



Euroregion Baltic
Executive Board Meeting
30 March 2022
online

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Title	Minutes
Submitted by	Warmia and Masuria Region
Summary / Note	This document provides final minutes from the ERB Executive Board online meeting on 30 th March 2022
Requested action	Implement

Participants:

ERB Executive Board:

Mr Gustaw Marek Brzezina	ERB President, Marshal of Warmia and Masuria Region,
Mr Mikael Benzón	ERB Vice-President, Member of ERB Executive Board, Regional Municipality of Bornholm
Mr Vytautas Grubliauskas	Member of ERB Executive Board, Chair of Board of Association of Klaipeda Region
Ms Britt-Louise Berndtsson	Deputy Member of ERB Executive Board, Region Kronoberg
Mr Robert Olesen	Member of ERB Executive Board, Region Kronoberg
Mr Grzegorz Grzelak	Member of ERB Executive Board, Member of Regional Council of Pomorskie Region
Ms Elin Petersson	Member of ERB Executive Board, Chair of Regional Development Board, Region Blekinge
Ms Ellinor Troli	Member of ERB Executive Board, Region Kalmar County
Ms Johanna Wyckman	Deputy Member of ERB Executive Board, Region Kalmar County

ERB Youth Board:

Ms Johanna Wyckman	Chairwoman of ERB Youth Board, Region Kalmar County
Ms Greta Tautavičiūtė	Member of ERB Youth Board, Association Klaipeda Region
Mr Grzegorz Gieda	Member of ERB Youth Board, Warmia-Masuria Region
Mr Dawid Markun	Member of ERB Youth Board, Association of Polish Communes ERB (TBC)
Mr Dawid Jędrzejewski	Deputy Member of ERB Youth Board, Association of Polish Communes ERB (TBC)

ERB Secretariats:

Mr Niels Chresten Andersen	Regional Municipality of Bornholm
Mr Sławomir Demkowicz-Dobrzanski	Region Kronoberg
Ms Egle Stonke	Association of Klaipeda Region
Mr Łukasz Bielewski	Warmia and Masuria Region
Mr Piotr Zwolak	Warmia and Masuria Region
Ms Agata Birecka	Pomorskie Region
Ms Paulina Aleksander	Pomorskie Region
Mr Marcin Żuchowski	Association of Polish Communes Euroregion Baltic

ERB Executive Board meeting

30th March 2022

11.00 – 13.00 CET

online mode

11.00	1.	Welcome and opening
11.10		<p>President of Euroregion Baltic, Gustaw Marek Brzezina, Marshal of Warmia and Masuria Region, welcomed participants of the additional ERB Board meeting, which was expected to take decisions about International Permanent Secretariat.</p> <p>President of Euroregion Baltic asked for a formal check-up of attendance of ERB Executive Board Members. Region Blekinge was represented by Elin Petersson. Region Kalmar County was represented by Johanna Wyckman and Ellinor Trolin. Region Kronoberg was represented by Britt-Louise Berndtsson and Robert Olesen. Sławomir Demkowicz-Dobrzański was also present. Regional Municipality of Bornholm was represented by Mikael Benzon. Niels Chresten Andersen was also present. Association of Klaipėda Region was represented by Vytautas Grubliauskas. Egle Stonke was also present. Association of Polish Communes Euroregion Baltic was represented by Marcin Żuchowski, on behalf of Witold Wróblewski, ERB Board Member. Pomorskie Region was represented by Grzegorz Grzelak. Agata Birecka and Paulina Aleksander were also present. Mr Brzezina confirmed that all ERB Member Organisations were present at the meeting.</p>
11.10	2.	Adoption of the meeting agenda
11.10		<p>President of Euroregion Baltic, Gustaw Marek Brzezina, presented the meeting agenda and asked about comments to the agenda. ERB Executive Board approved the meeting agenda.</p>
11.10	3.	Decision of ERB Executive Board on the options for further hosting the ERB International Permanent Secretariat
11.35		<p>President of Euroregion Baltic, Gustaw Marek Brzezina, reminded the previous ERB Executive Board Meeting focused on the future of IPS. It was decided that Association of Polish Communes would present the draft agreement in English in the shortest time possible, which happened just one day later. Internal analyses were conducted after that, as well as working meetings of ERB</p>

Regional Secretariats. There were also sent some proposals for changes in draft agreement to the APC, and APC shall relate to these proposals during this meeting and communicate its vision for agreement with ERB. Mr Brzezina asked APC to present the final proposal of agreement and all specific aspects discussed during last weeks.

Marcin Żuchowski informed that opinion of APC has not changed from the time it sent out the draft agreement. APC has not received any official suggestions of changes to the text of the agreement, it has got only "justification of the position of Bornholm". Therefore no changes to the text were introduced, APC declared readiness to introduce suggestions to direct points of the agreement if they come in. The comments from Bornholm were very general, justifying why option A would not be possible, and difficult to introduce them to the text. He assured that APC remained open to work on the text of the agreement.

Mr Brzezina asked member organisations for comments.

Grzegorz Grzelak from Pomorskie Region informed that Region holds its position about the draft agreement. The main concern is ensuring the independence of IPS and continuation of taken activities. Pomorskie Region is in favour of option B – finding alternative solution for a new hosting organisation.

Britt-Louise Berndtsson from Kronoberg Region informed they support option B and support all arguments sent from Bornholm. Kronoberg Region wants to assure independence of IPS and possibility for ERB to follow its own Statutes.

Niels Chresten Andersen, on behalf of Mr Benzon, indicated that comments from Bornholm contain some concrete matters. He reminded Bornholm had only one or two days to react to APC's proposal. APC's had a little different situation, having 3 – 4 weeks to respond for the proposal from Warmia and Masuria Region. He stated that negotiations about draft agreement came to the conclusion and it was not understandable why to continue the negotiation process. Bornholm concluded there was no reason to continue option A and option B must be started. However, Mr Andersen pointed at Bornholm's comments, which in fact contain very concrete proposals, that "the staff of IPS should not be compared with the ordinary staff of the hosting organisation", directed by ERB Executive Board, as well as that "the recruitment of the Head of IPS should directly involve ERB President and Executive Board, drafting the employment contract should also directly involve ERB President and Executive Board, and APC should not interfere in priorities of Head of IPS." None of this were reflected in the draft agreement, therefore ERB should fully concentrate on option B.

Vytautas Grubliauskas from Association Klaipeda Region stated, that in the situation of limited time and not perfect solution available, we had to look for the smartest possible

decision, so we should keep option B, maybe with some possible corrections in the future.

Elin Petersson from Region Blekinge informed that option B is preferred and we should be moving forward with that alternative.

Johanna Wyckman from Region Kalmar County, just like other Swedish regions, informed that option B is preferred and we should be moving forward with that alternative.

Marcin Żuchowski from the Association of the Polish Communes informed that APC is in favour of option A, it is still open to negotiate text of the draft. Mr Żuchowski said APC is also bound by certain procedures and had two days to respond to Bornholm's proposals. He also said that APC did not agree on option B.

President Brzezin said that his intention was to reach consensus, from the beginning. However, Warmia and Masuria Region does not see any longer a possibility to continue cooperation basing on option A, this option is run out and any extension here is ineffective. President hoped that working meetings would bring some solutions enabling further work but this finally was not possible, and there is no consensus possible as for option A to be continued.

Decisions of ERB Executive Board usually have been taken in 100% consensus, but APC is against dropping out of option A.

Marcin Żuchowski confirmed that, claiming that APC was in favour of option A and against option B, which had been tested by APC and proved ineffective.

President Brzezin said that consensus was not possible and the results of discussion could only be included in the minutes of the meeting.

Niels Chresten Andersen expressed his confusion pointing at results of the written procedure where APC was open for option B, while now it seems to be against it. Therefore he asked about what has changed since January that APC has changed its opinion.

Mr Brzezin said that currently the option A was considered and that discussion about option B remained ahead, and would be continued later on. He continued saying, that situation we face now is not easy and some transitional arrangements need to be made now to safeguard normal activity of ERB, especially its financial aspect. All financial issues, such as fees or projects currently implemented must be currently looked into. President Brzezin asked for a discussion about Umbrella 2.0 project and other 4 projects where ERB is a partner.

Marcin Żuchowski asked for a clarification about basis on which ERB Executive Board would intend to decide about option A or B if there is no consensus.

ERB Executive Board members agreed that results of discussion will be included in the minutes of the meeting.

11.35

4.

Current projects where ERB is a partner

11.50

Marcin Żuchowski began his presentation explaining that APC is a partner in the projects as ERB has no legal personality and cannot be a party in projects. APC gave its legal personality for projects from various programmes, as: Interreg South Baltic, Erasmus+, etc. Projects were implemented by IPS staff and contracted IPS employees, who had full independence in the implementation, financial operations were conducted from IPS ERB account run by APC.

On the day of the meeting APC was engaged in following projects as a normal partner: Baltic Sea Youth Platform (Erasmus+), InDigiSE (Erasmus+), Creative Waves (CBSS Project Support Facility) and WaterMan (Interreg BSR Seed Money). It was also a Lead Partner for Umbrella 2.0 project, financed by Swedish Institute. Some of them were supposed to finish soon, some would finish later, but reporting duties would last even until June 2023 in some cases.

According to Mr Żuchowski, APC received some documentation of the projects from IPS, but expressed concern about quality of some documentation received. APC formally would be ready to finish those projects but would need support from other ERB Member Organisations. Those projects did not necessarily follow goals of the Association, which acted there as a sign of a good will and support towards the whole network. APC is aware of the responsibility, which is related to completion of the projects. He underlined that from the end of March 2022, persons managing those projects would not be employed by APC. All costs related to projects would need to be covered from IPS account.

Project Baltic Sea Youth Platform will last 8 more months until 12.2022. Challenges are related to missing documentation, information and project materials, as well as to technical issues (no access to programmes through which settlements are made). There is also the issue of covering the cost of the person necessary to finalise the project and responsibility for the project.

InDigiSE project will last 3 more months. Challenge is also gathering materials and documentations.

Creative Waves project has a very clear situation. It will last 8 more months. There is a person who is contracted for project implementation, Ms Krystyna Wróblewska.

WaterMan Seed project is currently during clarification process and final report. Clarifications were submitted to Joint Secretariat of the Programme. The final report was approved, now project funds must be transferred to all project members from IPS account.

Mr Żuchowski said that APC was open to finish those four applications, but costs would have to be covered from IPS

account. He added from 1st April only accountant would have access to this account, which could be a challenge.

Gustaw Marek Brzezina thanked for comprehensive information, which included positive conclusions. He referred also to remarks from Mr Żuchowski about decision on options, explaining that he proposed to put it in protocolary manner, as consensus is not able to reach, adding there is no formal error to note it this way in a minutes from the meeting.

Situation is difficult, having also in mind suspension of the partner from the Russian Federation, but whether you like it or not we face transitional period, which must be carried out in a smart and friendly way. We must solve problems on an ongoing basis with a good will.

President Brzezina said that APC presentation about projects status revealed quite positive picture, where APC would be ready to implement four projects. President Brzezina asked ERB Executive Board for discussion about implementation of projects.

Britt-Louise Berndtsson from Region Kronoberg presented proposal from Swedish regions regarding all the projects. The suggestion was to choose one civil servant from Sweden, one from Bornholm, one from Klaipėda Association and one from Pomorskie to deal with project, giving them authorisation to make a plan for future of each project. They would come up with solution for each project finding out what ERB could or could not do, according to the EU regulations.

Niels Chresten Andersen from Bornholm Municipality related to question from Marcin Żuchowski about legal basis for a decision. Looking at the procedures, if one member organisation disagrees to skip option A, would it be a valid decision for ERB Executive Board to do it. He was of the opinion that this would be a valid decision, because in a letter from 3rd December 2021 APC informed the ERB President about results of internal audit. 20th December 2021 ERB Executive Board met, discussed the letter and decided to start the written procedure. Chairman of APC also proposed then alternative solution, such as not having IPS, which was also included in a letter from 3rd December. ERB Executive Board agreed for a written procedure. The written procedure from 13th January indicated that ERB should choose from 3 options: A,B,C. This was a legal basis and decisions were taken in consensus. Having no consensus about option A means we have to terminate the agreement with APC. APC mentioned in the letter and the answer to the written procedure that "APC is open and willing to support the decisions of the other Euroregion members, should they wish to change the host institution". If the Association changed its mind in the meantime that would mean we are not able to reach consensus to continue with option B as well. ERB Board would be only able today to terminate the agreement from 2015 regarding IPS. Mr Andersen proposed to decide on option A and follow the proposal from Swedish regions about projects.

President Brzezina said that Bornholm representative confirmed his opinion about this issue. ERB is currently in a transition period when its financial obligations and current activities must be ensured. We need to introduce solutions going in three directions. (1) Projects – there are two possibilities, because APC sees a possibility to continue projects and there is a Swedish proposal. Mr Brzezina pointed out that in the beginning there should be consultations with Programme authorities and project owners, who have project budgets. (2) Ensuring the daily, technical functioning of ERB Permanent Secretariat – the proposal is that these tasks would be taken over by Warmia and Masuria Region, Mr Łukasz Bielewski as a Director of the International Cooperation Department. Further issue would be to propose during May meeting some solutions related to option B, which would be worked out by the International Cooperation Department. (3) Management of ERB funds, which are currently in bank account owned by APC. Current decision about spending could be taken by ERB Executive Board every time when expenditure is needed or ERB Executive Board would authorise somebody to decide about daily operations. These 3 aspects are necessary to be dealt with.

Britt-Louise Berndtsson gave an explanation to her proposal in the chat. She also added that Swedish partners were aware of the process related to managing projects and proposal was to provide with answers how to proceed in the future in the best way.

Marcin Żuchowski commented on the previous statements about noting down the results of the discussion on option A in minutes from the meeting, expressing doubts about legal meaning of such decision. Another issue he raised was future of projects: should they be finished with no delay or be continued until the successful ending. The Swedish proposal he called good but unreal technically and formally. Another issue would be a legal basis for such decision. Finally, the proposal from ERB President to split implementation of the projects, but it must be remembered that APC would be responsible for final reporting from the projects. As long as other organisation is not ready to take over responsibility for finances of the project we are not able to discuss this possibility further. The issue would have to be discussed with APC Board as well. He asked all ERB Executive Board Member to have those aspects in mind.

Elin Petersson said Niels Chresten Andersen explained very well ERB Board's decisions and formalities. In her opinion it was clear that APC was not interested in moving forward. She thanked ERB President and Warmia and Masuria Region for taking responsibility and admitted to have great confidence in this process. Blekinge Region declared readiness to help with actions of ERB Mobility Core Group and website of Interconnect project. Region Kalmar County was also ready to help with ERB Water Core Group, Kronoberg Region was ready to help with preparations for ERB Board meeting in May.

Niels Chresten Andersen thanked Warmia and Masuria Region for attempts to find a way forward. As for projects

the answer would be to have ongoing projects completed. The Swedish proposal was good in this regard. He believed that Presidency and APC should be involved but agreed with a Swedish proposal. According to him it was also clear that APC cannot just drop out of the projects.

President Brzezina informed he was to leave the meeting soon and would hand over chairing the meeting. He said that opinions and proposals given during the meeting were not wrong, however the projects were under implementation, APC was directly involved in execution of them. He believed that if APC was willing to complete the projects, largely being in the final stage, ERB should follow this way, with a further cooperation and substantive viewpoint at each milestone of execution. In the future, when other projects would be considered, we could show huge activity in other areas of project cooperation. President's Brzezina proposal was based on practicalities, personal involvement in projects and relations between beneficiaries and owners of the projects. Mr Brzezina asked ERB Executive Board to agree that APC could complete those projects.

Marcin Żuchowski agreed that APC could complete the projects while discussed further should be the issue how these project should be completed.

ERB Executive Board agreed that the Association of the Polish Communes would complete the projects.

ERB Executive Board agreed as well that Warmia and Masuria Region would take up responsibilities of IPS in a transition period.

ERB Executive Board agreed also that expenditures from ERB budget would require agreement of the ERB Executive Board, at least in the nearest future.

Britt-Louise Berndtsson expressed gratitude that Region holding the Presidency offered to take care of ERB Secretariat. She asked about possibility of transferring the money from ERB budget. President Brzezina answered that such operation was not possible. Transition formula is the only possible way until a consensus about future is reached. He thanked all participants and asked Mr Łukasz Bielewski to lead discussion in remaining points.

11.50 5. **Prolongation of the project Umbrella 2.0**

12.05

Łukasz Bielewski invited ERB Executive Board to discuss the prolongation of Umbrella 2.0 project. He reminded that Umbrella 2.0 project was discussed during the working meeting of ERB Secretariats and recommendation was to ask APC not to prolong the project.

Mr Bielewski asked APC whether it would be willing or not to continue implementation of the project. Marcin Żuchowski informed that APC is not in favour of prolongation of the project. The project was prolonged

once, in December 2021 and APC wishes to finish the project with the day 31st March 2022.

Elin Petersson said the extension of the project was doubtful and ERB would have difficulties in terms of resources to produce a full-scale application. There was also information from Interreg South Baltic Programme, which was hesitant about new project, therefore moving forward with Umbrella 2.0 is doubtful.

ERB Executive Board decided to address the APC Board to contact the Swedish Institute and inform about decision not to prolong the project.

12.05 6. **Decision on the temporary arrangements to ensure the continuity of ERB IPS tasks**

12.30

Łukasz Bielewski confirmed that Warmia and Masuria Presidency will be responsible for organising meetings, preparing agendas and meeting minutes. It will also remain in touch with Baltic organisations and other institutions, as well as care for ERB website.

Mr Bielewski thanked member organisations for declarations of help regarding working groups and preparation for next ERB Board meeting. He believed that partners together would be able to handle the situation, which is not easy.

There will be also a need for ERB Executive Board to decide how to proceed with the expenditures from the common budget. There must be a procedure settled how to deal with expenses. A solution should be proposed for the next ERB Executive Board meeting. Until that time ERB Executive Board would be asked to take decisions in a written way, if necessary.

12.30 7. **Information about ERB representation in Interreg South Baltic programming and monitoring committees**

12.40

Łukasz Bielewski informed that Magda Leszczyna-Rzucidło, Head of International Permanent Secretariat, was also appointed as the Member of the Interreg South Baltic Monitoring and Programming Committees and the Head of Delegation of Euroregions. As she will step down on the 31st of March 2022 there was submitted a proposal, that her deputy Ms Raimonda Mc Geever from Klaipeda Region, would be ERB representative in the Interreg South Baltic Monitoring Committee. ERB Executive Board approved the proposal.

12.40 8. **Baltic Meeting Point event in Karlskrona**

12.50

Łukasz Bielewski informed that Euroregion Baltic International Permanent Secretariat received the invitation to participate in the event Baltic Meeting Point in Karlskrona on 19th May 2022. Euroregion Baltic representative was requested to participate in the panel "Baltic Cooperation in practice – Who, where, how?", together with other Baltic organisations. Discussion would

be focused on presentation of particular organisations and their mutual connections.

It was proposed that Johanna Rönn from Region Blekinge would represent Euroregion Baltic in the panel.

ERB Executive Board approved the proposal.

12.50 9. **Information about upcoming ERB Executive Board meeting on 11-12 May 2022**
12.55

Łukasz Bielewski asked the representative of Region Kronoberg to present details of the upcoming ERB Executive Board meeting.

Britt-Louise Berndtsson invited ERB to Växjö in Region Kronoberg for a meeting, which will be held lunch-to-lunch on 11 – 12 May. Arrivals are expected in the morning on the 11th of May, while Board meeting is scheduled in afternoon the same day. After that a short trip is planned to see one of local attractions with nature and culinary heritage. On the 12th of May all participants will be invited to “Junior Skills Competition 2022” – the Swedish championships of different professions for young people between 13 and 17 years old. Spectators will have a chance to see these practical professions live. The aim is to stimulate interest and inspiration of young people before they make their career and study choices. Poland will be the host of Euroskills Competition in 2023. Departures are planned after the study visit and lunch.

12.55 10. **Any other business**

13.00 Łukasz Bielewski informed that on the 29th of March there was a meeting of the CIVEX Commission in the European Committee of the Regions. That commission is responsible for external relations.

Marshal Gustaw Marek Brzezina took the floor with a short presentation of Euroregion Baltic, its history, mission and activities. It was a sign of a good beginning of the Presidency in the international dimension.

13.00 11. **Conclusion and closing**

Łukasz Bielewski thanked everybody and closed the meeting.
