

Euroregion Baltic
Executive Board Meeting
25th May 2021
Online meeting



REGION
BLEKINGE



Title Agenda

Submitted by MLR, International Permanent Secretariat

Summary / Note This document provides the meeting minutes of the ERB Executive Board online meeting on 25th May 2021

Requested action Implement.

Participants:

ERB Executive Board:

Mr Johan Sandberg	ERB President, Member of ERB Executive Board, Chair of the Regional Development Board, Region Blekinge
Mr Wiesław Byczkowski	Member of ERB Executive Board, Deputy Marshal of Pomorskie Region
Mr Robert Olesen	Member of ERB Executive Board, Member of the Board Region Kronoberg
Mr Roland Gustbée	Member of ERB Executive Board, Member of the Board Region Kronoberg
Ms Suzanne Svensson	Member of ERB Executive Board, Member of the Regional Development Board Region Blekinge
Ms Ingrid Hermansson	Member of ERB Executive Board, Member of the Regional Development Board Region Blekinge
Ms Cecilia Magnusson-Svärd	Member of ERB Executive Board, Skåne Association of Local Authorities
Ms Sabine Lyngberg	Member of ERB Executive Board, Regional Municipality of Bornholm
Ms Liana Maximova	Deputy Member of ERB Executive Board, Deputy Head of the Agency for International Affairs and Regional Cooperation of Kaliningrad Region
Ms Elin Sjölander Landerdahl	Member of the ERB Executive Board, Region Kalmar County

Ms Johanna Wyckman	Deputy Member of ERB Executive Board, Region Kalmar County
Mr Åke Nilsson	Deputy Member of ERB Executive Board, Region Kalmar County
Ms Bożena Olszewska - Świtaj	Deputy Member of ERB Executive Board, Board Member in Association of Polish Communes Euroregion Baltic

ERB Youth Board:

Ms Johanna Wyckman	Chairwoman of ERB Youth Board, Kalmar Region
Ms Małgorzata Lewandowska	Vice-Chair of ERB Youth Board, Pomorskie Region
Ms Elin Petersson	Member of ERB Youth Board, Region Blekinge
Mr Alexander Nilsson	Member of ERB Youth Board, Region Blekinge
Mr Grzegorz Gieda	Member of ERB Youth Board, Warmia and Masuria Region
Ms Greta Tautavičiūtė	Member of ERB Youth Board, Association Klaipeda Region
Mr Daniil Migunov	Member of ERB Youth Board, Kaliningrad
Mr Illia Oganisian	Member of ERB Youth Board, Kaliningrad

ERB Secretariats:

Mr Niels Chresten Andersen	Regional Municipality of Bornholm
Mr Sławomir Demkowicz -Dobrzanski	Region Kronoberg
Ms Evgeniya Russu	Kaliningrad Region
Mr Peter Nilsson	Skåne Association of Local Authorities
Ms Egle Stonke	Association of Klaipeda Region
Mr Łukasz Bielewski	Warmia and Masuria Region
Mr Piotr Zwolak	Warmia and Masuria Region
Ms Małgorzata Klawitter-Piwowska	Pomorskie Region
Ms Marta Czarnecka – Gallas	Pomorskie Region
Ms Antje Schreyer	Region Kalmar County
Ms Johanna Rönn	Region Blekinge
Mr Marcin Żuchowski	Association of Polish Communes Euroregion Baltic
Ms Magda Leszczyna-Rzucidło	Head of the Euroregion Baltic International Permanent Secretariat
Ms Anna Dudziak	Euroregion Baltic International Permanent Secretariat

Ms Paulina Lieder- Żuchowska	Euroregion Baltic International Permanent Secretariat
Ms Adrianna Gniado- Turkowska	Association of Polish Communes Euroregion Baltic

Guests:

Ms Aleksandra Lobaškova	Klaipeda Region, European Youth Capital ambassador
Ms Greta Statkute	Klaipeda Region, European Youth Capital ambassador
Mr Sven Kastö	Director of South Sweden's Brussels Office
Mr Mattias Andersson	ERB Mobility Core Group
Mr Nicolai Munk Pedersen	ERB Mobility Core Group

ERB Executive Board meeting

25th May 2021

13.00 – 15.30 CET

Online session

13.00	1.	Welcome and opening
13.10		President of Euroregion Baltic, Mr Johan Sandberg, Chair of the Regional Development Board in Region Blekinge, Sweden, welcomed participants of the ERB Board meeting organised online due to the COVID19 pandemic and presented its agenda. <i>ERB Executive Board approved the agenda.</i>
13.10	2.	Signing the minutes of the previous ERB Executive Board meeting
13.15		ERB IPS have submitted the minutes of the previous ERB Executive Board meeting held on 25 th Feb 2021. <i>ERB Executive Board approved the minutes, and ERB President signed the ERB Executive Board meeting minutes.</i>

13.15 3. **Virtual Tour to Blekinge Region**

13.35 Due to the COVID19 pandemic, the ERB Executive Board meeting could not be held as a physical meeting in Karlskrona Blekinge Region. Thus ERB President, Mr Sandberg, invited all ERB Board Members and participants to a virtual tour in Blekinge Region. This allowed the Euroregion Baltic Board Members and guests of the meeting to get to know the Blekinge Region better.

ERB Executive Board was requested to take note of the information presented.

13.35 4. **Euroregion Baltic Youth Board Work Plan for 2021**
13.55 **and upcoming ERB youth-related activities**

Due to Mr Sven Kastö, Director of South Sweden's Brussels Office, being late, the Board decided to swap the agenda points' order and start with original point 5.

Ms Johanna Wyckman, ERB YB Chairwoman, presented the ERB YB Work Plan prepared by the ERB Youth Board during their meeting on 23rd April. She briefly underlined that the ERB YB main priorities areas for 2021 are: youth participation, sustainability, economic growth and gender equality (e.g. child trafficking, domestic violence, lack of LGBTQ rights, equal opportunities for representation in politics).

JS underlined that the youth perspective is critical in BSR cooperation and agreed that the presented ERB YB priorities are of much importance.

NCA asked if the ERB YB discussed any concrete actions within the presented priorities, such as the Erasmus + opening new calls.

JW informed there are no new project ideas at the moment; however, the ERB YB is about to apply to E+ call with a project they jointly prepared last year. The YB is also focusing on increasing youth participation.

NCA ensured if the YB want to intensify its role in the ERB Board by taking part in discussions.

JW confirmed and added that the YB wants to be active in other areas and the BSYP project. The YB representatives are very active members of the Advocacy Group, which increases youth participation in the BSR. She said the YB is branching out and would like to take a more active role in this priority area.

NCA expressed his hopes that the ERB YB will be engaged in the Conference on the future of Europe, which is very much targeted at youth.

MLR announced the next speaker - Ms Aleksandra Lobaškova from Klaipeda Region, the ambassador of European Youth Capital, to present a short overview of Klaipeda's youth-targeted events and activities' EYC title in 2021.

Ms Aleksandra Lobaškova started by underlining that Klaipeda being chosen the EYC in 2021 is a highly ambitious and beneficial port-city initiative for Lithuania and the whole BSR. She informed that more than 500 young people were engaged in preparing the project's application, which aims to involve young people to participate in different kinds of activities actively. The goal is to strengthen the youth voice on the national and international level, develop an attractive youth-oriented business environment, strengthen the youth sector through capacity building. During the project, around 400 events and 17 national & international partnerships will be implemented. AL explained Klaipeda would implement a program for nine platforms, each of which is dedicated to tackle a significant problem and overcome the challenges identified by youth. The platforms are: dialogue (related to youth policy), solidarity (promotion of volunteering), leadership (supporting youth entrepreneurship), out of the box (openness & funding of different and unusual ideas), spaces (creating infrastructure for youth), north-south (activities for youth from various areas of the city), colours (promoting European values), connections (developing local, national, regional & international cooperation), potential (building the capacity of young people and youth organisations). AL underlined that the project's general goal is to create a new, fresh look at the youth strategy. She said that youth is not a challenge but rather a positive force to create a better future. Klaipeda's ambition is to become one of the most youth-friendly cities in the region.

JS congratulated Klaipeda on this massive undertaking and assured ERB would keep its eyes on the project.

NCA asked if the project includes monitoring Klaipeda becoming the most youth-friendly city.

AL said they are thinking about considering the data further to present the implementation of the goal to society.

ERB Executive Board was requested to take note of the information presented.

13.55	5.	Information about the Conference on the Future of Europe debate and the possibilities for ERB to involve in the process
14.10		

The Conference on the Future of Europe is a unique and timely opportunity for European citizens to debate

Europe's challenges and priorities. It offers European citizens the possibility to think about what future they want for the European Union and join the dialogue.

The European Parliament, the Council, and the European Commission have committed to listening to Europeans and following up within their competencies on their recommendations. By spring 2022, the Conference is expected to reach conclusions and provide guidance on the future of Europe.

Mr Sven Kastö, Director of South Sweden's Brussels Office, briefly presented the Conference aims and main activities foreseen during 2021 and 2021. SK explained that Ursula von der Leyen announced the initiative to shorten the existing gap between the citizens and EU institutions at the start of the new EU Commission. The reasons for that were the feeling of vulnerability among citizens – EU has to deal with more and more threats, for instance, globalism versus protectionism, migration issues, climate crisis, political threats etc. Another thing is that the economic talks are being pushed away by discussions on values. The third issue that became a background of the initiative is what the EU should do or shouldn't do – the question of super nationality versus subsidiarity. The challenge is that we all have different views on what fields the EU should do more – climate change, health issues, migration, EU funding etc. therefore, the idea behind the Conference was to meet, involve EU friends and sceptical about discussing how the significant challenges ahead of us should be solved. The EU institutions see the Conference as a tool to mobilise the citizens. It officially started on 9th May and will last for almost two years. The thoughts, opinions and ideas will be gathered, analysed and presented to a European Citizen Panel, then reported to the EU institutions. The report will be treated as guidelines and could lead to the modification of the treaties.

SK briefly explained the content of the Conference's website and the opportunities it gives to the citizens.

He added that most people would agree on the conference initiative's importance and close the gap between the citizens and the EU institutions. However, as many people have no idea what the EU does at all and most people connect the EU to foreign policy, they would probably point out that the EU is too far away or too weak to act, although the member states that it is too weak to block the actions actively. Yet, another question to answer is how do we communicate our European activity to citizens.

SK indicated another problem – if there is no political proposal on the table, can the offices deal with a questions/problem without a political mandate?

NCA added that as far as he is concerned, the Conference will end on 9th May 2022. Also, one of the discussions he has noticed is about joint candidates lists across the borders. If this is the case, it might make Euroregion Baltic quite interesting. As the European Agenda is one of the main ERB's action plan area of interest, it could be a good idea to prepare a webinar regarding the Conference on the future of Europe to see if we can identify any concrete issues relevant for ERB to discuss.

SK added he is not 100% sure when the Conference stops. However, president Macron would probably like to present the Conference report due to France's presidency. As for the idea of joint candidates lists, he informed that only one out of 21 representatives wanted to deal with regional questions according to a recent survey among Swedish EU Parliament members.

Mr Wiesław Byczkowski shared an idea of the Pomorskie Region for the involvement of ERB in the Conference of the Future of Europe. Since the Conference is a multi-layer dialogue with all European inhabitants and the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission have committed to listen to Europeans and to follow up, in his opinion it is of great importance for ERB to take part in this undertaking and influence ERB's future with the means it possesses. Many of the topics covered in the Conference are already on ERB's everyday agenda, and most of them are covered by our regional strategies. WB recommended an active ERB's involvement in the Conference. This could be organised via establishing a dedicated ERB working group consisting of ERB's secretariats. The group could focus on finding the best ways to get involved. There are several ways to think about it: either by organising a so-called "decentralised event" on a regional South Baltic level or by joining one of the international actors' events, or managing a citizens' panel. There is also an option to prepare and present an ERB opinion or policy paper directly to the EU Institutions. WB added Pomorskie declares its will to engage in this process.

JS agreed it is an excellent opportunity for ERB to involve on the EU level.

MLR added the issue will be taken to the ERB Secretariats meeting and agreed on the idea of establishing a working group. She reminded that within the ERB's Action Plan for 2021, a seminar planned related to the European Agenda could be an excellent opportunity to combine all the ideas for the working group and ERB becoming an active part within the dialogue about the future of Europe. She also proposed organising an event which could go back to back with the seminar.

JS, Pomorskie, Bornholm and Blekinge Region agreed on the proposal.

ERB Executive Board discussed the proposal, agreed on establishing the Working Group and took note of the information presented.

14.20	6.	Results of the ERB members mapping activity and conclusions from the debate on future ERB cooperation topics
14.40		

Ms Leszczyna-Rzucidło, Head of ERB International Secretariat, presented briefly the ERB Members mapping

exercise results done by ERB Secretariats representatives – 9 ERB Members. The aims of the joint discussion during the meeting on 25th May in the morning – 10.30-12.00 CET was to indicate the regional priorities for ERB members and seek possible common areas of cooperation in upcoming years. All regional priorities somehow relate to the global goals, both Interreg South Baltic & Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme, EUSBSR and EU Green Deal Policy. The main priorities that have been highlighted are tourism & culture, youth, circular economy, health, climate change, water issues, innovations, energy, forest & wood strategy, transport.

MLR informed that IPS would prepare detailed reports from the group discussions for the use of ERB.

Johanna Ronn from Blekinge Region presented the results of the 1st group discussion. It turns out that the present challenges are very much likely in all ERB regions, the same trends that actually can be put as positive. Despite the very negative trends for local small business, primarily in tourism and other small business, there has been a big trend of increased export (Blekinge). Another trend is going from urban to rural living—furthermore, a digitisation trend boosted by the covid 19. The regions see there is a great need to develop the techniques and skills related to this trend. There is also a boost in tourism in national travel and outdoor activities. This also relates to an increase in a raised interest for health and well-being as horizontal priorities (Pomorskie). JR added all regions conclude to a need for sustainability and environment as horizontal priorities. As for the most significant challenges currently for the ERB regions, there is still hopes for cross-border travel in the future. All regions in the 1st group claim the enormous need to recover the smaller business effects on the economy and unemployment from the covid-19 restrictions. The most significant potential to work in an international context with other ERB members are skills, educations and digitisation needs, innovation and creativity, cooperation on smart specialisation.

JR added the Interreg South Baltic Programme is seen as a tool to increase the cooperation opportunities for ERB stakeholders. Still, ERB should also seek opportunities in Horizon 2020 and the EU Green Deal–related financial calls and instruments.

Finally, the need to include small organisations was underlined. It was suggested to gather municipalities, NGOs, etc., in networks, build consortia's and/or create enduring partnerships to join the EU project in the future, where ERB could be a great facilitator.

Mr Niels Chresten Andersen presented the results of the 2nd group discussion. The group was missing representatives from Kaliningrad, Warmia & Masuria and Kronoberg. The first part of the discussion was exchanging information about the current, post-covid situation in each region – vaccination problem. It turns out that none of the regions has any specific plans or strategies on how to recover from the pandemic. However, Blekinge Region seems to have some action plan where there is a discussion on how to deal with increasing youth

unemployment. This problem also occurs in Poland. While in Klaipeda, a resilience plan could be used in this massive challenge of the post-pandemic situation. Also, the issue of EU recovery plans has been raised.

NCA added that the potential areas for cooperation were similar to in the 1 st group: blue economy and SGDs, tourism (mostly Klaipeda), eco-development for regions and municipalities, technology investments, circular economy focusing on waste & plastic. Also, there was a discussion on tourism & culture in the social dimension: the need for digital skills, dealing with youth unemployment, etc. Furthermore, the green energy & water sector was an essential issue in the ERB context and engagement of small and local actors.

Ms Małgorzata Klawitter – Piwowarska presented the results of the 3rd group discussion.

Johanna Wyckman, ERB YB Chairwoman, started the discussion by sharing the information that Kalmar is now mapping the effects of the pandemic. The main focus areas are now bio-innovation, tourism. There are two ways now: some things should go towards “back to normal” mode, and some should evolve into new, greener ways. The critical task is also to foresee and prepare tools for future crises possible to appear. ERB could continue its role in spreading news, good practices, enhancing learning processes among the smallest actors, continue project and policy support. This was an excellent introduction to the discussion that followed. The role of ERB was seen, as mentioned before and also to develop ideas and incentives for new projects among ERB members and beyond. ERB's regional entities and other stakeholders are engaged from member regions like academia, NGOs, SMEs, and others. It was mentioned to continue with connecting the regions in a hybrid way. An ERB database should be established where regions would post their good practices, projects to join and already joined. Among other areas of interest supporting Smart Specialisation Strategies of regions was discussed, sustainability and green aspects of all cooperation fields, promoting projects and their outcomes, and enhancing the continuity of cooperation after project closure.

Furthermore, the need to work with obstacles that newcomers face while joining international activities was underlined. The group discussed finding several entities that would serve as contact points in the main themes covered by the ERB, the need to use clear language that could ease communication between ERB and other stakeholders and newcomers. Finally, according to the group representatives, it is essential to include the following subjects: tourism, small tourism movement across ERB regions, well-being, Baltic Sea itself, Biodiversity, mobility, connectivity, transport, health, Public-Private Partnerships, silver economy, inclusive economy, clusters and using various EU funds, not only Interreg.

JS summed up the results of the discussions are very promising.

ERB Executive Board took note of the information presented.

14.40 7. **Information from Skane Association of Local Authorities regarding their decision to end their membership to Euroregion Baltic by 31st December 2021.**

Ms Cecilia Magnusson-Svärd, ERB Board Member from Skane Association of Local Authorities, informed the ERB Board about the Association's decision taken in March to finalise its membership in the ERB by the end of 2021. The reason for that is the significant reorganisation of the Association and narrowing down the agenda of areas of cooperation. The Association's core assignments will now focus on education and social issues. Thus the cross border cooperation, EU related issues, water issues do not meet its agenda anymore. Furthermore, the Association will no longer engage in international projects within the energy and climate sector. Thus, the Association's Board did not any longer find it natural to remain the ERB member.

JS commented that it is sad seeing Skane leaving the ERB. It creates a big geographical gap within the SBR cooperation; however, he expressed his hope to continue cooperating with other projects.

NCA expressed both his understanding and regret for the decision. He then raised the issue of a need to rescheduling the presidency rotation. JS agreed to the proposal.

ERB Executive Board took note of the information presented.

14.50 8. **Reports from the Water Core Group and Mobility Core Group**

15.05

Mr Mattias Andersson representing the Mobility Core Group secretariat shortly informed the ERB Board Members about the Mobility Core Group seminar - focused on biogas and electrification of public transport that took place on 24th May 2021. The next meeting will be connected to the next board meeting in October and will be focused on E-ticketing. MA added that the application to Swedish Institute is clarified, so the MCG is still in the game with the seed money project Interconnect Tourism which aims to combine the results from Interconnect with the tourism sector. The final decision from SI will follow in June. The project will include five partners from MCG and one other organisation from Pomorskie. Furthermore, MA informed that the Public consultation TEN-T were submitted.

Mr MA presented very detailed outcomes of the second MCG meeting. The first speaker was Tommy Lindström

from Energy Agency for Southeast Sweden, who focused on biogas and the future European development. He raised such issues as reaching a fossil fuel independent transport system in 2030 and the reasons for using biomethane in transport. Next, Mr Patrik Tidåsen presented the experience of Kronoberg Region in the usage of biogas in public transport – its advantages and disadvantages, future solutions etc. Furthermore, Mr Pawel Warszycki – HIE-RO Rostock explained the potential of the new market for Bio-LNG on a micro-scale and presented the proposed solutions within the sector. Finally, Sven Borén from Blekinge Institute of Technology elaborated on collaboration and design aspects when planning for electric bus systems.

Next, Ms MLR shortly presented the updates of the WCG work related to the WaterMan Interreg Baltic Sea Region Seed Money facility project development. MLR mentioned that all ERB members have their representatives in the WCG, which creates an excellent partnership. Until the end of October 2021, the WCG will be working on the Seed Money phase. Once the call for the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme is open, the goal is to be ready with the main project on climate-resilient water waste and groundwater management. The WCG project is focused on measures and techniques to re-use water from wastewater treatment plants and water retention before flowing into the BS. The primary target groups of the project are municipalities and water companies. MLR underlined that the project aims to develop approaches and solutions to a ready-to-use level by concrete pilot actions & investments. At the moment, the WCG is brainstorming on the main project ideas. As there are Russian partners on the project board, the BSRP is the best option to apply. The project is planned for three years, and its value will estimate at around 2-5 mln Euro. At the moment, a consortium is being formed. The goal is to have a similar type of actors. MLR briefly presented the most probable partners to be involved in the project.

ERB Executive Board took note of the information presented.

15.05	9.	Information on the implementation of ERB projects, new project invitation for the Euroregion Baltic and the upcoming events and ERB activities.
15.15		

Ms Magda Leszczyna-Rzucidło from the ERB International Secretariat presented information on the developments in currently running ERB projects and informed the ERB Board members about the invitation from Denmark.

MLR informed the Board Members that the activities within the Umbrella 2.0 project have already started. The Awareness

Raising Event, which was held at the end of April, turned out very successful. The event proved a tremendous interest among small and local actors to be more engaged in cross border cooperation. MLR shortly presented the topics of the event and its results. The response from the participants was very positive. She informed ERB Board that the recording from the event and all additional materials could be found on the ERB website. At the moment, project partners are concentrating on so-called entry points, which will enable small ad, local actors to start the cross-border cooperation. A very detailed study on already existing entry points and the possible future points were prepared, basing on the interviews with all 16 PA coordinators. MLR informed the final analysis should be ready to be published within a week or two.

Ms Anna Dudziak from the ERB International Secretariat briefly updated the ERB Board Members with the activities undertaken within the BSYP project. She said that the project is very much aligned with the regional priorities of ERB members. It is engaged in many youth-oriented events. AD shortly summed up the recent and also upcoming events that the BSYP is a part of, e.g. CBSS Ministerial, BSSSC Spring Youth Event, the Hanseatic Youth Days, or the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference in August. She also informed the ERB Board members about preparations for the Baltic Sea Youth Camp and developing the Baltic Sea Youth Declaration.

MLR shared information with the Board about the invitation from Mr Mads Randbøll Wolff from Voluntas Group Copenhagen to ERB to join their new project with partners from Bornholm, Klaipeda and Kalmar. The project aims to redefine peripheral regions as centres of resilience and innovation; in this case, this would be the South Baltic Region. It also seeks to facilitate the collaboration across sectors, actors and regions within the South Baltic Area and enhance the knowledge sharing process within the region. The project would respond to the current call in the Nordic Council of Ministers' funding programme for NGO cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region. The main themes of the project are energy, environment & climate and innovation & entrepreneurship. MLR briefly summed up the project's goals and target groups. She stressed out that the project concept is very much in line with ERB's strategies and agendas. MLR requested the Board to discuss and vote regarding the possibility of entering the project by ERB.

JS asked if the project proposal fits in the ERB budget.

MLR confirmed there is no financial contribution.

The ERB Board Members voted and decided to enter the project.

15.15 10. **Invitation to the next Executive Board meetings**
15.25

Ms Maximova from Kaliningrad Region informed about the detailed plans for the ERB Executive Board meeting in Kaliningrad in October 2021 and other accompanying events.

She said there is a great chance the meeting will be held in offline mode. The ERB Board meeting is planned to be arranged back to back with the BSSSC Meeting and BSSSC Annual Conference. She briefly presented the draft programme of the events, including the visit to the Curonian Spit National Park. She also added some crucial information regarding the travel visa issues.

JS added he very much hopes it will be possible to have the meeting in a physical mode.

ERB Executive Board took note of the information presented.

15.25 11. **Conclusion and closing**

15.30

President of Euroregion Baltic, Mr Johan Sandberg, closed the meeting of the ERB Executive Board.
