

Meeting of Baltic Sea Region CBC Programmes – Focus on Eastern Border

04/June/2024

Online 13:00 – 14:45 CET

Meeting summary

Context / background

Meeting gathered more than 30 representatives from Interreg programmes and border regions to share experiences on the work to support the regions bordering Russia and Belarus in their new reality. This meeting was second in row first being in Tartu, Estonia in January 2024. European Commission (DG Regio) has been active participant in both meetings and has highlighted the importance of this topic for the European policies in general.

These regions were incorporated into internal Interreg CBC programmes as the planned Interreg Next programmes were cancelled due to the Russian military aggression towards Ukraine. Change of programme context and the cooperation direction has brought challenges for these regions on building new partnerships, to meet the requirements of “new” programmes’ in which the regions have been incorporated and not to talk of challenges with changed administrative and procedural practices when comparing former ENI CBC programmes to current Interreg CBC.

Closing of borders has deepened the economic challenges of these border regions and safety and security as well as the management of borders has become more and more relevant.

Key discussion points and takeaways

European Commission informed of their tour to the border regions and Member States and highlighted of the challenges that these border regions are facing and noted that many of these regions were already earlier economically lacking behind. EC encouraged the regions to continue their important work with these regions.

Discussion was taken of programmes experiences until now. Border regions have been incorporated into programme structures in various ways. In some cases border regions were already part of the programme region and there no need for big changes to programme bodies were foreseen. In other cases new regions were taken into the Monitoring Committees for example on rotation basis or on observatory capacity. In these cases new regions have participated actively into the discussion. In some programmes new human resources had been taken to the secretariat to help manage the situation with increased budget and widened programme region.

Programmes had good experiences of border regions participation to dedicated webinars, seminars and partner search forums. First initial figures of calls give positive signals of new regions’ participation. More information of their participation and success in calls can be expected during the following months.

Group highlighted the need for increasing the visibility and awareness of the work that is done with the regions bordering Russia and Belarus. Programmes decided to further ideate joint messages and communication that can be used in their communication efforts. With these messages general public is informed of Programmes' important role on supporting these regions and offering new platform for international cooperation not leaving the regions alone to struggle with their challenges. At the same time it was noted that Interreg is not alone but plays its important part in the support and Interreg together with other tools and policies play a role on solving the regions challenges in a long run.

Programmes discussed of the preparation of joint workshop in EUSBSR Annual Forum in Visby in October 2024. Objective is to bring a variety of stakeholders together to talk of specific challenges of these eastern border regions.

Next steps

Programmes continue to build joint messages to be utilised in their communication. Networking meeting is organised back to back with the EUSBSR annual meeting in October and dedicated workshop on 30 October (main day of the annual forum). Efforts are continued to bring together different initiatives and projects working with the challenges of eastern border regions.