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Workshop – Labour market co-operation within ERB: European Employment Strategy

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- After a short presentation of his professional career in the area of social welfare expert defined the goal of the workshop and specified the main questions he would like to tackle:
 1. Can the European Employment strategy be helpful in the Euroregion Baltic co-operation?
 2. Definition of the European Employment Strategy
 3. What do we want to achieve by co-operating within the Euroregion Baltic?
- Regional policy is within the sphere of member states. Member states representatives meet once a year and decide on the main trends and directions. EES translates politicians' decisions into implementation. On this basis MSs have to prepare National Employment Plans. On the basis of those plans the EC prepares the basic document to be discussed at the summit of heads of governments;

EES was launched in 1997 at the Luxemburg summit It is based on four 'pillars':

- employability
 - entrepreneurship
 - adaptability
 - equal opportunities
- and ten guidelines:
- unemployment prevention
 - promoting entrepreneurship
 - adopting to changes on the labour market
 - investments in human resources
 - promotion of workplaces
 - equal rights for women and men
 - preventing discrimination on the labour market
 - ensuring decent pays
 - preventing illegal employment
 - co-operation between regions – convergence difference and discrepancies

On the basis of the guidelines MSs prepare national Employment Plans

How can we define "strategy"? - it is partners being permanently in the process of debating, exchanging know-how, information and then trying to jointly define if they have anything in common and if there is anything they can do together. And so strategy – as a process – covers three stages:

- exchange of experience
- answering the question – why do we need the strategy?
- Evaluation of steps – how effective they have been

And so in the Euroregion Baltic we have to ask the following questions:

- What do we want to achieve through co-operation?
- Can we set clear goals?

For instance: - do we want a common labour market?

- ageing of society – can we do anything together in this respect – e.g. employ innovative measures in this respect
- long-term unemployment and exclusion – what solutions, especially for the disabled. (Here we could use very positive Scandinavian experience).
- while talking about the process related to EES and national employment plans it is good to ask a question if they are really “national” – prepared via debate with the society or just decided by some specialists. Has the civil society been involved in their creation. Has there been a dialogue? From what I know the answer is negative maybe with the exception of Sweden.
- Given the above – what can be the value added of co-operation within the ERB:
- It can help use funds from the EFS;
- It can help translate the ministerial “national” employment plans into truly national – bottom up process

It is extremely important in our deliberations and plans in this area not to forget about Kaliningrad Oblast and the fact that their conditions differ from the rest of the partners. They are not covered by the EES and they cannot use the EFS. But there can be resources for them – e.g. NNI. Now it is still Interreg and Tacis.

It is also important, while talking about employment, to open to other sectors – education, culture, etc. They are interrelated.

Presentations of views from the participants followed:

- given the differences between EU members and Kaliningrad it is extremely important to co-ordinate actions within the EFS and NNI, especially in trilateral co-operation – Poland, Lithuania, Kaliningrad.
- It is extremely important to decide what topics we want to deal with.
- In the Euroregion Baltic we have never exchanged information on national employment plans – we should start with that and see if and what they have in common – to define basic joint steps or common interests. We should also get to know national operational programs and compare them. Again the same problem is with EQUAL – which could be another good source of funds. Each country has defined its needs in a different way – again we should compare. So we should get to know all the instruments and see if anything can be co-ordinated. It is the best time now as national employment plans are just now being updated.
- We do not care for plans or strategies. We are about real work. We care to create jobs on the ground – in small municipalities.
- One of the problems is immigration. If we want to allow them to come they should be covered by the same system as the citizens – have the same salaries, insurance, etc. Otherwise in a very short time in all our countries we will have Chinese or Hindus taking all our jobs.
- We need projects with companies participating;
- In different countries we have different problems with labour force. In some it is a shortage of labour force – so we have to encourage those from abroad ensuring language

and other courses. One of the projects could be about educational courses – preparing people for one labour market – in terms of skills, languages, cultures, etc.

- In the ERB we have to think how to take advantage of the existing well educated labour force. People from regions should identify one topic, concentrate on it and give it a try. We have to focus and see if we can be successful. Such a project should be reinforced by politicians and society. – It is important to use the potential. Differences and disparities between regions can be seen as a potential for the win-win situations.
- Kaliningrad has great achievements in the field and we should not be forgotten when talking about co-operation. We have recently had a very good conference about migrations. We have also experience in obtaining sponsors. – In co-operation with Kaliningrad we should build on long-term experience in this co-operation and look now for new possibilities – especially how to finance further co-operation.
- Kaliningrad labour market is in a bad shape as there is a big discrepancy between what employee and employer wants. Each of us should first solve our own internal problems and only then look into co-operation. Social partnership are very important – in Kaliningrad we are establishing a social partnership centre on the basis of Polish and German experience. We also have good experience when it comes to arrangement of internships.
- Rural areas are extremely important when talking about employment. We need doers and not talkers and we have to start with learning. For instance language courses. Co-operation is possible only if we can find common values.
- There are shortages in the medical sector when it comes to labour force. The issue is sensitive but needs solving. What is very important is mutual recognition of vocational training. Examples were given by Bornholm (failure) and Kalmar (success in spite of sensitivities). When people on the labour market move they learn from each other and exchange know-how. These are win-win situations.
- It is important to talk about the concept of the common market, but we have to be careful in sectors in which there is enough labour force. Migration should mainly be for specialists.
- What is extremely important is life-long education
- We have to prevent risk of brain-draining in common areas