

# Notes from the ERB Cooperation Review Task Force Meeting

Copenhagen 11 February 2010

## The What Session

- The purpose of ERB
  - The activities of ERB should complement the regional agendas and have added value for the regions (most partners perceive added value present at the cross-border level). Otherwise there is a risk that the political leaders of the member regions will not see ERB as an integral part of the work in the regions and/or a good tool supporting the region in the cross-border cooperation.
  - It is necessary to discuss what ERB is today and what we would like it to be in the future, in other words try to define an ERB identity. Such a definition should be based on the ERB achievements so far and its external image.
- Political representation
  - It is necessary that the chairperson of each region is a member of the ERB Board (this is already the case for the two Polish regions and Klaipeda County to a degree), which will maximise the capacity to anchor the ERB work in the regions' political structures.
  - Active involvement of leading politicians and civil servants in the ERB cooperation will make it easier to get ERB issues on the political agenda in the member regions.
  - ERB should use other political networks and forums as well as the different representations in Brussels in order to maximise its impact in the European structures.
- Thematic focus of the cooperation
  - The thematic scope of ERB is wide with 8 focus areas in the Joint Development Programme and 9 Working Groups (WG).
  - It is necessary to narrow down the **focus**. It makes more sense to **do less but to a higher standard**.
  - The region of **Kalmar** mentioned three issues they consider important for the ERB cooperation: environment, EU Cohesion Policy after 2013 and other current issues to influence EU.
  - **Blekinge** suggested creating a group to get the task of pointing out strategic areas of focus for ERB.
  - It was generally agreed that ad-hoc methods and approaches will serve more purpose than permanent structures. Such task-orientated groups prove more effective in maximizing the added value of the cooperation.
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- The geography of ERB

Issues that have been discussed were among others:

  - Should ERB extend its territory to neighbouring regions?
  - Are we the right partners?

- A closer cooperation with Euroregion Pomerania was discussed briefly. Such cooperation was not thought to bring added value to ERB mainly due to the different foci of the organisations as well as the low activity of the cooperation.
  - Another issue briefly discussed was the new forms of cooperation in Sweden. The cooperation between the three Swedish ERB member regions has in many areas been extended to a fourth region in South Sweden (Jönköping). A joint Brussels office has been established, joint participation at the Expo Shanghai etc.
  - Discussions based on the future alignment around a common cross-border programme
- The role of ERB  
The following was discussed:
    - ERB should be a proactive actor and take initiatives when needed.
    - ERB should be a tool for political debate between the member regions.
    - ERB should be an important political organisation for strategic issues.
    - ERB should be a facilitator on specific questions e.g. to facilitate to bring different actors/stakeholders together for project partnerships.
    - **Bornholm** considered ERB as an organisation for developing projects in the beginning of the cooperation. During the last years it is considered as an important political platform. In the future these political and lobbying functions should be improved and less focus should be given to initiating projects and running WGs. Bornholm summarised four different roles for ERB: lobby; projects; exchange of knowledge; involving external actors.
    - **Blekinge** emphasised the role of ERB as a political platform, involving politicians on the “right level”, or in other words, chair people of the regions. Blekinge agreed with the four roles summed up by Bornholm.
    - **Kalmar** emphasised the role of ERB as a political platform. ERB should also focus on running few strategic projects in the best possible way, for example by engaging in activities where we perform best when we cooperate. ERB should also stimulate cooperation with other actors in the regions.
    - **Warmia-Mazury** emphasised the role of ERB as a political platform. This role has grown since the accession of Poland and Lithuania to the EU. ERB is one of the most politically developed euroregions. Still, there should be a balance between the political role and that of running projects. ERB is considered a multiplier of cross-border cooperation.
    - **Pomerania** perceived ERB in its early stage as a platform to develop people-to-people cooperation. During the last years ERB is considered an important lobbying platform . The role of ERB is thought to be as follows: political platform; running projects and facilitating people-to-people activities. ERB is also believed to be a good structure to involve Russian partners (all regions agreed).
    - **South Småland** considers ERB as the most important tool for developing cross-border cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region. ERB is a strong political actor and the organisation should have a narrower focus in order to be more efficient and effective in delivering results.
  - ERB as a lobby actor
    - Bornholm mentioned different levels for the ERB lobbying function:
      - lobbying at the regional level

- lobbying at the ERB level;
- lobbying with other Baltic organisations,
- multilevel lobbying.
- **ERB lobbying activities at all these levels require effective coordination**
- The regional offices in Brussels have a role in lobbying. South Sweden is developing a new office and both Pomerania and Warmia-Mazury have theirs.
- The cooperation within ERB can be a tool to monitor and exchange information on different issues e.g. the EU Baltic Sea Strategy, the EU Cohesion Policy. An important element of this activity is again coordination.
- In the lobby work it is necessary that we make a good use of politicians from the regions or other good contacts present at the Commission, European Parliament or Committee of the Regions. It is also recommended to build new relations with the Baltic Sea Group in the European Parliament.
- In the lobby function ERB must remain flexible to be able to change priorities and react promptly.
- It is important to consider the role of Kaliningrad region while discussing ERB as a lobby actor since these initiatives mostly target the European Union.

## The How Session

- ERB Joint Development Program (JDP)
  - The JDP was the basis for the CBC South Baltic Program 2007-2013.
  - The JDP was the first document of its kind and a great achievement but it was also too ambitious.
  - The implementation of the JDP should be **assessed** and the content should be **revised**.
- The CBC South Baltic Programme after 2013
  - The **optimal situation** after 2013 is an Interreg A programme that covers the entire area.
  - Given the experience with e.g. the trilateral programme (Lithuania-Kaliningrad-Poland), there is a question mark on the functionality of Interreg programmes including the ENPI component. The **ENPI** component is both interesting and difficult.
  - The **geography** of the programme could be questioned when lobbying for a new programme, although the programme geography should probably not be questioned too much since we then could run the risk to lose the programme all together.
  - The ambition could be to move the South Baltic Programme further to the east after 2013.
  - It is important to have more discussions about the geography of the South Baltic Programme after 2013 within ERB to be able to reach a joint position and proposal.
  - After such discussion we then need to develop a **joint lobby strategy**, since lobbying towards a new/revised program is a long and complex process involving many actors.
- ERB as an EGTC

The following issues need to be discussed:

  - Is it relevant?
  - Is it possible?

- Is it realistic?
  - What should be the purpose/role for an EGTC?
  - How does it gain the cooperation?
  - Do we want the EGTC to become the Managing Authority for an Interreg A program? The experience from other Euroregions managing parts of programs is that they tend to be pre-occupied with the bureaucracy.
  - The **conclusion** of the discussion was to wait and see, monitor the development of other EGTCs, keep us well informed and not eliminate the possibility of an EGTC.
- The organisational structure of ERB
    - The experience of the **Working Groups** (WGs) has not been good; it has in general not proved most effective good tool to implement the JDP. The water WG is probably the most successful one. Having politicians as chairs of the WGs have not improved the WGs.
    - Instead of the WGs **ad hoc groups** for specific tasks or issues could be set up (with defined purpose, tasks and time frame). Flexibility is the key word. Perhaps one group for project generation could be established.
    - There is a need to strengthen the **Board and Council** to include leading politicians from all member regions. It is important that the agenda on these meetings is interesting and that important strategic issues on the political agenda are discussed. To be able to develop and improve ERB as political platform perhaps there is a need to limit the numbers of meetings. It might be too demanding to have four Board and two Council meetings each year.
    - Apart from the secretariats there is also a need to involve the leading civil servants from each region.
    - The daily cooperation and work need to be more effective, and communication methods improved.
- Klaipeda County
    - The situation in Lithuania was discussed.
    - It is important to continue the cooperation with Klaipeda County after the closure of the Klaipeda county administration.
    - Cooperation with municipal partners in Klaipeda County should be intensified (partnerships already exist) and a new meeting between the ERB president and the Lithuanian minister of interior should be organised.
- Road map for the ERB Cooperation Review Process
    - Discuss the future focus of the ERB cooperation in the member regions during spring 2010.
    - Report and discuss the development of the process at the board meeting in April.
    - Arrange a stakeholder conference in June, 17<sup>th</sup> June was preliminary decided. It was agreed that at such event “other” actors from the regions should participate.
    - Have a proposal for the future ERB cooperation in the autumn to be anchored in the member regions and adopted by the ERB Council in November in Växjö.