

## MINUTES OF THE MEETING

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

Venue: Cēsu New Castle, Cēsis, Latvia

October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013

Beginning: 10:00

End: 13:15

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

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

Minutes-Secretaries: **Ilga Gruševa**, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development  
**Līga Djačenko**, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development

Participants:



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The list of participants is annexed:

Agenda



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**Agenda:**

#### 1. Opening of the Joint Session

The Joint Session of the Latvian-Estonian Intergovernmental Commission for Cross-border Cooperation (hereinafter – Latvian – Estonian IGC) was opened by the Chairman Mr Edmunds Sprūdžs, Minister of the Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia.

Chairman gave floor for welcome speech to Mr Jānis Rozenbergs, Chairman of Cēsis Local Municipality Council.

Jānis Rozenbergs welcomed everyone to Cēsis and stressed that Cēsis town has close cooperation cities in Estonia – Rakvere is its twin city, with Tartu there is close cooperation in the field of culture, with Viljande – in sport sector, with Pärnu – in professional vocational education sector. He acknowledged that cooperation between Estonia and Latvia is of high importance for both countries and wished the IGC fruitful discussions in setting the new proposals for the IGC work next year.

Chairman expressed gratitude to everyone for contribution in organizing the work of the Latvian – Estonian IGC 2013 and informed about the changes in composition of Latvian delegation after the elections of local governments. Chairman admitted that the Latvian-Estonian IGC has proved to be an essential platform for discussions and exchange of experience, determination of the common objectives for cross border cooperation and finding joint solutions for common challenges.

Chairman also informed that after the last meeting in Pärnu in 2012, significant progress has been reached: the legal acts have been consolidated in order to ensure availability and realization of fire fighting and rescue operations in border areas; successfully continues reconstruction of border roads “Killingi-Nõmme-Mazsalaca” and “Ape-Mõniste”, thus improving the living conditions for local inhabitants, accessibility of the border region as well as making it more attractive for visitors; cooperation in implementation of joint vocational education programmes proves to be of high importance in the context of regional employment and entrepreneurship activity; Latvian and Estonian language trainings has proved to be essential to promote people to people contacts, as well as labor mobility across the border.

Chairman admitted that this is the right time to discuss and to reach common understanding for regional cooperation priorities in terms of the next funding period 2014-2020.

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

Co-chairman thanked Latvian colleagues for inviting to the Joint Session of the Latvian – Estonian IGC. He stressed, that there are different multiple platforms and formats for cooperation between Estonia and Latvia established, but this format – Joint Commission is very important, because it provides the possibility for border regions, local municipalities, and ministries to discuss the common issues together. Some issues during four years of IGC work have been solved, some reached certain progress, some lost its actuality, but some issues are constantly monitored. He pointed out that issues discussed in working groups could be classified in three groups: 1) legislative: where amendments in laws are required for solving the issues; 2) cooperation issues, which could be solved in collaboration between national and local authorities; 3) issues which need investments and funding. Those are concrete projects which potentially could be financed by support of the Estonian-Latvian cross-border cooperation programme, or other financial mechanisms. The IGC can define the problems that need financial support and further monitor the progress of their solving.

## **2. Report on the progress of the joint cooperation activities agreed by the Intergovernmental Commission in 2012**

The Report on the progress of the joint cooperation activities agreed by the IGC in 2012 was presented by Ms Dace Grūberte, Deputy State Secretary of Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia.

Ms Dace Grūberte pointed out, that since last IGC meeting significant progress in solving some issues within working groups has been reached:

- Implementation of directive 2011/24/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2011 on the application of patients` rights in cross-border healthcare will be

ensured by 25 October 2013; the provisions of the Directive are transferred to the national legislation; patients will have a chance to receive reimbursement of costs for received planned health care; to get the prescription for medications or medical devices in one country, and receive them in another country; to get reimbursement from a medical facility if harm is done to a person's life or health;

- Legislation for realization of the fire-fighting and rescue operations in border areas have been consolidated (amendments to the Latvian law “Fire Security and Fire-Fighting” (adopted by the *Saeima* on 9 July 2013));
- Several projects have been approved within Estonia – Latvia cross border cooperation programme 2007-2013:
  - Project “*Jate*” approved in October 2012; the aim of the project is to improve first responders’ efficiency and effectiveness regarding response time to an emergency in the border area to combat natural and manmade disasters;
  - Project “*Renovation of Valga-Valka Railway station*”; the aim of the project is to upgrade Valga-Valka Railway station to today's standards and improve services for Estonians and Latvians;
  - Project „*Coastal and maritime spatial planning*”; the aim of the project is development of coastal areas towards better accessibility, sustainable usage of terrestrial and marine resources and mitigation of climate changes.
- Cross-border gravel roads “*Killingi-Nõmme-Mazsalaca*” and “*Ape-Mõniste*” have been asphalted;
- More than 7000 entries have already been compiled for the new Estonian – Latvian dictionary at the end of March, 2013. It is expected that dictionary will be ready by April 30, 2015;
- Cooperation in implementation of joint vocational education programmes is ongoing: carpentry (wood-working) - 11 students in school year 2012/2013, 18 students in school year 2013/2014) from Latvia; logistic – 9 students in school year 2012/2013, 4 students in school year 2013/2014 from Latvia;
- Several information days and meetings about free vacancies in Estonia and Latvia have been organized by Latvian State Employment Agency and Estonian Unemployment Insecure Foundation (especially within EURES activities), information about job opportunities in cross-border towns is being regularly exchanged.

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

Mrs Maija Bišofa, the representative of Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, informed the Latvian - Estonian IGC on developments in the area of Latvian-Estonian Future Co-operation. She noted that elaboration of Latvian-Estonian Future Co-operation Report (hereinafter - Future Co-operation Report) is a proof of very good neighboring relationship; it shows how many common fields of interest we have and the areas where deeper co-operation is possible. During previous year 2012 and year 2013 six fields in the Future Co-operation Report have been most intense – people-to-people contacts, culture, tourism, finance, energy and transport, foreign and security policy issues and education – in Valka/Valga and the border area. Mrs Maija Bišofa informed that in the field of culture there is close cooperation of national archives, national libraries, art museums, as well as in cinema and literature.

In the field of tourism amendments to the Trilateral Tourism Agreement have been made, which foresee to establish common information offices in both countries, to cooperate towards recognition of Baltic brand and find the solutions for attracting more tourists to Latvia and Estonia.

In the field of finance, energy and transport one of recommendation in the report was introduction of the euro, that has been achieved. Latvia and Estonia participates in international forums, economic and marketing events, for example, World Expo. The economic interests of Latvia and Estonia in third countries are quiet similar – to export as much products as possible and to attract tourists. This year Latvian Chamber of Commerce organized business forum in Estonia, where ministers, ambassadors and businessmen from both countries discussed how to work together in third countries market.

Latvia and Estonia works actively together towards establishment of functioning common Baltic electricity market. In the field of transport the decision about joint venture for “Rail Baltica II” has been made with headquarters in Riga.

Regarding foreign and security policy issues - regular high level visits are ongoing. Mrs Maija Bišofa informed that joint diplomatic representation of Latvia and Estonia has been opened in Egypt.

Valka/Valga and the border area has close cooperation in the field of education, carrying out joint professional programmes and providing Estonian and Latvian language courses and language workshops.

Mrs Maija Bišofa informed that next Future Co-operation Report review’s meeting will be held in December 6, 2013 in Pärnu.

#### **4. Results of the Joint Meetings of 4 Thematic Working Groups (hereinafter - WG) in 2013**

##### **1) WG “Social, Health Care and Rescue Services”**

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

###### **1.1. First-aid, Rescue and Health Services in border regions**

Taking into account that the implementation of directive 2011/24/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2011 on the application of patients` rights in cross-border healthcare is ongoing, **it was decided** to monitor the implementation of the Directive 2011/24/EU and to continue cooperation between responsible institutions to solve practical issues for hospital services in border regions. Regarding Ambulance Services agreement between Emergency Medical Service of Latvia and the Estonian Emergency Response centre **it was decided** to re-vise agreement in order to simplify response procedures; in the beginning of 2014 to organize the meeting between responsible institutions and to invite other responsible Emergency Call services providers (State Fire and Rescue Service, Police etc.).

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

Legal acts for realization of the fire-fighting and rescue operations in border areas have been consolidated. **It was decided** to monitor the implementation of the legal acts, as well as to

develop internal procedures for providers of services (Latvian State Fire and Rescue Service and Estonian Rescue Board, volunteers and municipality brigades) and to continue cooperation on practical aspects – joint trainings.

### 1.3. Improvement of the Fire-fighting and Rescue Services, Development and Equipment of Fire Stations in Border Areas

During years 2012/2013 joint cooperation has been strengthened through meetings, exercises, projects and rescue operations. For further improvement of the fire-fighting and rescue capacity and capability **it was decided** to continue mutual cooperation: purchasing equipment, technique, improving fire stations network and carrying out joint exercises.

### 1.4. Development of social entrepreneurship

There is no significant progress since last IGC meeting regarding this issue. Therefore **it was decided** to establish contacts between responsible institutions to exchange information and experience for elaboration and implementation of legal acts – Latvian Ministry of Welfare, Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs, Estonian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication.

### 1.5. Development of social care institutions

The issue has been raised by the Latvian Ministry of Welfare as it has started to develop social care services outside the institutions. In the working group **it was decided** to organize meetings between responsible institutions (Latvian Ministry of Welfare and Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs) in order to agree on exchange of information and experience for improvement of social care services outside institutions.

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

The results of the Joint Meeting of WG “Transport, Energy and Environment” were presented by Mr Nikolajs Stepanovs, Deputy Chief of Vidzeme Planning Region Development Council.

### 2.1. Joint planning in border areas

In order to ensure coordinated and complementary actions, project planning and implementation in Latvian and Estonian municipalities the WG discussed the need to continue solving the issue and **it was decided** that the responsible ministries (Latvian Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development and Estonian Ministry of the Interior) will supplement the methodical guidelines with the recommendation that local municipalities shall negotiate their planning activities with neighboring territories on the other side of the border.

### 2.2. Availability of Public transport information

Since the Latvian – Estonian IGC meeting in 2012, Estonian website “peatus.ee” has link to Latvian website “1188.lv”, as a result the information of the public transport in Estonia is available for persons who want to go there. The WG discussed and **it was decided** that Latvian Ministry of Transport shall facilitate the development of link from the website “1188.lv” to Estonian website “peatus.ee”.

### 2.3. Development of railway traffic: Tallinn-Riga passenger train service

According to OU “Positium” analysis Estonia can operate Tallinn-Riga passenger train service with two “Stadler” trains 3 trips per day from year 2015 if the following is solved: 1) agreement about subsidies (2,5M€/year); 2) investments between Riga un Valka to ensure

120 km/h outside cities; 3) platforms in Latvian stations meet EU demands (550 mm) and all other necessary technical details are agreed upon. Latvian Ministry of Transport provided information that it is not clear what calculation of subsidies by OU “Positium” is based on. The language of analysis is Estonian and thus it is incomprehensible. On Latvian side the speed 120km/h is available everywhere on the railway between Riga and Valka, and the investments are being implemented to maintain necessary speed. Also the platforms in the train stations in Latvia meet EU demands. In addition Mr Anti Moppel - the representative of the Estonian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, informs that the reconstruction of the rout in Estonia will be finalized till the end of 2015, nevertheless the agreement on necessary subsidy is needed in order to open the Tallinn-Riga passenger train service in 2016. To determine the amount of the subsidy the discussions on the number of stations, services, schedule of the train, fees are needed. Considering the information received **it was decided** to start negotiations between the responsible ministries (Latvian Ministry of Transport and Estonian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications), infrastructure owners, eventual operators and other interested actors about the possibility to open Tallinn-Riga passenger train service by May 1, 2014.

#### 2.4. Development of project “Rail Baltica”

Mr Anti Moppel - the representative of the Estonian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications informs that ministers of all three Baltic countries have agreed on establishment of joint venture, however there are some particular differences between the Baltic countries about forming joint infrastructure owning body, route dislocation etc. The pre-design plan will be adopted by municipalities and ministries by December 31, 2015. The construction could be started by year 2018. **It was decided** that the WG will follow up the progress of the project “Rail Baltic”.

#### 2.5. Asphalting of smaller cross-border gravel roads

Since the last IGC meeting in 2012 the reconstruction of the cross border road “Karksi Nuia-Seda Bridge to Naukšēni” has been completed, road “Killingi-Nõmme-Mazsalca” will be finalised by the end of 2013 and “Mõniste-Ape” road reconstruction procurement procedures are ongoing, the road is planned to be reconstructed in 2014 and completed in 2015.

During the discussions **it was agreed** that the prior roads to be reconstructed remain “Ipiki-Mõisaküla-Kamara”, “Gaujiena-Taheva”, “Abja-Paluoja-Rūjiena” and “Veelikse-Laatre-Rūjiena”. The need to reconstruct the 2,1 km stretch of local road in Valka was accepted as it will ensure intensive transit flow from Estonia the technical project for the road is ready. In addition the road “Veclaicene-Krabi” was expressed to facilitate exchange of goods and services in the particular area.

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

Valga railway junction has geographical advantages – shortest way from Latvian ports to Russia, as well as close to EU/RU border. Majority of the actions depend on Estonian side. Considering that the construction and maintenance of the pipelines require large financial contributions and the use of gas is not significant now, **it was decided** to keep the issue under surveillance.

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

In the previous IGC meeting it was decided to close the issue. This meeting it was brought up again. The WG discussed possibility of prolonging of Pärnu-Ikla line to Ainaži. The

problem is the differences of system of subsidizing of public transport in Estonia and Latvia. **It was decided** to keep the issue under surveillance.

#### 2.8. Common solutions of energy supply

The WG discussed the issue concerning Karksi-Nuia – Tõrva – Valga/Valka main gas line. There is no development regarding prolonging Valka gas pipeline. **It was decided** to keep the issue under surveillance.

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

During the WG discussions the issue of development of small harbors, maritime transportation routes and necessary maritime and mainland infrastructure was raised by the Kurzeme planning region. The representatives of the Kurzeme planning region noted that the development of ports is of crucial importance not only for Kurzeme planning region, the interest to cooperate has been expressed from the other planning regions of Latvia and Estonia as well. The focus should be put not only to development of infrastructure, the combination of other issues, such as, monitoring, nature and environmental protection, security and rescue issues should be considered.

The other issue which was discussed under the agenda point during the meeting was the process of mutual spatial planning (legislation, language, coordination). As a solution was proposed to sign the agreement between the responsible ministries (Latvian Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development and Estonian Ministry of the Environment) on mutual spatial planning, incorporating the obligation to coordinate the process between both sides.

**It was decided:** 1) to consider the aspects of monitoring, nature and environmental protection, security and rescue during the discussions between interested parties (Latvian planning regions and Estonian counties) on development of small harbors, maritime transportation routes and necessary maritime and mainland infrastructure; correspondingly responsible authorities to consider the possibility to include previously mentioned aspects in LV-EE cross-border cooperation programme for year 2014-2020; 2) to exchange the information between responsible ministries (Latvian Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development and Estonian Ministry of the Environment) on how to ensure the bilateral spatial planning process.

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

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

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

The building of joint visitors’ centre in Valga–Valka at the moment is not a priority due the financial issues. Tourism information centres from both municipalities have good cooperation and the exchange of information about both countries is ongoing on regular bases. The idea of development of joint tourism information centre was brought up by the representatives of the WG.

**It was decided** to keep the issue under surveillance.

#### 3.2. Development of vocational education

Two Latvian student groups study in Valga. The “Agreement on Cooperation in Vocational Education” still is not signed between the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science and Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. The Latvian Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development has informed that according to the educational system in Latvia the financing follows students, but not across the border, therefore the agreement on certain steps to ensure sustainability should be made.

In order to move on with this issue **it was decided:**

- Latvian Ministry of Education and Science shall specify what kind of arguments are needed (sustainability, needs of the labour market, social issues, etc.) to consider the possibility to sign the “Agreement on Cooperation in Vocational Education”;
- Municipalities of Valka and Valga shall compile the information/arguments to prove the necessity of certain specialists in the border area;
- Meeting of the working group shall be held in the first quarter of 2014;
- The responsible ministries shall continue with activities to sign the “Agreement on Cooperation in Vocational Education”.

### 3.3. Estonian-Latvian language courses for borderland area inhabitants

In Latvia there are possibilities for the unemployed people to get support from the national programme to learn Estonian language, in Estonia such possibility does not exist yet. The WG proposed to promote language learning opportunities. **It was decided** that Latvian language courses in Estonia should be included in official programme supported by the state (for the unemployed people).

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

During the previous IGC meeting in Pärnu, 2012 was discussed the possibilities to widen the cooperation with the University of Tartu, as the Latvian-Estonian Institute is looking for the new directions of work. Taking into account that this is mostly initiative of local municipalities and planning regions, no governmental support is needed. Nevertheless **it was decided** to keep the issue on the agenda.

### 3.5. Development of competitive and open higher education

The cooperation between the universities is ongoing, however the WG discussed how to use the capacity of the regional universities to solve the regional problems, how to identify regional needs and transfer knowledge and competence in order to support regional development. It was agreed that the cooperation between the universities, municipalities and regions/counties should become more active and **it was decided** that the regions (in Latvia planning regions and in Estonia counties) will provide list of the needs that could indicate the possible cooperation directions and activities between the universities, municipalities and regions/counties.

This WG brought up some joint challenges where cooperation could be promoted, for example, development of small ports, sailing sport, as well as development of joint competitive tourism products, clusters, vocational education programs in Latvia for Estonian students etc.

## 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 Mrs Erna Pormeistere, Head of Valka Affiliates of State Employment Agency.

#### 4.1. Issues concerning free workplaces in border areas/labour movement

There is ongoing cooperation between Latvian and Estonian National Employment Agencies and other public institutions about information related to the vacancies in local municipalities. The problem is that local vacancies are in local language – Latvian or Estonian.

Important issue at the moment is lack of information about employed people in neighbor country. It affects tax policy, projection of business, employment in borderland, planning of local municipalities’ budget, probability of getting salary in one country and meanwhile unemployment benefit in other and forecasting of tendencies in future regarding labour mobility. Estonia has experience concerning this issue with Finland; therefore it would be important to explore it and if possible transfer to the case of Latvia and Estonia.

#### **It was decided:**

1) to explore possibilities for publishing job advertisements in both languages on Latvian and Estonian employment agency websites for job seekers (technical requirements, translation) – responsible institutions – Latvian Ministry of Welfare, Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs, Latvian and Estonian Employment Agencies;

2) to start cooperation and discussions between national authorities (State Employment Agencies, State Revenue Services and Latvian Ministry of Welfare, Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs) on possibilities (technical, legal) to exchange the information on Latvian employees in Estonia and Estonian employees in Latvia.

#### 4.2. Development of the Valga Free Economic Zone

There is interest from Valka municipality to develop Valka Special economic zone similar as it has been developed in Estonia. Valga Free Economic Zone is mainly used for the transport and logistics. The main idea for the development of Valga-Valka free economic zone is to provide services for enterprises, custom services as well as for non-EU countries. WG supported development of Valka Special economic zone as it promotes the entrepreneurship and creation of jobs, etc. **It was decided:** Valka municipality to prepare letter about situation to the respective responsible institution on the issue on Latvian side - the Ministry of Finance and in case of positive reply or decision made to start discussion with Estonian Ministry of Finance.

#### 4.3. Use of EU Funding in Border Areas on the Other side of Border (2014-2020)

National responsible institutions of Latvia and Estonia (Latvian Ministry of Finance and Estonian Ministry of Finance) acknowledged that the possibility to use national structural funds for financing the activities across the border is not planned.

**It was decided** to remove this issue from the agenda.

In further discussions, Mr Peeter Unt, Head of the Joint Technical Secretariat for Estonia-Latvia cross border cooperation programme, proposed to bring together three groups of specialists – Latvian-Estonian IGC, Commission for Estonian-Latvian Future Cooperation Report and Monitoring committee of Estonia-Latvia cross-border cooperation programme to avoid the duplication of discussions and save time and financial resources.

The Co-chairman agreed that there is a lot of exchange of information, but supposed that there is no necessity to merge the above mentioned groups, as the decision making process in the Estonia-Latvia Programme should be kept transparent and there should be another platform for discussions on the possible cooperation that does not require financial decisions.

Mr Rainer Kuutma said that the commission for Future Cooperation Report deals with Estonian-Latvian issues on national level, Latvian-Estonian IGC priority is cross-border cooperation, but the Estonia-Latvia Programme has financing resources. He is in opinion that the more forums are for discussions, where different ideas are discoursed, the better.

The Chairman raised the issue of frequency of Latvian-Estonian IGC meetings. The Co-chairman notes that frequency of Latvian-Estonian IGC meetings once a year is sufficient, but the working groups could consult, exchange information or monitor Latvian-Estonian IGC issues often – quarterly or once in a half year.

Mr Margus Lepik, Co-chairman of WG “Social, Health Care and Rescue Services” said that Latvian- Estonian IGC issues involved a lot of ministries that are not participating in meeting, so the decisions of Latvian-Estonian IGC should be sent to responsible ministries. Latvian-Estonian IGC meeting could meet annually as before, but the monitoring of implementation of decisions taken should take place quarterly.

Ms Iruma Kravale, representative of the Latvian Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, made a remark that in Latvia the decisions of Latvian-Estonian IGC are submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers, where all the ministers agree on actions and responsibilities to be done during the year. Once in a half year there is a midterm review, when all the responsible institutions report on the progress regarding the issues of Latvian-Estonian IGC. It is proposed that Latvian side could share the information regarding the coordination process and it could be done in parallel.

## **5. Conclusions**

Estonian and Latvian sides agreed that the work of IGC should be continued in year 2014, the frequency of IGC meeting remains once a year, but the monitoring of progress could be done once in a half year.

Mr Edmunds Sprūdžs thanked all the participants for a good working day and closed the meeting.

Chairman: E. Sprūdžs

Co-chairman: S.Kiisler