



# EUROREGION BALTIC STAKEHOLDER CONFERENCE ELBLĄG, 17-18 JUNE 2010

## *Summary of Discussions*

*The added value of cooperation, the power of building together, the strength of group work, the advantage of making your voice heard at the EU level, the essence of sharing knowledge, the richness of multiple brains thinking in synergy. All this is possible! This is what ERB stands for (after Luca Polizzi)*

## Lessons Learnt

### What have been key successes of the ERB cooperation so far?

1. ERB has been a successful cooperation platform, which has resulted in effective lobbying towards the EU and national level, joint strategic projects (based on the Joint Development Programme), improved intercultural dialogue benefiting European integration, youth cooperation (and its formal inclusion in ERB structures) , as well as the attraction of financial instruments (in particular South Baltic).
2. 8 member regions of the five participating countries established the International Secretariat, thus safeguarding continuity of work flow and coordination of efforts within Euroregion Baltic.
3. ERB has become a recognizable brand name and is today considered an important and reliable partner in discussions and consultations in the European Union.
4. ERB was the first such structure to have formally involved a Russian member in 1998 and since then has fully integrated the partners from the Kaliningrad Region in the cooperation.
5. Contribution to the development of close ties between local communities, authorities, non-governmental organisations, educational institutions in the ERB area, mainly those involved in the Phare and Norwegian Financial Mechanism projects implemented by the Association of the Polish Communes.

### What weaknesses have we identified in the ERB cooperation to date?

1. Some imbalance has been observed between ambitions voiced by the cooperation stakeholders on the one hand and the capabilities and resources shared within ERB on the other.
2. It was generally felt that ERB work has not been sufficiently anchored in its member regions, resulting in limited visibility of ERB in the regions (ERB seems more recognizable at EU level), not reaching citizens and communities.
3. Unequal involvement by the political representatives of the ERB cooperation has been observed as a result of changes to the earlier planned schedule of meetings.
4. Obstacles to the fully available and equal opportunities for the cooperation between the ERB member regions have been reported. Firstly, South Baltic CBC Programme does not cover the ERB area utterly. Secondly, existing visa regime hinders smooth cooperation with Russian partners.
5. There was general consensus that the ERB Working Groups have not proved effective enough. Too many Working Groups have meant the fragmentation of cooperation, frequent replacement of members and unstable work flow.
6. Some also commented on the low number of concrete, tangible outputs of the ERB activities and unused potential of cooperation between the self-governments at the local level in all the countries.

### What has been the added value of the ERB cooperation?

The discussion on added value of the ERB cooperation focused on two aspects:

#### **A. What has been considered the added value so far where the main points are as follows:**

1. Lobby results achieved so far such as the South Baltic Programme, influence exercised on EU policies, including the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.
2. Contribution to sustainable development in the region by means of joint strategic projects like Seagull DevERB, Seagull II, MOMENT, etc.
3. Development and improvement of competence and skills of the politicians and civil servants involved in the ERB cooperation.

4. Improved intercultural dialogue and cooperation through exchange of information and experiences, integration of youth and a number of projects bringing together partners from two or more of the ERB member regions.
5. Attracting external financing from EU and national programmes, as well as the Norwegian Mechanism.

#### **B. How to ensure added value of the ERB cooperation in the future**

Here the stakeholders of the ERB cooperation thought that added value for the ERB cooperation should be the basic requirement for any joint initiatives within Euroregion Baltic. Whatever action the ERB stakeholders may decide to take, they should always consider it in the context of added value it is expected to bring. Added value is mostly understood by the ERB stakeholders as any action which can *only* be implemented through the ERB partnership or implemented to bring a *significantly better result* than if taken by each region alone. It seems that the ERB stakeholders see the greatest potential for added value in the following functions:

1. ERB should act as a lobbying tool towards the EU and national governments
2. ERB should act as an implementer of joint strategic development projects
3. ERB should act as a platform of exchanging info and experience between politicians and civil servants
4. ERB should act as a facilitator of other forms of cooperation and actors in the ERB area

#### **Our Common Interests**

Is there a role for ERB to play in the BSR cooperation? If so, what should be our major tasks?

Clearly, ERB has a role to play in the BSR cooperation. This role should mainly be seen possible in its lobbying activities in order to strengthen the role of territorial cooperation in the next programming period (in particular concerning the continuation and/or transformation of the South Baltic Programme) and EU Cohesion Policy in general, but also in such specific issues as:

1. Environmental protection, including maritime safety
2. Transport accessibility, including border crossing with the Kaliningrad region
3. Economic cooperation and single market
4. Cooperation between universities and academia, between innovation centres and clusters, and between small Baltic ports
5. Youth cooperation
6. People-to-people cooperation in sport, education and culture

How can we make ERB an integral part of the work in the member regions?

1. Better involvement of political leaders in the regions into the ERB cooperation (but also of such political bodies as regional parliaments)
2. More flexible organization in ERB, i.e. one structure with leading politicians to be involved in strategic debates and decision-making
3. More focus in joint activities; optimising the role of ERB as a lobbying tool, implementer of strategic projects and a platform to exchange information
4. Forum of stakeholders to be held annually
5. Cooperation of the member regions' offices in Brussels
6. More effective use of mass media in promoting ERB work
7. ERB as a Baltic think-tank
8. Small projects between limited number of interested partners

What role can ERB play in the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region?

1. ERB should first of all inform of initiatives in the regions and countries around the Baltic Sea related to the Strategy
2. ERB should continue to be part of the Strategy implementation and monitoring processes and take part in the Strategy annual forum

3. ERB should consider being involved in the implementation of a flagship project (e.g. concerning youth cooperation)

What strategic joint initiatives do we need to undertake?

1. Building a stronger link between ERB work and work in the member regions
2. Lobbying towards the next programming period
3. Implementing a Baltic Sea Strategy flagship project
4. Stimulating business relations in ERB
5. Implementing strategic joint initiatives with added value potential
6. Cooperating more closely with Baltic organisations, Committee of the Regions, EU Parliament, etc
7. Conducting a SWOT analysis of establishing an EGTC
8. Acting as a provider of information on opportunities for international cooperation

**Reviewing institutional capacities of Euroregion Baltic**

1. Fewer structures, specific task forces instead of working groups
2. Board and Council merging into one structure with two members, two deputies and representatives from Youth Board
3. Fewer meetings per year (if agreed, requiring strengthened role of ERB President and closer link to the International Secretariat)
4. Holding annual meetings of stakeholders
5. Significant reduction of working groups
6. Yearly plans to implement selected parts of the JDP
7. Better links between the member regions and IPS
8. Continuation of online meetings between the secretariats
9. Involvement of leading civil servants on the ERB work

**Reviewing financial capacities of Euroregion Baltic**

1. All partners should pay the same amount of membership fees in the future
2. Extra resources for selected ERB initiatives should be made available through EU programmes
3. One CBC programme for the whole ERB would be the most optimal solution