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## 6th Annual Forum of ERB Stakeholders 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2015 Gdańsk, Poland

### Summary

The 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Forum of ERB Stakeholders was held in Gdańsk on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2015. Organised in Gdańsk and chaired by Mr Wiesław Byczkowski, Deputy Marshal of Pomorskie Region and President of Euroregion Baltic in 2015, the Forum coincided with the 25th Anniversary of INTERREG cooperation, one of the most important instruments of EU Cohesion Policy fostering cross-border cooperation among the border regions of Europe. Taking this opportunity the partners of Euroregion Baltic cooperation engaged ERB stakeholders in a discussion on the benefits and challenges of cross-border cooperation within Euroregion Baltic area and the wider Baltic Sea Region.

This year's Forum focused not only on the strategic aspects of cooperation, but also touched upon the basic and concrete needs and challenges identified by local and regional stakeholders during their cooperation with their counterparts on the other side of the border. The Forum also allowed potential beneficiaries to learn more about the INTERREG South Baltic Programme 2014-2020 in the context of upcoming calls for proposals.

In the opening key note speech Ms Joanna Wojtkowska from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented the [priorities of the Polish Presidency in the Council of the Baltic Sea States \(CBSS\)](#). For Poland the CBSS presidency is not only an opportunity to promote and implement important areas of Baltic Sea cooperation, that are in line with the three previously agreed long-term CBSS priorities: Regional Identity, Sustainable & Prosperous Region, Safe & Secure Region. In its activities in this key Baltic organisation Poland aims to make a more comprehensive use of the organisation's potential by underlining the key factor of diversity. It is the diversity of all CBSS members and their potentials that may be streamlined into three main focus areas of the

presidency – sustainability, creativity and safety - to obtain a much needed synergy effect of cooperation. Additionally, in the second half of 2015 and the first half of 2016 Poland would be leading the work of the National Coordinators of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, which will allow to achieve maximum synergy between different cooperation formats in the Baltic Sea Region.

Next came the presentation focusing on a more practical side of cooperation in Europe i.e. the European Territorial Cooperation. Ms Anita Rying from the Polish Ministry of Infrastructure and Development used the opportunity of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Interreg Initiative to talk about the [benefits and challenges of cross-border cooperation in the Baltic Sea area](#). Focusing on the benefits, she underlined the importance of trust building in taking full advantage of possibilities offered by diffusion of innovation, capacity building of institutions involved, ability to learn from each other, find solutions to common problems, joint management of common assets, pulling resources together and drawing attention of decision makers.

Among the challenges she mentioned continuing difficulties in convincing many partners from Poland and other countries to engage in cross-border cooperation. This problem concerns especially those institutions or organisations with less organisational or financial capacity to cope with more complex international projects, but is also an issue for more developed and experienced organisations. Also much needed are better skills in preparing good quality project applications, and last but not least – cooperation among different types of stakeholders e.g. local and regional authorities, academia, NGOs, entrepreneurs. Still too many cooperation initiatives lack this organisational diversity which in turn hampers proper dissemination of results equally among different target groups.

Bringing the audience closer to the question of multilevel governance (MLG) in the Baltic Sea Region, Mr Anders Bergström, Coordinator of the Horizontal Action Capacity within the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) gave a [presentation on the importance of the MLG concept for the future development of the region](#). The most important thing to remember about macro-regional strategies such as the EUSBSR, is that they are not about international cooperation, something on top of other duties or outside our

daily work but about solving the challenges we have at hand together with others. And although they are complex initiatives, with multiple stakeholders, bringing different perspectives together, still it is possible to reach their full potential by employing capacity building measures for all implementing stakeholders.

Responding to the question of importance of multi-level governance, Mr Bergström said that at the key to success is understanding and being able to use the cobweb of multilevel governance in a project driven reality and within the respective policy areas. Multilevel governance strengthens openness, participation, coordination and joint commitment to delivering targeted solutions, and consequently provides better development opportunities for the entire region.

This was supported by the Council of the European Union which called on “the Commission and the Member States to actively support the multilevel governance approach recognizing the potential substantial contribution from all levels of society in implementing the macro-regional strategies”. Local and regional authorities, as well as civil society, business and academia are indispensable for making this concept work.

After the presentation all key speakers engaged in a panel discussion moderated by Mr Niels Chresten Andersen from the Regional Municipality of Bornholm. Among the matters discussed were the problems of relevance of different organisations and cooperation frameworks for stakeholders on the local or regional level. During the discussion participants exchanged opinions and doubts on the relevance of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region while still admitting that the cooperation across border can be and in many cases is very beneficial to the development of local communities. The fact is that many such instruments as the EUSBSR are simply too complex and consequently do not seem to be relevant or useful for solving practical problems on the local level. The best way to change this situation is to engage more effectively local stakeholders, including key decision makers, in a dialogue on the objectives these instruments envisage. The issue of ownership was often mentioned as an important aspect which, if introduced correctly, may win more support for the successful implementation of both the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and other macro-regional strategies implemented by the EU.

The second part of the Forum was dedicated to the South Baltic Programme. First introduced in the 2007-2013 programming period, the Programme was an ambitious undertaking aiming at creating an effective cooperation framework in the area of South Baltic. Both Euroregion Baltic and Pomerania were among the early promoters of this initiative. The first edition of the Programme turned out to be a success and decision was made to have the second instalment for the new programming period of 2014-2020.

This part of the Forum started off with a presentation of a special movie project showcasing the best projects implemented within the South Baltic Programme between 2007-2013. Ms Monika Wojtkiewicz from the University of Szczecin gave a [short presentation on the preparation and implementation of the South Baltic in Moving Images project](#) which resulted in an inspiring multimedia production covering all five countries of the Programme.

The presentation of the Programme continued with an intervention from Mr Thorsten Kohlisch, Head of the Programme's Joint Secretariat who talked about the [role of the Programme in developing cross-border cooperation in the South Baltic area](#). By providing the strategic orientation of the new Programme, he stressed the importance of including the perspective of blue and green growth in all South Baltic projects. As compared to its previous edition, the current South Baltic Programme focuses more on multilateral cooperation between local and regional actors, favours maritime and 'soft cooperation' with focus on the joint development and testing of innovative solutions. At the same time the Programme puts an increased focus on its actual impact and results on the ground. Contribution to the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region remains an important part of the strategic orientation of the Programme. Still the Programme offers a wide variety of funding opportunities for projects tackling such important issues as SME competitiveness, sustainable use of common resources, sustainable mobility, labour issues and cooperation capacity.

A more [in-depth analysis of measures and requirements of the new South Baltic Programme](#) was delivered during a workshop session moderated by Mr Jakub Fedorowicz from the Joint Secretariat of the Programme.

The final presentation during the plenary session highlighted one of the most successful project implemented within the South Baltic Programme. Mr Tobias

Facchini from the Regional Council in Kalmar County presented the [results of the MOMENT \(Modern Water Management in the South Baltic Sea Area\) project](#) which together with its follow-up project MOMENT Up was implemented within the Programme between 2009 – 2013. Being a direct initiative of Euroregion Baltic and representing 7 out of 9 member organisation the project aimed at developing local networks and local measures that would reduce the release of harmful substances to the South Baltic Sea area. Successful implementation of MOMENT also prompted the Swedish partners to continue water management cooperation by submitting a new project application to the first call of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme 2014-2020. The WaterNets project would promote the concept of Water User Partnerships in the wider Baltic Sea Region.

The plenary session of the Forum finished with a summary presented by Mr Wiesław Byczkowski, President of Euroregion Baltic and Deputy Marshal of Pomorskie Region. In his final words Mr Byczkowski stressed the importance of going beyond the current development model which focuses primarily on infrastructural projects. The current EU programming period is the last one which will provide significant funding for the development of new Member States. Now it is the time to focus also on softer measures such as the exchange of good practice or diffusion of innovation. This could only be done if we cooperate more with our international partners who have already developed necessary measures and are willing to share them in international, cross-border partnerships. But to reap the benefits of such cooperation we need to be open and able to create and maintain trust within this international context. Engaging in soft cooperation within the framework of such instruments as Interreg is a perfect opportunity not only for obtaining new knowledge and skills, but also contributing to a better development of communities on the local and regional level.