



Euroregion Baltic

FUTURE OF THE INTERREG SOUTH BALTIC PROGRAMME ARGUMENTS SUPPORTING THE CROSS-BORDER-COOPERATION

Prepared on 16th October 2019

Established in 1998 Euroregion Baltic (ERB), is a politically solid and well-anchored cross-border cooperation platform in the south-east of the Baltic Sea region, representing regional authorities and associations of local authorities in nine regions in five countries. ERB is the first euroregion to have formally included a partner from Russia.

With reference to:

- the Position Paper of Euroregion Baltic on the Future of Cohesion Policy after 2020, adopted on 18th September 2017
- the Position Paper of Euroregion Baltic on the Future of the Interreg South Baltic Programme after 2020, adopted on 26th September 2018
presentation during the “The Baltic Sea/Arctic Area post-2020” round table discussion on 12th September 2019

Euroregion Baltic takes the following position:

- ERB supports the continuation of the South Baltic Programme as a separate European Territorial Cooperation instrument, and therefore strongly opposes the European Commission’s proposal to merge the South Baltic Programme with the Central Baltic Programme.

- ERB believes that the merger of the South Baltic Programme and Central Baltic Programme would result in creating another, in fact, transnationally oriented programme, as eight countries and the vast geographical area would be involved in this cooperation. From ERB's perspective, this would no longer be the cross-border-programme in real terms.
- ERB opposes the proposal of merging the Central Baltic Programme and South Baltic Programme, as Central Baltic Programme's geographical coverage is more urban, with four state capitals and significant nationwide stakeholders involved, whereas the South Baltic Programme geography covers more rural/small and medium-sized towns areas, and the Programme itself is more peripheral. It means that the socio-economic challenges such as economic and innovative potential, demography, education and skills development, environmental issues, transport accessibility etc. would vary considerably in a newly merged programme. This would put the priority setting process at risk and make the new programme ineffective in addressing the specific cross-border needs of the area.
- ERB supports the idea of bringing the EU closer to its citizens. We firmly believe that the South Baltic Programme needs to keep its cross-border character, and in result be able to come much closer to and involve the citizens at mostly local and regional level.
- ERB believes that merging the two programmes will weaken the primary goal and most endorsed by ERB approach, which should be to address citizens needs in a most direct way possible. This could also disconnect significant players in South Baltic area – such as local authorities and smaller NGO's. ERB shares the view that local communities and institutions are more willing to engage in the cooperation on the sub-regional level than on transnational level.
- ERB welcomes the European Commission's proposal to establish small project funds within Interreg programmes but recommends that their budgets should not exceed 20% of the total programme allocation. The beneficiary of a small project fund shall be a cross-border organisation such as Euroregion, working together with hosting organisation, a legal entity, such as *Association of Polish Communes Euroregion Baltic*. ERB recognises that such funds are the best instrument to implement people-to-people projects as they help in a straightforward and effective way to build up and maintain trust between people and regions in neighbouring states.

Vytautas Grubliauskas

President of Euroregion Baltic

