

## MINUTES OF THE MEETING

### Joint Session of the Latvian-Estonian and Estonian-Latvian Intergovernmental Commission for Cross-border Cooperation

Venue: Valka Culture Centre, Latvia

September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Beginning: 11:00

End: 17:00

Chairman: **Mr Raimonds Vējonis**, Minister for Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia

Co-chairman: **Mr Siim Kiisler**, Minister for Regional Development of the Republic of Estonia

Minutes-Secretaries: **Anna Škabireva**, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development  
**Ilga Gruševa**, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development

Participants:



Annex 1

The list of participants is annexed:

Agenda



Annex 2

Agenda is annexed:

#### **Agenda:**

##### **1. Opening of the Joint Session**

The Joint Session of the Latvian-Estonian and Estonian-Latvian Intergovernmental Commission for Cross-border Cooperation (hereinafter referred to as “JS of IGC”) was opened by the Chairman Mr Raimonds Vējonis, Minister of the Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia.

Chairman expressed gratitude to everyone for contribution to the work of the JS of IGC and informed about the changes in composition of Latvian delegation. Chairman mentioned that the Latvian-Estonian IGC is a significant platform for the determination of the common objectives and solutions for cross border co-operation.

Chairman also informed that after the last meeting in Valga in 2010 the Agreement between Latvia and Estonia on “Mutual aid on providing the ambulance service in the border areas” had been concluded and two projects regarding reconstruction of the roads had been supported by the Estonia-Latvia Cross-border Co-operation Programme (hereinafter - EE-LV CBC Programme).

Chairman stressed that the development differences between the regions within the countries should be eliminated and various activities need to be supported from national and regional level as well as both countries need to cooperate to reach higher development level in the regions located at the border.

The opening was followed by the opening speech of the Co-chairman Mr Siim Kiisler, Minister for Regional Development of the Republic of Estonia.

Co-chairman admitted that at the first time when the IGC was mentioned, there were doubts that the results could be reached, as the issues were very complicated, but during some years the IGC as the way of cooperation had proved to be successful. Work of IGC is a good platform where the ideas can be discussed, solutions found and recommendations made for the other institutions. The support from the central governments is required to both countries' regions and the results found during the meeting will be useful for further cooperation.

The opening was followed by the welcome speech of Mr Kārlis Albergs, Chairman of Valka Local Municipality Council.

K. Albergs welcomed everyone to Valka and stressed that Valka town has a very close cooperation with Valga town and Valga County Government. A number of joint projects had been implemented by Valka and Valga in such fields as environmental protection (the area of Pedele river), culture and education (Valka Cultural school), water system management. All the projects promote the establishment of joined Valka-Valga area and also promote further development of co-operation, taking away bureaucratic obstacles, not only in Valka-Valga, but also in the wider territory.

## **2. Overview of the Intergovernmental Commission's work in 2010**

The Report on the progress of the joint cooperation activities agreed by the IGC in 2010 was presented by Mr Rainer Kuutma, Valga County Government.

R. Kuutma reminded that the Task of IGC given by Estonian and Latvian ministers was to agree on joint measures and activities, which would help to ensure freedoms of the European Union, which is free movement of people and labour, cross border movement of goods, services and capital. The tool for work is to find legislative acts, that might support it and if needed suggest amendments or supplements. The countries should come up with suggestions if some legislative acts or agreements are needed.

In 2010, 23 different tasks were given to IGC to solve and 4 working groups (hereinafter –WG) were established and the work of WGs started in February 2010 in Estonia and Latvia.

WG “Social and Medical services” was the most successful last year and solved 2 difficult tasks- Cross-border movement of ambulance services, emergency call “112”. One of the tasks which still needs to be solved is cross-border provision of medical services for the patients free cross-border movements.

WG “Transport, Energy and Environment” had 11 different tasks and most important tasks were Tallinn-Riga passenger train (the work is not completed and needs the subsidies to launch the service), availability of public transport information (current solution is links to the neighbouring country public transport internet portals), finding solutions to asphalt cross-border gravel roads (decision was taken in May 2011 that EE-LV CBC Programme supports Kilingi-Nõmme – Ramata road renovation works), etc.,

WG “Education, Tourism and Sports” has solved the tasks concerning development of tourism corridors, special requirements related to sports weapons upon border crossing, the other tasks need to be continued.

Tasks of the WG “Cross-border Labour Movement and Taxation” still need to be continued.

In October 29, 2010 during the meeting of WGs and the Minister of Regional Affairs of the Republic of Estonia the decision was taken that some certain issues or tasks should be taken on the National Estonian Government level. As a priority issues to the Estonian Government are mentioned opening of Tallinn-Riga passenger train service, patients' free cross-border movement, signing of a Memorandum on Education in border areas, etc.

## **3. Information on implementation of Latvian-Estonian Future Co-operation Report**

Mr Arvils Zeltiņš, the representative of Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Mr Mart Loite, the representative of Estonian Government Office, informed the JS of IGC of developments in the area of Latvian-Estonian Future Co-operation and explained that the initiative started in 2009, when the potential for closer co-operation between both countries was identified by the prime ministers. In 2010, the Latvian-Estonian Future Cooperation Report was published and responsible co-ordinators

were appointed. Several common interests and areas for co-operation had been identified – e.g., potential for large cross-border infrastructure projects in the field of transportation, such as Rail Baltica, development of local roads, and harmonisation of public transportation, as well as development of e-services (public transport, maps), co-operation in health care, co-operation in culture and education, development of an Latvian-Estonian-Latvian dictionary, etc.

For implementation of above mentioned co-operation ideas no specific action plan or specific funding scheme should be elaborated, necessary action should be included in existing development plans of ministries financed by state budget or taken in the framework of EE-LV CBC Programme.

Both sides agreed that the report should be incorporated in the Action plans of the ministries and the implementation of the planned activities should be supervised stronger. For many of the issues in IGC a wider political support is needed, also the Monitoring report of the document is needed.

#### **4. Review and approval of implementation of the plan of activity of the Joint Session for 2011**

Ms Arina Andreičika, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia (hereinafter – the MEPRD) made a presentation on IGC joint cooperation priorities for 2011.

Taking into account that the Latvian-Estonian Future Cooperation report was presented in the beginning of this year, the MEPRD as the coordinator of IGC took on board the results and suggestions provided by the report. The coordinator meetings (March/April/May) were organized in Latvia to discuss the further actions of IGC and WGs in 2011. It was decided to continue the work of 4 thematic WGs in order to solve problems obstructing cross-border co-operation. A.Andreičika also gave an insight about the preparation activities of both sides for IGC in 2011.

Regarding the content of the WG “Social and Medical Services”, it was agreed to continue solving health care issues, at the same time the broadening of the WG was discussed, proposing the new tasks for it. The new tasks concern the realisation of the fire-fighting and rescue operations and services. Further Ms A.Andreičika informed about the tasks proposed to be continued and tasks proposed to be added for the rest of the WGs.

The organisation of work after JC of IGC and provisional time frame was presented.

#### **5. Results of the Joint Meetings of 4 Thematic Working groups in 2011**

##### **1) WG “Social and Medical Services”**

The results of the Joint Meeting of WG “Social and Medical Services” were presented by Mr Intars Zitiāns, Deputy Chief of the State Fire and Rescue Service of the Republic of Latvia.

The WG discussed and proposed to the IGC to change the title of the WG from “Social and Medical Services” to “Social, Health Care and Rescue Services” as the WG had discussed not only social and health care issues, but also the issues regarding rescue services.

First task the WG discussed was Response capabilities and mutual assistance in border areas, which was divided in 5 sub-tasks:

##### **1.1. Realization of the fire-fighting and rescue operations**

The possible solution of the problem was proposed that Estonian Ministry of the Interior in cooperation with Latvian Ministry of the Interior would prepare amendments for the Mutual Agreement between Governments of Republic of Estonia and Republic of Latvia on Assistance in Case of Catastrophes (2002) and other relevant regulations. It was also proposed to establish the additional working group for solving issues of the fire-fighting and other “blue lights services” with involvement of specific experts from responsible institutions of Latvia and Estonia.

##### **1.2. Development and Equipment of Fire Stations in Border Areas**

##### **1.3. Equipping fire brigades with new technique and equipment**

The possible solution for both tasks was proposed to prepare common projects within EE-LV CBC Programme or to continue solution of the tasks during the next planning period.

#### 1.4. Common border crossing procedures

The possible solutions of the problem were presented to amend the Mutual Agreement between Governments of Republic of Latvia and Republic of Estonia on Assistance in Case of Catastrophes and to establish additional working group for solving issues of the fire-fighting and other “blue lights services” with involvement of specific experts from responsible institutions of Latvia and Estonia.

#### 1.5. Working out common deployment list in border areas.

The task could be solved when the tasks 1.1.-1.4. are accomplished and only then the common procedures and requirements for equipment of the fire fighting and rescue work could be worked out.

Regarding the second task of the WG - Development of social entrepreneurship, the agreement was reached that the issue is actual for both sides and more discussions are needed to find possible and better solutions, e.g. to exchange the experience.

Taking into account that some tasks on Health Care were solved in 2010, the WG initiated to continue the issues of Health Care keeping active issue of cross-border movement of ambulance services and cooperation between Estonia and Latvia in case of big medical emergencies. The issue of development “112” has been solved in medical side, therefore it needs to be solved between another services further. The most significant issue for people living in border area is patients’ rights in cross-border healthcare. The WG proposed to keep the issue active and try to solve it before the deadline (year 2013) of transposition of Directive 2011/24/EU of 9 March 2011.

**Decided:** 1) to adopt the change of name of WG as the scope of work and the issues are broader and are important for both sides; 2) to continue to solve the health care issues and additionally proposed new tasks.

### **2) WG “Transport, Energy and Environment”**

The results of the Joint Meeting of WG Transport, Energy and Environment were presented by Mr Rainer Kuutma, Representative of Valga County Government.

There are 11 different topics to solve:

#### 2.1. Tallinn-Riga passenger train service

The solution of the issue could be found on commercial basis, which would allow covering the running costs of the service. Current task of both countries is to estimate the amount of necessary investments. A specific study on the issue is being elaborated in Estonia by the Ministry of Economics and Communication and it might be finalised by the end of 2011. Estonia has planned the investments also to the suitable new trains which could serve also this line. Some of the investments are needed on Latvia side. The discussions should be continued when the results of the study is known, therefore the proposal of the WG was to keep the issue active.

#### 2.2. Availability of Public transport information

Both sides acknowledged that finding of public transport information on the other side of the border is complicated. The solution would be to have a joint website about the border area public transport. Nevertheless a special border area public transport information portal is too expensive. The solution proposed was to have links to the neighbouring country public transport websites. The issue will be kept active.

#### 2.3. Asphaltting of smaller cross-border gravel roads

In the WG it was agreed that joint planning on reconstruction works for cross-border roads is vital for both countries. The parties also have to agree on prioritisation of the roads to be reconstructed in the future. The decision on which roads are priority should be taken on regional level – Vidzeme Planning Region in Latvia and Western and Southern regions of the Estonian Road Administration. The WG also discussed the possibilities of funding the reconstruction works.

Currently 2 cross border roads are being reconstructed by means of EE-LV CBC Programme (within joint projects): Karksi-Nuia – Koni road will be completed by November 2011; \_ the decision on approval of the joint project for reconstruction of Kilingi - Nõmme – Jäärja – Ramata road was taken in May 2011.

WG also discussed the following cross-border roads: Ape – Mõniste; Veelikse – Laatre – Rūjiena; Taheva-Gaujena; Abja-Paluoja-Rūjiena.

#### 2.4. Restoring of cross-border bus service

During the WG meeting it was agreed that there should be distinction between international public transport and cross-border public transport legislation. International public transport should not be supported by national governments, because according to European Union's Rules it should operate on commercial basis, whereas cross-border public transport could be supported by the national governments or could be supported if there is an Agreement between the countries. It would be stipulated in the legislation, therefore the discussions must continue.

#### 2.5. Valga railway junction for the mutual Estonian-Latvian benefit

The new Koidula railway border station was opened in the beginning of September, which is also the shortest connection from Latvian ports to Russia. This is of mutual interest of Estonia and Latvia. Positive impact also expected for Northern Latvia through working places. Latvian and Estonian ministries responsible for transport field should be involved in order to evaluate the added value and mutual benefit of such proposal. This information needs to be further distributed to the Railway service providers in both countries.

#### 2.6. Development of transport corridors/tourist routes

Regarding the issue of Rail Baltica the improvement of the existing infrastructure is needed. A governmental decision will be taken before the end of September, 2011. Very much depends on cooperation between Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania and Poland. On the regional level the task is to keep track of this issue.

Via Hanseatica – the project is approved by Estonia-Latvia-Russia Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013, the issue is removed from the agenda.

#### 2.7. Common solutions for energy supply

The WG discussed the issue concerning Karksi-Nuia – Tõrva – Valga/Valka main gas line. In the development planning of Valga County, this line will run till Valga. Parties informed each other that the decision on where gas line could enter the Latvian side is not taken on the state level. Construction of the gas line is possible on commercial basis by Eesti Gaas Ltd if they see consumers for 50 million cubic metres of gas per year. According to estimations about 70% is reached by now. The issue is kept active within the WG.

#### 2.8. Joint planning in border areas

The recommendation worked out by the WG was to initiate joint planning and to agree upon joint investments with the neighbours on the other side of the border.

Co-chairman initiated that the amendments to the Legal Act could be proposed to the Parliament in order to stipulate that municipalities should consult the neighbouring municipalities on the other side of the border regarding joint planning.

Chairman informed that the Law on Development Planning is planned to be accepted in Parliament of the Republic of Latvia till the end of September. The consultation possibilities to border municipalities could be discussed during the preparation of new regulations on how municipalities are planning the development plans.

#### 2.9. Development of cycling routes

It was agreed that common development of cross-border cycling and walking paths is needed.

The new topics suggested from Latvia were:

#### 2.10. Coastal and maritime cross-border water transport development

#### 2.11. Integrated Coastal Governance in seaside areas

It was decided to continue the discussions and negotiations further with Estonian side, in order to solve problems regarding the issues of environmental protection and tourism which the municipalities are dealing by themselves.

The WG suggested that the issue on Common waste management should be removed from the list of tasks. At the same time the target to find possibilities how to sort wastes in cross-border cooperation should be kept. The issue regarding Cross-border internet was also proposed to be taken out from the list of tasks, as no entirely free of charge solutions are possible. The survey in the border areas could be carried out to identify the places without internet coverage. It was agreed that this issue is too technical for the IGC, therefore should be left to the Governmental level.

**Decided:** 1) to continue to solve the issues, which are not realized yet but are at the stage of implementation; 2) to continue discussions on topics suggested from Latvian side; 3) to remove the issues “Common waste management” and “Cross-border internet” from the list of tasks of the WG.

### **3) WG “Education, Tourism and Sports”**

The results of the Joint Meeting of WG “Education, Tourism and Sports” were presented by Ms Dagnija Ūdre, representative of the Vidzeme Planning Region.

#### 3.1. Development of Valga-Valka joint visiting centre

It was suggested to get an official approval and support by the responsible ministries on the necessity and importance of a joint visitors’ centre in Valga–Valka (to sign an official document e.g. letter of intent) and to agree on the principles of joint management and financing of the building in cooperation between both countries.

Co-chairman proposed that the Agreement between the Ministries of Economics of both countries could be signed on necessity of joint visiting centre.

#### 3.2. Development of vocational education

The WG recommended establishing a joint working group, where the practical issues concerning vocational education could be discussed.

The WG also proposed to change the title of the task – Development of vocational education as the issues regarding higher education will be discussed under the task Development of competitive higher education and research.

The possible solution of the issue could be the assignment of the Memorandum on Co-operation in Vocational Education.

#### 3.3. Elaboration of Latvian-Estonian and Estonian-Latvian dictionary

WG supported the idea that the dictionary is needed. The issue could be solved if the application to the Estonia-Latvia Programme would be submitted. Both the electronic and the printed versions should be made. The need for printed version of the dictionary is also seen by the specialists and users, e.g. embassies, students, entrepreneurs, etc. Institutions that could be involved are Latvian Language Agency, Institute of the Estonian Language.

#### 3.4. Development of the Joint Latvian-Estonian Institute

The WG initiated to establish a working group for elaboration of the tasks, function and finance system of Latvian-Estonian Institute that would work for development of Latvian-Estonian cross-border cooperation. An official agreement between municipalities/regions/countries that such an institution shall be developed is needed.

#### 3.5. Estonian/Latvian language courses for borderland area inhabitants

There are possibilities to learn the languages of the neighbouring countries, but people are not informed about such possibilities. The WG is on opinion that the possibilities to learn the language of the neighbouring country should be promoted and the information about these possibilities disseminated.

#### 3.6. Development of competitive higher education and research

The direction is of future cooperation. This is a field where both sides need to do a lot to strengthen cooperation in joint education programmes between educational establishments, cooperation between scientific research institutions. The suggestion of the WG is to focus research on

smaller municipalities, border areas and regions. The competence centre in Valga will be established and it could become a common centre for future cooperation between both countries in future.

The tourism issues were taken over by WG "Transport, Energy, Environment", but it is to a high importance that both countries develop common tourism products and market border areas together.

The WG has not received problems regarding sport issues. Some of the projects in sport are already financed by EE-LV CBC Programme.

**Decided:** to continue to solve the tasks which are not realized yet and tasks proposed during the meeting of the WG.

#### **4) WG "Cross-Border Labour Movement and Taxation"**

The results of the Joint Meeting of WG "Cross-Border Labour Movement and Taxation" were presented by Mr Kārlis Albergs, Chairmen of Valka Municipality Council.

##### 4.1. Issues concerning non-citizens working in border areas

The WG supported the need to keep the demand stipulating that in order to work in other neighbouring country it is necessary to know its national language. There are certain reasons for that, one is communication and another is to prevent the inflow of too many non-citizens. National Employment Agency, Unemployment insurance fund and the tax authorities must exchange the information more closely.

Chairman stressed that proposal on how to tackle the issue should be elaborated from both sides.

##### 4.2. Taxation differences

Taxation systems are very different in both countries. The main issue that should be achieved is that there is no double taxation. At present the situation is that if Latvian person works in Estonia he/she pays tax according to the Estonian law, but in Latvia he/she has to pay the difference according to the residence place. If the amendments in the Income Tax Law are accepted by the Parliament of the Republic of Latvia, the problem with double taxation will be solved.

##### 4.3. Development of the Valga railway junction as a transit junction

WG supported that the deadline for the Valga free zone is prolonged as it promotes the entrepreneurship and creation of jobs, etc.

##### 4.4. Mutual accounts for educational, social and health services

WG proposes to add the issue to the WG "Education, Tourism and Sports" and discuss during the next meeting of the WGs.

**Decided:** 1) to continue the discussions regarding the tasks; 2) to add the task on mutual accounts for educational, social and health services to the list of tasks of the WG "Education, Tourism and Sports".

#### **6. Conclusions**

Estonian and Latvian sides agreed that the work of IGC should be continued in 2012 and the structure of the WGs should not be changed. Besides to see the results achieved by the IGC, information about the tasks solved should be added to the reports of the WGs.

Chairman: R.Vējonis

Co-chairman: S.Kiisler