

Euroregion Baltic
Executive Board Meeting
11th May 2022
Växjö



Title Minutes

Submitted by Warmia and Masuria Region

Summary / Note This document provides final minutes from the ERB Executive Board online meeting on 11th May 2022

Requested action Implement

Participants:

ERB Executive Board:

Mr Gustaw Marek Brzezin	ERB President, Marshal of Warmia and Masuria Region,
Mr Mikael Benzon	ERB Vice-President, Member of ERB Executive Board, Regional Municipality of Bornholm
Mr Roland Gustbée	Member of ERB Executive Board, Region Kronoberg
Ms Britt-Louise Berndtsson	Deputy Member of ERB Executive Board, Region Kronoberg
Ms Helen Bengtsson	Deputy 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 Johanna Wyckman	Deputy Member of ERB Executive Board, Region Kalmar County
Mr Åke Nilsson	Deputy Member of ERB Executive Board, Region Kalmar County

ERB Youth Board:

Ms Johanna Wyckman	Chairwoman of ERB Youth Board, Region Kalmar County
Ms Marlene Meier	Deputy Member of ERB Youth Board, Regional Municipality of Bornholm

ERB Secretariats:

Mr Niels Chresten Andersen	Regional Municipality of Bornholm
Mr Slawomir Demkowicz-Dobrzanski	Region Kronoberg
Ms Felicia Arpzell	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
Ms Antje Schreyer	Region Kalmar County
Ms Johanna Rönn	Region Blekinge

Online:

Ms Heidi Burgedahl, Member of ERB Executive Board, Regional Municipality of Bornholm

Mr Marcin Żuchowski, Association of Polish Communes Euroregion Baltic

Guests:

Mr Mikael Johansson, Chair of Region Kronoberg Executive Board

ERB Executive Board meeting

11th May 2022

13.00 – 17.00 CET

Kronoberg Regional Administration

13.00	1.	Welcome and opening
13.15		<p>Mikael Johansson, Chair of Executive Board of Region Kronoberg, welcomed all participants of the meeting, thanked them for arrival and presented Region Kronoberg, starting from the Castle. Kronoberg is a geographic region, with 9500 km², 203,000 inhabitants, with plenty of forests and lakes (350), where lots of tourists come. Important manufacturing plants are located here, like glassworks and Ikea furniture factory.</p> <p>Administration of Region Kronoberg is responsible for growth and development, with a motto "providing good living conditions for people in Kronoberg". Administration (with Regional Council and Regional Executive Committee) works on development vision for the region. Main area of interest is healthcare, transport is also important (buses, railway, airport). Region Kronoberg is on the verge of a large investment – building a new regional hospital, which will engage much of regional budget.</p> <p>Gustaw Marek Brzezina, President of Euroregion Baltic, thanked for the presentation and welcomed participants of the meeting. He thanked Region Kronoberg for organising the meeting, which was organised face-to-face for the first time in over two years. Then he asked for formal check-up of the attendance.</p>
13.15	2.	Adoption of the meeting agenda
13.15		<p>President of Euroregion Baltic, Gustaw Marek Brzezina, presented the meeting agenda. Executive Board approved the meeting agenda without comments.</p>
13.15	3.	Signing the minutes from previous ERB Board Meetings on 10th March and 30th March 2022
13.15		<p>Gustaw Marek Brzezina, ERB President, signed minutes from previous ERB Board meetings held on 10th March and 30th March 2022.</p>

13.15

4.

Political discussion

14.00

Mr Brzezina opened the discussion, saying that recent events in Ukraine upset the whole world. Brutal war strongly disturbed democratic countries. A humanitarian crisis emerged, taking the form of millions of refugees from Ukraine. Poland is the nearest to Ukraine, but all European countries may be affected. In Poland there may be currently around 3 mln refugees. We are currently working to secure their need with efforts of the whole society, local, regional and central authorities.

Europe and the whole world is aware that this may be a long-lasting process; we in our region must be prepared for providing help to the ones in need, especially mothers with children.

Before the war, there were two waves of Ukrainian immigration in Warmia and Masuria Region. After the Second World War about 60,000 people from Ukraine settled down there. During last 10 – 15 years the same number of immigrants came in and assimilated in the region. After 24.02 we could see considerable leaving of men to Ukraine to the front.

Up till now around 25,000 of Ukrainians came to Warmia and Masuria Region, mainly women and children. This may not be a large scale; refugees are not eager to live close to the border with Russia (Kaliningrad).

Impact of war was evident in Euroregion Baltic, where we suspended Kaliningrad Region. We face a structural problem for the role Euroregion was supposed to fulfil in democratisation of non-UE countries. This role must have been halted.

Warmia and Masuria is able to coordinate aid to Ukraine. Every one or two weeks we organise aid convoys to Rivne Region in Ukraine. Partner regions from France and Germany assist us but Euroregion Baltic could also be involved in the actions. Economic activity in Warmia and Masuria Region is also affected by the crisis. Northern part of the Region began to experience investment and economic cooperation problems.

Mr Brzezina asked members of the Executive Board for opinion, with Vice-President Mikael Benzion as the first.

Mr Benzion thanked ERB President for information about situation in Ukraine and Poland. He thanked for support given to Ukrainian refugees. He said it was a honour to speak at this forum. We meet in a moment of serious changes and conflicts, which creates new conditions for cooperation. The period after WWII has been a time of exceptional tranquillity. Peace was the cause for unprecedented growth and trade. It was said we entered the age of a peaceful co-existence for years. That was the "age of innocence", where peace, prosperity and commerce had to last forever. This reasoning was wrong, which is confirmed by Ukraine war, but war is only

a symptom for other issues, which are solved only in a part.

After the crisis in 2008 and coronavirus pandemic banks used to print huge amounts of money, which seems to result in current inflation. Today the question is: how to ensure safe conditions for the world trade and what results will bring new outbreak of COVID-19 in China. Maybe we just observe the peak of globalisation.

War in Ukraine showed us how fragile our energy systems are. Despite attempts to move away from high-carbon economy, effects of climate change are becoming more and more visible. Temperature increase in Baltic Sea Region may reach 3-4% until 2100. We must adapt to these changes.

In the meantime consumption costs rise, societies are getting older, there is shortage of high-skilled labour.

What should be our agenda? Increase in participatory democracy should be an imperative – to avoid threats from desperation and radicalisation. Citizens should have a feeling that they are a part of growth. One of the ways could be higher participation of local communities in green, ecological projects, retraining of labour force in green transformation and local crops.

We should focus on integration of Ukrainian refugees in our societies and communication with Russian society. A new paradigm for development should be created, new ways for cross-border cooperation and dialogue. ERB should effectively solve the issue of structure for International Permanent Secretariat to be able to quickly and efficiently react to things that happen.

Mr Brzezin thanked for this speech and asked Pomorskie Region to speak. Grzegorz Grzelak presented a short information on actions undertaken by Pomorskie Region in the context of Ukraine. Regional Council of Pomorskie Region condemned actions of the Russian Federation and suspended cooperation agreement with Kaliningrad Regional Duma. Since the beginning of the war Pomorskie Region has been undertaking activities towards Ukrainian refugees: information and medical points, charity campaigns, meetings with local and central authorities, opinions on regulations, cooperation with NGOs, websites and helplines for refugees, humanitarian aid convoys to various towns in Ukraine. Mr Grzelak addressed the ERB Executive Board members to participate in relief activities, Pomorskie Region is ready to assist in such activities.

Roland Gustbée said Region Kronoberg was far from Ukraine but this not decrease its engagement. No more than 1000 people from Ukraine arrived to Kronoberg. In this moment cooperation within Euroregion Baltic seems more important than before, we can complement one another in solidarity. Swedish citizens showed big, unprecedented commitment. All 8 parties agreed to send weapons to Ukraine. Sweden may join NATO very soon. Cooperation in ERB should be continued and apply to previously defined areas, but democracy area comes to the fore.

Elin Petersson thanked for expressed opinions and a clear stance towards Russian Federation. Region Blekinge welcomed significant number of refugees, which requires money and resources. It is important for us to strengthen international ties in Europe. We can give a good example how to act in the spirit of participation. Euroregion Baltic can be a good model for such cooperation.

Johanna Wyckman said that youth has got a feeling that peaceful coexistence is necessary to build good living conditions.

Mr Brzezina commented that Euroregion Baltic approaches 25 years of existence and its great value is true cooperation in unity, solidarity and democratic procedures. We will continue this discussion in our regions. He reminded that he presented Euroregion Baltic this year at Committee of the Regions in Brussels. This highlights how effectively we have managed the organisation during all this years. We face a new opening: structural and global. We must use this experience and preserve a strong role of Euroregion in Europe. The most important is safety, peace and possibility for free development. For Polish and other nations a superior value is a peaceful NATO structure with Art. 5 of NATO Treaty. Striving for energy independence, which is a part of security, should be recognised in the whole Europe. We cannot go away from ecology and mitigation of climate change. Politics of European institutions indicates that in this moment of crisis we need to reorganise economic systems and adjust it to security requirements.

Mr Brzezina closed the discussion.

14.00 5. **Information about current ERB projects**
14.45

Marcin Żuchowski, representing Association of Polish Communes Euroregion Baltic thanked ERB President and presented budgetary situation of Euroregion Baltic, which seemed positive. He stressed a good cooperation with ERB Presidency. All cost issues are discussed at ERB Regional Secretariats online meetings. Financial reports are updated every two months. Issues that remain to be solved are related projects and operational costs, as e.g. phone subscriptions. MŻ asked ERB Executive Board to decide on telephone contracts for IPS. Contractual penalties for breaching may reach over 2000,00 EUR. Some of these contracts expire as late as 2024. Moreover, APC will implement projects until the end of 2022, which will also generate costs.

Project WaterMan Interreg Baltic Sea Region Seed Money is closed and completed. Final financial settlement remain to be distributed among the project partners (22 670,00 EUR, to be deducted from IPS budget).

Costs will be incurred in first half of May 2022.

InDigiSE Erasmus+ project on youth entrepreneurship will last until 30 June 2022 (after prolongation). Currently partners are involved in organising international youth

camp in Klaipeda (in May) and local event in Elblag (in June).

Estimated costs for budget of ERB would be around 7250,00 EUR.

Baltic Sea Youth Platform, financed by Erasmus+, is another project where APC is a partner. Project closes in August but may be extended until December 2022. APC expects the reimbursement from the Lead Partner. To be decided remains organisation of youth event in Poland (Olsztyn?) in June or September.

Organisation of Youth Camp in August is also being considered.

Creative Waves project, financed by the Council of the Baltic Sea States is managed by external manager, Ms Krystyna Wróblewska. Final project meeting is to be held in Gdańsk in the end of September.

As implementation period was initially predicted until 15 September 2022, APC would like to ask ERB Executive Board for prolongation until 30 September 2022. In result, contract of the project manager would also need to be extended adequately, by decision of ERB Executive Board.

Future spending in the project would amount to 1200,00 EUR plus transport costs of Ms Wróblewska.

Project Umbrella 2.0 funded by Swedish Institute was not prolonged. Tasks to be done are: selection of the audit authority, preparation of the final report and contact with the programme representative.

Future spending in the project should not exceed 2000,00 EUR - costs of First Level Control. Reporting period has been prolonged until 15 June 2022.

Niels Chresten Andersen from Bornholm asked if the balance presented was valid for 25th of April and what would be the balance for 11th of May. He also asked about possible balance for 15th of June. Marcin Żuchowski promised to prepare relevant reports. There were no more questions. Mr Brzezina informed that budgetary information would be sent out after the meeting. However Association of the Polish Communes asks ERB Executive Board for decision on prolongation of Creative Waves project. Łukasz Bielewski added that another project, Baltic Sea Youth Platform, may require prolongation in future and asked if ERB Executive could agree on that in this point.

After the break, requested by the Swedish delegation, Roland Gustbée informed that Swedish Party was not ready to agree on these requests and applied for a written procedure. Mr Brzezina ordered the written procedure, where all member organisations could take decision in response to APC's proposal.

15.00 6. **Authorisation for ERB Presidency to manage ERB budget**

15.10

President Gustaw Marek Brzezina reminded discussion during last ERB Executive Board meeting. In order to fulfil ongoing tasks of Euroregion, Warmia and Masuria Region proposes to authorise ERB Presidency to manage current financial obligations, with consent of Association of Polish Communes. Authorisation would be valid until new framework for IPS comes into force, or until the end of Presidency.

Roland Gustbée confirmed that Region Kronoberg agrees with the proposal; Mikael Benzon confirmed this for Regional Municipality of Bornholm.

ERB President concluded, that ERB Executive Board agreed to authorise ERB Presidency to manage ERB budget.

15.10 7. **Information from ERB Youth Board**

15.20

Gustaw Marek Brzezina asked Johanna Wyckman to present information from ERB Youth Board.

Johanna Wyckman welcomed new ERB Youth Board member, Marlene Meier. In last weeks ERB Youth Board worked on Erasmus+ meeting, planned in the beginning of August. Currently meeting activities and recruitment of participants are being prepared. ERB Youth Board was represented in: Baltic Meeting Point, Baltic Sea Parliamentary Youth Forum and Baltic Sea Youth Camp. It was also active in Advocacy Group at Baltic Sea Youth Forum. Mikael Benzon asked what activities ERB Youth Board wants to undertake under one of its Priorities – Democracy. She replied that she presented there 4 ERB Youth Board priorities, where she referred to Russian invasion in Ukraine and how youth wants to build peace in Europe.

15.20 8. **Information from ERB Core Groups**

15.40

President Gustaw Marek Brzezina asked Johanna Rönn to present information about ERB Mobility Core Group. The Group was established a year ago. Recently Group has prepared comments on revision of TEN-T Network. It has also asked ERB Executive Board for consent to join Seed Money Swedish Institute project.

Ms Rönn presented current status of implementation "Interconnect Tourism Seed Money Project". Final partner meeting will be organised on 12 – 13 May in Karlskrona. ERB is invited to join and to follow activities in the project and to indicate interest to join as a partner for a full scale project application to the Interreg South Baltic

programme. It is also possible to submit proposals of themes to be investigated by the Group.

Britt-Louise Berndtsson supported the idea of a new project on tourism, which is very important after the pandemic. Kalmar and Blekinge Regions could benefit a lot if joined the project together.

Mikael Benzon asked about calculations of CO₂ emissions in the project. Johanna Rönn replied, the aim of the project was not to calculate emissions but it would be interesting if this was possible in the project.

Due to technical problems Mr Tobias Facchini was asked to send out the presentation about Water Core Group after the meeting.

15.40 9. **Decision of ERB Executive Board on the future status of Euroregion Baltic**

16.20

President Gustaw Marek Brzezina said it seemed that Euroregion Baltic wanted a new opening with more independent and legally defined International Permanent Secretariat. Warmia and Masuria Region temporarily took over tasks of IPS. Legal Department of the Marshal's Office was given a task to define the best legal basis for the future of Euroregion Baltic. 3 options were considered: international association, foundation and European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation. The legal analysis recommends to establish EGTC. It is a legal framework defined by EU legislation and harmonises the most with characteristics, objectives and activities of ERB. It is possible to accomplish but requires longer time. President asked Łukasz Bielewski to present more details about establishing EGTC.

Łukasz Bielewski said EGTC was a European legal instrument to enhance international, transnational and cross-border cooperation. EGTC is entity with formal structure, it has its own bodies: Assembly and Director. EGTC can be initiated by intention of potential members. EGTC founding documents are:

- Convention, which defines: introduction, name, list of members, geographical area, objectives, mission;
- Statutes, with bodies, working languages, financial contributions, staff, etc.

Once documents are ready, national authorities have to agree for establishing EGTC. In Poland they have six months to decide. When all state authorities agree the establishing procedure can be started. In opinion of Mr Bielewski this step is worth to be taken, so that ERB could enter next period of cooperation and be capable to face new challenges.

Mr Brzezina explained that ERB Executive Board would be asked if ERB should immediately start preparations for such procedure.

Grzegorz Grzelak said Pomorskie Region supports the idea to set up EGTC, but Warmia and Masuria Presidency should be authorised by ERB Executive Board to draft Convention

and Statutes and consult Polish government. This will be a long process but Pomorskie wishes success in it.

Niels Chresten Andersen reminded that this issue had been discussed a few years ago, but idea had been abandoned because of a member from outside EU. Currently, when Kaliningrad Region is suspended it is relevant for ERB Executive Board to take up the issue once again. Rules for establishing EGTC are now simplified, but some issues remain complex, as a scope of EGTC's activities for example. Bornholm is open for opening the process.

Roland Gustbée explained that Region Kronoberg supported the initiative, as "wise men think alike". Although the issue is complex, it would be a step forward for Euroregion Baltic. Region Kronoberg asks the Presidency to analyse it and prepare documentation.

Mr Brzezina proposed that ERB Executive Board recommended to start the work from now on. The process will require interregional and national arrangements, before the registration. The content of the proposal will be prepared by the International Cooperation Department in the Marshal's Office. Good communication among ERB Secretariats will be also necessary. Detailed activities and their schedule will be worked out by Secretariats.

ERB Executive Board agreed to begin work on establishment of European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation.

16.20 10. **Next ERB Executive Board Meeting**

16.30

Gustaw Marek Brzezina informed that next ERB Executive Board meeting is planned on the 9th of December in Olsztyn. Meeting would be accompanied by "Baltic Evening", a cultural event promoting Baltic regions in cultural aspect.

Mr Brzezina warmly invited all members of ERB, hoping for a physical meeting in Warmia and Masuria Region.

It would be also very welcome if ERB Youth Board came to Warmia and Masuria Region for another meeting during the year.

16.30 11. **Information about public hearing on VASAB long term perspective**

16.40

Johanna Rönn informed that Region Blekinge received invitation from VASAB Committee to participate in a public hearing on its long term perspective and vision 2040. VASAB is international organisation dealing with spatial planning. All regions are invited to participate until 15th of July. Region Blekinge believes issues are inspiring and interesting. VASAB identified for example cities of high potential, maritime connections, environmental areas on land and sea and set of indicators. The answer to the

invitation could be prepared by ERB Mobility Core Group, for example.

Niels Chresten Andersen said Bornholm would be interested in drafting its response. These topics could be interesting for whole ERB as well.

Mr Brzezina proposed that ERB Secretariats would define needs for the position, its scope and mode of preparation in a working mode.

16.40 12. **Information about BSLF Roundtable in Turku on 8-9 June 2022**
16.50

President Gustaw Marek Brzezina informed that on 8-9 June 2022 there will be the event – Baltic Sea Labour Forum, which will be organised together with final conference of BSLF project, financed by the Swedish Institute, in Turku (Finland) in a hybrid mode. ERB has observer status in the Forum and regularly was present in this annual event. President proposed that Euroregion Baltic would be represented by Warmia and Masuria Region, which holds the Presidency.

ERB Executive Board agreed on this proposal.

16.50 13. **Any other business**
16.50

16.50 14. **Conclusion and closing**
17.00

President Gustaw Marek Brzezina summed up the meeting, which in his opinion was very intensive but constructive. He thanked Region Kronoberg for organising the meeting and the visit and closed the meeting.