues were discussed among other things. After the Kick Off the project coordinator Lisa Andersson, Region Blekinge, and the Youth Board chair Cajsa Augustzén was invited to participate at a conference focusing on the implementation of the EU Baltic Sea Strategy in Visby, Sweden, 29 June.

The project aims at increasing youth participation and influence in cross-border cooperation to stimulate intercultural dialogue and develop cross-border networks.

Euroregion Baltic and EU Strategy for Baltic Sea Region

The role of euroregions and similar cross border structures needs to be made clearer in the EU Baltic Sea Strategy, which was launched by the European Commission on 10th June 2009 and by the EU Summit 18th – 19th June 2009 forwarded to the Swedish EU Presidency for a final adoption at the next EU Summit 29th – 30th October 2009.

The 11 pages communication concerning the Strategy was followed by an Action Plan on 71 pages, dividing the four main thematic areas into 15 priorities and into so far 78 concrete examples of so-called flagship projects.

Niels Ch. Andersen nevertheless made 3 reservations to the launched Strategy and the Action Plan:

- It is very unclear what should become the role of euroregions and similar cross border cooperation structures, most of them based on formal and permanent agreements referring to the Madrid Convention from May 1980 on transfrontier cooperation,
- Selection of lead partners of the different flagship projects lacks transparency, objective selection criteria and an open selection procedure, to which all relevant stakeholders can apply,
- The financial aspect of the implementation of the Strategy does not look convincing, as the financial implementation fully depends on existing programmes. This means a risk of transnational selection criteria in programmes which are not transnational *per se*.

He, on behalf of ERB, therefore strongly recommended

- more clear description of the role of euroregions in the implementation of the Strategy,
- more open and transparent selection of flagship lead partners, and
- ensuring that transnational projects will be financed by transnational programmes. As for other EU programmes there will still be a room for them to support the implementation of the EU Baltic Sea Strategy, but it should not be based on inclusion of transnationally based selection criteria.

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During the summer much effort will be put on the development of a graphic profile and the web site. The next project meeting will take place in Kalmar, Sweden, 18-19 September with an open seminar on young entrepreneurship.

During the next two years to come, the project will be implemented by ERB Youth Board and ERB member regions with Region Blekinge as Lead Partner. The project is co-financed by the South Baltic Programme and SIDA the Baltic Sea Unit.

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Euroregion Baltic Board meets in Gdańsk

The third meeting of the Euroregion Baltic Executive Board this year has taken place on 9th June in Gdańsk. The meeting focused on the future cooperation within Euroregion Baltic.

The session began with a special address by the President of Euroregion Baltic, Mr Jacek Protas in commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the democratic changes in Eastern and Central Europe, and fifth anniversary of the 2004 EU Enlargement. After contributions from the other members of the Board, the discussion focused on the main topic of the meeting, i.e. future cooperation within ERB.

The central objective for the ERB cooperation has been the implementation of the Joint Development Programme. It has been reflected in our strategic initiatives, e.g. involvement in the South Baltic CBC Programme, as well as in more practical endeavours, such as the establishment of thematic reference networks within the Interreg Seagull II project, which were transformed into the Working Groups.

ERB Working Groups will now implement specific tasks of the Programme. The four projects developed and submitted to the South Baltic CBC Programme deal with the issues related to the development of a network of labour market organisations (BaltNet), the establishment of a knowledge exchange network of incubators and science and technology parks (DISKE), the increase of energy saving through conversion to LED lighting in public spaces (LED), and modern water management (MOMENT). 35 project partners and 15 associated organizations will implement projects which will last up to three years. In total, the budgets of these projects amount to 6.8 MEUR (with the ERDF funding of 5.5 MEUR). The Joint Development Programme also remains the prioritised objective within the ERB action plans which are adopted every year by the Council at the beginning of each new presidency in Euroregion Baltic.

In the coming years Euroregion Baltic will also commit itself to further integration of local communities and youth. To this end, a Youth Board was incorporated into the organizational structure of Euroregion Baltic, giving the young representatives of the member regions an opportunity to influence the work within ERB. Initiatives at the local level and people to people cooperation projects will be coordinated by the special Working Group established in February 2009.

Current and new challenges related to such EU policies as EU Cohesion Policy, Baltic Sea Strategy, European Neighbourhood Policy, and Eastern Partnership will constitute a natural arena for Euroregion Baltic to test its institutional and organizational capacities. In this respect, closer cooperation with the Working Groups as well as more coordinated efforts among the ERB member regions seem crucial in order to continue to enhance ERB's role as an important actor in the Baltic Sea Region.



The aim of the discussion held at the Board meeting was to find best possible solutions to the management of joint ERB resources (both administrative and financial) to face the ever-increasing intensity of the cooperation, and at the same time enable continuous build-up of the ERB brand. Opinions and arguments voiced during the debate highlighted first of all the necessity of ensuring an effective flow of information between the ERB Council, Executive Board, Working Groups, and secretariats. Growing pressure to coordinate a number of joint initiatives on the part of the secretariats is in the opinion of many a major challenge in our future work.

It was also generally recognised that ERB's external activity in EU and BSR debates will not only help us acquire necessary knowledge of current issues but also result in better visibility and higher profile of Euroregion Baltic on the international arenas. Therefore, focus will be placed on joint initiatives with other key players in Europe, e.g. Committee of the Regions, Baltic Development Forum, Baltic 7 Islands or Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Co-operation.

The Board took time to discuss other issues related to the cooperation within Euroregion Baltic, including a request to extend the composition of the Board with a representative of the Association of Polish Communes and a thematic scope of a future joint ERB project. Such a project, it was agreed, should bring added value to the ERB cooperation. It was noted that the two previous projects – Seagull devERB and Seagull II – apart from the facilitation of the JDP-related goals, were generally considered to have brought in a unifying element into the work within the organisation. In addition, the technical capacity of providing financial assistance to special activities within the ERB has also a more pragmatic aspect. It makes Euroregion Baltic an efficient organisation able to generate funds with the membership fees allocated by its member regions. It seems extremely important, especially when these membership fees need to be defended among other costs borne by the regional administrations.

Another aspect concerned the added value that such a project should also bring to the member regions themselves. Thus, the regions had been asked to forward their project proposals. Two ideas were presented to the Board:

1. a Key Study on the Creation of ERB Business Promotion System, and
2. a BSS Pilot Project Aiming at Decreasing CO2 emission.

Since the Board could not reach unanimity the ERB secretariats were asked to work on a compromise proposal which would then seek approval of the Board at its next meeting in October 2009.

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What next?

The discussion on a future ERB project initiated at the Board meeting in Gdańsk will continue. Questions that need answering concern not only the project thematic scope but will also indicate directions in ERB development in the coming years.

The following three aspects have been so far considered in the preparatory work on the project:

Triple helix concept and insufficient participation of private and academic sectors in ERB cooperation.

The Triple Helix concept has not been satisfactorily implemented in the ERB cooperation so far. The political level is naturally best represented in Euroregion Baltic with knowledge institutions and private sector lagging behind. The greatest challenge remains the involvement of private companies in ERB projects. One reason could be that businesses are dynamic entities which will pursue their opportunities regardless of the geography of cooperation areas like ERB. It is therefore not specific territories that constitute a sufficient magnet for businesses but business opportunities they may be able to identify in them.

Small and middle-sized companies are essential to the economy. High levels of entrepreneurship generate rapid development of the regions. However, as noted by experts, ineffective local and regional entrepreneurship support systems are still a major problem and should be addressed, a.o. by developing supporting structures based on public - private partnership. This puts a question of ERB's role in such processes. How could ERB provide a valuable platform for businesses and not overlap with the work done by professional business support structures?

One idea could be to investigate needs for such public-private partnerships, and for the application of the full Triple Helix concept on individual basis, from project to project whenever such need is justified and feasible. The idea of cluster building has been suggested as a possible solution to avoid the problematic Triple Helix. ERB partners could engage themselves in building clusters in specific projects and thus secure the efficient involvement of relevant stakeholders in their implementation.

This idea would be very much in line with a suggestion shared by the secretariats that the next joint ERB project should target specific branches / thematic areas and seek possible private partners to deal with selected issues, e.g. tourism development or climate change combat.

EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and identifying the role for ERB in the implementation phase

It has been agreed that implementing one of the Baltic Sea Strategy actions should constitute a good political message for the

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Upcoming Events:

2009-06-30 - 2009-08-28
2009-07-20 - 2009-07-24
2009-07-22 - 2009-07-26
2009-07-23 - 2009-07-26
2009-07-25 - 2009-07-27
2009-07-25 - 2009-08-16
2009-07-29 - 2009-08-02
2009-07-30 - 2009-08-01
2009-08-01
2009-08-01 - 2009-08-09
2009-08-01 - 2009-08-28
2009-08-04
2009-08-05
2009-08-06 - 2009-08-09
2009-08-10
2009-08-23

International Festival of Organ Music
Etape Bornholm
Europeade (European Folk Culture Festival)
Folk Music Festival
Sea Festival
St. Dominic's Fair
Sail Karlskrona
Emmabodafestivalen
City Birthday
Shakespeare Festival
International Opera and Symphony Music Festival
ERB Local Action Group Conference
ERB Rural Development Working Group meeting
Karl-Oskar Ddays. Emigration & Immigration Festival
Skate Marathon
Around Bornholm by bike

Gdańsk Oliwa (PL)
Bornholm (DK)
Klaipėda (LT)
Korrö (SE)
Klaipėda (LT)
Gdańsk (PL)
Karlskrona (SE)
Emmaboda (SE)
Klaipėda (LT)
Gdańsk (PL)
Klaipėda (LT)
Olsztyn (PL)
Olsztyn (PL)
Växjö (SE)
Bornholm (DK)
Bornholm (DK)

ERB Working Groups' Projects

Five projects submitted by the Euroregion Baltic Working Groups and Youth Board have been approved by the South Baltic CBC Programme Steering Committee which met on 6 - 7 April 2009 in Kalmar, Sweden.

Altogether, the Steering Committee approved 12 projects requesting the total ERDF funding of 10.4 MEUR. 5 projects will be managed by Polish Lead Partners, 4 by Swedish LPs, 3 by German LPs and 1 by a Lithuanian LP. So far, the total of 16 projects with the total ERDF funding of 14,9 MEUR.

The projects were quite evenly spread among the Programme axes and measures excluding measure 2.3 which was targeted by most beneficiaries in the first call.

The projects developed by Euroregion Baltic Working Groups are:

- South Baltic Networking Development for Labour Market Integration (BaltNet), submitted by the Social Dimension WG,
- Development of Innovative Systems through Knowledge Exchange (DISKE), submitted by the SME/Innovation WG,
- Increasing Energy Saving through Conversion LED lighting in Public Space (LED), submitted by the Energy WG,
- Modern Water Management in the South Baltic Sea Area (MOMENT), submitted by the Water WG.

In addition, ERB youth Board submitted the Youth Cross-Border Cooperation Communication Project, in short YC3.

In total, the budgets of these projects amount to 6.8 MEUR (with the ERDF funding of 5.5 MEUR).

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What next?

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ERB member regions. Euroregion Baltic has been an active actor in the development process of the Baltic Sea Strategy and intends to continue its role also at the implementation stage. The Strategy recommends 15 priority areas which represent the main areas where the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region can contribute to improvements. Coordination of each priority area is allocated to a Member State to work on the implementation with all stakeholders involved, especially other Member States, but also regional and local authorities, inter-governmental bodies and NGOs.

Within such a wide partnership implementing BSS actions Euroregion Baltic could provide a good testing ground for BSS projects to be implemented in the whole Baltic Sea Region. Some half of the Strategy priority areas correspond well with the ERB Joint Development Programme, therefore giving the ERB actors a good choice of possible activities to consider.

Financing

The South Baltic CBC Programme is an obvious choice of co-financing to projects implemented within Euroregion Baltic. The choice of a specific measure within the Programme remains an open question. On the one hand, it could be related to the choice of a theme: measure 2.3 in the case of the Key Study on the Creation of ERB Business Promotion System and measure 2.2 in the case of the BSS Pilot Project Aiming at Decreasing CO2 emission. On the other hand, if more stressed is placed on the Triple Helix cooperation both optional projects could apply within measure 1.1. Another possibility is that the joint ERB project is co-financed within measure 2.4, i.e. as a local community initiative.

Taking into account the temporal framework, the third call in the Programme (between 5 July and 30 September 2009) could be a little too early to safeguard a proper gradual preparation of the project application, and most importantly to secure efficient partnership to implement it. Therefore, it is recommended that the fourth call (between 1 April and 21 May 2010) should be a feasible deadline to submit the application.

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