

Euroregion Baltic as a grouping of the border regions in the south eastern corner of the Baltic Sea faces development challenges that are probably typical to the border regions, e.g.

- strengthening the cross-border regions as an economic unit.
- further improvement of transport and communication infrastructures, both in and between the regions;
- promoting cross-border networks in all areas of development but also within local communities and youth organisations,
- solving environmental problems;
- The development of the regions is also fostered by activities in the field of culture. The cooperation aimed at protection of cultural heritage contributes to increase of the region's attractiveness, exercising a positive impact on the competitiveness of the local market.

The border regions within Euroregion Baltic also have to deal with issues resulting from the fact that the border they share is a maritime one:

- need to shorten distances between the shores of border regions, good transport links (both between ports and airports), which enable "gateway" functions for the free movement of goods and persons and for international transport;
- necessity for environmental monitoring, protection and management of their joint natural resources, esp. Baltic Sea,

Therefore, we believe enhancement of competitiveness, of prosperity, of the ecological situation and the quality of life in the Baltic Sea Region should be the overall objectives of the Strategy

We are all aware that these crossborder challenges are supported within the framework of EU cohesion policy programmes. Euroregion Baltic recognises the importance of this particular EU policy in its cooperative efforts and believes it will be an effective instrument financing the implementation of the future Baltic Sea Strategy. /SLIDE/

ERB participated in the consultation process on the future European Union's cohesion policy launched by Regional Policy Commissioner Danuta Hübner producing the statement which I would like to briefly recall:

- the principle of solidarity and confidence between Member States should continue to be exercised within the European Union Cohesion Policy
- that the principle of subsidiarity should remain a fundamental rule in the future EU Cohesion Policy.
- the scope of the EU Cohesion Policy should focus on the renewed Lisbon agenda.
- that it is appropriate to earmark part of EU funds to the Gothenburg priorities.
- that territorial cooperation should be further considered a specific objective of the EU Cohesion Policy.
- that the South Baltic CBC Programme should be continued and extended in the future EU Cohesion Policy.

Cohesion Policy instruments, and in particular South Baltic CBC Programme provide significant assistance to such cooperative organisations as Euroregion Baltic in their efforts to benefit territorial cohesion and implement joint development strategies.

Baltic Sea Strategy should complement, support and constitute a framework for existing cooperation efforts, and involve existing governmental and non-governmental Baltic Sea organizations, regional and local authorities and other stakeholders in the drafting and implementation of the Strategy, making use of their expertise and experience and of the high level of integration.

ERB consists of one region of the Russian Federation and finds the ENPI support crucial in its activities aimed at promoting prosperity and deepening political cooperation on the basis of shared values and common

interests. We therefore urge the Commission and the Member States to continue and extend the scope of ENPI programmes with the future EU structural funds. Specifically, Euroregion Baltic recommends extending the South Baltic CBC programme with the ENPI component comprising the Kaliningrad Region and its neighbours in Lithuania and Poland, and making the whole Euroregion Baltic area eligible for cross-border cooperation within a single EU programme;

Thus, ERB considers it necessary that Norway and Russia as the only non-EU Member States of the region in the Strategy are included in the strategy development process as early as possible because a coherent and sustainable Strategy requires an institutionalized dialogue and cooperation with all states of the Baltic Sea Region.

Cross-border cooperation should be a cross-cutting theme producing added value at the sub-regional and transnational level, enhancing sustainable regional development, the involvement of civil society and people-to-people contacts keeping in mind progress made towards the objective of visa free travel as a long-term perspective between the European Union and Russia as stipulated in the St. Petersburg Summit of May 2003.

Euroregion Baltic also joined in the discussions on how to facilitate effective border traffic. We held two conferences on the subject: in Svetlogorsk, Kaliningrad Region in November 2006 and in Karlskrona, Sweden in March 2007. A report was also presented.

A resolution was adopted at the final conference recommending among others:

- the extension of the limit of 30 kilometres from the border allowing residents in the Kaliningrad Region and neighbouring regions of Lithuania and Poland to take advantage of the special local border regime,

while the limit has been extended on the Polish – Ukrainian border we know the local border agreement between the two countries is under careful consideration by the European Union; preparations are under way as we hear between the governments of Poland and Russia to draft an agreement regulating local border regime between the two countries.

- allocation of specific resources in the programmes financed within the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument to more intensively prepare a visa-free regime between the Kaliningrad Region and neighbouring EU regions in a short term perspective, to be extended to all the regions within Euroregion Baltic in a medium term perspective,
ENPI programme Poland Lithuania Kaliningrad is significantly delayed we know one of its indicative actions (1.2) will make it possible to apply for funds on the development and implementation of border transport infrastructure plans,
- and enabling navigation in the Vistula Lagoon and the Curonian Lagoon, with the aim of inducing humanitarian and economic relations and making a good use of to the existing infrastructure on border area inland waters.